

# Penultimate Vampirekiller for 2024

*by strannikov*

When your luck splits in two: d'you have twice as much or half as much? That's something he never got around to asking Orinoco, but had the question even occurred to him to ask of Sergeant Dill, he wouldn't have asked anyway or likely would have received no sensible response for his trouble. The two stood in wait for their prey to emerge from the alley, the sewer cover had been welded shut and a fresh dead cat had been hurled close to the alley's entrance as bait.

"Nah, I don't mind takin' 'em down first, the new ones, anyway, they all smell hideous but the 'newly converted', you know, aren't nearly as ripe as some old moldy dry-bog vampire, they just exhale their stink all the time! Stinkin' vampires, death to all of 'em, them and their plague-festerin' rats. But the new ones, I don't mind takin' 'em down before gettin' rid of 'em. —But you'll never get that smell off o' you if you use only one condom, I'm here to tell you . . ."

Orinoco had somewhat carelessly, somehow thoughtlessly left herself susceptible to vampiric visitations, which began only a few months prior to her untimely subway accident. Once she woke up and clawed her way to the surface (in Jersey! Someone would pay!) barely an hour before sunrise six weeks later, she was in an atypically snarling mood. By the time she emerged from her grave, she knew in the main what she was facing. Never once in her life had she tolerated dirt under her nails, no negligence in this department had once overtaken her, no quarter-hour during waking hours had ever passed from the time she was seven without her careful examination of her nails and her dutiful care to wipe or scrape or wash them clean of any offending mote, any unsightly

smudge; but as she broke loose to the surface, Orinoco knew with spine-snapping vitriol that she had gobs of grit and black dirt caked thick under her nails, all of them, thumbnails too, and nothing, nothing handy to even begin scraping them clean with! She couldn't use her burial attire, her clothes were now just as miserably muddy as her fingernails. A deep sinkhole of rage accompanied her out of her empty grave, she could feel rage upon irate apoplexy sinking into the center of her chest until she finally broke the last damp clods of earth loose; then instantly, self-preservation wiped her mind clean of her complete disgust for the reeking dirt she'd just spent six weeks wading through. Orinoco looked around and around, keeping a steady guard eyeing the perimeter round and round, interrogating her unfamiliar surroundings sharply, watching for the approach of anyone who might try to walk up suddenly to look inside her. (Face it: vampires always have some kind of vacancy lurking within, some metaphysical absence, some empty chamber of heart, some barren recess of soul, which the uninitiated so often take as a sign of vulnerable charm and which routinely favorably impresses the stupid, the gullible, and the unwise for whom the vampire's appeal is somehow magically doubled, with the enhancement of whatever physical attributes endure. —But a stinking vampire, I really don't care what she's wearing, you think I'm impressed with the cut of her clothes? It's a tailored shroud as far as I'm concerned, she and her moldy skin can return whence they came, sooner usually being far preferable to later. I mean, who cares? So she wears silk blouses, she's still a stinking corpse! I refuse to be favorably impressed with a vampire's cut of clothes, no, I refuse!)

He and Orinoco met in a cemetery outside of Oughton a month later. His resumed familiarity with garlic pasta over the past month had been just enough so that his olfactory mechanism didn't clue in to Orinoco's dead pheromones the first couple of weeks they began seeing each other, and she kept her distance from him while his garlic potency diminished over the following two weeks. In the meanwhile Orinoco—her nails long since cleansed underneath but

now painted in the darkest black cherry possible—had exercised the good sense to rely on thin even coats of sweet-scent morticians' wax to impart a semblance of freshness, pots of heavy black coffee each night to abate her abattoir breath, and incessant cigarettes to keep her lips warm.

One week later he had to decapitate her, in the alley behind the Variety Café, she was getting too hungry to handle one night longer. She'd've been a gas to have around if she hadn't already been dead, but that vampire shit is no solution, no no and no. His genuine fondness for her led him to try to keep her head, he took it to the cabin out on the farm in Pennsylvania and set it on the window-ledge overlooking the dining table from the kitchen. The thin coat of morticians' wax she'd applied so skillfully seemed to keep everything fragrant and in place for the first few days, but barely by mid-week, of course, he had no choice left, but he had really gotten to see her potential in the scant month he'd known her. With his own gloved hands he tossed what was left of her head into the posthole he'd excavated in the woods six or eight weeks earlier. Then he tipped over the gas can he'd set there that afternoon with his left foot, watching its contents drain down the hole before dropping in his soiled gloves. Kicking the empty can away in the dark, he arched back from the hole to strike a kitchen match which fell in with a sudden whoosh! and a crisp crackling from within. As an afterthought, gazing at the burning hole and sighing needlessly about what might have been but what couldn't have been owing to her status as vampire, he struck another match which he also disposed of in the burning hole, giving his lungs time to enjoy the fragrance of an unfiltered Camel on his stroll back to the cabin.

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