



BODY COUNT  
PRODUCTIONS, INC.

Short Story from the Vault

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A DEAD MEN'S

## Midsummer's Night

Jason came down the ornate staircase, hitting the deep red carpet. Quinn and Evan were already in the foyer, waiting. Jason leaned into the sitting room where Travis sat in the soft chair, the smoke from the cigar circling his head.

Nanette, they didn't know her last name was one of their oldest and most dedicated friends, sat at the table. She was dealing out her hand of solitaire on the marble-top table. Her dark skin smooth, her brown eyes deep with age and knowledge. A woman who knew her magic and created the tattoos protecting these men from the sun.

"You're sure you don't want to come?" Jason asked Travis.

Travis blew smoke into the air and picked up the brandy snifter beside him.

"We've got a pretty good discussion going on here. You have fun."

"What are you discussing?"

"Which one of you is the biggest pain in the ass."

“So,” Jason said. “Self-fulfilling dialogue pointing to the reflection in the mirror. I like it,” he smiled.

“Hey,” Evan said. “Come on. You’re going to make us late.”

Quinn grinned at Jason. “You actually let him talk us into this?” They left the building and started down the street.

“I’ve never been on a Vampire Pub Tour, have you?”

Evan walked ahead down the road at a quicker pace than Quinn and Jason.

“I’m pretty sure we won’t be learning anything new tonight,” Quinn laughed.

Jason stuck his hands in his pockets and walked beside Quinn. The air was hot and muggy, the moisture of humidity hanging on every breath. He wore a black muscle shirt with his 501’s, his feet covered with black flip flops. His silver Celtic cross hung around his neck and the matching leather bracelet on his wrist.

No moon hung in the sky, making the path on the uneven ground tricky. Streetlights helped but were few and far between. Around them, the building rose above the streets level, they screamed old and wicked the slight tint of green mold covering the plaster. The newlyweds were gone now; off on a honeymoon doing things Jason didn’t really want to think about. Ashley—then Barrow, now Stuart—was more little sister to him than he had anticipated. He was used to doing the seducing, but standing back to watch the girl seduced? Punching Stuart in the nose had crossed Jason’s mind but so far, he had refrained.

The honeymooners might get the privacy they wanted by taking off, but this was The French Quarter and Jason didn’t plan on spending one minute bored.

The threesome, led by Evan, walked down Bourdon Street, passing open bars with naked women riding poles. Jason stopped to look for a second before Evan shoved on his back, laughing, propelling Jason forward. They saw wild get-ups in bright colors and shiny sequins and soon they stood on the doorway this late at night with a group of twenty people waiting for the tour to start.

Evan pushed his way in while Jason and Quinn waited on the crowded sidewalk. The variety of people out at almost midnight for this bizarre tour didn’t surprise him in this town. It was New Orleans. They had the accountant, the punks, there were three housewives in Bermuda shorts smiling and laughing over their adventure. The four

pretty college co-eds, dressed in skimpy dresses to fight the heat, stood out and looked as if they might make the evening interesting.

Two blondes, a brunette and a red head, rounding out the perfect ensemble.

Jason looked at Quinn and nodded toward them. Quinn followed his gaze, pursed his lips and nodded.

"We're old enough to be their grandfathers."

"They don't know that," Jason laughed. "I'll buy the first round. You buy the second and flip for the red head."

"What is it with you and red heads?"

"They taste like strawberries."

Quinn tilted his chin at him.

"Kidding," Jason protested with a laugh.

Evan came back. "You owe me twenty-five bucks each."

"Welcome," a man in a black long coat and top hat said. Tall on his own, the box he stood on added half a foot. There was black light behind him, which threw shadows everywhere. People turned to listen to him.

"I am Vincent, your undying guide. Please step closer and make room for everyone. There's no turning back now."

Jason and Quinn moved with Evan following, to stand closer to the girls.

Jason leaned in a little, even as Quinn bumped his shoulder.

"Happy," Jason said softly.

The girl in front of him, the red head, looked back. "Excuse me?"

"Your perfume. It's *Happy*. I can tell."

She smiled, her chin dipping down a little. "How did you know that?" she whispered.

He tapped his nose. "Can't fool it."

“Our tour begins here,” Vincent said, “In front of the innocent looking building. But to learn its history and find out what lies behind these walls will terrify you on this dark night.”

“Quinn,” Evan whispered.

“Hmmm,” Quinn mumbled.

“He’s already hitting on girls and the tour hasn’t even started yet.”

Three ‘shhhs’ came from the crowd as Vincent told the wicked tale of the rituals that had occurred to change human to vampire just a few feet away.

“It’s said that buried under bricks and mortar in the basement, are the remains of the original vampires who came to the Quarter in 1713, just two years before the city was established proper. Now if you will follow me,” Vincent said, getting down off his box. “I will take you to the cemetery where it’s believed vampires still assemble.”

Quinn joined Jason, Evan still nearby, more interested in the wild tales Vincent spun and beer he was getting at the first pub. Jason saw the bartender check the ID, and even question it, but the document stood up to scrutiny and Evan got his brew.

“This is my friend, Quinn,” Jason said at the table where he stood with the girls. “Quinn, this is Becky, Amber, Julie and Tracy,” he said going around the table. “They’re visiting from Florida State for the week.” Jason pointed toward the returned teen. “Little brother there, that’s Evan, but he’s underage so be careful.”

“He’s got a beer,” Julie said.

Jason smiled. “I made him a fake ID right before we came down here.”

The girls laughed and Jason’s face split in a wide smile.

“Come on, finish up,” Vincent called from the door. “More tragedy to see tonight of this long held city.”

The crowd moved into the dark.

“We have ghosts, we have murders, suicides and demons,” Vincent spoke as he walked backwards along the uneven ground as if he had done it a thousand times. He used his arms in sweeping motions to the right and to the left and to the sky.

“Elmswood Park is a park now, but two hundred years ago, it was a field where rituals were held to cleanse the city. Different practitioners used their own ways for dealing with the undead. Burying a corpse face down with Holy Water was one. Beheading was another.”

“I like beheading,” Quinn said. “Quick, easy. Gets the job done.”

The blonde, Julie, punched him in the arm.

“I’ll pass,” Evan said.

“Stuffing the mouth with garlic and sewing it shut,” said Vincent. “Not a good way to go if the undead is still alive.”

Quinn and Jason looked at each other. “Travis” they said at the same time. He liked Italian.

“Shhh,” brunette Amber giggled.

The tour moved through the quarter, up one street, to another. They stood at the grave of Samara Brown, the witch who never died, a concept Jason found ironic. He raised his hand at Vincent.

“If she never died, where is she?” asking the expected and obvious question.

“Some say she is here, in the box, awake and aware and trapped by a spell. Others say she walks the streets on foggy nights to trick the innocent into giving up their souls.”

“Promising,” Jason said.

Another pub. Another site, this time The LaLauries House, one of the most famous and most haunted in the area. Horrible tortures happened inside these walls, slaves walking in and never been seen again.

“Man,” Quinn said, looking up at it. “It hasn’t changed in fifty years.”

“What?” Becky asked, sounding a little shocked.

Jason saw Quinn blink at her innocently. “What?”

“You said it hadn’t changed in fifty years.”

“Yeah, the article I read, the photo was old. I didn’t think it would still look like this.”

She turned away and Quinn blew out a hard breath.

“Good save,” Jason laughed.

“I haven’t been here in awhile. What do you expect?”

Pub three and the girls were starting to walk a lot less neat. Jason and the rest of the boys could down two bottles of tequila and it wouldn’t affect them.

Pub four and the girls’ staggering and giggling was cute enough to give Jason a smile even as he sighed, knowing he would be going home alone. There were rules to follow. Seeing the drunk safe to their beds while staying in yours was one of them.

They turned the corner, the guys a little ahead of the girls as Becky’s sandal strap came undone. She leaned on the building, getting Julie’s help to get it back on.

Jason took his gaze off them, watching as the crowd moved, listening to Vincent bring a vampire film that had been filmed locally to vivid light.

When he looked back, both Becky and Julie were gone.

“Quinn,” he whispered, moving to reverse course.

Quinn looked at him. Jason nodded toward the spot where the girls were.

Quinn looked, slapped his hand down on Evan’s shoulder in front of him and pulled him along as they headed away from the tour.

“Hey,” Evan protested. “That was fun.”

“Yeah,” Jason said as the three walked down the dark deserted lane. “I have the feeling we’re going to get our own fun.”

The house was abandoned for a long time with that kind of growth. They had to push aside the low hanging moss as they went up the narrow, barely there side alley.

In the back, they stayed out of view as Becky and Julie, now unconscious, laid in front of the stairs near three flashlight lanterns lighting up the yard.

Men dressed in black, some with their faces hidden, some too pale with dark make-up around the eyes. None of them was consistent enough to be the same thing and not one of them had glowing red eyes, surrounded the girls.

Play acting, taking their roles too serious, the tall man knelt down in front of Becky, biting into her wrist in ways Jason didn't really want to think about. Human and blood, did not mix. Well, not with the sane, at least.

There were four.

"They drugged them," Quinn said. "Has to be chloroform. Not a good mix with alcohol."

While one guy bit, another guy began to lift Julie's skirt.

"Okay," Jason said, taking a step out of the shadows. "Shit, man," he said, walking toward the group with his hands in his pockets. "Big party like this, and you didn't call us?"

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

Jason stepped forward. "She tastes like strawberries, doesn't she?"

The man stood up to his full height, and Jason had to give him credit. He was bigger and taller than Travis.

"Freshly plucked," the man said, grinning.

Jason was not sure if he was creeped out or grossed.

"What the fuck are you doing here, mortal?"

The people around them came forward and Jason knew Quinn and Evan were at his back.

"Mortal?" Jason asked. "Did you just say some creepy ass script shit that said mortal?"

Jason peered, leaning a little side to side. "And are those teeth real? You had a dentist make you fake vampire teeth?"

"I checked it out once," Evan said. "It's like six hundred bucks. They make them out of—"

"Fuck off," the tall guy said again. The men behind him moved back and forth but not closer. They kept their voices down.

"This is an ancient and powerful ritual. You will not interfere with the taking of these souls drop by drop."

“No,” Jason said shaking his head. “It’s not an ancient ritual. I know the ancient rituals and pulling up her skirt isn’t on the agenda.”

“We have done this a thousand times in centuries gone by.”

“No you haven’t,” Jason laughed.

“Can we play?” Evan asked almost cheerfully. “You guys never let me play.”

“Two pretty boys from back east and a kid?”

“Actually, *I’m* from back east,” Quinn said. He pointed at Jason. “He’s from Nebraska.”

Jason moved closer to the man. “Are you going to hand them over?”

“No,” the vampire said, squaring off his shoulders.

The others behind him didn’t seem to have the same dedication to the theme.

“Rich,” one said. “Come on. It’s not worth it.”

“They’re worth it,” Rich said.

“Yeah,” Jason said. “We kind of think so, too.”

Jason moved, already showing teeth and glowing eyes. Rich gasped before Jason caught too tall Rich in the jaw with a punch that took him off his feet and onto his back with a thud. Vampires were strong. Vampires were fast. Vampires wanting to inflict damage were strong and fast.

Jason saw in a glance that Evan and Quinn shot forward.

The others ran backwards with cries of “What the fuck are you?” and “Go back to hell.”

Showing a fake vampire what a real vampire was had its own rewards. Shrieks, screams, scrambles and rambles, things to laugh about later.

The runners made it to the alley and shot through it like speeding bullets.

“Go after?” Quinn asked.

“I don’t think so,” Jason said, kneeling down. “Don’t think they had many balls between them.” He pulled at Rich’s jaw, noting with satisfaction the red-knuckled marks. Jason raised the upper lip.

"These fucking teeth are real?" Jason asked.

"I told you," Evan said. "Any dentist can do it for a whack job."

Jason looked at Julie's wrist with the puncture wound. "He never took anatomy. He was off the vein by an inch at least."

Quinn knelt between the girls, looking at one then the other. "They're out," he said, "but no real damage though I'm thinking Rich was looking for some real damage."

"There is nothing for the ritual," Evan said, looking around.

"What?"

"Look around. Even if he was doing some bogus burial dance, there's no altar, no flames, no candles. Nothing that burns. Where's the incense?"

"What do we do with him?" Quinn asked, pointing at the unconscious Rich.

Jason pulled the cloak from under him and began to rip it into strips. In a minute, they had enough to hog-tie him, and the double gag worked well too. They hauled him up and dragged him to the edge of the house, leaning him back to the cement foundation.

Rich was regaining consciousness as Jason knelt in front of him. Jason reached behind him and took Rich's wallet.

Rich pulled against the binds, he tried to say something, but he was caught. Caught good. And he wasn't going anywhere.

Jason smiled his best toothy grin, his eyes changed. "You want to play with the undead, then find the undead and leave girls alone. Because, I will watch and I will find you if you ever touch anyone else. Are we clear on the subject?"

Rich glared at him.

Jason held the wallet up between them with his forefinger and middle finger.

"With what's in here, I can track you for the rest of your life, no matter where you go. Think you can remember that?"

Rich nodded.

Quinn went through Julie's purse, pulling out her phone and dialing in the numbers.

9-1-1

He set the phone gently on her chest and stood up beside Jason and Evan. All stared at Rich trying to get free.

As the men walked by to hide in the opposite overgrown alley, Evan gave Rich one punch to the head, knocking the son-of-the-bitch out. Rich fell over.

The men moved to the side and waited in the dark, the girls still safe and in sight. When the noise on the other side of the building indicated big men with big boots marching hurriedly down the narrow alleyway, it was time to go. They slipped down to the main street, coming out behind the police car and walked into the night.

They caught up to the tour as it ended, missing the free bumper stickers. They headed back to Nanette's.

"How did that go?" Travis asked when they came in.

Quinn looked at Jason, Jason to Evan; Even to Quinn. They all shrugged.

Travis was still in the same chair with either the longer brandy he had or a new one but his cigar was burned down.

Nanette sat at the table, dealing another hand, smiling like she knew something, which she probably did.

"Met some people. Met some weird people than we went the extra mile and met some really weird people."

"Learn anything exciting about the city?"

Jason smiled. "As a matter of fact, I hear the strawberries are still the best."

