

KISS

PSYCHO CIRCUS

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OH, I REMEMBER HER WELL. MET HER IN THE MARKETPLACE IN CEYLON. I WAS TRADING SPICES IN THOSE DAYS. A RARE THING SHE WAS, TOO. HAD A MERMAID TATTOOED ON THE SMALL OF HER BACK.

A CHILD OF THE WATER, SHE WAS. TOO PROUD TO BE A QUEEN.

WHAT ABOUT YOU, KISMET?

WHAT, ME? A GREAT LOST-LOVE, ONE-WHO-GOT-AWAY-STORY? SORRY. UNLESS YOU COUNT DRUNKEN FUMBLINGS WITH ASPIRING WIFE-BEATERS, I GOT NOTHING.

HOW 'BOUT YOU, BLACKWELL?

HMMPH.

OH, DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME WITH CAPTAIN MISERY HERE. THE MAN WANTS A ROMANTIC BONE IN HIS ANCIENT BODY, I'D WAGER...

YOU'VE A BETTER CHANCE GETTING A TALE OUT OF STAGRAVE HERE.

TIBERIUS IS RIGHT. OUR FRIEND SEEMS EVEN GLOOMIER THAN USUAL. TONIGHT, LET'S NOT BOTHER HIM.

BELIEVE ME, YOU'LL NEVER GET ANY SECRETS OUT OF HIM.





I DON'T
WANT TO
DIE...

KING OF THE HIGHWAY, SCOURGE OF
THE MARSHES OF KENT, NO COACH
WAS SAFE WHILE THE DASHING YOUNG
BRIGAND RODE THE SHADOWS.

STAND
AND DELIVER...
OR THE DEVIL
HE WILL TAKE
YE!

NO, SIR!
PLEASE DON'T
SHOOT!

THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE
OF ENGLAND, THE NAME
OF BLACKWELL THE DEVIL
WAS WELL KNOWN:

HE WAS A THIEF, TO
PUT IT PLAINLY, BUT
WHAT A THIEF HE WAS...



WHAT WAS THAT? I'M A TRIFLE HARD OF HEARING, LAD.

DON'T SHOOT. I'M JUST A HIRED DRIVER, POOR AND HUMBLE, SIR.

THE COACH, HOW MANY?

TWO.

ARMED?

NO.

RICH?

AYE, VERY, AN' THEY'VE GOT IT ALL ON THEM.

GOOD, MOVE YOUR ARSE THEN, IF YOU DON'T WANT IT SHOT OFF. RUN!



DON'T STOP TILL YOU GET TO CANTERBURY, AN' ASK THE BISHOP THERE TO SAY A PRAYER FOR ME! HA!



HULLO, KIND GENTLES, DID YE KNOW YOU WERE RIDING A TOLL ROAD, THEN? TIME TO PAY THE FARE.

LEGEND HAD IT HE WAS A NOBLEMAN ONCE, A MAN OF GENTLE BIRTH, WHO TURNED TO CRIME TO AVENGE WRONGS DONE TO HIS FAMILY.

SOME SAY HE HAD MADE A PACT WITH A DEVIL, THAT HE COULD DISAPPEAR INTO SHADOWS, OR DISSIPATE INTO MIST, OR THAT HE RODE A GHOSTLY STEED THAT SPIT FIRE AND BLACK LIGHTNINGS.



HE WAS YOUNG AND WILD IN THOSE DAYS, QUICK WITH A SMILE AND FOND OF JOKE.

THE THRESHNER'S INN WAS A SAFEHOUSE, RUN BY A RASCAL CALLED OLD NED.

WHAT SAY YOU, INNKEEPER? GOT ROOM IN THIS PIGS HOLE FOR AN HONEST SOUL?

IF YOU FIND AN HONEST SOUL IN ALL OF ENGLAND, LET ME KNOW, YOU BASTARD!

GIRL, FETCH SOME WINE FOR OUR FRIEND!

BEEN FIGHTING I SEE. WERE THE WATERS KIND TO YOU, JOHNNY BOY?

I'LL LET THE OLD MARINER DECIDE FOR HIMSELF.

OLD NED WAS A SMUGGLER WHO FENCED GOODS FOR BLACKWELL.

GLORY! WHAT'D YOU DO? ROB THE POPE?

WHAT'S THIS WORLD COMING TO, MY BOY, I ASK YOU?

DAMN NEAR IT. TREASURES HIDDEN FROM THE TAX MAN. I'LL GOTTEN GAINS OF THE ENGLISH PEERAGE. 'TIS A SCANDAL, IT IS!

THEY WERE LIKE FATHER AND SON. THERE WAS NO ONE BLACKWELL TRUSTED MORE IN THE WORLD.

EXCEPT FOR ONE, OLD NED HAD A DAUGHTER, TESS, PRETTY AS ROSE AND NEAR AS FULL OF THORNS.

WHEN BLACKWELL WOULD GO OFF TO SLEEP IN THE STABLES, TESS WOULD MEET HIM.

AYE, THERE'S A GIRL, YOUR FATHER ASLEEP YET?

NO ONE HAD EVER TOUCHED HIM LIKE SHE HAD, GOTTEN UNDER HIS SKIN THE WAY SHE DID. THEY DREAMED OF RUNNING OFF TOGETHER, OFF TO THE AMERICAS, AND STARTING A NEW LIFE.

PASSED OUT IS MORE THE TALE. THAT WAS QUITE A PURSE YOU BROUGHT TONIGHT, I'LL AGREE, BUT DON'T YOU THINK IT'S TIME YOU STOPPED SMIRKING?

WHY? IF A MAN CAN'T TAKE JOY IN A JOB WELL DONE, WHAT GOOD IS HE?

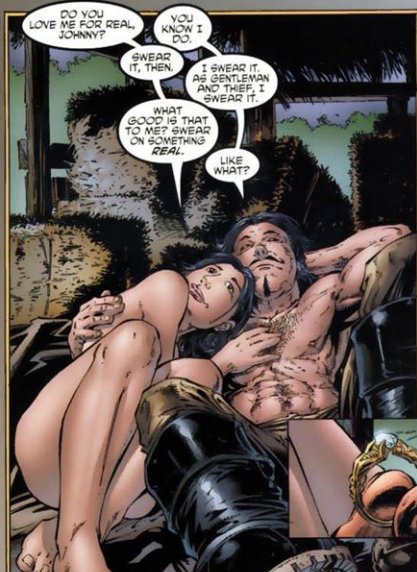
I THINK IT'S ENOUGH FOR A DOWRY, DON'T YOU?

HE PICTURED HIMSELF LIVING THE LIFE OF A COUNTRY SQUIRE, SITTING BY A ROARING FIRE, WATCHING TESS GROW FAT WITH THEIR CHILDREN.

WHY?

ARE YOU PLANNING ON MARRYING MY FATHER, THEN?

SOMETHING LIKE THAT.



DO YOU
LOVE ME FOR REAL,
JOHNNY?

YOU
KNOW I
DO.

SWEAR
IT, THEN.

I SWEAR IT.
AS GENTLEMAN
AND THIEF, I
SWEAR IT.

WHAT
GOOD IS THAT
TO ME? SWEAR
ON SOMETHING
REAL.

LIKE
WHAT?



THERE!
THE MOON!
SWEAR
IT ON THE
MOON.

BY
PHOEBE'S SILVER
COURTESAN, I
AVOW MY LOVE
TO YOU, SWEET
TESS.

EH? WHO'S
PHOEBE?

THE MOON.
I SWEAR ON
THE MOON. ARE
YOU HAPPY
NOW?

AS CLOSE
AS I'M LIKELY
TO GET WITH
YOU.



WELL,
WHAT SAY
YOU TO
THIS?



AH! IT'S
BEAUTIFUL!

BEAUTY
DESERVES
BEAUTY.



I'D BETTER
GET BACK INDOORS
BEFORE MY FATHER
NOTICES ME GONE.
DREAM OF ME?

I
ALWAYS
DO.

BUT BLACKWELL'S HEAD WAS FULL OF TROUBLED DREAMS THAT NIGHT. DREAMS OF DOOM AND DISASTER.

HE DREAMT OF A PALE STRANGER, CLOAKED IN BLACK, WHO TRAILED BEHIND HIM, HOUNDING HIM ALL HIS DAYS.

THIS STRANGER WAS HIS NEMESIS, THE SPIRIT OF REVENGE FOR THE WRONGS HE'D DONE IN HIS LIFE.

FOR ALL HIS WICKED WAYS, THERE WAS STILL A CONSCIENCE IN HIM, A HEART THAT DARED TO HOLD SOME THINGS CLOSE.

IN HIS DREAMS, THIS WHITE-FACED DEMON SOUGHT OUT EVERYTHING HE HELD DEAR.

SOUGHT THEM OUT AND CUT THEM DOWN WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT.


ALL HIS HOPES FOR THE FUTURE,
ALL THE DAYS OF THE NEW LIFE HE
HAD PLANNED FOR HIMSELF AND
TESS, ALL THE SMILING CHILDREN
HE WOULD NEVER HAVE, WASHED
AWAY IN A RIVER OF CRIMSON.

AND IN HIS DREAMS
HE CALLED OUT TO
THE DEMON: WHY? WHY
DO YOU DO THIS?


BUT THE DEMON
JUST TURNED TO
HIM AND LAUGHED.
A BLACK KETTLE
CACKLE THAT
SHOOK HIM TO
HIS BONES.

YOU
DON'T DESERVE
HAPPINESS. YOU
DO NOT DESERVE
PEACE. JONATHAN
BLACKWELL.






HE WOKE WITH A START,
BUT A LUNGFUL OF ICY AIR
QUICKLY BROUGHT HIM
BACK TO WAKEFULNESS.




THE SAME DREAM HAD HAUNTED HIM
FOR SOME TIME NOW, AND IT CHILLED
HIM MORE EACH TIME IT VISITED HIM.




NO MATTER, SOON HE WOULD
HAVE PLENTY OF MONEY TO TAKE
TESS AWAY, AND PUT AN OCEAN
BETWEEN HIM AND HIS DEMONS.

BUT WHILE THE SLEEP STILL
CLUNG TO HIS EYELIDS, HE
HEARD A RUCKUS, GUNSHOTS
AND SHOUTING.

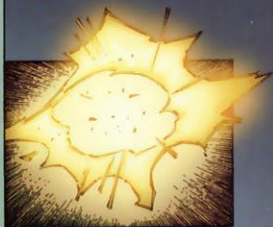


RED COATS. THE KING'S
SOLDIERS WERE POKING
AROUND THIS SECLUDED
OLD INN. WHY?

BLACKWELL CURSED
HIMSELF FOR A FOOL.
HE'D LEFT HIS SWORD
AND GUNS IN THE STABLE.



HE'D NEED THE
DEVIL'S LUCK TO GET
HIM THROUGH THIS.



BLACKWELL COULDN'T BELIEVE WHAT HIS EYES TOLD HIM.

THE BAND OF REDCOATS RIDING OFF, CARRYING THE CHESTS OF LOOT HE AND OLD NED HAD STASHED AWAY...

THE HOUSEHOLD SLAIN AND THE THRESHERS INN TORCHED...

UNABLE TO MOVE, UNABLE TO SPEAK, BLACKWELL WATCHED THE CAPTAIN AND HIS MEN AS THEY RODE OFF WITH THEIR SPOILS.

IN THE THICK, BLACK SMOKE THAT BILLOWED FROM THE BURNING HOUSE, BLACKWELL IMAGINED HE COULD SEE HIS OLD FRIEND, THE DEMON.


THE CREATURE WHO HAD HAUNTED HIS DARKEST NIGHTMARES HAD CAUGHT UP TO HIM AND CUT OUT HIS HEART.

EVERYTHING HE HAD HELD DEAR HAD BEEN RIPPED FROM HIM, ALL HIS HOPES FOR THE FUTURE HAD BEEN TAKEN.

TESS, HIS BEAUTIFUL TESS, SLAUGHTERED BY UNIFORMED MURDERERS. THEY WOULD NEVER RUN OFF TOGETHER, NEVER SEE THE AMERICANS, NEVER RAISE THEIR WILD BROOD OF SPIRITED CHILDREN.

THE DAY SHE DIED, THE DAY THEY KILLED HER, SOMETHING IN HIM DIED AS WELL.





HE HAD NO STOMACH FOR
ADVENTURE AND INTRIGUE
ANY MORE. HIS DAYS AS
HIGHWAYMAN BEHIND HIM,
HE BECAME A WANDERING
BEGGAR.

PEOPLE WOULD LOOK
AWAY WHEN THEY SAW HIM,
OR MUTTERED PRAYERS
BENEATH THEIR BREATH.

LIFE WAS A PALE SHADOW
THAT CLUNG STUBBORNLY
TO HIS HEELS, A TRIFLE HE
WOULD HAVE BEEN GLAD
TO DISCARD.

ONE DAY HE
WAS PASSING
THE VILLAGE
SQUARE. A
CROWD HAD
GATHERED.
SOME POOR
FOOL WAS TO
BE HANGED FOR
A CUTPURSE.

BLACKWELL ENVIED
THE WRETCHED SOD,
JEALOUS OF HIS
RELEASE FROM LIFE
ON HIS DUSTY, TEAR-
STAINED ROCK.




BUT AS BLACKWELL SCANNED THE CROWD,
HE SAW A FACE HE RECOGNIZED. FARRELL,
THE ARMY CAPTAIN WHO HAD CARELESSLY
SNATCHED HIS LIFE AWAY FROM HIM.

HE NEVER UNDERSTOOD HOW THE CAPTAIN KNEW
WHERE TO FIND HIM, WHERE HE HAD HIDDEN HIS RICHES.
HE HAD ALWAYS BEEN CAREFUL TO COVER HIS TRACKS.

MEMORIES TWISTED LIKE
A KNIFE IN HIS BELLY.

AS THE TRAP WAS SPRINGING AND
THE CONDEMNED MAN DANCED A
CLUMSY JIG AT THE END OF A ROPE,
BLACKWELL SPIED SOMETHING ELSE...



THERE, IN THE SHADOW
OF A DEADMAN,
BLACKWELL'S HEART
BEGAN TO SMOLDER
WITH NEW LIFE.

BY FARRELL'S SIDE THERE WAS A WOMAN. SHE WAS DRESSED IN FINERY, TARTED UP LIKE A WELL BORN LADY, YET THERE WAS NO MISTAKING HER.

IT WAS TESS. IT COULD NOT BE, YET THERE IT WAS.

IT WAS HER ALL ALONG. IT MUST HAVE BEEN. SHE HAD LED THE CAPTAIN TO THE TREASURE, BETRAYED HER FAMILY, HER LOVER, AND RAN OFF WITH HIM, THINKING HE COULD BETTER HER PROSPECTS.

INCONSTANT BITCH, BLACKWELL THOUGHT TO HIMSELF. WHAT A FOOL HE HAD BEEN! SWEARING HIS HEART ON SOMETHING AS COLD AND CHANGEABLE AS THE MOON.

ON HER SLENDER, PALE FINGER, STILL SHE WORE THE RING HE HAD GIVEN HER THAT CURSED NIGHT.

HE HAD ONCE LOVED HER WITH A LOVE HE HAD NEVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE. AND NOW HE HATED WITH HATE BEYOND MEASURE.

HE WATCHED THEM ENTER A CARRIAGE TOGETHER AND RIDE OFF. AS THEY DISAPPEARED AROUND A CORNER, HIS SOUL BURST WITH FIRE.

AN UNQUENCHABLE FIRE THAT BURNED THROUGH EVERY INCH OF HIM, AND GAVE HIS SAD LIFE A NEW PURPOSE: REVENGE.

TWO NIGHTS LATER, FARRELL AND TESS WERE LEAVING A PARTY TOGETHER...

BLASTED RAIN. I HATE IT!
CAN'T YOU SPEAK
TO THE KING
ABOUT IT?

I WILL
SEE WHAT I
CAN DO, MY
DEAR.

BOY!
QUIT DAWDLING!
BRING UP THE
CARRIAGE!

SORRY
TO KEEP
YOU WAITING,
SIR.

TESS AND FARRELL WERE TOO BUSY LAUGHING AND GIGGLING WITH EACH OTHER TO NOTICE THAT THE COACH HAD MADE AN UNPLANNED DETOUR.

BENEATH THE GAZE OF THE DISTANT MOON, THE COACH PICKED UP SPEED, HURLING WITH WILD ABANDON DOWN A FORGOTTEN SIDE ROAD.

THE CARRIAGE WHEELS
SPUN DIZZILY AS THE
HORSES SPED OFF
INTO THE NIGHT.

WHERE ARE
WE? THIS ISN'T THE
HIGHWAY!

BOY! WHAT
ARE YOU DOING?
YOU'VE GOTTEN
US LOST!

FOR
GOODNESS
SAKE,
BOY! SLOW
DOWN!

BUT THE CARRIAGE JUST
CAREENED ON ITS WAY,
THE DRIVER WHIPPING THE
HORSES, URGING THEM
TO A FURIOUS PACE.

STOP! STOP
THIS MADNESS THIS
INSTANT! DO YOU
HEAR ME?

WHAT
WAS THAT? I'M
A TRIFLE HARD
OF HEARING,
SIR!

IN THE
NAME OF GOD! STOP
THE CARRIAGE! ARE
YOU DAFT?

YOU'RE
GOING TO
GET US ALL
KILLED --



*CAPTAIN FARRELL AWOKES ON
A STUFFY OLD MATTRESS IN A
CRAMPED AND COLD ROOM.*

*FOR A MOMENT, HE BELIEVED
IT HAD ALL BEEN A BAD DREAM,
BUT THE ACNES IN HIS BONES
AND THE BANDAGE ON HIS
HEAD TOLD HIM IT WAS NOT.*





AH... YOU ARE AWAKE. I AM GLAD TO SEE YOU WELL. I HAD MY DOUBTS YOU'D PULL THROUGH. I DON'T MIND TELLING YOU.

I AM FATHER DOMINO, A HUMBLE HERMIT OF THESE WOODS. PLEASE, MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME.

PLEASE, TELL ME... WHAT HAPPENED?



YOU WERE IN A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT. I FOUND YOU IN A DITCH, RATHER WORSE FOR WEAR, I DARE SAY.

I BROUGHT YOU BACK HERE, AND TREATED YOUR WOUNDS. YOU'VE BEEN ASLEEP FOR DAYS.

THERE WAS SOMEONE ELSE, A WOMAN...

YES, I AM SORRY. SHE DID NOT SURVIVE THE CRASH. I BURIED HER AND BLESSED THE SITE.



OH NO... MY TESS... IT CAN'T BE...

YOU ARE WEAK, MY SON. YOU NEED YOUR STRENGTH. I HAVE A SHEPHERD'S PIE. PLEASE TRY TO EAT.

I HAVE NO STOMACH TO EAT. I AM A HOLLOW SHELL OF A MAN.



PLEASE, YOU MUST TRY A BIT. I INSIST.



WHAT IS THAT? THAT TASTE. I DON'T THINK...
HACK! HAUCK!
UUFF!

OH, MY DEAR BOY! YOU'RE CHOKING!



QUICKLY! HAVE SOME WINE!





NO KIND
AT ALL, I'M
AFRAID.



SO I
WOULDN'T
EXPECT ANY
FORGIVENESS
IF I WERE
YOU.

YOU STOLE
MY WOMAN, STOLE MY
FORTUNE, KILLED MY FRIENDS.
YOU SNATCHED AWAY THE
VERY THINGS THAT MADE
MY LIFE WORTH LIVING. AND
NOW I HAVE DONE THE
SAME TO YOU!

YOU!
YOU'RE
THAT BLASTED
HIGHWAY
MAN!



DID YOU
LOVE HER? DID YOU
PROMISE TO TAKE HER
AWAY AND START A NEW
LIFE? PLEASE YOUR
DEVOTION ON THE MOON?
WAS SHE YOUR LIFE?
YOUR SOUL?

OH, YES,
I CAN SEE
SHE WAS.



YOU'RE A
BIGGER FOOL
THAN I.



IT SEEMS
WE HAVE MUCH
IN COMMON. WE'VE
BOTH LOST
THE THINGS WE
LOVED.



SO HERE
WE STAND, TWO
LOVE-POISONED FOOLS,
TO SAD WRECKS OF
MANHOOD. TWO LIVES
RENT TO PIECES, NO
LONGER WORTH
THE LIVING.

BUT ALAS,
ONLY ONE
BULLET.



EH?



YOU ARE
THE GUEST, SO
I WILL LEAVE THE
CHOICE UP TO
YOU.

ONE
OF US NEEDS
TO BE PUT
OUT OF OUR
MISERY.



BLAM





FROM THAT NIGHT ON, BLACKWELL
HELD NO LOVE IN HIS HEART. HE
RODE THE BACK ROADS AND
HIGHWAYS OF ENGLAND, A TERROR
TO ALL WHO CROSSED HIS PATH.

AND FOR ALL HIS DAYS, THE DEMON CHASED HIM,
LURKING IN THE SHADOWS AND HAUNTING HIS DREAMS.

UNTIL THE DAY THE DEMON WOULD
COME AND CLAIM HIM AS HIS OWN.

BUT SOME PART OF HIM COULD
NEVER FORGET, NEVER FORGET
THE LOVE HE HAD ONCE HAD, AND
THE BETRAYAL THAT STRIPPED
AWAY HIS VERY SOUL.



NEXT:.....
THE NIGHTIGALE'S SONG