

Jasper
“The Beginning”

by
Eileen Sheehan

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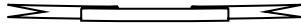
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Notice: Portions of this novel could prove too graphic, violent, or explicit to the sensitive reader. It is intended for mature readers.

Supernatural: a manifestation attributed to some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature.

Supernatural Beings



Zombie: *a person or reanimated corpse that has been turned into a creature capable of movement but not of rational thought, which feeds on human flesh.*

Lycanthrope or Lycan: *The supernatural transformation of a person into a wolf (Werewolf)*

Vampire: *also spelled vampyre, in popular legend, a creature, often fanged, that preys upon humans, generally by consuming their blood.*

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Chapter 1

Darkness slowly receded as Jasper's muddled mind gradually regained a semblance of consciousness. Blood steadily oozed past swollen lips as he lay, face down, in a shallow, muddy pothole. He could feel the flesh over his left eye swelling while the throbbing in his head intensified to the extent that he was sure the iron bar that was used to beat him with was lodged deep inside of it. There was a faint sensation of warmth coating his ears from the blood that steadily trickled from them. This explained why all sounds were muted and barely audible.

He was grateful that the pothole was shallow enough to keep him from drowning because he had no idea when he'd find the strength to push himself up and out of it. Even the effort of rolling onto his back felt unobtainable.

He'd run out of money to pay for his research. Never one for waiting until tomorrow to do what could be done today, he'd insisted on making the trip to the other side of town after a late-night dinner to petition his benefactor for more funds even though logic and his assistant told him that his petition could have waited – and probably would have been better received- until the following morning. If only he'd listened to one or the other.

Knowing that the streets would be barely passable in his car and with his destination less than a mile away, he'd

decided to traverse the distance on foot. In his impatience to reach the townhome of the wealthy entrepreneur, Steven Giles, he did what he knew he shouldn't have done. He made the fateful mistake of cutting through the alley.

He normally avoided alleys since nothing good ever happened in them. Not to him, anyway. During his college days, his friends would brag about all the great things they did in the dimly lit private cubbies and alcoves of alleys, like hooking up with a woman who didn't demand payment for the sex that they had with her while concealed in the recesses of a remote doorway or the purchase of a coveted item that mysteriously fell off the back of a truck from an unsavory looking character for an unbelievable low price. For him, it was never that way. Instead, a trip through the alley at night generally led to the loss of his wallet or a family heirloom such as his grandfather's watch.

Although he'd been robbed on numerous occasions while foolishly using an alley at night, admittedly, he'd never suffered an assault such as the one he'd just experienced. In fact, he couldn't even fathom something of this degree ever happening to him. Yet, it did.

No. Alleys were not good for him. He should have stayed out of it.

Jasper had no reason to be there other than the fact that he was taking a shortcut to the other side of town. He'd almost managed the long and narrow stretch behind the block that contained the "Old Thyme Tavern" to avoid the

crowd that had spilled out of it onto the street to celebrate Independence Day. The owner of the local bar was famous for hosting extravagant celebrations for major occasions. The functions attracted such large gatherings that the streets were often either difficult to maneuver through or completely shut down during the occasion.

On this particular night, the city was busy celebrating Halloween and maneuverability was a major issue. His regrets for wanting to avoid pushing his way through the crowd by taking the notoriously perilous short cut were acute.

With his mind clouded from the pain in his head, he was hard pressed to remember just what had happened. He recalled a man wearing a zombie costume that was so authentic looking that it was not only creepy, but a tad frightening. It reminded him of the zombies in the television series and movies that were all the rage. The zombie man had behaved in perfect character by grabbing and pulling at him while acting as if he wanted to bite a bit of his flesh. In fact, Jasper was certain that he got a good nip in there. Even though he'd drawn blood, it wasn't the zombie character who pummeled him to the ground. He was still trying to piece it together, but he was certain that the beating came from another source. Two. No, three men.

They came out of nowhere in wolf-like costumes and sliced off the head of the zombie dressed character with a large sword while Jasper was struggling to be free of him.

Jasper's first thought was that he'd stumbled into a gang war zone of some type. Gang battles were nothing to take lightly. Although death was often a result of such battles, beheading wasn't something that he'd read about in the news.

Traumatized to the point of being immobilized by what he'd just witnessed, he was unable to fight back when the three men proceeded to tackle him to the ground and pummel his body with fists, rocks, and, finally, a crowbar. It wasn't until much later that he questioned why they'd left his head intact.

The attackers' desire to closely mimic the character of the costumes they wore was both frustrating and shocking. He could only reason that there was some sort of contest or gang challenge that they were participating in to make them behave with such dedication even while mugging someone. If memory served him right, he was clawed and bitten by one of them as well.

Left broken and barely holding onto life, he felt certain that he wouldn't survive more than a few hours. The possibility of someone of strong moral character stumbling upon him in that dingy alley and calling for medical help was bleak. If by some miracle someone did come along to rescue him in time, he'd definitely have to get tested for diseases that could have entered his bloodstream via these wounds.

He grew weaker and weaker as he faded in and out of consciousness. Whenever his mind got coherent enough to

realize his situation, he was surprised to discover that he was still able to inhale life giving air. He shouldn't have survived such a brutal attack. Yet, the searing pain that coursed through every inch of his body told him that he'd done just that.

The question was... for how much longer?

Summoning enough strength to move his hand to his pants pocket, he was surprised to discover that his money was still there. He could feel that the designer watch that he'd purchased to replace the watch he'd inherited from his grandfather and had been stolen in a mugging while in his early twenties had also been left on his wrist. Things weren't making sense. Getting drunk and, then, acting in character and attacking in such a way was one thing, but since when did robbers beat a man to mere inches from his life and then not rob him? Then, were they really robbers? They'd beheaded a man, after all.

As if his mind wasn't muddled enough after such a head bashing, trying to make sense out of what just occurred confused it even more.

With all the strength that he could muster, he lifted his head and looked around. The dim lighting from the sparsely placed fixtures on the back of a few buildings mingled with the moonlight. It illuminated the narrow, cluttered alley just enough for him to make out his surroundings. Vomit surged up his throat and out of his mouth and nose when his eyes settled on the severed head of

the zombie costumed man. With his breathing temporarily impaired, he feared that the vomit would do what the beating hadn't succeeded in accomplishing.

After vigorously coughing and forcing air through his damaged throat and broken nose, he managed to clear the passageways enough to take in a sufficient amount of precious, life-giving oxygen. With his fears of suffocating on his own vomit quelled, he braved a closer look at the zombie man's decapitated body that lay so close that, had he the wherewithal, he could have touched it.

He doubted anyone would hear him over the boisterous celebration going on in the streets, but he tried to cry out anyway. His attempts proved useless. The only thing that his crushed vocal cords managed to produce was a barely audible, gravelly groan.

Feeling exhausted from the pain and defeated by his situation, he eased his bruised and bloody cheek back into the shallow mudpuddle and allowed darkness to relieve him of his nightmare reality.

As he lay so still as to appear lifeless, a tall figure dressed in an eighteenth century styled, sleek black cape with a red satin lining and an equally sleek looking black satin top hat steadily made his way down the alley. Had Jasper been alert, he would have admired such an authentic costume that clearly showed the stranger to be portraying a vampire.

The man's footsteps echoed off the building as they blended with his carefree whistling. Spotting the decapitated zombie's body next to the lifeless looking one lying in a heap with his face in a puddle, the vampire character stopped whistling and cautiously looked around. Seeing no one or nothing that could prove menacing, he made his way to them.

Bending over the unconscious man, he carefully checked for signs of life before piercing his wrist with an elongated tooth and allowing his blood to drip into the wounded man's mouth. Satisfied when he saw the man's severely bruised throat working to swallow the blood that was given to him, he picked up the wounded and limp form as if it weighed no more than a rag doll and positioned it over his shoulder.

Jasper's body flopped to and fro as his rescuer ran hard and fast until he'd gained enough speed to leap into the air. Once in flight, Jasper's limp and almost lifeless body settled into position. Had he been conscious to see the vision that they made, he would have been in awe over the way that the man's cape spread like wings while he soared with the grace of an eagle as they disappeared into the moonlit night.

Chapter 2

Cora pulled her thick and wavy, waist length auburn colored hair into a ponytail while she agitatedly paced the perimeter of the mansion's medical room.

“So, he brought home another one. This is the third in two months,” she grumbled as she stopped next to the cot that supported Jasper's still body. “What does he think he is going to do with this one? The man is barely breathing.”

The elderly whitehaired attendant placed her hands on her thick hips and slowly shook her head as she said, “Master Rowan has a reason for everything that he does. Although, for the life of me, I have no idea what it is this time. I cannot imagine what use he could be around here. This poor lad is on death's door.”

Cora's slender form leaned low over Jasper's still body. Placing her cheek near his mouth to feel for breath, she said, “Exactly. The others showed promise of recovering enough to provide household service.” Straightening up, she added, “I think this one is dead.”

“No one dies here should I choose them to live,” said the vampire lord, Rowan Jules, as he sauntered into the room. His tall, slender form hovered over Jasper to the extent that, if Cora didn't know that there was a body on the cot, she'd miss it.

Rowan was taller than most of the males that Cora had encountered over the years. His lean body was well-formed. He possessed a power and strength that belied his appearance. She found his square jaw and the straight nose that complemented his charismatic brown-black eyes irresistible. She'd occasionally heard him referred to as creepy by young women who he'd brought home with him for one reason or another, but she found him to be overwhelmingly handsome. This was a situation where looks were definitely in the eyes of the beholder.

Cora first met Rowan when she was a young woman of fourteen almost two centuries earlier. He'd come upon her while she was fighting for her virtue -and more than likely her life- on the docks of London in the wee hours of the morning.

After her father took his life out of despair over losing their fortune, her mother was forced to sell most of their belongings to satisfy creditors. What little they had left was only enough to secure a small one room hovel for them to cram into on the most undesirable side of town.

The eldest of five children in a family that had fallen from society's grace, Cora had no choice but to abandon her dreams of a fun filled season of coming-of-age parties and husband hunting. With stiff resolution, she set out to search for a way to help her mother put food in their mouths. Luck was on her side, and, with minimal effort or

strife, she'd managed to secure a job selling meat cakes for a local pastry maker.

She'd been working for several months before things went awry. After collecting her day's supply of cakes, she'd almost made it to the area that proved most successful for selling when a half dozen sailors stumbled out of the ale house that she was forced to pass each day.

Sadly, on that particular morning before the sun had yet awoken, luck had abandoned her. She'd almost successfully slipped past the tavern when the drunken sailors caught sight of her. Even though the sun had not yet risen, and the streets were still just waking up, they dragged her into a nearby dank and dirty alley to prevent being caught while doing their dastardly deed.

She kicked, bit, and threw wild punches, but there were too many of them. They'd managed to rip her dress so that her youthful breasts were revealed. Encouraged by the sight of her rose tipped delights, they muffled her screams with their filthy hands.

They'd pinned her thrashing body firmly on the ground with the intention of each of them having a turn with her when Rowan swooped down upon them. What occurred next happened so fast that Cora could barely believe her eyes.

This tall, well-dressed gentleman was so slender in comparison to her attackers that he looked as if one of those burly sailors could have blown him over with his foul-smelling breath. Even so, he wasted no time in pulling her

assailants off her with rapid speed. One by one, he heaved them with such might that they landed in the icy bay.

He did this with all but one.

The last drunken sailor was so engrossed in getting between her legs that he'd paid no mind to the battle between his comrades and Rowan. As a result, he'd almost succeeded in penetrating her by the time her savior grabbed him by his neck and lifted him high above her.

Outraged at being prevented from the sensation of power from forcing himself on an innocent while reveling in the sensation of release in her virgin womanhood and humiliated over being forced to suffer his feet dangling in the air, the large, burley sailor bellowed curses while throwing powerful punches at her rescuer. One blow managed to land so hard on Rowan's jaw that his head swung back while a loud crack filled the air.

Suddenly, her rescuer's brown-black eyes turned a bright yellowish orange as long, powerful looking fangs dropped from what had originally appeared to be a normal looking mouth. With a loud growl, he secured his set of ivory colored impalers deep into the sailor's thick, weathered neck.

His victim's body was suddenly paralyzed. All he could do was to howl with agony and fear until Rowan drained every drop of blood from him. Then, he tossed her attacker's lifeless body into the bay amidst his wide-eyed

companions who were treading water while wearing expressions of terror.

Cora watched in stunned silence as the well-dressed gentleman casually pulled a linen handkerchief from an inside breast pocket and cleaned the blood from his mouth and chin. Then, after tucking it back in place, he offered his hand to her.

She timidly took it.

With trembling body, she allowed him to pull her to her feet.

“You have no need to fear me, child,” he cooed. “I mean you no harm.”

“You drank his blood,” she timidly whispered.

“That I did,” he said with a firm nod. Removing his cape, he wrapped it around her bare shoulders before saying, “Shall we go?”

“Where?” she asked with a shaky voice as she gratefully pulled the cape closed over her exposed breasts.

She wasn't sure if she was trembling from the adrenaline that still coursed through her veins from the trauma of her near rape or the sensation from the powerful energy that radiated from her mysterious savior. Or, perhaps it was from the shock of watching a man drained of his life's blood before her very eyes.

“I can either return you to your mother or you can come home with me,” he replied. “The choice is yours.”

She hesitated in answering. The temptation of going with this handsome and charismatic gentleman who she concluded was a real vampire was great. It was clear that he would not harm her. She feared not for herself, but worried about how her mother would survive without her assistance.

As if he'd read her thoughts, he said, "You need not worry about abandoning your duties to your family. If you come with me, I will make sure that your mother and siblings are moved into a more suitable home and cared for."

She was surprised by how safe she felt. She'd learned about vampires in fairy tales, but never considered them to be more than a fable. Discovering that the stories were based on fact was both unsettling and exciting but not frightening.

Feeling surprisingly empowered yet slightly wary of the motives for such an offer coming from such a charismatic male, she cocked her head to the side and looked at him long and hard.

"You are considerably my senior," she mused. "What do you want with me?"

She debated whether the grin he produced was one of humor or mischief as he replied, "I crave not to force you as those men were doing, if that worries you. I will never touch you in that way, dear child."

"Never?" she said with a hint of mild dismay.

She had no idea of this vampire's true age, but it was clear that, when he was turned, he was much older than the young men she'd considered for husbands. Even so, she

found him dangerously sexy and attractive. Vampire or not, this was the first man who'd affected her in such a way. The thought of him never wanting her was practically devastating.

She forced herself to move past the acute attraction that she had for him and the disappointment that it wasn't reciprocated and focused on the fact that he'd drained the blood of her attacker before her very eyes. What if he had a change of heart and decided to do that to her?

Even with such a possibility looming over her, she took only a moment to decide to take him up on his offer. Whatever it was that awaited her with him, it couldn't have been worse than the life she'd been forced into after her father's death.

Now, two centuries later, she was a grown woman who, to her surprise and extreme disappointment, still hadn't been taken to his bed. Not only that, but he'd refrained from turning her. She'd been kept alive by tiny weekly doses of his blood, but never made vampire no matter how much or how often she begged for it in hopes that he'd then make her his mate.

"He is no good for service. Are you going to turn him?" she asked as she watched her vampire hero thoroughly inspect Jasper's condition.

"It is probable," Rowan mused as he dropped his impalers and pierced the end of his finger with its tip. Holding it to Jasper's lips, he forced a few drops into his

mouth. “I imagine that it will take a few days of nurturing before he recovers enough for me to realize what can be done with him.”

“Will you give him your blood each day?” she asked with concern.

Rowan nodded as he said, “It is required for his recovery.”

“He is remarkably close to death. He will turn before he heals. Will he not?” she jealously asked.

Rowan’s dark eyes settled on his beautiful ward with strained patience.

Heaving a sigh, he emphatically said, “Whether he does or does not has no reflection on your situation, my dear. It would be a help for his healing if he did, as it would speed up the process. He is taking a goodly amount of time to recover.” As an afterthought, he added, “Jealousy does not become you.”

Her jaw involuntarily dropped as she struggled for a response. Still tongue-tied and embarrassed at being chastised for her obvious emotions, she watched in silence as her benefactor strode from the room.