

One

FATHER, IS THAT YOU?

1875, England

It was a forgotten night. Cold gusts of air curled across the pavement as if summoned to pass by. Did you know the wind is soulless? Yes, think about it. Airy currents flow past people and disappear in the flicker of an eye. The wind waltzes past...leaving no trace other than a pathway cleared of rubbish and stench. Like the breeze, I too am cleansing. I have no reason to disguise my acts, for they are just and enlightened.

My honesty about the ensuing events remains without suspect. Any modifications to the accounts I am about to reveal to you are lies. My existence is like the wind; our similarities entice the breeze to accompany me like a lost puppy searching for its mother. I appear serene, but looks can deceive, for I enjoy wreaking destruction and basking in the tones of chiming screams and cherish a twist of uncertainty.

Some claim I am evil. Evil? Ha! I howl at their naivete. Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf...a coward, that's who! Through living, I have discovered that to

satisfy humanity's perspective regarding evil, you must be vile. Under society's judgmental eye, evil is unkempt, smelling of piss, poverty-stricken; being handsome and rich automatically excludes me from the title of "evil." I am merely a darkened spirit that dwells within this statuesque frame. I know how to live and recognize what drives my contentment. I appreciate the murkier aspects of existence, possess a secret fancy for justice, and enjoy grasping what others dare not take. Do you understand? Imagine seizing the warmth from the depth of a person's being. The mere prospect of it provides me the craving to endure. By embodying the hunter in a macabre tale, I reclaim my youth. Paradoxically, the predatory act makes me even more alluring to women.

I've determined what I loathe most about women is their wealth-seeking mentality. They are amusing creatures--most only marry for materialistic reasons, such as social escalation or financial gain. If I were ugly as a bear with overfilled pockets, a well-suited woman would gladly marry me. I can have any female of my choosing! Do you consider me arrogant? Typically, one would give themselves the benefit of the doubt, but I am an honorable fellow, as well as the most narcissistic being you will ever meet.

My confidence is justified. I am young, attractive, and affluent as hell. Everything about me is superb, including my collection. "What assemblage?" you may ask. Why, the store of victims I have tossed onto my trophy shelves throughout the years. One might

expect I'm teasing, but in fact, it is not a theoretical collection. Being modest, I will not divulge all the boring details of my altruistic purge of rubbish from the world, although I will share what I believe to be most paramount.

My method of carrying out my life's purpose is flawless. Touring from place to place, I have no acquaintances, and like the wind, I am out of people's lives before they can lay any accusations. Some might speculate as to how I select which market animals to pluck from humanity and the details behind my justification. Now, before you cringe with revulsion, I only choose those who exhibit qualities like mine: they must be vain and possess an undying hunger for affluence.

As a youthful suitor who reads the age of thirty, stands tall and is rather stylish, I have few problems accessing the cattle I choose to harvest. I am not impolite for branding the name of "cattle" onto the enticing creatures, for they too have owners, often referred to as "parents," who, without hesitancy, will auction them off to men who offer the loftiest social positions. When cultivated the societal way, these women become ruined, and I must rid humanity of such monstrosities. They are worthless, lowly specimens whose eradication we will not lament. Like a domino trampling the next, they too obliterate those who stand in the way of their rapacious appetites.

Before you judge my existence, please look at your own. *We are animals.* We have developed from

beasts; therefore, we are inclined to hunt like beasts. I have learned to welcome what I am.

Picture a flower forming from a bud. It first appears insignificant; then, over time, warm soothing air blows life into its succulent veins, filling the helpless budding babe with life. Society has destined this beautiful image for cruelty. Think about it: why nurture the flower, knowing that once it burgeons, it will be hacked down, slashed from its youth! Lifeblood will never invade the bloom's veins again. Civilization's careless disregard of life's beauty is archaic and thoughtless. A flower has done no wrong, but society has determined its sole purpose is to function as a simple decoration. I am that flower, cut down and cast aside by society at too young an age.

Some might have referred to me as an orphan, but the term is too charming; "scum" is more befitting. My value was nothing more than that of an infinitesimal insect no one cared if they trod upon. Like the blossom, I assumed my life would end prematurely. I would lie on the streets at night, wishing for someone to put me out of my misery, exterminate me from a rotten world that wouldn't allow me a fighting chance. Frequently I prayed for death, but no one answered my pleas.

Do not grieve for me, for through my anguish a glimpse of intrigue entered my life--some might even suggest a guardian angel. On one especially unsympathetic night, from an alley's feces- and rat-infested corner emanated a voice so quiet that the

words might pass unnoticed if one were not attentive. The brusque voice presented as a whisper so intoxicating that it drew me to stare at the corner in a trancelike state. My breath hung on every word as I listened to the melodic verbiage repeat over the course of several nights. No one dared invade the pitch-black corner, for whenever someone had tried, they didn't emerge the same. The intolerable stench made my eyes water and ache with tears, yet I overlooked it to determine who was behind the voice that consoled me. The tone was bewitching. Even if I were hallucinating, I was at an age where I ached for an ardent figure to bolster me. I dare say I loved this shadowy voice that soothed me.

Though a name or gender was never divulged, I decided it was a masculine figure based on the timbre of his voice. Therefore, from this moment forward, I will refer to the voice as "he." He never offered me his name, nor did I ever know his character. Deep down, I recognized he was the only one who gave two shits about me and my sorrowful existence. The voice assured me refinement and prosperity, which at that moment was all I craved. I needed to show the world I am someone you should give two shits about. I am almighty.

The initial tasks assigned to me by the enigmatic voice started as petty misdeeds, such as stealing. He wished the best for me and knew I needed money to survive. Well, hell, we are past the point of giving him the meaningless title of "he." From now on, I will refer to him as "Father." Yes, Father! Reared up as a

bastard child with no fatherly example to study, I found this title was the most fitting. As I became closer to Father, I desensitized myself to the hostile world. The only beings in existence were Father and me, and together we would transform humanity.

As the streets filled with darkness, I retreated to my cobblestone alley, where I found comfort with Father. The cold stones lay still under my feet, darkness oozing from their veinlike fractures. The night stood quiet as the sky conjured up an unusual turn of events. A shift, as momentous as the earth leaping, was about to begin.

Curled up in the shadowy corner, frozen from the bitter cold, I sensed a comforting spectral blanket had been flung over me, separating me from my murky surroundings. The consolatory action was the closest I have been to experiencing love. Encased in Father's presence, I heard his tender whisper, which only I could decipher. He advised me I must be brave to flourish. Considering his intentions to be authentic, I freed my ears to attend to the wisdom that flowed from his mouth.

From his guidance, I recognized the spiny backbone of civilization to be women. Women's values are tainted by their environment, picking up from their parents to seek prosperity above all else, including love. Little did I realize an extraordinary calling to purge humanity of these ruined creatures was about to be slung upon my soul. Father instructed me not to consider the spoiled ones as human but as cattle, for they had proved their authentic existence and

provided no other benefit to society than slaughter. As I stared into the blackness, I pledged to comply with his wishes, for he was the only one who ever cared for me.

With the money I had collected foraging from undeserving pockets, I bought suitable clothes to woo the most selective of women. Father recommended I rehearse before committing to reform the world. At his directive, I frequented high-class bordellos with the initial intent of honing my social and sexual prowess. The nights grew darker when I went out to play. Brothels thirstily opened their gates, anticipating my glorious arrival. To breach the chambers, you must embody the part. Without Father luring each heavy pocket filled with coins to fuel my expenditures, I would not have secured admittance.

As I strode through the shadowiness of the ever-familiar cobblestone pavement, a blackness deluged my spirit, and for a moment I thought I was drowning. I considered whether to combat the darkness, but it was marvelous, my stride becoming bolder with every step. Fear was no longer a virtue but a lusting; I craved to see others' dread. All my life, I had feared the world around me and the horrors it excreted upon me. With my new stability, however, the tables had shifted.

In the distance, I smelled a familiar rot basking in the air. These were my people, my kin. All heartbeats on earth grew louder as each approaching minute elevated my anticipation. The vibration grew so loud that my thoughts and speech no longer had room to

exist. Once again, Father's presence filled my carcass with stability. At last, I arrived at the fated brothel door.

Who built this wretched dungeon entry? Its contents reeked of heartless souls appealing for anyone to break their existence of immoral standing. As I pounded on the impenetrable devil's gate, a surge of anxiety coursed through me. The door inched open with the utmost of caution, revealing a fellow of considerable stature. He almost looked heroic as he stood robed in all black. Gold accents embellished his red and gray coattails, which trailed like flags, welcoming my arrival. His impeccably slicked mane was black as midnight, with silver adorning his temples. It was clear that he had the assets to entice any female who captured his attention. Maybe that's how he started his shop. Like Satan himself, he persuaded the most beguiling members of society to serve in his brothel. Now, seeing him in all his illustriousness as he stood at the entrance, I was beside myself. I called it a brothel, but it was much more luxurious than that. The man hosted a dainty--yes, dainty--establishment. As I continued looking at him, I swore he became taller with the anticipation of the words that would flow from my tongue. With self-assurance, I looked him square in the eyes and declared, "I understand you have the finest, and I very much fancy some company tonight." I clattered the coins in my pocket while alluding to an inheritance. He studied me up and down, fixing his sight on my

jewel-encrusted pocket watch; without a second thought, he summoned me in.

He glanced both ways down the desolate street and slammed the devilish door behind me, sealing me inside. I swore the hinges chuckled about the deception that was about to befall this "master of a man." He led me into a chamber that had an atrocious color scheme of putrid mustard yellow. Then, one by one, he brought out the cattle from behind a beckoning red curtain. They were physically beautiful; one may only speculate how they had given in to such treachery. Their souls, once full of purity, had been snatched from their bodies for a few shillings. Within moments, a dozen young women stood before me. Unlike what you might expect, they looked dignified, clad in ceremonious attire. From left to right, I scanned down the line, questioning which victim to select. At the end of the row of faces, a wench caught my view. She scanned the livestock to her left with a competitive and appallingly smug grin and, like clockwork, leaned over just enough to supply me a quick glimpse of what she offered. Hunger seared in her eyes, and a need for attention oozed from her veins. It was as if she were bleeding out all of society's deepest desires. To get a better view, I swept back my black locks to uncover my golden eyes. As my manicured, well-boned finger rose to summon her, it was sickening how proud she appeared at having been selected. Her eyes lit up as she taunted the other females who surrounded her, carrying on as if she had won first prize at a fair. She was mistaken.

It was not a trophy she had gained but a one-way ticket to hell.

Soon she would visit the very depths of damnation, to which she had already sold her soul. Do not pity her, for she would hastily reach her ambitions. All the other cattle vanished as the rotten one continued to make it known that she had earned my attention. As she approached, I noticed her pupils glowed red with loathing. She was the spawn of Lucifer himself. The proprietor showed us down a corridor to a set of stairs. After we ascended the staircase, he pointed to an impressive door and handed me the key. He then headed back down the staircase to greet another customer. I grinned at the thought of our perfect seclusion. The floor creaked with each step as we approached the suite. The sound escalated my excitement, as I knew the secret of her destiny. When I opened the door, the vaulted ceilings, draped with elegantly hung tapestries, along with the perfectly positioned candles, awed me and heightened the mood. *If I could love someone, I mused, I would build them a chamber like this. Love? Did I reference love?* Pushing aside my irrelevant thoughts, I locked the door.

At last, we were alone, with no one to ruin this magnificent occasion. I drew a whisper from my mouth that only a dark soul could hear. "How shall we begin?" I solicited. She gave me a perplexed look. Abruptly her inner demon took over as the appetite in her eyes swelled and voracity filled her desolate soul. In the corner of the room stood a bed with a