

The Twelfth Century
by
The Dark Lord Insidious
(just call me Sid)

**A New Beginning:
Zombies
&
Skeletons
&
Not So Elvin Princesses,
Oh my!**

(c) Brett Paufler 2013-2014
www.paufler.net
Brett@Paufler.net

**### Chapter 31 ###
Metal Shop ###
Again! ###
Back to Basics ###**

Flip. Gloria turns a page.
I have long since stopped pretending to be reading anything of my own.

Flip. Gloria turns a page.
The espresso has grown cold, I no longer sip, while the Kibbers have faded from view; and yet:

Flip. Gloria turns a page.
She does not read. But rather scans, going from one book to the next, from one tome to another, the wisdom of the ages, writings of the

centuries, eons, millennium, flitting through her fingers and dancing across her eyes.

I could not begin tell you what she understands -- or even if she has the slightest glimmer. But, no. Every once in a while she makes a statement, has a question, and it is clear that she recognizes the limits, of something, "So, you don't know what's out there?"

Past the mists? Past the gates? Past as far as I extend, as far as I can see or perceive?

In a word, "No."

"Oh," and she is back to her reading.

Flip. Gloria turns a page.

###

Gloria is not nervous. She is not shaking. Rather she is happy, content... or so I believe. But there, now. Look. She raises her eyes, smiles. Clearly she knows that I have stopped reading long ago.

How long has it been? Who Knows? It really does not matter.

But still she reads on.

Flip. Gloria turns a page.

Until there is nothing left to read.

Nothing left to say?

No. There is everything left to say.

But all the same, nothing left to say.

Flick. Gloria flicks her hair, looks around, studies the room: a Kibber dusts, a Kibber tidies, a Kibber scurries off with the book she has just finished, bringing her the next. But this time, there is no next, only the last, the one Jack dropped off at the library, and how long ago has that been? A week? A day? A month?

I suppose it is a test of sorts.

I suppose it was a test of sorts.

But Gloria has no reaction to the book, no love is lost, she is over Jack. And at the idea of being enslaved, re-captured, placed therein for my own amusement, she does not bat an eye. The hours have given her strength -- resolve.

Or perhaps she knows -- she cannot run, she cannot hide.

Nor can I when she asks, "So, what is your plan? What are you doing?"

But even if I cannot hide, I can be cryptic... or shrug... or not really know in the first place. Do any of us really know (like ultimately) what we are doing here -- in existence -- other than undertaking some feeble attempt to grow and, "Extend my reach... beyond what it is now," which consists of a graveyard, isolated, alone, a purgatory before dust, "and I think you can help. Of course, I don't know exactly how."

"But you have some general idea?"

"I know the direction I would go."

###

The distance between us has closed. Once again, I am at liberty to hold her in my arms (an end unto itself) and together we dissolve into the mist -- alone, together, intertwined, as one, forever together, separate, apart.

###

I am the graveyard.

The graveyard is me.

Everywhere.

Nowhere.

All at once.

###

Down in the metal shop the remaining dwarves hammer away. Mog has convinced one to fit the football as the top ornament on his staff. It looks stupid. It fits Mog perfectly.

Jack and the rest (Abby, Ned, Mine'irva, you will forgive me if I fail to name them all and draw the list short) discuss game day delivery options for the Holy Water that is Jack's sweat.

“Arrows,” Jack suggests for the umpteenth time. Clearly, he is not all-aboard on this Holy Warrior gig.

“I’m not shooting my friends with arrows,” Ned insists.

“They’re already dead,” Strathmore reminds him.

“But it hurts.”

Hurts like the Dickens, I hear tell. But alas, we have already used that joke once before if my memory serves correct (Abby having stashed my previous work amongst her robes, so I cannot be sure... not that I would check if I could).

But whatever.

The point is, the Dwarven equipment is quite impressive. But bolts, slicing blades, crushing balls of steel, these are not the sort of experiences a friend puts another friend through.

“They are going to hate us,” like, forever, “if we do this to them.”

“Should of thought of that before they decided to turn zombie.”

But despite the grumbling, the point is taken by all... save Mog. He has only been listening at the periphery. These Humans, Elves, Dwarves (especially the Dwarves), not only do they not like him (he knows they do not like him), but they make everything so complicated, more complicated than it need be. Ah! He sees a zombie shuffling in the distance. And in a flash, Mog is out the door, chasing it down.

“Good riddance,” one of the Dwarves comments (not bothering to pause in his work as he lands the next blow). And that is all the notice Mog’s departure elicits. But in a moment, he is back, zombie in hand (under his arm), which he sets down (none to gingerly) before Jack.

There is a moment of collective silence, and then nothing, followed by silence. You can see all glimmer of thought and recognition slowly vacate the room. Or at least, Mog can see it. For all their pride and glory, when push comes to shove, they just don’t get it (Elves, Dwarves, Humans, and especially Goblin scum, which only by coincidence just so happens to be the type of zombie he grabbed, but it doesn’t matter). What matters is that Mog grabs the zombie (Gary the Goblin, I do believe, but I must say, I don’t remember him turning) and rubs the poor little guy against Jack. The intent is to turn Gary back -- after all, that’s all you have to do, right, get a little of Jack’s sweat on the zombie (any

zombie) and they'll turn. Isn't what these Hordlings have been saying? But when Mog does it, nothing happens. Maybe he's doing it wrong? Or more contact is needed? Or maybe he needs to rub more furiously. But no, no, and no. Nothing. Gary is still a zombie. But Mog is getting more frustrated (at his Orcin limits), so deciding perhaps he has been doing it wrong, he grabs Jack and starts rubbing him against Gary the Zombie as if he were sort of life size terrycloth rag doll.

"Hey! Stop it!"

Maybe if he does it faster.

"Stop!"

Or holding Jack upside down.

"Help!"

Or backwards.

"No. Stop. This is unacceptable."

Nothing. None of it works. So after one last swipe (rubbing their faces together) Mog puts Jack down. But then, he is not done -- not really. I mean, this is not how it's supposed to work. Or rather, this is exactly how it is supposed to work, but it isn't working. Why not? Best to go slow and work it out. So, Mog grabs Jack's hand and rubs it against Gary's zombified face. Nothing happens... except for perhaps a murmur of annoyance. Seeing that doesn't work, Mog tries the opposite by grabbing Gary's (putrid and zombified) hand and rubbing it against Jack's face.

"Stop it!" Spit. Sputter. Yuck.

But these (mere material comforts) are not what concern the mind of a great Orcin Chieftan mid-stream (and/or mid-puzzlement as it were), so Mog rubs his eyes (nasty bit that, you just know he's got bits of zombie on them), scratches his head (working those zombie bits in real good), and deciding he probably had it right the first time, he picks Gary up once again and proceeds to give Jack a good scrub down.

"Stop it!" Jack protests.

"Stop it," Strathmore reiterates, stepping in with drawn sword, finally deciding (at Mine'irva's insistence) to back up his friend in the most straightforward manner possible. Not that any of this bothers Mog. The Elf is right. (He has a point. Get it? A sword point! Fine.

Whatever. You'll see. After two or three chapters go by and I don't use that very same joke again and again, you'll miss it. Just you wait and see.) But in the meantime, Mog does not have to wait and see any longer. He knows that what he's been trying hasn't been working. So, time to try something new. Why not the ball? A rub here, a tap there, poking, prodding (more like jabbing, really) Gary a final time good and hard in the gut, but other than a slight zombie "murmur", there is no effect, no change, no reaction, no nothing.

And then, because even the zombie seems to have enough of this (and therefore tries to make a run for it), it's back under Mog's arm (right in the pit) for safekeeping. I mean, if zombies could die from asphyxiation, this one would be doing just that.

"Murmur. Murmur. Murmur," which I do believe means, 'Help! I can't breathe! Help!' But unfortunately, at the present, Gary is a zombie and so it comes out more like, "Murmur. Murmur. Murmur." And no one pays him the slightest heed.

###

During all this time, of course, I have been in the room, which is to say my presence has been the room, intertwined with Gloria's. For the most, the denizens of the graveyard cannot perceive me in this state. But there are exceptions: Abby being one.

So, rather than concentrate on Mog, she has been looking at me and Gloria. I could not tell you all that she sees or perceives, but I am led to believe it's less than she might like.

"Sid's looking a bit pale," Abby says more to herself than anyone.

But Ned picks up on it, "What? Like sick?"

"No. Well, maybe. Maybe that's why's he's been gone so long. Maybe he had to regroup, conserve his strength, or maybe he's at the end and that's the reason for all of this go-round in the first place."

Not much mercy in that voice if you ask me. But then, her concerns are not mine; and mine, not hers.

Of course, none of this gives Ned anything to go on. And Abby is still trying to work it out (my current state of being with Gloria riding along as she is), so she continues, “You really can’t see it?”

“See what?” Strathmore asks, getting right to the point as only an Elf, who wants to get right to the point, can.

“The mist, it’s paler. Tell me you saw it drift into the room.”

But no, they hadn’t. That is Abby’s thing, not theirs.

“Are you crazy? It’s been misty everywhere for months, now,” Strathmore points out.

“But it’s a little paler,” Abby observes.

“Fine. Sure. Whatever.” If you say so.

“Tell me you see it, Ned.”

But Ned does not.

And as much as he might like, Mog doesn’t have a clue as to what Abby is talking about, either. So instead of saying anything, he grabs at the air blindly, hoping to get lucky, maybe grab me, whatever that might mean. But I can roll around and through him (slip right through his fingers) and he will never notice a thing until I want him to.

“Ah! Off! Get away!” And without warning, Mog is doing a little dance, trying to shake free, like one who is surrounded by gnats. And when I grow tired of this and he finally feels free of the oozing presence (and only the ever present mist that surrounds everything is left behind as a cloak), Mog tries to use his football staff/wand as a charm, jabbing at the air. It is quite ineffectual, I assure you.

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

###

“OK. Now do you believe me?” Abby asks, but then, doesn’t, not really, because there is nothing to ask, no reason to doubt that she has perceived something. She is an Apprentice, after all. And there is a reason Wizards chose her kind in which to intertwine their fates, so long

ago. But much more importantly, timely, and straight to the point, there is the question of, “Why is he... white?”

And then, it sort of hits her. I mean, I can see those gears churning. And the next thing you know, Abby has Mog standing next to Jack, and she is pushing the two together.

“Stop rubbing him against me,” Jack protests, as Abby does just this (rubs them against each other... quite distractedly, I assure you, almost as a comedic afterthought placed into her mind by another) as her concentration goes elsewhere and she tries to divine a more effective course of action.

“Stop it,” Jack yells, once again, breaking her reverie “I’m not standing here anymore if he touches me again.”

I guess Mog couldn’t help himself either. (Odd world we live in.)

But Abby has the answer to all their fidgeting, so she commands Mog to “Behave!” as in a Word of Command, released with a force so sudden and out of the blue that even if I had wanted to stop her (which I can’t say that I do), I might have been hard pressed to react in time. “And you too, Jack! Stand still!” And while she’s at it and the spells seem to be working, “You too, Gary. Stop your squirming. This will all be over in a moment,” the little Apprentice says with much more conviction and belief than I presently have at the moment; but then, perhaps she does not know exactly what she is up against... or then, perhaps (and more likely) her goals are different than mine -- and always will be... for the most.

So, I suppose all those things can be true.

No matter.

Moments later (and at Abby’s command), Strathmore and Ned are lugging the barrel of water that the Dwarves keep next to the forge (for plunging red hot metal into... and probably drinking, I suppose) over to where Mog, Jack, and the zombified Gary stand (don’t ask me why they didn’t move the trio instead).

And the next thing you know Abby is splattering water here, splattering water there, and in general annoying Mog, “Argh!” and Jack, “Stop it!” and even Gary, “Murmur. Murmur. Murmur.” (Trust me, you don’t want to get a zombie started. They’ll “Murmur” your ear off.)

Of course, none of her spells work after that first spout of command words. “Sid’s blocking me,” she insists. But no one seems to believe her, “You can see that? Right? He’s standing in the way?” It’s true, I am. “Blocking me?” Once again, true.

But no one else can see, hear, or tell. I mean, what’s a little more mist one way or another? And only a special few hear the voices carried on the wind...

And in truth, I suppose this last, the prospect of my making her look the fool in front of her friends, as much as anything else is the last straw (and she’s been pissed at me for a while now, perhaps longer than I had any idea); and so, don’t ask me where she finds the strength (the little girl has unseen reservoirs of willpower lurking within her the depth and magnitude of which I had no idea), and it all comes out in a fit of rage as she bends down and lifts the barrel of water over her head.

“No. Don’t throw it,” Jack yells.

“Yeah, throw it,” Strathmore counters.

“NO!” Jack yells again even louder, “I forbid it!” as if that has any meaning, as if he’s studied the ancient arts and knows the words of power. Certainly his impotent cries (the little sissy boy) mean nothing to Abby as she takes a step forward and throws/drops/dumps the water over and through him at me, covering Jack, Mog, and Gary in the process. Needless to say, they all curse and complain, but none more than Jack.

“Why? Why? Why am I always getting wet?”

But then, Mog is hugging him and Gary both (the smell only being made worse by the water) on account of how Gary has changed back to his normal Goblin self.

And of course, I would take credit, claim the change was made when the force of the water pushed Gloria and I back into Gary, but then, that would ruin the fun.

I mean, that is what happened. It was all Gloria. But you can see how that would ruin the fun, right? And personally (just between you and me -- no sense bringing a Certification Board that I haven’t seen in years into this), I’m hoping they decide to load Jack up into one of those catapult contraptions and throw him (along with a barrel of water) at the next group of zombies they come upon.

“No. No. It’s not happening,” Jack insists. Of course, maybe he’s just responding to that look in Mog’s eyes, the one that says, I’m going to give you another hug.

“Nooo!”

And I guess that was it. Oh, well. I do believe my work here is done.

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

And with that I am out the door and down the hall carrying Gloria in my wake...

#

Of course, not really... only sort of.

#

“Excellent. We’ve got Sid on the run,” Abby states, so happy with her quick thinking, she could hug herself. “All we had to do was overpower him. Lots of water, that’s the key.”

“Oh, yeah? Then why is he laughing?” Jacks asks. “You might be the only one that can see him, but we can all hear him laughing. And he is most definitely laughing.”

“Oh, that’s easy,” Strathmore says, helping out in that way that Elves have, “It’s because no matter how weak you get, a sense of humor is the almost always the last thing to go. And you look ridiculous.”

“I’ll second that,” Mata agrees. “How is it that you never seem to stay dry?”

And with that, our friends (if that is indeed what they are: yours, mine, or even amongst themselves) have a good chuckle. Even Mine’irva feels at liberty to join the fun and lets a little giggle slip free. Perhaps she is more than a bit relieved. I mean, to think, she actually thought Ned might end up being the hero in all this. What a relief it must be knowing that’s not going to happen...

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

{{{Chapter End}}}