

## 16. More than a Memory

Once upon a time, I met a girl, named Angyl Hunter. A girl who I had reduced to merely a memory, a shadow of her former self in my mind's eye, but upon closer inspection, I realized the monster I had beheld. The beast, which I'd turned my back on, would return later in life as a far greater threat. Stay with me, and allow me to explain a series of events to you much more bizarre than my parents' murder.

Once upon a time, I worked at the bar, keeping my role legitimate and clean. Once night fell, I moved to the sewers, the underground, where anything was possible. There, I kept the position of cleaner – should a disloyal soldier be tried in our court of man, it was my duty to ensure their punishment. They would be taken to their deaths, but should the executioner fail, I was to ensure that neither person saw the light of day.

Such was my dark deed, one that I performed with great passion and precision. My heart was cold and my soul void, so my place there was perfectly suited. Until one of the community leaders was murdered and a great war began. A war that would envelope us all, destroying the lives we knew and forever altering our great purposes. I had loved another girl back then.

Relic Mason. The bar owner's daughter – there was a relationship with her that seemed beyond words and understanding. As if every action I conceived she predicted. At first, I foolishly accepted it as the mere shadow of young love and idealness. With time, I learned it was something more. As the stories got out and the truth lay to light, I learned that my true love was actually my true twin, separated from me at infancy to protect each other.

A plan of which failed, as I watched her die as our enemies made demands we would not logically fulfill. With the burden

of her death, I was relieved of my duty as executioner, my mental state under severe distress. I was entrusted with my parents, the Dorrances, assuming their name and identity to ensure my safety for the rest of my years. It seemed like a solid plan. All the pain and bloodshed were repressed early on, and I was able to continue living my life almost like any other teenager.

Until Angyl Hunter was brought to my doorstep. I had almost forgotten the dreary night when Dacien Ransom, herself desperate and blood soaked, had brought the body to us. Angyl was alive, but barely. We had been entrusted with a series of secrets that night, my parents' first test of faith and loyalty. They needed to keep Angyl alive, but more importantly, they had to keep her son's existence a secret. Yes, with the murderess herself came a child, just as clever and deep as his mother, taking in every detail of his surroundings. Dacien had explained to me in great length the importance of both mother and child, and their place in the world. Though Angyl had killed easily, and would continue to if necessary, her son would lead to great things with the proper potential. With the right influences; so we lent every bit to his learning.

Until a year or so back, Angyl and Corvis, her son, disappeared. To go upstate, she claimed, to save us from her burden. It made sense to a point, and again the repression kicked in. I erased all details of her existence, to further protect her in the future.

Then Damiano was tortured to death by a nameless face I had only seen in distant nightmares, a cruel smile to follow the most passionate eyes I'd ever known. I couldn't connect things then, but now, as the repression ended and a flood of memories shocked my system and destroyed my sensibilities, the truth started to fall into place. The fourth member of the Wicked had been Angyl Hunter herself, hiding from her enemies in a new landscape, but still maintaining the brutality she was

born with. I had resented her so heavily then, wanted nothing more but to destroy every fiber of her being that night, but now...I had discovered a newfound respect and association with her. We were both murderers, weren't we?

And both destined to achieve something greater than ourselves.

How I'd been able to tune out such immense details of my life...I couldn't tell you. There was no rational reason why or how I had been able to intentionally block things like that out. Perhaps that's why I was chosen for my position in the underground, since I allowed nothing to take a permanent residence in my mind. I killed the disloyal just as simply as I might have killed a spider, without a moment's consideration or pity. I did as I was told, and throughout life found myself railing against authority later on for inexplicable reasons. It was all starting to come together and the madness of it made my head spin drastically.

Thinking back on the scene, on my parents' murder, I knew that the only truth was what Daicen had provided me. I had pulled the trigger, entirely without remorse or consideration; nothing about that fact bothers me now. But why? What about my parents bothered me so much that I had to destroy them, without warning? I contemplated Dacien's initial suggestion: money. They were doctors and gave me everything I could desire, except for more drugs, but I didn't resent them enough to kill them over it. Freedom? They were a bit disappointed with my lack of creativity, and my decision to bypass their career path, but all the same. So what was it that finally pushed me over the edge?

With long consideration and a severe amount of meditation, I decided it was the consistency of everything. The pace, the normalcy, the humdrum – the lack of anything interesting or different in their lives. They were spending every waking moment trying to achieve more, trying to make people that didn't want help – better. It seemed like a bullshit double

standard, to kill yourself trying to save souls that are beyond salvation. People like Dacien Ransom can be calmed to a point, but they will always be the ruthless monsters that they began as, no matter how much you pad the truth.

I kept myself awake for hours as my mind ran over the possibilities. How I'd fallen this far, and how the truth had evaded me for so long. How I'd managed to lie to myself all this time. Were there others that saw through the lies? Had Irish been aware of my past and present, and just did everything in her power to keep up the charade? How many people had I murdered before my parents? How many people had I watched meet their end in that tunnel underground? So many questions, memories long lost in my mania.

What kind of a monster was I?

Do no evil, she said.

If she only knew.

But she did, didn't she? Angyl knew exactly who I was and what I was capable of. She was counting on it. She knew that the right combination of pain and love could create a force impossible to stop and even more improbable to catch. She knew my potential early on and had planted the seeds for the mature murderer I would become later. Was I merely part of everyone's elaborate schemes? Damiano had used me to satisfy her own ends as well. Had I been a tool my entire life, someone else's prop to get where they needed to be?

And if so, that was coming to an abrupt, and painful end. I would no longer dance someone else's dance; I would not be corrupted for their means. I would accomplish my own ends, and punish the sinful for their deceit.

There was something peaceful in death that I had recently come to respect, a sort of quiet that could only be found in the absence of life. I spent hours wondering about the simplicity

of it, the joy of no longer having to suffer for someone else's failure. To no longer toil for a mission that's a flop before you ever start. The possibilities were endless...and there was honor in dying. Especially for dying for something real, something you believed in, to achieve something noble. I was hoping to find such a peace in my travels, to discover that sort of calm along the way. If I could be so fortunate...

The role of avenging angel has been filled my friends, and I will be avenging my own sins for a change. The rest of you can kindly form a line to the right.