



Sleeping With the Dead

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Chapter 1

The house looked abandoned. No signs of life in the windows or at the doors. It was a one-story frame house with two simple steps up to the front porch. It was white, a white that appeared not to have been cleaned, refreshed, or attended for years. The dark mold that dripped from the rain gutters were in contrast to the chipped gray paint that covered the front porch. A couple of those steel white primed porch chairs sat forlornly on the porch behind a porch railing that had seen better days.

The yard, such as it was, was covered with fallen leaves from the centuries old oaks that surrounded the property. There was no sidewalk to the front door just a worn path that reached the basic two-laned blacktop road and the mailbox with a simple street number pasted on the side. The house itself was at the end of a dead-end street a turnaround for lost travelers set just to the left. No lights, no mail, no trailing smoke from the furnace chimney. An abandoned home on a forgotten street, in a nowhere town. Just what he needed now. Somewhere he couldn't be found. He moved closer to the house went around back and climbed the simple stairs to the back door.

He tried the doorknob. It turned and the door opened with little sound save the grunt of old wood. He walked into the kitchen. A simple design with cabinets and counterspace to his left. An older model stove and range on the far wall. A Frigidaire from a prior century stood strong against the wall between the kitchen and the front room. A kitchen table with a Formica top took up most of the space in the center of the room. Pantry door stood to his right with an array of hooks for coats and hats lined on the wall beside him. He gingerly closed the door.

The kitchen wasn't empty. Coffeemaker, pots, forgotten plants in the windowsill sat throughout the area. An old hat and a rain slicker sat quietly attached to their respective pegs on the wall. The pantry door was ajar giving an easy glance into a sparsely stocked set of shelves.

The room wasn't cold, but it also wasn't warm. A glance to a thermostat set next to the entrance to the front room yielded a setting of 68°. With the temperature outside somewhat much less, it took little to keep the house content with the desired setting. Still, he was pleased to see the furnace did work. He also noted various fixtures were still working including the Frigidaire. That meant they had electricity and heat. If the residents weren't coming home too soon, he could hole up here nicely for a couple of days and plan his next move.

He moved from the kitchen into the front room. It quickly became obvious this was a one-bedroom home. Off to his right was the entrance to the facilities, bath and toilet. To the left was the entrance to the bedroom. The door to the bedroom was ajar but not closed. He couldn't hear anything moving in the bedroom. There was no light save that coming through the window.

He looked around the front room quickly and took in the contents. A small sitting couch. Barely large enough for two grown adults. A sitting chair next to an end table. A couple of bookshelves lined the wall and a desk sat just under the only large window in the room. Nothing else. No electronics. No television. No telephone. He had never been in a house that didn't have at least a television. Since cellphones, not having a land line was common. But no cell phones. He didn't even see a laptop. For an urban boy this was a wilderness.

He moved quietly toward the bedroom. If anyone was here, they would have to be in the bedroom. There were no other rooms left. He gently pushed the door open and peered into the room. There she lay staring at him, eyes wide open. *Shit!* He jumped back ready to run. He made it to the kitchen door. But heard no scream, no rustle of bed clothes. No life. He stopped. His hand firmly on the door frame to the kitchen ready to bolt. He listened for a moment then a moment more. Nothing.

He made his way back to the bedroom and looked in once more. She lay there in a hospital bed next to the only window in the room. The curtains were pulled back just enough so she could peer out into the

yard. However, she wasn't looking in the yard. She was staring at him. Staring at him with dead eyes. Eyes that had seen their last of this world not too long ago.

After his first startled entrance the man walked cautiously into the bedroom careful not to disturb or dislodge the woman in any way. A glance around found the room was just as sparsely situated as the rest of the house. A simple queen-sized bed with a wrought iron headboard and footboard set up against the wall. A small chest of drawers set close to a simple closet. To one side was a simple vanity complete with small mirror and bench. Various feminine products cluttered the top. That was it. A couple of pieces of furniture and two beds, the hospital bed where the woman lay and the master bed where she must have slept at one time. Sparse, cold, and creepy but quiet. The man sat on the side of the master bed. He kicked off his shoes and stretched out. After the days he had he fell asleep quickly.

Chapter 2

The hands were deathly white, long fingers, women's fingers, finely manicured with blood red polish. They played in his dreams. They swirled back and forth in the dark as if in a dance. They were detached from any body. Only the sleeves of an unremarkable white garment framed their movements. The hands played before his eyes then suddenly grazed his face. The fingers were cold, so cold. His body shivered at the touch. It was if the touch alone could freeze his soul. Then eyes appeared out of the dark. Eyes dark and dead hovered before his face. He tried to scream. He opened his mouth and tried and tried to scream.

Suddenly he heard a sound. The sound was in a panic. It was terrified. It tore through the rafters as an agonizing scream. He recognized the voice. It was his. He sat up in the bed sweat pouring down his face. His heart pounding. His chest heaving to gain breath. He looked around terrified. But no one was there. Just himself and the lady laying dead on the bed by the window.

The evening light was playing through the window. He got up gingerly from the bed to take a closer look at the dead woman. She seemed to lay at peace in the bed. Her raven hair was splayed on a white pillow as if a halo around her face. She was dressed in a non-descript white night gown. It was clean and crisp and bore not a mark or smudge. Her arms were crossed on her chest with her fingers extended along each arm. It startled him when he noticed that the fingernails wore blood red paint.

But more unsettling was she was quite beautiful in her death. She wore a contented smile on a face that had few wrinkles. Her skin was milky white as if she had few days in the sun. Her lips were red, a deep crimson red that created a contrast to her deathly white body. All the stranger because there was no lip coloring applied. Curiosity compelled him to reach forward and stroke her cheek. The skin was cold but still soft. He expected more taunt. The actual scary part of her countenance was the dark dead eyes. They had not closed at death and looked as two black coals. It was in a way, creepy. Her body never moved, never shuddered, never drew a breath. The body was perfectly still with no bugs, dust, or imperfections to mar it. The bed she lay in was flat and lowered as if those who held her in their keeping had cleaned and settled her then left.

He could tell she wasn't young. But age had not defined her looks. No marks appeared on the body that he could see to suggest a violent death. In all aspects it was just a dead woman on a bed waiting. Waiting for what or who? The man began to assess his situation. The house and the woman seemed to be in some sort of preservation ritual. The heat while on was turned low, very low as if to halt decomposition. The rooms were clean with everything in its place, not even a fork randomly left on the table. He was pretty sure if she was in a hospital bed, she couldn't have taken care of the household chores. That meant caretaker. But where were they? Were they coming back? Why wasn't the body taken by a nursing home? Was a nursing home coming to take her? If so, when? But that didn't quite explain the perfect housekeeping. And where was the car? Did she have a car? If not, who gave her transportation?

Why no telephone, computer, or cell phone? He reached to flip on the switch to the single overhead light centered on the ceiling in the middle of the room. The light sprang to life before his touch even graced the switch. Startled he looked quickly around and then through the bedroom window to the surrounding lawn. No one appeared. He went quickly from room to room checking for anyone inside or out. No one. Yet the single bulb in the bedroom shown giving spirit to various dancing shadows of random items in the room.

The man made his way to the sitting room just outside the bedroom. It was getting dark outside, and he needed to think. Was he staying the night, or should he make himself comfortable and leave at first light? He flipped on a small lamp sitting on the desk. A book lay open. It a journal. Handwritten entries were meticulously inscribed in ink without a blemish or errant mark. Simple thoughts he assumed had to be written by the current tenant of the bed in the next room.

The last line caused him to pause. It simply said, "He will be here soon." That was it. The whole entry for that day. Nothing more. No mention of who, when, or even why. The date on the entry was the 30th. Today was the 31st. He flipped backward through journal trying to determine who was coming and when. Or if they had already come and placed the woman in her current state. Not a name appeared. Nothing but what appeared to be recipes for various concoctions. Many of the recipes used local herbs, insects, and small animals. He figured she must have been some sort of survivalist. That would explain the absence of electronics and the odd isolation of the house.

A six pack of the local brew was in the fridge. There was at least something calming about finding something common to drink. A small steak sat in one of the crisper drawers. It was thawed and ready to cook. A skillet, hot range, some spices turned raw meat into a passable meal. Some fries and a small package of green beans added to the feast. Forty-five minutes of cooking and he was sated for the first time in days. The meal settled his mind, and he felt the tiredness in his bones. Another nap was needed. The only open bed was sitting in the room with the dead.

"At least she doesn't snore." He made his way back to master bedroom. He passed the dead and paused to really look upon her. There was something familiar. Something about her sat in the back of his mind. Even in death she looked soft, kind, and giving. He wondered why she lay out here all alone.

He stretched out on the bed once more and stared at the ceiling. The image of a black cat with golden eyes filled his mind before he fell sound asleep. He heard purring.

Chapter 3

The man looked around. He was holding a cat, a black cat, and rocking in a porch swing. The day was sunny and warm. Birds were singing and flowers were blooming. But he seemed unsettled. Something was bothering him in the back of his mind.

He stood up and the cat fell to the porch floor. He walked quickly into the house and sat down at the desk. He began reading the various recipes. He frantically turned pages first forward then back again. He feverishly read the recipes discarding first one and then another. Finally, he stood up and slammed the book closed in frustration.

As he closed the book, he noticed the sleeve of his garment. It was flowery with a lace cuff. He was wearing a dress! How was he wearing a dress? His thought paused. His arm moved to pull the blouse forward for a better look. Suddenly his head shook violently, and his thoughts receded back to his dreams.

The man could have sworn he was in the body of the dead woman. At least when she wasn't dead. Sometime, some distressing time in her past. It felt uncomfortable and a violation of himself and the dead woman. He fell deep into a dark quiet sleep once again.

As he began to wake, that between time before he was truly awake and yet still dwell in the dreams, his body felt as if he was leaving it. He floated above himself and drifted over to the dead. He looked down on her when suddenly those darks eyes grabbed his consciousness and dragged him deep into her soul. He

screamed as he fell deeper and deeper into the dead. The man felt thrown hard against the ground. He lost his breath from the violent hit against his body.

He looked up and saw it was day. The birds still sang. The flowers were still blooming. But the cat, the dark black cat, was unconscious on the front porch as if thrown hard against the house wall. He sat up. He was trying to find his tormentor. He tried to stand. When a dark form of naught more than heavy black smoke shot a clawed blood-stained hand from its bowels. The hand grabbed him by the neck as he tried to scream.

He tried to speak words he had learned from the recipes in the book, but the hand choked off that possibility. Eyes appeared in the dark. Blood red eyes. Clouds appeared and covered the sun. A coldness enveloped them completely. A hard cold. A deathly cold. An evil, terrible cackle filled the silence. A face, or what passed for a face, pulled him close so he could see nothing but that terrible, awful, grievous visage. It smelled of death, sickness, and disease. It's face streamed blood, puss, and infection.

Suddenly it rushed into his body. He screamed as the evil's tight grip gave a momentary release. His thoughts, or her thoughts, were shoved to the back of his mind. Evil began to take over the woman's body to command it and take what he knew right from his mind. But the woman wasn't finished yet. She closed a door to a small room in her mind and spoke a recipe that sealed the door against anything foul or friend. The woman became lost in a darkness of her own device. It was terrifying. The Evil could be heard pounding and pounding against that small door she created. Its screams could be heard as it threw the body against the ground and beat it to a lifeless form. The door held but the consciousness remained lost and in the dark. The man was terrified and screamed to be released.

He opened his eyes once more to the sound of his own screams. He was in a terrifying sweat. But the room remained dark, quiet. The dead slept quietly against the dark seeping through the window. The only sound, the only noise was his terror.

Chapter 4

He stood up and walked to the restroom. He splashed some water on his face and used the facilities. He heard a clock strike twelve times in a deep timber reminiscent of an old grandfather's house.

"The witching hour has begun." He spoke the words and immediately understood them. He didn't know how, but he knew it was Halloween and for the next 60 minutes death and the living had the thinnest veil between them. It was a time of power and a time of fear.

He made his way back to the bed in the master bedroom. He sat on the side. His mind didn't want to place his head on the pillow but an evil in him insisted on it. He had a wicked smile on his lips and lay back down.

"Bring it on witch." He heard himself say. Then he closed his eyes. This time he saw himself just days ago.

It was a simple robbery. Jean, his girl, and he had done it many times. Old woman alone by herself tottering around a big old house. Those old women always had some money stashed somewhere. Piles of jewelry easily fenced. Kick their cats once or twice and they knew he meant business. In and out usually no more than a few minutes. No one hurt but the cats. This time though Jean hesitated. He remembered her holding him back just before he kicked in the front door.

"Tommy, not this one. Doesn't feel right. I mean it. Somethings wrong." Jean grabbed his arm, the one with the gun. He got angry and pistol whipped her right on the porch. She fell and crawled away. It wasn't the first time he had to get her in line. He didn't worry about it though. She would be back. She always came back.

He turned his attention back to the door and kicked it in. The old lady was standing inside at the far end of the front room directly opposite of the door. She stood there with her hands folded on top of a cane.

She looked directly at him with neither fear nor concern. She had on some old fashioned long black dress that buttoned all the way up her neck. Her face was all wrinkled like many an old lady. She had long grayish black hair that went to her waist. Her brown eyes were sunken in her pale white face. A large black cat sat at her feet unperturbed at Tommy's violent entrance. The cat merely licked one paw in a disinterested expression of concern. Tommy heard the sirens. Someone had already called the cops.

"You bitch!" He shouted. The old lady just smiled a crooked smile. He was furious. He needed this score. There was no time to find another mark. He tried to storm forward but Jean moved in front of him a small cut from his gun bleeding hard on her face.

"No Tommy. We have to go!" Jean pulled at his arm. The gun went off and the old lady's face disappeared. It was no longer there. He had never shot anyone before. He didn't intend to shoot her. When Jean pulled on his arm the gun just went off. All he wanted was her money not her life. Now she was dead. He saw her body fall. Blood covered his arm and splayed across his face. He looked down as Jean pulled on him to move. Then he saw that damned cat walking cautiously out of the room unconcerned for the old lady or anyone else.

Jean screamed. One of those movie screams that rattled a man's soul. It woke him up. He grabbed Jean and pushed her ahead of him out the door. She was still screaming and waving her hands in front of her face as if to push away all she had seen. The waving hands, bloody face, and gunshot was all the officer needed to fire off a round. Jean fell back into his body blood gushing from her wounds. In terror he had shoved Jean to the ground and jumped the side railing of the porch and ran. The gun that killed the old lady now sat on the table in the kitchen. He thought of the gun. It was no longer a tool. It had taken on such a nightmare it was more than metal and bullets.

He couldn't remember how he had gotten to this house. Suddenly he was just here at the edge of the old dirt road that led down to this singular house at the end. He had to have been on the run for days. He did remember hiding in dark places many full of rats and hideous bugs. He remembered the sirens following, always following him, as he ran and ran. Only when he turned down that old road did the sirens finally stop.

Chapter 5

The black cat stared at him. That one black cat that had moved so effortlessly away from the carnage earlier just stared at him. Tommy couldn't move. All he could do was stare back at that cat. The cats' eyes never blinked. The eyes were a golden brown with a slit of darkness in the middle. A darkness that he feared. A darkness that unnerved him. He wanted to scream at that damn to cat to leave, but he found he couldn't make a sound just like before. He opened his throat to scream once more but once again nothing came out. The cat and its dark empty eyes just stared at him.

"I thought I killed you." He heard himself speak, but it wasn't his voice. It was a dark voice an evil voice. His arm reached up and grabbed the cat by the scruff of its neck and threw it off his chest.

"He's mine. You'll never get him back. He enjoys it. You would have too." He spoke into the dark. Nothing spoke back.

He heard soft footsteps first. Small feet against the hard flooring. There had to be at least six sets of feet. Then he heard voices chanting. They were all around him. All women, if judged by the timber of their voices and the proximity to his body. Tommy lay still. He couldn't move if he wished. He was sure it was all a dream, but it felt all too real. His eyes were drawn to the damn cat. It was sitting on the floor looking at him. Tommy's senses went dark. He saw a black book on a large wooden desk. The desk was settled into a room that looked like an old private library. A lighted lamp was perched above the book.

The book was opened to a verse. A man's hand was tracing the verse. His hand was tracing the verse. A darkness lifted from his mind. It was slight, but clear. He saw the same dark evil from his previous dream. The hand reached out and grabbed his throat. The stink, the eyes, the smell rushed down his throat. His mind

filled with hate and anger. His consciousness was nothing more than a puppet in his own body. Then suddenly the clarity closed.

“No! He is mine.” The evil was back. He could hear the dark laughter as his body responded at evil’s command.

But evil wasn’t through with the dead. He closed Tommy’s mind off tightly and settled above the dead woman in the bed next to the dark window.

“Come out, come out, witch.” The evil voice mocked.

But while the evil mocked the dead Tommy heard the chanting. It was familiar chanting. He knew the words. He began chanting himself. Then he heard the half hour mark pass on the chimes of that old grandfather clock. Time was of the essence. He had to do something but what? What did he have to do?

He struggled against the evil to try to regain some of his consciousness. An image appeared. A mirror. What did he need to do with a mirror? He remembered a mirror in the restroom. A mirror above the sink. His mind moved to go to the mirror. Evil pulled back hard.

“No. We’re staying here. This bitch is mine.” Evil was adamant about taking the dead.

The chanting picked up. It became louder. Then the cats appeared. Nine cats came from the next room, and one stood by each woman in the room. The black cat from the robbery jumped upon the Tommy’s chest and purred. He stared at Tommy’s eyes. Tommy felt the power and pulled his consciousness to the restroom. Evil screamed and pulled back. But evil followed. He had to follow.

His mind made it to the restroom, and he saw the mirror above the sink. He turned and looked at the mirror. But it wasn’t his face he saw. It was the face of evil. All the sickness, puss, and blood stared back at him from red eyes sunk in a dark blackness.

Then Tommy heard it. He understood. It was a demanding voice. He heard it as the old clock chimed the three-quarter hour.

“Call his name.” The voice screamed in his mind.

“I call your name. I call you Samael.” His voice was loud and demanding. It was his voice, and he heard the scream of anger coming from evil.

“You bitch. You hated harlot of the goddess. He’s mine. I claimed him. You cannot have him.”

The chanting stopped and all became quiet. The final chimes of the witching hour marked their time on that old grandfather clock. “You have been named Samael. You will leave.”

With the final chime a loud shriek of evil filled the room. Tommy’s eyes flew open. He was still in the bed sleeping with the dead. But 10 cats and 9 women stood smiling.

Chapter 6

Finding the right magic had taken its time. Decades. Their sister witch had protected them from Evil itself by sacrificing her own being. They had become the prey of Evil when their powers had grown strong. Evil would have no rivals, so it sought out the center of their coven. It attacked her directly. Evil tried to force her to his will and take her powers for his own. But she resisted and cast a spell to save them all in her final moments.

This story was known by every witch in every coven around the world. Her final battle’s site, her resting place, had become a sacred shrine, holy ground, for all wiccan followers. It had also become a place of immense power. The home had been carefully cared for throughout the years as was her body. A body that didn’t decay, didn’t alter, didn’t grow old. Years before in soft ceremony the coven had placed her by her window in a bed of white so she could see her beloved nature.

It was the lack of decay that had prompted the search for an intervention and a belief she wasn’t really dead. Many believed she was in a trance or advanced spell. None sought answers more than the old witch that had defied Tommy in the house. It was her talent, her knowledge, her research that had come

upon a possible answer. But that answer needed a warlock. A warlock clever enough, strong enough, to take on Evil itself within their very mind. It was a dangerous task. One that could damn a soul and destroy a body.

The old lady asked the only warlock she knew that possessed the ability. The only warlock she knew that might accept the sacrifice. She asked her son, Thomas. He never hesitated in his answer.

Plans had taken years to create. Even more years to perfect. A deception had to be created. A deception that couldn't be perceived by the trickster of life, Evil itself. The old witch, Martha, sought the best that each coven could offer from around the world. Each coven was honored to be considered and provided their most talented witches for the task. But out of hundreds only nine were chosen. A final nine chosen for their talent, their skill, and most of all their commitment.

It was difficult luring Evil into the library. Even more difficult to remove the deception from Thomas' mind. Thomas had to believe the lie as truth. But he also had to know, when the time was right, how to fight and win. He had to know how to return to them. He had to know the cues. He had to know the familiar, the black cat, intimately. Only the familiar could hold and give him the key to his return. Martha was never worried about the cat. Cats, when they agree, can never be turned from their commitment. Her familiar agreed.

But to succeed Thomas had to sleep with the dead. He had to share the very room and lie on the very bed that their sister witch, Sarah had lay all those years ago. He had to allow Sarah to reach out to his mind and show him the way. Sarah had to provide him and him alone with the key to her recovery. It could only be done at her old house.

Finally, all the pieces were in place. Thomas had lured Evil into the library. The very Evil that had taken Sarah all those years ago. Thomas fought with his mind, but Evil took him. He claimed his body and his mind. Thomas was transformed into Tommy. Tommy, a fool who robbed old ladies, took women for his own, and defied every law. But Tommy and Evil never saw the locked memory in Thomas' mind. The memory hidden behind a dark small door waiting for a cat to provide the key. Eventually it did.

"Did it work Thomas?" Martha stood in the sitting room off the bedroom. Her familiar, her cat sat purring in her lap.

"I hope so. I swear I thought I blew your head off. I am so glad I didn't. I don't know if I could live with that trauma."

"Oh hell, Thomas. An old witch like me has more than one trick up their sleeve. What did you find out?"

"You were right. She wasn't murdered. She is in there hidden in her mind. It is far advance magic. I've never seen anything like it. She had to be quite powerful. She used some serious spellbinding to keep herself from Samael. She couldn't beat him on her own. She knew he was waiting for her, coming for her alone. So, she created a survivor spell. She gave him one hell of a fight though before she shut herself off."

"Can you revive her? It's been over half a century. Is it still possible?"

"I know how. She revealed it in my dream state. You were right as well. It had to be a warlock. That was her final secure lock. She wanted to ensure none of her sisters would or could be put into such a position to aid Evil itself. But are you sure you want to revive her? As you said, it has been over a half a century."

"She has a right to die. This half life is no life. What she has sacrificed for the craft and her sisters demands we allow her life or death as she sees fit. She deserves the choice."

Thomas rose slowly from his chair and made his way into the bedroom. He ached all over as if he had physically fought Evil for fifteen rounds. Sarah lay in the hospital bed her black hair splayed across the pillow. Her red lips were softly open. The blood red of her fingernails stood out starkly against her hands. Thomas leaned down and gently pushed her hair from her perfect ear. He whispered into her ear and then stood back.

The moon, full at its apex, shined brightly on her form as the clouds above parted. Her chest moved as a full breath was drawn in her body. He heard her heart begin to beat in the quiet of the room. The darkness in her eyes receded and her brown eyes glistened in the moonlight. She turned her head and looked

at him. No explosion of power. No fireworks in the night sky. Sarah just returned to them as if she had done nothing more than taken a nap.

“Hello Thomas.” She smiled as he reached down to help her sit.

Women shrieked with joy. Dancing could be heard in the next room. It was only moments before cell phones chimed as the news was spread. Women in the room moved forward and hugged her in a deep embrace. It was a joyous celebration, at least as could be had in a quiet house in the middle of nowhere. The last to embrace her was Martha with the unperturbed cat. Sarah looked and cried at the revelation.

“Martha. My Martha.” Sarah cried and held Martha tight. “I knew you would figure it out, Martha. I knew it. Where did you find the warlock?”

She smiled at Thomas. Sarah had shared many of her memories with him as she lay dead on the bed. But she had found little about him save his name.

“Oh, it wasn’t too hard. He was close by all the time. It’s time to introduce you to your grandson.”

Sarah hugged and squealed. It was if she would never let go until a small woman walked in with a plate of eggs and toast and a brew that had been in the fridge. Sarah smiled, took a deep breath and dug in. After all it had been more than half a century since her last meal. Her final death was going to have to wait. She had living to do.

The End. Or is it?