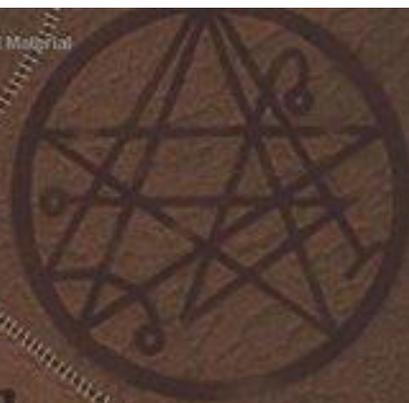


Copyrighted Material



The
NecroNomNomNomicon:
Cookbook of the
Dead

by
Felix C. Galvan



Copyrighted Material

GALVAN

**The
NecroNomNomNomicon:
Cookbook of the Dead**

Felix C Galvan

Copyright © 2010 Felix C. Galvan

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 099806680X

ISBN-13: 978-0998066806

This book is dedicated to everyone who supported me in my writing, but *especially*:

Yvonne Butler (Editor Extrordinaire)

Robbin Van der Ven

Julie B

Amy Fair

Nolen Heisler

Haley Gentry

And finally

My brother Travis

CONTENTS

1	Good News, Bad News, and an Invitation	9
2	The Studio, a Recipe Stolen, and Sweethearts Reunited	13
3	Althea Visits, a Diabolic Dish, and Boy's Defense	25
4	Emergency care of all sorts	37
5	Janice visits the Vet, and Boy visits Jason	45
6	The Renfro house, A Kick, And a Beating.	56
7	Boy meets Child, the Orientation, and Thea is lost in the Library.	67
8	Althea's frisky dream, Day One Shoot, and a Boy and his Mother	79
9	Vermicelli, the Pentecost gimmick, and Jason's confession	90
10	Enter the Bansheep! Jason and Althea get hitched, and the Crapbook	103
11	The Haunted House Tour, the Bansheep is Defeated, a Hairsplasion!	116
12	Mission Improbable, a Fabulous Grooming, and Boy Gets a Uniform	129
13	Ghoulash, and Bread of the Dead	140
14	The Afterlife, Gingerbread Scramble, and Shannon refuses	153
15	When Cultists Attack! Boy Schmoozes, and Kent is on the Job	166
16	An Emergency meeting, Joseph is Questioned, and Janice gets lucky!	179
17	Althea Dresses up, The Baron gets Fluffy, and Katrina snaps!	192
18	Kent Questions Jason, Birthday cake!, and a Tempest in a Teapot	205
19	The Stage is set, Giles is Rescued, and Edgar Reveals Himself	217
20	The Concert, Enter the Devil's Food Cake, and a chase!	231
21	Boy gets trained, Recipes are divided, and Fingerman attacks!	243
22	The Baron has an attack, Edgar makes his move, and a Demonic Duel!	255



GALVAN

Prologue

Have you ever been eclipsed by a brother or sister? I have, and it torments me more than any lake of fire or cloud of imps.

I was fashioned in the traditional way, from the essence of other demons, bound into a tome of dark magic. However, the Great Deceiver thought it was being funny when it made me into a cookbook. I can still hear its laughter even now that it has repented and gone back to sit at the foot of the Maker, leaving Hell and its colonies without a leader.

Do I sound bitter? I am.

You see, we Tomes were not among the Fallen, so we couldn't repent even if we wanted to. So I'll gain my freedom by being summoned or bringing an end to everything. If not now, then tomorrow, or even a hundred years from now. I have all eternity ahead of me, after all.

Now, everyone in infernal trafficking has heard of the Necronomicon, from the mightiest demon lord to the lowliest cultist. That's my brother. He's a huge showoff. Armies of humans vie for his presence, killing and sacrificing for his attention. He's been fully summoned at least three times. But me? Not a single time. I'm lucky anyone knows about me at all.

So this is my latest attempt to be free.

Now I could just give you the important details, but being a book, (albeit, a cookbook) I'm inclined to spin a yarn, so relax and let me tell my tale. Once I'm done, I'm quite sure you'll be a bit peckish, I can probably help with that too. So let's take a look at our unlikely canine hero, shall we?

* * *

The Harrison home
Spring 2012
3am

A horrendous cockcrow decimated the peaceful silence of the otherwise quiet neighborhood, simultaneously waking and sending Boy tumbling from his bed that was perched on the rocking chair

to the porch. Scrambling to his paws, he growled, tail held low as he sniffed the air, searching for intruders.

Movement in the flowerbed drew his attention. The dark, fragrant earth among the azaleas bulged as something beneath slowly forced its way to the surface

Growling, he approached the mound of earth, leaping back as it sprayed outwards, revealing a spectral rooster, its bones visible through faintly glowing, translucent feathers.

Boy barked a sharp warning at this intruder and growled as he sized it up.

Cocking its head at the dog, the rooster's eyes blazed with emerald flame, flapping its wings. It further showered the area with damp clumps of soil.

Get back! You are in my territory!

Boy growled, his hackles rising as the sickly sweet scent of rotting flesh rolled towards him.

With an evil clucking that sounded eerily reminiscent of a laugh, the Poultrygeist stepped forward, its faintly luminescent wings spread in an aggressive posture.

A garden gnome launched from its resting spot amongst the perennials, hurtled over Boy and shattered against the wall. As the unfortunate garden gnomes' pieces clattered to the wooden porch, the two joined in battle. Lunging, Boy snapped out but only managed a mouthful of slimy feathers.

You're good. I'll give you that much, but you'd better flee before I get serious! Boy circled to the right, re-evaluating his enemy.

Another gnome sailed through the air as the Poultrygeist leaped, wings flapping with the loud crack of laundry in the wind. Boy nimbly leaped to the side, but failed to see the third, with its red pointy cap like a kitschy missile, which knocked him backwards, crashing to a stop against the porch with a yelp of pain.

The searing pain of his ribs threatened to debilitate him, Boy struggled to his feet, fangs bared in defiance.

The Poultrygeist fell on him, slashing with wicked spurs.

Panic hit home as Boy realized that he was clearly out of his league. Fiery agony shot through him when one of the Poultrygeist's spurs ripped into his neck. Yelping, he wrenched

himself free of the melee and dashed around the corner of the garage.

With a squawk of outrage, the Poultrygeist gave chase, ducking around the corner after its prey. Much to its surprise, a face full of snapping fangs greeted it as Boy leaped out with surprising ferocity. Startled, it shrugged off the little dog and dove at the garage door, sailing through it leaving only faintly glowing ooze, marking its passage.

Boy started after the Poultrygeist, but rammed the aluminum door with a loud bang. Thwarted, he scratched the garage door madly, desperate to give chase.

The sound of havoc erupted from inside the house.

Momma!

He redoubled his efforts, barking as loud as he could muster.

* * *

The sound of shattering glass jarred Jason awake. Jerking upright and sliding out of bed, he felt around for his trusty baseball bat.

What the hell is going on out there?

Jason's grip on his bat grew tighter as he slowly opened the door.

“Mom?”

Creeping down the hallway, he flinched at the sound of destruction.

He peeked around the corner, Jason saw a ghostly rooster flapping about the living room, amid a whirlwind of household objects.

“What the ever-lovin’ fuck is that?”

Hearing his expletive, the Poultrygeist's head swung about. It fixed a baleful eye on him, crowing loudly. A trophy flew off of the mantle and embedded itself in the wall beside his head. Doing a double-take, he ducked back and called out to his mother.

“We have a problem here,” Jason yelled. “I'm gonna try to get to your room. Be ready to open the door for me.”

“What the hell is going on?” his mother yelled above the chaos.

“You'll never believe me!”

Jason dashed for his mother's room.

“Call 911!”

Jason parried a small brass sculpture with his bat as he crossed the living room, dodging flying kitsch.

“I can't! My cell phone is in the living room.”

“Crap ...okay,” He spun on his heel. “I'll try to get it,” he ducked back into the living room, “I'm gonna...”

One meaty thump later, Jason fell to the floor, brained by a resin “world's greatest mom” statue.

The Poultrygeist stalked closer to its victim, clucking in a low tone.

* * *

Covered in dirt and blood, Boy burst into the living room from the kitchen and surveyed the situation.

The Poultrygeist strutted towards Jason's fallen form and spread its wings. A heavy cedar trunk rose into the air slowly and positioned itself in the air next to the undead cockerel.

Oh no you don't!

Despite the little dog's wounds, he managed to leap onto the back of the Poultrygeist and wrestle it to the ground. The Poultrygeist squawked indignantly and tried to shrug it off its attacker.

Boy glared into the malevolent flaming eye of the monster he now held at bay. A flicker of fear reflected in the emerald flames that licked up from its hollow eye sockets.

Die. He curled his lips and exposed his fangs, Boy clamped his jaws on the beast's putrescent head and shook it back and forth, tearing its head off. The Poultrygeist thrashed with surprising violence then lay still. All the objects that had been whirling around the room crashed to the floor, causing the room to become eerily silent.

THE COOKBOOK OF THE DEAD

Swallowing his prize, Boy howled in victory as his foe dissolved into a pile of glowing goo and feathers.

Bones, He swore as he limped to Jason's fallen form, *My ward!*

Boy licked the blood that ran down his face as Momma burst from her room.

“Oh My god! Jason! What happened?” She fell to her knees at her son's side, unsure of what to do.

At least my people are safe.

Boy whimpered as he slowly fell; everything went dark.

GALVAN

Chapter 1: Good News, Bad News, and an Invitation

ONE WEEK AGO:

“I’m home!”

Jason dropped his car keys into the monkey-shaped dish by the door.

His dog lay among the throw pillows on the couch, whimpering in his sleep, legs kicked the air in spasms.

“What’s wrong?” he stroked his dog’s overgrown fur.

With a jerk, Boy woke, righted himself, eyes alert for danger.

“Didja have a nightmare, Boy?”

Jason picked him up. A quick lick to the face assured him that he was alright.

Jason dropped his jaw in mock surprise.

“What do I have here?” he pulled Boy’s favorite toy from under one of the pillows on the couch.

Boy leaped out of his arms and spun on the couch, his tail fanning the air.

“Bite it, Boy!”

Jason shook the furry bone at him.

Boy dove in and latched onto the toy. He shook it back and forth in an attempt to wrest it from Jason, making growly noises of pure joy.

“Jason! Get in here!” Mom called from the kitchen.

Jason scooped up the scruffy looking poodle and headed into the kitchen. Jason’s mother, Janice was standing there waving a letter in one hand and pointing at the television with the other.

“I just found out I’m going to be on TV!” she exclaimed, jumping up and down.

“Sweet! Wait -- what? What show?”

Jason’s face flashed with confusion.

“Oh, just a little show called ÜBERCHEF!”

She crossed her arms and looked smug.

“But, uh,” Jason said, flashing back to many, many bad experiences with his mother’s cooking.

“That’s a cooking show, and you know...”

Jason glanced at the various indelible oil stains and burns that liberally marked the walls and ceiling, telling the tales of her many failed attempts at cooking as a warning to all who would sit at her dinner table.

“Yeah! I know!” she gushed, “And to celebrate, I’m gonna cook a special dish for the three of us.”

Startled, Boy leaped out of Jason’s arms and fled the room.

Jason frowned briefly after Boy.

Maybe it’s just me, but sometimes I think he really understands us.

“Run, Boy! Save yourself!”

Jason stuck his tongue out at his mother as Boy disappeared into the living room.

“And what is that supposed to mean?”

His mother arched an eyebrow in his direction as she crossed her arms.

Jason smirked as he dashed after his dog. “Oh nothing. Nothing at all.”

* * *

Staring outwards from a stone balcony, a large hirsute man in his late fifties, in superb physical shape for his age, beckoned to his butler.

Like magic, his butler, Edgar appeared at his side. “Yes, Baron?”

The Baron handed him a set of dossiers that he had been reviewing, Janice’s face mugged manically at him from a passport photo paper-clipped to the top cover.

“These last two contestants seem especially suitable for our needs. Have you completed the spell?”

Bowing deferentially, Edgar accepted the folders, tucking them under one arm.

“Yes sir. They will be drawn to the Cookbook like bees to honey. I took the liberty of making certain arrangements at the site of the shoot.”

“Excellent! This will be the best season yet!” The Baron clapped his large hands loudly.

“Yes, sir. You're right as usual, sir.” Edgar bowed again and retreated out of sight.

The Baron smiled into the night, pausing to listen to the sound of crickets chirping their sleepy song before heading inside, closing the enormous double doors behind him.

* * *

Janice twirled the phone cord around her fingertip as she chatted, her eyes bright with excitement.

“So yeah, I knew I had to impress them, so I made the recipe a little daring, and I was accepted! What? Well, I thought I'd...”

Frowning, she paused. “Well, I thought I'd worry about that when the time comes. I'm sure I'll think of something. Yes! Okay. I'll catch you later, Sue. Buhbye.”

Busying herself with organizing her kitchen cabinets, she peered into them desperately seeking inspiration. Frowning, she shut the cabinets, picked up a letter that lay on the table, and sat to read it for the hundredth time.

I'm going to prove to Jason that I'm not a ditz in the kitchen once and for all!

Janice smiled and nodded to herself.

“Well, it looks like it's time for a road trip.”

Folding the letter and slipping it back into its envelope, she squealed with glee.

“I gotta call Chuck!”

She hopped up and grabbed the phone again.

An hour later, Janice heard the front door open, the noise prompting Boy to rush excitedly into the living room. Clutching her acceptance letter tightly, she leaned her head through the doorway into the living room.

Jason was watching with amusement as his dog danced around in excitement. “Well, hello Boy! It's good to see you, too!”

“Hey, we're going to Louisiana. I'm gonna check out the studio.” His mother waved her letter at him. “Pack a day bag.”

Jason's expression fell, “You're not even supposed to be there 'til the third. Will they even let you in?”

“Well,” she said, looking at the ceiling, “It's like, scoping out the situation. I hope I can... or maybe even...” Flustered, she

looked away, “Well anyway, I just have to go, and since Arlington to Shreveport is four hours... I'm taking you with me.”

Seeing a way out, Jason's eyes lit, “What about Uncle Chuck? Weren't we supposed to...”

“Already called him. He said we could do it next weekend.”

Janice added, giving him the eye.

Jason muttered under his breath and ran his fingers through his unruly brown hair, as he headed to his room.

* * *

Jason lazily watched Boy stick his head out of the window of the SUV, his eyes squinting against the pressure and ears flapping in the wind.

It must be so easy for him, Jason smiled at his dog. No real worries on his mind, no school or anything. I suppose, just a loving family who spoils him way too much.

The scenery was flying by, and the humming of the tires on the road was making him sleepy, luckily his mother had a habit of chattering on nonstop (which he attributed to her coping mechanism, since his father died), so at least her conversation would keep him awake, lest he become the victim of a wet-willy.

“You know...” His mother signaled and swung around a slow moving semi. “I want to take Boy to the groomer and get him one of those fancy haircuts.”

“No, just no. I will not have it. Will not.” Jason emphasized his statement by making an X with his forearms. “He's *my* dog. I will not have him looking fruity,” Jason scowled. “A trim is okay, but if I see so much as one puffball on him, I will be very, very mad.” Jason crossed his arms and gazed out the window.

His mother giggled and focused on the road once more.

Jason rolled his eyes, focusing on the scenery as it flashed by.

I can't believe I'm going along on this stupid road trip. I could be playing smashem'up with Eddie.

The rest of the drive was relatively calm; they arrived in Shreveport about four in the afternoon. As they drove through town, Jason stared at the clouds though the window. They hung ominously in the sky, a dull blue-gray that threatened to open up and drench them, which Jason considered to be a bad omen.

Chapter 2: The Studio, a Recipe Stolen, and Sweethearts Reunited

The studio was in the industrial district, in a rundown factory building. Carpenters and painters were swarming in and out like ants in overalls. Sniffing the air, Boy hopped out of the SUV.

“Well Boy, this is it. Mamma's gonna be made famous here. What do you think?”

Jason cocked an ear at his dog, who peered into the building and smiled, “He said good luck.”

“Okay, let's get in there, and get my creative juices going, boys!” Janice strode towards the entrance. They pressed past the workers, into the large factory-cum-studio.

Janice spied a blond middle-aged man in a black suit approaching them, hand extended in greeting.

“Hello! I'm Janice...”

He smiled as he took her hand.

“Janice Harrison. Yes, I didn't expect to see you quite so soon. I'm Edgar, the Baron's butler, pleased to meet you. I am sad to say that you're not going to be able to see the Baron today, he's not in the country just yet.”

He turned and motioned towards the set.

“You are welcome to come have a look around though. Sadly, I must attend to an important matter, so please have a look and let yourself out when you're done.” Edgar bowed slightly and left through a side door.

“Ah, thanks!” Janice called out to the butler's retreating form. Briefly looking at her hand, still somewhat surprised at how firm Edgar's grip had been, a dark shadow fell over her.

Shivering, she turned to her son.

“Well boys, have a look, but don't get in anyone's way, okay?”

“Sure thing,” Jason clapped his hands together sharply. “C'mon Boy! Let's see us a TV studio!”

Boy took off towards the main stage. His nails clicked softly on the floor as he trotted away.

“Hey! Wait for me!” Jason rushed after the errant pooch. Boy wove his way through the workers into the main kitchen area, with Jason following hot on his heels.

This, Janice thought, is an excellent opportunity to get an advantage over the competition. So... let's see that office.

Opening the door, Janice peered inside. Subdued lighting and large bookshelves filled with heavy leather bound books and spice racks. The scent of exotic herbs and spices permeated the room. A large intricately carved wooden desk, dominated the room. Upon it, a large, leather bound book sat open upon it, centered in a pool of light provided by the nearby lamp.

Janice wandered around the room, taking in the rich decorations. She found herself gravitating towards the desk and peered at the open book blankly as the shadow encroached on her vision, casting her into darkness, leaving only the book existing as her entire universe.

Like a switch in her head flipped, the shadow was gone, and she snapped back into action. “Hmmm . . . What language is this? Italian?”

She peered from the book to the exotic spice racks on the wall. “Well, I think I've found my inspiration.”

She flipped through the book, stopped and bit the tip of her tongue as she copied the recipe onto a notepad she pulled from her purse. Once finished, she looked at her handiwork.

“Good enough for government work.” Janice hemmed and hawed as she pondered the exotic list of ingredients.

I'm not sure what some of these spices are... well I'm not going to find you at the local grocery store, that's for sure, so you are coming with me.

Scanning through the spice rack, she pulled several bottles from their places. Momentarily pondering taking the bottles, she suspected that it would be noticed. In a moment of inspiration, she pulled out her vitamin case, dumped the contents into her purse, filled the sections with the various ingredients, and as a final touch, she marked the container with her eyebrow pencil, so she wouldn't forget what was what. She dropped the vitamin container back into

her purse, quickly cleaned up and replaced the bottles in the spice rack.

She straightened her clothes and composed herself; then closed the door behind her, and set off to find the boys.

* * *

Jason followed his dog to the main stage where a middle-aged man in overalls knelt as he made touch ups to the white circles that were around each of the cooking stations which gave the overall feeling of islands separated from each other in a sea of darkness. Boy sniffed both the man and his handiwork.

The painter stopped and peered at Boy. "It's okay to look, but don't mess up my handiwork, okay pooch?"

"Boy, get over here!" Jason called out.

Boy whirled and trotted back to Jason's side.

"Sorry about my dog!" Jason picked up Boy, and went back to examining the area.

Jason wagged an index finger at him.

"Be a good boy, okay?"

The little dog replied by licking his finger.

"Hey! You got paint on your sniffer," Jason said, pausing to wipe it off with the sleeve of his hoodie. "Let's find Mom."

He dropped Boy, who turned to look at him. "Okay, Boy. Find Momma!" Jason demanded.

Boy spun off and headed in the direction they came from. After a few moments of sniffing, he gave a short bark and dashed away, nails clicking on the cement floor like a little tap dancer.

Jason followed Boy towards the back of the studio, where he saw that Mom was headed his way. Boy wiggled and jumped about, quite happy to have found her.

"Well Mom, did you find your inspiration?"

"Ya know, I think I did." Janice winked at her son, "Now let's go eat lunch at that burger place we saw on the way here."

"That's the best idea you've had all day."

* * *

As Janice and Jason left the studio, Edgar re-entered the main studio, cell phone held to his ear.

“Yes, Baron,” he said “It went as expected. Like bees to honey. I will refill your reagents immediately and send someone to keep an eye on her. I imagine we'll get our second visitor soon.”

He paused, listening attentively.

“No, sir. I'm unaware of which recipe she copied. Yes sir, as you wish.” He closed his phone, and headed back to the office.

* * *

Having finished lunch, Jason and his mother climbed back into the SUV and headed home. The trip home was unusually quiet, since his mother was apparently deep in thought. Seeing his chance, Jason lowered his seat to take a nap.

* * *

“Well boys, we're home,” Janice announced, jarring her son awake.

Rubbing his eyes, Jason unbuckled his seat belt and hopped out, stretching his cramped muscles. Blinking blearily, he headed inside and emptied his pockets onto the desk in his bedroom before flopping on the bed.

Boy joined him by slamming his body into him and sliding down, getting the most body contact that he could.

Jason reached over and hit the switch on the lamp beside the bed, casting the room into darkness. He suddenly sat upright and grabbed his hoodie, which was softly glowing. He flicked back on the light.

He peered at a smear of off-white paint on the sleeve. “Hey, that paint that was on your nose must have been glow in the dark!”

Boy stood and sniffed at the smudge briefly, then did a few circles before plopping down again. Jason pondered the paint for a few moments, then dropped the hoodie back onto his computer chair and wandered into the living room.

He could hear his mother humming to herself from the kitchen. Jason leaned into the doorway and caught a peek of her writing something down.

She looked at her copied recipe intently. Hemming and hawing as she worked her way down the list, she made a few notes on a second piece of paper, scratched it out, only to write them again. Exasperated, she threw up her hands in frustration with an annoyed grumble

Having seen enough, Jason entered the kitchen. “Exercising?” “What? Oh, I'm trying to read this recipe, it's in Italian, I think,” she said, pointing to the page on the table.

Jason had a look for himself, and squinted at the page. “That's not Italian.” Jason picked the page up and squinted at the his mother's sloppy handwriting, “It's Latin.”

“Latin, huh? What an odd language to have a recipe in. I'm glad to know that you take after your dearly departed father instead of me in that respect, I'm awful with languages. I wish you had taken Latin instead of Spanish.”

Jason laughed. “Well, Mom. Latin is a dead language, but Spanish will get me a better paying job. That said, I might have a friend who can help, for the right incentive...” Jason said, barely suppressing a smile.

“Incentive?” she said, raising an eyebrow.

“Yes. I'll need to butter her up, so I'll need some financial lubricant.” His grin grew larger as he rubbed his thumb and index finger together.

“Larceny! I swear!” she reached for her purse. “I really don't know where you get it from.” Peering at him, she slowly withdrew a twenty, and failing to see him reach for it, produced a second one, which he deftly took from her.

“Yes, that'll do nicely. Love you, Mom.” He pocketed the cash and gave her a quick peck on the cheek. “I'll get to work on her tomorrow at school.”

And maybe we can pick up where we left off before she left.

* * *

Jason flashed his hall pass at the old woman who glanced at it briefly through paint speckled glasses and nodded before returning to her painting. Scanning the room, he smiled as he spied his target easily: A tall, thin girl dressed all in black, with long black hair, and a ghostly pale complexion.

Wow, still as beautiful as I remember.

“Hello Thea, It's been a while.” Jason sat beside her.

Looking up from her photo montage, she paused and resumed her work.

“Hello, Jason.”

“Ah, I need to talk with you.”

Hesitating, she gave him a sideways glance. “What do you want?”

“You wound me, Thea. Do I really need a reason?”

Althea turned her gaze on him and stared silently.

Jason laughed uneasily and rubbed his fingers through his short hair. “You got me, I need a favor. But in all fairness, it's my excuse to finally talk to you since you're back.”

Pushing away her project, she crossed her arms and leveled her gaze on him. “So, what can I do for you?”

“I'll tell you on Friday night, I'm taking you out and buttering you up. Movie and dinner.”

“Bold words, Jase. Where and when?”

“The Chinese place on the hill, five-thirtyish. Okay?”

“I'll be there,” she waved him away. “Now shoo, you're disturbing my creative process.”

Bowing deep, Jason retreated. “Yes, my dark muse.”

As he turned to leave, he caught a brief glimpse of a smile as Althea turned back to her work.

Man, I've missed that smile. I will thaw that ice queen.

Jason headed back to his own homeroom, humming to himself, a wide grin on his face.

* * *

Jason opened the door to see Boy jumping around with his favorite stuffed toy in his mouth.

“Hey Boy! I missed you sooo much!” Jason squatted to give his dog a good rub

“Mom! You home?” Listening carefully, he heard no reply. Shrugging, he flopped on the couch, and began to channel surf; pausing his steady flipping as something caught his eye. He sat up, and turned up the volume.

On our all new season, The Baron will face five of his most talented opponents ever, as they duel in the dark world of occult food! The screen flashed quick head shots of five people, Two men, one with dark slicked back hair, one regular looking guy, an older woman with piercing eyes and scowl to match, and finally his mother with a silly grin and fingers raised in a victory sign.

Which one will become the next ÜBERCHEF?

Be here next month!

“Wow!” Jason glanced at his dog. “She sure doesn't seem to fit in with that group, does she, Boy?”

His pooch settled on a lick to the face as the appropriate response.

“I wonder if she knows the theme?” he pondered, throwing a stuffed toy across the room. Boy flew off of the couch after it, and reclaimed his place at his masters' side.

“Hey Boy! Mamma's gonna cook!” Jason said.

An alarmed look crossed Boy's face, causing him to try to hide under the pillows on the couch, completely unaware that his rump was still sticking up into the air.

“I'm just kidding!” Jason laughed.

Just then, the sound of turning keys in the door was heard.

Boy's head popped out of the pillows, followed by the rest of him as he dove towards the door, sniffing like mad.

Scrambling for his toy again, he began his greeting dance.

Janice entered with bags of takeout dangling from her arms, “The mighty hunter has arrived! I have slain the dim-sum beast!”

Gathering around the table, the two of them laid out the feast.

Jason spoke up as his mother pulled out the plates and silverware, “I've got the help you need. I'm taking her out on Friday night. Assuming I'm convincing enough, she'll be around on Saturday to help. But I'll need the car.”

Jason made steering motions with his hands.

“Sure, but don't stay out too late, you got me?” Pausing, she added. “Who is it? Do I know her?”

“Yes, its Althea Brown, remember, from middle-school? She lived a few houses down, but they moved across town suddenly, so I hadn't seen her until recently when she transferred to my high school.”

“Aha!” she said as she poured two glasses of water from a plastic jug from the fridge, “Yes, I remember her, she was really sweet. You told me you were going to marry her when you were eight.”

Rolling his eyes at the impending childhood story, he interjected, “She's gone goth. I want you to be prepared for that.”

His mother blinked. “I don't follow.”

“She's become...” Jason chewed his lip thoughtfully, “Er, well, she's wearing a lot of black now. Almost exclusively, in fact. And

she's somewhat withdrawn. When you see her, I expect you to not make a scene about it, okay?"

She sniffed, "Of course I won't, I understand the fragile nature of a girl's heart, unlike you."

Ignoring her jibe, he turned his attention to the food on the table with a hungry eye, "Thanks."

* * *

Friday arrived without much fanfare; classes came and went as usual. During gym class, Jason's best friend, "Steady" Eddie Walker approached him with a suspicious grin on his face.

"Jase, did you watch TV last night? I saw your mom."

"Yeah. The ÜBERCHEF! commercial, right? I know all about it." Jason said without much enthusiasm.

Eddie placed his hand on Jason's shoulder, "Seriously, your mom on a cooking show?" and gestured for Jason to explain the rest.

"I know, I know, don't ask me what they were thinking." Jason scowled. "But, it did land me a date with Thea."

Eddie scowled, "Althea Brown? The one who went goth?"

"Don't pretend you don't know her just because she left without saying goodbye."

"Hmph, well I expect a full report if you get anywhere with her," Eddie turned and left, waving lazily over his shoulder as he went.

* * *

Eddie grumped as he left Jason behind and made his way to his next class.

Of course I was mad! You loved each other, and she wouldn't even say goodbye!

* * *

Chin's on the Hill was a fairly small place, but quite popular. Large plate glass windows offered a great view of the town. Six Flags lay in the distance, its bright lights and activity now dormant, waiting for summer to resurrect it.

Jason sat there, staring out at the city, as the sun went down.

* * *

Fingering the ring in his pocket, he thought about what he should say to Thea when he gave it to her. She had missed school today and he figured that surprising her would make her feel better. Slinging his backpack, he pedaled his well-worn Huffy towards her house.

Time seemed to stand still as he saw the moving truck, swiftly taking Althea's life away at a low daily rate. Jumping from his bike, he rushed up the front stairs and into the living room, now an empty husk, bereft of the trappings of a home. He made an attempt to run upstairs and look for the one girl who had completely captured his heart from the moment they met, but was chased out and admonished by her mother who insisted that she did not want to see him.

From the corner, he watched with a hollow feeling as Thea's mother guided her outside, and into the beaten up blue station wagon that she drove. As they pulled away, Jason only saw a haunted, vacant look in Althea's eyes as she stared into space, as if in a trance.

* * *

“Did I keep you waiting long?”

Startled, Jason turned and saw Althea, wearing a pair of black jeans and a long sleeved black blouse with bright red piping and matching ribbon that held back her silky locks.

“Wow, you look great!” he said, a bit dumbstruck. “And no, I was just checking the scenery.”

“Excellent.”

“I'm glad you came, but let's talk business first, and then we can relax,” he nodded to the waitress as she swooped in placing a second tea cup on the table and swapping the pot of water for a fresh one. “I don't suppose you've watched TV lately?”

“No, I think television makes you stupid.” she winced. “Sorry.”

“No, don't be. You're right. The reason I ask is my mom, for unknown reasons, was chosen to participate on a reality cooking show.”

Puzzled, she nodded. “Cooking show, Your mom ...okay, continue.”

“Well, we took a trip to where the show is going to be shot. It's just a few hours away, in Louisiana,” he said. “While we were there, my mother somehow came up with a recipe, which she was sure was in Italian. It wasn't. It's Latin.” Pausing, he added, “And since I know you studied Latin in Catholic school . . .”

“Well,” she said, “That's pretty straight forward.”

“Yes, well,” he held his hands up. “There's more.”

Raising an eyebrow, she nodded for him to continue.

“The shows' theme is occult cooking,”

She blinked. “Occult cooking.”

“Occult cooking,” he repeated. “I really don't know what to say about it... I've never even heard of it before. I'll send you a link when I get home.”

Jason pushed a piece of paper and pen her way.

“Okay, that's a good start.”

She took the pen and wrote her phone number and e-mail address down, and pushed it back.

“We would like you to come over tomorrow before lunch, okay?”

He folded the paper carefully in two and slid it into his jeans pocket.

“That's fine,” she said. “Now on to the really important business, I think I'll have the General's chicken with noodles and egg rolls.”

Jason nodded in agreement. “I like the way you think.”

As the two of them chatted, Jason noticed that for a moment, just a tiny moment, a crack appeared in Thea's armor, and Jason caught a brief glimpse of the girl he fell in love with years ago.

I know you're in there, Thea, why don't you come out to play?

Jason smiled and took a sip of tea.

* * *

Janice returned from the market with a pair of fully loaded grocery bags. Humming to herself, she stepped around her prancing poodle and into the kitchen. Placing them on the table, she plopped on the couch and let out a sigh of relief.

“Hey, Boy! Momma missed you!”

Boy jumped up in her lap with his toy in his mouth, where he continued to wiggle and dance for her attention. Stroking him, he

finally calmed down and lay in her lap, his head propped up on his toy, a mysteriously shaped brown furry whatzit that he had received for Christmas the previous year. She never did figure out what it was supposed to be, but he loved it so it didn't really matter.

Taking the beloved saliva-soaked toy, she tossed it across the room. The little dog leaped on it, and began to chew it as he kneaded it with his paws.

Smiling, she returned to the kitchen and put away the groceries. She held up one of the chickens she had bought and danced around the kitchen with it, singing to herself.

* * *

As Jason opened the front door, he heard Boy howling.

"Mom, I'm home!" he called out and hearing the singing, headed to the source.

Spying his mother dancing around, he grimaced.

"Mom, I hate to burst your bubble, but dancing with uncooked poultry is unsanitary at best. And I don't even want to consider the worst case scenario. Besides, what would the neighbors say if they saw it? I mean, really."

Jason clucked at her and gave his best look of disapproval.

* * *

The fancy chamber music that had been playing in her head came to a screeching halt.

"Do you have good news for me?"

Jason grinned. "She'll be here before lunch tomorrow, and if you'll excuse me, I need to send her some info." Waving as he went back to his room, he called Boy, who followed along with a spring in his step.

Sitting at his desk, he powered up his computer, and hummed to himself as it went through the familiar sounds of booting up.

"Okay, now. Let's see... the ÜBERCHEF! website..." He hummed as he browsed for a copy of the current season's teaser.

"Gotcha." Jason copied the address and emailed it to Althea

Making a quick stop for some munchies, He settled down and flipped through the channels. Boy looked jealously at the bowl of snacks, and hopped off the couch, and ran out of sight. When he

returned, he dropped a mouthful of dry dog food in front of him, and began to eat.

“Well boy, looks like we both have our snacks now, so let's relax.”

Mom wandered into the room after putting away the groceries, and sat beside him.

“Hey,” he asked, “what do you know about ÜBERCHEF!?”

“Well...” she began, “It's a cooking show... It started about four years ago. The host is some crazy German guy; apparently he's a very good chef. Every season so far has had a cool theme.” Janice screwed up her face in thought, “Last season's theme was medieval, I think.”

“So,” Jason said, “do you know what this season's theme is?”

She pondered. “No, I can't say that I do.”

Jason grinned. “You'll learn soon enough.”

Chapter 3: Althea Visits, a Diabolic Dish, and Boy's Defense

Saturday morning: quite possibly the most perfect part of the week. No real pressure to do anything, a nice lazy breakfast, and an afternoon full of goofing off. There is nothing better in the world than Saturday morning.

Reality struck Jason like a slap to the face. He scrambled out of bed, sending Boy diving for cover.

He had to shower and make himself and his room presentable fast!

Jumping into the shower, he gave himself a quick double scrub, then emerged, ready to greet the world.

“Good morning, Sunshine!” he said, scooping up Boy, who had been camping outside his bedroom door. They headed into the kitchen to browse for breakfast.

“How do you feel about eggs and bacon, Boy?” At the mention of bacon, Boy kicked himself free of his master’s grip and began his bacon dance.

“Yeah, I thought it was a good idea too,” he said as he peered into the fridge.

“Okay, Boy. I’m cooking the eggs and bacon, you make the toast, OK?”

Boy paused his dancing to cock his head quizzically at him.

“Okay, Okay. I’ll cook the toast too, lazy dog.”

As breakfast wrapped up, Janice stumbled into the kitchen, drawn towards the coffeepot like a zombie to brains. Once she had coffee clutched in her hands, she looked around blearily.

“Make yourself presentable, we have a guest coming over in a few hours,” Jason rinsed the dishes in the sink.

Moaning noncommittally, she sipped her coffee.

“And that, Boy,” Jason winked at his dog, “is as good as we’ll get out of her.”

* * *

A little before noon, the doorbell rang, announcing Althea's arrival. Boy, as usual was at the door, giving it a good sniffing, poised to dance, should the occasion warrant it.

Janice smiled and opened the door. "Welcome to the Harrison domicile! Please come in!" She scowled at her dog, "Geeze stop already! It's embarrassing!"

However, Boy was far too busy to listen, as usual.

I smell Max! Where's Max!?

Jason entered from his room, and gave Althea a warm smile. "I'm glad you made it. I see Boy has already extended his greetings."

"I think he smells my dog." She handed her backpack to Jason, and knelt to receive Boy's affections.

* * *

"I remember you!" she said, scratching his muzzle. "From when you were a little puppy."

She stood, smoothing out her clothes, "I have some materials in my bag to help, and of course, my laptop, in case we need to look something up."

Althea retrieved her backpack from the couch.

"I saw the commercial, and I think I understand a little better. Let me show you."

She opened her bag and took out her laptop, which she set up on the coffee table. A few moments later, a copy of the Uberchef! commercial was playing on her screen.

"Okay, this is the Baron . . .but you know that. Let's skip forward to the important part, twenty-three seconds in." She stopped the video, dragged the marker to the correct point, with the Baron in a full frontal shot. "This is it," she said, pointing to the screen. "Do you see the book he's holding?"

"Yes, why?" they replied, in unison.

"That book is a major clue. Let me zoom in on it."

She zoomed it for them to see.

"As far as I can tell, it's a supernatural book of some kind. It reads" 'The NecroNomNomNomicon'. After some research, I discovered was 'The cookbook of the dead.' It's not very famous, but I still managed to pull up a few things. However, as with

anything you find on the net, you have to take it with a grain of salt.”

Reaching into her bag, she withdrew an old, battered, Latin textbook and held it aloft. “And this is to help with your recipe problem.”

Janice nodded.

“So,” she said, looking from the laptop to the worn textbook “Where do we start?”

Jason raised a hand. “With the recipe, I think.”

“Ding ding ding! Correct answer! So, let's see this mystery recipe.”

Janice took the recipe from a drawer and laid it on the table.

Althea peered at the paper and uttered a soft hmmm.

“Is this exact?”

Janice looked a bit sheepish. “...I hope? I don't understand it, so I may have miscopied some of it...”

Althea made more thoughtful humming noises as she read over the document.

“Well most of this is pretty straightforward. The second half is pretty much a recipe. I'm not sure about the measurements or some of the ingredients really.”

Taking several plastic containers out of the cabinet, Janice placed them on the table. “These are what you're looking for I think.”

“And these are...” Althea prompted.

“Spices. I found them in a pretty extensive spice rack in the Barons' office,” Janice supplied.

“Well, I'm glad you labeled them.” Althea said, comparing them to the recipe. “With a few more ingredients, I think we'll be able to get to work.”

“Woohoo!” Janice said, bouncing up and down. “Have a look at my spice cabinet, and Jason will take you to get what I don't have,” she said, nodding to he

“I brought my own car, I'll drive.” Peering in the cabinet, she found a strange assortment of spices, most of which were untouched.

Unfortunately several of the recipes' ingredients were not present. She took a piece of paper from the counter and jotted down the ingredients on the list, checking off the ingredients that

they already had. Nodding, she turned back to the expectant gaze of Janice.

“Okay, we'll go to this exotic organic food store I know. They have lots of fresh and natural ingredients, and considering the nature of this recipe, that's probably for the best,” she said, grabbing her jacket and a small handbag from her backpack.

“Come along, Jase,” Althea said.

“Yes dear,” Jason said, throwing his mom a wink, which she returned with a smile.

* * *

Althea sped along the freeway in her old Cadillac convertible, top down and stereo blasting.

“So, where is this shop?” Jason yelled.

“Downtown Dallas, you get to it through an alley. It's kind of small, but you'll like it, though, it's kind of like the little bodega we used to play video games at,” she yelled as they cruised towards their destination.

Jason turned the stereo down. “Do you want to get something to eat while we're out?”

“No, we're going to be cooking, remember?” she frowned at him for a moment before focusing on the road again.

“Well yeah,” he wriggled. “But this is my mom we're talking about. Her cooking is dangerous.”

“Not so long as I'm there it isn't,” she replied with a firm tone.

They pulled into a parking space downtown. Jason hopped out and put a few quarters in the meter.

Althea pointed to a nearby alley.

“It's in there.”

Jason's eyebrows shot up as they approached the alley.

“Isn't it kind of weird to have the entrance in an alley?”

“Not really. Now, the owner is like family to me, so be polite.”

They entered the small, dimly lit shop; the scent of strange incense greeted them.

“Mr. Kwok! Are you here?” Althea called out, walking down a cluttered aisle.

Jason picked up a tin of something and squinted at the inscrutable Asian hieroglyphics on it. Holding it to his ear, he shook it gently, and then returned it to its place on the shelf.

From the back, a small commotion erupted, followed by the appearance of a small, wizened Asian man with a large smile.

Raising his arms in the air, he exclaimed, "Ah! Miss Brown! It's good to see you!"

"You too, Mr. Kwok, I've missed you"

"I see you brought your boyfriend this time." He raised his eyebrows in Jason's direction

"Mr. Kwok, Jason. Jason, Mr. Kwok," she said, gesturing back and forth.

Jason smiled and offered a small wave, "Pleased to meet you Mr. Kwok"

"You too, my boy," Mr. Kwok looked back and forth between the two. "So, why am I getting a visit today? Do you need more sassafras root?"

"Not root beer this time, I have a small project, and it requires some ...unusual spices and herbs"

"Oh! A challenge! What do we need?" he asked, rubbing his palms together in excitement.

Pulling the list of ingredients from her coat pocket, she handed it to the old man, who poured over it with an eager expression. He looked up and gave Althea an odd look, and went back to the list.

"Yes, yes. I think this list won't be a problem. I assume the check marks mean you have this reagent already?" Mr. Kwok asked over the list.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'm glad you came to me. Let's go into the back, where all my professional goods are kept. Only my special customers get to see this part of the store," he said, parting a bead curtain and waving them through.

The back room was revealed to be less like the cliché Asian market up front, and more like a professional apothecary.

"The outer store is purely for show; my customers like it," Mr. Kwok said as they entered the back room.

The proprietor fed the list of ingredients and quantities into a program running on his computer. A few moments later, a printout was dropped into a waiting tray. Mr. Kwok scanned the list, and

led them down aisles filled with rows and rows of glass jars with different colored liquids, powders, plants, and possibly animal parts. As he moved from shelf to shelf, filling small paper envelopes with various herbs, and marking them with a pen, he turned towards Althea.

“You're kind of young to be practicing, aren't you?” Mr. Kwok asked as he filled envelopes with pungent smelling ingredients.

Pausing, she glanced to Jason and back. “Um, I'm a novice.”

“Some of the items on this list aren't usually for ...student use.” Mr. Kwok looked at the list again.

“It's not my project. I'm assisting...”

The old man's face split with a grin.

“Your father? He hasn't been here in a long time.”

Althea shuddered slightly, and gestured to Jason.

“N-no. His mom.”

“Ah, I see. That makes sense,” he filled the envelopes, looking much relieved.

Putting the collection of envelopes into a small brown bag, He motioned the two back to the front store.

“Since this is your first professional purchase from me, and your father and I go way back, I'm going to give these to you for free.”

Taking the bag from him, she gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. “Ooh! Thank you!”

Mr. Kwok tittered “Repeat customers are the majority of my business.”

“Well, I'll be back soon. Goodbye Mr. Kwok!”

“Let me know how it turns out!” Mr. Kwok returned the wave and headed into the back.

* * *

Althea's father had just stepped out of the back room, followed by Mr. Kwok.

“Well, princess, did you find anything you like? It's your birthday, so the sky's the limit.”

“Yes, daddy! I want to try all the pocky!” Althea held up an unsteady armful of brightly colored boxes. “Oh! And can we make root beer too?”

Her father knelt before her, slipping a bulging envelope into his jacket pocket and taking some of the boxes from her, “For Jason?”

Althea blushed. “Yes, daddy.”

He kissed her on the forehead and stood again, towering over her. “You heard the Princess. Mr. Kwok, we need Sarsaparilla root and birch bark!”

Grinning, the old man scurried into the back room once more, “Right away!”

* * *

“Alright, that was weird,” Jason said, looking at Althea as he buckled his seat belt.

“Very,” Althea looked into the bag of spices.

Jason glanced back down the alley.

“Why do I get the feeling something very important just went unsaid in there?”

Nodding, Althea folded the bag shut and wedged it under the fold-down armrest between them.

“I’m feeling that there’s something I’m forgetting.”

Althea turned the ignition and pulled out, her face unreadable as they headed home.

Jason frowned as he casually glanced at Althea out of the corner of his eye.

Ok, something has you withdrawn even more than usual. What could it be?

“Well, we’ll figure it out together, I’m sure.”

Althea glanced at Jason, her face completely devoid of emotion.

“Yeah. Maybe.”

* * *

Boy barked, causing Janice to lean out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on a towel she pulled from her apron. Jason opened the door, which sent Boy into a dancing frenzy.

“Ah! You’re back! Did you get everything you needed?”

“Yeah, we got everything on the list,” Jason replied, holding up the bag.

Althea picked up Boy, who gave her a kiss, then handed him to Jason.

“You take Boy and stay out of our way, this might get ugly.” Althea said, taking off her coat, and pulling a black frilly apron out of her backpack before heading to the kitchen.

“Sure thing. Let's go for a walk, Boy.”

Boy wiggled as Jason put his harness on, and squinted into the sunlight as his ward opened the front door.

* * *

My ward and I are walking in the park.

Ah! A p-mail!

Hmm, large dog, male, healthy.

He marked this spot about two days ago, so that tells me this isn't his territory.

I'll add my own mark so others will know I was here.

I wonder why my ward never checks them?

Another dog comes close, we exchange courtesy sniffs. She's healthy, and her ward is talking to mine.

They make happy noises, and then part.

My ward pulls a ball out of his pocket. I crouch ready.

He throws, and I chase after it.

In this perfect moment, it's just us three: him, the ball and me.

After a good session of ball, we sit in the shade of a tree, exhausted.

A bell rings, and a man I recognize has arrived. My ward has noticed him too.

He stands in the same place every time we're here, and gives my ward food, and this time is no exception.

In recognition of my hard work, he gives me half.

Tired and happy, we head home.

* * *

Boy stuck his head in the door and sniffed cautiously before stepping inside.

“Guys? We're back,” Jason called out.

Jason noticed a good smell, and following it into the kitchen, he saw his mother standing there with flour on her face and

looking disheveled. She pointed to the dish on the table with an aura of triumph; it looked like a perfectly normal roast chicken. Althea was standing over the stove, putting the final touches on the side dishes.

His mother was practically beaming with joy. “See! I told you!”

“I'm impressed, It does look and smell good, but how about taste?” Jason asked, inspecting the chicken with a wary eye.

“We'll discover that together,” Althea handed him a handful of silverware. “But I don't think it'll be a problem.”

Jason sat at the table. Nodding to herself with satisfaction, his mother left to clean up while Althea finished setting the table.

“Your mom worked really hard on this,” Althea whispered. “And I kept her from making quite a few mistakes, so you should eat it without complaint, or face my wrath.”

“Yes, my dearest Thea,” Jason said with a deferential smile.

His mother returned a few minutes later, squeaky clean and grinning.

“Well.” Jason began, “I'm feeling brave, let's do this.” He held his plate out to her.

His mother began carving the chicken, disbursing the still hot and juicy meat onto everyone's plates. She then followed up with mashed potatoes and green beans for everyone.

Jason raised his fork, loaded with this ominous chicken, and paused a moment before taking a bite.

His eyes lit in surprise, “Mmm!” he mumbled around his fork, “This is really good!”

Althea's eyes glazed over as she took a bite, but it went unnoticed as everyone else's did as well.

Mom paused, “I didn't realize I was this hungry. Suddenly I'm absolutely famished.”

“Me, too,” Althea said as she spooned more potatoes and beans onto her plate.

They ate in silence, broken only by the sounds of silverware against plates and the bestial grunts as they devoured everything.

“Woof, I'm stuffed,” Jason said. “If any recipe would win a contest, that was it.”

“Thank you. That really means a lot to me,” Janice replied with a sluggish tone . “I need you to take this all out to the trash can before it gets smelly, I'll do the dishes.”

“Yes Ma'am.” Jason forced himself out of the chair.

He gathered the remains into a small bag, which he then put into the kitchen trash. Then, taking the whole thing outside, he deposited it into the can.

Clapping his hands together and turning to leave, he noticed a flower delivery van across the street. It had been there since before they went shopping for the ingredients. Shrugging, he went back inside.

Janice and Althea were stretched out on the couches when he made it back inside

Still utterly stuffed, he sat in the recliner and closed his eyes, drifting into sleep.

An unwelcome whap to the head with a throw pillow woke him from his sleep.

“Althea just left. Go to bed if you're gonna sleep.”

Janice held the pillow aloft in a threatening posture.

Mumbling at her, he stumbled into his room and immediately fell into a strange dreamless sleep.

Jason got up the next morning, bleary eyed. He staggered into the kitchen and sat.

“What truck hit me?” his mother muttered, as she shambled into the room and turned on the coffeepot.

“The same one that hit me, I think,” Jason replied, rubbing his eyes.

“Where's Boy?”

“I thought he was with you last night,” Jason propped his head up on his hands.

Opening the sliding door, Mom looked into the back yard.

“Boy! Get in here!”

The little dog reluctantly came inside. Wet and shivering, he sat at Jason's feet and stared out the sliding door, growling under his breath

“What in the world were you doing outside? ...and you're all wet!” Janice went to go get something to dry him with.

Boy sat there in stoic silence as Janice rubbed him with a bath towel

“Holy guacamole! Check this out, Mom!” Jason stared out the front door in disbelief.

His mother came to the door, holding Boy wrapped up in the towel like a canine burrito.

Janice gaped as she surveyed the front yard, the trash can was on its side, and garbage was strewn across the whole length and breadth of the yard.

Boy started growling and thrashing.

As Janice put him down, he wriggled out of the towel, and bolted out the front door.

Watching Boy as he went, she turned, “You know you're going to have to clean that up, right?”

Jason sighed. “Yeah, I guessed as much.”

From his vantage spot on the porch, Boy sat at attention, his eyes sharp on his surroundings.

“What are you so worried about boy?” Jason asked, pulling the garbage into a pile with a rake from the garage.

How did any of this happen without waking me? I'm a light sleeper. He mulled this over as he finished cleaning up the mess. “C'mon Boy, let's go inside.”

However, the little dog sat on the porch unmoved, as if on guard.

Shrugging, Jason turned to leave, “Scratch on the door when you want in, okay?”

Jason went inside, and returned with Boy's bed, and placed it in a plastic chair that was sitting on the porch. He picked up Boy and sat him in the bed. He then went inside, leaving Boy to stand guard on the house.

“Boy is acting really strange.”

“Probably thinks there's a raccoon out there that got into the garbage, and he wants to chase it away.”

Jason picked up the phone and dialed from a piece of paper that he pulled from his pocket. “Yes, can I speak with Althea? Yes, this is Jason Harrison. Yes ma'am, the very same. It's nice to hear you too.”

An annoyed sound squealed from the other end.

“Gimme the phone! Jase, I'm glad you called. Did you have plans for next weekend?”

“Yes, I’m taking you out again. We’re going to the Gothic Lolita convention in Fort Worth.”

“It’s like you can read my mind.” Althea sat and stretched out on the couch.

“Yeah, scary, huh? It was in the Observer as a big event and when I saw it, I immediately thought of you.”

“I’ll be going in costume,” Althea paused before blurting “You don’t have to, if you don’t wanna.”

“Well, thanks for that. I’m not really a dress-up kind of guy. But I know you’ll look mighty fine in whatever you choose.” Jason cast his gaze to the ceiling, “Oh, not to change the subject, but how did you sleep last night?”

“Like the dead, apparently. I didn’t even roll around. I woke up in the same position I hit the pillow in,” she replied.

“Me too! That’s unusual for me, because I normally toss and turn all night long.”

“That’s a strange coincidence.”

“Well, I gotta go, my Uncle Chuck is going to be here soon, I’m looking forward to seeing your costume.”

“I look forward to being seen.” Althea made a loud smooching noise and disconnected.

CHAPTER 4

Emergency care of all sorts

The present

Janice peeked out of her room, and seeing Jason lying on the floor, threw the door open and rushed to his side.

“What happened?” She found her cell phone among the jumbled chaos of the living room and fumbled her way through dialing 911.

Fifteen minutes later the EMT and police had arrived and strapped Jason to a back board for transport. One of the police officers approached Janice, a notepad in hand.

“Did you get a look at the people who did this?” he asked, writing in his pad.

“The only people home were my son, Jason, and myself.” Pointing to boy, she added, “And our dog.”

Taking a second look at Boy, she blanched, “Oh my god, you too!?”

Boy was bleeding badly from a gash on his neck, and covered with dirt and unexplainable goo. Boy mumbled weakly in her general direction, and collapsed.

She blanched and dialed a second number. “Chuck?” she said as the line engaged, her voice shaking.

“This better be important, it’s two in the morning,” said the voice on the other end.

“We’ve had an accident. I need you to take Boy to the vet, He’s bleeding badly. I’d do it but I have to take Jason to the hospital.”

“What happened?” he replied, now completely awake.

“I don’t know yet. Jason is out cold. I need you here ten minutes ago.”

“I’ll be right over.”

* * *

The EMT team wheeled Jason out, and loaded him into the ambulance.

“Officer, I’m going to have to ask you to come back later, okay?” Janice said “I need to take care of my boys.”

“I understand, Ma’am. I have kids too. I’m going to leave my card here on the counter. You call me when you’re ready,” the officer said. “I’m sure your son will be okay, so be strong.”

“Thanks,” Janice replied, as pawed through her first aid kit, unsure of what might help Boy.

They left, leaving the house empty except for Janice and her dog.

She cleaned up Boy’s wounds, and tried to bandage him up as best she could. Stroking his head softly, she cried, hot tears rolled down her cheeks as she looked at the destruction that had laid waste to the living room.

“Don’t you dare die, Boy. I need you. Jason needs you. Who will protect us?” Holding the unconscious poodle in her lap, she rocked back and forth, sniffing.

Chuck burst into the house. He looked around in amazement.

“What in the world happened here?” he demanded.

Janice blinked back more tears and wailed, “I don’t know! I don’t know!”

“I’ll take Boy to the doc, you hurry and get to the hospital,” he said, taking Boy from her. Turning to leave he said, “Call me once you know something, okay?”

Nodding her assent, she took one last look at the room around her. She closed the door behind her and sped off into the night.

* * *

Janice’s mind was whirling in circles. What could have possibly happened? All she could recall is loud crashing ...and a chicken crowing? Cursing herself, she wished she had told Jason to stay in his room. And Boy ... wasn’t he outside? How did he get inside? How did he get hurt? She let out a moan of despair and confusion.

First things first, I have to make sure Jason is alright. She thought as she sped along the expressway to the hospital.

* * *

Dammit, be home!

Chuck beat on the front door.

“Doc please, if you’re home, please open up. It’s an emergency!”

A commotion from upstairs broke out, and the sound of someone running down the stairs was heard. Moments later, the door opened to reveal a tall, sleepy, dark skinned middle aged.

“Charles, my friend, what is wrong at this very early hour?”

“There’s been an accident,” Chuck said, holding out Boy. “He’s badly hurt.”

“Oh my, let’s get him inside and have a look.” The doctor ushered him inside. “Edna, get the emergency kit and bring it to the kitchen please!” he called out.

* * *

Turning on the lights, He placed Boy on the table, and removed the makeshift bandages that were covering his wounds. Edna, his wife, ran downstairs, and into the garage. She reappeared with a large case, which she placed on the table, beside Boy.

The doctor rattled off something in rapid fire Punjabi to his wife, and she ran back to the garage.

“He’s lost a lot of blood,” the vet frowned and glanced up. “Do you know what happened?”

Chuck shook his head, “I really don’t, it’s my sister’s dog. There was some kind of accident at her house, her son is at the hospital now,”

Edna came back into the kitchen with an IV setup and a case which she sat on the counter.

The vet carefully removed Boy’s collar and glanced at the tags before setting it to the side. “It looks like he was in a fight with another animal. I can safely say that the collar kept him from being cut wide open.” Taking a sample jar out of the case, he took some of the goo that was covering Boy’s muzzle and placed it inside. Opening his jaws, he peered inside with a penlight and removed a fragment of a feather, and held it up for inspection.

“It seems our furry friend was in a fight with a rooster, and he got hit with a leg spur,” he stated as he set up Boy with the IV.

“Don’t you need to know his blood type?” Charles asked.

“Dogs are lucky, my friend. They get a free pass for this kind of thing. His collar doesn’t show that he is DEA 1.1, so he should

be fine for now, we will type him at the clinic. But for now I need to clean him up and inspect him for further injuries, we don't want to make things worse."

The doctor sprayed Boy off in the kitchen sink, and gingerly dried him with a soft towel. He took a small razor and shaved the area around his injury and puffed a little white powder on it. He then felt the ribs carefully. "It seems that he may have a fractured rib as well," he reached into his case for a small ampoule and syringe. "I'm going to give him something for the pain. When he wakes up he will be in quite a lot of it, I'm sure" he said as he squeezed the plunger on the syringe.

"Let's get him to the clinic now."

The vet loaded Boy carefully into a dog carrier, which his wife had brought into the kitchen and clipped the IV stand onto. "I'll meet you there."

Chuck nodded in agreement. "Thanks, Doc, really. You don't know how much I appreciate this. I'll follow you."

* * *

The doors slid open and revealed the emergency room, which was filled with people in various amounts of pain and suffering, sitting in silence, only broken by the hoarse coughing of a miserable looking child. Stepping up to the reception desk, the nurse looked up and said, "How can we help you today?"

"I'm Janice Harrison. My son Jason was just brought in by ambulance," she gripped her purse tight.

"Yes, Mrs. Harrison, please sign in here, and I'll take you to him," the nurse said, pushing the registry to her.

Janice signed her name, and followed the nurse into the emergency ward, where her son lay in a bed, a line of neat stitches was across his left temple. A youthful doctor with tired eyes was looking over some paperwork. He looked up to her and smiled.

"Hello, I'm Dr. Johansen. You must be Jason's mother. It seems he's had a head injury. I don't see any critical damage, the preliminary x-rays don't show any fractures to the skull, but we still need to run a MRI on him." The doctor paused. "He isn't in a coma, he was just struck unconscious."

"Thank you, Doctor. Can I stay with him?"

THE COOKBOOK OF THE DEAD

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Harrison. We need to prep him for the MRI. We’ll call you when it’s done. It won’t be long, I promise.”

Janice headed into the waiting room and sat, a feeling of dread settling over her like a cold blanket.

I hate this place. I have always hated hospitals. They’re supposed to be places of healing, but to me they only seem to be places of pain and death. God, if you’re out there... please save my boy. Since I lost Steven, he’s all I have. I don’t know what I’d do if I lost him too.

* * *

Chuck was at the veterinary hospital with Dr. Mahju, who was explaining his findings to him.

“The loss of blood was severe, but now that we have him here and treated, he will be fine.” He pointed at the neck wound. “The wound was not as bad as I had originally thought, it just bled a lot. It shouldn’t need more than two stitches and some antibiotics. Normally for this kind of thing, we’d use a protective collar. But the wound is on the neckline where it would rest, so we have to use a plastic cover, which we will glue to his skin. It will fall off when it’s completely healed in a week or so. Let’s have a look at those x-rays.” The doctor slipped them up on the viewer.

“Are his ribs broken?” Chuck asked.

“It doesn’t seem so, although I thought I felt one,” the doctor said as he scribbled some notes. “That’s good news for you; makes things less complicated. We’ll keep him here overnight, give him antibiotics against infection, and give him some fluids,” pausing, he added “I just have one question.”

“Ask away, Doc.”

Pulling the sample jar from his pocket, he held it aloft. “What is this?”

“I have no idea,” Chuck replied, looking at the goo and feather fragment. “I wasn’t there when it happened.”

“It was in his mouth. I wouldn’t be surprised if it was in his stomach as well.”

“Is it poisonous?”

“I don’t think so. He isn’t showing any signs of poisoning. I noticed when I had a look at it in the car that it was slightly

luminescent. I'm going to send it off to the lab for analysis. We'll know more about it in a week or so."

"So, the prognosis is good?" Chuck said giving a pair of tentative thumbs up.

"Indeed! Your fast action saved this dog's life. You might be able to take him home in a few days if everything goes well today."

* * *

Janice felt the receptionist's withering glare as her cell phone erupted and pointed to the "Please turn off all cell phones" sign on the wall. Wincing she ducked outside. "Hello?"

"Sis?" Chuck replied.

"Chuck! Please tell me you have good news,"

"Of course I do. Would I let you down?" Chuck replied "I got Boy there just in the nick of time. He's all patched up, the doc says you might have him home in a few days. Of course, he'll be pretty well doped up with painkillers though."

"I'm so glad to hear that, Jason is unconscious, and the doctor says he doesn't have a cracked skull, and apparently he's not in a coma. They're doing a MRI on him now. Once the doctor reviews those, he's going to let me know," she said, relieved.

"Then this crisis is resolved for now. If you need me, I'll be at home, okay?" he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Sure, Chuck. Have I told you how much I love you lately?" Janice asked.

"No, you haven't," he replied.

"Well, it's a lot. You get some sleep, and I'll call you tomorrow at work." Closing the cell phone, she went back inside.

The receptionist stood and caught her attention. "Oh, Mrs. Harrison, the doctor wanted to see you."

"Great thanks, fingers crossed for good news!"

The receptionist buzzed her inside, and she returned to where her son was lying. She squeezed his hand, and looked to the doctor.

"It's good news, I think. As I guessed, there was no fracture. It just knocked him out cold. It's not a coma, the brain activity is normal. Since he's had his stitches, he's good for now, but of

course, we'll need to keep him here for evaluation," stated the doctor.

"That's the second time I've heard that tonight, and let me tell you, it never gets old," Janice sighed in relief.

"Beg pardon?" asked the doctor.

"My dog was injured too."

"What exactly happened ... If you don't mind me asking?" said the doctor.

"I don't know. We were asleep, and it seems like all hell broke loose in the living room," she said. "Jason was the only one to see it. You'll have to ask him directly when he wakes up." Stroking his head, she continued, "I can't say for sure, but I'm fairly confident that I have my dog to thank for saving his life."

"You're a very fortunate woman."

"Is it okay if I stay here with my son?"

"We're going to move him to a recovery room," the doctor said. "There's a couch you can lie on in there. I'll have one of the orderlies bring you a blanket."

"Thanks a lot, really."

"No problem."

Kissing Jason on the forehead, she made room for the orderlies who came in to move his bed. Following them, they settled him into a small room with a TV, couch and small restroom. She sat on the couch beside the bed and quickly fell asleep.

* * *

Janice woke up some time later, discovering that a fuzzy blanket has been placed over her. Looking around, she saw that Jason was propped up, and was flipping through the channels on the TV.

"Good morning, sunshine," Jason said.

Janice popped up off the couch, and immediately tripped over her blanket, landing face first in front of the bed. Standing, she rubbed her head, and flashed him a 'V' sign with fingers "I'm okay! I'm okay! But, how about you... are you okay?" she rushed to his side and squeezed his hand.

“Well, Mom, I feel like a steer has been tap dancing on my head, but I think I’m fine,” he said, gingerly touching the bandages on his head

“Okay, well I have to ask; what exactly happened? It sounded like world war three in there,” she asked, squeezing his hand.

“I don’t remember much, but I recall stuff flying around the room, as if a tornado had hit it. I also recall a chicken. A big rooster with funny eyes. It was the eyes that caught my attention. They were glowing, like they were burning with green fire. And then... I’m here, trying to watch TV despite your snoring,” he said, with an exaggerated shrug.

“Well ...I did hear a rooster too. But I didn’t see one when I came out to see what happened. Maybe it was on the TV? The knock to the head may have scrambled your eggs a little.”

Jason looked away, hurt.

“Boy got hurt last night too. He’s at the vet’s now,” Janice said. “Just before I came out of the room, I heard Boy barking, He was standing over your body, licking your face. He was bleeding badly, but I didn’t even notice that until he collapsed. Chuck took him to the doc. He’s going to be fine. “

“How could he be okay after heavy bleeding?” Jason asked.

“I suppose it’s relative. He’s stable and healing. I’ll know when I see him.” she replied.

Jason nodded.

“So, you’re under observation for a day or so. Do you want me to bring you anything from home?” Janice asked.

“You could call Althea. I’d like a visit.” he said hopefully.

“Write her number down for me, okay?”

“Consider it done,” Janice said, putting the number into her phone, she then kissed him on the forehead. “I’m gonna call work and then head to the vet.”

“See you later, Mom. Love you.”

“I love you too, Jase. Get some rest.” Janice said, closing the door behind her.

Chapter 5: Janice visits the Vet, and Boy visits Jason

Janice left the hospital, with the usual spring in her step finally returned. She whistled to herself happily, as she dialed Althea's number.

“Hello! Is this Althea? Oh hello! This is Jason's mom. He's in the hospital, and would really like for your daughter to come visit him. What? No. He's fine now. We had something of an accident last night, but he sure put a lot of worry into me, let me tell you. Yes, thanks. He'll be very happy to hear it. Okay. Bye-bye!”

Well that's one thing done, now let's go see the Boy.

* * *

Janice glanced at the sign as she pulled in, smiling at a child's depiction of a happy dog, cat and bird drawn in multi-colored crayon was displayed outside. She entered and looked around at the quiet office empty of people, save the receptionist, and the occasional glimpse of someone in a smock or scrubs going about their daily work.

“Hi, I'm Janice Harrison, you have my dog.”

“Ah, yes! The poodle, right?” the receptionist asked, flipping through a log book.

* * *

Boy opened his eyes slowly as he regained consciousness

Where am I?

Sitting up, Boy peered out of the kennel into the room, which was filled with recuperating animals in enclosures of various sizes.

I gotta find Momma!

Boy pawed at the cage door and barked. He pawed the door, hoping to open it like his kennel at home. Unexpectedly, the scenery spun as he tumbled out of the kennel to the floor, yelping in surprise.

Standing, he shook himself off and glanced back up at the cage, he noticed while that the door remained shut fast, it now dripped mysterious goo onto the kennel below it.

The other animals began barking and screeching loudly in their enclosures

Quiet! You'll attract attention!

The animals calmed somewhat at his outburst. Boy padded out of the room, looking back and forth, ears cocked for the sound of Momma's voice. Boy took off running as he located her, his ears cocked out like little wings.

I'm coming, Momma!

* * *

Janice was chatting with the lady as she filled out paperwork. With a mad clicking of nails, Boy came around the corner in a power slide, closely followed by a small woman in baby blue scrubs.

"Boy!?" Janice exclaimed "What are you doing out here? I thought you were in recovery?"

Startled, the receptionist looked over the counter. "How did you get out?" she wagged her finger at him.

"Well it seems as if the patient has checked himself out," Janice said, lifting Boy up onto the counter where he licked her face and wriggled in joy.

The nurse leaned over the counter and plucked the phone from its cradle and hit a few numbers.

"Dr. Mahju, can you come up front?"

Setting the receiver down again, she peered at Boy curiously, "The doctor will be here in a moment."

A few moments later, the doctor came in, wiping his hands on a small towel.

"What can I do for you?"

He stopped and looked at Boy, confused.

"You, my friend are supposed to be in back, resting. Did you bring him up front, Mary? You know you aren't supposed to handle the patients while they're under observation..."

The little nurse looked flustered.

"No, he came running in on his own, someone must have left his cage unlocked,"

“She's right. He skidded in here like a race car,” Janice said. “He was so happy to see Mama, weren't you, Boy?”

The little dog gave her a liberal coating of kisses in reply.

Dr. Mahju gave him a quick inspection. “Well, he seems much better than last night, I'll grant you that,” he said. “I'm going to give him back to you, but if anything happens, you should bring him back directly.”

“Thank you, doctor! I'll take him to see my son. He's in the hospital; they got hurt at the same time.”

“Yes, Charles said as much. I hope he will be alright,” Dr. Mahju nodded.

“Will you be at Chuck's Christmas party?”

“Yes, Edna wanted to go visit family back in India, but I can't leave the clinic without staff, so I'm going to stay here this year. As soon as your brother heard that, I got an invitation the next day.”

“Great! I can't wait to see you there!” Janice looked at her dog. “Say thank you to the kind doctor, Boy.”

Boy let slip a happy bark and jumped into her arms.

* * *

“Okay, Boy, we are gonna sneak you in,” Janice took out a large book bag. She picked her dog up and placed him inside. “Now sit down and be quiet, okay?”

Boy mumbled, and settled down in the bag. Janice walked the bag into the hospital under her arm, trying her best to look innocent.

“Boy, you are heavy. You're going on a diet when we get home.” From within the bag, Boy whined.

“No lip from you.”

As they headed to Jason's room, they passed the cafeteria, which caused Boy to stick his head out of the bag and sniff the air. Janice pushed his head back in the bag, and looked around, picking up her pace a bit.

“Guess what I have here!” Janice called out as she entered the room.

Althea pulled back from Jason, trying to seem as if she weren't about to put a lip-lock on him. Janice politely ignored the obvious and strode to the bed with a smile.

“Cake?” Jason said, eyes lighting.

“Even better, I got a whole bag full of...” She paused for dramatic effect. “Boy!”

Boy popped his head out of the bag at the sound of his name with a bark. He jumped out and danced around on the bed. He proceeded to lick Jason's face and shake with excitement.

Jason laughed. “I'm glad to see you too, boy!”

“I thought you might like my little surprise,” she said, her eyes twinkling. “Okay, Boy, back in the bag. I just stopped by to show him to you. I'll head out now; don't wanna interrupt private time y'know.”

Boy jumped back in the bag and sat. Janice shouldered it and headed out, pausing to throw Althea a knowing wink.

Althea blushed and looked at her feet. Janice strolled back to her vehicle, a wide smile plastered onto her face.

Janice cackled. “Hey Boy, Jason's got a guuuuurlfriend. It's about time. It's good to know he's popular with at least one girl.”

Janice rolled down the window, and cruised home, with her music turned up loud, and boy hanging out the window. A smile sat on her face that refused to leave.

They arrived home, only to discover the front door had been kicked open with a big size twelve footprint on the door. She picked Boy up from the sidewalk, and walked inside, snagging the calling card from the counter and ran back outside to her SUV and called the number from it.

“Captain Jenkins. Can I help you?”

“Yes, this is Janice Harrison; you were at my place last night. You need to come quickly. I just got home, and my place was broken into. But what's weird... it looks like they cleaned up the place.”

“Have you been in the house?”

“Just long enough to grab your card from the counter.”

“Good. Wait outside. I'll send a car around now, and I'll be along shortly after that.”

“Sure.”

Five minutes later, a police car pulled up, and two officers got out.

“Mrs. Harrison?” said the taller of the two.

“You must be the officers Captain Jenkins said he would send. Yes, I’m Janice. Pleased to meet you...” She extended her hand, which he shook warmly.

“I’m Officer Smith, and this is Officer Morales, We’ll just have a look around before the Captain arrives,” he said as he took his notepad out. They started walking around the house, taking notes along the way.

Janice watched the policemen inspecting the area carefully, and leaned against the SUV.

“Oh! Boy! I have something for you!” Janice exclaimed. Boy cocked his head at her curiously. “I’ve got it right here,” she said, pulling a small paper bag from her purse and holding it behind her back. Boy was jumping up on her in excitement. Suddenly she pulled the contents out for Boy to see.

“A pig ear!” she exclaimed. “Who wants a pig ear?”

This sent Boy into a dancing frenzy.

Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! I want a pig ear!

Boy danced around barking and jumping.

She laughed at his antics, and wiggled the ear so that it caused boy to spaz out.

“Okay, Boy, if you want the pig ear, I’ll need you to roll over. Roll over.” She waved the pig ear in a circle.

He rolled over twice.

“Good boy! Okay, let’s see a difficult one. Shatner, Boy. Shatner.”

Boy sat up, held up his paws, stood utterly still; he then cocked his head slightly, uttered a low woof, and with an over dramatic pause, fell over, legs twitching.

“Wow! You’re such a good boy!” she said, tossing him the ear, which he deftly snagged midair. He busied himself with chewing on it greedily.

Captain Jenkins arrived on the scene. Since two of his men were already gathering information, he got out of his cruiser, and greeted Janice.

“Hello, Mrs. Harrison, I’m glad you called. Let me see what the men have come up with.”

Looking thoughtful, he added. “Did you find any information out about the incident?”

Janice winced. “Yes and no. My son told me what he saw, but I think the blow to the head made his memory a bit pear shaped. I don't think it's very reliable.”

“Well, I'll get the details from you anyway; you never know when something might come in useful,” he said, pausing. “Let me check in with my men first, and I'll be back to get your information, okay?”

Janice nodded in assent. “Sure, go ahead.”

Captain Jenkins approached officer Morales and spoke with him. Morales nodded and pointed around the side of the house. He nodded and went around the house, looking for Officer Smith. Morales went to his car and took out a camera. He photographed the foot print on the door, several blood spots on the cement near the garage door and the area around the front porch before heading inside.

The captain returned and waved to Janice as he approached. “Well, our initial findings show there was a scuffle out here, near the front porch. Some small garden statues were thrown about, and someone was injured in a way that drew blood. I'm going to hazard a guess and say it was your dog, because the blood leads to the gate into the back yard, where a hole was dug under it. The blood trail leads back to the dog door. It seems your dog was fighting an intruder and got hurt, and had to get in the back way. Let's see what Morales has to say about what's on the inside.”

They entered the front door. Boy was looking around intently, from the vantage point of Janice's arms. The shattered glass from the coffee table was gone, (and replaced!) and the nick-knacks that were scattered around were placed in natural looking (but wrong) places. It even appeared that part of the carpet had been steam cleaned.

“The place has seriously been worked over,” Janice said, pointing to the various misplaced objects. “These are all in the wrong places, and the carpet has been cleaned.”

“And the wall has been repaired,” Captain Jenkins pointed out. “There was a trophy of some kind stuck in it when I was here last.”

Morales gestured to the knick-knacks on the mantle. “Which of these were definitely misplaced?”

“All of them, really. Everything was strewn about,” Janice gestured about.

Officer Jenkins gestured to Morales, who nodded.

"I'm on it," he replied, and went out to his car. He returned momentarily with a small case. He put on some blue neoprene gloves and began dusting for fingerprints.

"Wow!" Janice said. "Just like on TV!"

"I'd like you to take a peek into the other rooms, without touching anything, and tell me if anything seems out of place, okay?" Officer Jenkins pointed down the hall.

"Alrighty," she clutched Boy to her bosom.

Janice tiptoed from room to room, inspecting them with a cursory glance, before moving on to the next one.

"I don't think they bothered with the rest of the house," Janice said, putting down Boy, who busied himself with sniffing the officers.

Morales removed the gloves, and repacked the contents of the case.

"Whoever did this took precautions against leaving fingerprints. Sorry, boss."

Officer Jenkins took out his notepad, and turned to Janice.

"This is as good a time as any. Tell me what your son said, please," he said, poised to take notes.

"Okay," she began, "he said that he was woke by loud sounds. He referred to it as 'world war three'. It was very loud. He came out into the hallway, where he said he saw things being thrown around the room."

"Did he see who was throwing the things around?" the Captain asked.

"That's where his story goes a bit crazy, I'm afraid, he said he saw a rooster."

Holding her palms outwards, she continued, "I heard a cock-crow, true. But I'm fairly sure it was the television. He got hit right about then, and I'm sure his brain tried to make sense of what he saw and heard and tried to blend his memories together." She made a dismissive noise. "Roosters with green fiery eyes indeed."

"Excuse me?" the policeman said. "I didn't catch that."

"He said it had green flaming eyes. Craziest thing I've ever heard."

Frowning, he added this latest revelation to his notes.

“Better to have it written than to omit it,” he muttered as he scribbled it down.

Officer Smith wiped his feet, and then stepped into the living room.

“I’m done here. I’ll have a full report on your desk this afternoon. Morales, how about you?”

“Just finishing now,”

The officers left, nodding to Janice on the way out.

“If anything else happens, anything at all, you give me a call, okay?” Jenkins said with a concerned look. “This isn’t your run of the mill case, so ...be careful, and don’t hesitate to call.”

“I will, don’t worry,” Janice walked him to the door.

She flopped on the couch, and patted the space next to her. Boy jumped up, and sat next to her, his head on her thigh. He looked up at her for a few moments, and then closed his eyes.

“Today has been really crazy, eh, Boy?” She yawned.

Boy made mumbly noises and dozed off. The light through the windows turned golden as afternoon faded to evening.

Finally there was peace in the house.

* * *

Edgar wheeled a cart into the Baron’s study. It held several large covered serving trays. He coughed to let his presence be known, before speaking. “Excuse me, Baron, I have the samples from Mrs. Harrison’s house for your inspection,” he said as he pushed the cart to the Baron’s side.

“Excellent, Edgar. What do we have?” The Baron rubbed his hands together greedily. With a flourish, he removed the first cover, revealing several small containers of fluid.

“Ectoplasm, sir. Not a lot, but still.” He unveiled the second tray to reveal the bones of the Poultrygeist.

“The physical remains, Sir. And last, but not least...” he said as he removed the final cover to reveal three tail feathers from the Poultrygeist.

The Baron’s eyes lit and he smiled broadly. He gently stroked the feathers with his fingertips. “Most excellent. These will be very useful. What about the essence?” the Baron asked with a hopeful expression.

“Lost, sir. I believe it evaporated before we could get it.” Edgar bowed his head. “My apologies,” he added, “We had to wait for the police and EMT to leave before we could enter the house.”

With a dismissive wave of his hand, the Baron stood and put his hand on Edgar’s shoulder. “Your discretion is one of your best qualities, Edgar. I’d have it no other way, now go put these in the lab.”

“Yes, sir, Thank you, sir,” Edgar wheeled the cart out of the room.

Althea sat on the hospital bed next to Jason, leaning in for a kiss, which he returned eagerly.

“Don’t you think it was weird?” Althea asked, Giving Jason another kiss.

“What was weird?” he replied.

“Well Boy was near death, wasn’t he? But he was here, energetic and happy as he always is. If it weren’t for the patch on his neck, I’d never have known he was hurt.”

“Well, modern medical science can do wonders. Maybe the damage wasn’t as bad as they thought,” Jason mused. “Look at me, for example: mortally wounded, and yet I have enough energy to...”

He waggled his eyebrows at her.

Althea gave him a pinch.

“Yeow!”

“You goof,” she kissed him again.

“I’m sorry for losing touch with you. You just stopped talking to me. I thought you’d made new friends and that there wasn’t room for me anymore. We grew up together you know? What we had you can’t get with just anybody. Why do you suppose you’ve never seen me with a girlfriend? Because they weren’t you, that’s why,”

Jason gazed deep into her eyes.

Althea blushed. “I.. well I have some issues in my life. I know that now. I have some things I’m not ready to talk about, not with anyone. When it comes time to talk about it, you’ll be the one I’ll tell it to.” She laid her head on his chest, and he put his arm around her. “But things have gotten a lot better now that we’re back together. Lots better. You have no idea the feeling I got in my

chest when I found out you were here. I was so scared that I might lose you again. I don't know what I would have done," she looked at the floor.

"You won't ever have to know." He stroked her arms.

* * *

It was early Thursday morning.

Janice was eating a microwave breakfast sandwich, and the loyal Boy was at his place by her feet, hoping for scraps.

A vacuous pop star's voice sang out a catchy tune, announcing a phone call. Janice pulled her cell phone out of her pocket and answered, mumbling her greeting through a mouthful of sandwich.

"Okay, sure," she said, standing up and walking to the fridge "That's great news!"

She turned back to see Boy standing in her chair casting meaningful looks at the sandwich. She pushed the remainder of the sandwich at Boy, who snatched it, and jumped back to the floor.

"I'll be right there," she said, closing her phone and grabbing her keys.

"Boy, you guard the house, and I'll be back. Jason is getting out of the hospital today! Yaay!"

She gave a happy little hop into the air. "I'll be right back."

* * *

Dr. Mahju was looking at some paperwork that had arrived that morning. It was a report from the lab that he used for chemical and biological analysis.

Frowning, He re-read the papers, the first of which was a graph which was conspicuously blank. The second was a note from the lab:

Dr. Mahju,

The sample you sent in has been evaluated. It is a complex protein chain of unknown composition. Although it has no active chemical components, it has a phosphorescence that cannot be accounted for.

In sloppy handwriting at the bottom, was written:

Hey, Joe, where did you get this stuff? -Ed
p.s. Gimme a call when you get this.

Picking up the phone, Dr. Mahju called the lab.

“Ed Meeks, Mad scientist, how can I help you?”

“Edward, my friend, it's Joseph. I just got your report,” the doctor said, leaning back and propping his feet up on his desk.

“Joe! Good to hear from you. I was pretty baffled by that sample you sent me. Do you have more?” he asked.

“No. Why?” Dr. Mahju asked.

“It disappeared. Well, to be specific, it seems to have evaporated, leaving no residue. The jar you sent was in the same place I left it, but the contents... poof, gone,” he said, sounding annoyed. “And you know how I get when I stumble on something that I can't identify.”

“Yes, Edward, I know all too well. You were the same way in college,” he said. “But I only had that one sample you sent me.”

Edward paused a few seconds, “Where did it come from?”

“Ah, yes. A patient that came in for injuries,” he replied.

“Injuries? What kind?” Ed pressed.

“Apparently the poor dog got on the bad side of an angry rooster. I found feather fragments in its mouth. He had been stabbed with a leg spike. The goo I sent to you was covering his muzzle, and was in his mouth as well. The feather fragments were saturated in it, too,” Dr Mahju stated.

“And the dog didn't display any kind of abnormal symptoms?”

“None at all. In fact he seemed to be right as rain overnight. He needed a patch and fluids, but he was running through the halls of the clinic the very next day.”

“That seems like an awfully fast recovery, don't you think?”

“While I'd like to say it was because of my superior skills, but I have to agree with you. It could have been that the wounds seemed worse than they were, and a good nights' sleep combined with the vitamin shots and fluids brought him right around,” Dr Mahju pulled Boy's file and flipped it open. “I get the feeling that you won't let this go, so I'll tell you up front, I don't have the dog with me anymore; he was taken home.”

“Can you...” Ed started.

“No, my friend, I cannot; but if he comes back in, I'll let you know.”

“I guess that will have to do,” Ed replied, with a sulky tone in his voice. “Are we still on for disc golf this weekend?”

“Of course, my friend. The loser buys lunch.”

“It's a deal!”

Chapter 6: The Renfro house, A Kick, And a Beating.

Janice was dancing along to the beat of her radio as she packed her things.

Jason walked in as she was getting her albeit awkward groove on to an old Midnight Oil tune. “Mom, the eighties called, they want their dance moves back,”

“Don't give me any lip; these dance moves were very popular back in the day,” she ignored her son's jibes.

“So... I'm packed. I was wondering. Since we're being put up in a fancy hotel during the show's shooting, can we invite Althea along?” he asked, his palms pressed together in proper begging form.

“I don't know. A boy and a girl ... in a hotel ... I trust you won't do anything that will upset me, right?” she asked, with a steely gaze.

“We had the birds and bees talk, Mom. I know the consequences, and I'm not prepared for them. Just because I have a girlfriend, does not mean we're going to have babies. That can wait until after marriage and definitely after college. I've seen the docu-dramas about young parents living in poverty because they didn't get an education. I'm not willing to live like that. I want to have a good home and a comfortable life like we have.”

Jasons' eyes jerked away from his mother.

“I just wish dad were here to enjoy it with us.” His voice trailed off

“He would be so proud to hear that from you,” she said, misty eyed. She wiped her eyes, to keep from crying as she stepped in to comfort her son.

Boy made his entrance into the room, and jumped up onto the bed. Janice looked at Boy and laughed.

“I see you're packed too!” Janice said, noting Boy’s little blue backpack

Composing himself, Jason pried himself out of his mother’s embrace.

“Yeah, I packed for him. He has bacon snacks and a pig ear in there.”

Boy barked in agreement.

“I'll give Thea’s mom a call now,”

Janice withdrew her trusty cell phone; an older model that she had gone back to because, unlike her three previous smart-phones, it had managed to survive her constant clumsiness.

Scrolling through her contact list, Janice located the number she was looking for and hit call.

As the call engaged, Janice felt an unusual awkwardness from the other end.

“Sam? Yeah, it’s me, Janice ...yeah, nice to hear you too.

“Well, I don't know if you heard, but I'm going to be on TV,”

She brightened as Sam began taking an active part in the conversation. “Yeah! A cooking show! ÜBERCHEF!

Janice flushed in embarrassment.

“What? No ...really. I really am. Ask Althea. She has a copy of the commercial. But the point is, Althea has been a really big help to me recently, and I'd like to take her with me to the studio when we shoot TV show. I'm being put up in a fancy hotel for the duration...”

Janice nodded. “Yes, well, of course I'll take good care of her.”

Pouting slightly, she twirled the phone’s wrist strap in her fingers, causing the little grinning monkey at its end to spin.

“O-okay, sure. Well, we're leaving next Friday, and the shoot is through spring break, so if you give our excursion a green light, send her by Friday morning. We'll leave about ten. Yeah, no problem.”

Janice motioned Jason over from his spot on the couch.

“It’s good to talk to you again. I hope you watch the show!
Buhbye now!”

Stowing the phone in her jeans pocket, she grinned at her son.

“It’s done. She said they’d discuss it and get back with us.”

Jason’s eyes lit with joy.

“Woohoo!”

Janice snickered, “Yeah, yeah, woohoo. She didn’t say yes,
exactly.”

“I’ll take what I can get.”

* * *

Day broke, and Boy woke Jason up at the crack of dawn. Jason stood groggily and stumbled into the shower. After the appropriate amount of grooming, he stepped out, much more awake, and ready to face the day. Boy danced around him licking stray droplets of water from his legs. Heading back to his room, he turned on the computer and dressed as it booted. Boy curled up on the bed behind him. Jason was reading the news online when he got an email notification. Clicking on it, he spied an e-mail from Althea:

To: Jase (jasonharr2323456w@ymail.com)

From: Thea (Altheabrown@gothchixbiteback.com)

subj: ÜBERCHEF!

Jase,

I convinced my mom to let me go with you over spring break

It’ll be nice to get away from the house for a week or so.

I’m looking forward to spending some quality time together,
aren’t you? ;P

Yours,

Thea

From the living room, Jason’s mother howled in anger.

“BOY! Get in here!!”

Both Jason and Boy went into the living room to see what was annoying her. She stood there, in the center of the living room, the floor covered in panties and socks, like wildflowers dotting a field in spring.

“What did I tell you about having panty parties, Boy?” Janice shouted, shaking a set of yellow polka-dotted panties at him.

Boy's head and tail dropped in shame as he crawled under the couch.

Janice muttered to herself as she picked up the various undergarments scattered about the room.

Jason peered under the couch's skirt. “Oh, Boy. How many times do you need to be told? Panty parties are right out,” Boy blinked back at him with a sad look in his eyes. “She'll forget about it soon enough. Let's get you dressed. C'mon out of there.”

Boy climbed out from under the couch and wagged his tail tentatively. His ears cocked, and he spun towards the door and barked loudly.

A moment later, the doorbell rang. Jason opened the door, revealing Althea, dressed in a smart looking black outfit with long exaggerated black lace cuffs.

“Get my bag, dear,” she said, stroking Jason's chin as she walked past him into the house.

“Of course.” Jason's face split into a wide grin as he snatched up Althea's bag and set it in the living room.

Althea picked up Boy and sat on the couch, cuddling him.

“You know why I like you, Boy? What's that? Because you saved my boyfriend? Well... yes, but also because poodles don't shed, so I don't get fur all over my nice clothes,”

As Althea scratched him diligently behind the ears, her other hand felt something under the throw pillow, and she pulled it up to see what it was: A pink pair of cotton panties with hearts printed on them.

Boy's eyes widened in surprise, and he snatched them from her and scooted off into the rear of the house.

Doing a double-take, Althea pointed at Boy's retreating form. “What was that?”

“Evidence,” Jason said with a grin

“He just got busted playing with Mom's panties. He likes to throw them all over the living room and roll around in them. She must have left her drawers open when she packed her clothes for the trip. He doesn't want her to get mad again, so he went to hide them.”

Althea just sat there with a half-smile and a confused look on her face. “I'm not sure if that's weird or completely awesome,” she said slowly.

“It's just one of his quirks, but he's a good boy. I need to get him dressed, I'll be right back,” Jason went into the back room after Boy and returned with him sporting his backpack and a hoodie.

Janice made her entrance, wearing a cute vest and skirt combination, striking a sexy pose, she blew them a kiss.

“Well, kids, we ready to go? We'll pick up some food on the way.”

They finished packing up the car, got in, buckled up, and headed out on their trip.

They ate extremely greasy tacos and burritos from a taco truck they frequented; apparently the greasier the better, because these were exceptionally delicious.

* * *

Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! We're going on another trip!

I recognize where we are! The smells of a long trip are so much better than the smells of a short one.

The scents this time are strangely different. Like everything is somehow... closer.

* * *

Perhaps it was the fact that Althea was with them, but the conversation was much livelier, and the trip seemed to take a lot less time than it did the first time around. They arrived at the studio about midafternoon. Everyone got out of the SUV to stretch their legs. A short man about five foot four, dressed in a suit, hurried out of the building and shook Janice's hand as soon as he was in range.

“Hello, Mrs. Harrison, I'm Peter Farnsworth, the executive producer. I was asked to meet all of our contestants as they arrive. I have this for you.” He handed her a manila envelope. “Inside are a map with instructions to the hotel you'll be staying in, and a schedule for the shoot. We will be having a preliminary meeting tonight in the conference room of the hotel at 9:00 P.M., please be on time.”

“Oh, well then, we should get to the hotel!” Janice handed the envelope to Jason.

THE COOKBOOK OF THE DEAD

“Yes, Ma'am.” Peter waved to them as they turned to leave.

“Navigator Harrison, get that map and let’s find the hotel.”

“Yes, sir, Admiral Harrison, sir!” Jason threw a snappy salute to her, and winked at Althea, who chuckled at the two of them.

Jason pulled out a photocopy of a map, it marked the studio with a circle, and with a broad arrow, led them out of the Old Quarter, towards the outskirts of town.

* * *

They pulled up to a large rusty gate, where a young boy wearing torn jean shorts ran out of a shack to open it for them. He waved at them as they pulled through, and then closed it behind them before disappearing back into the shack. Driving through a narrow path, lined with weeping willows, until it opened up to reveal a giant Victorian house, its paint peeling in some places and moss hanging from the roof in others. It sat, tired and worn out looking, as if just waiting for a chance to fall into a pile of rubble.

“Dude, we left the Old Quarter and entered the Creepy Quarter,” Jason said to himself as he took in the scenery.

“I love it,” Althea said in a whisper, her fingers stroking the outline of the mansion through the window.

They got out and stood there, inspecting the mansion. A young woman in her early twenties stood there, dressed in a long sleeved dress and a maid’s apron. She smiled kindly at them.

“I’m Sarah, leave your things there they will be taken to your room. Please, follow me.”

Sarah led them inside, where there was a distinct change in atmosphere, everything seemed well maintained and in good shape. The interior was lit softly by light coming through curtains, whilst the main desk was bathed with the light from a lamp, turned yellow with age. A young man in his early twenties, wearing a set of comfortable looking khakis and a white button up shirt, stood behind the counter. Upon seeing them approach, he smiled and raised his hand in greeting.

“Hello! I’m Ezekiel Renfro. I’m the owner, and I’m pleased to make your acquaintance. You must be one of the reserved parties for the cooking show. If you would please sign the register, we can get you checked in, Mrs....”

“Harrison. Janice Harrison and company. We need a third room, if that's possible.”

“Yes, ma'am. No problem. Our entire place is reserved for your group,” he said, pushing the register towards her.

She signed her name, and passed the pen to Althea so she could sign in as well.

“Very good, now let me take you to your rooms. By the way, you can call me Zeke.”

He led them up the large staircase that dominated the room and down the hallway.

“If you see me or any of my staff, you can ask us if you need anything.” He pulled a large old style iron key out of his pocket and unlocked the door with it. Swinging it open revealed a large room with an equally large canopied bed. He handed the key to Janice, who nodded to him. He moved to the next door, unlocked it, and handed the key to Jason, and repeated the process a third time for Althea.

“The kitchen opens at seven for breakfast, and six for dinner. Mealtime lasts two hours. All of your luggage will be brought up shortly, and your vehicle will be put in the big barn. Let us know if you'll be leaving, and we'll get it out for you,” he said. “Oh, and the conference room is downstairs, off of the lobby. You'll see the sign.”

Janice smiled at Zeke. “Thanks a lot! You've been very helpful.”

“I'm gonna check out my room a bit, and go have a look around,” Jason headed upstairs.

“Me, too,” Althea headed inside her room.

Boy looked conflicted, and finally chose to follow Jason. Running past him and jumping up on the bed, he rolled around, making happy noises.

Jason took Boy's backpack off for him and pulled a snack out of it for him. Very pleased with this windfall of snackage, he ate it with cheerful abandon. Jason then examined the bathroom, and saw that it was much more modern than he had feared. Satisfied that he wasn't going to receive any surprises late at night, the two of them left to go have a look at the rest of the mansion.

* * *

Jason discovered his mother in the lobby looking at the paintings that decorated the walls. They were fairly thematic, mostly portraits of old dead people, probably family members of the owners. The bell over the door rang, announcing the arrival of new people entered. A tall, thin woman with pinched features, wearing clothes reminiscent of a nineteenth century school marm, clutched a purse in such a way that she resembled a praying mantis. She was followed by a pasty faced teenaged boy, who was badly scarred with acne and wore a baggy, worn out looking t-shirt, with equally worn out jeans that looked as if they'd seen their last days a few weeks ago. He carried a large doctors' bag made of black leather with intricate silver clasps.

Boy took off to greet the new people. He wove between the couches and went to offer a polite sniff of the teen that had just arrived.

The teen scowled at Boy and kicked him in the ribs. Boy yelped in pain, and whirled back on him, growling. His eyes lit with green flame. The teens face went white as a sheet, and dropped the bag on his own feet, causing him to howl in pain. Boy took a step forward, his fangs bared in a snarl of hatred. The teen scuttled back like a startled spider; tripping over the dropped bag, he fell to the floor. As Boy advanced again, he glared at the teen. The woman who arrived with the teen finally took notice of the disturbance, and looked behind her. Seeing Boy for the first time, she did a double take, and quickly made an arcane gesture at him. Boy completely ignored her odd gesticulating, and slowly crept closer to the teen who at this point was practically in tears. She repeated her gesture with more feeling, and again, much to her distress nothing happened.

“Boy!” Jason shouted.

Boy's eyes extinguished and he looked back to his ward. Jason hurried to his side. “Are you hurt, Boy?”

Boy looked at the panicked teen and growled again, this time less aggressively. The woman had a much relieved expression on her face, which was quickly covered up with an ugly frown.

Janice came around the couches like a flash of lightning and put her finger in his face, her features contorted with anger.

“If you ever kick that dog again, there will be hell to pay, do you hear me? HELL!” she said in an angry whisper, right in his

face. This was apparently too much for him to bear, as his eyes rolled up, and passed out. Janice picked him up by his shabby jacket and pressed him onto the thin woman he was with. "I think this belongs to you. You should keep your boy in line," she said, pushing him onto the old woman before letting him go. Making no attempt to catch him, the teen crumpled to the floor in a pimply heap.

"Boy! We're going upstairs," Janice snapped. Boy obediently followed her upstairs

Stunned, Jason gawped at the scene. He had never seen his mother so angry before.

* * *

The sound of a slamming door was heard throughout the building, causing Althea to peek out of her room.

"I wonder what that was all about," she thought. Walking to the end of the hallway, she stood in front of a large glass window overlooking a gazebo surrounded by rather unkempt and somewhat tired looking topiary and hedges reaching just over seven feet tall. From her vantage point, a limousine came into and out of view, pulling around to the front of the house.

"Must be another contestant," she mused. Looking thoughtful, she went to Janice's room and knocked on the door.

"Mrs. Harrison? Janice? Are you there?" She waited a moment, and then shrugged.

She must be checking out this awesome mansion. She turned to head downstairs when the door opened, and Janice stepped out.

"Hello, Thea. I have your bags in here," Janice said. "Open your room and I'll bring it over."

"Yeah, thanks, Ms. Harrison. I appreciate it," Althea said.

"You stop calling me Mrs. Harrison. Janice will do. After all, you're my boy's girlfriend."

Boy made an inquisitive whining sound from behind her.

"My other boy's girlfriend," Janice corrected herself. Boy barked at her in reply.

“Don’t be jealous, Boy. You’ll have a girl someday.” Janice picked up Althea’s suitcase and followed her to her room, and lay it on her bed.

“Did you hear a door slam, Janice?” Althea asked.

“Yeah, that was me. Sorry,” she said. “One of the other guests kicked Boy and I flew off the handle. Apparently Boy had the situation well in hand, though. Who knew a poodle would inspire terror in a teenage boy? Not me, that’s for sure. I’ll be fine by the time we have the orientation, but if that little pimply scab bothers Boy again, I’ll have Jason show him what for,” Janice muttered, glaring darkly.

“I think Jason is still down there, why don’t you two go for a walk on the grounds?” Janice waggled her eyebrows at Althea.

“Thanks, that sounds like a good idea,” Althea replied.

“Wait a moment; I just wanted to let you know that I’m alright with you and Jason seeing each other. You two grew up together. Even though you didn’t see him for two and a half years, I can plainly see how close you are. I can also see how happy he has been these last few weeks. I credit that entirely to you. I see it in you, too; and don’t think I didn’t notice you givin’ him some lip therapy in the hospital,” Janice smiled.

“Yeah, well... about that...” Althea chewed the inside of her cheek and looked away.

Janice held up her hand. “No need, my dear. I know what it’s like to be your age. Believe it or not, I was actually seventeen once myself. And I know Jason enough to know he is a responsible young man. Treat him good because he deserves it.”

“Oh, I will, don’t worry!” Althea said, awed by her insight.

“I’m going to take a nap before the orientation, the drive and the stress has me beat. Take Boy with you; I’m sure he wants to go outside.”

“Yes, ma’am! C’mon, Boy! Let’s find Jason,” Althea said, beckoning Boy, who leaped off of the bed and sat before her. They then left the room together in search of Jason.

* * *

In their room, Giles, the young teen is knocked to the ground with a resounding slap. He can taste blood in his mouth. The

kicking began, like it has so many times before. He lies still, hoping that it will make her stop. It never does.

* * *

“How many times do I have to tell you to never cause a scene in my presence!? How many!?” Katrina screeched. “And to think I accepted such a useless slug as yourself as an apprentice.” Pulling him up by his hair, she slapped him down again, her unnatural strength tossing him about like a rag doll.

Her voice was as low as a whisper and as cold as a snakes’ hiss. “Bring me the bag,”

Giles’s eyes widened in fear. He looked side to side, as if to find an escape. “Please, no! I’ll behave! I promise,” he begged, crawling to her feet and stroking them.

“I SAID BRING ME THE BAG!” Giles cringed at her voice and scrambled for the bag. He brought it to her and sat it on the table beside her. She laid a hand on the bag, and he cringed away from her. She gave him an oily smile.

“I’m glad you understand. I try to be understanding, but you always force me to punish you,” she said, stroking the bag’s silver clasps.

“I’m sorry, Mistress, really and truly sorry.” Giles groveled at her feet.

“Thanks to your outburst, I now have an enemy. And as you so plainly saw, she has a hellhound for a familiar; a very powerful one. My anti-demon warding couldn’t drive it away.” Inspecting her fingernails, she paused. “I suppose I should thank you. I had underestimated her. I had no idea she could control something like that. I really don’t get any sense of power coming from her at all. She must be very powerful to be able to mask it so well.” Directing her gaze to him once more, she clasped her hands to her chest. “So as thanks, the bag will remain closed ...for now.”

Sighing in relief, he pulled himself up into a sitting position, and withdrew from her.

“Now get out of my sight. I wish to freshen up before the meeting.” She waved him away.

Giles scurried out of the room, as if chased, closing the door behind him.

THE COOKBOOK OF THE DEAD

To read the rest of the story, please visit our webpage, where it can be purchased as a deluxe softcover book or in Kindle format:
<https://indubitablypress.com/home/necronomnomnomicon/>

GALVAN

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Raised in West Texas, Felix has moved around the United States over the years. He is currently residing in the Pacific Northwest, reveling in the local artisanal works, as well as working on a few new titles.