

Haunt Another Day

by F.R. Southerland

Dawn broke, cold and bleak. Even the daylight breaking through the crowds did not warm the day's start. The sun rays illuminated the snow-covered street, blindingly so. But Mason did not look away. There was something in the air only he could sense—heavy, foreboding, dreadful.

It was far too early for Vinnie to come by. The youngest Foster was generally punctual, but a few hours ahead of schedule? Even her punctuality wouldn't extend that far ahead. He watched the street a few moments more before he drew back from the window and let the curtain fall.

His vision adjusted quickly to the darkness of the room. A haze hovered near to the ceiling, cigarette smoke lingering from... something. Mason hadn't smoked in this room in some time, but it was unmistakable. With the smoke came the scent of burning tobacco and the sharp aroma of aged whiskey. After another, deliberate scent, he realized the scents were not real. A fabrication.

Something—or someone—was toying with him.

There was no need to puzzle it out further. Victor materialized several feet before him seconds later. He was intangible, but he still held a certain amount of power even in his spectral state. Right now, he appeared as solid as any living man.

Mason greeted him with a faint nod of his head. It wasn't often the ghost revealed himself. Usually, there was some purpose. Victor rarely did anything idly. He would reveal his intention soon enough—the sooner the better, he hoped. Dealing with spirits was not on his agenda for today.

For some time he'd been watching Mason. It was easy enough to do, at least for a short time, undetected. Unlike most people Victor haunted—an inaccurate term for what he did, he felt—Mason could sense him. Despite knowing it was never a good idea to play games with the half-demon, he could never restrain himself from testing the limits of how far he could go before he was detected.

“An hour,” Victor said, amusement tinged his voice. “My best time yet.”

Mason inclined his head ever so slightly. “Were you attempting to break a record again?” He didn't sound so entertained.

“I'm always looking to improve myself, you know that.”

He did. Victor was nothing if not ambitious. “Then I suppose you will be disappearing once again into the beyond? Soon?”

“You're always so quick to dismiss me. Don't you ever miss me?” Victor should've considered himself lucky. Mason could banish him with a few sharp words, if he so desired. He never did. That spoke more of their relationship than Victor was willing to think about right now.

Mason stepped to his desk, retrieving one of the many books piled there. He began to sort them, attention diverted to the task rather than his former friend and lover. “Perhaps I would... if you ever left me alone long enough.”

Victor smiled tightly at that, then a laugh followed. He hovered, close by. “Maybe I will, soon enough. You won't see me for days,” he told him. “Weeks.”

“If only.” The corner of Mason's mouth turned up—the first hint of genuine emotion there. It lasted all of two seconds before it faded. “But leave now. I have a guest arriving shortly and I rather my

attention not be divided.”

“Mara?” Hope crept into his tone at the mention of his wife—former wife’s?—name. Seeing her always brought him some level of comfort.

“No.”

“A student then.”

“Of a sort.”

Victor let out a breath—or what passed as breathing for the ghost—and with it came a lightly triumphant chuckle. “One of the girls.”

He paused and looked to him. “Yes. Vinnie. We have a lesson.”

“I will be unobtrusive. Quiet. Carry on.” Victor wondered what instruction it could be. Telekinesis, perhaps. He knew his youngest daughter was not quite as adept with it as Andy, or himself. Practice was absolutely necessary to grow and hone the talent. He fully intended to oversee the lesson.

“You will be gone.” Mason fixed him with that impenetrable stare Victor knew so well. It earned a scoff.

“It’s not as if she’ll see me or sense me any way.” None of them could. But Victor knew it was a moot point to argue. Mason did not blink or look away and he understood he was only a few seconds away from a banishing.

“You will go away or I will send you away myself.”

Victor narrowed his eyes, good humor gone entirely. The already diffused light dimmed further, crackled with the energy the spirit sent out. Mason did not break his stare, not until Victor vanished from sight.

He waited a moment, until he was certain he could no longer feel his presence, before he let out a breath. Victor would return, he had no doubt of that, and he hoped it wouldn’t be until long after Vinnie left. It was getting more and more difficult to block her from noticing Victor’s presence. Eventually, she would sense him, and eventually she could see him.

But not today. Mason would make sure it wouldn’t be today.