

FROM THE CHRONICLES OF LUPA VOLUME 1

- P. JULIAN -

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LUPA

VOLUME 1

RUBY TUESDAY

From the Chronicles of Lupa Volume 1

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This text is set with fragments from Cavafy, Seferis, Kerouac, Yeats, Jeffers, and others. Reviving an ancient tradition, paying my endless respects. "And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

for CT

I was formed aeons ago, at the very beginning,
when the world came to be...

I was there when the heavens were set in place,
when the horizon was marked out upon the face of
the deep, when were established the clouds above,
and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when
He gave the sea its boundary so the waters would
not overstep His command, when He marked out
the very foundations of the earth.

Proverbs 8: 24-29

LAMENTATION

MKULTRA ARTIFACTS PROJECT

www.mkultrafacts.net

Doc: MKU.LSDI.100120030.SSP

File: Psychosis Inducement/Treatment

Sub: Lysergic Acid (Di) & Related Compounds

Source: Syracuse State Psychopathic Hospital NY

Author: Patient <presumed><unidentified>

Media: Graphite pencil on plain paper <transcribed>

Date: undated

TO the Slave-Lords of Babylon, you procurers and hypocrites, you vile
princes of Sodom and Nineveh -

Hear me now, you men who blaspheme upon the earth –

For before your beginning was The Beginning -

And there was the Light, and the Light shone without any knowledge
of the Darkness. The Light that was upon the world, shining even
upon the face of the deep, before your blasphemy could be wrought
upon it -

And the Children of the Light were sustained there with milk and
honey, and they knew neither sorrow nor shame, nor the sting of old
age, of death -

And the Darkness opened its eyes towards the Light and it saw that it
was good -

And the Darkness so loved the world that it sent its only sons to sow
dissent amongst the People, the deceit that lies in the double hearts
of men –

So was the Light divided into the Light and the Firelight, and the
Children of the Light were driven into their refuge, the realm of the
moon, the infinite softness of starlight –

So came they out of Zion. So came they in chains and ashes, into their
captivity, their servitude in the bitter land of Cain.

O you who know the truth -

So are they called: Vampire. Werewolf. By you also: Harpy. Fury. All manner of your depravity and slander. Whore. Succubus. They are none of these things, yet you persist in your lies and degradation.

They call themselves by a secret name, a name that still is denied to me, even as I cry out in the wilderness to be delivered.

You will not repent from your blasphemy. Witch. Siren. They hear your lies and they store them in their hearts. Turnskin. Turncoat. All of these. You slander them with your own names, your own depravity.

Do they rape women? You who stand accused. Do they murder children? Do they devour the dead upon your battlefields?

You call them wolves, and they rejoice in that name, as they hunt you in packs in the terrible depths of night upon the earth. The Just shall have no fear, but you who walk in the valley of the shadow of death, you should hear these words and tremble.

Even now they hunt you. They lie in wait, and in your corruption there can be no knowledge of your fate until it is delivered to you.

They are not corruptible. They abhor your drugs, they will not adorn their bodies with your gold, your silver, your cruel and fleeting steel. Your diamonds, cold with your lust to dominate women -

Where would you run? O you wicked. Theirs is the moon, and her power shines through them. Would you outrun the moonlight?

What you do to me, you shall not do to them. You cannot hold them any more than you may hold starlight, which flashes through your grasp and moves onward to places vastly beyond your reach.

You anoint me not with oils but with your steel, pressed even through my flesh. But you will not silence their voices.

Even as the great desolation steals over me, still I testify that you shall be overcome.

In my despair I cry out to you, shining ones. You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.

Deliver me from my tormentors, they are become stronger than my own strength

Deliver me

O thou who shine out -

In your mercy deliver me -

[Roughly drawn crescent, inverted cross, a sun (or star?)]

You who would do this to our Beloved

Deliver me -

You Fools, you shall not be forgiven

[document unsigned, no further salutation]

BOOK I
(1 Lupa)

CHAPTER 1

Ruby Tuesday

RUBY Tuesday was born on a Wednesday, one day later than perfect symmetry would have required. Her mother, who was also called Ruby Tuesday, had been born on a Saturday, about as far away from her name day as she could possibly have been born. But these were not bland or uniform women, and mere symmetry was an unworthy measuring stick to hold up to them.

The name Ruby was derived from very ancient times, before it was bestowed upon the god of Mars, the blood-red planet so redolent of the many significances of blood. The blood of Ruby's lineage flowed back beyond the beginnings of history, this deep red line stretching so far back in time.

Although both women wore tresses of subdued and nondescript hair, their hair was shot through with that elusive hint of red, the colour of their every ancestor. And when the full moon shone through them this red streak flared near-crimson, as if their own blood flowed through it in hidden rivulets of brilliant red effusion. So beautiful to those eyes that recognise beauty, so terrifying in the sight of the damned.

Ruby Tuesday inherited the middle name of Pearl, and there were dense and myriad significances contained within those letters. This name meant The Desire of Men and also Wisdom but it also meant Lustrous, and it was with a deep and abiding lustre that Ruby Pearl shone, surpassing even the luminous women of her inheritance when the time came for her to shine.

Ruby's Mother was also called Ruby Pearl but from the time Ruby was born she was known by the honorific title of Mother Ruby, at least amongst the elect. Her full name and designation was Ruby Mother of Pearl, and she rejoiced when she saw that even her brilliant sheen was nothing compared to the light that was upon her daughter, the unprecedented brightness that gathered about her daughter.



From her earliest days Ruby loved music, but there were only two songs that she could sing without having to think through the order of the words, or sound out the intricacies of the melody amongst them.

The first song was the famous song that everybody knows, the song that was sung about her mother. Ruby knew that this song had sprung from the loveliness of her mother, though perhaps it was only sung upon a distant glimpse of her, a cool shadow cast within the caverns where the sweet waters gather to flow out into the world.

Mother Ruby would smile quietly when her daughter asked her about this song. She said there were many ways to inspire a song in men and Ruby asked to know these ways but her mother would only smile quietly. You have many years to learn this, Ruby Child. Ruby knew it was a song of loss and goodbyes in which the words that were sung grasped only a portion of the truth. Ruby also knew very clearly that although her mother may have been named in this song, this song was equally inspired by every Ruby Tuesday who had inhabited the magic of that name.

The other song that Ruby knew was the song her mother sang. Ruby knew this song from it being sung to her but there was no time she could recall when she did not know this song, as it was inscribed on the scroll of her heart before the world knew her at all.

This song that Mother Ruby sang was not an ordinary song. It had no beginning or end, and there was no tune that was common to it at any time it might be sung. The song was vast and it told of great love and great sorrow, it sang of the destruction of evil that kept replicating itself. The song recounted a vast cycle of battles and confrontations that were never finally concluded, and which owing to their nature could never be finally concluded.

In this song Ruby Pearl heard her name sung out, and also the names of many other women she had never met. She heard of the love of men and the death and grief that it had caused, all of it subsumed in the dire shadow of a cross looming over everything for the last two thousand years. She heard of the final prohibition of love between her women and the men who sought them out, and the desolation and impoverishment that

this edict had visited on these men and women equally.

Ruby asked her mother sometimes whether their song was a true song or just an ordinary song. Mother Ruby would only smile and say: for the moment you must just hear it, my child, as it sings itself through me. When you are older it will instruct you more directly. Why it has no beginning, why we pray it will have no end.



Ruby went to school and she behaved herself but she did not understand why she had to read such stupid books as they gave her. The Bible made no sense, derived as it was from the need to protect the truth, but her mother would say: in this Book is the sanctuary of Lupa. You must be thankful for the deceptions in this Book, but you must not believe in them.

Her Mother also said that there were parts of the Book that were true parts and were woven from their song, even in the same breath as they had first been intoned and taken down.

When Ruby heard those parts sung out to her as they were so often *let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth* she was silenced and she listened intently for the whole cycle to be recited:

*... My beloved thrust his hand through the latch opening
My heart began to pound for him
I arose to open for my beloved*

*And my hands dripped with myrrh
 My fingers with flowing myrrh
 On the handles of the bolt...*

And at Ruby's stillness, not even taking a breath so as to hear better, her mother would laugh softly and say: Ruby Child there are more important parts to this song. But although this may have been true for her mother, and although Ruby did her best to listen to every other part of their song, there seemed to her to be no greater part than this.

And even as Ruby dreamed her heart stayed awake, listening for these stanzas of her song, this song above all other songs, setting out in true lines the desire that would suddenly come upon her for her beloved when he should reveal himself, coming out of the wilderness like a column of smoke, sweetened with incense and blowing only for her and the desire that was within her, sweeping towards her on the south wind that is warmed by the desert places. The south wind that would whisper to her, saying *he is coming*, coming for her alone to receive up with her body, and into the chambers of her heart.

Ruby searched carefully through the books and fables that she was required to read for school, but although they would divert her attention sometimes they always seemed thin and incomplete when she compared them with her mother's song. They were forced to offer endings, which always seemed so contrived, because the song that her mother sang cycled through its phases with hope and with sorrow but never with any sense of finality, moving through loss to new life, through death and sorrow again and again, coming back to seal the beginningless, endless cycle of mighty life.

Ruby had some friends at school but she also found them shallow when compared with the heroes in her song. She ate lunch with them and laughed when they laughed, but this sort of companionship could only ever feel hollow for her, raised as she was on the lines of a song that was now completely foreign to the world. And if these friends found her strange and drifted away from her in time, Ruby was not sorry and she did not call them back.



Her mother would be strange sometimes, strange and distant and seeming to look at things that were not in front of her but rather were beyond her, distracting her from life by their vivid life.

Ruby saw her mother grow this way with a stern regularity, upon the cycles of the moon, and she learned not to fear this change because her mother always reverted to her, coming back into her world before too much time had passed.

Mother Ruby would prepare carefully for those times that she would become strange, telling Ruby that there was food in the freezer and plenty of money in the kitchen jar, and for at least one night in those times, sometimes more than one night, there would be a babysitter to look after Ruby.

Ruby did not mind these times, as the sitters were all kind and friendly girls who would make toast with her in front of the open fire, or cook and burn marshmallows, grabbing them

before they became too hot and twisted off the coat hanger wire.

Ruby laughed but also became serious when she asked these girls about their fathers and their brothers, and they pouted and said that men were beasts and even worse than that, and that they smelled awful and they broke things and fought and yelled, and they were just crass in the things they did with their bodies and were not much use to anyone.

But Ruby did not believe these things that she was told. She saw men playing football and laughing, and she saw especially young men in their easy pride and their valour, and there were things in her that burned most unashamedly when these boys passed her by.

And there were older men too that she noticed, in a calmer part of her. Uncommon men, perhaps, who moved with a specific gravity, as though there might be a weight that pressed down on their shoulders. And yet they were also soft very often and so often laughing, smiling, as the weight they carried bore down on them, as if these men knew that this same weight, and the strength to bear it on behalf of others, was the essence of what it was to be a man.

And they smelled of wood smoke and soap and shoe polish, of steel and tar, they smelled of salt and machine oil and hard work, and Ruby Tuesday's heart went out to these men past all of the stories she had been told. She did not prevent herself from inhaling as they passed her without noticing her, the dun-coloured fatherless little girl who watched them so very quietly without that interest being returned, and she wondered at the strange love and the stranger sad discomfort that came upon

her at these times, wondering whether one of these men might be the father she had never found, and stranger wonder than this most certainly, as they in their strange gravity looked past her, smiling as they passed her by.

Ruby heard other things of course from her friends at school. There were sitters who had boyfriends too, who started to tell her things before peering at her and saying with a resigned chuckle: oh Ruby you are much too young for this. And although she would press them and pout and cajole they would not divulge anything further and these secrets burned her from just beyond her reach. The secret key to the love of men, what that might cost a woman to achieve, the terrible burden of heartbreak, the other costs that might be levied.

Her mother never wavered, when Ruby would ask her.

We do not expose ourselves to the love of men.

Not women like you and me.

As Ruby pouted and sulked.

Why, she would ask. Why do we not?

Her mother sighing gently.

You will know these things in time, Ruby Child.

I cannot tell you now.

Ruby would huff at that and go off into her room, and try to hate her mother for her strangeness and her secrecy, but despite her best efforts, even to squeeze out some tears, she always failed in hardening her heart that way.

And in time her mother's voice would always come, stealing up the stairs and singing out as if it were a brand new song that song they both knew so well. Ruby would sigh in love and resignation and drift downstairs again on those lines of longing

and sorrow, stealing close to her mother who smiled and sang out with the new voice that was given to her by the closeness of her daughter, the joy and the perfection of her luminous, only daughter.

CHAPTER 2

And We Shall Be Changed

RUBY grew older. People who watched might notice that Mother Ruby lost some of her lustre precisely as it grew upon her daughter, but although this was apparent even to the ignorant there were secret reasons known only to the elect that required it to be so.

There were also changes more visceral in Ruby, in her skin and her bones. As all of these changes came upon her Mother Ruby told her to watch for the cardinal sign that would very soon arrive. Ruby recoiled at the thought but her mother said: oh no my child. It comes as a blessing, a blessing upon the earth.

The blood came to Ruby on a Sunday morning, just two weeks shy of her sixteenth birthday. She felt the strange clutching sickness, she saw the telltale colour. She told her mother with something like embarrassment and she was swept up in an effusion of kisses, and although these were welcome Ruby was also mildly disappointed, wondering what all of the fuss had been about. Her mother heard her mind work at those thoughts and she squeezed her daughter tighter, whispering to Ruby that there were much greater blessings to come.

In the days before the full moon Mother Ruby made her preparations. She cut herbs and flowers from her garden and she shopped in strange places, slipping behind red gates adorned with ornate gold symbols. In large enamelled pots these ingredients were seared and simmered, with selected elements added to the mixture at the proper time. Mother Ruby began to reduce these liquids, adding further things and taking others away, and although Ruby begged to be allowed to help her mother shooed her away and continued to simmer and taste and stir.

By the time of the full moon the preparations were complete. As the sun set and the evening lengthened Mother Ruby collected her things and led her expectant daughter out into the small meadow behind their home. They walked across the cool grass in the faintest hint of starlight, Ruby bouncing in anticipation. Mother Ruby led them through the pine trees at the edge of the meadow to a little freshwater lake, fringed with reeds and rushes. They walked out on to a small sandy beach, and as the frogs bonged and croaked Mother Ruby set up her potions and salves on a wooden card table that she unfolded and wedged down tightly into the sand.

Mother Ruby told her daughter not to be frightened, but although Ruby was quite nervous she puffed her chest out and told her mother not to be silly, that the moonlit night was nothing to be frightened of.

Her Mother nodded slowly.
Not for us, Ruby Child.
But there are Others.
Others who should rightly fear.

Ruby stood trembling at the edge of the lake. She undressed when that was asked of her and her mother led her down into the lake, rinsing Ruby's hair with cold pine-scented water. They splashed and squealed and giggled as the sky gradually leavened and the full moon began to rise.

As the moon rose Mother Ruby led her daughter out of the water. She took the ointments that she had prepared and stroked them in careful order and direction through Ruby's hair. As her hair grew thick with it the salve tingled on Ruby's scalp. She said Ma it burns but her mother kept stroking her, saying Ruby Child that's you burning. Ruby shivered when she saw the truth of that, and although she still wriggled to get free her mother kept whispering to her: wait, wait, my darling. You still have no idea.

As the last of the salve was applied Mother Ruby stepped back and watched the full moon rise completely over the pine trees. The moon began to splash its light over Ruby's body and over her head, flooding and energising the balsam that was coiled thick within her hair. Ruby felt the light coil there also, and then be drawn down deeply into her soul by the magic unguents that her mother had anointed her with.

Ruby gasped and squeezed her mother's hand as she felt what was flooding in, as she felt herself open and make more space for the moonlight to enter. Ruby felt herself coil tightly and then rush out towards the incoming light, and as she burst into the light she was released into the throes of an ecstasy that in these times can only be vaguely described, that has only profane names.

As the moon joined with Ruby she cried out, and by that cry

she broke open inwardly to the light that had now infused her. She saw into the nature of her own being, she saw her lineage stretch back further than could be imagined. No woman in that line was separate from any another, from any Ruby Tuesday living now or in the past. Seeing this truth Ruby sought her Mother's twin soul in order to cleave to it, but her mother gently denied her the joy of that final union.

Not yet my child.

I still have some years left to me.

Now you must let me bathe you.

You look an awful fright, with all that muck on you.

Mother Ruby led her daughter down into the lake again. She poured water over Ruby's head and body and that libation of moon-infused water sealed Ruby's skin as it cleansed it, holding the moonlight within her. As the light continued to flow into her Ruby began to release it also, and as the pressure of the light inside her and outside her slowly equalised she was consecrated to the Light completely.

Then by way of completion and blessing Mother Ruby said these solemn words to her daughter.

Beloved Ruby you are now reborn as Lupa. Our lineage reaching back beyond the knowledge of time. Given sight that others lack, to see the pathways of good and evil, given the power of judgment over those who walk upon them. The Just you will pass over, the wicked you will condemn and lay utterly to waste.

Ruby looked into herself with new eyes. She saw intricate maps made up of many layers, setting out the dark paths and the

undercurrents of the world. She saw horror and majesty, she saw Love and its baleful opposite. She saw sections of the map made squalid with darkness, and others that were bathed in the most extraordinary light.

Ruby felt her vision orient itself to a single vein in that map, following one line of darkness to its dead black centrepiece. She saw suffering deliberately inflicted on a woman and her children, and on many other women and children besides. She saw the contours that led the perpetrator to these crimes, warped by the gravity of his self-regard, and she saw without hesitation or remorse where this evil was now expressing itself and what was required to be done.

Ruby's mother also reached within her, through the new shared space they inhabited. She saw the tasks given to her daughter, what the moonlight had empowered Ruby to do, and she gave her final blessing and wished her safe hunting.

Ruby then broke away from her mother, burning a bright blood-red, and with an awful cry of outrage and retribution she disappeared into the night.



For some moments after Ruby disappeared Mother Ruby stood quietly beside the calm waters of the lake. She knew that her daughter would be returned to her, but never again as the

innocent child that she had been. Mother Ruby sighed quietly to confront this truth, before turning to pack up the provisions she had brought with her to the lakeside.

As she walked home across the meadow Mother Ruby also looked within herself, to see how her own light had begun to wane just as it was taken up by her daughter. This hard, inescapable consequence of the nature of their souls. Yet as she reflected on this fact Mother Ruby felt a strange lightness, rather than regret, she felt a weight lifted from her and carried over to allow her to rise. Her sadness was also alleviated by her communion with her people, who rejoiced and commiserated with her in the shared spaces of their souls.

But her people were stern with her also. As she stood at the sink washing her preparations away Mother Ruby was reminded of her own powers and the strength that was yet within her, the evil that reigned in the world and the necessity for Lupa to confront it.

Mother Ruby felt her way towards the next locus of darkness, burning as she did so with a very dark blood red: the dense blood of a woman losing her youth but more vengeful and terrifying for that fact. She saw her next victim and the fate that awaited him, on this night when she had consecrated the soul of her only daughter.

Mother Ruby allowed herself a single cry of sorrow, and one of terrifying vengeance, before she vanished into the night.

CHAPTER 3

Fat Max

MAX Fairlight was born a normal boy, with the normal human ability to choose between good and evil. Had he been more courageous or disciplined he might have made a fine leader of men, because he had a gifted tongue and a strange charisma that could move most people to do what he wanted them to do. But Max Fairlight preferred cruelty to discipline, for it brought him the same reward, and he found courage to be thankless and too much like hard work. So he trod the path of iniquity, and there were few men who have trodden it so confidently and so well. He trod it also under cover of his surname, which spoke so generously of him, and that strange mantle, speaking of such goodness and light, admitted him to places that more pointed and ugly names might have excluded him from.

Max started small, the way cowards usually do, torturing insects and lizards and blinding the odd puppy. He learned the various facets of cruelty and he delighted in them, and he grew fat and strong and began to set his sights much higher, towards better victims who could feel more pain and more anguish for much longer. He led a gang at his school, routinely terrorising other children, and in their turn the members of his gang were consistently terrorised and beaten and molested by him.

Nobody escaped his cruelty.

Max learned to rule by fear and loathing, showing hints rather than the full force of his viciousness. His gang hurt every boy they could corner and isolate and they were particularly cruel to the kind-hearted boys, whom these cowards knew instinctively might outshine them and eventually overpower them, should they be permitted to grow properly into men.

One brave boy sassed Max directly, standing against him out of his special goodness and valour. For that sin the gang suspended him by his ankles from a tree behind the bike sheds, wrapping him in garbage bags, tying them so tight that he could scarcely breathe. They beat him with lengths of plastic pipe and improvised rope whips and then left him there dangling and screaming, and he was only fortunate that he screamed loudly enough that a teacher came to investigate and finally cut him down.

The gang was punished for that outrage, but not before they had the satisfaction of gathering with a large group of other boys to see that poor child being cut out of his plastic cocoon, crying and covered in his own shit and piss and vomit. Max Fairlight howled with laughter and derision when he saw this boy so degraded, and he also smirked with every blow of the cane that they gave him in return. He knew that his own cruelty was not nearly matched by their cruelty, that the cane was nothing compared to what he inflicted on people. As the strokes fell he knew that in this cruel world he was already amongst the great, even before his voice had broken, before he had grown into the vile man that he would eventually become.

Max Fairlight grew into a large and vicious man whose sadism

could only temporarily be sated. He married a slim gentle woman who had been brutalised and violated by her own father, and Max made sure that he continued in this pattern of abuse. He raped her and beat her and degraded her in ways that cannot be spoken of. And when she bore him children, from out of her poor wasted body, he also degraded and violated them in brutal and disgusting ways, subjecting his whole family to an absolute reign of terror.

Max Fairlight crushed other people and many never recovered, but he always rather enjoyed his own life. His lust for savagery and brutality was usually well satisfied in his home life, and he was ever so witty and charming in the outside world. He seemed most attractive to the women he met through work or at bars, because these were false places where he could pretend to be true and charm and cajole anyone who wandered close enough to be drawn in. Young women in particular fell under his spell, as he would flatter them and feign interest in their stories, especially their stories of love and the loss of love, at their desires sadly unfulfilled. He would nod and lie and say yes, yes, I know how that feels.

Max would charm these women and then lure them to the smart little rooms that he kept for these purposes, and there take them and use them in various degrading ways, leaving them bruised and feeling ugly and hollow, despising themselves for what he had done, for his own brutality and ugliness. And if that set them up for further exploitation at the hands of other brutal men, well, for Max there was that benefit to it also.

Like many psychopaths Max was keenly aware of the boundaries imposed upon him by the law, and he observed

those lines very carefully. Although his victims knew they had been terribly violated Max always made sure that there was nothing they might complain of in a specific enough way. In any event Max would have set them up with their own sexual texts, if they were ever to complain, the graphic photos he coerced them into sending him. Most of his victims felt as if his weight crushing down on them had taken so much of their spirit that they had no will left to complain, leaving them accusing only themselves, feeling only their own lack of worth, and only in their own degraded privacy regretting what they had allowed to happen, what from that point onwards would also continue to happen.



On the night that Max Fairlight led Ruby Tuesday into his apartment he was feeling unusually pleased with himself.

He had been drinking it up with some work buddies, bragging about his conquests, and he had a brilliant flash of insight when he went to take a piss. He saw that there was no justice in the world, in the sense of there being some over-seeing force for the righting of wrongs. He saw that all talk of justice and recompense was just that, hopeful talk for the benefit of children, to give them some hope in their lives.

Max laughed and he pissed on the floor a little, and as the proof of his own impunity spread there he laughed more and more, letting the rest of his urine stream out on to the floor. He did it

because he could do it, knowing that no judgment would come upon him, and that no man would dare to rebuke him, much less visit some vengeance on him. For this ugly deed, for any of the ugliness and iniquity he had brought into the world.

As if to prove his point Max went back to the bar to find a lovely thin waif of a girl awaiting him there. She smiled and smelled of fear and need, looking at him shyly with her big eyes. She was hardly more than a child, not properly out of home surely, the very way that Fat Max preferred his girls. She crept up to him and he smelt her fear and her desire to be dominated, as she touched his arm and asked him to buy her a drink.

He bought her one, of course, and he charmed her and she giggled and she soon seemed very drunk, leaning against him with her hand on his thigh. He drank some more bourbon and when he leaned over to kiss her he spat the drink into her mouth. She choked a little but managed to swallow, and as he laughed and told her in graphic terms what he was going to do to her she leaned in towards him and trembled all the more.

Max Fairlight led his victim out of the bar and she pressed against him in the cool night air. He was so busy anticipating the outrages he would visit upon this girl that he did not notice the lack of farewells as he lurched out of the door. He did not notice the silence of the people that they passed on the street, their faces turned upwards and away from him as they passed.

And later, when they were questioned, not one of his colleagues could recall seeing Max leave that bar. Not a single person there could remember a waif-like young girl drinking with him, or getting drunk with him, or pulling him out suddenly into that

brilliant moonlit night.



In this world vengeance is scarce, and judgment rarely falls upon those who most deserve it. But although Max Fairlight dismissed the thought of it entirely there are routes by which justice seeps into the world, scarce routes travelling through the eye of a needle but routes for it nonetheless.

In that night Fat Max was to learn the error of his ways. He threw the little girl down on to the bed, and he turned the lights up very high to better see what he was doing to her. But as he tumbled towards the bed he saw the girl slip around him, turning off every light in the room in a sudden swift flash. She was then at the window, throwing open the curtains, standing there for just a moment facing away from him, her naked body bathed in the brilliant moonlight.

The moon surged through Ruby and filled her, and as it built up in her she shone and spangled violently. She waited until she was fully absorbed in the moonlight before turning to face her prey, who at that precise moment was lazing vile and ignorant on the bed, leering at the slight, terrible beauty of the prize he had stolen for himself that evening, reaching for himself as he watched the young girl standing naked at the window.

Max's pleasure was choked out of him when Ruby turned to face him. He gagged in fear as her face blazed red and then

turned slowly in on itself, a death-mask of terrifying depravity, its features twisting and reflecting back to Max Fairlight the hideous nature of his deeds. He stared this horror in the face for many moments, and although he went to scream he felt the air sucked out of him towards the place where Ruby stood and shone and burned.

Max groaned in terror as his chest bulged outwards into the swift vacuum Ruby created before him. His engorged heart was exposed as his ribs collapsed outwards, and then with a horrible tearing noise it was sucked out of him, wrenched from the stays and the sinews that had held it in place. Ruby wrenched Max's heart clear of his chest and turned it back to show him, to accuse him by the blunt testimony of that gorged and swollen muscle.

Max's mind was also sucked out of him, and he knew the special terror reserved for those witnessing such an event. He saw his mind pulled to pieces, as he watched with what animal senses remained to him. He saw every cruel deed of his sorted and stacked higher than could be seen, he saw the weight of his own iniquity grown to the point where the stars in their multitudes could no longer tolerate his existence. He felt every blow he had ever meted out fall like a hammer upon his head, and he saw his sexual parts stretched out of him to be stomped and crushed by every perverted desire he had ever dreamed or fulfilled.

After she had shown Max all of these things Ruby was suddenly before him, bright and savage and terrifying. She put her mouth on his as if to kiss him, but it was a terrible kiss that this man was given. What things she had torn out of him, including the corruption of his heart, Ruby now force-fed back

down his throat despite his pitiful gagging. She forced these horrors down inside of Max until his torso swelled and bloated beyond recognition, the muscles of his abdomen straining to keep this diet of filth and degradation within him.

But Max could not hold himself in. His abdomen suddenly split, spewing out bile and putrid fragments of hatred, and his body was torn apart as he watched, amidst the filthy spray that his own innards had created.



After the destruction had subsided Ruby Tuesday rested for a few moments. The room was released from the tensions of judgment, and the body of Max Fairlight sank back into the corporeal world, out of the other dimensions where he had been taken to have judgment executed upon him.

After the storm had settled and Ruby had recovered her senses she left the suite quietly, slipping back into the night by the same way that she had come. Ruby was stealthy and she shielded the minds of the innocents as she quietly passed them by. If the concierge swore that he had seen a tall elegant lady pass him by, nodding to him as she left, he would be contradicted by a cleaner who had been surprised by a golden retriever emerging suddenly from an elevator to slip into the street outside.

Among these many accounts the one undisputed fact was that the lifeless body of Max Fairlight had to be stretchered from his rooms by no fewer than four strong men. He weighed far more than anyone could have imagined, as if his muscles and bones had bloated within him and turned themselves into lead.

Watchers might also have noted, with a shiver as they did so, that these strong men did not dare to approach the corpse, much less lift it up, until the horrifying rictus of terror on Max's face had been obscured with layers of blankets, placed there by the night porter, who approached the corpse walking backwards so he too could be spared the horror that was written on Max's bloated, terrified face.



Max Fairlight was an important man and the coroner had him cut open in order to prove it. Forensics looked inside him and drilled into his bones, but they saw nothing damaged there, nothing they could identify in any event.

The only thing that surprised them was finding Max's veins and arteries infiltrated with a fine black grit, which they tested and found to be more or less like finely ground charcoal. The ventricles of his heart were also thick with it. Forensics reasoned that Max must for some reason have injected himself with it, although they could find no puncture or bruise to betray the place where the needle had gone in, or the syringe he must have used to inject it.

In the end the coroner returned an open finding, noting that on the evidence available Max Fairlight was most plausibly dead by his own hand. There was a peculiar accuracy in this finding, for this man judged so terribly for the evil he had caused to come into the world. The findings were widely published, and also publicised, and as many beings as there were who understood these things and exulted in them, there were just as many beings who also clearly understood, and trembled.

CHAPTER 4

So Much To Be Consoled

RUBY returned home early the next morning. The moon had set and she felt herself much diminished, and when she walked into the house she fell exhausted into her mother's arms.

Ruby felt herself begin to sink and turn for the things that she had witnessed, the things that she had done. Her body began to surge with sobs, with tears begging to be released for those same terrible things.

Mother Ruby knew that this surge was to come. She held Ruby tightly and shepherded her mind beside the still waters of her heart. She led Ruby into the centre of their new shared space, and in that space Ruby heard things that sounded like words and yet which surpassed mere words, as Mother Ruby instructed her daughter in things that she still needed to learn.

Hush, my darling. We do not weep. These things that rout others, they shall not diminish us. We destroy evil in the dread terror of the night, and we pray for healing in the morning. I will staunch your tears, and stand with you. We shall not be overcome.

Ruby expanded to fill her own place within her mother's mercy. She then turned back her tears as her mother showed her, and they flowed within her like rain to wet the fields of her own heart. And out into the world flowed their opposite, a kind of cool spindrift of mercy and forgiveness, running like a river to those places where its healing was required.

The tenderness of mother and daughter flowed out into the clear dawn, and it fell first on the children of Max Fairlight. These innocents felt their hearts soften to welcome the waters in, and they were set free to uncoil themselves and collapse finally in relief and flooding tears.

Mother Ruby sought out Max's wife primarily, with her grave and urgent compassion. That stream broke open the great vault of her heart and merged with what was locked in there, a great tenderness of heart. This woman felt the merit she had heaped up as she had absorbed blows intended for her children, as she had continued to cherish them and uplift them amidst the violence of her marriage.

That morning around the breakfast table Max's wife wept and embraced her three daughters, and as they wept also she knelt and dried their tears. These four women held each other until all of the fear had gone out of them, and thus returned their broken parts to wholeness.

Ruby and her mother did not cease from flowing outwards for a long time. Their love and forgiveness ran outwards to soften and heal every outrage that their victims of that night had committed. The fractured souls of children were knit and made whole again, and as they brightened and shone those children ran about laughing, laughing for the sheer relief of their

redemption.

So it flowed. Poor kind men who had been bullied and broken felt lines of tension and shame leave their bodies, and they stood up straight again and felt their vigour and self-belief return. That morning careers were abandoned for much more benevolent careers, and hearts were enabled to love again, and spouses were reconciled into the love that had always resided in their hearts, without the fear that held that love from being poured out.

In that morning there was one man who wept with a special intensity, the bravest and most upright of the victims of Max Fairlight. As great tears of relief fell from his eyes this beaten man felt his hardship lift from him, and he felt his old strength and bravery come back into his heart, his old hunger and thirst for doing what is right, whatever the cost.

As his soul revived and decided this man also felt the whispers of a greater love drift into his heart, although he did not yet have the ears to hear it. A love song breathed into him, lifting him up. *You the most favoured amongst the sons of men.* His heart was exalted upon this secret psalm, he was raised up and set upon a strong foundation. *The hard hills and the mountains you have climbed, we have sung to you, Beloved.*

Upon these lines this man felt his right hand strengthen, and his left extend itself outwards towards mercy. He felt sure again that justice could be done, and he felt suddenly that he might do justice also, and live a life that was different from the crawling, terrified life that his torture had condemned him to. Without hearing the words but having their whole healing, without knowing the words that were recited to him at all.

CHAPTER 5

Sandra Lee

SANDRA Lee Megiddo was born in the very dark of the moon, the point where the moon was most swallowed in darkness. The world also was dark and her soul crept there amongst the bones of the living. It found itself admitted to a birthing suite and it waited hunched there in the gloom, ready to cast out the soul of the child who was to be born into the deep shadow of that night.

The woman who bore Sandra Lee was a loving but frail woman by the name of Lina. She howled and grunted and she endured a hard labour, for there was a struggle within her womb that she could perceive but never hope to understand. She laboured long into that night, and when she had birthed the child she was spent and she lay back on the bed and wept, for sheer exhaustion but also the blessing that after all of that struggle her child, the little soul she had so carefully nurtured, was safely out into the world.

When Lina Megiddo lay with her first child on her breast she expected to feel all manner of tenderness, especially the unconditional love that she had read about and so longed to feel. But when that soft skin touched hers she felt a violent

surge of repulsion and she began to cry out for the baby to be taken away. Each time the nurses brought the child back Lina would refuse to touch it. She became increasingly agitated, demanding to know what the hospital had done with her real child.

Eventually a psychiatrist was called. Lina told the psych in great detail about what had happened, how her real child had been stolen from her and replaced with a child that had the devil in it. The psych was gentle and intent and asked her a number of questions, and in the end could have no doubt that Lina should be treated assertively for post-natal psychosis.

Lina did not recover. She refused the medication that was offered and soon would not eat or drink. She was moved to the specialist maternity psychiatric unit, where despite good intramuscular medication and the care of the maternity nurses she continued to deteriorate. Lina wept and begged for the nurses to believe her, and when she was not believed she grew in her conviction that the child had placed a curse on her, that worked even in its absence, and all of this continued to spiral in her mind until one morning, despite the special obs they conducted, poor Lina Megiddo was found hanging by a bedsheet knotted to the television stand at the opposite wall to her bed. There was no note of explanation.

After the arrangements had been made the baby Sandra Lee went home with her broken-hearted father. She lived with him until she was sixteen years old. From an early age she had severe temper tantrums, and when she flew into a rage she became possessed of an immense strength that belied her tender age. She left her father feeling concerned and then increasingly terrified as her strength increased. He told friends

and family of his fears and they scolded him, insisting that a dear sweet child could not possibly do such things, could not have any other intention but to love and be loved. They tutted and told him that if he just came from a Place of Love, as they called it, then all of these behaviours would resolve themselves in time.

Sandra Lee never made any friends. She would sit in the school playground silently all lunchtime, and then she would go back to class and sit there silently too. Her teachers worried about her but her grades were not too bad, and in any event they could never get her father to focus on these issues or take the necessary remedial steps. Sandra matured early but she showered irregularly, her hygiene was poor and she began to reek, but although she was increasingly alienated at home and at school nobody had the courage or the inclination to intervene or to help her. Such help that would have been scorned in any event.

When Sandra was eight years old she knocked her father out from behind with a shovel while he was knelt down weeding some onions. When he came to she was on top of him, straddling him, her hands around his throat trying to choke the air out of him. He managed to get up but only after she had put her face close to his and hissed: You Tell No Body.

The poor man obeyed and remained silent and terrified from that point onwards, enduring increasing violence and indignity until on the day of her sixteenth birthday, her sweet sixteenth, Sandra Lee Megiddo sat sullen on the lounge room floor amongst a mess of broken plastic, while in his bedroom her father lay dead from choking on the body of a Barbie doll, his neck arched backwards, two dainty plastic feet still sticking out

of his mouth.

On her sixteenth birthday, having murdered the father who raised her, Sandra Lee showered perfunctorily, packed a small bag with some clothes, and left home. Although the flames that rose from the house were soon fierce and spectacular she did not pause to savour them, or even to glance backwards at them. She hitched rides for a thousand miles and more, and when she arrived in the Great City she bought a hard packet of cigarettes and headed straight to the red-light district, turning her first tricks that same day.

The first few times she was mildly fascinated at the way men moved and grunted on her, as she lay there and smoked and felt the ugliness and cowardice of these creatures. She felt their sinister weight, she felt the lies they had told to their wives and she was gladdened and aroused by these dreadful things. Although she did not move or respond still they pushed themselves inside of her as if she were something dead or inhuman. She smoked and she smiled at this violence and degradation, which so agreed with her own conception of the world.

Sandra soon tired of being passive. She started to toy with the men who came to use her, and visit her own degradation upon them. She did not harm the ones who were violent to her, who tried to subdue her, in fact she would encourage that by affecting the weakness and frailty that she had seen in her mother those first times she had touched her and made her recoil.

But the gentle men, who were there for intimacy or relief, these she despised and she would assail them in sickening ways. She

would clench her muscles and twist and they would cry out in pain, and she learned to do this in such an expert way that she caused frightening damage to the parts they put inside her.

This savagery fed upon itself and soon Sandra Megiddo was engaged in all manner of depravity. Men would be found slain in cheap motel rooms with their genitals stuffed in their mouths, or in the back seat of their cars with their pubic bones crushed in, their ears and noses bitten off.

Sandra knew that these acts would inevitably lead to sanction, and that the authorities would be closing in, but she knew with her special sight that there would be many more occasions for cruelty before she was apprehended.

She also slavered at the possibilities that would open to her once she had been detained, all of the opportunities for degradation and vileness that her years in the prison system would provide to her. Free or incarcerated, she slavered at the possibilities.



On a warm moonlit night Sandra Lee was waiting on her usual corner when a car pulled up and a woman called out to her from the driver's side window. Sandra went up to the vehicle and saw two lovely women who told her that they were mother and daughter. Sandra was intrigued by that, and by the older woman's explanation of what they wanted her for. A price was

negotiated and money was produced, and the two women drove Sandra to a plain hotel back up towards the airport.

When they had closed the door to their room the younger woman produced a looped length of soft rope, part of the game they wanted her to play. Sandra sat and allowed herself to be tied to a wooden chair. She knew that she could break the rope easily if that was required, but for the moment she was interested to see where this game might go. She liked that there was some prospect of her own indignity and suffering, which to her was as enjoyable as suffering meted out to others.

Having tied her to the chair the women then lifted Sandra with sudden and effortless strength, depositing her on to the small balcony that was attached to the room. The slack rope they had tied her with suddenly clinched tight around her and began to burn. With her dull curiosity Sandra supposed this was from friction, but as the full moon beamed down on her she saw its power taken up into those tight lines, searing through her skin and her flesh to burn her bones right through to their marrow.

The ropes burned and burned. The fire also spread out from those containment lines and slowly burned off Sandra's skin, consuming her hair and her sebaceous glands in a putrid, bubbling burn. The fire reached her neck and then her face, and as it spread there the vitreous parts of her eyes boiled and ran down her cheeks, a terrible effigy of tears. As Sandra burned the chair that she sat on remained completely untouched, the ropes also remaining tight and unaffected as the whole substance of her stolen body was burned away into cinders.

As her life in this body was extinguished there was no horror for Sandra Lee. She regretted that her desire to roam the earth

would remain unsatiated for some time, that some potential victims would now remain unscathed by her. She felt some pain but no sorrow, as such human emotions had no place within her.

As she was devoured Sandra did wonder about her tormentors, surprised that there should be such vengeance upon the earth. She had gorged on human weakness and human venality, and she could not comprehend these strange women who stared at her and chanted quietly as she burned away to nothing.

As the fire consumed the last of her skin Sandra shrugged her shoulders and began to laugh. She laughed louder and louder and soon she was quaking with laughter, the first mirth she had ever experienced in her short journey through the world. The fire though would not be mocked and soon even her laughing was burned away, as the body that hosted her spirit fell apart and the ropes fell slack against the cool timbers of the chair, the fire resolving itself back into moonlight with nothing further to burn.



The body of Sandra Lee was consumed but that merely released her soul once more, casting it back into the shadows. The soul of Megiddo was restored to the creeping thing that it had been, waiting in contempt for the next poor body that might house it.

As the soul of Megiddo was released it oriented itself to the

gloom, looking carefully around. It began to creep quietly past the source of its release, seeking to escape the further sanction of these women by way of the lines of inert matter that thread their way through the bright places of the world.

As the soul slouched onwards it was halted. It found its way blocked by a strange barrier that swirled around it, suddenly appearing everywhere at once, a fast eddy current conjured by these women from the strange circular chant they began to intone.

The soul lurched forwards again but the chant denied it any forward movement. The words then began to grab and twist the tendrils that the soul felt its way forwards with. The words began to twist tremendously around the soul, and in the grip of those swivelling lines the soul began to twist also, and then spin with increasing velocity. The soul cried out to be released but that merely wrenched it further into motion, as the spin imparted to it mounted incessantly. The soul was spun faster and faster, crushed by its dire pirouette into a smaller and smaller corner of the world.

And for its sins was the soul of Megiddo confined, in a prison of a terrible singularity. It continued to spin there, faster and more sickened and horrified, packed smaller and smaller into that one tiny corner of space and time where there could be no quantification. The spin was then released and made absolute and the desolation of this soul was assured. It was cut off from any forgiveness, for it had no claim to mercy, merely the destiny to be forever damned to its tiny prison where it would continue to spin, spin.

CHAPTER 6

Jesse James

Jesse Quinn had a hard birth but was a smiling baby, at least at the beginning of his life. He brought into the world some talents and some weaknesses but there was nothing very special about the way he saw the world, save for his constant feeling that he stood slightly to the outside of things, and that try as he might he could never reach the central place where the major parts of life were conducted.

As a child he was baptised Jesse, with James as his middle name, and thus was his father before him named. But it was a short lineage, of such redolent names, and Jesse's grandfather had not been so named, nor the many men that had gone before him. These earlier men were not marked out either to cause suffering or to save, but there was such a mark upon this child Jesse, bluntly obvious to those who were properly informed. Amongst these there spread a ripple of excitement when he was born into the world, a hope of a major victory on both sides of the ethical equation.

Whatever the destiny of this child there was a terrible bitterness that had guided his mother Naomi in the choice of his name. Jesse's father JJ had been a dashing man, and in his brighter

moments could focus intense love on the people he chose to favour. But he fell mostly in love with himself, as his life grew longer, especially with his own image reflected in the soft eyes of the women he caused to desire him, and the fickle men who both admired and envied him for the spell he could cast on women.

This weakness was an inheritance, rather than JJ's birthright, and as weak men have done throughout the ages he always pleaded this fact in his defence. This false and venal man had been brutalised by his mother, who was not ashamed at her brutality for he was, so she would say: a bad child, a bad seed. And although JJ was not in his turn brutal he was weak and unreliable and loved only those people he could control. Increasingly his main satisfaction was in neglecting and denying his wife Naomi, and elsewhere bleeding and manipulating other people, multiplying his own iniquity and sending it out into the world.

Jesse's mother Naomi might these days be described as a complex woman. Along with everything else that had assaulted her, every other insult she had to bear, there was awful difficulty in giving birth to Jesse and she was not able to have any more children after him. All of these things merged and submerged in creating bitterness in her heart, which then coursed out on to the head of her only son, trading hardship for that particular tenderness that he needed his mother to give him.

Was this the fault of Naomi? It is pointless to ask. Did her name expose her to the triumph of bitterness? It is pointless to speculate. Naomi was what she became, a sad and distorted woman, and she found devastating ways to press those

distortions home. She focussed her scorn and resentment on her son Jesse, and was thus able to present a preternaturally sunny disposition to other people. Your mother is a wonderful woman, people would say. You are lucky to have her. As this deception worked Jesse's wounds ever deeper in him.

If Jesse ever queried this reality people were resolute and disparaging. Your mother loves you, they would say, some of them spitting those words at him. All mothers love their children. They would deny his reality and turn it back on him, saying that it was wickedness to suggest anything else. How dare you, they would say. Ungrateful child, to question the love of your mother.

With parents like these there was no hope for this boy Jesse James. He was raised on a diet of bitterness and self-abnegation, and like his mother, like his father in his turn, Jesse turned his bitterness and his rage upon others. Continuing as he did so the great chain of evil suffered and evil inflicted, reaching back endlessly through the vast circle of time.

Jesse became cruel. He hurt animals and smaller children and he would kill things for the satisfaction of it, and in his cruelty and his rage he was transformed into precisely the child that his mother needed him to be. The man that her bitterness had demanded from her flesh, the man who would prove to her those lies that were stored in her heart.

See what he does to me.
Even the son of my own body.
See what he is.
This is the Truth.
This is not my fault.

But the story changes, here.

Before Jesse was a man, without any shadow of a beard on his face, he began to experience snatches of horror and heart-sickness at the terror he was dealing into the world.

When these fits took him Jesse tried to crush them down. But the accusations within him would not relent, even when he turned his face away. At such a young age his conscience rose and overwhelmed him, witnessing the dire nature of his actions and their ugly fruit.

Jesse was dismayed by these things and the more he reflected the more he felt ashamed. He thought of his small cousin Laura, hardly old enough to walk, and how he had left her behind in an empty street because she could not keep up with him. He saw the tears on her dark lashes as he recalled his harsh words and his taunts and he was assailed by tremendous shame and grief. Even though his heart offered him further ways to avoid these feelings he let his feelings come, and they seared into his mind and heart. He saw his other cruelty, saw his mother's little dog shy away from him whenever he approached. Jesse knew the reason for that, the beatings and abuse he had dispensed, and suddenly tears came into his eyes, burning, stinging tears of self-reproach. They burned and he saw through them into the ugliness of his actions: the suffering they had created, the suffering they had maintained.

You should know: this is uncommon decency. For a boy so young, still nothing like a man, to turn away from his own iniquity, to be pricked by the stern reproach of his conscience without shifting the blame, without implicating even his

mother in the disease that had grown within him.

Just as Jesse was overpowered by his shame and his remorse, so too did he repent sincerely from his actions. Jesse changed his ways, and he swore especially to atone for his misdeeds, and in that instant of repentance all of his rage and cruelty was overpowered. As his heart turned towards the Light it turned the bitterness of Naomi out into the dust, to flail there and be still, with no further place to breed in him, and no purchase either within him or within the victims that he might have grafted it to.



Cynics might observe that Jesse had no claim to such repentance, or any example to follow in the restoration of his own damaged heart. He had been badly betrayed by the people who should have loved him, and there was no obvious influence in his life that could have set his footing so firmly back on the proper path.

But the world is vast, as are the places outside of it, and in the desert places where the strange voices sing perhaps there was some intercession on his behalf. A deep and abiding love that sang strangely to Jesse, from the clear space of these outward places, especially when he would doze, or dream, or come to the verge of sleep.

Sometimes in the dusk, in the night season, this love might float down upon his head, or rise like mist from the ground

luminosity that arose unseen, unnoticed about him at these times. In the morning with the dew on the grass, and before the first light of the sun, a sure love that sang to him, that did not falter from its singing.

And if he could discern the words, in those times when he was anointed by them, reading the patterns in the dew and the evening sky, the mist upon the night gardens, Jesse may have heard these words, praising him and calling him to the greatness he was destined for:

*Who is this, whose eyes are the Morning Sun
His face as irresistible as the dawn?
Who is it that comes among us
Like the balsam that flows upon the slopes of Gilead?*

This strange love song that falls mostly on deaf ears and hearts of stone but which also falls on more fertile fields, like the heart of this Jesse James, hearts that are constructed to be entirely susceptible to it:

He is chief amongst the ten thousand...

And it may have been this love that Jesse learned by, this love that he followed, this song that led him to the places where men are guided so that they may be restored.

And it may be that Jesse multiplied this love within himself, and thus purified his heart, and grew worthier of this love as it reached out ever more strongly to him. Even though the architects of this song could not help but sing to him, as the world has been made.

And if Jesse grew in his many gifts, gifts that might repay
sevenfold the strange ones who sang to him, and if he thus
accepted the destiny he was born to?

O you who know the truth -

CHAPTER 7

Better Than Birthdays

FOR those years that were designated to them Mother Ruby and Ruby Pearl roamed together and hunted together. Together they faced many dangers, and they destroyed many other dangers separately and alone. They shared and stored up their knowledge of these things without resorting to words, in the shared space that grew between them, unlimited even by the arcane forms of description that could approximate the nature of their deeds.

Ruby Child proved herself to be a savage hunter and to have an instinct for rout and capture that was developed far beyond the instincts of her mother. More and more Ruby led her mother in their forays, and she was so absorbed in their exact execution that she did not notice that her mother was lagging further behind, showing less and less fervour for the hunt. In her dedication Ruby did not see the space between them taken up increasingly by her young soul, as her mother's soul spooled down and was diminished. Ruby did not notice, when they sang together after hunting, she did not notice her mother sing ever more quietly, retaining more of the evil she had encountered, her strength slowly attenuating and laying her lower and lower.

One day Ruby arrived home from college to be greeted as usual by her mother waiting at the door of their little house. But on this day Ruby saw very deeply into her mother's soul and she saw the blunt truth of what was occurring there, what had been occurring for months without Ruby ever noticing.

Ruby gasped and pushed roughly past her mother and went directly to her room. She blocked her ears but she could not shut out the sound of her mother singing to her, this time her line more tenuous, full of longing and sadness and also a grave contrition.

Despite her shock and pain Ruby Child came out of her room, following her mother's songline down to where she sat waiting for her, pouring her a cup of tea.

Why didn't you tell me?
Her mother smiled and stroked Ruby's burning cheeks.
It is forbidden, she said.
So that you would not seek to hold me.

How long do we have?
Some time, her mother said.
And my precious Ruby you already know. There is no death for us.
That is just a song, Ruby said.
No, her mother said. It is our song.
But is it true?
Yes, my child. I am with you. I will always be.

Ruby wanted to say more, or yell and run out of the house, but she saw how great was the weariness that had descended upon

her mother. Ruby led her by the hand to her bedroom and made her lie down, and although her mother told her not to fuss Ruby went to make her a fresh cup of tea, and a little bit of buttered toast.

When she returned to the bedroom her mother was already fast asleep. Ruby set her offerings down on the bedside table, and she sat there silently beside her unwaking mother until night came down around them.



Mother Ruby's sleep did not refresh her, and from that point onwards she rarely left her bed. Ruby tried to feed her but she took very little by way of food or drink, and she grew pale and her breath became shallow and strained whether she woke or slept.

Ruby knew that her mother was dying and she wanted to bring her medicine, but she also knew in the deep part of her bones that the death approaching her mother was not something that could be halted, even by the best medicine that was available.

Mother Ruby breathed shallower and shallower until there was little air that circulated in her lungs. She moved less and spoke less, and then upon the first new moon after she had taken to her bed, in that time between the darkness and the dawn, she stopped breathing altogether and her heart was still.

Ruby made careful funeral arrangements. She directed that her

mother's body was to be burned, and she accompanied the body to every place that she was admitted, and she waited just outside the doors if that was all she was allowed. She directed that her mother should not be treated with any kind of chemical, and that nobody was to disturb her organs or her blood in any manner at all. Her mother was placed in a pine box without any adornment and she was brought as quickly as possible to the crematorium, where she was to be burned absolutely in accordance with Ruby's wishes. For as she grieved Ruby knew what forces were arrayed during that intervening time, forces anxious to take the body of her mother and to desecrate it, to use it for their own despicable ends.

On the final morning of these preparations Ruby sat in the crematorium, tense and serious and vigilant. Her mother's coffin was placed on to the conveyor and soon the flames of the furnace began to consume her body.

Ruby had been vigilant but as the fire did its work she knew there was no further need of that. She softened and found tears welling in her eyes, but she knew that these were forbidden to her even in such extremity. She closed off her tears and she sat without crying, shaking and shuddering in her desperate, dry-eyed grief.

As she sat and shook Ruby felt the flames devour her mother's body, and for the first time in her life she felt horribly, disastrously alone. Even by the standards of this depraved world she made a piteous sight, this slight girl shaking and heaving against the vastness of the world, having so carefully delivered her mother to the flames that were taking her away.

Ruby sat while the last parts of her mother were consumed and

turned to ash. But just as she felt that happen, the last of her mother's body disintegrate, she felt the latches of her heart snap open. And what flowed into her, what her heart rejoiced to absorb? These are things that cannot be told, but Ruby's sadness was turned into joy, and just as she had sown in sorrow, so did she rejoice as she gathered in her sheaves. Her spirit soared in a fierce rush and joined ultimately with the soul of her mother, and also with the soul of every Ruby Tuesday that had gone before them. She found that what her mother had always sung to her was true, and that song was suddenly within her being sung by many singers, singing her back to the Garden where once they had sung, to which they will be restored by the One who will be sent to deliver them.



After some time the stiff man who was assisting Ruby with the funeral arrangements came up and sat next to her, carrying a small steel urn that he held out for her to take. Ruby thanked him with a smiling, overspilling warmth, and the man was both pleased and intensely puzzled by the change that had come upon this poor girl who had so recently lost her mother.

These are her ashes, he said.

Thank you, said Ruby.

I'm so sorry.

Don't be, she said, warmly shaking his hand.

The man did not know what else to say. He gravely wished her

all the best, and she thanked him again, and although she took the urn with due gravity she only did so in order to protect the man from the limits of his understanding, the narrow constraints of his particular religious faith.

Ruby walked out of the crematorium into the cool air. She smelled the coming rain, the cool rain that was to fall on that day, the mercy that falls from heaven.

As she walked down the raked gravel of the driveway she opened the urn, and she let the ashes slowly swirl out of the vessel as she walked. The ashes dusted themselves against the neat hedges, and out on to the edges of the carefully tended path.

After all of the ashes were swept out Ruby dropped the urn into the last of the hedges lining the driveway to the crematorium. And through fine and persistent rain she walked bareheaded all the way back to her home. The rain moved in creases and rivulets through her hair and across her face, touching the sides of her mouth as they coursed there, her smile softly meeting the tiny streams as they flowed across her skin.

Ruby walked for many hours. When she arrived home she sat down at the kitchen table and smiled to think of her new presence there, now fully inhabiting their home. She thought of what she had become, what she was turning into. Ruby felt her mother now absolutely with her, and also the absolute presence of her lineage for the first time in her life, reaching back to those times when there was little else upon the earth. She felt her mother's admiration for how she had confronted her grief, she heard her mother whisper to her and teach her those things that remained to be taught. And in that intense presence, the whole

P . J U L I A N

of her mother's soul, Ruby was most willingly instructed.

BOOK II
(2 Lupa)

CHAPTER 8

Jesse James, Law Man

ALTHOUGH religion was not the obvious cause of his suffering, the deprivation of Jesse James was multiplied by the fact that he was brought up within the confines of the Catholic Church.

Jesse went to mass and he saw the grim warnings. He was assailed by piteous images of Christ Crucified, this Sorrowing God who was also a young man, living alone and suffering alone. Jesse saw that for His bravery in particular Jesus was scourged and broken and killed, all at the will of His distant Father, who would neither intervene on His behalf, nor stoop to ameliorate His agony, deaf to His terrible, agonised pleas. *Eli, Eli. Why have you abandoned me?* To save the world it was said, but Jesse could see like anyone else that despite His horrifying suffering the world had not been saved.

Despite all of his misgivings Jesse thought he might be called to the priesthood, when he had finished his schooling. He liked the idea of listening to people and providing succour both practical and spiritual, and he thought that he might best be able to help people if he were freed from the burden of earning money.

Jesse's parish priest was a sharp-minded monsignor who still harboured some kindness in his heart, along with a hard kind of wisdom. He saw Jesse's genuine devotion to the welfare of other people, this devotion so rarely encountered, and he invited Jesse to eat with him at the presbytery one night.

Jesse came to dinner and the meal was pleasant enough. It was not until after dinner, when the priest was relieved by a couple of glasses of scotch, that he really searched Jesse out. The priest quickly gave him the warning that he wished in his sombre moments that somebody had given to him, when there was still time left to him to live some other sort of life.

Don't be mistaken, the priest said. It is a lonely life.

Jesse nodded, although he went to disagree.

But your parishioners...

Need me, from time to time.

And I am there for them.

But I wonder, often, why there is nobody there for me.

Jesse looked puzzled.

Isn't God there?

Ah my boy, the monsignor said. I wish I had more to tell you about that. I know God doesn't speak to me, not like He used to. Perhaps He is just a good listener. But that comforts me less and less as I get older.

Jesse asked a few more tentative questions that the old priest either rebuffed or avoided, and they sat mostly in silence, looking down at their hands. As the evening lengthened Jesse noticed the old man sink back further into his chair and his eyes began to glitter strangely. Jesse knew that any further questions

he might ask would come only as a goad to the priest, and he had no desire to cause this crumbling old man any further suffering. Jesse also saw in a bright flash that although the presbytery was very clean it was also very sterile, right down to the ornaments on the mantelpiece. Jesse knew suddenly that this was not a House of God, at least not of any God that he could relate to.

Jesse stayed long enough to be polite and then he stood awkwardly and thanked the Monsignor for his hospitality. Jesse was sincere in his thanks but as he was walking down the front steps he felt a tremendous weight shrug and lift off him. He felt the evening coolness greet him and revive him, as the dew drifted down softly through the night air, and as those strange refrains called to him again from just beyond his hearing Jesse almost turned and marched back to the presbytery, to grab the old man by the hand and bring him out into the night air, to be blessed by it, perhaps to be set free.

But Jesse did not turn back. He had seen the tremor in the Monsignor's hands, the whiskey he poured to relieve it, and he knew that there would be no redemption for such a man even in the deep consolation of that night, for he had made his election and stood condemned by it and was now lost to healing of any kind.

Instead Jesse walked home through the cool evening, grateful and unencumbered, still without a clear path but also preserved from one particularly nasty fate. He walked slowly and let the night breezes instruct his heart, and hint to him in words he did not recognise what he might do with his life: what he might achieve, how he might be blessed, how he might really live.



When Jesse finished school he looked around hoping to find himself a career. Something that would suit a hard-working young man who was strong and diligent but not particularly brilliant at anything. Jesse spoke to a couple of adults that he trusted, and he looked into himself for inspiration, and in the end he chose to enter the police.

As a police officer Jesse had hoped to serve and protect, to be a bastion for those who most needed protection, but Jesse was naive to hope for these things. What he found instead was a brutal culture seeded heavily with corruption. On more than one occasion he was handed a plain yellow envelope and he knew without opening it what it contained. Each time he would hand the windfall back, shaking his head, and when he had done this three times he was marked out for it and nobody was ever the same way towards him again. Even other police who would not take the envelopes did not acknowledge him or help him any further.

The one time he tried to speak to his sergeant about it the man made a zipping motion across his lips and mimed shooting himself in the head. Jesse got up quickly and saluted and said yessir and got out of there as fast as he could, his guts churning and his mind trying to overcome his fear, wondering whether he had already gone too far to escape the sanction that his superior officer had so clearly signalled to him.

Jesse was accustomed to being on the outside of things, and he

might have persisted with his chosen career had there been some good that he could do. Instead he found himself booking drunks and itinerants and junkies, people who needed help rather than punishment, and he restrained and sometimes injured earnest students and immigrants and plain ordinary mothers and fathers who were protesting some just cause or other. He took a secondment to the sexual offences unit and he sat for those weeks looking at disgusting images of children, issuing warrants for the arrest of the men who collected these images, for some reason or satisfaction entirely unfathomable to Jesse.

There were real children in these images but the investigators never found the monsters who were degrading them in such ways. They only ever busted the pathetic men who were addicted to looking at these pictures, men who had almost without exception been the victims of terrible abuse themselves. Jesse knew that they had been brutalised and twisted by far worse crimes than they had committed but he also knew there was no point in speaking such truths, as he would be taken as justifying or perhaps identifying with these degenerates, and so he reluctantly and silently kept doing his job, amassing the evidence he needed to put these wretches into jail.



Jesse admired women, from his strange distance, and he experienced longing for certain of them that he could not put

into words. Now and then he even got up the courage to ask a girl out. He would smile and approach her with the same longing that had called to him as a child, that called to him even now, the only love that Jesse had ever known.

For some reason this love only repulsed the women he approached. They batted it away and sneered at him and said: stop with this needy shit already. He tried a couple of times to explain that he could take care of himself, and of them also if they would like that, but this reaction in these women was not susceptible to that sort of rationality, and his protestations only served to confirm their accusations against him. You are so fucking lame.

There were clever girls who immediately recognised the damage that Naomi had put in him but it was with a cruel instinct. They mocked him in subtle ways and he never had any defence to that kind of derision. They mocked the victim as though it were his crime, his shortfall, and Jesse in his longing could not protect himself against this knowing sort of cruelty.

Jesse would treat women kindly and they would tire of that especially, in their damaged hearts that yearned only for abuse. They would leave him stranded while they went off with callous boys who preened and grinned with their teeth, who flattered expertly but had no real love in them. Boys who would complete the circuit of contempt by seducing these women and using them, then turning on them with scorn or cruelty if they were ever requested to make good on their blandishments, their extravagant promises of Love.

After a while Jesse stopped trying. He forgot any thought of love and went on through life resigned, and lonely, and as he

grew out of his childhood the strange mercy that had always anointed him grew more and more remote. Jesse walked alone without any consolation and he began to doubt whether there was any love left in the world. This conviction that nobody will allow, this desolate truth that has been cried out in Psalms and other supplications since the beginning of history. Jesse came to expect very little of women, and although he nursed his life along he almost entirely forgot that there was something, somewhere in the deep heart of the world, something that loved him and wanted him to be happy.



One day Jesse was appearing for the prosecution at the magistrate's court. He made his usual fair submissions, moderated by an understanding of the sad and often brutal backgrounds of those he was prosecuting.

One defendant particularly moved him, a woman who had been charged for possession of a small amount of methamphetamine and for other petty offences. She had something of his mother about her, as she trembled and scratched her arms. Like Naomi she sought to blame everybody else for her predicament but there was truth in that as well, such that any compassionate soul would be moved to pity for this poor creature, hunched there at the bar table weeping and shuddering and holding out her hands.

The duty lawyer who was defending that day knew something

of Jesse, and he was moved by the obvious compassion that Jesse extended to this poor woman. After the morning's list was completed he came over and touched Jesse's arm and said: Senior Constable. Would you have time for a coffee? Jesse smiled and said: I don't, I really don't, but I think I can make an exception.

Over bad coffee and a couple of shortbread biscuits the lawyer told Jesse various things. He spoke about Legal Aid funding being pruned back, about the increasing difficulty in getting people access to justice. He asked Jesse various things with a keen and rare interest, such as how he came to be a cop.

I wanted to make a difference, Jesse said.

And are you?

Jesse smiled.

Probably not, but I'm trying to do no harm.

The lawyer told him that there were not many jobs that made a difference but that keeping busted-ass people out of jail was difference enough for him. Jesse said that he was not lawyer material but his new friend waved that away. It's not rocket science, he said. There are the elements of the offence, and there is the evidence. You do it all already. All you really need is the desire to keep these people on the right side of the fence. And the courage to stand up and fight for them, even when they won't fight for themselves.

As Jesse listened his heart surged quietly. He knew that this conversation was destined to bring about a change, that it was one of those opportunities life is able to present to people if they have the courage and the grace to accept. The lawyer offered to have a word to the Dean of one of the law schools in

the city, a friend of his. Jesse thanked him for that but he was also slightly puzzled. Why would you do this for me? he asked. The lawyer shrugged and said: some people are obscure, Senior Constable, but you're not one of them. You are clearly one of the good guys.

In due course the Dean was approached and Jesse was offered a place in an accelerated degree programme with a half-scholarship. Jesse took the place, and he remained poor for a long time, but with work at a security firm and extreme frugality he was able to pay his way. As it had been at school Jesse was not particularly brilliant but he was never too far behind, and he had the advantage of his police work to take him over various obstacles. Jesse eventually graduated with a mid-range honours degree with a reasonable specialty in criminal law and procedure.

Jesse thought about joining a firm or Legal Aid but after a couple of interviews he decided that he knew enough to strike out on his own. He rented a tiny office on the shabby fringe of the city and he put out his shingle and on it was written simply:

Jesse J. Quinn
(Formerly Senior Constable)
Attorney at Law

Jesse worried about paying his rent or having to pull beers at a bar to cover himself but as soon as he opened his doors there was a steady stream of clients. People who thought that he might be able to talk to the police for them, to get them some advantage, but while Jesse held some sway most of his former colleagues envied him, with some turning that into open hostility.

Jesse was not concerned. He knew that the most important person to persuade was the judge or magistrate hearing the case, and as he concentrated on that aspect of persuasion he soon became very deft. He could be tough when that was required, and also very subtle, and he had great success even in the most difficult cases. He would get his clients put on diversion orders and community service, obtaining orders for the treatment of their addictions and their mental illnesses. Although some of his clients actually preferred a stint in prison there were many who moved through these services back to health and decent lives. Such results gratified Jesse very greatly, and spurred him to work ever harder.

Jesse was not especially good looking but he was tall and broad and he carried himself gravely and with grave sincerity. The truth also infused him, as he spoke and listened with serious direction and intent. He would take his clients out for coffee and a sandwich and speak to them from his heart, and many clients came to believe that there was some value in their lives merely by hearing Jesse assert this truth to them. He also outlined their choices: their own past of depravity and suffering sprawling hopelessly into the future, or the path of honour and their own conviction. And though there were many clients who heard Jesse and did not listen, there were many who were moved by his words and went on to prove his faith in them.



Jesse worked hard and he won hard cases and his wins brought

him a great deal more work. Some clients were referred by caseworkers and parole officers and family but increasingly people heard of Jesse directly and they came to him for help. He became very busy and then crazy-busy and things generally deteriorated until a colleague pulled him up one day, laughing at the mess of paper that Jesse was drowning in.

You need some help, he said.
Jesse smiled, looking around.
I think you might be right.
Here, said his colleague.
I wrote you an advert, to save your sorry ass.

The advert was put in the next day's papers, and it drew a surprising number of applicants. Jesse looked over the resumes that these people had submitted, their various qualifications and experience, but they all seemed to merge with one another and look very much the same. He thought interviews might help but the candidates were all similarly polished, and they each told him exactly the same things about why he would be lucky to hire them. Jesse was polite and he thanked each applicant for their interest, but with every interview he felt like he was getting further and further away from finding what he needed.

There was one applicant, though. She held herself quietly and with strange poise for such a young woman, and there was also a sad intensity in her that Jesse identified with. She answered all of his questions with tremendous sincerity even when the truth counted against her, and when Jesse asked her about the terrible mess he had made she smiled quietly and nodded, saying: yes, Mr Quinn. I think that I can fix it.

So Ruby Pearl Tuesday came to work for Jesse Quinn. The first week she did not seem to make much headway against the mess, but she smiled as Jesse looked around and apologised and she said: Mr Quinn. I promise you. You can leave it to me.

Jesse blushed and said: of course, Ruby.

I'm just sorry I'm such a mess.

She smiled at him, looking around.

You've got yourself in a bit of a state, haven't you.

Jesse nodded.

Never mind, Mr Quinn.

I think I can handle it.

Before the end of the next week the office was like a new pin. There were shelves of files and bold long file numbers, allocating every note and scrap of paper to its proper place.

Jesse was astonished by this transformation and he felt tremendous gratitude, and he rushed out to buy Ruby some flowers that same afternoon. In his haste Jesse forgot the profound significance of roses and he bought her twelve long stems, the flowers all a deep velvet red. He saw Ruby gasp as he held the bunch out towards her, and he blushed suddenly and profoundly until he was nearly the same colour as the flowers.

I'm sorry, he said.

I just didn't know what else...

Oh Mr Quinn, she said.

Roses are my favourite.

Especially in that colour.

Jesse smiled and nodded, his face growing less inflamed.

Now Jesse Quinn had a mind that became absorbed very easily in the one thing that was before it, which was one reason why his filing had come so badly undone.

It was also the main reason that he did not notice anything strange occurring after Ruby came to work for him, the strange change in the ebb and flow of clients arriving at his office, the way that clients departed as well. Certain clients would just drop off the radar without any explanation, and there were new clients who seemed to pop up from the most unlikely places. Clients who would walk in unannounced as if in a dream, and when Ruby announced them she might also say quietly: Mr Quinn. It could be a good idea to see this client immediately. Just for a minute, just to calm her down.

Jesse would always comply with those things that Ruby asked of him. He met with these clients and heard their stories, and more and more those stories were of violence and persecution. Sometimes that was at the hands of the police but usually there were far worse perpetrators than that. These clients would often weep as he dispensed his advice and reassurance, and tell him as he did so: I knew it. I knew they were right, to draw me to you. Although Jesse would agree he had no real understanding of the import of these words. He would just nod in agreement and say: there are never any guarantees, but I promise you I'll give it my best shot.

Monday mornings Jesse would take Ruby down the street for brunch, and they would talk over anything that needed reviewing. Ruby spoke without referring to notes or lists, reminding Jesse of deadlines and court dates, showing him all of these things set out in the diary that she kept for him.

They would eat and then walk slowly back to the office. On hot days Ruby wore broad-brimmed colourful hats and chided Jesse about his Irish skin, the dangers of the sun as it burned him. On wet days Ruby went bare-headed, and although Jesse always thrust his umbrella out to shelter her she would twist away from him and say: oh no, Mr Quinn. It's so lovely, in the rain. Even as her hair grew heavy-wet, dripping in slashes across her jacket and the collar of her shirt.

Jesse was increasingly grateful for the help that Ruby gave him, and surer every day that he could not do without her. He gave her a pay rise for three quarters in succession, and at the last one she tutted and blushed and shook her head at him.

Mr Quinn. I think that is enough.

Jesse screwed up his face.

I don't know, he said.

I don't know how I can hope to repay you.

Ruby knew, though. She watched him give straight advice to the suffering and the poor, those who were drawn to seek him out. She secretly thrilled to see him stand up on their behalf, to have the courage to defend and protect these wretches who had never known protection in their lives. There were times when Jesse went down and these times never got any easier, but there were many more times when he had unfair charges dismissed and proposed penalties reduced by magistrates and judges who were moved by his sincerity, his appeals for them to be clement and humane in the treatment of his people.

Ruby loved to see these things meted out to the deserving but there were darker lines striating her gratitude, lines of enquiry and access to various clients that Jesse could not perceive. He

would represent every client without fear or favour but that dispassionate sort of justice was not the justice that Ruby and her sisters dispensed.

Ruby would see truths leap out at her the instant she welcomed clients into the office, although she was always careful to smile very blandly, keeping her teeth hidden. She would identify the wicked as they sat there rehearsing the lies that they would tell to Jesse, so smugly satisfied with the protections guaranteed to them by the elegance and idealism of our legal system. Ruby judged them swiftly and unerringly, and although she sat there meekly and smiled at them, in her innermost self there was a lust for satisfaction that she in her hunting instincts could sometimes only barely constrain.



Jesse was always respectful but could not help but warm hugely to Ruby. His honour bound him to be formal and reserved with her, but although he observed those strictures carefully Ruby quickly became everything that had been missing in his life.

Ruby in her turn warmed to Jesse immensely. Yet as her heart softened to him she knew what was required of her, and also what was strictly prohibited. Thus she maintained her careful cordiality with Jesse, despite those feelings that were building within her for this man who struggled so bravely in the loneliness and the wastes of the world that he had been

consigned to.

One day Jesse came to her and raised their strange formality.

Ruby. You know you don't need to call me Mr Quinn.

Jesse would be fine.

Ruby nodded and said: I know.

Despite what leapt in Ruby she looked downwards. She said that calling him Jesse might be a little too informal, at least for the time being. Jesse nodded quickly and said yes, yes of course. She saw him wax so remorseful, so crestfallen, that she could not help but reach out to him.

How about I meet you halfway, she said.

And call you Mr Jesse.

Jesse smiled broadly and said: isn't that worse?

Ruby smiled and said: not for me.

Do you mind me still calling you Ruby?

She smiled broadly at him.

Yes, Mr Jesse.

I believe that would be just fine.

At the end of every month there were Friday night drinks. Jesse hosted a ragged band of lawyers and court officers who drank and laughed and told the stories that had been mounting in them since the last time. There were women and men there but they were mostly men, and poor Ruby had to field all of their tipsy questions, and be friendly whilst deflecting their mild attempts to flirt with her. She would laugh and keep circulating and the men sighed and learned that they could not succeed with her, and they all admired her particularly for that, her faculty for deflecting their most subtle advances.

Some of the cannier men would watch Ruby manoeuvre around the room and see her return to Jesse again and again, often with a fresh drink or something to eat. These men would smile enviously as she was kind to him and as Jesse gratefully accepted her attention. On the sly they would accuse Jesse of more than this, in various bawdy ways, and he would shake his head and demur and say: she is far more my mother than my wife.

But in his heart Jesse knew that there was more than this. On those nights that Ruby was specially attentive he would glance over at her and fill up with longing, and with some drink in him that longing would completely fill him up. He wondered at her age, and whether the perhaps ten years difference would repulse her. He thought more and then forced those thoughts down because they were misplaced, and because if he did not force them down these feelings might overflow and betray themselves for what they really were.

On those nights Ruby would come over and touch his arm softly and say: why are you looking at me funny? And he would say: I'm sorry Ruby. I'm just a little bit drunk. And she would tut him like she always did and say: no more for you, mister, and Jesse would always nod ruefully and say: no more.

Most days Ruby was bright and talkative and she would sing quietly as she busied herself around the office. There were days however that she seemed a bit under the weather, and some days when she would call early and tell Jesse that she would not be able to come in. Jesse was always solicitous in these times, asking whether she needed anything but she would always say: a day's rest is all. And the next day she would be well again and extra bubbly, and Jesse did not enquire further

because he knew there were some things that men would be better not to enquire about. In any event the barrage of papers across his desk once Ruby returned would keep him from making any enquiries whether ill-advised or not.

Jesse's practice flourished. He took high profile cases and won many of them, and his office groaned under the weight of the cards and small mementos that grateful clients would bring to him. He worried about the extra work and its effect on Ruby but she seemed to get brighter and happier as the surge of clients increased. Jesse knew that he owed most of this new success to Ruby, who kept getting more and more efficient, and at the end of one particularly busy day he asked Ruby to sit down with him and talk.

Now Ruby, he said. I am not permitted to make you a partner, not in the actual firm. Is there anything else that will suffice to repay you for all of this? Ruby said: only to keep me on here, and pay me as well as you pay me. As Jesse nodded gravely Ruby suddenly smiled and she said: oh. Well as long as you are asking. A present some day might be nice. Jesse said he was not much good at presents, and Ruby said: perhaps just some more flowers, until you find more inspiration.

Jesse was glad to have that clarity. He started bringing Ruby cut flowers every week. She would smile warmly when he brought them to her and she would say with genuine sincerity: what a lovely present. He was not sure what other gift might please Ruby but when he tried to quiz her she always said: Mr Jesse. These flowers are lovely. You really don't need to buy me anything else.

Jesse bought Ruby a book one time, one of his favourite books.

He wrote something on the flyleaf, starting hesitant but becoming increasingly bold as he wrote. He was in the end quite forward and he repeated himself and he soon grew ashamed of what he had written. He sat down again and drafted something different on his laptop, where he would have the time and liberty to shift it around, and he swiped at it a few times and cut it back and still the perfection of it eluded him. He took two days to finish it, even fretting over the salutation, and in the end he got weary of perfection and he printed it out and thought it would have to do.

What he pasted into the book read as follows:

My Dear Ruby,

I thought you might like this book. I liked it very much as a young man, and I have yet to find its equal anywhere in the world.

My only concern is that the book might appeal mostly to me and to other romantic men, what is in our hearts and minds.

If that is true then I hope you will forgive me, for as the hero says: as men we cannot do any better than to love, and to give our love courageously without stopping to count the cost.

I hope that is enough for now.

Love,

Jesse.

Jesse left the book on Ruby's desk one evening after she had headed home. He grew concerned about it overnight, worrying that he had gone too far, and he went into work very early the next day to retrieve the book and figure out what he could better write to Ruby.

When he arrived Jesse found Ruby already at her desk, smiling at him. He went to apologise for what he had written but before he could speak she held the book up and said: I liked what you wrote for me.

I'm glad, he said.

And what was beneath was even better.

Jesse halted, and blushed.

But it was...

Hidden. I know. Isn't that always the way?

He coloured further and thrust a bunch of gerberas at her.

I was going to trade these for it.

Oh they are lovely, she said.

But I would not trade, not for all the flowers in the world.

Jesse handed the flowers to Ruby, and when she was up getting a vase to contain them he opened the little book he had given to her. The paper he had glued there was still stuck fast and to his eyes there was not even a shadow to betray what was underneath. As he grasped the edges of the paper, thinking perhaps he might tear the page away, Jesse glanced over to where Ruby stood with her back to him and without turning around she said: I see you, Jesse Quinn. Don't you even think about it.

Jesse laughed and closed the book, placing it back on her desk before he turned and walked into his office. Even with her back

turned to him Ruby knew every step that he took, and she saw him even after he had entered his office and closed his door. Where he sank at his desk and held his head and smiled a rueful smile, for this woman that he now saw that he loved, hopelessly and completely. And yet how could he ask that of her? And what might he offer?



One night after drinks Jesse asked Ruby to dine with him, and although it was a transgression for her to accept his offer, in these exact circumstances, she was loose from two glasses of a very good champagne and she said: Lovely. They got their coats and went to an expensive place and she made some awkward noises but Jesse smiled and said: Ruby. It would be such a small price, to have you dine with me.

They ate small courses of exquisite food, and though there were only small glasses of wine selected to accompany each course they were soon both very effusive. Ruby told Jesse stories about her mother, and when she told him of the song named after her Jesse said, astonished: I thought it must have been the other way around. He listened intently as she told him so much more than he had known, and he asked her about her own life outside of work and she shook her head and said: I'm afraid that is not very interesting to talk about.

Jesse spoke softly in the candlelight, telling Ruby things that he had never told anyone. He spoke of his bitter mother and his

absent father, all the while doing his best to excuse them, and he told Ruby many other things about his efforts to overcome his childhood. How for a long time he would take no drink at all. It made me a boring kid, he said. When I left school I left without many friends, and it did not get much better when I was with the police.

And even now, he said. These guys I have to our drinks? If I gave up again, if I didn't buy them booze, they would forget about me quicker than you can say my name.

Mr Jesse, said Ruby with a smile.
Quicker than that, he said.

Their talk turned to intimate things and he confessed his loneliness to her and she nodded gravely as he told her and said: I can see that. It's even in the way that you hold yourself. He asked her whether there was anyone in her life and she said: not that I mean to tell you about. He stopped, and he coughed and apologised, and Ruby leaned in quickly and said: that was a stupid thing to say. There's no one to tell you about. I just wanted to sound less lame when I told you that.

Jesse confessed his loves, brief as they had been, and he told Ruby of the heartache that he had been caused by women who would initially express interest in him, become increasingly scornful of his tender heart, and then leave. I feel like an old man, he said. I want someone to cook for and watch TV with. They all want to be trophy wives. And when they see that I am poor, or too poor for them, they just leave me without stopping to say goodbye. Maybe a text, I don't know. Even a fuck you would have been nice.

Such conversations are perilous things, especially when they are inflamed by the drinking of fine and sensual wines. Ruby and Jesse began talking about what they wanted, in love most of all, and what they would settle for, and there were covert declarations within these confessions, and there was secret yearning expressed without any explicit confession of anything, and more than that even, in the longing that was between them.

Ruby, he said.

Yes.

I have something to ask you.

She lowered her head.

Mr Jesse.

Yes Ruby?

It might be better if you didn't.

Jesse sighed and looked downwards, shifting his cutlery with his fingertips.

I suppose I already knew that, he said.

Ruby saw such sadness rise in him, and his hard solitude, and his yearning to be released from it. She also saw his tragic goodness shining out to her more brightly than she had ever seen it. Ruby began to soften and she felt her heart reach out to him but there were gargoyles at the gates of her heart and they arrested it as it flowed. They turned her love back sharply and she saw deeply into things that she had not properly comprehended before, and with the mercy and the severity of every Ruby Tuesday, the great heart that had beaten since Gan Eden, she took Jesse's mind and she shepherded it beside quiet waters, and in those cool pastures where he was led Ruby spoke to him, using just those words that were stored within her, for Jesse and for this very occasion.

O Jesse. You fine, upright man. My heart yearns for you, as you can only imagine. But in Babylon you know: my love would mark you out for destruction, and damn me to die of desolation. O spring of Jesse, O my heart's desire. I shall not yield to you. You shall not know me, Beloved, until we are led back into the Promised Land.

Ruby was silent again and Jesse was quiet and still, and he did not move for many seconds. When he did move he slowly picked up his wine glass, and examining it in the soft light of the room he asked: what are they putting in my wine? And Ruby held her glass up too and she laughed gently at his astonishment and said: whatever it is, I hope you feel better. And he said: I feel proud, for some reason. I feel like somebody loves me. And Ruby said: we all love you, Mister Jesse. More than you can know.

And although Ruby was quiet about that and did not volunteer anything further still Jesse's heart swelled gently within him. It grew and also softened in pride and satisfaction, and although these feelings were strange still he felt as though he was worthy of them, and they did not abate for the whole of the rest of the meal, or the next day, or the next. Like a gift, an abundant blessing, these feelings stayed within Jesse and they shored him up, and while his solitude persisted he felt justified in it, and even loved, and he felt all of the strictness of his honour but also the sturdy reassurance of it, as it beat with the same beat of his heart, entirely inseparable from that deep rhythm which sustained him, and which raised him up. Such is more than most men could hope for.

CHAPTER 9

The Hunt Goes On

UNDER the full moon, Ruby always hunted.

She hunted mostly alone but sometimes in conjunction with her fellow hunters, bound by their intertwined hearts to aid each other, and by the power of the moon.

Ruby read the legends of the world as they spanned the light and the dark places, searching both ways throughout history to seek out the legends of the damned. Knowing the truths that were recorded there, still she sought out more prosaic knowledge of the deeds of the wicked, even in the documents she now had access to, the files she kept so neatly for Jesse.

Ruby followed some trails for many months, carefully threading out the fibres of good and evil. She also struck swiftly, unerringly, where those stories were finished and told. Ruby used all of the powers of her lineage and also the new powers that she had brought into the world, and while she did not exult in her work she was absolutely committed to it. For it was what she was, in heart and soul, and there was no sense in asking whether she might relent from it, or leave the work to others even if those capable could be found.

For the wicked there was no mercy. Ruby tore their hearts out of their chests and presented them for judgment, and upon their own pronouncement her victims stood condemned. She ripped minds out of heads and interrogated them, she read the very guts and entrails of those who gorged themselves on cruelty, drawing them out for the divination of the truths that resided there.

For the wicked there can be no mercy. Sooner or later judgment will be executed upon them, swift and terrible and leaving no time for appeal or remorse.

To those who would harm the innocent: rightly should you fear. Those who would abuse children, in the dire secrecy of your crimes: rightly should you fear. Those who would lie and exploit and slander, consuming the goodwill of the world: rightly should you fear.

Especially under the full moon, when Ruby always hunted.

CHAPTER 10

The Watchmen Of The City

RUBY had her ways and she was faithful to them but like all beings fair and foul her perspective was limited. There were movements in the world that even her special sight could not perceive, subject as it was to the strict delineations that allow uncertainty to bleed into the world.

Carlos Lasenex was one very special surprise. He arrived at Jesse's office at 10am on a sunny Monday morning, smiling broadly at Ruby, asking with perfect deference whether he might be granted a moment to consult with Mr Quinn. Ruby told him that Jesse was in court, and Carlos said that he would happily wait. When Ruby said that Jesse might be some time Carlos smiled more broadly, saying: I am content to wait for as long as might be necessary.

As Carlos sat waiting on the battered chesterfield, elegant and upright, Ruby grew more and more uneasy about his presence. She tried to clear her mind towards a proper view of him, but there was nothing in his appearance or demeanour that she could interpret clearly. In her anxiety to know more Ruby sent a small stream of enquiry towards his heart, but just as it entered that place Ruby found it snapped and blunted back at her with

a single imperious word.

Don't.

Ruby was shocked, at this retort from this man.

My business is with him.

Do not intrude upon me again.

Ruby flushed a deep crimson as she looked around for something to distract her. As she flailed there at her desk Carlos looked over at her and smiled his inscrutable smile and said: Madam I wonder. Would you have the facilities to allow me to make a cup of tea? Ruby pointed mutely towards the kitchen alcove, suddenly unable to speak, and Carlos thanked her kindly and moved in that direction. As he made and then sipped his strong black tea he became stranger to Ruby, and despite her efforts to remain calm she found herself confused and beset by an unfamiliar feeling, a feeling that she realised with a sudden flash must be the feeling of fear.

Jesse returned to the office at around eleven, and before Ruby could introduce their strange guest he stood up and shook Jesse's hand. I am Carlos Lasenex, he said, in his cool, polite manner. I wonder if I may have a few moments of your time. Jesse nodded and said of course, Mr Lasenex. Just let me have ten minutes? Carlos bowed slightly and said: please, Mr Quinn. Take as much time as you need.

As Jesse walked past Ruby towards his office he raised his eyebrows to her in query, and she shrugged her shoulders in a most uncharacteristic way. He paused and asked quietly: Ruby. Are you OK? She nodded and turned blushing to some papers on her desk, and although Jesse was puzzled at this change in her he turned slowly and went through the door of his office.



Once inside Jesse's office Carlos Lasenex reclined in his chair and smiled.

This is a charming office you have, Mr Quinn.

By charming I take it you mean small?

Perhaps compact is a better word.

Indeed, said Jesse. So. How can I help?

Help? Carlos smiled broadly.

I thought I might instead help you.

Jesse looked surprised.

Why is that, Mr Lasenex?

Please. Call me Carlos.

Fine. Carlos.

Thank you, said Carlos. You would like me to explain? Well.

There are certain people, Mr Quinn. Certain people who... matter. They may not know it but there are others who do know it, very clearly. And it is in the interests of such people, for me to how shall I say. To keep an eye on them.

Jesse sighed and shook his head. Mr Lasenex. I appreciate your interest in me, really I do, but there are people today who genuinely need me. So unless there is anything specific I can assist you with...

Of course, of course. I have some specific questions. I suppose the first would be: how do you choose your clients?

Do you mean...

Yes. The ones you defend. How do you come to choose them?

They choose me, Jesse said.

No.

Yes, Mr Lasenex. I can swear to it.

Carlos wrinkled his brow and said: I very much doubt that, Mr Quinn. There are many things in this world, and others exterior to it entirely, but free choice is very infrequently seen. No. I rather suspect that most of your clients are drawn here. I would suggest that many of them tell you this self-same thing.

Well yes, Jesse said, they do say that but I don't....

And what is it that draws them in?

Jesse sighed. Is this a test?

No.

I really have no idea.

Think, Mr Quinn.

Jesse sighed.

Perhaps you could enlighten me?

Carlos looked back over his shoulder towards the door.

Do you know what that woman is?

Ruby?

So she says.

Jesse bristled at that and said: her name is Ruby. Ruby Tuesday, if you can believe that. And she runs my practice, every part of it. I could not do without her.

And your clients?

I keep them out of jail.

But afterwards? How do they fare?

I really have no idea.

Carlos smiled.

No. I believe you. You really don't have any idea.

Carlos was silent and then he looked at his watch. Well perhaps I had better get out of your hair, he said. Thank you for your time. I will leave my details, so that you can call me if you notice anything... strange. I am possessed of a certain authority.

Possessed? asked Jesse.

Carlos smiled.

Perhaps that is also true.

Jesse ran his hand through his hair. I'm sorry Mr Lasenex that was rude of me. I do appreciate your interest, but unless you can tell me what you need, I don't see how I can assist you any further.

Of course, Mr Quinn.

Perhaps I will come back to you when I have something more specific to discuss.

No problem, Carlos. I wish I could be more help.

Oh you have helped me already. And you may get further opportunity.

I hope so.

Carlos got up and bowed slightly.

You may wish otherwise, he said.

Once you know what might be asked.

And he turned and left the office immediately.



As Carlos Lasenex passed Ruby's desk he paused for a moment, feeling her shrink back and her shields arise against him. She recoiled but her shields were porous to the forces that were within him and Carlos surged through them and past them on all sides at once, and in a less than a moment of conventional time he delivered the following stern message to Ruby.

There are Rules, he said, his voice crashing within her mind. There are Sanctions, also, attendant upon those rules. Do not go too far, She-Wolf. There are mandates within heaven and earth that vastly exceed your own mandate. If you go too much further you may find out about them, much to your sorrow and dismay.

Carlos surged further within Ruby's mind and she made no further effort to repulse him.

You do not know what this man is. You do not know what he might become. You are arrogant, and that serves you in your hunting but it will not serve you here. If you interfere you might find out what hell really means, and there may well be Hell to pay. And what repayments they exact in that place? You cannot begin to imagine.

Ruby went to demur but Carlos interrupted her.

I have spoken, She-Wolf.

Beware of this man.

He will crush you.

You have no defences, not to the likes of him.

And as easily as he had breached them Carlos Lasenex surged back behind Ruby's barriers, as he smiled politely at her. There was at last some genuine warmth in the smile that he gave her, and her fear abated somewhat.

Ruby stared and sought to ask him: what are you? But the question was pointless, as he would not be permitted to answer, and Ruby realised suddenly that there were many things that were forbidden for her to know, by edict of an authority that was beyond her power to comprehend.

Ruby was confronted by that knowledge as she watched Carlos collect his jacket, return his cup to the kitchen alcove, and then walk out of the office, bowing to her slightly as the door closed upon him.

CHAPTER 11

The Love Of Ruby Tuesday

ONE unremarkable Thursday evening Jesse walked out of the office, farewelling Ruby as he went. Don't stay back too late, he said. Ruby reminded Jesse that she was not in tomorrow with a doctor's appointment and he said: of course, I should have remembered. I hope it's nothing serious. She laughed and said Mr Jesse you may not want to know. He hung his head in play shame and said: you're probably right about that.

Most nights Jesse went straight home to his empty house but this night he was booked for dinner with an old friend from school. The restaurant was decent but although there was talk and sincere efforts towards intimacy between them, there remained a gulf between the two men that could not be bridged. Jesse battled on, dredging up anecdote and memory, and he really tried to listen to the workaday claims that his friend kept trotting out. How his wife was riding him, how his kids were brats, how he would love to write a novel one day if the world would give him the permission to do so.

Jesse acknowledged that false dream and everything else that his former friend had to say to him but he grew sadder as the evening grew long, seeing their lives now so estranged from

each other.

After dinner the two men ambled slowly down the street past restaurants and fashion boutiques and bars. Although in the cool night they spoke very little to one another still they felt the oppression of the dinner table fall away from them. The bright moonlit evening did not require any further words and in the absence of speech they were suddenly companions again as they walked together down the street.

The night was so pleasant that Jesse's friend did not see him slow and then stop completely in the street. Nor did he notice Jesse's absence until he was twenty paces or more away from his side. He looked back and called out but Jesse did not hear him, but rather continued staring out across the street towards a dark laneway on the other side.

What Jesse stared at cannot easily be described in words. It was his whole heart's desire, and it was his fate, and it was everything he had never dared hope to find upon the earth. He saw a woman that he loved but she was so much more than that, as she shone out to him in a focussed beam that was for him and him utterly and also for him alone. He wept tears of gratitude that did not wet his face, and he felt such longing and desire that could undo a man if he had the courage to really feel those things. He saw something worth living for and something worth the immediate surrender of his life, and this contradictory desire to live and also to die made his heart swell to the point that it was barely contained within his chest.

These feelings were not only his feelings. What stood across from him, and what he stared at? O this luminous being desired Jesse more than a man could dare to imagine. The moon shone

brightly through him as well and Ruby could finally see the immense size of the heart that beat within Jesse, the sheer colours and the radiance with which it shone. As his heart went out to her Ruby felt herself throb hugely with it, and she gasped with the sudden desire to weep human tears and also tears made of moonlight for the man who burned there and stared at her so intently. His bravery and his honour burned exceptionally incandescent, leaving Ruby to feel such hopeless devotion that she could not look away.

All of these things happened in an instant, and they also occurred in a space that extended infinitely beyond time. When Jesse was shaken back to reality by his friend he did not know what day it was, or what the hour, and he stared at the moon with some surprise, and when he looked back to where his heart's desire had been standing he saw that Ruby was no longer there.

Jesse woke from his reverie as his old friend gently shook him. He nodded and smiled and said: sorry about that. I must have drunk too much.

But Jesse knew that this not the proper explanation. Even as he recovered himself he was intensely illuminated by Ruby, feeling himself burn for the love of this woman who had now been so revealed to him. He also burned in the knowledge that the same desire was within her: that just as he burned for Ruby, so would she in her desire and devotion continue to burn for him.

CHAPTER 12

Yet Even If These Forget

WHEN Ruby arrived at work on Monday she went very intently about her tasks, pulling together all of the papers that had accumulated on her desk during her absence the previous Friday.

Jesse rushed out of the office very soon after she arrived, heading to an urgent bail hearing that had just been listed. On his way out he paused to say to Ruby: I think we need to talk. She nodded as he looked at her and she said: I do hope that I am not in trouble. No, Jesse said. I think that might be me. He gave her a wry grin and hurried out of the door.

At lunchtime Jesse tried to talk with Ruby but she made busy with client calls and organising the monthly accounts, and he sighed and left her to it. At afternoon tea he brought Ruby her favourite coffee and she thanked him briskly before turning back to her work.

At five sharp Ruby poked her head into Jesse's office. He asked her to sit with him but she said that she really had to fly. She also asked: perhaps you might walk with me? Jesse did his best to stifle the rush of pleasure that caused him just as Ruby said: I

have to warn you, I walk really fast. Jesse smiled. Then I'll just have to keep up. He got his jacket and held the door and the two of them made their way down via the elevator and out into the street.

Ruby walked fast enough to make conversation difficult. As Jesse hurried to keep up she also reached out gently into his mind with those powers that were within her. She led Jesse to her usual tram stop, and as he got on to the tram with her he looked around in a sort of vague astonishment. What am I doing? he asked. Ruby smiled and said he was being quite presumptuous.

Although Jesse moved towards the door at each stop he found that he could not bring himself to get off the tram, even when the doors clattered open for him. Jesse missed stop after stop in this way, halting and confused, until Ruby took his arm gently and guided him to relax into the journey, watching the flow of passengers moving on and off through the doors, Jesse still shaking his head as he rode the tram further and further up the line.

Eventually Ruby pressed his arm firmly and spoke in a quiet voice. The both of us get off here. They walked to the footpath and then down a gentle hill, until Ruby turned them both down a pretty street flanked with terrace houses. They turned down a laneway and then through a gate, and Ruby led them both beneath her trellis of wild roses and through the door that led into her house.

In the lounge room Jesse sat down, puzzled.
I'm sorry, he said.
I shouldn't be here.

Ruby hushed him and offered him a cup of tea. When he asked what she was offering she said: something very interesting, I believe you might enjoy. Jesse sat very still on the sofa as she pottered in the kitchen, and after some time she came out with two bright green teacups, one for her and one for him.

Jesse thanked her and took his cup and when he asked her what it was she said: a sort of herbal tea. Try it and see. He drank and tasted liquorice and cinnamon and raw sugar, and although the tea was hot he drank very deeply of it. Ruby was quiet and drank her tea, waiting for the effects to come upon them both, waiting until she might press its forgetfulness down inside of Jesse, to erase any memory of the secrets she had been careless enough to reveal to him by the light of that last full moon.

The potion Ruby gave Jesse was a potent memory scrub. As it trickled into his veins and muscles it washed these places first, and then it headed towards his heart to work its potent magic. But this was no common man that the potion had invaded, and there was a heart within Jesse that was chambered like no ordinary heart. The potion sank there and it foundered badly, and it produced strange and unforeseen results. Jesse felt the potion bite and then retreat and he felt something suddenly surge within him, something like tenderness but with much more passion and intent. This surge built within him, gathering in his high and his low places, before reaching out in a prodigious sensual flood towards poor Ruby Tuesday.

Ruby saw this great tide flow towards her but although she was shocked she did not feel dismayed. There was a deep gentleness in what flowed, and it reached out to her with such tenderness and strength that she was instantly opened to it.

There was nothing in her that could hold it back, even if she had retained any shred of a desire to do so.

Ruby, Jesse said.

She gasped at the sound of her name.

Ruby what was in this tea?

She grew faint and began to pitch forwards but Jesse was before her in an instant. He held Ruby there, gentle and intense, and she did not fall any further. She lurched forwards involuntarily to kiss Jesse but he held her gently upright and away from him and her lips closed on the grave disappointment of space.

I'm not mad with you, he said.

Jesse don't make me.

Please, Ruby. It's Ok.

No No No.

Please, Ruby. I don't understand....

Jesse...

Please.

Ruby, he said

Please just let me in.

At those words she was sunken and done for. If he had commanded her or been imperious she would have had her every defence at the ready. But his longing broke her open, and his regard for her, and the power of his deepest, most longing desire.

Oh No she said, as the truth rose in her.

Please Jesse No.

It's OK, he said.

I'm not mad.

I just really need to find out what's going on.

Oh my love, she gasped, and though she clapped her hand over her mouth this truth was suddenly out. Jesse's heart leapt at those words, giving him the courage to ask her further things.

Please Ruby, he said.

I'm a grown man.

You don't need to protect me.

And although she would have said no a thousand times Ruby's heart betrayed her with that word that was suddenly on her lips. Yes. Yes, she said. As Jesse eased her down towards him she kissed his soft lips and she felt again what was stored up within him, all of the hardship that should have ossified into bitterness and yet had only increased his strength, and his longing for the kisses she was now suddenly giving to him.

Jesse fell back on to the sofa, still holding Ruby tight to him, and as they fell she released all of her weight down on to his body and she kissed him, unable to hold herself back. Jesse also kissed her, kissed her as deeply as the Song within her demanded, kissed her with the kisses of his mouth that had been so foretold. As he did that Ruby's heart crashed open to him and they lay there gasping and astonished at what they had created: what had moved within Jesse and surged outwardly just as Ruby broke open in his direction.

As they kissed Ruby sighed and told Jesse: Yes.

Oh god Jesse yes.

Oh no.

It's OK, he said.

I love you.

That truth fell out of him before he could suppress it.

There, he said.

I love you, Ruby Tuesday.

I always have. I always will.

You are all I have ever wanted.

Then these words that left the two of them together.

Oh my Love.

A HEALING THING
FROM THE BANISHED PARTS

THERE are things that should remain secret and yet they burn to be told, for the forgiveness and the healing of the world they burn wantonly to be told.

What Jesse saw, when Ruby lost her mind, when she turned and was suddenly on top of him, biting his shoulder and growling, her haunches tight around both sides of his hips. Jesse straining upwards towards her, Ruby catching his bottom lip in her teeth and saying not yet and saying also: easy, tiger.

Ruby pressing herself hard against him, pulsing hard with her small muscles against him. Jesse trying to relent from his desire but only managing to groan louder and beg her: Please Ruby. Ruby growling again and biting him again and saying. Not. Yet.

Ruby pulsing against Jesse without ceasing, and Jesse shifting in mounting ecstasy and frustration. Jesse looking away and Ruby catching his head as it wrenched to the side, pulling his gaze back to face her and saying: do you like that? With Jesse groaning as he says yes and he says no and he says please Ruby. Ruby don't torture me.

And then at the appointed time Ruby turning suddenly and getting under him, unwound and suddenly vulnerable, and Jesse now released and gathering her up in his hands. Lifting her hips as Ruby says Now Jesse and he holds back bravely saying Ruby there's no going back but she grabs his hips and pulls him hard towards her.

There is one last moment of stillness where Jesse holds her face in his hands, saying Ruby I don't know and she says: Jesse. Shut up, right now, and take me. And as he moves against her

she says I Am Yours, and as he moves suddenly inside her he says the very same thing back to her. Ruby with her head arching back, Jesse's hand there instantly to hold it, and they are suddenly confessing to each other, Jesse in his warm voice saying My Love, Ruby saying Yes, Jesse, Yes as he says again My love, my Only Love.

These things that burn to be told, for the forgiveness and the healing of the world burning wantonly to be told.

BOOK III
(3 Lupa)

CHAPTER 13

The Dark Side Of The Sun

IN the morning Jesse woke very early, before the sun had risen, feeling cool and unravelled as he lay sprawled across the bed.

When he looked with a smile over to Ruby she was not there, but he heard her bumping around in the kitchen. Jesse smiled to think of her pottering there amidst all of the strangeness of the previous night. He looked at the time and marvelled that he should feel so well rested on such a few hours sleep. Jesse got out of bed and straightened the sheets, just enough to make the bed look a little less ravaged, and he pulled on his shirt and walked towards the kitchen to see Ruby.

As he entered the kitchen Jesse walked up behind Ruby, kissing her on the back of her neck. She dropped her head forwards and sighed quietly, leaning her body back into his, pressing herself against him once more. He pressed back against her and then turned her around and lifted her up on to the kitchen bench. She gasped as he was suddenly inside her again, her cup dropped and smashed and she bit his lip and said keep going and he was willingly, desperately obedient to that command. She bit his shoulder hard, this time, and he groaned and suddenly all of his strength was within her, lifting her up with

every surge of it, and she felt some of his full power now crashing within her, driving her insane again.

Afterwards Jesse slumped gently against her, his forehead resting against the top cupboards. He laughed quietly and stroked her hair and said: Ruby. I don't know what you do to me.

She said: it's what you do to me, Jesse.

I am out of my mind, for these things you do to me.

They had some breakfast and after a shower Jesse set off for the office. It was still very early and the morning was bright and cool and Jesse decided he might walk all the way into town from Ruby's little house.

As he walked Jesse smiled broadly to himself. He shook his head and smiled as he soothed his bitten lips with his tongue. His mind was lucid and yet pleasantly skewed all at the same time, and he could not prevent himself from trying to pull together every memory he had of himself and Ruby over the long course of last night. The things she had said, thought Jesse. My God. The way that she was against him, her limbs heavy and supple, the way she twisted and got around him, opening to him so fiercely without any restraint at all.

Jesse sought each memory out diligently and he placed them in order. He moved forwards from the first bite of that tea, and as he got close to work he had nearly finished his inventory. Jesse knew that if these were the last memories granted to him, the end of his time upon the earth, still he would feel lucky to be offered such a bargain. Jesse searched out the last of his memories just as he felt the first warm rays of the sun on his

face, and he thought of Ruby's warmth and the heat that was stored within her. He also suddenly wondered whether she would want him again, and what he might do with himself if she did not want him.

In the cool of her little house Ruby also felt the sun rise. She felt it shine with its great light but she also saw with a terrible burst of dread the dark fire that had now erupted within that same place. Ruby saw the minions of this fire and she felt them begin to swarm, and as she finally understood the danger she had exposed Jesse to she gasped and retched in terror. She went to run out of the front door but she knew that in the sunlight she was far too weak to save Jesse, and that after last night she was also terribly vulnerable.

With trembling hands Ruby found Jesse's number on her phone. She dialled and tried to steady her hands, willing him to pick up. The phone rang several times, and just as Ruby went to hang up she heard a crackle and Jesse was on the line.

Hey babe, he said.

Jesse listen to me.

He paused for a moment and said: OK. Are you OK?

Jesse, she said.

Get in a taxi and go straight to your office.

But I'm nearly...

Get a taxi. Or run, and I mean run, to your office. Stay in the shade. Go inside, turn off all of the lights. I will meet you there.

Babe if this is a sex thing...

Please, Jesse, shut up.

If you love me at all.

Please just do as I say.

Jesse was puzzled as he pocketed his phone, shaking his head at the strangeness of Ruby Tuesday. This woman who could be so expansive in the heat of the night before, who was now so strict with him in the cool of the morning after.

Jesse trotted to the opposite side of the road where the buildings could shade him from the sun. He walked quickly and then broke into a jog, all the while glancing backwards over his shoulder to see whether he could find a taxi. As he ran he smiled and said out loud: Ruby you are a nut. This had better be worth it.

As Jesse ran he saw that it was going to be a hot day, as he was obedient to Ruby and stayed out of the sun. There may even have been a slight shadow of dread that passed over him when he ran through a patch of sunlight, as he felt that heat sear into him until he reached the next patch of shade.

But despite such hints Jesse was entirely distracted by his thoughts of the night before. He knew that he loved Ruby, and that he always had done, and he knew that he would always strive to give her the things she might ask of him. Which was why he was now running like an idiot, keeping in the shade, getting to his office as quickly as possible without understanding anything about the reasons why she might ask these things of him.

As he ran Jesse smiled to think of her.

Anything for Ruby Tuesday.

He knew that he would run to the ends of the earth.

All for Ruby Tuesday.

CHAPTER 14

The Jackals Of The Last Day

AS soon as Jesse reached his office the phone started to ring. He went to turn on the lights and then stopped himself, recalling what Ruby had said. He locked the main door behind him and went to Ruby's desk and picked up.

My darling, he said, you are completely insane.

There was a cough on the other end of the line.

Ruby?

No, Mr Quinn. It's Carlos Lasenex.

Jesse reddened.

Sorry. Mr Lasenex.

It's Doctor Lasenex.

Jesse sighed.

Doctor Lasenex. What can I do for you?

Lasenex cleared his throat.

Mr Quinn. May I speak frankly?

He continued before Jesse had a chance to reply.

I regret to inform you that your evening with Ms Tuesday has put you in rather a predicament.

Jesse started. She told you?

No, there was no need.

Doctor Lasenex I don't know...

Lasenex was suddenly curt. No. You don't know. So let me inform you, Mr Quinn. You are now in the most tremendous danger. You have one chance to be saved, and one chance only. Let me convey you to a place that has been prepared. A place where you will be safe.

Jesse paused. Safe from what?

Mr Quinn.

I assure you.

You do not wish to know.

Jesse listened with quiet resignation as Lasenex told him about the preparations that had been made. The hospital he would be admitted to, the story that would be told. Lasenex was brisk and cool as he explained these things to Jesse.

It may not be comfortable, Mr Quinn.

But it will be safe.

As he listened Jesse kept trying to clear his head. It occurred to him that perhaps the stress of work had undone him, that his mind had suddenly ruptured and left him to go insane. He thought perhaps last night had never happened, except in his own disordered mind. Jesse wondered with a nasty sinking feeling whether this was how all psychotics felt, that even their conveyance to hospital was part of some larger, paranoid scheme.

Jesse tried to press Lasenex for more details of the danger, why he was in need of asylum, but the doctor immediately dismissed those questions.

Saying: there is no time.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Mr Quinn.
Not all of them friendly.
Soon I hope to explain all of this to you.
For now you must be satisfied with that.

As the call ended Lasenex told Jesse that he would be coming with paramedics in something less than an hour. He told Jesse to stay where he was, in the dark as Ruby had prescribed, mentioning her name with a kind of grudging praise. She has done this well, at least. You are safe for now. But you must not open the blinds, or turn on the lights, or unlock your door. Not to anyone, Mr Quinn. Most certainly not to Her.

As Lasenex said goodbye Jesse asked him a final question.
Why should I trust you, Doctor?
There was a pause.
You shouldn't.
You have no reason to trust me.
But if you do not trust me, Jesse Quinn.
Then there is no hope for you.

The line went dead, leaving Jesse alone in his dark office.

After standing still for a few moments Jesse walked over to the water cooler, pouring himself a cup and sipping it while sighing and shaking his head. He felt very confused but he knew with absolute certainty that he wanted his old life restored to him, his life as it had been until the night before. He thought of his clients with their prosaic problems, issues that could be solved or at least ameliorated, and he thought of his former role where they were the ones in peril, coming to him

P . J U L I A N

for help and protection. Where he was not the victim, standing in fear of his life. Where he was not The One, so suddenly, who stood in the line of Fire.

CHAPTER 15

Neither The Hour

WHEN Ruby got to the office she ran to Jesse. Even in the gloom she saw him shine out, and her heart nearly bled to see the full danger he was in. She grasped Jesse and held him, moaning into his chest, and Jesse hushed her and said: Ruby. It's going to be OK. She clutched at his shirt tighter and she said no no no, shaking her head in dismay.

Can I turn on the lights?

No you may not, she said.

He raised her face to his, although she would not look at him.

Babe what is going on?

She said: Oh Jesse.

Oh they see you now.

And he said: Who? Who see me?

Ruby shook. Them, Them.

They see you. They will take you.

I don't understand, he said.

Look then.

Jesse started at those words, because although they were clearly

articulated the voice speaking was not Ruby's physical voice. Her words moved and sounded within his mind without Ruby moving her lips at all.

Jesse looked down at Ruby, her face buried in his shirt.
Ruby how can I hear you in my...

Close your eyes. Her voice within him again. Close your eyes, and I will show you. On that night you saw me you saw into these things, although you did not understand. Let me show you now.

Jesse nodded.
Ok Rubes.
Close them, my darling.
Ok. I'll do anything you say.

Jesse closed his eyes. As he waited he saw nothing but what he usually saw, a kind of predominant darkness with the desultory impressions that swayed and sparkled there. He saw nothing more than that and he told Ruby so, and she told him: keep your eyes closed. I'm not as good as the others.

Jesse became restless, but as he was almost ready to open his eyes again he felt them clamp shut. Although he tried to blink and open his eyes he could not open them, and they stayed closed completely to the light.

Jesse began to panic.
Ruby my eyes...
Shhh. I know.
Just see these things, and I will open them for you.

Jesse felt his eyelids become thick, and profound darkness grew inside of them, and as the darkness became overwhelming he saw past scenes begin to play out against the gloom. He saw Ruby again illuminated, just as he had seen her on that moonlit night. He also saw himself through her eyes on that same night, and he gasped at this shining vision of himself, so completely altered from what he imagined himself to be. He saw the light that flowed from within him, he gasped to see his huge heart beat and flow, how that could be manifest from the outside of his body.

Jesse saw further things. He saw Ruby shepherd his mind on the previous night, he saw the tea he drank and the forgetfulness that was within it. He saw his vast heart rise and turn that forgetfulness back, and he saw his great light slip around Ruby, twisting her off balance. Jesse saw her come spiralling out of control towards him and crash into him, the two of them colliding and merging and lighting up like a sun.

Then came the terrible parts of the vision. As he and Ruby kissed each other a dark fire erupted outwards in a distant part of the firmament. He saw the hideous servants of that fire, separating outwards in gobbets and shards, shrieking and gibbering as they rushed down upon him. Jesse saw that although they would tear him to pieces it was the knowledge of Ruby Tuesday that these devils ultimately sought. Jesse knew that they would divine her identity from the knowledge that was now within him, literally sucking it from his blood, and he saw such terrors in store for Ruby that the spell that shut his eyes was broken and he heaved and broke back up into the light.

Jesse pulled away from Ruby.

It's not true, he said.
Ruby entered his mind again.
Jesse you saw.
I won't let them.
Ruby smiled wanly and said: dear heart you saw.
You cannot contend with them.
But there is a place, where there is help.
Let me take you there.

Jesse sat down and held his head in his hands. He told Ruby about his conversation with Carlos Lasenex, the asylum that had been offered. Perhaps he can keep me safe, Jesse said.

Ruby thought of Lasenex's recent visit and she shook her head with a shudder. I don't know what he is, she said. I don't know whom he serves. But Jesse you need more than hospital. That would be no safer than you are here.

Ruby knelt and stroked Jesse's hair.
My sisters will help us.
Let me take you to them.

Jesse answered her without raising his head.
I don't know, he said.
I don't know what's happening.
But if we are going to go?
We better get a move on.



Ruby made Jesse drink as many cups of cold water as he could stand. While he drank she put his suit jacket on him and his overcoat as well, buttoning it up and turning up the collar. She led Jesse out into the foyer of the building, past the banked lifts and into the concrete stairwell. They hurried down the three flights to the bottom door and they emerged into a tightly packed car park.

Ruby led Jesse past car after car, eventually pausing at a large and expensive European saloon. She touched her hand to the driver's side door very gently, and when all of the locks blipped up she raised her eyebrows at Jesse and got into the car.

Jesse opened his door without getting in.

Ruby. What are you doing? This isn't your car.

I know, she said. And you know what else?

What?

I have absolutely no idea how to drive.

Jesse looked at her.

I'll take that as joke.

Don't. This is an automatic, isn't it?

Jesse paused, and looked. Ah... Yes. I mean I think so.

Well they are easier than stick, aren't they?

But Ruby you can't just...

Jesse, she said, leaning across towards him.

There's no time, my love.

Shut up, get in the car, and let me get us out of here.

Jesse got in. Ruby started the engine and then wrestled the large car out of the parking lot, inches away from scraping the panels on the concrete pylons as she turned and turned the wheel. She pushed the air conditioning up as high as it would go and she

threw her pashmina at Jesse, telling him to recline his chair back as far as possible.

Put this over yourself, she said.

And close your eyes again.

Ruby I can't...

Shut. Up.

She growled at him, audibly this time.

You need to do what I tell you.

Above everything else, do not let the sun touch your skin.

Ruby pulled the car up out of the car park and on to the bitumen. She knew enough to just turn the car in the first direction that she could identify and stab down hard on the accelerator. There were enough places that would do. She felt herself turned with the traffic until she was facing roughly west and she kept on in that direction, easing towards the south eventually. The hot sun searched the road as she drove. The traffic bunched and then thinned out as the blacktop headed out into the hill country that encircled the Great City.

Once out of town Ruby could see more clearly the great meridians that she was searching for. She saw tight junctions in the way the land shifted, she saw the stern soft delineations that drew her sisters towards one another, and also away to mark out their individual territories. As she drove she began to drift further towards the south, seeing the signal mountain that she needed to pass by. Even in the urgency of her journey she had time to grimace at the signs bearing the name of that mountain, as it was not nearly an approximation of its proper name.

As the sun moved past its apex, deflected by the heavy panels of the saloon, Ruby turned into a gravel car park somewhere

close to the place where she was taking them. She pulled the car under the protection of a tall bluff, with trees hanging over the car. As she pulled the handbrake on, Jesse stirred and began to elevate his seat from its reclining position.

I fell asleep, he said.
Must have been my driving.
Rubes we really should take this car back.
I'm sure it's insured, she said.
Besides it's only a car.

They sat.
What do we do now? asked Jesse.
We wait.
Until?
Ruby wanted to say: The end of the world.
But all she did say.
Until the sun goes down.

CHAPTER 16

Ultreia

THE afternoon grew soft and shadows gradually engulfed the deserted car park. Jesse slept on for the greater part of the afternoon, recovering his strength from the previous night. Ruby sat there sentinel, glancing at times at the peace that was on Jesse's face, wishing that he could abide in that peaceful sleep forever.

As she sat watch Ruby tried to find them some options. She searched mostly for ways in which Jesse might be absolved of the knowledge that she had so foolishly given him, restored to the state of innocence that had so far protected his life. More than once Ruby thought about bringing the car back to life, squealing its tyres out of that car park, ferrying Jesse to some other form of safety. For why should he suffer? In her helpless love for this man Ruby would have defied every statute of her kind but there was nowhere safe to go and Ruby knew that absolutely. All that she could do was guard him while he slept and wait for the night to come down.

As the evening lengthened Jesse stirred and turned, reaching for Ruby while he was still half asleep. Her heart surged and she let herself go out to him to kiss him, but she broke from that

kiss before it was properly begun and she said: easy now.

Jesse smiled and shifted back in his chair, stretching, and Ruby on her side tumbled out of the car and stretched there in the early twilight. She moved to the passenger side and knocked on the window, and Jesse groaned and slowly got out of the car. As he emerged Ruby saw him scintillate wildly under the evening star, such a slight light as that, and it was only by a great effort that she resisted her desire to take him once again, stretched over the bonnet of the car. All of the things that her body counselled her towards, when she lost her mind, all of the things that she knew were forbidden to her.

They left the car park as the evening deepened. The sun had now set, and its power over them was extinguished for another night. Ruby led the way and Jesse walked behind her, trying to match her pace, the bracken tearing at the legs of what was one of his better suits. There were granite boulders in the path and the way they took was over them, and although Jesse scrambled as best he could his shoes were soft and leather-soled and they gave him no grip. He pressed on bravely but Ruby was very fleet and he kept losing sight of her in the twilight.

Ruby slow down, he said.

Ruby slackened her pace a little but she did not let Jesse catch her. She needed him to move quickly and so she jogged up the rocky track, through low heath and souging pines towards their destination. The trees sighed and whispered in their strange speech and Jesse felt soothed by them, although there were no parts of their speech that he could understand. He knew in his heart though that the pines genuinely spoke, and that they yearned especially to speak to men, but that men in

their loneliness and alienation could no longer understand what the trees had to say to them.

As the track grew steeper Jesse forgot the sougning of the pines and began to gripe and grumble in his heart. What he was doing here, why he had let Ruby take him on this fool mission. In his pique he cried out to Ruby a couple of times but she was now away and beyond him. Jesse began to sulk and threatened to sit down and stop walking but there was no response from Ruby at all. He was badly lost now, with no choice but to keep walking, stumbling along in the gloom with that unfamiliar griping in his heart.

Jesse was so intent on these reproaches that he did not notice the track level off and the country fall away around him. The track opened out and in the very last of the long twilight he barged straight into the back of Ruby Tuesday as she stood there very quietly catching her breath.

As he stood and breathed Jesse looked around. He saw what could only be the stillness of water, deeper and darker than the night that now surrounded them. He saw the shape of a small lake slowly marked out against its stone banks, and as his eyes adjusted he saw sparks glowing there amongst the waters.

Jesse watched as the shape of the grotto became clear to him, lit by the star-like teeming of phosphorescence both above and below the waters. He looked up to see great stone cliffs curving inwardly in protection of the grotto, then carving back slowly to disappear into the night sky. The phosphorescence began to glow with many colours and its soft glow filled Jesse with wonder, removing any memory of the hard walk it had taken to arrive at this place, the rancour those exertions had bred in him.

Jesse looked at Ruby and saw her close to tears.
This is your people's place, he said.
She nodded as he looked with his new sight.
So far back, Ruby.
So far I can't see.

She nodded again quietly and Jesse knew suddenly that this was her place also, and that it would be so designated for her own daughter Ruby, all in the fullness of time.

At the thought of a child Ruby's heart went out to Jesse but in that same surging she felt such disaster ahead for both of them that she immediately crushed it down.

Ruby grabbed Jesse's hand as he went to say more, shushing him gently and pulling him down to sit with her. As the lights moved there the two of them sat without speaking, gazing at the strange luminosity that grew and filled them with its strangeness, its wonder.

CHAPTER 17

The Twelve

AS Ruby and Jesse sat hand in hand looking over the grotto they felt something like a breeze blow over them, but it was without any sound and the waters were not disturbed by its passing. The pines whispered louder as though they were sighing in greeting, and a strange warmth came towards them from the vast wall overhanging them, like sweet breath flowing towards them without a single breath of air.

They're here, said Ruby.
Jesse squeezed her hand.
I can't see anything, he said.

Jesse strained to see but still he saw nothing. Just as he was about to speak again he saw the waters shimmer and the phosphorescence start to rise up from the surface of the lake. It began to form shapes and then define those shapes and Jesse was astonished to see the shapes becoming human, coalescing in a luminous array that shone out across the waters. The lights massed and grew solid, and out of the formless dark there came the forms of a dozen women, all of them pale and illuminated and sublime.

They greeted the two pilgrims.
Greetings, Ruby Child, they said.
They spoke to her in one voice, like the song of many singers.
Greetings, Jesse, Beloved.
Jesse felt their voices ring in him like a memory, like a dream.
There was nothing he could find to say in response.

After their greeting the women gathered around Jesse and he felt their soft lines of enquiry reach out to him. He surrendered to them instantly, feeling their thrilling touch steal over the contours of his soul, through the broad bones of his body that contained it. As they caressed him they murmured and sighed and sent out their wonder and admiration, in waves that immersed Jesse in the most prohibited, unimaginable pleasure.

In his ecstasy Jesse grew afraid of losing himself, and he reached out to Ruby at the same time as she reached within him.

She said: Jesse.
There is no need to fear.
But do they...
Yes, my Love.
They know that you are mine.

The Twelve then began to sing to Jesse, in their special range and timbre. Their song was intensely familiar to him, for it was the song he had always been nurtured by, although he could scarcely recognise himself in the lines that were sung to him.

*Who is this, whose eyes are the Morning Sun
His face as irresistible as the dawn?
Who is it that comes among us*

Like the balsam that flows upon the slopes of Gilead?

*He is chief amongst the ten thousand
They kneel and wait upon his command
He has no equal in the lands of Canaan
The house of our mothers, the lands of our desire.*

*He is tall like the cedars of Lebanon
His fruits are sweet to our taste
His heart is a temple
The clouds wreath his head
His brow is sovereign amongst the heavens
The grasses of the field bend gladly beneath his feet.*

When the lines of this song were completed Jesse stayed there in their thrall. The song retreated but only in intensity, and on the promise that it would return to him very soon. Jesse saw suddenly what brave men are so willing to die for, the solace and the praise of these songs in such ample recompense for their bravery. All the brave men of this world, as it is written, giving their lives for a song.

Jesse came back to his senses. He opened his eyes and looked around, amazed to find that these dream-like figures were still arrayed around him. He saw the Twelve shining out in their true colours, and though they were of many tones and hues they were also strangely undifferentiated, the closer to their core he looked.

Jesse went to speak, to utter some words of greeting and also to express his gratitude for the song they had sung to him, but as the words formed in his mind they travelled and were plainly seen, and so travelled back to him via the same route the

answer to his greeting.

Thank you for your song, he said.
The women glowing at his words.
It is your song, Beloved.
You do not need to thank us.
We will always sing of you.

I am glad to be here, Jesse said.
There was consternation amongst the Twelve.
O poor man.
You will not be.
When you know why you have been summoned.

At this point Ruby burst into the conversation.
Don't tell him, she said.
Just tell me.
The Twelve spoke to her in their silent speech.
No, said Ruby.
Let me be taken.
He has done nothing wrong.

And then all of the Twelve and Ruby at once.
O dear child.
It is impossible.
Not this way.
O dear heart, do not...
His choice, his free choice.
No. I forbid it.
O Child.
You are not permitted.
You know, Lustrous One.
There is no other way.

Jesse felt these words mingle and swirl within him, and he grew turbulent and began to feel his courage fail. His fear grew until he cried out for the speech to stop, and then all speech fell silent in his mind. The minds of the Twelve withdrew from him slightly, with a palpable sense of apology.

Thank you, said Jesse.

Now if I may ask ...

Ruby cut in: Jesse don't...

Ruby, said Jesse.

I am theirs.

I cannot refuse.

Ruby fell silent, and Jesse reached out again.

Please, sisters.

Please tell me what you would have me know.

At his request one of the women moved forwards from centre of the Twelve, reaching out across the waters to hold Jesse's face in her hands. As she did so her shared twelve-fold sorrow flowed into him, causing his heart to clench and then fall open, her soul breaking open the barriers to Jesse's own soul. He gazed into the bright eyes of the greatest of the Twelve as she showed him the truths that were stored up within her.

O beloved man.

O Man of Sorrows.

O Jesse. Ruby did her best to deny you but you could not be denied. There is some new perfection in you that we have not foreseen. And yet you must be denied, for the sake of Our Kind.

O Jesse.
Look into my heart.
Look within yourself also.
Look to see the truth, revealed.

As best he could Jesse did as he was asked. He looked within himself and followed the river of his heart downwards, finding himself immersed again in the darkness that Ruby had shown him when he had closed his eyes for her.

As he watched Jesse saw a light come into the darkness, a cool clear light that owed only vaguely to sunlight. Jesse also saw beings composed of light, constructed of such pure radiance that they shone out like stars against the darkness. Jesse watched these lights multiply and join together and then separate again, in a swirling dance of tremendous grace and dignity. There was only joy in the soft glow that they imparted to the world, their unity with each other shining out and sustaining them against the uncomprehending darkness.

But the Light did not prevail. Jesse saw the dark fire erupt against the void, and the terror that this presaged. He saw once more the hideous servants of that fire as they came howling and gnashing their teeth into the communion of the Light.

In confusion and terror the lights were separated from one another, with many hunted down and extinguished. Those who survived were driven out into the wilderness, hiding themselves in the last cool refuges of the earth, their luminosity so diminished that they almost ceased to shine. Jesse saw the faces of these luminous beings streaked from weeping, and he saw their terrible servitude, their banishment from the

communion of the Light.

His guide entered his mind again.

Jesse, Beloved. You see Them. The Unclean, the Unforgiven. But there come others, also. Born to this lineage, they betray their distant Father and turn their hearts towards the Light.

Jesse saw a long line of men appear before him, a rare lineage stretching back endlessly into the past. He gasped to see himself at the front of this line but so changed, with the light that poured out of him and the goodness it comprised. He saw himself as the Twelve saw him, along with the other men of his kind, and he saw that the sisters were entirely susceptible to them.

Do you see? These men are our Hope, and that marks them out for destruction. Until that day when the One shall arise, Selah. Until then we must be separate, until then we must mourn.

Why should love be forbidden? asked Jesse.

With these good men.

Why?

You know in your heart, Beloved.

Look there to see what is written.

Jesse did as he was asked. As his gaze lit up his dark places he saw what might be called a scroll, setting out in intricate detail the vast history of Lupa. Jesse saw the fear they struck in the wicked, the mission they were sworn to fulfil. He also read the names and the secrets of the Elect, including where they dwelled, and the protections that were available to them to keep them safe from The Unforgiven.

Jesse also saw the names of the brave men who had won the hearts of these women, and by that love marked themselves for destruction. Jesse saw Abel die, casting the world into shadow, he saw Remus perish and the terrors that had flowed from the absolute victory of Rome.

Then Jesse saw the greatest of them all. He saw the great Love that had surged within Him, he saw the devastation of Magdalene who even now held his face in her hands. Jesse saw the manner of His death played out before him, and he was suddenly crushed and horrified.

You killed Him, Jesse said.

No.

I see you. I see you do it.

Look deeper, Beloved.

What Jesse saw then were lies heaped up on lies, the bitter slag of so many lies that history has been compacted from. Jesse choked on these corruptions of the truth, lies told for the protection of Lupa but also slating the world for ruin.

Among these remnants of the truth Jesse saw Jesus and the Twelve, the same Twelve that were gathered around him now. He saw Jesus open to them, most explicitly to Magdalene who had seen Him shine out, just as Ruby had seen Jesse shine on the night of that last full moon. Magdalene had fallen to Him despite all of her defences, she had anointed Him with her love just as Jesse had been anointed.

Jesse saw His love but also His terror when the truth was revealed to Him. Jesus knew that He would be taken, and His

blood drained out of Him, and the secrets that were now stored up in Him used to destroy every one of the Twelve, along with every other woman of their kind left in the world.

The Twelve watched on in horror as this story played out once more, plying Jesse with great gouts of outrage for what they alone could witness, for the truth that they alone knew. The sacrifice of Judas, willingly taken into captivity to buy time for his twin brother, so that He could be safely delivered into death. There were no pieces of silver, there was no betrayal by a kiss. Instead these brothers embraced and kissed each other in their terrible last goodbye, striking each other on the chest to make fast the courage that burned there. The Twelve cried out as these men were separated from one other, each going to what place exactly they did not know but knowing in their twinned hearts that they were utterly condemned.

And in terrible visions Jesse saw Jesus eat and drink and perish on that same night, in the darkness of Maundy Thursday, the sorrow of Tenebrae when all knowing hearts weep in outrage and desolation. Jesse saw His death, and the manner of it, endured so that the people of the covenant might be saved from their destruction.

Jesse cried out to see Judas taken and scourged and tortured, flayed until his skin hung in strips from his body, his brow cut terribly by the thorns they had crowned him with. Judas cried out in agony but he did not betray his brother, he accepted the bitter cup of suffering so that their joint purpose could be achieved.

Only too late did his captors realise their mistake. And still in their hatred and corruption did they put poor Judas to death,

dragging his broken body to Golgotha, mocking him and piercing him as he hung upon the cross. This image that still adorns churches and chapels in every part of the world, like the crosses that lined the Appian Way, the same warning to brave young men: this is the price you will pay if you defy us. The same warning circling the walls of these places, the disgusting profanity of the Stations of the Cross, threatening young men with the same fate that was meted out to Judas. These warnings meant to deter their courage especially, that courage so feared by the perverts and idolaters of the churches of men.

Jesse saw the dread terrors that had issued forth in Jesus' name, out of the few drops of blood that could be wrung from His corpse when they finally found His grave. He saw the psychotic Saul and what he became, so much worse than the murderer he had been. He saw Saul's deep hatred for life hammered out over so many confusing letters that now bound and tormented his credulous slaves, tricked into thinking that that they portend anything other than madness and suffering and death.

Finally there were visions of what might be to come. Jesse saw horrors reach out infinitely ahead of him, and he saw them wrought in his own name of Jesse, the absolute tyranny of his kingdom's throne. He saw whole nations prostrate before graven images of him, his visage become bleak and terrifying, he saw priests and ministers dealing hatred and madness in his memory that was made so disfigured and awry. He saw vast armies surge across the seas in obedience to him, the edicts of an imaginary prophet who never truly existed in time.

There were further visions but Jesse could not continue watching. He broke from the gaze of Magdalene and fell to the ground, gasping with horror at the fragments of the truth he

had been shown. Ruby saw him fall and rushed to assist him, and as the Twelve clamoured in concern she cried out in Jesse's defence.

I will deliver him, she said.

O child.

I will protect him.

O child.

Even as you say that.

You know he cannot be saved.

Ruby howled a chorus of denial and protection but the Twelve would not be moved. Who can repulse the truth, who is stronger than destiny? The Twelve answered with the only words that the truth would permit them to speak.

They will grind him to a husk.

They will eat your soul.

If any of us are to live.

There is no other way.

Jesse spoke suddenly.

Let them take me.

I will not betray you.

I am not afraid.

The Twelve shuddered at his bravery but they took no solace in it.

Dear Heart. You cannot imagine what it is that hunts you. You would not endure their merest touch upon you. You would surrender everything you have just for the promise of death, that death might be granted to you sooner rather than later.

Jesse looked to Ruby and she strove to paint him a version of history in which he might still be able to live. Her effort immediately faltered, and it was all that she could do to provide a vision of him surviving the horrors that would be visited on him in a single hour.

As her strength failed Ruby could not withhold a quick vision of her own fate, should Jesse be allowed to be Taken. He watched in horror to see Ruby torn to pieces, her flesh torn by hot steel and much worse than that, and at this slight glimpse of these horrors Jesse felt himself swoon, and although he managed to remain conscious his blood ran utterly cold.

Must this happen? Jesse asked.
If you remain, said the Twelve.
It is certain to happen.
And there will be far worse also.
For Ruby and for every one of us.

As these words were uttered Jesse hung his head, knowing that his fate was sealed. Ruby moved again to deny it but Jesse sat immobile as she cried out, with the truth clearly written within him.

You saw, Ruby, he said.
There is no other way.

Ruby went to cry out once more but Jesse hushed her gently, asking for the space and quiet that he needed to confirm his choice. The grave election that his honour demanded of him, the only choice that the strictures of his conscience could possibly allow him to make.

P . J U L I A N

Ruby sat silently as Jesse resigned himself, breathing the borrowed breaths of a man who stood condemned.

CHAPTER 18

Here Is Thy Victory

FOR some moments after his decision was made Jesse sat quietly on the hard rock, with Ruby silently holding his hand.

As Jesse sat the Twelve drifted towards him and gathered around him, and despite his fear and consternation Jesse was comforted by their presence. He knew that he did not mind to face death if it came to him in such company, as these women shone and surrounded him with their love and admiration.

Jesse watched as Ruby picked up a smooth stone from beneath the waters of the grotto. She wiped the stone dry with the edge of her shirt, then knelt bowed over with the stone in her hands.

The Twelve began to chant softly and Jesse saw the stone tremble and begin to change. The entire substance of the rock shimmered as it was prayed over before turning suddenly into bread. Without acknowledging his surprise Ruby looked up at Jesse and held the bread out to him while the Twelve intoned in unison.

Take this bread and eat it. This bread of consequence, the bread called Ergo. It will guide you safely through the vale of death,

and it will shield your soul until you have passed over. When you have eaten, so shall we eat, in order to guide you hence.

Jesse took the bread and broke it as the Twelve continued to sing.

Take this bread, and eat it.

As we do so in protection of thee.

After Jesse had eaten they invited him to drink. He cupped the water of the grotto with his hands and it was cool and refreshing beyond what he could have expected, and also laced with something sweet and cloying, like altar wine but more soothing and uplifting than that.

When Jesse had eaten and drunk and the Twelve had partaken also he retched and felt his final meal turn abruptly within him. He knew that his time would be short. He turned to Ruby, who could not bring herself to look at him, and with his hands he gently lifted her face towards his.

Ruby, he said.

It's not your fault.

As she kept her head turned away from him.

It is.

No Ruby.

It is, Jesse. It is my fault.

Jesse gathered her up in his arms but although he felt her tremble for him still she held her face away. Jesse stroked her hair for the final time, but as he tried to reassure her she shook her head and bitterly denied him.

No, Jesse.

Ruby. It's OK.

No.

You'll be OK.

No.

Jesse held Ruby without trying to reassure her further, until he felt his last meal roil and shift violently within him. The cool touch of Magdalene came upon him and she said: Jesse, Beloved. There is no more time. He nodded and kissed Ruby but she remained coiled up and turned away from him. Jesse sighed and left her that way as he turned back towards the Twelve for the final time.



Ruby did not watch the terrible sequence that unfolded over the next few minutes. She did not see Jesse turn back towards the Twelve and have his head anointed with the waters of the grotto. She did not see him stiffen and lurch slowly sideways, nor did she see him begin to cry out and speak in tongues as he lay rigid and pitiful on the hard rock floor of the grotto.

Ruby kept her eyes closed as Jesse sank further. She did not witness him hunch and slaver and convulse, or when he became like a wild animal, scratching at his face and neck as he howled there in the silence.

As Jesse thrashed and sank the Twelve began to chant, and by that chanting guide Jesse gradually into death. In her innermost

heart Ruby began to curse the Twelve for what they were doing, and then she repented from that and cursed herself with a dozen times the ferocity. Ruby knew that all of this was her own fault, even in her ignorance, for showing herself to Jesse when she should have remained concealed. She also knew in bitter retrospect that the memory scrub she had given him was hopelessly inadequate for the strength of a man like Jesse, and although the knowledge of such men had been concealed from her for her entire life still she knew that she was entirely to blame.

The Twelve saw Ruby berate herself and they reached out in an attempt to reprieve and console her, although the anguish within her was not susceptible to consolation.

You could not have known, they said.
You could not have foreseen this man.
And there is still hope, daughter.
The trumpets may yet sound.

Suddenly there was consternation amongst the Twelve. As he sank towards death Jesse began to fight back, in that precise moment when death finally called him onwards. The Twelve were surprised and then dismayed by his strength as they wrestled with his soul. The Twelve called on Jesse to cease but he would not cease, the strength within him defying their own twelve-fold strength. Jesse's power even overcame the drag exerted by the Ergo as he fought to remain in the world.

Ruby heard Jesse shout out to her as he struggled to avoid his fate. She was so devastated by his cry that she cried back to him, despite her efforts to restrain herself. Without any further thought she rushed to him and held his poor head in her hands,

and he slackened in her embrace while saying only a single word to her.

Ruby.

This name that he so loved.

I'm here, she said.

Ruby.

As Ruby held Jesse he relented from his struggle and began instead to weep. His tears fell out of him like so many shattered remains of the strength that had kept him in the world. Ruby held him as he wept and the Twelve were able to fall away from Jesse and restore themselves for the end, to guide him into the final descent that was only moments away.

As Jesse was held and comforted he reached out into the minds of the Twelve via some new route that had been created by his struggle, taking these women greatly by surprise. He showed them the full shape of his heart, the wonders that were stored up in it, and the Twelve saw how near they were to their complete destruction, out of the secret strength that Jesse had accumulated to himself.

Jesse spoke softly to them.

I am sorry, sisters.

My courage failed me.

I am ready to go.

Ruby moved again to dissent from these things but as she did so Jesse was suddenly and entirely with her. He surrounded her with the light she had seen in him previously, that night of the deciding moon, but there is no way to describe the deep abiding that she felt as his soul surrounded her, completely

enclosing her soul. Ruby knew that Jesse was willing to go and that she must let him go, for many reasons including the profound bonds of his honour. She saw that his substance as a man would be terribly degraded if he chose to remain alive, with the whole world now imperilled by the life he so wanted to embrace. Jesse showed Ruby some of those possibilities, what he now knew by heart, and the dissent within her died and she knew that he must go.

So it was. Jesse's body sank back and his soul slowly detached from it, receding across the waters before Ruby could think or argue further or buy him further reprieve.

Jesse's soul was ferried out across the lake, and it floated into the indeterminate space beyond those waters until it became hazy and obscure. Through the merest fissure between worlds they saw his soul pass by the outer reaches, and then sink past the dragons guarding the descent into the places under the world.



In another place entirely Carlos Lasenex felt what it was that had slipped beneath the world. He rushed to retrieve what had fallen but there was no means available for him to do so. He thrust out his hands in vain, feeling Jesse plunge past his power to save him and be utterly lost to the world.

No, cried Carlos.

No, No.

O they have damned him.

His cry resounded in the grotto, shaking the Twelve as they prayed for their Beloved, harrying the air in that place before it was cried out altogether. This cry of desolation for another man condemned, another man gone.



The visitors to the grotto felt Carlos' cry rise and tail off, and although they did not comprehend his words or know of their provenance they were not surprised to hear such anguish for the loss of a man like Jesse.

The Twelve held Ruby, hoping to console her, but she felt banished from the Light that united them and she could not be consoled. They would have held her there forever but the darkness was chased from the sky and their retreat was forced upon them. Each of them reached out to Ruby and caressed her but although their compassion fell on her like rain it did not reprieve her at all. For this terrible disaster she had caused, what she had allowed to happen even by bringing Jesse to this place.

The Twelve said their goodbyes as their forms faded and shimmered upon the waters, their souls gradually retreating to their various parts of the world. Leaving poor Ruby sitting devastated on the hard rock, a slight and motherless child, now bereft of her only love, her form now the form of pity and of

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cruelty, the sorrow that will not cease in this contingent, corruptible world.

CHAPTER 19

To Break The Cursed Ground

RUBY sat next to Jesse for a long time. She sat long enough to feel the day break and her powers wane again. She sat hunched and shaking with grief but she did not weep, even as Jesse grew cold and the rigor came into his sinews. She saw death take the colour out of his skin, so recently warm and responsive to her touch. It had always responded to her absolutely but it would not respond to her now.

Ruby did not weep. She would have died for Jesse immediately and traded places with him in the underworld but that was no longer for her to offer or decide. Instead Ruby sat there with dry eyes rocking herself slowly, praying for Jesse's safety and his protection even though he was now in a place where such prayers are not admitted, where they remain unheard.

As the night sky leavened and the birds began to sing Ruby felt a tremor come into her that could not be stilled. She shook from the inside out, with the terrible beginnings of a grief that would take her life away and bury it in misery. She stood up and scolded herself but the tremor did not abate, but although she could not stop the chattering that came from her teeth still she did not weep.

Ruby knew she needed to bury Jesse. She knew what They would do to him if they took him, how they would take even the remnants of his blood in an effort to divine his secrets. Ruby had felt his blood course under her, inside of her, and she was not about to let Them take it from him, the blood that had flowed with everything that made Jesse into a man.

Ruby first needed to wash Jesse's body. She pulled him to the edge of the pool and she bathed him in cupped handfuls of the cool pine-scented water. She bathed his wounds, the cuts and abrasions that his struggle had left him with, but although those wounds flowed again with liquid blood he was not revived. Ruby anointed Jesse's head with water, and as it ran down over his cheeks and across his lips the dust there was washed away. The water flowed over his eyes and covered his nose and he raised no word of complaint. She drew more water and wet his hair, stroking it back out of his eyes, kissing his forehead and stroking his hair for the final time.

Ruby knew that she must bury Jesse. The Twelve had promised that they could hide him in this place, but only if his body was sealed safely within the ground. Ruby knew that the grave needed to be close enough to the waters to hide him, and yet far enough to maintain those waters from the putrefaction of his corpse.

Ruby lifted Jesse up on to her back, the dead weight of his much larger body. She carried him slowly up the near slope into the pine forest that surrounded them. Jesse weighed on her like bricks or stones but still she made herself put one foot after the other under the terrible, tragic weight he had become. Occasionally a small noise would come from him, a small sigh

dislodged by her jolting carry. Each time her heart leapt at the sound, but then realising what it was her heart fell back to earth again.

When Ruby had climbed far enough, up to a small saddle with enough flat ground, she laid Jesse's body out gently under the pine trees. She stood bent over with her hands on her knees, breathing hard to regain her breath.

Ruby did not stop to admire the sunrise, or to feel the early sun wash over her and warm her to her bones. She marked out a space with her foot, and then she knelt beside Jesse and scratched at the earth with her fingers. She scratched and tore her fingernails and when her fingertips began to bleed she took up a sharp stone and continued to scrape violently at the earth.

Eighteen inches under the soil Ruby found brutal coffee-rock, and although she did not relent from digging she was forced to take short breaks, a breath or two, to get up enough strength to strike at the ground again. As the morning wore on she hungered and suffered terrible thirst but she did not relent from her task. The sun watched her work as it crept to its high place in the sky, and as it began its journey back down to the western horizon again.

Ruby dug on. She worked silently and brutally, like a steeldriver daring his heart to fail, to find release from the labour that she was condemned to. The afternoon heat tormented her, flies stung her but she did not brush them away. The shadows eventually grew long and the heat softened but still Ruby scraped at the ground, as the whole of her body cried out for rest. She would not halt even when the last light was leaving the sky, until she had disturbed enough ground to bury

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Jesse's body.

Ruby dug on deeper and deeper as the sun sank out of the sky.

CHAPTER 20

The Shortest Verse

AS the last of the light died Ruby stood back and looked at the grave she had prepared for Jesse. She took off his clothes and carefully laid them aside, and then with the last of her strength she pulled him down into the space that she had made.

His eyes were closed but his mouth opened as he was moved, and Ruby took a small round stone and placed it in his mouth, and she took two flatter stones and placed them over his eyes. She crossed his hands over his chest and she packed his clothes down around him, as if to give him some protection from the sharp sides of the grave she had dug out of the compacted gravel.

As Ruby looked at Jesse for the last time a tiny wail began to build in her, and she moaned along its line for her fallen love. For his bright soft eyes that were now dark, for his tongue now stilled on a stone she had placed there.

Ruby moaned as she began to cover Jesse's body with the ground she had dislodged, and her lines of sorrow grew louder as he disappeared from view, sinking further underground with every handful of stone and earth that she placed on him.

She keened as every last grain was heaped up, and she did not pause when she found a large chunk of quartz and pried it loose and rolled it to the top of the mound that she had made for Jesse, the grave that she had consigned him to by her stupidity, her desire.

Then Ruby could not contain herself. Against all of the dictates of her kind, the requirements of the very song that was within her, tears began to well in her eyes, and this last time that was required of her she could not staunch those tears. She was lost and distraught and in the darkness there was no one to witness her sorrow, and there was no moon, for it had gone behind the earth, and there was just the darkness within her and without.

Ruby wept. She could no longer maintain her eyes in their dryness and so tears began to fall from her, slowly at first, splashing softly against the dust that she had stirred up from her hard day's digging, the dust that now covered her and also the body of her dead love Jesse.

With that, the dams that had been so carefully constructed within Ruby finally collapsed. She wept great soft tears of desolation, and the more tears that she wept the more she found within her, demanding even as it was forbidden to her that she weep for the loss of this man, who had no-one else to mourn him, whom she alone had loved and by the tragedy of that love had consigned to the grave.

And with no one to hear her Ruby turned from weeping to howling, and she then shifted beyond that to sorrow sounds of terrible majesty and devastation. Her grief was in every pore of her, and it grew louder and more savage until every beast that stood within hearing fell to the ground in shared wretchedness

and despair. Even humans who could not hear her howling in the night were laid low by her grief, some falling to their knees, as the sorrow that was massed within her soul broke outwards and poured into the world.

At the centre of this grief-storm knelt poor Ruby Tuesday, horror shaking every fragment of her being, every part of her shattered by it and becoming one fluid misery and devastation, amidst her howling reproaches against herself. In her sorrow and her shame she did not pity herself but instead savaged herself with accusations, for having killed precisely the thing that she most loved. This poor man whose only sin was loneliness, this kindly light being whom she should have cherished and protected and yet had consigned to the awful silence of the grave.

She felt Jesse's soul cry out to her from the place where it now resided and she cried back, cried out to redeem him but he could not be redeemed. Her vast soul then became utter desolation, a waste land bare and devastated, nothing but the shrieks of scavengers and the damned they fed upon, the very image of catastrophe, the beginning and the end of the world.



Ruby wept for time beyond telling, and her grief went out of her to places both sacred and profane. She wept to revive Jesse, and she wept to bring him back, and she pledged everything that she had in order to wrestle him from out of the underworld

and the clutches of the ones who crouched there.

In the grotesque wreck of her sorrow and her shame Ruby fought and bargained all night. Even as dawn prepared to come back into the world, when she saw portals there between worlds, she made one desperate last effort at bargaining and redemption, and she pledged her soul unreservedly in exchange for Jesse's soul.

As Ruby saw that this was not permitted she fell though all sorrow and became one with the great keening gulf at the heart of the world, the place where all tears run to be remembered, the vast river of mourning that flows out and then returns to its centre, bearing the inevitable tears of all suffering, sentient beings.

With that, Ruby was finished. She felt herself fade, and her fingers bled again suddenly and profusely. She said one last goodbye to Jesse, in sorrow that she had now lost her strength after her night of grief, that she could do no more than she had done for him by putting him safely under the ground.

Ruby's strength faltered and she fell back softly on to the dust that was now mingled with her sweat and her blood and her tears. In the shade of those pine trees, as dawn became day, Ruby collapsed into absolute darkness, a dead sleep that she could not hold herself back from. Even as she wished that that she could go on to much darker places, to redeem what had fallen there, she fell back in exhaustion on the dusty ground and she did not fall any further than that.

CHAPTER 21

A Branch That Shall Bear Fruit

THE light grew and day stole back into the world but Ruby was lost in the darkness, impervious to the seductions of the light. She slept and her soul clung to that forgetfulness. Although her sleep restored some of her strength Ruby would have wished for it to be otherwise, preferring death to any other state, but there were barriers between her and that final destination that could not be overcome, and so she was condemned to come back into the world no matter how long she slept.

When Ruby did return to the world it was by a circuitous route, visiting places for which there exist no adequate words of description. After that journey Ruby's soul returned to her poor bruised body, the damage of her night of grief still written heavily upon it. She opened her eyes and felt the waves of physical tiredness that still assailed her, and the much greater pain in her heart that she knew would never be assuaged.

After she woke Ruby lay still for some time. She stared mutely across the surface of the earth, her breath kicking up the dust she had disturbed, the grave-dust that was now settled everywhere around her. She felt bitterness rise and accuse her when she looked towards the funeral mound she had built, the

raw earth drying slowly in the last light of the sun. Ruby shook as she lay there, and as much as she tried to still those tremors she could not hold her body still.

Ruby lay there and looked for the stone that she had placed on top of the mound but she could not see it. She looked past the now furrowed mound in puzzlement and then in horror as she saw that the stone had been rolled away. She gasped and blinked and looked around and she knew, suddenly, she knew that her grief had sent her mad, like so many grieving women before her, the madness that was predicted in the lines of her own song, brought on her inevitably by the loss of such man as Jesse.

Ruby pulled herself upright. She slapped herself and scolded herself for her stupidity but the mad vision did not abate. She stared at it, and as she stared the vision looked back at her and smiled at her. She groaned to see the beloved smile that she had seen so often, the same smile that she had fought all night to redeem.

The vision continued to smile at her warmly, and despite her misgivings all of the warmth and life that had deserted Ruby as she grieved rushed back into her. Even though she knew she had been driven insane still she clung on desperately to the smile that greeted her, the vision of the beloved face that smiled at her.

As she stared, Ruby began to wonder. She doubted whether even madness could create such a clear vision, or provoke the love that it suddenly moved and revived in her. Ruby doubted mostly whether madness could animate such a vision to speak, or to say the words that came in such an ordinary way towards

her, although she could not understand why Jesse would be motivated to say them.

Thank you.

Just that simple expression.

Thank you, Ruby.

Ruby remained still for a long time, looking at him.

Jesse?

Yep.

Jesse. You can't be here.

I know, Rubes. I know.

Because last night...

I know, Ruby. Believe me.

Even for us, this is really fucking weird.

Ruby got up slowly and pulled herself to standing, thinking that her insanity might be shaken off if she stood up straight enough to dislodge it. She thought that if this was only a dream it might dissipate if she hauled her poor body into a position inconsistent with sleep. But as she stood the vision did not waver or abate, and her lost love sat looking at her, smiling quietly in the last light of the setting sun.

Jesse, she said again.

You can't be here.

I know, he said.

How did you get... back?

Jesse smiled at her, shrugging his shoulders.

I'll make you a deal, Ruby.

She nodded, trying to hold back her tears.

You come sit here with me.

You put your arm around me, and hang on to me.

I'll do my best to tell you what happened.

Ruby could not contain a final huge convulsive sob. She then breathed out hard, wiping the tears out of her eyes before they could fall. She moved over to where Jesse sat and she sat beside him, just as he had asked. Jesse sighed softly when she touched him with her hand, and he sighed louder when her arm slid softly around his back to hold him. Ruby for her part shut her eyes and squeezed Jesse hard, and although he felt dense like flesh and blood should still her grief did not allow her to hope, as she closed her eyes tighter and held on to him as tightly as she could.

Jesse was quiet as she held him but he was not reserved or withdrawn. He was simply quiet, and full of a new spirit that had not been within him before. He did not speak for a long time but he somehow slipped open his heart to Ruby, and she saw with her own sight what was now contained in that place. She would have wept tears of wonder and gladness but Jesse had asked her to hold him, and so she clung on to him tightly without weeping or speaking. Ruby would have kissed Jesse but there was no need to kiss him anymore, as all of the warmth and grace of this man shone out in a strait beam towards her, and he was like a sun or a new flame or the return of all of the goodness in the world.

As Ruby held Jesse he began to speak. He spoke of his death, and he told Ruby that although death might seem terrifying it was actually nothing to fear. It is what comes after, he said. There is a jealous and savage beast, somewhere under this world, and you pay him in kind for every joy you have encountered in our human realm. You pay especially if you have strengthened your soul with kindness, generosity, good

deeds.

Jesse continued. I saw other souls flicker there and be snuffed out, souls that were rotten and putrid and cruel, but for me and others like me there is torment beyond description, beyond endurance or even the time to describe. I was suspended in agony that I cannot account for, and I was held there in the certain knowledge that there would always be worse to come. I saw my suffering multiplied for eternity, I cried out for oblivion but it was viciously denied to me.

But Ruby, he said.

I cried out to you.

As my hope faded within me, I called upon your name.

Ruby shuddered.

I heard you, she said.

I know, said Jesse. You heard my pleas. You heard and then like a blinding light, you appeared. My dead eyes could not see you but you were there all around me, as bright and cool as the moon on a summer night. You were there, and you stood for me, and my tormentors were utterly dismayed.

Jesse faltered and he shed tears, but although they shone on his face they were tears of relief and wonder and not of desolation. Ruby wiped his tears and she felt them cool and soothe her, soothe and heal her tattered fingers. She brought her hand towards her eyes in amazement, to see the damage being repaired as she watched. She touched one of his tears to her tongue, gasping at the relief and exultation that swept through her from the merest taste of his tears.

Ruby looked at Jesse.

My God, she said.

What are you?

Hey, Jesse said, smiling.

I was telling you a story.

Jesse continued. You came down, he said. I felt you come, and you loosed my chains, and then I heard such a piercing song of love for me, even in the face of my death, that all of my agony was ended. I was released from my captivity and it was all my captors could do to save themselves, in their terror and flight they forgot entirely about me.

I was lost in the darkness, and I fell down and down, but as I fell I felt your sorrow and your love reaching down to me like a beam of light, or a lanyard. I reached out for it, and I lashed myself to it, and without any further effort of mine I was raised up upon that love that you sent down, and I felt myself burst through the surface of the earth.

And here I am.

He looked down at himself, and then at her.

And what am I?

Ruby shook her head.

I guess I am: Risen.

Jesse looked down again at his body, smiling ruefully.

What is this Light in me?

Ruby did not know how to answer. She knew that this was her love Jesse, sitting naked under a pine tree, but she also knew that he had been transformed and that he now shone with the most extraordinary light. His light was gentle even though it was intense, and although Ruby did not recognise it she knew very clearly it was something new to come into the world.

Can I kiss you? Ruby asked.
Jesse laughed gently and nodded his head.
I hope so, he said.
Why don't you give it a try.

Ruby kissed him with the softest of her kisses. She tasted his tears again, shuddering at the energy and strength that they imparted to her. Jesse wept further tears as he kissed her back, and as she broke off from kissing him he said softly to her.

I don't know how to thank you.
I was lost, and now I am found.

Ruby wiped his tears away, and as she did so she felt further life come back into her tired body. She shuddered with those deep uprushes of pleasure and she said: did I save you, just that I might be saved? And she kissed his mouth very deeply, and she drank of the light that was in him, and she saw how purified he was by his travels through hell, and she was pierced by his goodness and bravery in a way that she had never been.

You are a new man, she said.
I know.
I don't think you do.
No. He smiled gently.
Probably not.

Jesse was quiet for some time, and then he asked.
Do you know what I am?
Ruby nodded.
I know it was foretold.
One was said to be coming but Jesse I did not believe it.

They said I was coming?

I think so.

The One who would be redeemed.

But in my lifetime, she said.

There was no sense to hope for it.

They sat silently with each other for a long time, until Ruby put her head down on his arm and told him: I could sing those lines for you, if you would like. Jesse sighed with deep pleasure and anticipation and he said: please.

So Ruby sang that most sacred part of her song, the prophetic lines that set out in all of their longing the things that had been promised to the People of the Covenant. The One who would be redeemed by the love of Lupa, rather than damned by it. Raising His banner, a true Son-God of the earth. Gathering up the exiles of Judah, leading them back into the Promised Land.

The lines of this song fell upon Jesse like the waters of freedom and reconciliation, even as he puzzled to hear of the light that burned within him, how it would light up the world. As the song touched on that light Jesse remembered a question that he had.

Ruby. Would you tell me what this is?

And before she could answer him Jesse extended the palm of his right hand, outwards and upwards. He knit his brow and suddenly there flashed an intense light exploding from the palm of his hand. Ruby gasped as she looked, for although the light shone soft and beautiful it was also tremendously fierce and acute. The light flashed and exploded into a beam of bright sparkling blue light, and Jesse waved it and wielded it, and as

its light infused him Ruby saw that the light within him was not separable from the blue light that he now wielded. Ruby grasped for her words and Jesse saw them form in her, and they both said the same words at the same time.

A sword.

A shield.

And more than these.

From these events were derived many further events, further things which may be told in the further chronicles of Lupa. Things that for the wise come already announced, through their meditation upon chapter and verse, and also legends inscribed in prose and poems and even baser forms than these. Reading past events as prophecy, and descriptions of future things as events already come to pass. The raising of the dead, incorruptible. A change going to come, like a flood on the barren fields of the earth. The chosen people, their gathering up, their entry to the gates of paradise. And it is for the wise, who know how to read such things, that the final words of this volume shall be given.

Rejoice, Daughters of Jerusalem. Rejoice! For he that was dead is now Risen. Rejoice, O Nation of Judah! For his name is Emmanuel – Light With Us, The Shining One. Rejoice, O Israel!

Here ends the First Chronicle of Lupa.

ABOMINATION 1:1-5

THERE are forces in the world that instinctively seek their own advantage, and counted amongst these are the righteous forces of the world. They battle their adversaries fiercely and they use such weapons as are available to them, with trickery and deception being heavily numbered amongst them. That the result might eventually prove indecisive shall not deter them from their struggle, for only through their constant combat is the balance of the world maintained.

So too are there bargains struck between these forces, in those rare moments of armistice between them. Bargains struck in hope and ignorance, without any reckoning of their true or approximate worth.

So did one such bargain restrain The Abomination until the time that a man should escape from his manifold suffering in Hell. So at the very moment that the root of Jesse was loosed from its perdition, there arose the exact condition for the release of this monster into the heart of the world.

So was the Abomination unleashed. This foulness that had neither integrity nor structure, yet revelled in engorged composition beyond any capacity to measure. This contaminate tumultuous thing, roiling in foul and turbid atrocity. It was clotted star-grime and other corrupted matter; grim colourless degradation coalesced; and far more despicable in form and substance than any of these things.

And it surged forth to make prophets from dead poets, who foresaw its dire waves seething and drowning the ceremony of innocence after many centuries of stony sleep. And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

