

Revenge on Thanatos

A Novel

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Contents

PRELUDE: COLD AND DEEP	1
FARTING IN BED	1
THE PARTY	3
THE FALL	7

Prelude: Cold and Deep

Eddie was bone tired. He had been waiting in the chill November winds for some time now. Hidden in the darkness of the car park with nothing but the occasional noise of a late-night wanderer looking to get out of the place. Then the strained whirring of the car engines descending. No wanderer he, he was here with a purpose. There was a dusting of snow on the edge of the ramp, outside he could see it swirling in the neon. Still he was quiet, as the mouse he had pretended to be before his escape.

The others were less skilled at discomfort. PS waited on another floor and Anne was still in the pub across the road, *The Angel's Arms*. Ironic really, waiting for their dark angel to come. Ironic that he felt underground here at twenty, twenty-five metres above the street but that is what car parks are like.

The wind howled again and more snow arced across the neon. The surveillance system in Anne's car crackled a little in his ear and he began to get ready. Then he heard the steady clack of heels going away. It was not she but some other. In his other ear Vivaldi played softly, *The Four Seasons*. Odd that a pizza sounded so pleasant. Old joke, he smiled to himself. He was the youngest and oldest of the happy band.

The heels came again. She coughed. This time it was Anne alright. He stopped Vivaldi and moved quietly out of the shelter at the side of his van, and walked quickly but quietly down the ramp until he was near but out of sight, between levels. Anne was drunk, maybe. She had a tolerance for alcohol that was second to none but he could have put something in her drink, their dark angel. A small man of quiet habits and no friends.

"Aren't you chilly, Willy?"

"Ah, no. I'm fine, are you OK now? Can I leave you now that you're at your car?"

"OK," Anne poured on the sugar, "thank you."

Eddie heard him start to move away and then hesitate as Anne stood fuddled at her car. Eddie began to close in, moving quietly to the break in the ramp where he could jump down. He pulled the balaclava down over his face. The dark angel took a breath and started back quickly towards Anne. In her fuddlement she had got the can of CS ready and as he started to try his usual knock down tactic she got him full in the face.

Eddie jumped down to where Anne stood with the dark angel spluttering and retching. It was the work of a moment to cuff him and throw him in the boot of the car. Eddie pulled the rubber pervert mask down over his head and removed his balaclava. The angel struggled a little until Eddie got hold of his balls and whispered "Remember these, darling boy?" Then he was quiet from an old memory.

PS came running up as all this was going on. Anne climbed into the passenger seat as PS jumped in and started the car. Eddie went back to his van and reconnected the CCTV system. Sometimes things went quite well. He choked back the tears from his own memory. The tears of pain and humiliation. As he drove down the ramps he let his mouth form a rictus of anger and roared black hatred from the back of his throat.

At the rendezvous the angel had already been trussed up with his hands pulled up behind his back. His clothes had been cut from him and he was shivering and wailing in the cold. Eddie's

stomach turned over at the site of a human being reduced to this, his bare bottom raised vulnerable.

PS was ready with the cattle prod. He handed it to Eddie, saying, “you first”.

Every time he passed out they would wait until he had wakened again. The screams were appalling through the mask but they did not stop, not for a long time.

Charles came up for air again and realised that he was tied to a chair this time. His genitals were a numbing mass of pain and he was shocked and fatigued to his marrow. He was angry and afraid, but he knew enough to mask his anger. Anger was pointless in this situation.

“Are you awake, Charles?” It was a man’s voice, processed somehow but oddly familiar. There was little point in arguing.

“Yes.” It was the ghost of a voice.

“You should know that we are not going to kill you this time. We know who you are and what you have done. We know that your friends in high places protect you and sometimes your victims can’t remember you once the threats start. We know about the girl locked away in the mental hospital and the convenient suicide of one of the boys. Here we are beyond all that. You have to stop, Charles, or we will kill you next time.”

The pain on his arm was excruciating and he blanked out for a while.

“Acid, Charles. If your name appears on our list again we will bathe you in it.”

There followed a delirious ride through the countryside. He found out later that he was thrown out of the van somewhere on the A329, but no-one saw anything, apart from Charles, and it took him a long time to remember the significance.

“I did not enjoy that,” said Eddie, “I thought that I would get a great deal of satisfaction from hurting him back. In the end he was nothing more than piece of shit. Strip a man of his clothes and truss him up and he’s nothing. I want to hit back at what made him the way he is, but I can’t.”

Anne was more sanguine. “If we have stopped another victim suffering at his hands then we have achieved something. I hate doing this because it demeans us also, but what choice do we have?”

“I know the arguments, Anne. I am one of his victims, remember? I thought this would set me free but I just feel cheap and unhappy.”

PS came through the restraint bearing a tray full of cakes and hot chocolate. He sat down at the table with them and said, “tuck in. We need plenty of sugar and comfort food. It takes it out of you to become one of them, even with the best of intentions.”

Eddie: “Why did we do it? I thought that revenge would be sweet but it isn’t.”

PS: “You watch too much TV. You are not Arnie taking the high moral ground and bearing assault rifle. Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent, or the powerless. There was no other way to reach him and killing him would mean that he couldn’t tell his tale to the others.”

They tucked in and there was silence for a while. Eddie had no education and drove a van for a living. He knew that they did not mean to talk down to him but they had none of his scars. He looked at his hand. How he had wept when he realised that he would never play again.

That was before he decided not to play the Victim Game any more. They kid you that you want what they do, that you want to be a receptacle for their juices. They call this love while they tear your arse apart. They never took that last inch from him, and they knew it, which is why they hurt him even more. He pushed his mop of hair out of his eyes and sipped his chocolate.

Eddie: “Ok, now what? Do we look for another one?”

Anne: “We wait to be contacted. It’s quite rare for one of the victims to be involved in the punishment. I don’t think I’ve seen it before.”

Eddie: “Yeah, we’re all made into mice by them. Some of us carry on in the great tradition they keep to by becoming like they are and the rest of us just lie there, glad to be away from them. I wanted to help, after the therapy and support you gave me. But I’m not kidding myself that it was justice.”

PS: “You know better. We told you what we were doing. Preventive surgery to stop more of the same to others. It makes me sick to hurt them, but then I think of the suicides and broken lives and it’s easy.”

Charles sat in the back of the police car with a blanket around him. As the cold wore off he felt the pains start again, only much worse. A tear traced out of the corner of his eye and made its way down his cheek. For the moment he could say nothing, but think about the hand.

Later in the station they had got some of his clothes from the hotel and he had dressed himself. He had let them take photographs of his injuries for court action but knew his attackers would not be found. He could not help the police and did not know where they had been. He had been missing for nearly a week. In that time he could have been taken almost anywhere in the country. The police surgeon examined him and he was taken to hospital for X-rays and a checkup. He thought that he would never forget the cold again as long as he lived.

Farting in bed

He had been sat there for a long time reading. As he decided to finally go to sleep he squeezed her shoulder.

“Let me sing to you.”

“OK.”

A loud fart ripped out before he could stop it. In between his quakes of laughter he said:

“That wasn’t it! I wanted to tell you how special you are to me.”

She smiled and hugged him.

Later when he could not sleep he lay there thinking about the significance of the fart. His body was laughing at him, telling him that all of the sublime things his mind could see had no more meaning than the fart. The strongest most loving feelings were just chemicals moving about. Consciousness was nothing more or less than that. The soul was no more than your body rotting, the connection with the environment a logical consequence of billions of years of evolution.

He tried to calm his mind back to stillness. Let the thoughts pass and go out of your mind. Slow things down a little and let them go by. Then it came to him *there is no sublime, there is only now, there is no ridiculous, there is only now.*

Outside the amber neon of the dark streets slept its heavy sleep.

In the morning they fought their children into clothes and breakfast. The tea was made and drunk. They poured themselves into their cars.

Out on the motorway he drove with his usual automatic competence. Keeping a good distance and using his foreknowledge of the inevitable jam at the inevitable junction to slow. The traffic ebbed and flowed past the junction. It picked up again and they were all soon racing across the countryside. Cows moved above them over a bridge taking them to the milking parlour.

Then he saw it transfixed in the early morning sunlight. A silver plane rising from the airport in the distance, made red gold by the morning rays. It was a perfect morning. The spring stillness transformed him and he was no longer in the car. The roar of the underpowered engine faded from him and his mind moved out, wider, and became part of the blue sky world opening above him.

The feeling stayed with him all day, nothing bothered him much. He moved through the surrounding world untouched by it. The trick is supposed to be to stay in this different consciousness, in the immediate now, and not be anywhere else. This is supposed to be where we should all live and be sincere but that is too hard for most of us.

It was anger that defeated him on the way home. The irrational irritation of the road. He could not remember whether someone had moved over without indicating or not moved over when the road ahead was empty. It started to gnaw at his peace and he found himself shouting at all of the meaningless crap of the motorway. Why did he do this? Why did he let the road bother him so? People are people. Of course someone will be selfish or inconsiderate, everyone is some of the time, why should it bother you? But the peace left him.

Prelude: Cold and Deep

He arrived back just after the rest of his family. He let himself in and listened to the children screaming and being difficult. The evening passed through its usual stages and on into night where he found himself wondering again. The wheel of becoming keeps turning, running you over all of the time. The only way off is death or some empty search for nirvana.

The Party

The room swirled a little around Eddie's head as he stood there, sipping Irish whiskey. It was new year and PS had invited him to his house for the festivities. Eddie had been trying to make friends with a likely lass called Jenine but was getting nowhere. She would not respond to his overtures but neither did she push him away. In his alcoholic stupor he did not see that she wanted something from him. Even so, she was getting nothing.

She was petite, blonde with almond-shaped green eyes. Behind it all there was a measuring quality to her which a more sober Eddie would have disliked. But at the moment he was consumed by a measuring drunken lust of his own. She had fended him off when he tried to kiss her but did not leave him either. Her small mouth had shrunk away from his and made him think of something else, something from far away.

A cat. She was an exquisite perfumed cat with a firm little palm sized ass. She shimmered there in front of him and he felt the blood pump in his head. In the meantime he also knew that he would never have her because he would not fit into her ordered little world. His imagination was consumed by a picture of her writhing in sexual frenzy, tormenting him, he could feel the soft flesh warming with him. Then the booze kicked him again and he felt the blue room of his head beckoning.

Still he kept his mind working and began again on the social niceties and started to see her all over again. She was judging and fitting him into a picture. The pretty face hid something he did not like and he was not one to fuck just for prettiness. He liked things to have some meaning, although like every man that ever felt it he sometimes just wanted to be lost in the world of flesh, with his cock exploding through his head. The watcher in his head started watching and recording, it sat in the blue room collating memories and pain for the long nights alone and his lust slipped away.

Jenine was looking for information. She had pumped this drunken man a little, thinking that she would have to sleep with him for more, but he did not excite her. She liked either rougher or smoother. There was also some pain in there, and she was not a nanny. In her life, large or small, nothing was aloud to touch her in her secret place. She had locked her heart away there long ago. One of her lovers had told her this, before telling her that she was not even aware that there was a heart there. But after all, what was life but a movement of flat nothingness across an eternity of emptiness. Ecstasy helped you forget the howling wind but in the end you will always be let down. Take what's on offer and always bargain for an advantage.

Back at the paper she had used her small mouth to great advantage. Dealing her way up the ladder she was now independent. She had scented something here. After some time under cover she knew she was close. There was nothing to give it away but a small clustering of victims. She had heard the hints of the organisation that took revenge for abused children. She knew, from hints dropped by a source at a psychiatric clinic, that the man everyone called PS was involved somehow.

They were so careful about their secrets that it was difficult to pin anything definite on them. She was sure that the police knew very little about them, except that they existed. There was even some tacit support for their aims within the force. She did not care much, only wanting the story and the courtroom drama. Around the edge she trod carefully. The last journalist to look into this was only just recovered from an accident and when she had tried to get some information from him he had slept with her and told her not to look any further. Rough not smooth.

In another room PS was talking old matches with his fencing buddies. There was less interest in sword fencing now, everyone wanted to be Japanese and some kind of martial arts supremo. But at least it was still an Olympic sport. PS had never wanted to compete at that level, he knew that he could probably hold his own but life had taught him that there was always someone better than you around the corner. His ambitions were very simple; generally to prove himself competent at a high level, but only to himself. This was his maxim throughout life, he believed that the only person worth struggling with was himself.

He sucked some more ice beer down his throat and returned to an old argument about a contest he had lost when he had appeared to score enough points but not been awarded them. His friend, James, said:

“But you had him cold! He should never have won, he didn’t win.”

“I won but not the points. It makes little difference to me.”

“You should have protested, done something!”

“Like what? The judges’ decision is final and without a TV monitor there there was nothing I could do to prove anything. Forget it, how’s Julie?”

“Well enough. Sorry she couldn’t come tonight but the baby isn’t well. I drew the short straw, or is it the long one?”

PS smiled. The contest had been fixed, but he had done the fixing. It was all part of an elaborate scheme to bring out his fellow contestant’s father from the woodwork. It had worked and everyone had gone away happy, with the exception of the father, who had gone away chastened. Another victory for the victim that nobody knew about. The drink was starting to get to him and he dragged James and the rest of the posse to the food.

They threw canapés and other food around for a while. PS felt the alcohol recede a little. It was time to go to the kitchen and get the stew out for the multitude. He snared Anne, James and David on his way. David was another member of the happy band of fencers. He had also become interested in the shadow world of the organisation but they needed him to prove himself before he could proceed.

For all his faults David was teetotal. He was a quiet control freak, in that he always wanted to be in control of himself. This did make sex a bit difficult for him but he didn’t like to talk about it. Unlike the lottery-winning millionaire PS David had a proper job, writing programs for a large consultancy company. In real life he wanted to be a musician but it would not pay the mortgage.

He had left home at eighteen and gone on the treadmill that landed an intelligent enough person with a degree at twenty-two. Then, working in information technology, he had never been without a job. Slowly moving up the ranks from a graduate on peanuts to a valuable member of staff on bananas with a company car. He was remembered with affection by those that he allowed to get to know him. Like PS he was not competitive and secretly looked down on the fools working long hours trying to prove themselves. He knew that after eight hours the work produced was without quality and would send people home if they worked more than ten. Strangely his team did not produce any less than the gung-ho merchants and his people liked him.

He had met PS at a tournament and taken an instant like to him. PS was loaded because of his lottery win, but he was quite happy to share his good fortune with anyone he took a shine to. He had also put a lot of money into a centre for rehabilitating victims of abuse. The centre

was not politically correct and part of its brief was to be able to tell harsh words or smacks from an angry all to human adult apart from systematic long term abuse. The centre had been instrumental in the prosecution of a number of care workers but also the robust defence of several others. There was also a daycare centre for the children of single mothers. David had read PS quoted in a broadsheet saying that he wanted to stop the state screwing so many people up; there was also a foundation for new ideas in information technology that would give grants to blue-sky companies, in return for 5% of any profit. PS had pointed out in the interview that for a relatively small amount of money he would probably double his original win if he only had one success in several hundred.

PS was himself an ex ITinerant, as he liked to call them. In fact the industry was quite small and you would see the same faces again after a while in your specialist field. David secretly envied the easy way PS had with everybody, no-one was alienated by him but nobody owned him either. Once he had asked him about it and PS told him about his big secret: he knew that he was the same as everybody else and didn't care what other people thought of him. You can read this in any self-help book, but it takes guts to try and live like that. David was not sure what to make of this. PS laughed and said that he had too much self control, which was why he was so easy to beat. "You think too much, you need to learn to just *do* it!" PS bought another round and things move on.

There comes a time in your life when you suddenly realise that you will have to stop giving a fuck about other people's rules and make your own. Then you realise that your own rules won't work either, then you just have to take things as they come and make mistakes. Rules don't work very often because life is just not simple enough.

They reached the kitchen and PS started to ladle out the stew into bowls while the others put hunks of bread on the side. PS started banging a gong and making loud host noises while his guests started to flow through the kitchen. PS had given in to the veggies and there was some blind stew and a vegetarian curry made to his mother's recipe.

David found himself next to Eddie, who was looking unhappy. Janine had glued herself to PS and was trying to drag him away somewhere quiet.

Eddie: "I'm not jealous. I just wish that some girl would do that to me once in a while."

David: "She works at the Centre, some sort of administrator. I suppose she wants his good offices."

Eddie: "He keeps himself to himself. I was one of the first people through the centre and I got to know him quite well. He doesn't do the therapy, because he's not been trained, but he took us out walking and taught some of us to fence and blast down rivers in kyacks. I love the man, his money and his humanity saved me from the scrap heap."

David went quiet out of embarrassment. He had never known the kind of pain Eddie talked about so matter of factly, and he never would. PS had sat down and started on the stew, having a jokey time with Janine. PS knew who she was. The injured journalist was a friend and his injury completely unrelated to the organisation. He wished he was cynical enough just to use her, because his bed had been lonely for a long time since the death of his last lover, but she would find things out. It was safer to keep her at arm's length. A more analytical part of him saw the cat, and knew that it would eat him given half a chance.

Later a party bore started reading all of the questions for trivial pursuit while everyone else either ignored them or made lewd answers. The rooms span and swayed the way they always

The Party

do when a party gets late. PS abandoned his guests to the revels at about 4 am. They had forgotten to see the new year in, but no matter.

The fall

Charles took a long time to recover from his ordeal. It did not make him any better though. His dark streak was darker. He stayed away from his old haunts and found new victims. The loose group of fellows that he was part of rallied round and started to make enquiries. He remembered the broken hand on the boy, even where he had seen it, but the boy was difficult to find.

He knew that he had seen the child in one of the homes they used to get gratification. The workers made useful money on the side allowing Charles and his friends to do what they needed to the children without families. They were so careful. Many children sung nothing but praise for the workers and the few who complained were held out as malicious. It was careful and discreet. The children healed physically, in time.

He remembered that this one had been rented for a whole weekend. In their country retreat they had tied him up, held him down and abused him. The screams had been most gratifying. Charles liked other people screaming. He liked life and death power over the helpless. It gave him a buzz. Now the boy was now out in the big wide world and no-one knew where, perhaps they should have broken more than his hand to make him co-operate.

Now Charles took victims from more difficult places and the bodies were never found. The warning had been pretty pointless. He was addicted to his violence. The hot drug had control over him and nothing else mattered. When he was about ten years old his father had shown him the drug and he had never looked back. Sexual feelings are not meant for the really young, they are too strong and mark you forever. His abductors could have done anything to him, even stuck him in the acid bath, and he would not have lost his addiction.

Charles now had a name, Eddie Wainright, and they knew that he had gone to that centre run by the mysterious PS. They had nobody on the inside there, somehow their contacts were never recruited. The centre would give the procession of damaged goods new identities if it was thought appropriate. Part of the remaking of the healed identity was sometimes to renounce the original name. The centre had full co-operation of the authorities and everything was changed, even down to National Insurance numbers. It was not the first time they had wanted to quieten a flapping mouth and had difficulties placed in their way by hidden identities.

Charles and the rest of his fellows were by nature loners and this made detection much more difficult. Despite this they still had their own shadow organisation. They would use it to distribute the hot drug amongst themselves. Once an individual was known to be an addict then they knew they could trust each other a little. Difficult people became victims in themselves, which made discipline easy. These people were looking, in their quiet way, for Eddie Wainright or whatever he was called now.

Eddie was sitting in his flat feeling quite pleased with himself. He had got surveys done and