



STOLEN TIME

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All hallows Eve.

The night we must never forget.

The night I don't remember.

They say it is when we fought the demi-gods.

They say we won.

Fuga

Calyx

Viribus

Bimembre

Dux Umbra

It is the night these five demi-gods disappeared without a trace.

And now they say I must find them and destroy them once and for all

Chapter One



The riverbank is so peaceful, sitting here, wasting away the day. An idle day today means a hungry day tomorrow, but what better way to spend my birthday than daydreaming and enjoying the squelch of mud between my toes.

“Ely,” Jason greets as he and our two good friends march up the path towards me. He has a face of thunder; anyone would think he’d been looking for me. Like wanting to be alone on my birthday is some kind of crime.

It’s always been the same, well, certainly as far back as I can remember. Ten years ago, with no memory of anything, I was taken in by Jason, Luke, and Alan. We’ve been inseparable ever since. Well, except for on my birthday.

“We’re taking you to town. Mr Grindle said you can have a free roll as it’s your birthday.” Luke pulls on my arm.

I conceded, this year I will be going to the Gods’ Remembrance party. I understand, it’s just annoying that the world was saved on my birthday. All these years, my birthday gets overshadowed by the Gods’ Remembrance party. This year it will be extra special, to mark ten years. Each year I slip off and enjoy the day to myself, but this time I will go and play their game.

The mud oozes between my bare toes, if I slip now, I won’t be fit to go to the party. It’s tempting. Oh, how tempting it would be to throw myself in and see where the water takes me. The dream of having something more than just this village always calls me. I wish this life was enough for me, but it isn’t.

“Elymas!”

I know I’m in trouble when Alan uses my full name. He’s grown since we first met; he’s changed. All of them have. Now they are looking for wives instead of escape.

“Clean your feet, Elymas, good Lord you can’t go into town looking like that.”

He’s right, but I miss the days when they’d encourage me – join me even.

The water is cold around my toes as I step into the shallows to wipe the mud from my feet. I swipe them quickly in the long grass and walk barefoot while they dry.

We walk along the river towards the town, heading towards the tall tower that dominates the horizon. It’s supposed to be a beacon to all, making town easier to find in the overgrown wilderness of the abandoned world. I think it’s a permanent reminder for all to pay their respects and taxes.

It haunts my life like an evil eye watching down from above. I have an unexplained hatred of the tower. It is just a feeling, but it’s rooted so deeply in my soul, I wonder if part of my childhood had been spent inside. I have no reason to think the tower was ever used for orphans, it acts more as a prison if rumours are to be believed. Personally, I think it’s empty. Certainly since the end of the war. Just the regional governor, Marholm and his mother, the matriarch bitch, live there now.

The town is busy for the Gods’ Remembrance party to mark the end of the war. The queue for the centre square is all around the block, it’s going to be a long wait, and all so we can walk past the five statues. The statues of the demi-god destroyers must always be respected. We are supposed to remember how lucky we are. I suppose we should feel lucky they only destroyed our world and reduced us to the brink of extinction. It’s hard to remember how lucky I am when I have no memory of anything before that night.

The queue is fast moving, people don’t really care about the demi-gods of old. The five statues stand in a circle facing inwards, protected by a wooden roof, built to a higher standard than my entire house. It’s compulsory to visit the statues today, and the four of us enter the open sided structure. Demi-gods of darkness, not there to be worshipped, but to remind the people how fortunate they are that these vile beings are now gone from the world. It makes no sense. These bearers of the apocalypse should be forgotten, not used as an excuse by the governor to keep us all in line.

“Calyx, demi-god of botanical chaos and global famine.” I speak his name as required for the greeting, not that anyone is listening. I know the story well; he was the bringer of natural disasters.

My hand runs across his contorted features, his carving more plant than man. I'm supposed to think about how much better life has been in the ten years since the demi-gods left. Ten years to the day and life still hasn't gotten a whole lot easier.

"Dux Umbre. Demi-god of dark and mystery. Bringer of nightmares." Half the figure's face is missing, I assume as a representation of his shadow-like form.

"Bimembre, a goat headed monster with the ability to change form." There is an unkind look in the eyes of this man's head, nothing like the goats farmed by Gerald Osbourne. Why a goat? If the man could shift into any animal form he wanted, why was his head that of a goat? It's not what I would choose, so I can't help thinking this man doesn't have a choice. I feel sorry for him, even though everything about him suggests I shouldn't.

"Fuga. The winged warrior who rode sheets of rain through the night sky as he stole souls from below." I turn to the final demi-god as I speak his name. He has the nicest features of all the statues, but it's not much of a compliment when over half don't have human faces.

"Viribus. Maniac with the strength of one hundred men. Could rip a man's arms off. Imagine the muscles needed for that! Although the statue's form is grossly over exaggerated. No real man could move properly with that much bulk, and he would be so heavy, he couldn't move fast. What is so scary about a slow man whose own muscles prevent his hands from touching each other?

Done. Nothing is more exciting about these men than wondering what colour socks they had worn.

I head off into the town centre, through the shops built by the men of this town. I remember the buildings being rebuilt after the war, just nothing but rubble before then. The matriarch has always said I bumped my head, and while it seems as plausible a reason as any, I don't like the way she looks at me. There is a jealousy in her eyes that I don't deserve from this lady. She lives in the tower in luxury. I know they have money, food, warmth, and comfort. Yet she has envy in her eyes as she watches me walk towards the bakery.

"Looks like someone wants your free bread," Luke laughs, giving me a nudge.

I notice the look, but I always ignore her. There is no reason to single me out, I've done nothing wrong. Well, I am the handsomest man in town, and it's not just me saying that; I have a string of ex-lovers who agree. It's a shame they are all ex's but I realised a long time ago that just one man could never make me happy.

"Ely," the matriarch calls with her stern tone.

All the blood drains from my body as a cold chill takes hold. Damn that bloody woman.

I leave my friends as I make my way over to the demon woman. "It's Elymas." She has no right to use the shortened version my friends use.

"Yes, dear, please come." Her attempt at being friendly is creepy at best.

I move towards her, and we head towards the tower together. If I thought I was cold before, I was mistaken. I feel practically dead inside now.

This is not turning into the birthday I had hoped for. All I wanted was peace, but why would I expect today to be any different to any other? Not that anyone remembers it is my birthday, half of them can't even pronounce my name. My friends all have normal, common names, but mine is unlike any other. Elymas Magus. That's Magus with a J, for no other reason than being awkward.

"Where are we going, Ma'am?" My feet tread heavily on the path heading towards the tower. The tower is a place of mystery and fear where the rich ruled in the demi-gods' stead. It is a place best avoided.

"You are honoured for your birthday," she replies. Her words bring me no comfort. Some would consider sacrifice to the gods to be an honour, especially if they were not the ones to be sacrificed. If that's the case, I'm not the dainty virgin they are looking for, more likely to speak my mind and cause a stir. My big mouth is probably the cause of my trouble. I like to think of myself as more wolf than sheep, but in the absence of a pack, I make do with a flock. A wolf in sheep's clothing, as it were.

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