

**Lea Monde**

*By: Daniel "Pendragon"*

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**Warning:** *This story contains elements of a sexual or violent nature that should not be shown to minors. Viewer discretion advised.*

**Rated:** *R for Restricted*

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## **Chapter 6: Dealing with the Devil**

The monster was a creature like a bat, but it had two arms and two legs aside from two great leathery wings. It looked like a bat that had been mutated and twisted, with only vague remnants depicting that the creature displayed ever was a bat. Great fangs and sharp teeth were shown in the red-eyed screaming picture of the beast.

The image would be burned in my mind till the day I died I was sure.

After conversing with Jenny for a time, I ultimately left to try and find my way back to the room I'd been provided... especially after she told me that it was getting dark out and I should try to get back to my room. But again the castle's continual changing led me awry and I found myself in a chamber that was an arboretum... only that the arboretum was filled with the most beautiful roses I'd ever seen.

The roses were of a unique color... blue... deep, deep blue, with the soil they were in being an iron-red. I'd never seen a blue rose before, didn't even think it was possible for them to become blue. But the smell was so intense, so mind-numbingly enticing that I became incensed just walking into the chamber, and panting, with both hands cupping the fronts of my breasts and both thighs pinching about my sex, I closed my eyes and tried to control my baser instincts.

I was craving sex more and more the longer I was here, and right now I was rather distracted with the throbbing, beating, and pulsating sensation between my legs. It was the longest time holding back a growing orgasm and rubbing the milk leaking from my breasts before I could open my eyes again.

There was a sunken area with more roses before a set of great curving bay windows... and situated before the windows, almost dead center was a man in a trim English brown suit with a matching brown bowler hat, a hooked cane and a leather business bag with a buckle on it.

"Greetings Susan." He said; a pair of glasses with small circular lenses in them balanced on his nose before his dark eyes.

"How do you know me?" I asked as stepped down the short stairs into the sunken area.

"I'm in the business of knowing things. That's why I'm here after all... to make bargains."

"What sort of bargains?" I asked. There was something that was making me very wary of this man. Something instinctive. It was making the hackles on the back of my neck stand on end.

"The profitable kind. But what do you consider to be profit? Well it could be fame, time, money... a way out of this world... the location of your scroll?"

I was immediately on the defensive. “All right... who are you?! Nobody knows about why I’m here other than Fell and Remy... so how is it that you know?”

“Simple. I made it my business to know.” And he flipped open his bag, letting go of his cane and it held itself upright as he opened the bag and removed a document made of glittering golden paper that he tossed up into the air with a pen and both hovered there for me.

“I can provide you with whatever you want, anything that your heart desires for any reason... for the right price.”

I crossed my thin arms beneath the ample bosom that was still expanding from generating milk. It was the only part of me that seemed to be growing still. “And what, pray tell, is that price?”

“It’s negotiable of course... but let’s start out with, oh, I don’t know...” he waved his gloved hands about for a moment before blurting out an answer. “...Your soul?”

I blinked and then raised an eyebrow. “What are you supposed to be? Some kind of Devil?”

He smirked and reaching behind him took hold of a tail with a spade on it and began swinging it around like some might swing a pocket watch. “You might say that.”

“Well my soul is out of the question...” he opened his mouth. “...as is other people’s souls.” He closed his mouth again. “What else do you want?”

“Well... I should warn you that I want souls. If you can’t give me souls... then what I’ll give you is likewise reduced, Susan.”

“So be it. Now what do you want?” I smirked.

He pondered for a moment and then smirked. “You’re familiar with the master of this castle?” he asked and I nodded before he held out his fist and opened his hand, revealing a glass vial with a rubber stopper. “Fill this with Drake’s blood and bring it back to me.”

“Drake’s blood?” I asked and the Man in the Bowler Hat nodded and smiled curtly. “And does this constitute any sort of ownership of him or contract between you or me or me and him or him and you or any combination of two or three of us? Not at all. I wish a commodity, Susan. This is a commodity where I come from.”

“Can this be used to create a contract, control anyone or be used adversely toward anyone?”

“Absolutely not. It’s a boon.”

I paused and thought. “Then what do you intend to use it for?”

“It’s something I don’t have and I want. And in return for it... I will give you the direction you need to continue your quest.” And he snapped his fingers and the contract suddenly changed.

Approaching it I read it carefully. Ugh... Legal Speak. I read it over and over again and then let the top fall as I looked up at him from under my brows and bangs with my head still tilted toward the paper.

“Why his blood and not my blood?”

“Because I don’t need your blood.”

“...Which means you do need his. I want to know why.”

“That’s not a part of the bargain.”

“Then no deal.” And I dropped the paper and turned to walk off, taking several steps before there was a flicker of movement and the bowler hat guy was in front of me.

“Unless you wish absolutely no help and leave, that is your prerogative, but if you come back later my prices will go up. We can still negotiate.”

“Then why do you want it? You have it dog-eared for a purpose already, and I will not betray someone to something dire for my own benefit. That’s a sin no matter which way you slice it. In all honesty, I shouldn’t even be talking to you. I feel like I’m going to be cursed at any moment.”

“Then let me put you at ease.” And he tapped his cane against the ground as he stepped around me back toward his briefcase and the contract that was floating in midair again. “I will tell you, but you must do an additional task for me first. Just a task. Nothing bad, nothing foul, nothing worse for wear, no dark curses, you will actually be doing someone else a favor in doing this task, a favor that for you may open up to other favors.”

“How?”

“The blood is a part of an escape clause in a contract forged long ago between the Master of this Castle and... a woman of considerable notice. I’ve been lax in my duties in obtaining it for the later of those two persons, and because of that this person has... deteriorated... because of it.”

“Deteriorated?”

“Died. Six hundred years is a long time, Susan. And this person has, shall we say... decayed.”

“That’s horrible!”

“That’s business. Sometimes we die waiting for business to be conducted. You’ve seen numerous movies of the sort, Susan, so now that business has been completed, I must still offer up the escape clause... as was promised in another contract with this person. What I want you to do...” and he gestured and a large black satin bag fell from his hand. “Is procure the remains of this particular person and bring them back here so that our contract may be completed.

“Escape clause. You mean this person can... leave this place? Even if they’re dead?” and the Bowler Hat Guy nodded. “And this person will owe me a favor?” again he nodded. “And you need the blood to accomplish this contract, and by procuring the blood you will help me in what I need... no further strings attached?”

“Plain and simply. I am a devil, Susan... I would much rather complete an incomplete contract than loose a potential new one. You have my word... and a devil’s word... is binding.”

“Cross your heart?”

And he lifted his hands to remove a glove, showing a reddened hand with a long black claw tip that he used to etch himself right down to the flesh before he lifted the palm of that hand. "I do solemnly swear that there are no further strings attached. And now... there's your part..." and he gestured to the contract and it changed again.

This contract was amazingly simple. It read:

*I Susan,*

*Do solemnly swear to provide the devil with the remains as indicated and at the same time procure the blood of the Master of the Castle known as Drake in exchange for my own escape clause and the scroll of my ancestors.*

I read it again and again, just to be sure, and then taking the pen I gasped as it pricked me, and I signed in blood.

"The contract is made." He said and handed me the bag and vial, explained as to where the bones were that I needed to collect, tipped his hat, revealing a pair of small horns jutting from his forehead, and in a flash of fire and brimstone he disappeared... literally leaving me holding the bag.

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*I am Fellania.*

*The meal was scrumptious. As Victor had stated I'd savored it as if it were my last, and so the flavor of such a meal came out far, far better than I thought it might. I arm wrestled a few of the men and won... apparently even reduced I was stronger than most men. I no longer had the cut look and the heaving biceps, but nonetheless, they were still amazed that I was so strong.*

*But after so much beer and wine, a girl had to do what a girl had to do, and with a mild buzz – I drank that much beer – I found my way to the outhouse to use it, but on my way out, opening the door, suddenly I found myself faced by a load of the men-folk here.*

"Pretty-pretty." *One chuckled and laughed. "Hello there, pretty-pretty."*

*The man was almost frothing at the mouth that his lips were so caked on with dried spit. He licked his mouth while several other individuals, all men of a like mind and body, where they were tough and brackish, but dressed in clothes that made my nose hairs curl with their stench.*

"If you'll all excuse me. I need to return to the castle." *I said, hoping that it was as much of a threat as others had used it around me. Mentioning of the castle or anyone from it tended to make others afraid, and don't you dare think I haven't figured that out yet.*

"C'mere pussy-pussy." *Another said, gripping his groin and approaching, lifting a hand that was dirty with yellow fingernails that looked like he was digging holes with them.*

*That hand aim right for my breast, and curling my lip I took that hand with a snatching grasp and threw it off before giving him a shove, stepping forward enough to allow the outhouse to close behind me.*

*“All right, clear off. I’m warning all of you.” I growled, but now that the door wasn’t obscuring my vision, I saw that there were more than just these few men. There were a good dozen of them.*

*On the one hand... it was good to know that so many men found me attractive enough... on the other hand... what sort of weak-willed, slack-jawed man did it take to need a dozen of them to take one of me.*

*“Such lovely flesh. Such lovely, lovely flesh. I will taste her. I will penetrate her... I will...” and that man spasmed briefly as a wet spot rose up over his fully erected groin.*

*These men were nearing to place their hands on me.*

*There was an instinctive sensation bred into the mind of a woman, further trained through the process of her life. That instinct was the ability to recognize when a man wanted to force you. I was currently in a situation women all feared their whole lives.*

*But in most situations, training told a woman to run... but I wasn’t just a woman, I was a bear. So lifting my hand to my hair as I slapped their hands away painfully, getting one to yowl and another to hiss at me, I pulled white Oak from my hair, the thing formed into a cowl with projecting rods from it, and in my hands it twisted and reshaped and extended into a long pole. The next moment someone came close to me I struck, snapping their head smartly with the staff, till I was soon surrounded by mindless sex fiends who clawed and gripped at me and with a scream, not a scream of fear... well... not entirely without fear, I began in a dance of striking and smacking and beating, managing maneuvers I’d never thought I could do before.*

*I mean, I was pretty proficient in a staff before, but there were flourishes and moves that I honestly never thought I could do before. I certainly was never trained them, and in my adrenaline rush I felt... strength, surging power!*

*My body tensed and tensed, partially transforming as muscles flared, veins throbbed, biceps curled, and the loose clothing I was wearing soon tensed about my body till seams groaned.*

*My sideburns lengthened down my jaw, eyebrows became bushier and I felt fringes of fur on the outside edges of both arms and the backs of my legs form as claws lengthened, but despite that these men wanted to do the worst thing to me that any man could do to a woman, which was to force her, I didn’t cause any permanent harm to them. I did remind them however that some women still had fangs.*

*What was worse was that I wanted sex. I really, really wanted sex right now... but not like this. Them attempting to do this to me, now felt like more of a violation to me. So I punished them more for it.*

*Standing there, heaving deeply, feeling my muscles burning from partial transformation, thighs bulbous and calves flaring, arms muscled from the transformation toward a bear, I began to calm down, but with the things lurching in my bowels poking and prodding me for some sort of release, it was difficult to calm down as I stood there with staff horizontally gripped in both hands while I balanced on the balls of my feet.*

*Slowly my clothes loosened, slowly the fur retracted, slowly I shrank, but I was still mid-way to returning to that lesser form when I felt something like someone gripping at my guts and giving them a minute tug.*

*It was a palpable sensation, I felt it deep inside me, and I turned toward it, turned again as it flitted about around me, and I swore I heard a woman laughing as if from far away, and when I turned again my breath caught in my throat as a Colonel Custer-looking Cal came walking down the alleyway toward me.*

“Sho-o-oot.” *He smirked looking around.* “Ye took care of them ye’self!”

“Were there any doubts in your mind?” *I smirked.*

“There were... admittedly, but you sure are a woman that can take care of herself. You’re a rare breed. Say... you want to be my wife?”

“Does being your wife entail permanently working in the house and kitchen, barefoot and pregnant?” *I asked.*

“Well...”

“If you have to think about it, then I pass. Thank you though. You’re the first man to ask me to marry him.” *I said and then exhaled a long breath, feeling my nipples aching and sex throbbing now. I felt warm despite the misting rain and the cold night. And here was a man agreeing to marry me... a man who could... no. Stop thinking like that, Fellania. He’s just some random man you’ve only know for a couple of days, and only in passing. Sex isn’t that important.*

“Well ah do feel privileged.” *And he tipped is hat before looking down at the men on the ground.* “Damned pack of vagrants. We all help each other here, and these scum live off of the others. You be on your way, miss Fellania... I’ll take care of...”

*And again I heard a woman laughing, and Cal reacted, ripping his guns from their holsters and cocking them.*

“The Lady.” *He whispered sharply.*

“The Lady?” *I blanched, holding up my staff. It’s edges shone a deep greenish-blue. It felt something dark nearby.*

“The Black Lady. Sure’n this is a cursed night tonight, Miss Fellania.” *Cal grit out.* “She’s a right devil she is. You best git before she decides to come down and swoop you up into her baleful grasp. Go. I’ll get some men to take care of this trash... jist go.”

“Are you sure...”

“I’m sure. Go now. I won’t be having the likes of you taken by that baleful witch.”

*And he proceeded to call for his men. I took that time to return to the castle, looking for whatever witchy woman that would have a hardened man like Cal spooked. But mid-way up to the castle, I heard someone scream down in the town of Deadwood... long before I re-entered the castle and found my way back to the rooms provided to me.*

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Finally, I found my way to the rooms Fell, Remy and me were using, and hoping beyond hope that he’d returned, I knocked on Remy’s door. When he didn’t answer I tried again and sighing when he didn’t answer again I turned away.

“Hai-eee!” Remy said loudly with his eyes strangely going in odd directions and I screamed before instinctively going into a slap fit to hurt him as much as possible.

“You ass... don’t do that to me!” I panted and he laughed in a low and sinister way.

“Loosen up, Sue.” He said and slapped my butt before going to his room and opening it up, and immediately I blinked at his room.

He’d taken every pillow and ever blanket in the room and piled them into a nest in a corner of the room, whereas nearly every scrap of clothing was strewn over the bed and the tables and chairs.

“Holy crap. I clean everything in my room, and you dirty yours up.” I mentioned.

“We all have our comfort zones, Susan. They’re all instinctual. Yours might be that you like to sleep in clothes fresh from the dryer...” I began to murr in the thought, the best a human throat could get to a purr. “...whereas I like to sleep in a corner with only one direction getting to me in a dirty room. You have your clothes all neatly hung and pressed, I wake up and pick something up off the ground and if it doesn’t smell too bad then I wear it.”

“I thought that was just all men.”

“I’ve met women who do it too...” and he picked up a pair of boxers hanging on a line strung across a corner of the room and smelt them deeply. “You see this? Turn it inside out and it’s good to wear for another day.”

“That’s disgusting.”

“At least I have underwear now. Try living in the same dirty pants for several years at a time and then talk to me about practicality. My first pair of underpants was a pair I stole...”

“Were they men’s underpants?”

“No... they belonged to a lovely young lassie.”

“Lassie? I didn’t think you were Irish.”

“No... Lassie... as in a Collie Werewolf. Brilliantly fluffy brown fur with a white that she shampooed and conditioned, brushed and combed ritualistically every day of her life... wore the brightest pink panties with a red heart right over her unmentionables. Size difference made it able to cup my cock and balls quite well, thank you very much. Thong wasn’t too bad either.” And he tugged on the elastic waistband of his shorts under the pants he wore. “Wht-ish... ngh!” he grinned that buck-toothed grin of his.

“What did you find out in your super sneaking around?” I asked him with a smirk.

He paused in thought as he tossed the boxers into a corner. “Drake sensed me.” He replied. “He knew where I was somehow... not exactly where, or exactly who I was, but a guy as smart as he was I’m sure the three of us are at the top of his list currently.”

“Why us?” I blanched.

“Haven’t you noticed?” he asked turning to face me.

“Noticed what?”

“Everything here is on a time schedule. People open their umbrellas and lift them in unison right before it rains. That Madoushi fellow you’re so interested in is obsessed with time... that’s because if he misses something, something else that requires his input doesn’t get done in time for the next thing to get done. A domino effect. Dominos are usually set up as tricks to accomplish the next thing. Sometimes it’s a domino fall, other times its some spectacular trick.”

“You’re being ridiculous.” I said uneasily, but I did remember seeing the umbrella thing at least when we first arrived, and remembered thinking that it was odd.

“New parts of the castle arrive in solid intervals of six. Six seconds, six minutes, six hours...”

“Six, six, six?” I said aloud. “That kind of supports some of the things I’ve seen.”

“Like what?” Remy smirked.

“Like a devil?” I replied and the humor fell from his face, and then he slumped slightly and rubbed his lips furtively with one finger, deep in thought.

“A day has passed,” He thought aloud. “That means the time frame we’re talking about is longer than six hours... obviously. So then the next phase is six days. I’d wager that in four days from now is when something spectacular happens, and by spectacular I mean grades upon grades of fucked up. I seriously doubt that this lasts as long as six weeks, but I think we should be prepared on that sixth day.”

“What if it is six weeks?”

“Six weeks... six months, six years... I doubt it. People don’t become that accustomed to a routine that’s that long.”

“Six hundred years?” I mentioned and Remy raised an eyebrow at me.

“Now you’re getting ridiculous.”

“The fun hasn’t started yet.” I laughed and then stepped close to him. “Remy... I need to ask a big... big favor of you. I can’t do it... I know I can’t do it... and you are *‘super sneaky’*...”

“That’s *‘Supah Sneak-ay’* Susan, but nevertheless, flattery might get you anywhere.” He smirked. “What do you want?” those last words were cautious, and I looked up, prayed to God I could get this down right and plunged right in.

“I want you to fill this vial up with Drake’s blood.” And I held the vial out to him.

Remy folded his arms before himself and looked at me discerningly, perhaps trying to see if I were mad or not.

“What do I get out of this?” he asked and I sighed and stamped a foot, and then biting my lower lip I went for the gusto.

I tried to determine what he might want, tried to think of what I had that he’d accept for something so stupid as this, and time and again only one thing struck me. So lifting my hands I began to undo the laces of my blouse, and he stood there, watching me as I finished untying the cinching strings and my voluminous breasts expanded fully now that they were free of constraint, right before I attacked the top of the corset I was wearing.



Only then did I feel his long fingers hold mine to stop them.

“Enough.” He sighed and re-buttoned that part of the corset. “No woman taken under duress is worth it.” He said and turned his back to me to go pour himself some wine from a pitcher which he smelt and tasted with the tip of his tongue before drinking it... checking it for poison I supposed.

“B-but I don’t have anything else.” I moaned. “Nothing that you’d want anyways.”

“Are you so sure?” he asked.

“I’m not doing anal.” I replied and he turned toward me with both eyebrows raised in surprise.

“Susan... am I so crass where you’d think the only one thing I’d ever want from you is sex?” I stared at him and he sighed when I didn’t answer. “I guess I am then.” And he sighed again before rolling his eyes. “I appreciate your willingness, it shows me how important this is, but I would like something more out of you than just a night of carnal sex.”

“W-what d-do you want?” I asked, afraid of the answer and he sighed a second time.

“I don’t want you to marry me either...” he said and then finished his drink before filling up the goblet again now that he knew it was safe. “I would like you to say that I’m your friend.” He said and then eyed me with his glass raised. “Introduce me as such; speak of me as such, even to Fellania. I know she doesn’t like me, but that doesn’t stop me from liking her... or you for liking me for that matter.”

“That’s it? What’s so special about that? Remy I have lots of friends.”

Remy grew quiet and made a sucking sound through his teeth. “I don’t.” he replied and drank his wine as I fell immediately quiet.

A pang entered into my heart as I realized in his line of work, the most precious thing in the world was a friend... someone he could trust.

“Remy... I already consider you a friend.” I replied immediately and he smiled and stepped to me to take the vial from my hand.

“Then I’ll get you that blood you want.” He said and I immediately embraced him and he gave a low and friendly chuckle before kissing my forehead and holding me squarely in my narrow back. “Now would you get? This is a man’s room after all, and if anyone sees you coming and going from here... hell... people are likely to talk!”

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Fellania had dressed at least. And I was struck, immediately... at how lovely she looked. I mean... I never noticed before now as I entered her room.

In the Victorian garb that she’d been given, of blouse and gown and jacket, she’d been standing before the open window as it rained outside when I’d entered, the cool night air pouring into the room as she held it open looking down at the town.

“You look very beautiful.” I mentioned as I entered, her hair held up by a complex series of wooden hair rods and hair stays... her staff apparently enhancing her beauty like that. I could tell because of the white leaves and the acorns that flowed from the peak of skull downward over the tailing strands of her hair that had been drawn into a pony tail.

“Thank you.” She managed. “I’m sorry about earlier today, Sue... I just felt... off. Something about this place... now that I’m aware of it, I can shrug most of it off. It looks like your man Madoushi was right. There is something in the air.”

“My man?” I blinked.

“Oh come on now, Sue. I can see how you look at him.” Fell smirked and turned to me.

I gave a subtle laugh. “Well, no apologies. I’ve been feeling... off... too. I understand.” And she nodded. “Fell, I’d like to ask you to do something very brave.”

“Oh? Like what?” she smirked.

“Actually...” and I lifted both hands and tapped my long fingernails together before me. “...I want you to help me be brace as I go into a creepy graveyard at night.” And then I grinned at her as she gave me a discerning look like the one Remy gave me when he was looking for madness in my eyes.

And then...

“Oh all right.” She sighed and rose. “But you owe me big already for this whole experience.” She said and I laughed before leading the way out of her room.

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Castles were built with dungeons. Dungeons usually had catacombs beneath them.

“One Dungeons and Dragons joke and I’ll leave you down here.” Fell mentioned as I lifted my hand and summoned a globe of light.

Strange... with my strength gone I still had my power. Summoning a light ball was a simple thing even as I flipped it up into the air and it flowed about me... a little ball of spiritual energy.

“Oh come on... you have to do a Dungeons and Dragons Joke when you go into the Under Dark... like: how many trolls does it take to screw in a light bulb.”

Fell rolled her eyes. “I don’t know... how many?”

“Two, but the better question is how did they get inside the light bulb anyways?” Fell paused, and then smirked as her body started to tremble before she began to chuckle, and then laugh... even as we walked down the spiraling staircase of one of the castle’s towers, delving deep into the earth where the smell of cold stone wafted up from underneath us. “You see? A little joke never hurt anybody. And you’re in a better mood.” I grinned, even as we paused on a landing to look out into a sunken chamber laden with all sorts of scientific equipment.

They looked like they all belonged to a mad scientist.

“The more I see of this castle the less I want to be here.” But then someone strode into the room, a man wearing a white lab coat even as I was heading down. “Hey... that’s Victor.” Fell mentioned as she turned away with a flurry of skirts and descended the stone steps deeper and deeper into the earth to its very bottom with me, in which the structure stone of the tower gave way to the chiseled stone of the castle’s foundations.

“Who?” I ventured over my shoulder as we descended.

“A doctor. I met him in town just before you came to get me for this little adventure... into a grave yard... at night. He seemed like a good guy. Mentioned that he was Drake’s Chief Physician.”

“Funny, didn’t think Drake needed one of them.” I mentioned even as we walked completely down the curving stairs and into the dungeons.

“Apparently he does.” Fell smirked as we walked past all the myriad of storage alcoves in which food stores were kept along with storage, past a door that led into a dungeon and finally down another curving flight of stairs into the crypts.

Great archways like massive bridges were formed here, with thick columns of natural stone that had been chiseled and etched into dark gothic artistry with gargoyle faces and naked men and women in torment.

“I knew it. This castle is built on the backs of the suffering masses.” Fell mentioned, and reaching up she drew the mass of hair stays and hair rods that came out of the tresses of her brown hair in one big bunch. Then pulling on two ends, all the bits aligned and knotted into her long staff before its end lit in a light of her own before its ends twisted around the light like a miniature lantern.

“But I was already casting light.” I smirked.

“Yeah... but in this place the more light the better.” She replied and then turned to me after looking over the crypts and sarcophagi all around us. “Do you know where in this place you need to go is? I’m... really not comfortable right now.”

“The Devil said it was in a nook on the third landing down...” I thought out loud and Fell froze.

“Excuse me? Devil?” and I turned immediately to her with a beaming smile, trying to fake calm.

“Sure! Guy with red skin, horns, tail with a spade on the end wearing a bowler hat...”

“Pshaw. How stupid of me not to have known that.” She said sarcastically.

“I’ll owe you bigger Fell. But we need this.” I said and stepped forward.

The ground was soft and earthen, and each step made us sink into the soft, spongy ground that was perpetually laden with a ground mist that seemed to get thicker the lower we went. Strange that the light cast by my spirit orb seemed to make the mist melt away from us.

“This may just be my imagination, Sue, but it feels like this stuff’s trying to crawl up my dress.” Fell said and lifted the folds of her skirts and then flipped her staff and waved its light about the ground to make the mists melt away from her.

“This is the third tier. We’re almost there.”

The tiers, as they were, were all connected. They were essentially landings on select intervals upon a deep curving spiral that led deeper into the earth along a center column that held up the castle and the ground above it. Each landing was made up of a long hall where additional floor to ceiling constructs of carved stone formed more crypts, whereas the walls themselves had countless nooks where there were coffins, sarcophagi and countless wrapped corpses.

I kept thinking of Johnny Cash’s *‘Ring of Fire’* as we went down to the third tier.

“This way.” I mentioned and indicated a direction to the very end of the tier. “The devil said it was at the very end of the hall.”

“Of course it is. Now what the hell are we doing down here? Why do you need to come to this particular graveyard in the middle of the night?”

“Um... we’re going to rob a grave of all of its remains?” I grinned over my shoulder at Fell.

“Tell me that was a joke.” And I sighed and shook my head.

“Dead serious.” I admitted at last.

“Sue... I’m your friend... but I got a problem with what we’re doing right now. These people are dead, they’re at rest...”

I stopped and turned toward her. “Fell... I’m sorry. I should’ve filled you in. The story is that I met a devil who wanted to make a bargain. Of course he wanted my soul and stuff, but I wasn’t going to give it to him. So in exchange for some information, I am collecting a few things.”

“A corpse’s remains...” Fell stated and folded one arm about herself, the other arm holding onto the light on her staff.

As the mists began to creep in on us she fed more power into the light and it flared brilliantly, driving the mists away with what sounded like mild screams.

“This... corpse, struck a deal with the devil.” I continued. “We’re helping someone escape this place who can escape this place, Fell. It’s an exchange of favors. I do the devil a favor and he feeds me information on how we can get out of this place ourselves and find my scroll. I know this is creepy, I know this feels bad, but we’re doing someone something very important. Someone has the chance to get out of this place and I intend to help them.

“I’d like your help, Fell. You don’t even have to touch the bones, I’ll do it all myself. I just... want someone here... and keep me company.”

Fell sighed and stepped forward and we two automatically embraced like sisters.

“All right, all right. I’m coming.” She intoned when we stepped back from each other. “Let’s just get this over with.”

But I hugged her again and kissed her cheek. “Thanks Fell. Sorry for not telling you everything all at once. You came this far just on friendship.”

“I would’ve gone all the way on just friendship... it’d just hurt my feelings that you didn’t let me in on this.”

And we journeyed to the very end of the tier, to a wall of coffins and sarcophagi, and counting from the upper left, finding the correct sarcophagus, I pushed the top open and looked inside, seeing a grinning skeleton with its arms crossed over the chest. Reaching in to touch it, it immediately collapsed under its own weight and the jaw opened gapingly.

Fell planted her staff in the ground where it continued to radiate the protective bubble of light along with the will-o-wisp of my own lantern chi-spell as I took a moment in bated breath to look upon the remains of the dead. It was the first skeleton I’d ever looked upon. I’d never seen a dead person before. Dead monsters, yeah... but not a person. A person was different. There needed to be a certain amount of reverence for this person.

“It’s a woman.” Fell said suddenly and I looked at her.

“How can you tell?”

“The pelvic bone’s too wide for a man. But there’re extra bones in here, Sue.” And she gestured at a series of bones that were off to the side of the skeleton itself. “What kind of bones are these? Are there two people in here?”

“I was told to collect these bones...” I said and hiked my skirts up and removed the bag the devil had given me from underneath where I’d placed it in the hem of the small of my back and opening it up, reached in for the first bones. “All of them.”

And so I started to collect the remains in the coffin, one after the next, swallowing down my fears and concerns – literally, and often – touching human bones with my bare hands till I came to the skull.

“*‘Alas poor Yorick, I knew him well.’*” I said, quoting Hamlet as I held the skull up.

“Yeah, let’s just hope we don’t end up like most of the people in that play, Sue.” Fell mentioned before I stuffed the skull in the bag and pulled the drawstrings shut before placing it on the ground before I began to pull the lid of the sarcophagus shut.

And then Fell happened to turn and see something.

“Sue... I see a lantern.” Fell hissed. “Someone’s coming!”

“Quick! Help me!” I groaned. It was enough of an issue for my newly slender woman’s arms to lift a stone lid and shift it, and Fell showed that while even reduced she was still stronger than me as she and I pulled the lid shut with a low grinding click. And then I turned with a gasp. “The bones! We need to hide them!”

Fell looked left and right for a moment, and then doing the only thing that came to mind she hopped over the bones, pinched them between her ankles and let her skirts fall around it right as the owner of the lantern was coughed up by the mists to reveal...

“Madoushi?!” I gasped. “Oh thank The Maker.” And then something peculiar happened to me.

I felt a wave of relief, partly that it was him and not Master Drake or something worse, and partly that I felt that his presence suddenly filled a hole in me. I didn't know it was missing until he was here, and suddenly that thing in my bowels leapt out at him, drawn toward him like he was one magnet and my loins were an oppositely charged magnet. In an action that my hips tried to thrust out at him and I tried to control myself so as to not look like some sultry woman or something, my body did a full-body shudder to keep myself in place.

"Susan? Fellania? What are you two doing down here?" he asked, holding up the lantern he had on the end of a staff.

"We were exploring when we got lost." I lied. "The mists here are so thick and... and I'm so glad you're here Mad." That was the truth. "Do you know the way out?"

He eyed our sources of light, and then looked around before I couldn't help myself and I surged to him. "Oh please take us out!" I asked as I pressed against him, and felt a connection in me with him that soothed one ache with the contact like this, but created another, more primal ache. I began to perspire and cupped his groin with the bowl of my crotch.

Any thought of mischief melted from him as his face eased. "When the castle's servants spoke of seeing you two come this way, I knew I had to come and find you. The castle isn't safe at night... and can be rather... *treacherous*. We can't have you go tripping in the darkness and go tumbling away." He paused. "I could never forgive myself if that happened. Please... come this way." And he led the way out of the catacombs, not even noticing Fellania as she stooped, picked up the bag of bones and carried it with us, and with all his attentions on me, she could carry the bag behind her without a single person noticing it.