

The Strange Death and Life of Johnathan Jay

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Drizzle falls from an overcast sky. Just a light dusting of rain. Enough to annoy but no more. The lights in the darkened street don't help, showing off the moist droplets in flickering yellow flashes. Illuminating the now abandoned street.

Almost abandoned.

His Raincoat doesn't fit, it was made for a woman nearly eighty years ago. It's been bleached clean more than once. The coat lets in water round the neck. Soaking the silk shirt beneath, sticking it to his back. The rain annoys him. It always did.

He pulls the raincoat tighter around him, and heads off towards the Offices. Trejan is waiting.

He remembers what this place used to be like. The fine terraced houses, Ladies and their maids walking in the summer air. Servants working for next to nothing in the bowels of the houses. Trying to stop the outside world from intruding on their masters.

He remembers the secrets, the gossip the plots, and intrigue. It never knew it was a society on the verge of collapse, and he doesn't think it really cared.

The terraces were bombed out at the Empires end, by an old enemy and ancient hatreds. When the people staggered out of their shelters, they finally saw the results of their fall. There for all to see in the light of the new day. The light of a new Empire, bright stars and gleaming stripes.

The people continued with their lives. Rebuilding, growing, expanding in a desperate attempt to regain their lost treasures. But all the ended up doing was copying the new Empire. It was all they could hope to do.

Walking across the road he hears the sound of screams and laughter in the distance. The roar of engines and drunken minstrels wandering the streets. Just the voice of the City. Just the prayers of the Street. It's no night to be alone.

As he reaches the glass doors of the office, the rain's intensity increases. Thundering off the pavement, and bouncing back up to form a low mist that slithers across the ground with the wind. He can smell the lightning to come. Pushing open the barriers, he enters.

The harsh reality of strip lights greets his eyes, searing them with pain. He Stumbles, catching himself weakly on the Reception desk. He's hungry. Been dry since Thursday.

The primal senses kick in. Once again they override his better judgement.

One deep breath. Someone on the third floor. Smelling succulent. Other faint odours, but no danger.

He's off before the brain reacts, running for the stairwell. Slamming open the door. Secrecy has no place here, the Hunger has complete control. Up the stairs in half a dozen strides. A hunter again.

He bursts into the room, and a thousand scents assail him. His brain registers the cubicles and urinals the Hunger only sees the victim, Suit and Tie. Bloated with blood.

Pouncing, Coat billowing like a cloak, as Suit and Tie turns in slow motion to face the hunter.

Shock.

Fear.

Recognition.

The fangs are out. Head lashes down.

The Bite.

Blood pumps into the hunters mouth. Suit and Tie thrashes but the hunter forces him into the cubicle.

Suit tries to scream but the hunter clamps a bony hand across his lips with lightning speed. And still the blood pumps. Spilling onto the floor. Staining the Suit and the Raincoat. Its smell mingling with the bleach and urine.

Then its over. The hunter lays the body against the wall and rests. Letting the blood flow through his body. His senses relax. The fangs retract.

Two minutes later he cleans up and goes to meet Trejan.

* * *

The Oak double doors slide silently open. Johnathan walks in and stands in front of the metallic desk. The rest of the office is sparsely decorated. An abstract painting on the wall, white blinds on the windows.

Behind the desk a woman sits, typing at a computer terminal, ignoring him.

“I killed one of your employees.” he announces.

She looks up. Her face is cold, emotionless.

“Did you bother to get his name?”

“No, but he tasted Jewish.” said Johnathan shaking the last of the rain out of his hair.

“Where?”

“The toilets on the third floor.”

“Shit. You always did have class Johnathan. I guess your old habits die hard.” she said brushing back her long dark hair with her hand. “I’ll have to pay off the usual law enforcers. Cover your tracks.”

“And the Body?”

“The river is very accommodating.”

“You’ll have to get someone to clean up the mess.”

“Christ! it gets better.” She says

“I couldn't help it Trejan, the hunger took over.”

“Get some self control. Its idiots like you that’ll blow the lid off the Family. One day there won't be anyone to clean up your accidents, and that'll be it.”

“Listen bitch, I'm out there standing between us and the outside world. I'm the one protecting all this.”

“And don't you enjoy reminding us about it all the time.” says Trejan quietly.

“If you weren't family I'd have your fucking head on a plate.”

Trejan stares into Johnathan's steel blue eyes and says,

"Sometimes, I think all you're ever going to be able to do is kill. You'll lose all the humanity you once had. And if that happens we might as well go back to living in coffins."

"Just tell me what you want." says Johnathan.

"Someone is getting close to us here in London," says Trejan pulling a file out of her desk drawer. "They're working for one of the evangelical missions near Kings Cross. Since you're the Homo-Venator I want you to deal with this threat. Everything's in the file."

Johnathan takes the file and glances at its contents.

"Her name's Elizabeth Duncan" says Trejan "I hope her being a woman doesn't pose any kind of problem."

Johnathan gives her a cold stare as a thousand memories flood back into his mind, then he walks out.

The rain had moved on by the time Johnathan arrived back at the safe house, but the dark clouds remained. He stood, gazing out of the old bay window at the jumbled skyline of the city, his mind forming plans.

The file had, as usual, contained everything he could have wanted to know. She was part of some obscure born again Christian cult. An off-shoot of American mystic evangelism. This group had decided that to hasten the second coming all forms of paganism and superstition should be wiped out. Johnathan actually laughed out loud when he read that. His first laugh in Thirty Years.

The group had lobbied against Horror books, films, any kind of occult or New Age shops and even old fairy tales. But now it seemed as if they had found out about the Family.

It wasn't clear how, perhaps a Thrall had been captured or one of the cult had been turned, but Elizabeth was the key. It was through her that all the information passed. And Johnathan had to kill her. The flow of information had to be interrupted.

He would do it at their mission. But not tonight. The daylight lethargy was beginning to set in.

His joints stiffened as he moved towards the safety of the bedroom, with its bricked up window and numerous locks. Once inside he collapsed on the hard mattress and allowed unconsciousness to reach out and take him.

At noon Johnathan's body was rigid, as if Rigor Mortis had set in. What blood he had, crept slowly through his veins. Every day was the same, his oxygen starved brain concocting dreams and hallucinations. Images from his past.

The battle fields of France, scarred by trenches and craters, spread out like a muddy sea. Waves crested with blood. The rumble of artillery.

A lone figure. Johnathan. Walking amongst the dead and dying. Searching for the oblivion of death. His instincts resisting self destruction.

Leaping, unconsciously, as the ultrasonic whine of the artillery shell reaches his eardrums. The explosion wounds but does not kill.

In the field hospital the nurses wonder at his recovery and fits of sleeplessness. Doctors are bemused but too busy to question. But Claire is there. She does not judge, she cares. Emotions so clear and open that he almost drowns in them.

For the first time since that day in Eighteen Fifty One he wants to live. Live with her, a human life.

The images change, familiar and painful. He tells her the truth. The look in her eyes is enough. Disgust, Revulsion.

His temper flares as he feels his hopes shatter around him. Moving with a blinding speed he tears at her human flesh. Ripping her body apart like an over ripe fruit. Blood, Sinew, Muscle covering the walls. He looks at the remains of his only love. These humans are to be pitied, he thinks, so frail, so fragile. They act the part of prey so easily. Only their numbers make them significant.

* * *

The days last gasp of light retreats behind the horizon. The Moon, alone now. A single eye searching the earth. In London it finds Johnathan Jay. Walking out from the subterranean world of Kings Cross station. He loves the Tube. The compressed flesh, the broken rhythms of the train, the air roaring in front an approaching engine.

Up here the roar is of the traffic, the drunks and pimps. Shouting and cursing. Walking along the concourse beside York Way, even the most addled of the drunks give him a wide berth, his power is obvious.

He crosses the road and heads off towards the old cinema, where the Evangelists have their mission.

The plans to the cinema were in Trejan's file, but he doesn't need them. Johnathan simply slips through the back door.

Dust. It covers everything.

Rats and Spiders slink in the shadows between the yellowing posters. They sense the presence that has just entered. Johnathan acknowledges their emotions. The animals cannot understand it, but they have the sense to be afraid. To run. To hide.

Johnathan walks further into the building stopping as he hears faint voices. The end of a prayer. Another plea to the dead God. Then the sound of movement, the evangelists start their good work with the downtrodden and weary. At one time Johnathan might have helped them. Not now. He doesn't see the point. A dying society, desperate for one last chance.

Why don't they just give up, he wonders. Just admit defeat and resign.

And then he decides. Before he kills her, she will be told. He will make her see his world before he casts her into oblivion.

Johnathan moves back through the building and into the storeroom. He pulls up an ageing chair, and places another facing him. He then sits, his body relaxing, his mind freeing itself, reaching out to the souls in the nearby rooms. In less than a minute he latches onto one of them. Elizabeth. Like a fisher of men, he reels her in.

Johnathan's acute senses pick up her perfume long before she appears in the doorway. It's strangely sweet amongst the cinema's decay. Johnathan releases Elizabeth from his grip as she sits. Confusion flashes over her face, then the true horror grips her as Johnathan smiles, baring his fangs.

“Your name's Elizabeth. You want me, and my kind dead. And, at the moment, you can't move. I want to tell you something, let you look at the world in a different way.

When I was Twenty One, I was introduced to a woman who claimed to be a survivor of the French Revolution. She looked in her twenties but could describe the events of Seventeen Eighty Nine with perfect clarity.

She seduced me in a Berlin hotel, describing it as part of my 'Grand Tour'. But she did something in that hotel room that was to alter me forever.

She Bit Me.

She sucked out my blood and replaced it with her own. I was part of her.

For a month we stayed in that hotel, taking what we needed. Indulging our basest desires.

There were no more taboo's, nothing was forbidden. I had crossed over from the world of morality and mortality.

She introduced me to more like us. She called them the Family. She taught me their customs, their traditions. She taught me how to hunt correctly and how not to get caught.

Eventually we separated, and I returned to England. Just in time for the opening of the Great Exhibition. Eighteen Fifty One.”

Elizabeth's eyes widened. She tries to move, to run, but some force is compelling her to remain. Making her listen.

“I enjoyed the next four decades, they were such hedonistic times, my powers allowed me to grow even more affluent. My wealth offset any comments made about my public behaviour. Of course 1888 was a tricky year, what with Mr Jack's unfortunate escapades.

But then Victoria died. And the empire died with her.

By Nineteen Fourteen I was sickened by the state of my country, and when the war began I decided that I would try to use what I had been given to help my countrymen. The Family rejected my ideas. They told me not to interfere with the mortal world. That would bring to much attention to bear on them.

I ignored them, and they cut me off.

It's ironic that amid all the carnage of the battlefield I was to find love. Or what I thought was love.”

“What was her name?” asked Elizabeth hesitantly.

“You don't need to know her name, all you need to know is that she couldn't take the truth of my existence.”

“If she loved you, that was wrong of her.”

Johnathan's hand lashed out, battering across her face. Knocking her to the floor. “Shut your whoring mouth.” he hissed.

The pain ripped across Elizabeth's body. Blood oozing from the side of her mouth and tears welling up in her eyes.

Slowly she stands up and steadies herself. Johnathan, looking away from her, lost in his thoughts.

She looks towards the open doorway, then sits back down in the chair.

“The next decade was spent in random and brutal acts of violence.” says Johnathan slowly “I was going to make everybody pay for what she had done. But my fury was causing problems for the Family. The authorities were asking difficult questions, and the Family didn't want anyone to know the answers.

Finally in Nineteen Twenty Six they contacted me directly. They said they would bring me back into the fold, if I would become their Homo-Venator.” Johnathan

looked into Elizabeth's cool blue eyes "Their Human Hunter." His eyes slid down to the wound at her mouth, and the blood. "I jumped at the opportunity."

He felt the primal energy start to build up inside. A very real blood lust.

"So you have come to kill me." Elizabeth says.

"Do you want me to?"

"No."

"Then your a fool. The life you cling onto with so much passion is such a cold and pedestrian existence. If just for a moment you could see it with my eyes, hear it with my ears you would cry out for what you have missed. You will never know the world the way I have, and that means you have never known life."

"But the lord Jesus Christ has come into my heart" says Elizabeth "He has shown me how to make this world a better place, how to live my life for a purpose."

"They nail some Jewish terrorist to a tree, and suddenly everyone thinks he's god." snorted Johnathan. The blood dripping from her face onto her white blouse, staining it. Johnathan's mouth drying. His senses alert.

"Why would I have expected anything but blasphemy to come from your lips."

"Because your an eternal optimist and an evangelical angel. Just alike every ignorant fool I ever met." said Johnathan, his hand twitching, eager. The blood on her face starting to congeal.

"If your going to kill me, just do it." She said "Unless your afraid"

"Are you really that eager to see Gods kingdom? I could make you apart of the Family. You could run with the wolves at night, hunt with the pack. Live forever!"

"I don't want your bastard life." she said, rising out of the chair.

"Then you won't have any at all!" screams Johnathan, leaping up at her.

She tries to run, but he would always be faster.

His fangs sink into her neck. Tearing her flesh.

Her body twists with the force. Blood spraying across the room.

Crashing to the ground, her bones brake and shatter, puncturing her skin.

Her last breath rasps between her teeth.

And through it all, Johnathan drinks deeply. Gorging himself.

An eternity seems to pass until he picks himself off the floor.

The primal need finally gone.

He looks at himself. Feels the blood and gore slip off his hands, thudding into the floor.

Johnathan looks down at Elizabeth's broken body. For the first time he feels a sense loss. She was right to fear. He sees himself as she must have seen him. Feels the revulsion she felt.

More than a hundred years of lying to himself drop away. Like a long awaited revelation, it hits him.

This is what Claire felt. This fear, this revulsion. And he knows, It's what he always really felt, deep inside, but denied. To himself.

He fishes in the pocket of his blood soaked raincoat and pulls out a box of matches. Still remarkably dry.

He strikes one and lets its glow illuminate the scene. Then tosses it among the bundles of crumbling posters.

As the smoke begins to fill the ageing cinema, he walks out into the dark street.

In his first breath he picks up the Wino's of Kings Cross. With the second, the cheap scents of the Prostitutes. With the third the faint traces of sweat from lovers in Hyde Park.

Then he sits, cross legged, in the doorway. And waits for the sunrise to release him into eternal oblivion.