

The background of the cover is a dark, textured image of a creature's face. The creature has large, glowing orange eyes with black pupils. Its skin appears scaly or textured. A hand with long, dark claws is reaching out from the right side of the frame, positioned over the title text.

WILLIAM W.
JOHNSTONE

THE
DEVIL'S
TOUCH

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(CANADA \$7.99/US \$5.99)

SATAN'S WARRIORS

Judith Mayberry opened her mouth to scream when a paw-like hand clamped around her ankle and another covered her mouth. She was dragged to a thicket and pulled down into the earth through a hole she never knew existed. When Judith came to her senses she was naked and cold.

She had never seen such horrible-looking monsters in all her life. Not even in the movies!

Suddenly two young Beasts seized Judith and forced her to a hands and knees position. Then the older Beast bit her on the neck several times as he mated with her. After a short time she started getting warmer. She looked at the back of her hands. Thick coarse hair was sprouting, not just on the back of her hands, but all over her body.

Her face, especially her jaw, was beginning to ache. Her teeth felt odd. She ran her tongue over them and found they were fanged. Several of the Beasts were talking and Judith found she could understand them. She crawled over and they welcomed her.

She was one of them.

She tossed her head, glad of her new strength and body. One earring gleamed dully in the gloom of the cave, as it remained pierced in place. That was all that was left of the woman once known as Judith Mayberry.

The Devil's work had begun...

THE DEVIL'S TOUCH

BY WILLIAM W. JOHNSTONE



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To Charles and Bobbi

The prayer for exorcism and the ritual was taken, in part, from Montague Summer's History Witchcraft and Demonology, published by Routledge and Kegan Paul LTD, London.

Every sound shall end in silence, but the silence never dies.

-Samuel Miller Hageman

But screw your courage to the sticking place, and we'll not fail.

-William Shakespeare

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ON THE ORDERS OF THE DARK ONE

She knelt in the center of the circle drawn on the floor. The circle was drawn with yellow chalk. She was careful that one bare knee was placed on the symbol denoting La Maison De Dieu, the past, and her other bare knee on the symbol denoting La Lune, the future. The symbols were widely separated and she was forced to spread her thighs far apart. She was naked.

The candles in the huge room flickered, casting long yellow shadows around the room, darkly illuminating the circle of men and women surrounding the girl in the yellow circle. A lone flute played by a young man wearing a black hooded robe cast its lonely sounds, the notes fluttering almost passively through the room.

The scene was soon to become anything but passive.

Kitty Carrier kept her eyes downcast as she had been instructed by the Coven leader. She knew what was next in store for her. Sweat beaded her face and began trickling down between her breasts at the thought.

"Renaissance," a man spoke from the darkness outside the circle.

It was time for Kitty's rebirth.

A rubber penis was placed in the circle, the lifelike dildo covered with drawings of many colors. Just under the flared head was a drawing depicting the fifteenth card of the major arcana of the tarot, *Le Diable*. The Devil faced upward, just under the flared head of the rubber penis. When the Devil is positioned thusly, the picture denotes bondage; subordination; suffering; shock; ravage; violence; self-punishment.

Renaissance. Rebirth. A time for renouncing one God and choosing another. When the picture of the Devil is placed upside down, only then can a person be freed. But if marriage has already occurred, no divorce is possible. For when one marries Satan, the contract is final.

"Let it commence," the man again spoke from the darkness. "She is ready."

The young woman's fingers found the rubber of the garishly painted penis. She lifted it. Her hands trembled at its weight and bulk.

Kitty was sixteen.

She was a virgin.

The music from the flute stopped in mid-note.

Outside the drape-darkened windows of the huge house, black clouds rolled overhead, obscuring any light from God's moon. The misshapen forms of nonhuman things began to emerge from the ground, to dance obscenely under the whispering winds and the dark clouds. The grotesque creatures were known as Beasts—the Devil's spawn. They were as old as evil and older than man is known today. The Beasts were mistakes in the scheme of living things. Failures that Satan chose for his own. They are found all over the world; wherever there is a coven that worships the Prince of Darkness, the Lord of Flies or the King of Filth.

Satan.

The Beasts began growling with pleasure as the screams of the young woman penetrated the wood and glass and cloth and stone of the mansion as the rubber penis denoting the Dark One's organ penetrated her.

Blood began streaking her thighs, and her screams became shrieks of agony as the penis tore its way into her.

Kitty hunched on the floor and wailed. "It's cold! It's cold!"

Within her wet warmth, the penis came alive as the men and women of the coven chanted to the Prince of Darkness.

The Beasts, now freed after a two year sleep under the blanket of earth, danced and growled and snapped their fanged animal jaws, flinging their hairy arms and prancing about on bent legs and cloven-hooved feet. Slobber drooled and dripped from the jaws in stinking ropes.

"Take this girl!" the coven leader shouted, his voice rising over the chantings of the worshippers of the black marriage. "She longs to be free from the chains of the Christian God and to drink the wine of the Prince of Darkness."

The coven members began stamping their bare feet on the floor. The room began to stink of sulphur.

Kitty pushed the devil's organ deeper; steam rose from between her legs as heat met cold. Sweat bathed her and her hair became damp and limp. Her eyes were glazed from pain and the extreme changes in body temperature. She groaned and then screamed out.

The black candles dripped hot wax as Kitty pushed the cold organ to its full length. She collapsed on her bare back, her legs spread obscenely wide, her knees bent, her feet flat on the floor. The wide base of the cold rubber covered her pubic area.

It was time for the marriage. An unholy uniting. A mating and marriage between Kitty and the Devil. A dirty covering of tattered lace was spread over Kitty, covering all but her face. The coven leader knelt down, holding a dirty goblet to the girl's lips. He ordered her to drink. The goblet was emptied of its content: semen collected from the coven hierarchy. Working his hand under the filthy, ragged lace covering, the leader worked the organ in and out, bringing grunts of pain from the girl. He removed the Devil's organ and laid it aside. Kitty moaned as the pain left her.

"Do you renounce your parents, all blood relations, all friends not of this unholy coven, God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost, the Saints, and the Holy Cross?" he asked the young girl.

"Yes," she gasped.

"You are firm in your conviction that God no longer lives within you and from this moment on He never shall?"

"Yes."

"You will serve me as you will serve the Prince, recognizing that I act in his place within this body of men and women known forever more as the coven?" She nodded her head.

He removed the tattered lace, spread the girl's legs, and mounted her, thrusting into her brutally. She cried out, not in pain, but crying out her love for Satan.

After the leader had finished with her, Kitty was then taken by all the males present.

The leader then squatted down and Kitty pressed her lips to his ass. The marriage was sealed.

"You are now one of us and one with us," Kitty was told. "And thus it will always be." He turned to a group of black-robed women. "Clean her and bath her in sweet oils. Prepare her for the meeting with the daughter of the Devil."

Kitty was pulled to her feet. Blood and semen stained her inner thighs. She was taken from the room. She was so sore she could hardly walk.

A man padded to the leader's side. "The Princess is here."

Frank Gilbert, leader of the Logandale, New York coven, and professor of history at Nelson College smiled. "Prepare the coven to meet our Princess, daughter of our Master."

"At once."

The Beasts had ceased their prancing and dancing and howling. They turned their hideous faces to the sky. The sky grew darker. The winds picked up, bringing with them a foulness, as if the wind had snaked its way out of the burning bowels of Hell.

It had.

BOOK ONE

ONE

Every male head in the classroom turned at the young lady's entrance. And every male present had but one thought: what they would give to spread the legs of the girl and gently take her. Every male in the room would give almost anything for the opportunity to spend just one night with her.

Every male but one: Sam Balon.

Sam had dropped the name of his adopted father, King, choosing to take his real father's name, Balon. Sam Balon, Sr. had been a minister, pastor of a church in Whitfield, Nebraska back in the late fifties. Young Sam had learned the story—the true story of what had happened in Whitfield—when he had been forced to face the Devil in actual combat. It was there he had met Nydia, and married her, performing the ceremony himself, just as his father had done with Jane Ann, and a son had been created. And just like the father, the son had been forced into combat with Satan, ultimately destroying a coven at Falcon House, in the wilds of Canada. *(The Devil's Heart)*

And Sam was truly in love with his wife, Nydia, and loved his young son, Sam, Jr., now approaching his third year. The child appeared normal in all respects . . . but both mother and father still harbored lingering doubts about the child.

For it was more than conceivable the child was a spawn of the Devil.

But so far, so good.

Both Nydia and Sam now felt the Devil had ceased in his pursuit of them. Perhaps the Dark One had found more easily attainable prey. They hoped so.

Sam looked at the beautiful young woman who had just entered the classroom of Professor Gilbert. She was accompanied by Professor Edie Cash. Obviously, the young woman was of some special importance to be treated in such a manner. No doubt about it, Sam thought, she is a very lovely woman.

Sam caught the eyes of Xaviere Flaubert, a lovely young lady from Montreal. She smiled at him and rolled her eyes, pointing at the young men all fascinated by the newcomer. Sam grinned at her and winked. They were good friends, Sam, Nydia, and Xaviere, socializing often. Sam looked back at the newcomer.

The young woman wore her hair long, a dark, rich brown that tumbled down to the center of her back. She was tall, with a magnificent figure. Her complexion was flawless. Full lips and very pale gray eyes. Sam thought she and Xaviere looked a lot alike. The pale eyes shifted, and for a moment lingered on Sam. The young woman smiled at him, and Sam returned the smile. He looked around at Xaviere. The two young women did resemble each other. Same pale eyes, brown hair, tall, and both had great figures.

Professor Cash left the room and Professor Gilbert tapped a pencil on his desk. "Class, I would like to introduce our new arrival. This is Miss Desiree Lemieux. She has just transferred in from Paris. Her parents have purchased Fox Estate and she has come here. Sam thought Professor Gilbert was going to fall all over himself. That he was quite taken with the young woman was obvious.

"Oh. my," Gilbert said. "We're all going to have to brush up on our French, I see."

The young men in the room all shared the same thought: They would like to brush up against Desiree.

"My English is quite good, Professor," she replied, in a voice that touched the groin of every male.

Again, those pale eyes touched Sam, then quickly dropped away.

"Yes, you certainly do, Desiree," the professor agreed. "Well, why don't you sit—umm—right over there, next to Mr. Balon, and we'll open class."

"Is she as beautiful as everyone says she is?" Nydia asked him.

Sam, Nydia, and Little Sam lived several miles outside of Logandale, about five miles from the center of Nelson campus. Nelson, one of the most expensive private colleges in North America, would have been financially unattainable for Sam had not his father set aside insurance money for his—that time unborn—offspring. Nydia, who had been attending Carrington College before she met Sam, had transferred to Nelson after their marriage. For Nydia, money was no obstacle, for she was an extremely wealthy young woman, having inherited all of Roma and Falcon's holdings, worldwide, at their death. At the hands of Sam.

Nydia's mother and stepfather had been witch and warlock. Her true father was Sam Balon. Sam and Nydia were half brother and half sister. But they had been forgiven for that and allowed to live as man and wife. Forgiven by the One who has the power to forgive any sin.

"Yes, she is," Sam replied.

"Oh?" Nydia turned dark blue eyes to her husband. "Better looking than someone I might name," she teased him.

"Well, now." Sam looked up from the research he was doing on ancient civilizations. His eyes sparkled with mischief. "Let me think. Umm? Desiree is—"

"Oh?" Nydia interrupted. "My. With a name like that, she would have to be lovely."

"Oh, she is! 'Bout this tall." He held up a hand. Then, using both hands, formed an hourglass shape.

"Really?" Nydia stepped closer to her husband. "How interesting."

"Perfection," Sam said, not realizing he was about to take the game past the foul line. He opened his hands and made a squeezing gesture. "'Bout like that, I'd say."

"Big boobs, huh?" There was a flatness to her tone that Sam failed to catch.

Sam rolled his eyes.

Nydia took his hands in hers and pressed them to her own breasts. "About that size, Sam?"

The dim light of realization clicked on in Sam's brain. Struggling mentally to get his foot out of his mouth, Sam said, "I would say there is only one person I've seen that is more beautiful than Desiree."

Warning signals flashed dangerously hot in Nydia's eyes. "Oh? And who might that be—*dear*?"

Sam looked up into her eyes and grinned. "Why— you, Nydia."

The warning lights dimmed, then cut off. "Almost swallowed both feet, didn't you, darling?" she said with a smile.

He closed his textbook and pulled her onto his lap. "I did come close." He kissed her. "But I'm only a man, remember?"

"I'll keep that in mind. What did Xaviere have to say about the new girl in class?"

"She thought the boys' behavior very funny."

Nydia unbuttoned his shirt and tugged at the hair on his chest. "Since Little Sam is with Janet, at her house ... why don't we mess around some?"

"Got anything special in mind?"

She whispered in his ear.

"My pleasure," Sam said.

"Is the child one of ours?" Professor Gilbert asked, looking at Little Sam but speaking to the group of men and women gathered at the Sakall home.

"I cannot tell," the daughter of Satan said, straightening up after her examination of the child. She

brushed back her long brown hair. "There appear to be no birthmarks denoting which side of the lineage takes precedent."

Janet Sakall sat in a chair, a pout on her pretty face. She was rapidly blooming into full womanhood. Now in her fifteenth year, the young witch looked older than her years. She was quite pretty, with auburn hair, a shapely body, and fully developed breasts. Her eyes were pure evil. She licked her full lips, her tongue flicking over teeth that could become fanged at the blink of an eyelid.

Janet met the stare of the daughter of Satan without flinching. "Why are we waiting?" she asked. "We could take them any time."

"The impetuosity of youth," the Princess said with a smile.

"I'm older than you," Janet reminded the young woman.

"In the way humans measure time, yes," the Princess acknowledged. "But in my veins race the blood of a thousand years of service to our Prince."

"You must not question the Princess," Bert Sakall admonished his daughter.

The Princess held up one hand, the fingers long and delicate, shaped like a pianist's fingers. "She has the right, servant. She performed well at Falcon House." Her pale gray eyes touched the eyes of Janet. "You have the complete trust of Sam and Nydia?"

"Totally, Princess."

"I see." The Princess smiled. "You have a plan, I am sure."

"I want Sam Balon," the young girl said simply.

The Princess laughed, exposing perfectly shaped teeth. "You are worse than my mother." She shrugged. "Or so I have been informed about her. My earth father is a handsome man, no doubt about that. But tell me, do you keep your brains between your legs?"

"Of course not. But I have been chaste now for more than two years, at my Master's orders. I may be only a girl, but I have a woman's needs. Think about it, Princess. What man, young or old, does not desire a young girl? Young girls are the image of innocence, their flesh not yet tainted by the lusts of full womanhood." She laughed. "Or so men think. Should I succeed, Sam Balon would be guilt-ridden and easy to control."

The Princess of Darkness nodded her head and smiled her approval. "Continue," she urged.

"And there is Jon Le Moyne for Nydia," Janet said. "Divide and conquer."

Janet's mother stirred at the mention of Jon Le Moyne. Sylvia Sakall, a woman in her late thirties and like her husband, a devout follower of the Prince of Darkness, had dreams of the young man named Jon. She had heard of him, as had most women in the small community of Logandale. But the story went that the young high school boy was to follow in the footsteps of his uncle, Father Daniel Le Moyne. But the Dark One was soon to change all that, so the coven had been told. A female had been chosen for the young virgin boy with, so the rumors went, an instrument of love that would be the envy of male porn stars.

The Princess picked up on the thoughts from Janet's mother. "You are not to interfere, servant," she told the woman. "The Master has plans for young Le Moyne. Do you understand all that?"

Sylvia Sakall bowed her head. "I understand, Princess."

"Yes," the Princess said. "That would be a coup. Nydia and Jon Le Moyne. Yes. And that might be the way to eliminate the priest, as well. And Sam, if you should succeed, would be so guilt-ridden, he could be controlled. Very well, I shall take it up with the Master. Your plan has merit, Janet. Carry it through if the opportunity presents itself, but do not endanger yourself or the coven or me. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Princess."

The lights in the room flickered, faded into darkness, and when they popped back on, the young woman was gone.

"Please forgive me," the young man prayed in the darkness of his bedroom. "But I am human, with human needs and wants. I try, Lord, I really do. But it's so difficult."

Jon Le Moyne struggled to fight back the erotic images playing sexual scenes in his young fertile mind. His thoughts, as always, were about the dark-haired wife of Sam Balon, Nydia. His mind replayed the scenes, each time adding new twists and turns ... and positions.

Jon's hand crept over his belly and gripped his growing heavy erection. He struggled to keep from masturbating. He tried prayer. It didn't work. It was as if his prayers were going unheard. He did not understand what was happening to him; why was this happening? Up until only a few months ago, his thoughts had been almost pure in content.

It was then Jon began experiencing dreams of a highly erotic nature. Then the high school junior had seen the woman in his dreams, and she had haunted his thoughts ever since. It was, Jon thought almost as if he were possessed.

He gripped his erection harder and began stroking himself.

Desiree Lemieux looked out over the dark grounds of Fox Estate. She smiled at some inner thought. Sam Balon entered her mind and she felt the heat build within her virgin body.

She turned at the sound of footsteps. She relaxed. It was only the groundskeeper, Jimmy Perkins.

"Yes, Perkins?"

"Forgive, mistress," the man said, his eyes dull as they swept over the young woman's lushness. "You sent for me?"

"My mother and father would be very disappointed with the condition of these grounds, Perkins. This afternoon I saw a tangle of brush and undergrowth on the east side of the property. Why has that been permitted to grow?"

Fuck your mother and father, Perkins thought, his dull eyes revealing none of the evil within the man. And fuck the horse they rode in on, too. I know all about your mother and father; know exactly who they are. "It is an unsafe place, mistress. That is the eastern border of the estate. It meets the estate of Mr. Norman Giddon."

"I know all that," Desiree said irritably. "Why should it be unsafe for *me*?"

"Hollow places in the ground, mistress. With only a thin covering of earth over them. Caves in the ground that run to the river over there." He pointed with a finger. "It is not safe. That is why the underbrush and thickets are allowed to grow; to discourage intruders."

"All right, Perkins. That will be all."

"Yes, mistress." He shuffled away. He wore an evil smile on his thick wet lips. Mademoiselle Desiree Lemieux may be the mistress of Fox Estate, and she might be in favor in the eyes of important people, but Jimmy knew who she was. And he knew she could not really hurt him. He had been around for too long. He had been privy to much information since joining the ranks of the undead more than a quarter of a century back, in Whitfield. He had adored the Devil's agent, Black Wilder, and thought the truth about Nydia a goddess. This young woman was supposed to be so important in the scheme of things, but she did not impress Jimmy, Not at all.

TWO

Father Daniel Le Moyne stepped from his small living quarters and looked toward the lights of the small college town. The priest had felt an ancient stirring rise from deep within him. He knew what

was. He had experienced it before. And it scared him. He did not know if he could cope with the again. He did not know if he had the strength.

He knew all too well the hand of evil.

He looked at his watch. The LCD flashed eight-ten. He shook his head and walked back toward his quarters. He stopped as the wind whispered around him. The wind rustled the dry leaves on the ground and the starkly naked branches on some of the trees. The wind should have been cool, for this was late October. But the breeze that touched him was hot. And it contained an odor that insulted the priest's nostrils.

Evil, he concluded.

Father Le Moyne shuddered, a cold shaking of both body and spirit.

But not my faith, he thought, and then wondered why he would think that. For nothing had occurred to make him question his faith.

Not lately, the priest amended that thought.

He turned his mind to his nephew, Jon. The boy was battling some inner conflicts, and so far, the priest had not been able to break through to the young man.

Fear touched the priest and he spun around as the sound of heavy, labored breathing reached him. The sound was coming from the side of the church.

The priest walked toward the source of the sound— whatever it, or they, might be. An odor, foul and ugly, reached his nostrils. He wrinkled his nose against the smell.

"Help me," the voice whispered. The words were very slurred. "Help me."

"Who is there?" Father Le Moyne called.

"Help me. For the love of God—help me." Le Moyne could scarcely make out the words. The voice spoke as if it possessed only half a tongue.

The priest walked toward the whispering. His heart was a dull heavy thudding in his chest. And he knew fear. Knew it on a far more intimate basis than ever before. And he could not understand the fear.

The wind picked up, blowing hotly in the priest's face.

The calling, pleading slurred words continued to reach Le Moyne.

Father Le Moyne stepped into the murky shadows.

A bloody hand reached for him as a scream touched his ears.

Chief of Police Monty Draper drove the streets of the small college town. He could not understand the feelings of ... doom, was the word that came to him, that had slipped into his mind just after supper. His face must have registered his thoughts, for his wife had asked him what was wrong.

"Oh, nothing," he lied to her, and that was something he did not like to do. "I just remembered some paperwork I have to do at the station."

"Will you be late?"

"I—I don't know, Viv. Don't wait up for me."

She had smiled at him. "All right, Monty. Just be careful in dealing with the desperadoes."

It was a standing joke between them. Logandale had the lowest crime rate in the entire state. The college was known as a haven for eggheads, not raucous and reveling frat boys. The town itself was just under four thousand population, with a full-time police force of only four men and one woman. The sheriff's department had a substation in Logandale, with one deputy living in town.

Monty had spent ten years on the NYPD, going on disability retirement at the age of thirty-two after taking a shotgun blast in his legs. He walked with a slight limp that became more pronounced as he grew tired. Unable to put police work out of his mind, and not trained for any other type of work, Monty had answered an ad in a police magazine, driven up to Logandale for an interview, and was

hired on the spot. That was three years ago. There had been no major crime in the small town during that time. A few break-ins, some petty theft, a fist fight or two on the weekends. Several domestic situations involving husbands beating the shit out of wives, and one domestic situation of a wife beating the shit out of her husband. No rapes, no armed robberies, no shootings, no knivings, no embezzlements—that came to the attention of the police force—no nothing.

It was boring. But the job paid surprisingly well. But a Boy Scout troop could have handled the job. Up to this point. All that was about to change.

Monty gripped the steering wheel and sighed heavily, trying to shake off the feelings of impending doom. Monty was of average height, average weight, average build; everything about Monty Draper was average, which was the reason he had spent nearly all his time doing undercover and stake-out work for the NYPD. One watch commander had commented that Monty Draper could get lost in a crowd of two.

Logandale, set off the beaten path, with no major highways or interstates running near it, was, putting it simply, a nice place to live. The town was surrounded by dairies, farms, and a sometimes colony of kooky writers and nutsy artists just a few miles out of town. When the colony was in residence—during the summer months—the townspeople viewed them with scarcely concealed amusement. But the writers and artists never caused anyone any trouble.

The man who owned the land where the colony was located was the Writer-In-Residence at Nelson College, Noah Crisp. Noah had inherited an obscene amount of money from his mother and father; had published many books, but had never had a best-seller. As a matter of fact, since most of his books were so off-the-wall, so to speak, Noah paid for their publication. But since he was the nearest thing Logandale had to a celebrity, he became sort of an instructor at the college. The board felt that Noah's babblings really weren't harmful, since no one in control of their faculties would pay any attention to them anyway. His classes were usually titled under something like: The Transcendental Aspects of Creating Salable Fiction. Or, The Haruspextic Pitfalls of Writing.

Classes any serious student of writing should take. Surely.

Noah was fifty, a bit on the pudgy side, and wore a beret, of the type featured in the Village back in the early and mid-fifties, and usually wore a painter's smock over jeans and cowboy boots. To say Noah was a bit eccentric would be putting it kindly. Many townspeople just called him a fucking nut and let it go at that.

As Monty drove the streets of the quiet little town, he recalled the visit by Noah, just a few weeks past. The man had not been his usual flaky self, not speaking in his usual pompous and/or condescending manner.

Monty had waved the small man to a seat.

Seated, Noah blurted, "Chief, are you a religious man?"

The question had caught Monty off balance. He had not expected that. Monty shook his head. "No, really. I was raised in the Catholic church, but I broke away from it years ago. While I was still in high school."

Noah nodded his head in understanding. "I, too, was raised in the church. But I haven't attended in years. Personal reasons. Chief, something very—strange is occurring in this town. I use that adverb in lieu of bizarre."

Monty elected not to tell Noah that strange was an adjective, not an adverb. He thought.

Monty waited.

"My dog disappeared, Chief."

Monty looked at the man.

"But I found him—yesterday."

"I'm ... glad, Noah. Do you consider your dog's disappearance bizarre?"

"What! Oh, no. Of course not. But I do consider it quite bizarre when the animal was tortured death. Wouldn't you?"

"You want to go into more detail?"

Noah laid half a dozen Polaroid prints on the chief's desk. Monty looked at them and felt like vomiting. The little dog had been hideously tortured, then patches of the animal had been skinned. Strange markings were cut into the skin. Alive, the thought came to Monty. The little animal was alive while this ... depravity was done. Monty lifted his eyes from the pictures of pain.

"Where did you find the animal, Noah?"

"About a mile from my home. Down a dirt road."

"What prompted you to look there?"

"Because I had looked everywhere else. Really. Victor, that's my dog's name—was his name, had a habit of running off quite often. But I always knew where to look for him. But this time, no Victor. So I began a systematic search for him. This spot," he said pointing to the prints, "was the last area in the quantum. I was—I became quite ill when I found him."

"That's understandable." Monty looked at the prints. Something was disturbingly familiar about the scene. But he couldn't pin it down.

"You look perplexed, Chief," Noah said.

Monty had mumbled something; he couldn't recall what. Now, driving the quiet streets of Logandale, it came to him: his sergeant handing out prints of a dead man found in an old condemned building. "We got us a bunch of Satan nuts," the sergeant said. "Coroner's office says the old guy was alive when this was done to him. Look at it real hard, boys and girls, and keep your heads up on the one."

That had been Monty's first year on the department. The pictures had made him violently ill.

And the same type of skinning had been done to Noah's dog; the same strange markings found on both the dog and the old man.

They never did find out who tortured and killed the old guy, but department shrinks said it definitely was the work of Satan worshippers.

Devil worshippers ... here in Logandale? Monty just could not accept that. College kids up to something.

He rolled down the window to catch some air.

The air was hot and smelled bad.

"What the hell?" Monty muttered. It had been cool for the past few weeks; now hot air that smelled bad. Last week in October and getting summertime weather that smelled worse than the Hudson. Didn't make sense.

That's when Monty heard the shouting.

The hand that touched Father Le Moyne's face was sticky with blood. When Le Moyne recovered sufficiently from his initial fright to run inside his quarters and grab a flashlight, he could see why the man was bloody.

The man was naked, his body covered with strange-looking cuts and slashings and markings. The man was bloody from his mouth to his toenails. Or where his toenails were supposed to be. Father Le Moyne tried to avert his eyes from the man's groin. The man had been castrated. Among other hideous acts. Covering the tortured body with his jacket, Father Le Moyne told him, "Lie still. I'll get help."

He ran back inside and jerked up the phone. The phone was dead. But it had been all right an hour before. "Damn!" the priest said. He ran out the side door of his quarters and toward the street.

The church was located on the edge of town, the nearest neighbor a full block away. The gas station across the street was closed. Le Moyne saw the lights of an approaching vehicle. He ran toward the

street, waving his arms and shouting.

~~Monty slammed on his brakes and jumped out of the car. "Steady now, Father. What's the matter?"~~

Pulling the chief toward the church, the priest explained as best he could. Monty could not believe what the priest was saying. In New York, yeah, it would not even make the pages of the worst rag in town. It seemed to the rest of the nation—Monty had been told, many times—the people living and working in the Big Apple seemed more concerned about the rights of street slime than in the rights of the citizen. That wasn't true. But just try explaining that to a tourist with a busted head, minus his watch, ring, and wallet. And the punks that mugged him back out on the streets before the tourist got out of the emergency room.

Maybe there was some truth in it, Monty finally admitted privately.

The priest knew his story sounded far-fetched. He held out his hands to the cop. Monty looked at the dark blood and quickened his step.

"There!" Le Moyne pointed to the side of the church.

The ground was sticky with blood. The jacket the priest had used to cover the man was there, blood-soaked. But the man was gone.

The Beasts feasted that evening. They tore the intestines from the tortured man's belly and ate them while steam rose from the man's open stomach. The Beasts ripped flesh from bone and devoured the sweet meat. They cracked open bone and sucked the marrow from it. One Beast contented herself with eating the flesh from the man's head, peeling the head like an orange, popping the eyeballs into her mouth like grapes. Then she ate the brain.

The few bones that were left were gathered and taken deep underground, through a hole behind the Catholic church. The hole had at one time been a well. It now connected with an elaborate labyrinth of underground tunnels. The tunnels crisscrossed under the entire town of Logandale, with exits under a church basements, the city hall, the police station, the sheriff's department substation, the public schools, many homes, and into the town's sewage system.

The digging and reinforcing of the tunnels had begun years before, back in 1948. For when our covenant falls, as happened that year, in another part of the country, it is written in The Book that another must spring forth so the number will remain constant. The coven in Logandale was one of the oldest in the Northeast, and one of the largest. The coven in Logandale was almost ready to begin its full possession of the town. It was down to a matter of hours.

THREE

Father Daniel Le Moyne sat in Chief Draper's small office. He went over his story again ... and again. Monty could not break the priest's version. Not that he wanted to, or expected to, for he believed the priest had seen exactly what he described.

"Do you want to go over it again, Monty?" the priest asked patiently.

"That won't be necessary, Father. I believe you saw a man. Hell, here's your bloody jacket. The ground was covered with blood. I have samples to send off to the lab. But what happened to the man?"

Father Le Moyne shrugged, shrugged as eloquently as only a Frenchman can; even a third-generation American of French heritage.

"Father, let me ask you a question you—well, may think odd."

The priest waited.

Monty said, "I don't know how to put this except to just jump right in. But bear in mind I fully realize this is not a question you would expect to hear from a trained cop. Have you felt—*evil* in the town? I mean, especially over the past few weeks?"

Father Le Moyne lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. He was thoughtful for a long moment, his eyes hooded with caution. Finally, he said, "Yes. I have."

The chief of police seemed to relax. "Care to elaborate, Father?"

"Are you asking if there is such a thing as varying degrees of evil?" The priest smiled.

"I was raised in the church, Father." Monty's response was dryly spoken.

"Your question about evil concerns the man I found this evening, correct?"

"Yes."

"The poor man had strange, bizarre markings cut into his flesh, Chief Draper."

Strange and bizarre, Monty thought. Those words keep cropping up. First from Noah, now from the priest. "Describe them, Father. We only touched on that."

The priest closed his eyes. When he spoke, his words were slow as he brought back the tortured man's condition. "Stars, moons, upside down crosses. Other symbols I—am not that familiar with. Some I have never seen at all. It looked as though the man had been tortured for several days. Some of the cuttings appeared to be crusted over; others were fresh. There were numbers cut into the poor man's flesh. Sixes and nines. I believe part of his tongue had been cut out. His words were so slurred. And as I told you previously, he had been castrated."

Le Moyne opened his eyes. Monty thought them to contain a haunting expression.

"What did the symbols mean to you, Father?"

Did the priest shudder? Monty thought so. "I— would rather not venture an opinion at this time, Chief. If you don't mind."

He knows, Monty thought. Knows more than he is telling me. Without warning, Monty opened the center drawer of his desk and removed the prints of Noah's dog. He flipped them to the priest. Father Le Moyne took one look and covered his mouth in shock.

"What's the matter, Father?"

"That's obvious, isn't it? The poor animal. That's Noah's dog, Victor."

"I wasn't aware you two knew each other."

"The dog or Noah?" Le Moyne asked, with a sense of humor that surprised Monty.

"Go on, Father. But I am glad to see you have a sense of humor. It helps in times like these."

"Quite true," the priest responded, lighting another cigarette from the smoked-down butt of his first. "I have been in Logandale for a great many years, Monty, more than twenty-five. I know practically everyone within a ten mile radius of the town: Protestant, Catholic, Jew. I came here when I was barely thirty years of age. Been here ever since."

"You see, Monty, I am one of the few people who remember the real Noah Crisp. The man who could have been a truly great author. But that was before— well, his breakdown, to put it as kindly as possible."

This was something Monty had never heard. "I always thought Noah was—well, just a little on the strange side." That word again. Strange.

"No. That isn't a fair or accurate portrayal of the real man. Noah was brilliant when I first met him. A deeply religious man, and, I think, perhaps on the edge of great literary success. Then one night—no, it was early evening—he came to me with this idea for a manuscript. He was going to write a book about the occult. The Devil. A fiction book. In it, he was going to kill Satan."

"I'm not saying there haven't been writers who wrote of killing Satan, but I can't recall ever reading one of their books. You see, Monty, Satan, like God, is immortal—no human can kill either. I told Noah that; begged him not to write the manuscript. Warned him of the danger of his project. He waved my objections aside. Then Noah became obsessed with his work. He stopped coming to Mass; broke all ties with God. He practically barricaded himself in his house—his parents were killed when he was just a little boy—and Noah seldom came out of the house during this period of— Devil research. I

conducted all sorts of Black Masses and the calling out of witches and warlocks. He conducted long seances. He became quite the expert on Satan."

The priest's gentle features hardened for a moment. "Then—one night, just after midnight, I believe it was, my phone rang. To this day I do not know who the caller was, but it was about Noah. Noah was running around on his property, stark naked, shouting that he had seen the face of Satan; that he had talked with the Dark One. It is written, Monty, by men much more versed in the subject than I, that when one sees the face of the Prince of Darkness, that person dies. Noah was very lucky—in a manner of speaking. He's alive. But he was a broken man, mentally and physically. He spent two years in a mental institution, another five years in deep analysis. Noah will never write another worthwhile book—about anything."

Monty was silent for a moment, mentally digesting all the priest had said. "You believe he saw the devil?"

"I—believe he saw something. Yes. Yes, I believe Noah Crisp met with the Dark One."

"Then you really, truly believe in the supernatural?"

"Yes, Monty. I do."

"You really believe the devil has—followers, covens, if you will; people who are really, actually in touch with the forces of the—well, beyond?"

"With all my heart and faith."

"Jesus!" Monty muttered. "Father Le Moyne, have you ever performed or been a witness to an exorcism?"

Without hesitation, the priest said, "Yes. To both your questions."

"Here in Logandale?"

The priest struggled with that for a moment. "I—can't answer that, Monty. I'm sorry."

The cop surfaced in Monty, and he knew the priest had performed the rite of exorcism in Logandale. But out of respect for the man—and, he would readily admit, fear stemming from his early teaching in the church—he would not press the man for an answer. Monty leaned back in his swivel chair. "So my feelings that something—evil was hovering over this town were correct?"

"Yes."

"Has it, in your opinion, become stronger during the past few weeks?"

The priest met the cop's eyes. "Yes," he said softly. "Quite a bit, I would say."

The weekend dawned gloriously, with the touch of approaching winter cooling the morning air. It was a morning for woolen skirts and shirts; the type of fall morning that makes a hearty breakfast more appealing to the palate. Steam colored the air white at the expulsion of breath. Kids jumped and ran and played in the coolness of this Saturday morning in upstate New York. People busied themselves raking up the multicolored leaves that fell in profusion, painting the landscape a joyous color of bronze and gold and green and red.

But for most of the people in Logandale, the acts were superficial, disguising the evil that lay bubbling just under the human surface. The evil that blanketed the area would soon burst forth, showering all who came close with its stinking pus of depravity.

And ... it was also the Saturday morning that Judith Mayberry found young Marie Fowler hanging upside down in the apple grove behind her house. Hanging by her ankles. Marie was naked. Or perhaps it would be better to say what was left of Marie who was naked. Certain parts of her anatomy had been quite crudely hacked off. Definitely not the work of a skilled surgeon.

Judith, when she recovered from her fainting, thought she'd better call the police. She was not conscious of eyes watching her movements from the homes around her. Eyes that contained evil in its blackest form. Judith was on her way to the house when she heard the low growl behind her. Judith

Mayberry turned around for the last time—in her human form—and froze rock-still in shock.

~~She dropped the basket of late-blooming wild flowers she had just picked to decorate her kitchen table.~~

She opened her mouth to shriek out her fright when a pawlike hand clamped around her left ankle and jerked. Another pawlike hand dropped over her mouth, stilling her yet unleashed howl of terror. She was dragged to a thicket that ran on the north side of the orchard and pulled down into the earth through a hole she never knew existed. When Judith came to her senses she was naked and cold and wished she were dead.

She soon would be. Sort of.

Judith was thirty-six years old, and while no one would ever call her beautiful, she was attractive with long legs and full breasts. The attractive part of her was about to undergo a drastic metamorphosis. She sat on the cold rocky floor of the cave, or tunnel, or whatever the hell it was—she wasn't certain—and looked at the Beasts who sat squatting, looking at her.

She had never seen such horrible-looking creatures in all her life. Not even in the movies.

An old Beast—one might call him a silver-back—grunted a command. Two younger Beasts seized Judith and forced her to a knees-and-hands position, her buttocks elevated.

The old silver-back then mounted her.

Judith began screaming out her pain and outrage.

The old Beast bit her on the neck several times as he mated with her.

When the sex act was over, Judith was allowed to crawl into a corner of the huge cave room and huddle in pain and shock. After only a very short time, Judith wondered why she was suddenly getting warmer. She looked at the back of her hands. Thick coarse hair was sprouting, not just on the back of her hands but all over her body.

Her face, especially her jaw, was beginning to ache. Her teeth felt odd to her. She ran her tongue over her teeth and found they were fanged. And now, as the rapid change spread over her entire body, it did not seem odd to her. Her jaw swelled to accommodate the new growth of teeth.

Several of the Beasts were talking, and Judith found she could understand them. She crawled over to them and they welcomed her.

She was one with them.

She tossed her head, glad of her new strength and body. One earring gleamed dully in the gloom of the cave room, as it remained pierced in place.

All that was left of the woman once known as Judith Mayberry.

"Sam?" Nydia called to him on this glorious Saturday morning.

The two of them were working out in the yard; more specifically, working by the fence that separated their property from a field to the northeast. Sam straightened from his work to look at his wife.

She stood very still, her face suddenly pale. She was pointing toward the old orchard.

Sam looked. He could see nothing. "Nydia?"

"I—saw something move over there." She again pointed her finger. "Then it just disappeared into the ground, like the earth swallowed it."

Sam knew Nydia was not the type to panic. They had both been through too much horror for that. And if she said she saw something, she saw it, and that was it.

"Let's go take a look," Sam said.

"No," she replied. She put out a hand to stop him. "Sam—it's them." Her eyes were now wide and frightened.

"Them?"

"The Beasts, Sam. They're back. They're here. They found us, Sam."

"Nydia—" He opened his mouth to calm her.

"I know what I saw, Sam."

He believed her. He walked to her, took her hand, and they started toward the house. "Stay with Little Sam. You have your pistol; you know how to use it."

There was no fear in the tall young man. He had faced the Beasts before. He had faced almost everything Satan could hurl at him in black fury. And he had been victorious. While it was something he hoped he would never have to do again, if it had to be, then so be it.

In his heart, Sam had always known he would be called upon to fight again.

Sam unlocked his gun cabinet. Chief of Police Draper had visited the Balon house several times, enjoying the young man's company for one thing, but the main reason for the visits was that the young man fascinated Monty. He had no past that police computers could punch up, other than the most mundane. And Monty Draper, with a cop's instinct, knew there was much more to Sam Balon.

Chief of Police Draper always shook his head and clucked his tongue at the sight of Sam's arsenal. He was like any good liberal New Yorker who had grown up under the most asinine of gun control laws: The Sullivan Act. While Sam displayed no illegal weapons (those were carefully hidden), the weapons visible were awesome. Of course a cap pistol is frightening to many screaming liberals.

Sam was his father's image, physically and mentally. He stood well over six feet tall, stocky, with naturally heavy musculature. His hair was dark brown and usually unmanageable. His jaw square. And he despised even the thought of any type of gun control.

"If I ever need a one-man riot squad," Monty had remarked dryly, "I certainly know where to come."

"At your service, Chief," Sam had cheerfully replied.

His curiosity heightened by the sight of the most impressive arsenal he'd seen since leaving the NYPD, Chief Draper ran—or attempted to run—a check on the young man named Sam Balon.

He found out what almost anyone could have discovered. The young man had graduated from high school in Whitfield, Nebraska (why did that name ring some sort of bell in Monty's mind, Monty wondered?) Sam had been an honor student, his mother a teacher, his step-father a doctor. His real father had been killed back in 1958. Sam Balon King—he had since dropped the King—had spent three years in the army, a member of the Rangers.

And there the information stopped. Dead. Cold.

Monty had run into a stone wall.

He called old friends on the NYPD and asked them to run young Mr. Sam Balon. Run him hard, push for answers. Call in markers if they had to.

He received a phone call late that same afternoon from a precinct captain.

"Monty," the captain had shouted in his ear through the long lines. "What the goddamn hell are you trying to pull up there in that hick town?"

Monty was speechless for a few seconds. "Captain—what do you mean?" Monty had known the man for years.

"Sam Balon King. That's what I mean. Why are you running this guy so hard?"

Monty came very close to losing his temper. "Well—goddamn it, Captain, because I want a mark on him, that's why."

"Not good enough, Monty." The man was adamant. "What's the guy done to warrant all this attention?"

Monty had never before encountered this much stonewalling. "Nothing," he admitted. "That I can't prove. Except he's got the finest collection of guns I've ever seen in the hands of any civilian. Especially one this young."

Down in New York City, the captain's sigh was audible up in Logandale. "Monty, my boy, listen to me. I won't bullshit you. Get off this young man's back. I've had CID and CIA and FBI and NSA people all over my ass this afternoon. Whatever this Sam Balon King did in the paratroops, it was something special."

"Rangers," Monty corrected.

"Haw?"

"The guy was in the Rangers, Captain."

"I thought those people took care of trees!"

"I think these Rangers eat the goddamn trees, Captain."

"It wouldn't surprise me, Monty."

"And they are trained to kill."

Another long sigh from the Big Apple. "Yeah? Well, so are Green Berets, marine Raiders, navy Seals, and lots of other service people. Not to mention the Mafia and other assorted crazies running around. Whatever, Monty. This kid is to be left *alone*. Just drop it, Chief Draper. For your own good and my peace of mind."

"You can't tell me anything else, Captain?"

"No."

"Can't, or won't?"

"Take your pick, Chief."

"Good talking to another member of the law enforcement field, Captain."

The line went dead.

So the mystery—if there was any mystery about Sam Balon, and Monty felt there was—was never cleared up to Monty's satisfaction. But it would be cleared up. Shortly.

Sam took a Winchester Model 1200 from the gun cabinet and filled up the tube with double 0 buck. He pumped one into the chamber. He took a .41 magnum revolver from the cabinet and checked the loads in that. Fully loaded. He shoved the big pistol behind his belt and turned to his wife.

"Stay in the house with Little Sam. You have your pistol with you and you know how to fire every weapon in this house." He smiled. "Well, *almost* every weapon. And I know you will if you have to. I'll be back in a little while."

Sam walked out the back door and started across the field. It was then the faint odor struck his nostrils. Nydia had been correct. The Beasts were here. He remembered that smell from behind Falcon House in Canada.

Sam and Nydia were falling in love. They both knew they were in love hours after they met.

They had left Falcon House, walking toward the deep timber behind the great house, holding hands like kids. They walked into the timber, and the silence of God's free nature seemed to make them stronger and draw them closer. The mood was almost religious, the towering trees a nondenominational cathedral silently growing around the young couple. They came to a small, rushing creek and sat on a log by the bubbling waters.

"Tell me more about being a Christian, Sam."

"I don't know that much about it, Nydia. I sometimes think it's a feeling one must have. And I don't have it very often."

"I think you're a better person than you will admit to being, Sam."

"Maybe."

They sat and talked and both felt the evil from the great house. It penetrated even the deep timber. Nydia told him about a circle of stones not too far away, a place that frightened her. Sam wanted to

see that place.

At the circle of stones, Sam knelt down, studying closely and with great interest the largest stone in the circle, which depicted scenes of great depravity: of men with huge jutting phalluses; of women with legs widespread, exposing the genitalia; scenes of mass orgies: men with men, women with women, men with small children; scenes of hideous torture; of grotesque creatures, monsters, leaping and snarling. And finally, on the east side of the great stone, a scene depicting a saintly looking man who was locked in some sort of combat with a beastlike creature.

"Let's see this hole in the ground," Sam said.

They smelled the stench long before they came to the hole, both of them wrinkling their noses at the foul odor. "Can you imagine what it's like deep in that hole?" Sam tried a grin, unaware that his father had said almost the same thing to a couple of friends back in 1958, standing near The Digging

(The Devil's Kiss).

It was then Sam had put his hand into his jacket pocket, jerking his hand out as if he had touched a snake.

His father's old army issue .45 was in his pocket. But before leaving his room at Falcon House the morning, Sam had put his own .38 revolver in that pocket.

Sam and Nydia looked at the pistol. A brass name-plate was riveted into the handle. SGT. SAM BALON KOREA 1953.

The young couple both felt themselves being overwhelmed by a dark force field. They sank to the ground, helplessly immobile as the strange force took them under its control.

Time took them winging backward. They watched a naked man fighting with a naked woman. Both Sam and Nydia knew, somehow, the identities of the couple. Sam Balon, Sr. and Nydia's mother, Roma, the witch.

Articles of clothing and equipment flew about the struggling couple. Both were bloody from the combat. The woman impaled herself on the man's erect penis, hunching on him. He struck her, knocking her away. But again and again she mounted the man, only to have him shove her away, each shove less forceful than the preceding one.

Then, shrieking her taunting laughter, the witch lunged at the man, wailing her delight as his phallus drove to the inner depths of her. For what seemed like hours, the mortal and the witch fucked the way across trackless worlds of space.

The young couple could see the man was nearly dead.

With one last supreme burst of courage and strength, the man grabbed something out of the maze of clothing and equipment that circled the couple. The objects seemed to fly from his hand, through the years, straight toward the young man and young women frozen to the ground on Earth, 1980.

Nydia screamed. Sam ducked.

They both jumped to their feet. All was peaceful. The scene replayed in their minds was gone. Sam looked at the gun in his hand. His father's gun. From years and worlds away.

When they returned to Falcon House, Sam found his father's old Thompson SMG lying on the bed.

Sam shook off the memories and walked across the old apple orchard, his irritation growing with each step. The smell grew fouler. Twice Sam changed direction as the smell grew fainter. Then he was standing over the hole in the ground. He picked up a rock from the ground and savagely hurled it down the stinking hole.

"Bastards!" he cursed. "I know, somehow, you didn't follow us here, so you must have been here a long time. Come on out, bastards—face me."

Only silence greeted his words.

"Satan's filth!" Sam called to the dark hole.

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