Jackson Lockhart

Nighthunter

I tackle Bloodbane as he dashes away, in an attempt to avoid me, which inadvertently causes the both of us to crash through the door. I wince as I felt a shard of glass slice open my cheek, then another along my forearm, and a third on my shin. Just some more potential candidates to add to my already innumerable scars. I grapple with the bastard, trying to subdue him as we both tumble down onto the tracks. We slam into the iron rails, and I lose my grip upon impact. Bloodbane hisses as he crashes into the tracks, dimly lit behind the shadow of the train by one of the last rays of sunlight. He quickly scampers up and darts into the shadows in an attempt to lose me, leaving behind pool of black blood and shattered glass. I try to push myself up onto my feet, but my left arm refuses to cooperate. With some extra effort, I struggle my way upright. I realize that my shoulder was dislocated, I took a deep breath and pop it back into place. I bend down and pull a frighteningly large shard of glass from my leg. I then jump back onto the platform and began to sprint after Bloodbane. I catch a glimpse of him turning around a corner, heading back into the streets. As I began to make chase, out of nowhere, a London Metropolitan Police officer steps out from behind a column and strikes me square in the head with his club. I stop dead in my tracks as he knocks me over backwards.

“Fuck me.” I groan.

THIRTY MINUTES EARLIER

It was a surprisingly chilly September day. The sun had just set behind the horizon, and a constant breeze brought with it a chill great enough to drain whatever warmth the sun had left behind. My thick coat however, made from elk hide and wolf fur, was more than enough to keep me warm. I had killed and skinned the animals himself to make the coat in my youth, and it had served me well through many harsh Scandinavian winters.

For these fragile Londoner’s though, it’s an exceptionally cold start to the rapidly approaching Autumn. They shiver and walk briskly, hustling to and fro about me. I snort in content and watch my breath fade away in front of me . Quite honestly, I find it hard to believe that these people, with their frilly clothes and their many “fancies” have been able to conquer half the world. Though admittedly, I had seen the British army in action once in Afghanistan, while returning from a journey to Persia. Their soldiers, a regiment of Scottish rifleman, were well equipped, highly-disciplined, and fought bravely. These hardy soldiers I respect, but I did note that their strict and regimented training and style of warfare made it difficult for them to adapt to different battle tactics. No wonder they lost to the Americans.

I put politics aside, however, as I approached my destination. It was time for business. I have arrived at King’s Cross Station. One of the busiest train stations in London, fortuitously, this allows me to easily slip in unnoticed amongst the crowd. Unfortunately, my prey could do so with just as much ease as I. I do not wish to hunt under such circumstances, but I have no other choice. The next train will arrive in thirteen minutes, at 8:35. This gives me some time to scout out the station.

I am a hunter by profession, but I am no ordinary hunter. I seek not stags nor bears. I do not shoot for pheasants nor do I send a hound after ducks. I have traveled the world, yes, but not in search of the most magnificent or dangerous prey. I do not hunt for trophies. I do not hunt for the thrill. I do not hunt for the sport. I hunt for revenge. I hunt to protect. My name is Magnus Johansson, and I hunt vampires. I prey on the bastard children of God, the kin of Satan, and every creature of the night that once plagued humanity in its infancy, during the primeval times. I hunt to keep them in check. This time however, it is personal. This time, the hunt has brought me to London.

The vampire’s have begun to exit the countryside en masse. No one quite knew why until about eight years ago. An ancient vampire, thousands of years old, lost his mind and made a home in London’s underground. At night he’d come up to the streets and fuck his brains out with the city’s many whores before killing them, savagely. He didn’t even drink their blood. Another hunter had gotten to that insane son of a bitch before he could. As far as he knew, the police still hadn’t been able to solve the case of “Jack the Ripper” as they called him. Well, old “Jack” was long dead by now.

But all the other vampires failed to realize that he was nothing but a crazy old bastard. They thought he had found the perfect new hunting ground. They abandoned the shrinking countryside and headed towards the cities across the globes. No more slow killings, picking off isolated settlers, deceiving them to be allowed entry into their homes. Now they would hunt in the dark alleyways, in the poorhouses, and in the empty moonlit streets. The tightly packed humans had no defense, except for the hunters.

Unlike their prey, the hunters were having trouble adapting the hunt to the city. Gone were the days when there were no eyes to gaze upon their deeds. The cities and their police often viewed them as murders. I don’t care. I was here for blood, and blood I will get.

I had counted six exits so far, with two main ones and four smaller exits. Seven minutes left. The schedule says that the train would be arriving on the platform furthest to the south. That left the vampire with only two exits closeby.

With six minutes left, I am ready and waiting for the vampire to step off the train. Six minutes. Those six minutes felt like an eternity. I’ve been waiting my whole life for this moment. The train finally came. The people spilled off, but he remained motionless, staring, unblinking. Waiting for the vampire to set foot off the train. It seemed like everyone had left the train. I was beginning to if my information was wrong. But then I see him. He might have human form, but I would never forget those eyes. I grab my whip and lash out towards him. He’s knocked down, and I rush towards him, ready to stake him. He rolls away and runs down the train. I chase after him, and tackle him as he tries to avoid me, causing both of us to crash through one of the trains windows.

But just then, our eyes meet. I find myself looking back into the eyes of pure evil. Just as I had fourteen years earlier.

FOURTEEN YEARS EARLIER

I will never forget the night of the seventeenth of February, 1882. It was a cold and stormy winter night, but the fire spread its warmth from the fireplace throughout the small woodland cottage that was my home. My mother was in the kitchen preparing dinner for the two of us.

My father would not be joining us. He was outside, resting six feet under.

My mother told me that my father had passed about two years after I was born, died on a hunting trip. My uncle Tobias, my father’s brother, had born the burden of informing my mother, and had brought back my father’s body to be buried outside their home. Uncle Tobias then gave them a large sum of money to hire some hands to help my mother around the farm until Magnus was old enough to do the work himself. They hadn’t seen or heard from Uncle Tobias since.

I barely remembered my father, and although sometimes I was lonely, I was content, happy even, of my life with my mother. The farm hands had all gone back home for the winter months, so it was just me and my mother. I was using a small hatchet my mother said was once my father’s trying to split some firewood, to no avail. I had managed to get the hatchet halfway into one of the small logs, but now it was stuck, and I couldn’t get it out. I grabbed hold of the log and pulled with all my might. To my surprise, the hatchet came out of the log, but my hand had been too close to it, and I had sliced open my thumb. I cried out in pain as the tears began to flow from my eyes. I ran to my mother, who stopped cooking upon seeing and hearing her son. She quickly bent down on one knee.

“Magnus, what happened?” She asked, soothingly. I explained the accident while my mother hugged me. She then got up and handed me a wooden cup. “Here, hold this.” She then took some water she had been boiling for dinner and poured it into the cup, after that, she reached up into one of the high cabinets that I couldn’t reach even when I stood on one of the tall chairs. She pulled out two small bottles, one with tea leaves, one with herbs. She sprinkled the tea leaves into the cup, and then took a pinch of the herbs, putting them into a bowl and crushing it with some kind of stone stick. “Sip on that tea Magnus, I’ll be done in just a minute, and we can have dinner soon after.” She said. I smiled, my mother seemed to know everything, especially when it came to making me happy. She was always prepared to help anyone with anything. I wanted to become someone good like her when I grew up. My mother spread the crushed up herbs onto a bandage and then began to wrap it around my thumb. Magnus instinctively jerked my hand back.

“I’m sorry mother, it stings.” I said.

“I know it might hurt a little right now honey, but it’ll save you from a lot of pain later, and it’ll go away in no time.” She replied with her warm smile. I smiled back and gave her back my hand. She wrapped the bandage around my thumb. “There,” She said, “It’ll be all better soon. Now the-” A knock at the door cut her off. My mother stood up, looking confused. “Who would be out here in this weather?” She opened the curtains in the kitchen window slightly, peering out into the moonlit night. I got up and stood behind her, straining on the tips of my toes to try to get a look as well. All I saw, however, was my mother’s eyes widen.

I thought she might be worried that she couldn’t answer the door because she needed to focus on dinner, so I walked to the door and opened it for our visitor.

“Magnus don’t!” My mother screamed, but it was too late. The vampire had already stepped inside. I had invited him in. He towered over me, a tall, lanky, yet muscular man. He was incredibly pale, with a large nose, and small, yet pointed ears. He had short, jet black hair, and eyes that seemed to glow a deep orange. He reached out his clawed hand and grabbed me by the throat, strangling me. My mother, Astrid, charged at him with a knife, plunging it into his shoulder. She then ripped off her necklace, emptying the vial of holy water she carried with her at all times onto its face. The vampire screamed in agony, his face steaming, as she shoved him out the door, barring it shut.

“Run Magnus! Get to the basement!”

But I couldn’t move. I was frozen with fear. A stranger had just tried to murder me, and my mother had fought him off with a skill and fury I was unaware she possessed. She grabbed me by the wrist and ran into the den, forcing me to follow. She threw the bear skin that served as a rug across the room. I could hear the vampire pounding against the door, trying to barge his way back in. I couldn’t believe what I saw. Underneath the rug was a large silver door, with our family crest carved into it. She unlocked it with a key she kept on another necklace. Opening the trapdoor she grabbed a nearby candle and handed it to me, along with the key, and ushered me down below. I turned back and she smiled at me as she began to follow.

Just then, however, the vampire smashed his way through the back window. He crashed into his mother, who never had a chance to fight back. I screamed in fear, and grabbed the chain hanging on the door above me. I closed the door without hesitation.

My greatest regret in life is how quickly I closed that door.

I cowered there, sobbing, holding the candle close to me. Hoping it would protect me from the monster that had come from the dark. There were screams from above. Sounds of a struggle. And then… nothing. Nothing but my the sound of my tears. Finally, there was the sound like meat cooking in a pan, then the vampire screamed as the consecrated silver that the door was made of burned his flesh.

Hours later, I emerged to a sight that still haunts my nightmares. My mother’s bloodless corpse.

I instantly retreated back into the safety of the basement. This time, instead of using the candle for protection, I began to light the other gas lamps I found along the wall. I discovered something there that changed everything I thought I knew about my family.

There were bookshelves filled with books in many languages, full of drawings of strange creatures. From what I could read, it seemed to be about how to find, and kill, these creatures. One wall was covered in weapons: short and long swords, axes, knives, a crossbow, but one in particular caught my eye. It was a whip, and not just any ordinary whip, this one was made of metal instead of leather, with chains connecting the handle to a spiked, thick mace ball. I grabbed it, along with several of the knives. I realized that when my mother said my father had died on a hunting trip, he hadn’t been hunting game, but monsters. Monsters like the ones depicted in the books, monsters like the one who killed my mother. On a desk nearby, I found a map, labeled for emergencies, and that it would lead me to the home of my uncle Tobias, several days away.

When morning came I packed a bag with as much clothes, food, and money I could carry, along with the weapons from my father’s basement. I put the bag on one of our strongest horses, and then I grabbed a shovel. I wanted to bury my mother next to my father.

I couldn’t.

I went to dig, but the shovel wasn’t even able to break through the frozen soil. It bounced right off, and the handle hit me right in the face. I fell on my knees, defeated. I couldn’t save my mother. I couldn’t even bury her. I cried for hours. When I finally stopped, the sun was high in the sky. I finally picked myself up, and grabbed the firewood I had been splitting last night. I let it burn for hours. I stared at it, the whole time. Staring into the flames, as if something in them might fill the hole in my heart. As the sun began to sink from its height in the sky, I put out the fire. Finally, the ground had thawed enough for me to dig. Even then, it still took me until sunset to dig her a grave. It was a shallow grave, but it would have to do. If I rode hard, I could still make it to the nearby village before dark. I wanted to give her a proper funeral, but I was too scared to be out at night, much less stay at the house. So I buried my blood-drained mother in a shallow grave. And then I mounted my horse and rode like hell.

I had to get to my uncle. My uncle had been with my father when he died, my mother had told me that, so my uncle had to be a hunter like my father. A hunter who could teach me everything I would know to kill the bastard who took my mother from me.

PRESENT

The bobby grabs his handcuffs, preparing to arrest me. I grab one of my knives and stab him in the hand. I shove him off the platform, and chase after Bloodbane. I round the corner at top speed, nearly crashing into a luggage cart. I can see him in the crowd. He’s heading for the streets, calling for the police. But no one would stop me from killing him.

I sprint down the hall, bound up the stairs and follow him across the streets. The bobby’s are long gone. We’ve long left the wealthier center of London, and entered the slums. Even after fourteen years of training, I can’t keep sprinting across all of London. When I see Bloodbane enter an abandoned warehouse, I know this is the one chance I’m going to get.

The only light inside comes from the moonlight shining through the windows. It’s enough to see by, and that’s all that matters. Bloodbane stands tall at the other side of the warehouse, having shed his human disguise and entered the terrifying form he had been in when he attacked my home fourteen years ago. But I’m not afraid anymore.

“So, another arrogant hunter who thinks he can kill me.” He said.

“I am no ordinary hunter, Bloodbane.” I unsheathe my sword with my empty hand, holding my whip in the other.

“Oh, so you actually managed to learn my name. Well then, you must know exactly who you’re dealing with. This means you’re either stupid for taking me on… or that this might just be the most fun I’ve had in years. Tell me hunter, what is your name? Why are you seeking out me in particular?” He smiles as he bares his fangs and claws.

“My name is Magnus Johansson. You killed my mother, Astrid, prepare to die!”

“I’m sorry, who?”

This simple question, the look of confusion on the vampire’s face fills me with undying fury.

“You… you don’t even remember!?”

“I have killed untold numbers of the sons of man. Mothers and fathers too. I stopped keeping count centuries ago, much less remembering who they were.”

Full of rage, I lash out with my whip, only for Bloodbane to dodge it. The mace becomes lodged in the bricks behind him, and the vampire charges at me. No time to try to pull it out. As Bloodbane roars, I heave at him with my sword. There was a flash of blood, and Bloodbane’s arm fell limply to the ground. Howling in pain, he struck at me, swiping me across the chest with his claws, nearly gutting me like a pig. He then kicked me in my exposed flesh, sending me flying into a nearby wall. Luckily for me, I was still holding onto the whip, and the kick managed to cause the mace to become unstuck. I struggle quickly back onto my feet and keep Bloodbane at bay by following his every move with the whip. I then throw out a small round ball, and strike it with the whip, causing holy water to spray all over the room. As Bloodbane shrieks in agony, I throw out another ball, and again use the whip to strike it open. This time, a thick cloud of garlic dust surrounded the vampire. Bloodbane, blinded by the smoke and the pain, was now vulnerable. I race towards him, silver sword in hand, ready to stake him and claim my revenge. Bloodbane, however, just looks up at me and smiles.

“Just joking.”

He reaches out and grabs my face, plunging the claw on his thumb into my eye, stopping me before I could stake him.

“I must say, Magnus, that you disappoint me. I am impressed that you managed to, ah, disarm me. But after that, I truly did think that you would be able to hold a candle to me. Alas, it was too easy. Thank you for providing me with some entertainment before my meal however. Mediocre though it might have been.”

He drops me onto the ground. I can only see out of one eye, and even all of that is blurry. Is this the end?

No. I won’t die without killing that son of a bitch first.

He leans down, ready to rip my throat out with his fangs. He sinks his wretched teeth into my flesh. But just as he does, I grab one of my knives off my belt, and pierce his heart. His eyes glaze over and he falls to the side. He’s dead. My mother is avenged.

The world spins the adrenaline wears off, and the blood loss begins to take an even greater toll.

“Mother, father…” I say, as everything fades away “It’s done. I’m coming.”