

Night Of The Ghouls

by Kevin Army

The following is a true story. Though it happened 35 years ago, it happened last night too. Everyday a new convert is welcome, a new tapestry begun. A new hunger is born.

Eric went for a walk. It was Oct 30, and he still had no idea for a costume. It took a block before he noticed the lights were all out. Shellmound street was faded and hard to see.

He entered the park where he liked to do his thinking. Shapes drifted in and out of his vision, he felt watched. Sitting on a bench he added up the sum of his 42 years, he didn't amount to much. A growing emptiness inside.

He saw a gray figure circle and hover. There was a stone chill, it entered through his bones and froze into his soul. His heart was racing.

"Do you go to church?" the figure asked in a quiet, stroking voice.

"No. Why?"

"Oh, no reason. Some say it's a form of protection. Others claim it saves them from themselves."

"Do you think I need saving?"

"It is possible. Have a good night."

The figure quietly left, almost floating. Eric shut his eyes, he couldn't remember a face.

Two more figures approached. One was almost formless, the other had a hooded robe. Everything was blurred and misty. The figures moved closer. Eric got up to leave. They pushed him back down.

More converged upon him. They gnawed at his feet, they pulled at his hands. It didn't hurt, and he was unharmed.

"Do you feel the hunger?"

Eric just closed his eyes. He submitted. An inner longing of unspoken chaos ran through his veins. He rose, and they held their hands upon him. He saw an ugliness inside their eyes, he shook a bit. Then, something happened. He crossed over to somewhere he had always feared.

He was filled with unshakeable longing. He felt older, gray and desperate. An internal clock reset itself, and he began to wander through the park, toward the water. He jumped in, and returned, half himself, half something else.

He knew he needed no costume anymore.

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At church, he felt a bit uneasy. He had been going for 6 months now, and today he was submitting to become a member. He knew his whole life would change. As he was lowered into the fake holy water, he felt the grayness return. It had been gone for months now.

He returned to his seat. Flames were welling inside. His eyes saw the ghouls again, here in this church. The alter and pews melted into earth and flesh. A nightmare of pain danced about his skin. The church members were laughing.

And like that he blew them all away.

Suddenly, he was back in the park. It was night, but he could see everything. He stood with his fellows. A man was sitting on the bench. *It was Eric.* He felt parched, hollowed out inside. The chaos of desire spoke to him. *This is your flesh. What will you do?*

"I shall offer protection."

Eric sat down next to himself. He held his own hand. "I'm sorry for who we are."

"What do you mean?"

"We will never fit in. *We have the hunger.* I gave it to you."

They both levitated. The other ghouls watched, naked and aroused.

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Some months later, a jogger stopped to relieve himself behind a tree, next to the highway. He found the body. He was mesmerized and felt mortal and alone. He called it in. It didn't make the papers, but the city cut the undergrowth away.

Today, the cars drive by, and no-one knows.

The chaos of the hunger. The church of forgiveness. The burning of the flesh. And the wicked smell of it all. Dancing lightly, there in the water. Hidden in oneself, crossing through the Solemnity of All

Saints Day, in a commemoration of the changing souls of self and desire.

