



BEYOND THE PALE

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DEATH WARMED OVER

~

by Rachel Caine

I hate raising the dead on a work night.

My boss Sam Twist knows that, and so it was a surprise when I got the email on a Monday, telling me he would need a full resurrection on Thursday.

“Short turnaround, genius,” I muttered. It took days to brew the necessary potions, and I’d have to set aside the entire Thursday from dusk until dawn for the resurrection itself. Not good, because I knew I couldn’t exactly blow off Friday. I had meetings at the day job.

Sam, who ran the local booking service for witches, was usually somewhat sympathetic to my day job/night job balancing act, mostly because I was the best resurrection witch he had—not that being the best in the business exactly pays the bills. It was a little like being the best piccolo player in the orchestra—it took skill, and specialty, and not a lot of people could do it, but it didn’t exactly present a lot of major money-making opportunities.

Then again, at least resurrections were a fairly steady business. Some of the other types of witches—and we were all very specialized—got a whole lot less. It was a funny thing, but so far as I could tell, there had never been witches who could do what the folklore claimed; those of us who were real worked with potions, not words. We couldn’t sling spells and lightning. Our jobs—whatever our particular focus—took time and patience, not to mention a high tolerance for nasty ingredients.

I contemplated Sam's message. If I'd wanted to, I *could* have turned down the job—I wasn't hurting for money at the moment. Still. There was something in the terse way he'd phrased it that made me wonder.

So was I taking the job, or not? If I said yes, prep needed to start immediately after work. Part of my mind ran through the things I was going to need, and matched it against the mental stock list I always kept in my brain. The bowls were clean and ready, I'd put them through the dishwasher and a good ritual scrub with sacred herbs just a week ago. I'd need to put a fresh blessing on the athame. I had most of the other things—rock salt, sulphur, attar of roses, ambergris, and a whole bunch of slimier ingredients. I might be running low on bottled semen, but the truth was, you could always get more of that.

I fidgeted in my chair as I stared at the message. Sam wasn't telling me much—just timing and a dollar amount, which while considerable wasn't enough to pay my mortgage. On their own, my fingers typed my reply. *I might be interested. Who's the client?*

I rarely asked, because most of the time that fell under need-to-know, and I didn't. So long as the client paid Sam, and Sam paid me, we were all good. But this time—this time I felt like it was worth the question.

I went back to my regular work—tonight, that meant straightening out a worksheet the experts in accounting had completely trashed—and was a little surprised when Sam's emailed reply came so quickly. Then again, it was a short answer.

P.D. Police Department.

My hackles went way up. The police didn't part with their money willingly for resurrections. The testimony of the resurrected had been thrown out as inadmissible five years ago, and the land-office rush for witches to bring back the dead had dried up just as fast. Some of the richer cities still managed one or two resurrections a year for particularly cold cases, just to generate leads, but I hadn't seen one in Austin for a while.

So if the Thin Blue Line was knocking, something was up, and it was big. Very big.

Why? I wrote back, and hit SEND.

It didn't take long to get my answer. Four minutes, to be exact, give or take a few seconds, until my cheery little *you have mail* chime dinged.

They need a disposable, he wrote, and this time, I sat all the way back in my chair. And rolled my chair back from the computer. *Tried to talk them out of it. Told them you wouldn't want in. You can pass on it, H.*

In technical terms, a disposable is a long-term resurrection—counterintuitive, but that’s police parlance for you. Most resurrections last no more than a few minutes, maybe an hour—you really don’t need that much time to do whatever needs to be done. It’s mainly finding out the name of their killer, or where they stashed the family silver, or where the bodies are buried if your deceased soul is the one who buried them in the first place. Holding them longer is brutally hard, and gets harder the longer it goes on. When a police department requests a long-term resurrection, it’s almost always specific—there’s a situation that requires a particular person to resolve, or a particular skill. When the cops ask for a disposable resurrection, well, you know it’s going to be bad.

I knew it better than anyone.

I typed my reply back in words as terse as Sam’s had been to me. *Bet your ass I’m passing.*

I hit send, feeling only a little wistful twinge of regret at all that virtual money disappearing from my future, and began to shut my computer down.

I’d just picked up my purse when my cell phone rang, and I wasn’t too surprised when the screen’s display told me it was Sam.

“Hey,” I said, shouldered my bag, and headed for the elevators. “Don’t try to talk me out of it. I don’t do disposables. Not anymore.”

“I know that,” Sam said. He had a deep, smoky voice, the kind that implied a cigarette-and-whiskey lifestyle. I didn’t know that for sure; for all I knew, Sam might have lived prim as a preacher. Sam and I didn’t exactly hang out; he kept himself to himself, mostly. “Not trying to talk you out of it, H., believe me. I’m glad you turned it down.”

“Shut up,” said a third voice, male, grim, and completely unfamiliar.

“Who the hell is *that*?” I blurted. “Sam—”

“Detective Daniel Prieto.”

“Sam, you *conferenced me*?” He’d never put me on the spot before.

“Hey, they’re the cops. I got no choice!”

“Hear me out.” Prieto’s voice rode right over Sam’s. “I’m told you’re the best there is, and I need the best. Besides, you have a prior relationship with the—subject.”

My mouth dried up, and I stopped in mid-stride to lean against the wall. A few coworkers passed me and gave me curious looks; I couldn’t imagine what was on my face, but it must have been both alarming and offputting. Nobody stopped. I tried to speak, but nothing was coming out of my mouth.

“Holly? You there?” That was Sam. I could still hear Prieto breathing.

“Yeah,” I finally managed to say. “Who?” Not that there was really much of a question. I only had a *relationship* with one dead man. He was the only disposable I’d ever brought back.

And Prieto, right on cue, said, “Andrew Toland.”

I felt hot and sick, and I needed to sit down. Never a chair around when you need one. I continued walking, slowly, one shoulder gliding against the wall for balance. “Sam, you can’t agree to this. You can’t let them do it again. Not to him.”

“What can I say? I’m just the dispatcher, H. You don’t want to take it on, that’s just fine.” The words sounded apologetic, but Sam didn’t do empathy. None of us did. It didn’t serve us well, in this line of work.

Cops had the same problem. “I have to tell you, if you don’t agree, we’re still bringing him back. It’ll just be somebody else running him. You said this Carlotta is next on the list, right, Mr. Twist? She’s the one who recommended this particular guy be brought back, right?”

“*Lottie?*” I blurted it out before I could stop myself. *No. Oh, no.* Carlotta Flores and I went back a long time, and not one minute of it was pleasant. In resurrections, we prided ourselves on detachment, but Lottie took pleasure in the pain that her resurrected souls felt; she *enjoyed* keeping them chained into their flesh. I’d reported her dozens of times to the review board, but there was never any real evidence. Only my own word for what I’d seen.

The dead can’t testify.

It was her fondest wish to run a disposable, and it was the very last thing she should ever do. *God, no.* The idea of letting her handle Andrew’s resurrection was more than I could take.

Detective Prieto somehow knew that, but then again, I supposed he’d done his homework. He’d probably gotten it from Sam, the chatty bastard.

“That a yes, Miss Caldwell?” Prieto asked. Sam was distinctly silent.

“Yes,” I gritted out. “Dammit to hell.”

“Right. Let’s get to business. City morgue, Thursday at dusk, you know the drill. Come loaded, H.” Sam was back to brisk and rough again, his brief moment of empathy blown away like feathers in a hurricane.

“Send me the details.” I sounded resigned. I didn’t feel resigned. I felt manipulated, defeated, and enraged.

“Will do,” Sam said. I heard a click. Detective Prieto had signed off without bothering to say goodbye. “Better you than Lottie, I guess. Though

look, if you just don't show up, what're they going to do? Arrest you?"

"They'll let Lottie do it instead. You know I can't let that happen, Sam."

"Kind of guessed, yeah."

"Why *him*? God, Sam—"

"Don't know. Lottie had some kind of chat with Prieto, next thing I know, he's telling me it's Toland he needs. Maybe Lottie told him about how tough the son of a bitch was. Is."

Maybe Lottie just wanted to yank my chain. Equally possible.

"Holly? Sorry about—"

"Yeah. Whatever. See you." I folded up the phone. I couldn't take any more of Sam's vaguely false apology. He knew my agreement was final. You don't become a witch making false promises. The stakes are far too high.

I must have punched the elevator buttons properly, because next thing I knew I was in the lobby, walking toward the parking garage. I couldn't feel my feet, and wherever my head was, it wasn't a good place. I went to the car on autopilot, got inside, and bent over to rest my aching, sweating forehead on the steering wheel.

My name is Holly Anne Caldwell, and I'm a licensed seventh-generation witch, with a specialty in raising the dead.

And I wished, right at this moment, that I was one of them.

~

I buried myself deep in prep work. It took up most of my nights, and I sleepwalked through my day job until Thursday.

Late Thursday afternoon, I went to raise the dead.

I knew the way to the morgue all too well. I had a parking pass, and the guard at the door knew me by sight. He still checked me against the list and opened up my heavy case to check the contents. All above board, along with my certification papers from the State of Texas. I'd dressed professionally—a nice dark suit, very funeral home-friendly, with sensibly heeled shoes. Moderate makeup. Light perfume.

It helps, because I do run into the odd person who still believes witches come with green faces, cackling, and cauldrons.

The guard hooked me up with a temporary ID badge and escorted me back to the—excuse the phrase—guts of the morgue, which always reminded me of a large-scale industrial kitchen, with all the chrome work surfaces and sharp instruments neatly arrayed on racks. Once there, he checked with the coroner's assistant, then backtracked me to a room that was normally used for family viewings. Nobody had bothered to dress it out

for this occasion, so it had a certain creepy sterility to it that unsettled me.

Detective Prieto unsettled me, too. He was about my father's age, stern and possessed of one stony expression as far as I could tell. He didn't like me, and he didn't like what he was doing. He gave me the paperwork, I read and signed, and he checked all of my credentials again before leaving the room to standing in the viewing area.

I pulled the sheet back on the corpse and there, lying pale and still in front of me, was Andrew Toland.

He looked damn good, for having been born in 1843, and especially since he'd died in 1875. By rights, I should have been looking at a skeleton, not a fresh corpse—like last time we'd been through this, another witch had produced a copy from his genetic template. It was known as a homunculus, in the trade. How such things were made was a closely guarded secret, although I knew the body would contain some kind of tissue or bone from the original corpse to hold the link. I wouldn't have known how to begin to conduct that kind of operation, but then again, the witch who'd made the mortal clay couldn't have breathed life into it, either.

Specialists.

I'd been here before, in this very room, with Andrew. One year ago, almost to the day—my first disposable. I'd been nervous, and excited, and thrilled at the prospect of meeting the man who'd made history. I hadn't been prepared, then, for the idea that I would *like* him.

And that I would mourn him when it was time to let go.

I didn't want to do this. It had hurt too much, been too intimate. I wanted to walk away from all of it... but if I did, someone else would be standing here within the hour. Someone like Lottie, who would turn something wonderful into something horrible.

I had no choice.

Andrew Toland looked peaceful, frozen at that moment of death. He no longer had the wounds that had killed him; the last witch had repaired that as part of the reconstruction. He was just... dead. All I had to do was bring him back.

And once again, I had to wonder: *why him?* Lottie had wanted him, specifically. It could have just been her one-two punch of hating me and wanting the prestige of running a disposable, but I couldn't believe that. There were easier ways to hurt me, and Andrew Toland was nobody she'd want to mess with. She knew his story, just as I did.

Andrew had lived a hard, interesting life, and he'd earned himself a

reputation, in his thirty-two short years, of being one of the toughest men of a rough and ready period of American history. A resurrection witch, like me, he'd gone down fighting during one of the worst zombie wars ever conducted in the Southwest. From time to time, a resurrectionist goes bad, and when that happens, the results are massively dangerous. Get three or four of the bad ones together, and you have the makings of an unstoppable army of the dead.

Andrew Toland had gone up against that, and earned himself a broken neck. Then, by prior agreement with his friends, he'd had himself resurrected to fight again.

He'd won. Most of his allies had been taken out, and in the end he'd carried on by himself—a gritty two-week campaign of attrition against the toughest opponents imaginable. And even when his resurrection witch had been killed in the last critical moments, he'd still managed to stay alive long enough to take out the enemy. It had been unheard of then, and it was still without parallel, and in the textbooks apprentices studied, he was an entire chapter all his own.

You just don't get badder-assed than that.

I knew Prieto was watching, and the last thing I needed was to lose my objectivity at a time like this. I put all my feelings away in a lockbox, bent down, and opened Andrew Toland's death-filmed eyes.

I parted his clay-cold lips and poured in the first, massive dose of the potion. It pooled in his mouth, liquid silver, and then I performed the part that nobody else could do.

I kissed him, very gently, on the lips, and completed the last step of the preset spell. I felt a line of power spooling out of me, traveling through the dark and connecting, with a jolting snap of power, with the spirit of Andrew Toland.

The last time I'd done this, Andrew's power and strength had overwhelmed me. This time, it felt oddly soothing. Like being folded in warmth and light.

Andrew coughed, swallowed, and blinked. His skin remained pasty white for a few seconds. The cataracts on his eyes faded first, fainter with each blink, and then his skin took on color.

He wasn't back, but he was breathing.

I took his hands and poured more power into him, raw and wild. It was sweaty work, bringing back the dead, and it required me to be vulnerable in ways most witches weren't willing to attempt. I had to touch his soul, and

let him touch mine. I had to not just taste death, but drink it down—accept it as a lover.

He gasped when I made contact, and the shine in his eyes shifted from mere existence to real life. Real consciousness.

I heard the first slow thud of his heartbeat, then the second. Then the rhythm falling into place.

And despite all the drugs cushioning his fall, I saw the agony hit him—I felt it, too, dim but strong, through our link, and had to breathe deeply to control the pain. He didn't scream. Some did, but not Andrew; he hadn't screamed when I'd revived him last year, either. His hands tightened on mine, brutally strong, and I tried not to wince. *It'll pass*, I told myself. *Breathe. Breathe, dammit.*

I was doing fine until he met my eyes, and he whispered, "Holly. Wasn't it finished? Didn't we get him?"

Holy hell. He remembered.

For a frozen second I couldn't think what to say, but training came back to me in a rush. *Establish control. Guide the dialogue.*

"Andrew," I said, and my voice was low and gentle and soothing, entirely steady. "Andrew Toland. Do you hear me?"

He nodded. He hadn't blinked since focusing on me.

"I need you to sit up now," I said. "Can you do that?"

He could, and he did. He swung his legs over the edge of the cold morgue table and came upright, and I stopped him long enough to adjust the sheet over his lap. I wasn't usually so fussy, but Andrew had thrown me off; I couldn't see him as a tool. He was a man, a living, vital *man*.

He hadn't looked away at all from my face. There was something very unusual about him. I'd brought back hundreds of dead, and I couldn't think of a single one who'd begun the process with a question like that. It takes time for the personality to reassert itself, for memories to come clear.

He had been crystal-clear from the moment our souls had touched.

"Holly, you must tell me the truth," Andrew said. "Did we kill that bastard?"

How could he possibly *remember who I was*? I'd had one other soul I'd brought back twice, the CEO of a major corporation who'd forgotten to pass along the passwords to some vital corporate accounts. I'd had to do it twice because the Board of Directors wanted to be sure they had everything from him, and that man, young and fit as he'd been, hadn't recognized me at all. Hadn't remembered a thing from one resurrection to the next.

“Holly!” His tone was sharp with concern. *He* was concerned. About *me*. I focused from about a thousand miles away and realized that he was frowning, totally focused on me. “Can you hear me?”

I laughed. I couldn’t help it. It came out a strained, strangled gasp. “Yes,” I managed to say. “I hear you, Andrew. We stopped him.”

“Then I expect there’s a tale to be told about why I’m back here.” He released me from his stare to turn it on the room around us. “Well, this place don’t get any prettier.”

He remembered that, too? Unbelievable. “How do you feel?”

“Feel?” His gaze came back to me, electric and warm, and his lips curved into a smile. “Alive would say it fine. But I’m not alive, I know that. You’ve brought me back again. Why?”

I turned away to pick up a stack of clothes from the pile nearby. Hospital scrubs for now, nothing fancy. I handed them to him, and he frowned down at them for a few seconds.

“Clothes,” I said. It was unnecessary; he clearly knew what they were, but I was rattled. I was all too aware of Detective Prieto at the viewing window, seeing me lose my cool.

That earned me another fey smile from Andrew. He had a nice face—a little sharp, with a pointed chin. In certain lights, in certain moods, he would look sinister, except for the humor in his eyes. “I know we’re well acquainted, but a bit of privacy...?”

I turned my back. I heard the faint sound of his bare feet slapping the cold floor as he stood, and the rustle of fabric moving over skin.

He was way, way too fast. Too well adjusted, for any newly revived corpse. He had *continuity*, and that meant he remembered all the trauma of the first resurrection.

“How long?” he asked. “How long have I been away this time?”

I cast a look over my shoulder, and found he was adjusting the fit of the pants on his hips. Except for the slight, indefinable distance in his eyes, he could have been any hospital attendant. He looked completely... alive.

“About a year,” I said. “Andrew—”

“Feels like yesterday,” he said, and looked down at his hands. He flexed them, frowning. “Awful strange, not knowing that.”

“We have work for you,” I said. I was sticking to my script, even though Andrew had lost his. “I’ll help you understand what you need to do. How do you feel?”

“Holly, my sweet, I’m annoyed you’re not listening to how I feel.” He

frowned, and I was right, he could look menacing. “Which shouldn’t be true, I think. No corpse revives so quickly as to be annoyed over such minor things.” Andrew should know. He’d been a better witch than I ever could be.

“You’re no ordinary person,” I said. My heart was pounding, my palms were sweating, but I sounded as cool and soothing as any clinical practitioner. “Are you in any pain?”

“No.”

“None at all?”

“Miss Holly, I’ve been in your shoes.” His gaze moved to focus on them for a second, smiling. “Never ones so dainty, maybe. But there’s no need to treat me like an invalid. I’ll let you know when I start feeling it.”

I stared at him. He stared back, challenge in those bright blue eyes. He was an average looking guy in a lot of ways—pleasant features, except for that sharp, aggressive chin; sandy brown hair that had grown into a style that seemed both modern and antique—shaggy, certainly. He had a sharp ridge and twist to his nose, as if he’d broken it early in life.

I tried to get my mind back to business. “If you start feeling anxious or drifting, tell me. I don’t know what the police need you for, or how long it will take, but you need to have a dose—”

“Each hour, yes, Miss Holly. I’m the one who wrote up the damn rules. Police, you say?” That seemed to give him pause for thought. “Why us, again?” *Us*, not just him. Andrew assumed instantly that we were a team.

I didn’t want to be a team. It had hurt so much the last time around, I couldn’t imagine how bad it would be this time, when I knew him. When I cared.

I opted for neutral topics. “Detective Prieto is waiting to brief us.”

Detective Prieto entered the room, and both of us turned to look at him. “Mr. Toland,” he said, and nodded stiffly. “I won’t say thanks, since I know you didn’t really have a choice in coming... here.” Nice way to avoid the whole death/life conundrum. “But I’m giving you a choice for the job. If you don’t want to do it, we’ll end this right now.”

Andrew had lost his smile. His eyes were narrowed, hard-focused. That was how he looked when he fought, I thought. And yes, he could be intimidating.

“It’s no small matter if you picked me,” he said. “I slept a hundred and thirty some-odd years before Miss Holly here brought me back the first time, and I’ll allow as how that job was worth the trouble. I expect this

one's just as raw.”

“Yes,” Prieto said. Now that he was face to face with the soul he was about to send into torment, possibly horrible death, he seemed deeply uncomfortable. “I need you to help us save lives.”

“Didn’t expect you brought me back for a pony ride, mister. Fine. I’ll do it.”

“Andrew,” I said quietly. “Hear him out before you agree to anything.”

“Don’t need to. Like I said, I wouldn’t be back here if it wasn’t bad.”

“All right,” Prieto said. “We have a credible terrorist threat against a protected group of individuals here in Austin. Four are already missing, and we’ve got intel about the next one to be abducted. We think these people are being killed, but we haven’t found remains yet.”

Andrew studied him for a moment in silence, then said, “I understood little of that, ‘cept you have four missing and some dead. I ain’t equipped to solve your crimes, so I don’t think that’s what you need me for, is it?”

“We need you to protect one of the people on the list of potential victims.”

“Wait a minute!” I blurted, horrified. The resurrected—even disposables—weren’t bodyguards, they were weapons—point them at a clearly defined objective, and let them go achieve it no matter what the damage. Disposables didn’t have a self-preservation instinct, so they were perfect for sending in on suicide runs.

Bodyguarding was completely different. For one thing, it was likely to be long-term, much longer than a disposable ever lasted. Days. Weeks. Months, even. “Wait a minute,” I repeated. My voice was loud enough to ring off the morgue steel. “What the hell? Since when did the resurrected join the force? This is something any cop in Kevlar could do, right?”

Prieto gave me another look. This one was blank and cool. “We’ve tried that,” he said. “Didn’t go so well, which is why we decided to go with somebody with nothing to lose, like your friend here. Our intel says the attack’s going to come in the next few days. Fact is, when we booked the job in the first place, we were planning to protect a completely different person. While you’ve been *preparing* we lost two more of the targets, *and* the teams of cops assigned for protection. So I don’t give a shit about your problems, lady. I lost four of my own police officers protecting these—people. Least you can do is your job.”

“But you can’t—”

Andy interrupted me. “Who’d I be protecting?”

Prieto had been waiting for the question, and he seemed to take a special kind of pleasure in saying, “It’s her. Holly Anne Caldwell. These fucking freaks are taking out witches.”

~

We left the viewing room to go down the hall to a small, airless conference room, where Prieto had set up shop for the night. He had folders.

He had a *lot* of folders.

I knew every one of the victims. Shayle Gallagher had been the first—he’d been taken right out of his flower shop (like me, he only moonlighted at the resurrection business), and there had been signs of a vicious struggle. Could have been robbery or a hate crime, so that hadn’t raised too many unusual flags at first, especially with no body found.

Two weeks ago, though, Harrison Wright had failed to show up to work at his medical practice, and his multi-million dollar estate showed signs of the same brutal attack as at Gallagher’s store.

Lottie Flores had been the next victim, and she’d disappeared the day after I’d taken the case from Sam.

“We kept it out of the news,” Prieto said. “Wasn’t easy. Oh, and Sam agreed we shouldn’t interrupt you while you were working.”

Sam agreed? I was going to have a talk with Sam. One involving a punch in the mouth.

“You said there were dead peace officers,” Andy said. Prieto nodded.

“My officers had missed a scheduled check-in. When backup arrived, their car was empty. They were found in the Flores house.”

“Why not bring one of them back, find out just what went on?”

Prieto looked grim. “We thought about it, but the families wouldn’t sign off, and by then, we were knee-deep in missing resurrection witches. Didn’t think we should waste the time trying to convince anybody.”

I looked at the photos of the two dead police officers, and felt my stomach twist. They’d been beaten to death. That wasn’t easy to do with any officer, but you could at least see how the five-foot-five, petite woman could have been overpowered. Not her partner, six-foot-four and big enough to intimidate pretty much anyone. He looked like he chewed nails as vitamins.

“Neither one got a shot off,” Prieto said. “No sign of Flores in the house, but we found blood and the same smash-up indicating a struggle. Blood in the bedroom turned out to be hers.”

Lottie's house was neatly kept. Most of the damage was confined to her bedroom—bed pulled sideways, covers wrenched half off, blood smeared on the sheets and floor, leading down the hall. She'd been dragged out.

I hated Lottie. I had good reason; I'd been her apprentice for three resurrections, before I'd transferred to Marvin Jones, my permanent instructor. I'd hated every filthy second of being around Lottie and watching her work. I'd lodged a complaint against her with the Board of Review; nothing had come of it, of course. There weren't so many resurrection witches running around that they could afford to turf one just because she was—let's face it—a psychopath.

Even with all that, it still made me cringe to think about what that had been like... and what might still be happening to her.

The next file was even worse, because I had no reason at all to dislike Monica Heitmeyer; she was a nice older lady specializing, like me and Lottie, in resurrections, but she mainly did family gigs, reconciling loved ones. As far as I knew, she'd never done any work with the police. She was in the feel-good business.

Two more dead officers at her house, these two killed in the back yard. One had a snapped neck. The other looked like a sack of raw meat. Someone had used him for punching practice. Monica, like Lottie, was missing, but she'd left behind a lot of blood.

Andrew hadn't said anything. His eyes had gone dark and cold, and whatever he was thinking, he kept it to himself.

"What makes you think I'm next on the list?" I asked.

"Not a hell of a lot of witches in your line of work in Austin," Prieto said. "Most of them are already gone. It's down to you and the other one."

"Annika," I said. "Annika Berwick." I knew her slightly, not well enough to have much of a feeling for how well she'd handle something like this. Annika was frail, nearly seventy, a sweet old grandmother of a witch who'd informally retired from practice last year. "You're protecting her, right?"

"Sure they are," Andy said softly. His gaze hadn't left Prieto at all. "They leave you open, you're the next target. That the idea, Detective? Holly's your damn stalking horse."

Prieto didn't answer. The truth was that he probably had strike teams ready to roll, and full surveillance, but he wanted it to look like he wasn't coming anywhere near us.

He wanted everyone to think that we were all on our own.

“Have you talked to Annika?”

Prieto nodded. “She’s good.”

I didn’t know about Annika, but I knew how I felt about it, and *good* didn’t exactly ring true. I desperately needed a shower and a gallon of Ben & Jerry’s ice cream to deal with this.

All of this explained why the Police Department was willing to spend the exorbitant cost to have Andrew Toland brought back. Resurrection witches were a rare breed, and valuable. Six in a city of more than 600,000; there were fewer in Dallas, only a couple hanging tough against a storm of fundamentalist persecution. Austin remained the home of the weird.

Didn’t feel like home, right now.

I turned to Andrew. “You don’t have to do this,” I said. “I can release you. I *should* release you. This isn’t your fight, it’s mine.”

He gave me a look that drilled right into my core. “No, it’s not. They were right to bring me into it, Holly. This is how the war starts -- put down those who might fight, and do it early. Nobody left to fight when the evil comes calling.” His blue eyes took on distance and chill. “I’ve seen it done.”

It had, in fact, been done to him. “It’s still not your problem.”

“True enough,” he said, and there came that slow, warm smile again, breaking my heart. “Still. I think you’re my problem.”

~

We didn’t speak on the drive back. I heard the jingle of the bottles in my case in the back seat; I’d been watching Andy for any sign that he needed a booster, but he seemed fine. Better than fine, actually. The spell that bound him here also bound us together; I knew I’d feel some sense from him if—when—he began to feel pain, or drift.

So far, nothing. It was like being with anyone. Any living person, that is.

“The last time,” Andy said. “I know we got the killer. What about the girl? Did I get her out?”

I shuddered. I couldn’t help it, and I couldn’t hide it. All of a sudden, the realities of it crashed down on me, and the lockbox of feelings blew open, and I was shaking like a leaf in a storm.

I dimly heard Andy asking me what was wrong, but I couldn’t tell him. I pulled the car over into a vacant parking lot, threw it into park, and stumbled out with my arms wrapped around myself for comfort. The warm, humid air didn’t help. I was shaking apart.

I heard Andy’s passenger side door slam, and quick footsteps on the gravel, and then his arms wrapped around me fast and hard. “Hush,” he

murmured, with his lips against my hair. “Hush, now, Holly. It’s not so bad as that.”

But it was, oh, it was. His question had opened up Pandora’s box, and I couldn’t keep any of it under lock and key anymore. “She—she—oh, Andy, I’m sorry—”

“She died,” he said, and pushed me back far enough that he could look into my eyes. His were dark, all pupil even under the streetlight. “Feared she would. Couldn’t get to her before he cut her. All I could do was try to get her to you before it was too late.”

My heart just broke. He remembered, but he didn’t *know*. I’d resurrected Andrew last year to deal with a witch out of Chicago who’d been on the run, who’d taken to abducting girls he fancied, killing them, and reviving them over and over for his fun.

Andy had gone in to stop the witch, and save the last girl before it was too late.

He’d accomplished part of it—the witch was dead, and Andy had made damn certain the bastard couldn’t come back. The girls he’d enslaved were gone as well.

But that last child, all of sixteen... she’d died in Andy’s arms, as he used the last of his strength to try to get her to safety. It had felt like it was all for nothing, because of that. It wasn’t—the witch wouldn’t be hurting anyone else—but it had felt hollow. Horribly empty.

I hadn’t realized until just now *why* it had felt so awful. It had been the tragedy of the girl, yes, but it had been *Andy*. Andy’s stunning courage.

I’d felt him go, and it had felt like losing someone I loved.

I burst into tears and buried my face in his hospital-style shirt. He smelled sterile, astringent, not living at all, but it didn’t matter. He felt *real*.

And I could *not* be in love with a dead man. I just could not. No matter how close we’d gotten before. No matter how good this felt just now.

Andy smoothed my hair with gentle strokes, not speaking. I felt him touch his lips gently to the top of my head.

“I remember, you know,” he said at last. “You were there all the time, Holly. You were all that kept me moving, at the last. You were the light.”

That only made me cry harder. I was thinking about him wounded and dying, struggling to save that girl. About how I’d kept him alive, alive, alive through all the pain and agony.

Until I hadn’t

It hadn’t been Andy who’d faltered... it had been me. I hadn’t been

strong enough for him, in the end.

“She was dying before I ever got to her,” he said. “And she’s peaceful now, Holly. So let it be.”

I couldn’t stop crying. His hand rubbed my back in slow, gentle circles.

“I don’t think you understand what it was like waking up today, seeing you.” His fingers touched my chin and tipped it up. “If I need to die for you, I will. But let’s not spend the time in tears.”

I could feel his heartbeat. See the fast pulse moving under his skin. I could feel our souls touching, intimate in ways that mere living people couldn’t achieve, and I understood just how deep this went between us.

I pressed my hand over his heart, feeling the strong, steady pace. “You can’t stay with me,” I said. My voice, normally so steady, sounded soft and uncertain. “We don’t get second chances, Andy.”

He smiled. “Sure we do,” he said. “What’s this, if it ain’t a second chance? Or, more proper for me, a third?”

And he kissed me. Warm lips, blood-warm, tasting of the potion that I’d given him. *Toxic*, something in me warned, but I didn’t care.

Andy’s thumbs stroked my cheekbones, and his big hands seemed so certain about what they were doing.

I was kissing a dead man, and I didn’t care a bit. I wanted to keep on kissing him until the sun burned out.

The memory of the harsh, bloodstained photographs Prieto had shown us flashed across my eyes, and I pulled free with a gasp, stepping back.

“What?” he asked. He took my hands, but didn’t try to pull me into his arms.

“It’s not safe,” I said. “We’re not safe. We need to get inside.”

Andy smiled—a real, full smile. “You think I can’t protect you, Holly?”

“I don’t want you to have to.”

He nodded out into the dark. “Ain’t the only one. Prieto sent a couple of fellas on our tail. They’re parked over there, watching us.”

I shuddered. Somehow, that made it even worse, both that there were eyes on us, and that I was putting Prieto’s men at risk just by being such an easy target. “Let’s go home.”

We got back in the car, and I broke speed limits on the way.

~

Andy was all business when we pulled into the drive. Although he’d never worked as a bodyguard, at least not that I knew of, he made me stay in the car with the motor running and the garage door open as he went into

the house and checked it out. I waited tensely, imagining every second that I would feel an echo of *something* through the bond... I'd lived through the sickening spiral of his torment and death once already, and I knew what it would feel like.

I nearly screamed when he popped up next to the car and motioned for me to get out. I closed the garage door, shut off the motor, and followed him into the house.

"Locks?" he asked. I turned them, and then set the security alarm for instant alarm. If any door or window opened, we'd know, and so would the police. My heart was hammering. I thought about Lottie, evidently surprised in her sleep. Monica, taken in the evening as she was getting ready for bed, bath water gone cold in the tub. "They come at night," I said. "Don't open any doors or windows. The alarm will go off."

"Fancy."

I smiled faintly. "Normal, these days. We live in scary times."

"Ain't nobody ever lived any other time." Andy, not content with the electronic alarm, was roaming around and testing doors and windows, engaging all locks. "You set this magic watchdog when you left today?"

"I didn't know I was being *stalked*."

Andy stopped and looked at me, hands gone still on a windowsill. "They didn't tell you." I shook my head. "Why not?"

"People all that fond of resurrection witches, back in your day?"

That earned me a full, crooked grin. "Not enough so you'd blush. Stay here, I'll check the other floor."

I watched him take the stairs, then went to the kitchen and put away the ritual pots I'd washed. I fixed myself a sandwich. Spellcasting took a lot out of me, and despite everything, I was feeling a small, significant drain of energy through the bond with Andy. Needed to keep my strength up, through the magic of carbs and protein.

I was just swallowing the last bite when Andy walked into the kitchen. "Never got to see your house last time," Andy said. He sat down at the kitchen table and looked around. "Big place. Warm. You live here all on your own? What about your family?"

"My parents and my sister live in New England. You going to tell me a woman can't live on her own?"

"I'd never dare," Andy said. "Specially not one who holds the keys to life and death. Then again, that's pretty much any woman, so I'll just keep my peace about it. Besides, I don't know your world all that much, 'cept it's

about as full of villains as the time I knew. Could be women tell men what's for now, strange as that would seem."

"Andy—"

His blue eyes stopped surveying the granite countertops and focused on me, and *now*, that packed voltage. "I'm not sorry," he said. "Stupid for a man to fall in love once he's dead, but I've done it, and there it is. But at least you know I'll do everything in my power to keep you alive, Holly Anne."

I couldn't even speak. What do you say to that? A dead man falls in love with you, and there's no chance for a future together. I knew that every minute, every *second* of this was limited. I wanted to take him straight to bed, but I didn't know—I didn't know for certain how that worked. Or even *if* it did. The subject of the sexual performance of dead men had never been included in my apprenticeship—probably deliberately. The potential for abuse of resurrections was huge, and our limits were strict. It was part of why we maintained such emotional distance.

Andy sensed my internal struggle, and he brought out his gentlest smile. It did great things to his face, put a devastating sparkle in his eyes.

I stood up, barely able to feel my legs. "I'm—going to bed. Do you want—" My throat closed up, and I had to clear it. Embarrassing. "Do you want me to make up the spare bed?"

Andy kept smiling. "No. I ain't sleeping, am I?"

He had a point. Bodyguards didn't, and neither did the dead. I felt flushed and awkward and out of control.

"Okay then," I said. "Good night."

He nodded, and watched me as I left the kitchen.

A hot shower and a pair of silk pajamas later, I retreated to my soft, lonely bed and tried to sleep. It was getting on toward the wee hours of the morning, but I didn't feel tired. I felt anxious, and achy, and relentlessly squirmy.

I could hear Andy roaming around downstairs. I wondered what he was doing—looking over my bookshelves? Examining my pictures? Getting intimate with me in ways that didn't involve climbing into bed with me?

Shut up, I told myself, when my brain started to run wild with images. *The man is dead. He's here to do a job, and then he's gone. And that's it.*

Except it wasn't, and Andy had said he loved me, and I *knew* I loved him. No getting around that. Bringing him back a second time—no, for him it was the *third* -- had been cruel, and unnecessary, and wrong, and if

I'd known what Prieto wanted him for I'd have said no even at the cost of my own life.

I didn't want Andy dying for me.

~

I'd drifted off into an uneasy half-slumber when something woke me up. I felt a tingle inside, and opened my eyes to stare at the ceiling. I knew that feeling, all too well. No chance of sleeping now.

I slipped out of bed, wrapped myself in a silk robe, and went downstairs.

Andy was standing at the windows, looking out. He didn't wait for me to ask. "I'm fine," he said.

"You're not." I'd carried my black case in from the car, and now I flipped it open and reached for the second vial of the stepped dose.

It felt light.

The bottle was empty.

I stared at it in stupefied horror for a few seconds, then dropped it back into the holder and pulled the third. The fourth.

The bottles were *all* empty. I began yanking the rest out to check. *Empty, empty, empty!*

Andy turned at the sound of my labored breathing and the rattle of glass. He frowned. "What?"

"It's not—someone sabotaged my case." *Breathe*, I told myself. *Come on. Think.* The case had been with me, and completely full, at the morgue. All the time? No. I'd set it in the corner of the viewing room and we'd both gone with Detective Prieto to look over files. The case had been left unattended. "The potions. They're gone."

Andy took a step toward me, then stopped. His blue eyes widened, just a little. "All of it?"

"Everything."

I abandoned the case and raced into the kitchen. I opened the refrigerator.

The four doses I kept on hand for emergencies were gone. I found the bottles in the trash, empty.

"Oh *Christ*," I whispered. Andy's hands touched my shoulders, and I felt him behind me, solid and real.

"It's all right," he said. "I don't need it yet."

"It's *not* all right. It takes hours to brew, and—" A terrible thought struck me. I opened the pantry where I kept all of my supplies.

Gone. I'd been cleaned out.

I felt a numb horror go through me. “There’s nothing. I can’t even get the ingredients until tomorrow morning at the earliest, then it takes all day to brew the base—”

“It’ll be all right,” Andy repeated.

I turned on him, suddenly furious. “It’s *not!* Don’t you get it? I know you’re in pain already! It’s going to get worse, Andy, and if I don’t let you go—”

His hands closed around my face. “Pain, I can handle. I ain’t leaving you alone. They’ve been here. They were in your house.”

“*Who?*”

“Somebody who knows you,” he said. “Somebody who knows what you’re afraid of.”

I was afraid of hurting him. Again.

He smoothed my hair back, and kissed me. It was soft and cool and gentle, but I sensed how much restraint it took for him to keep it that way.

“I can handle this,” he said. “I *will*. You believe me, Holly?”

I gulped and nodded convulsively. “Okay.”

I didn’t, and it wasn’t. But he wasn’t finished.

“Get dressed and pack a bag,” he said. “We’re going.”

~

No matter how tough you are, nobody takes pain well when it comes on slow and cold, with nothing to cushion it.

I kept dialing phone numbers, trying to get *somebody* on the phone who could help as we drove. Sam Twist wasn’t answering—not his phone, his cell, or his secret emergency number. I tried Annika. No answer there, either. I tried Detective Prieto, but it rang directly to his voicemail.

I thought about calling 911, but what was I going to say? *I have a dead man here who needs his medicine?*

I had no idea what to do. I could feel Andy’s pain, black and constant and growing, and I was helpless to prevent it from getting worse.

“Holly?”

I took my eyes off of the road for just a second. His lights shone silver, unreal in the dashboard lights.

“Why’d you bring me back?”

Of all the questions I’d expected, that had to be last on the list. I held his stare for a long few seconds, then blinked and focused on the road. “Lottie,” I said. “They were going to do it anyway, and they were going to let Lottie—I couldn’t let that happen. I thought maybe it would be better

for you if it was me, that's all."

"That's all."

"Yes."

"You're a liar. Pretty one, but a liar."

And he was right. I was lying not just to him, but to myself.

I loved him. I'd grown to love him during that first resurrection, and I'd lost him, and it had hurt me. Having him back was a painful barbed-wire ball of a miracle, because it contained the seeds of its own destruction.

My hand left the steering wheel and touched his, and his fingers closed warm and strong over mine.

"Where we going?" he asked.

There was only one place, really. The other witches had been abducted, dragged out without warning, which meant that their supplies would have remained intact.

I needed to make him some potion.

Lottie's house was the closest.

~

Before we left the house, I pulled a suitcase from under my bed, and took out a pair of pants, a dark shirt, underwear, shoes, and socks.

His own clothes, from the last time I'd brought him back. Somehow, I'd never been able to get rid of them. I put them on the bed, and he gave me a long, measuring look that told me he understood why I'd kept them. Why they'd been so close.

He didn't say anything. As soon as he changed into the clothes, we left.

"The cops," I said. "Are they following us?"

Andrew had shut his eyes—fighting back pain, I could feel it—but he opened them as I turned the car out of the driveway and scanned the street. "Don't see 'em," he said. "Don't mean they ain't around, though. Since we're bait in the trap, they'd like your killer to have room to breathe, seems to me."

I hoped the police would follow us, but I couldn't wait to find out. Time was running out.

On the way, I remembered to call in sick to work—not that keeping my day job was the most important thing in my world, but it was normal life, and I desperately wanted to believe that there would still be a normal life, after today.

The sun was on the rise as we navigated morning rush hour, heading for Lottie's neighborhood. She had a place in an upscale area, one story but

sprawling. It was the kind of place that was deserted by day—working families out from seven to seven. The only sign of life along the street was a lawn service truck in the distance, and a couple of guys on riding lawn mowers.

Lottie's driveway was empty, so I turned in and parked in the back. Yellow police tape fluttered here and there, but they'd finished their work in the yard. An official-looking seal was on the back door, and a newly installed padlock.

Andy opened the trunk of the car, took out a rusty tire iron, and popped the padlock with a single wrench. He had to stop for a moment and brace himself, and I felt the swirl of darkness between us as the inevitable tide rolled over him.

"Andy," I said. He shook his head.

"Let's just get it done," he said. "This ain't nothing yet."

He was right. It would get a lot worse. That didn't mean it wasn't bad, though, bad enough to drive most men to their knees.

The death-tide was pulling him back. Pulling him away from me.

I ripped open the seal on the door and stepped into Lottie's kitchen.

There were few signs of violence in here—neatly ranked pots and pans, shelves of supplies. I quickly rummaged through them, breathing easier with every single thing I found. Yes, yes, yes....

I opened the refrigerator door, and inside saw not just a few bottles, but a gallon jar of swirling silver liquid.

A gallon jar.

Andy joined me, alerted by my expression. "Why'd she make so much?" he asked. I shook my head. There was absolutely no reason for Lottie to do a thing like that—the expense was enormous. Unless she'd found an effective way to really store the stuff—no, when I wrestled the gallon jar out of the refrigerator and onto the counter, I could tell that it was at least a week old, probably two. Not bad, but not fresh, either.

In another week, it would be useless. It was a foolish waste. Why the hell did Lottie brew it like this?

"She's been up to something," Andy said. He might have been reading my mind. "Makes you wonder why she wanted me back, don't it?"

I dipped up a cup of the potion, sniffed it again, and tilted it this way and that in the mug. "I don't trust this," I said. "It doesn't feel right, Andy. I just—"

He held up a hand to silence me.

“What?” I whispered.

“I think maybe someone’s here,” he said.

I sealed up the jar and hefted it. We’d take it with us. It’d have to serve until I could brew my own.

Andy turned his eyes back toward me, and there was something dawning in his expression, something grim and terrible.

He lifted the mug I’d filled and poured it into the sink.

“What are you doing?”

“Somebody’s been studying up.” Andy didn’t bother to keep his voice down. “Used this same trick myself, long ago. Made up a batch of poisoned brew, left it for the revenants to drink when they came looking. Did for quite a few that way, back in the wars.”

Poison. I looked down at the jar and let it slide out of my hands back to the counter.

“Come out,” Andy said. “Face to face. You want us dead, you do it barefaced.”

“All right,” said a smoke-strained, whisky-rough voice from the hall, and a big, red-headed man stepped into the light. There was a gun in his hand, pointed not at Andy, but at me. “How’s this?”

Sam Twist. *I’m just the dispatcher.* “Sam—” I wet my lips. Andy stepped between me and the gun, and I heard three loud pops in quick succession.

Andy just stood there and took the bullets, shook himself, and said in a voice I didn’t even recognize, “You all done, Irish, or you want to reload?”

I slid slowly along the counter, angling for a view of Sam. He was calmly holding the gun at his side.

“No need,” he said. “I was just softening you up a little. No question, you’re one hell of an opponent. That’s why I tried to get Holly to take a pass on bringing you back again.”

“Mine,” scraped another voice, and the thing that shuffled into view next to Sam... if it had been born human, it hadn’t stayed that way. Misshapen, malformed as a dropped lump of clay, but roped with muscle. Dead gray eyes. Pointed teeth displayed by lips that had been cut or ripped away. Sam was a big man, and this—creature—topped him by a foot or more. Its shoulders were broader than the doorway.

I remembered the photographs of the cops. Beaten to death. Necks snapped.

Andy had never looked fragile to me until that moment.

If he was worried, or even startled, it didn’t show. He bounced lightly

on the balls of his feet, eyes fixed on Sam's monster. "Well, ain't you pretty?" he said, cool and quiet. "Your momma must be real proud."

The thing swayed, but didn't move. Its blind-looking gaze strayed from Andy... to me.

A low growl started in its throat, a diesel engine running rough, and I felt Andy's whole body tense. "Get behind me," he said. "Holly, dammit, do that right now."

I did, but not before I got a glimpse at the blood soaking the front of his shirt, and the tattered flesh beneath. Dead men could die, and they could feel pain, and no matter how focused and tough Andy was, he couldn't overcome this monster.

Not alone.

"Who is he?" I whispered. Sam couldn't have brought this creature back, not on his own.

"He was my brother Donal," Sam Twist said. "Before Lottie got hold of him."

He was *Lottie's*. But Lottie was dead. Wasn't she? "She—brought him back?"

"He got knifed in a bar fight," Sam said. "Strongest man I ever knew. I begged her to help, and she did. She brought him back. But I didn't know what she'd *do* with him."

Sam moved over to the side, edging to where he could once again see my face, and line up a clear shot. Andy didn't move. He clearly thought it was better to stand between me and Donal.

"What did she do?" I was acutely aware now of the blood pooling at Andy's feet, of the waves of darkness vibrating the air between us. Death was coming, and coming no matter how hard he pushed against it.

"What does it *look* like she did, you bitch?" Sam spat, and the sudden raw fury in him exploded like nitro. "She *used him*. My own brother. She told me she put him back to sleep, but she didn't. She set him to fighting other dead men like some trained bear, and brought him back, kept dragging him back until there was nothing left. She took *bets*." Sam swallowed hard. "But he remembered. He heard my voice on the phone, and he remembered."

Sam's face was red, distorted with anguish, and his eyes were glittering with tears. I swallowed hard to clear the lump from my throat. "He came to find you," I said. "Oh, Sam, I'm sorry."

He sneered at me. There was no more sanity in his eyes now than in his brother's. "Keep your pity," he said. "I don't want it. I'm putting you down,

bitch. I'm putting all of you *down*."

Lottie wasn't dead. Lottie couldn't be dead, if Donal was still alive. Sam had her somewhere, under lock and key, maybe drugged or worse, but still breathing.

She was Donal's only vulnerability.

I was still partly blocked from Sam's view. With my right hand, I dug my cell phone from my pocket, flipped it open, and hit and held the speed dial number I'd assigned to Detective Prieto. I had to hope he'd answer, or at worst, that his voicemail would give him the clues he needed after the fact to put it all together. "You kept Lottie alive," I said. "Right, Sam? To suffer."

"Damn straight," he said. "When I'm done with you, I'll take out Annika, and we can move on to the next town. You have to be stopped, all of you."

"You're using Donal just as much as Lottie did," I said. "Let him go, Sam. God—please, let him *go!*"

"No," he snapped. "Not until every single one of you is dead. Don't move, Holly. I want you to watch what happens next."

He knew. He knew about Andrew; he'd heard how traumatized I was when I'd lost him before.

He wanted me to watch him die again.

~

Donal was fast, but Andy was faster. Even wounded, he was as lithe as a cat. He dodged Donal's roaring charge, tripped the twisted giant, and bashed Donal's skull hard into the marble counter. I backed away, dodged behind the fighting men, and screamed into the phone, "Prieto, it's Sam Twist, find Lottie, Lottie's the key—"

Donal's hand slapped the phone away from me, and it bounced and broke into scattered pieces against the far wall. A bone snapped in my hand, and I choked back a scream, then another as I felt Andy's torment surge stronger. He was feeling my pain, too.

He'd do anything to stop it, and that was so dangerous.

I needed the gun Sam held.

I settled for grabbing a cleaver from the block next to the stove. Lottie, like all good cooks and witches, kept her tools in order; the cleaver had a wicked fine edge, a silky deadliness that vibrated the air.

I kept Donal between me and Sam as he sought for a clear shot. Andy slipped in his own blood; his strike at Donal's massive throat lost its

strength, and Donal's huge gray hands closed on his shoulders.

I felt Andy's arm being wrenched out of its socket. I screamed. He grunted and pulled halfway free, but Donal bunched up a fist and drew back—

I threw myself to the floor and swiped the cleaver through Donal's Achilles tendons, and he toppled, howling, like a tree. The table collapsed under his impact. Andy squirmed free, panting, and I felt the tide coming faster, deeper, all that darkness swirling and clouding the air between us as he tried to get to me...

Sam fired twice. One shot hit Donal's flailing arm and kicked a fist-sized chunk of flesh out of it. The second shot...

The second shot took Andy in the chest as he lunged to cover me.

"No!" I shrieked, and took his weight in my arms as he collapsed against me.

There was no fighting the emptiness that rolled over me now, the call of endless peace, and I felt Andy slipping away.

I felt him find some small, impossible anchor in that tide, and his body shuddered against mine, holding me tight against him. *He can't. He can't make it.* Even the dead had to die.

But Andy refused to go.

He pulled back, and his eyes were liquid silver, the color of the potion I'd dosed him with in the morgue. His skin was as pale as paper. Most of his blood was poured out on the floor, an offering to harsher gods than I could ever worship.

But he *stayed standing*.

He took in a deep breath, and closed his eyes. "Potion," he whispered. "Give it to me."

The jar behind me on the counter.

Poisoned.

"No," I said. "No, Andy."

Another shot struck him. I screamed something at Sam, I don't even know what, and he bared his teeth in response. Donal was crawling toward us across the floor. He couldn't stand, but he wouldn't give up. He wanted me dead as much as Sam.

Andy reached behind me, fumbled the gallon jar of silver liquid, and looked at me with the most heartbreaking plea. "Help," he whispered. I felt the tide roaring in again, stronger this time. He couldn't resist that, not even for me.

I helped him lift the jar.

One swallow.

Two.

Sam's next bullet hit the jar and exploded it into a shower of glass. The potion coated us both and swirled in thick silvery streams in the blood on the floor.

But it worked.

I felt the black surging inside of Andy fall away, and the sudden pulsebeat of life took over. For just an instant, his eyes locked with mine, and I saw a promise there.

An acceptance, too.

Donal's huge hand swiped at his feet, but Andy sidestepped and waltzed me with him. He put me gently out of the way, and turned to Sam Twist.

"You got plenty of cause to hate," Andy said. "Your brother's been used hard. But you took it too far, mister. You got no quarrel with Holly."

"She's a witch."

Andy's smile turned wolfish. "So am I, mister. And now you got a quarrel with me."

Sam fired again, and hit Andy. The bullet wounds didn't seem to matter at all; with a bellow of rage, Sam rushed forward, still firing. Andy moved like a bullfighter, avoiding the attack, and swung his arm around Sam's throat from behind. He threw his weight into the motion. Sam's feet slipped in the blood, and his neck snapped with a muffled dry crackle. It happened too fast for me to really take in, and then the life was leaving Sam's blue eyes and his body falling in that utterly empty way that only the dead can fall as Andy let him go.

Donal howled, and it hurt me to hear it. Andy turned toward me, and our gazes met again.

He'd taken two steps toward me when Lottie's poison took hold. Andy's fearsome strength of will might be able to deny bullet wounds, but this was different. Very different.

His legs folded, and he fell to his side, panting. His pupils grew huge, no longer silver but black, black as the death that was coming for him.

"Next time," he whispered.

I dropped to my knees beside him and put my hand on his forehead as he began to convulse.

I tasted poison on his lips, and I wondered in a black, desolate fury if it would be enough to finish me. It wasn't.

The universe wasn't quite that merciful.

~

"Miss Caldwell," Detective Prieto said. I raised my head slowly, every muscle aching and hot. Part of it was Lottie's poisonous mixture; the other part was a collection of injuries I hadn't realized I'd accumulated until the heat of battle was past. I was back in the hospital. They'd taken Donal away in a massive steel prison truck, still fighting. They'd taken Andy away in a coroner's wagon, along with Sam. I'd screamed about the two of them riding together, but the cops thought I was out of my mind.

Maybe I was.

I looked at Detective Prieto wearily, too exhausted to care about the pity in his eyes. "Did you find her?"

"We did," he said. "She was drugged. Chained up in a room underneath Sam Twist's house."

I nodded. "And the others?"

He just looked at me. Sam hadn't needed the others, of course. He'd only needed Lottie to keep Donal alive.

Perversely, Lottie still lived, like the cockroach surviving nuclear winter. And so did Donal, for all the good it did him.

"You okay?" Prieto asked. It was my turn to stare, and he turned away from what he saw in my expression. "Lottie's down the hall, I hear. They say she'll make a full recovery."

With that, he pushed open the door to the grim little hospital room and left. It hurt too much to stand up, but I did it anyway, and shuffled to follow.

Prieto was getting into the elevator when I emerged, but he caught my eye and jerked his chin down the hall. "Four down," he said.

The doors shut.

Carlotta was a lovely woman with the soul of a pig. I'd always known that, but I'd never really *known*.

I'd never seen the depths. Now I couldn't get out of them. Not without climbing over someone else.

She'd do.

Carlotta was asleep. She was an older woman, with black hair threaded with silver and lines on her face. Could have been someone's mother, someone's grandmother. Asleep, you couldn't see the real person.

Her eyes opened when I dragged a chair up next to her bed—dark brown, as confused as any soul dragged back from the dark. Except she'd

been drugged, not dead, and the softness cleared from her in seconds.

“Holly.” She nearly spat my name. “I should have known he’d spare you. Sam always liked *you*.”

I didn’t answer her. Somewhere, in the coldest part of me, I was seeing the agony of Andy’s last moments, and I was realizing how much Lottie would have enjoyed it.

“The others?”

“Dead,” I said. My voice sounded soft and distant. “How long have you been doing this?”

“Doing what?”

“Bringing back the dead and fighting them like dogs. For *money*.”

Lottie’s bitter brown eyes narrowed. “Don’t you judge me, you narrow little bitch. We all bring them back for profit.” She smiled slowly. “I’m just creative.”

The room looked red for a few seconds, and I had trouble controlling my breathing. My hands ached, and realized I’d clenched them into tight, shaking fists.

“Creative,” I repeated. “Why’d you ask Prieto for Andy?”

“I knew somebody was stalking us,” she said. “If anybody could stop it, Toland would have been the one. Besides—” She was still smiling, and it had a sharp, cutting edge to it. “—he’d have made me a lot of money, after. A *lot* of money.”

I shuddered. It was hard to stay in the chair. Hard not to put my hands around her throat and squeeze.

“You’re done,” I said. “I’m going to make it my personal mission to see you’re finished.”

“How?” Lottie’s laugh broke on the air like ice. “You’re a stupid girl. I’m the *victim*. You counting on the Review Board? Better not. So many resurrection witches gone? They might give me a fine, but they need me. Now more than ever.”

She was probably right, at that. Resurrection witches were a rare breed, and she and I were the only ones left in the city. The Review Board would blame Sam. Lottie would get away with a slap on the wrist.

Lottie would do it again, and I wouldn’t be able to stop her. The police wouldn’t act. The dead didn’t have legal rights.

I stood up. Lottie’s dark gaze followed me as I crossed to the door. There was a thumb-lock on the inside, and I flipped it over.

Lottie laughed. “You going to kill me, Holly? You going to spend your

life in prison over dead men?”

“No,” I said. “Funny thing about comas, Lottie. You can slip back into them without warning. It’s really tragic.”

A flash of something in her eyes that might have been fear. Her hand reached for the call button.

I got there first.

I held her down. She struggled, and snarled, but when my lips touched hers, it was all over.

I was the best resurrection witch in Austin. One thing about being able to give life to the dead... you can take it from the living. It’s forbidden, but it can be done.

I didn’t take all her life. Just enough.

Just enough to leave her wandering in the dark, screaming, trapped inside her own head. Her body would live, mute and unresponsive, for as long as modern science could maintain it, but Lottie Flores would never, ever bring back the dead again.

Not even herself.

~

Andy was in the morgue downstairs, two drawers away from Sam. I had to see him. What I’d done to Lottie had hurt me in ways I knew might never be right again, but somehow seeing his face, even in death, would give me peace.

I had no potion. I had nothing but what was left inside of me. Darkness and passion and need, so much need it seemed to bleed silver from my pores.

He was so lovely. And he was at peace, the way I knew he should be.

I kissed him lightly. I didn’t have any potion, and I put no spell behind it; it was just a kiss, just the brush of lips.

But the *emotion* behind it—that felt like magic.

I felt him reaching for me, in the dark, and I couldn’t help but respond. It wasn’t my own magic. I wasn’t this strong.

I felt the connection snap clean between us, silver and hot, vibrating like a plucked string.

His eyes opened, and he smiled.

“You came back,” I murmured.

“Course I did, Holly,” he said. “I’ll always come for you.”

“I didn’t—there’s no potion—”

“Don’t need it,” Andy said. He stirred, and the sheet across his bare

chest slipped down, revealing raw bullet holes that were, before my eyes, sealing themselves closed. “Got myself some skills, you know. More than most.”

I kissed him again, tasting potions and poisons and my own tears. “How long can you stay?” I asked.

He smiled. “Long as you want me.”

Forever.

ABOUT BEYOND THE PALE

Rachel Caine's "Death Warmed Over" is one of twelve delightfully dark fantasy short stories in the anthology, *Beyond the Pale*. The other stories were also written by award-winning and New York Times bestselling authors:

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