



Eternal Blood

J.E.Pocknell

© 2007

PROLOGUE

He felt his age. His true age that is – not the earth years that hung from his appearance creating a false impression.

He sat, slouching like an old man in the threadbare armchair staring out through the grime and dusty pollution that covered the small window. His thoughts were troubled and his heart was heavy, while outside the world continued to turn oblivious to his pain. A pain he was sure every one of them would soon come to know. The uninvited guest would gatecrash into a billion souls and wreak a kind of havoc that no mortal could dare to imagine.

His surrogate daughter had taken the defectors with her this particular night. They would all need to feed, it had been sometime. In truth, he himself craved the vital fluid that ran through the intricate maze of veins inside the mortal body. Although he craved a moment of solitude still more. He needed time to reflect – time to mourn and time to set things straight in his head before he tried to plot their next moves in attempting to put things right.

He placed his fingertips very gently against the side of his face, tracing a path along the withered unfeeling flesh. The irreversible ugliness that he touched turned his stomach. Could he ever confront his scarred and mauled face in a mirror? He doubted it. The same as he doubted that if he ever found his sweet, sweet Jane again – she could look at him with any kind of fondness. He imagined the look of repulsion as her eyes locked with his for the first time again. He felt his heart splinter. A tear freed itself and trickled a path through the lumpy scar tissue upon his face.

He reached down by the side of the chair and lifted a dusty book. Its front cover was crumpled and wrinkled like an elderly mans skin. The scarred man opened and began to read the first page. He read no more than two lines before slamming it shut sending a cloud of dust upwards. How had it all come to this? He asked himself. Was he to blame? Or was this the destiny that the Gathering had revealed?

He looked down once more at the book. One of the few journals they had procured in their hurried escape. The sick, twisted immortal world of a crazy being filled the pages. Maybe too, the ancient scriptures that all of the Vampire kind held dear were just as sick and twisted. A creation of their ancestors who perhaps could not know what damage their writings could one day do.

He rose tentatively from the chair, the springs squeaked as if grateful for the weight being lifted from them. The scarred man moved towards the window. He gazed out at the night sky while in his mind he tried to put events in order. Where had this god awful chapter in his life begun?

A loud bang brought him back to reality and a splatter of colours filled the sky outside, crackling and popping before fading away. Guy Fawkes night had been and gone – yet either someone was having a belated fireworks display or some kids had got hold of a few. It did nothing to improve his sombre mood. Fireworks would remind him forever more of the last night he had spent with Jane, in her mortal world.

The scarred man shuffled back to his armchair. He needed to rest, needed to regain his strength. He had to evaluate recent events, however much it hurt him to do so. Like the ancient scriptures and the dusty old journals, he had to flick through the pages of his recent memory in order to assess what was to come.

It began on the night of the firework display when he had to terminate his relationship with Jane. That fateful night when everything changed and when one of the worst chapters of his life had finally begun.

PART I

RECLAIMED

Monday 5th November 2001

07:45 hours somewhere in the world..

The sun began to ascend from behind the sea of sand and the intimidating sight of a vast mountain terrain. Eight figures, cloaked in black, uttered mumblings of ancient scriptures, pulling their hoods tightly across their faces. The group turned, their backs facing the orange orb. Slowly they moved forward, making their way towards the protection and security of the caves. The day of days had dawned and for the first time ever they had welcomed it. Another figure stood at the opening to the network of caves. Although, he too, was clothed in black and wore a hood, which covered his face, his stature was vastly superior to his counterparts. He towered over them, his body thick set.

‘They will soon be with us.’ His voice was deep and croaky but masterful. It demanded respect.

‘ They will arrive in waves, remember this is their exodus, we must be patient with them, some of them will be more advanced than others, some will be worlds of knowledge, others, mere fledglings, some devious, some naive, but they will all come, all of them hoping to claim the prize.’ With his palm faced down, he lowered it towards the ground. The eight-cloaked figures went down on bended knee, in front of their master. He led the recital as they spoke the ancient scripture in alien tongue.

Saturday 3rd November 2001

All around the echo of sounds similar to that of fired bullets and mortar shells filled the air. Short, sharp bursts of aggressive noise disguised as entertainment and met with absurd, if not deranged whoops of joy and excitement. The response seemed so manufactured, like a game-show assistant holding up cue cards.

He watched the faces of small children, openly scared and bewildered, and shook his head at the expression of embarrassed parents. He found it pathetic.

The sky lit up in bursts of colour, reminding him of flares and tracer fire. The proverbial cries of joy rang out around him. ‘You ok?’ She asked, genuinely concerned.

‘Just thinking, there’s a line from a lyric written by Aimee Mann that fits this occasion perfectly.’

He stared above, stone cold eyes picking out each crack and each burst of colour.

‘What?’ She asked, following his gaze up to the heavens.

‘What a waste of gunpowder and sky.’ He took her firmly by the hand and led her quickly through the crowds of onlookers. The sea of bodies made him feel quite claustrophobic. He pressed on through the human maze, craving space.

‘What the hell’s gotten into you!’ she screamed, causing unwanted eyes to peer in their general direction. He couldn’t, wouldn’t answer her here. Instead he shook his head and made to leave, trudging through the muddy field. ‘Wait!’ She shouted, grabbing at his arm. He pushed her away, ‘Not here, wait until we get home.’

His voice was calm but still threatening, his eyes of almost pure ebony, held her in his gaze. ‘Oh no... tell me its not, please tell me it isn’t time.’ Her voice trembled with fear, panic and a sense of hopelessness. He was afraid that she would breakdown in floods of tears. He hated to see her unhappy. He loved her deeply. A nod of his head was all the answer she needed. To her, that one simple head moving gesture contained more information than could be gained from a thousand words. She had thought it possible that this day would never come, at least not in her lifetime – he had told her as much, but here he was calmly telling her. It was devastating. Her legs turned to jelly, before giving way completely; she sank to her knees in the mud.

He couldn’t look at her; instead he looked up into the night sky as the last explosions of light and colour vandalised the darkness. ‘Oooh-ahhh!’ He shouted in a mock parody. She tilted her head to look at him through blurred and salty eyes to see him looking at the night sky, a lamenting smile pinned to his lips, ‘What a waste of gunpowder and sky’ She said.

Wednesday 12th September 2001

Connor stared at the TV screen. The spoonful of cornflakes he held was suspended in mid-air as his brain tried to digest the visual images, being replayed over and over again on the screen. In the last 24 hours he reckoned he had seen the footage at least fifty times but it still failed not to shock him. It was like the climax to a disaster movie, continually being put on rewind and played on a loop. He watched closely as the jumbo jet collided with the building, and again disbelief filled him... 'Connor, you'll be late for work', Sophie flicked the TV off. 'And don't forget 2pm at the clinic.' Connor shovelled the spoon of cereal into his mouth, while staring at his wife disapprovingly.

'Don't look at me like that, I just want to make sure you're there, that's all!' Sophie put his pack up on the table in front of him. She folded her arms and looked sternly at him. 'I was watching that!' he nodded towards the TV. 'You've seen it a thousand times, don't be morbid.' 'Morbid? A bunch of fanatics steal some jumbos and crash them killing thousands and we're supposed to go about like nothing's happened and all you can say is I am being morbid!'

Sophie sighed impatiently, 'Listen. I know it's terrible that all those poor people died but yes our lives carry on. It was in America anyway for God sake – it's not like it happened on our doorstep.' Connor threw his spoon down into the cereal bowl, sending milk splashing onto the table. 'Oh well, that's ok then, it happened to them, we're all right Jack! God almighty Sophie, what kind of bubble are you living in?' She took his bowl and stomped over to the kitchen sink. 'This isn't about the bloody terrorist attacks in America, is it Connor, this is about you and your hang ups with the IVF treatment, you've been like a bear with a sore head for days.'

She returned to the dining room with a dishcloth and began to wipe away the spilt milk. 'For God sake woman! You're obsessed! You're oblivious to everything except the fuckin' IVF treatment!' Sophie threw the soiled dishcloth in his face. 'A baby used to be what we wanted, but because you're not up to the job it's got complicated and because it's got complicated it obvious that you're getting cold feet.' Connor forced his chair back. 'One, yes I did want kids. Two, I would have done anything to have them with you but, Three after watching what I consider to be a world changing event and witnessing your reaction to it I am not so sure I believe that having children and bringing them into this shitty world is anything more than an act of selfishness, worse still I am not sure that I should be entertaining the idea of having them with you!' Connor strode from the kitchen into the hallway and grabbed his coat from the peg.

'Connor!' Sophie yelled after him. He slammed the front door as he left.

'Connor!'

She heard the car engine splutter to life. 'You've forgotten your pack up' she said quietly into thin air.

Connor drove at speed, winding his way through the post rush hour traffic. Christ, she made him angry. Sometimes he was baffled as to what really went on inside her head. Her, a prospective mother, and yet the value of life – including children's lives seemed to be beyond her. 'Fuckin' Bimbo!' he said aloud. His friends had all said as much, love is blind, maybe they were right.

He sat, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel, waiting for the traffic lights. Suddenly, without warning, a burning pain whipped across his chest and abdomen, causing his body to stiffen, a momentary spasm. With total lack of self-control his scream filled the car. It was the third time in a week. He knew he should get to the doctors but conveniently he never seemed to find the time. The pain subsided, beads of perspiration trickled down his face, yet he felt a cold chill flood his body. His mouth felt dry and an awful metallic taste clung to his tongue. Connor took a few deep breaths as he tried to compose himself.

A car horn sounded from behind. Connor glanced at the lights; he lifted his hands in acknowledgement, he hadn't noticed the lights change to green. He turned left onto the quiet road that led him towards his office, a leafy suburb that always seemed to bring him comfort as he left behind the hustle and bustle of the city. He checked his rear view mirror, noticing that the smart BMW seven series that had sounded its horn was following him closely, a little too closely.

Sunday 4th November 2001

07:15 hours

He woke with a start, momentarily unsure of where he was. Once he had found his bearings he rolled onto his side and raised himself on one elbow, his hand holding the side of his face. He watched her steadily breathing; his eyes gazed at her nakedness. Her voluptuous figure curled in a foetal position. He reached out and caressed her lily-white skin with his fingertips, she stirred briefly.

‘Jane’ He whispered her name.

They had left the firework display under a cloud of depressive silence. The couple had arrived at their small flat, and once inside he had cradled her in his arms as her tears ran free. He had showered her with tender kisses and eventually carried her to the bed, where their lovemaking had been; at first, slow and deliberate, as they both tried to treasure the moment. Soon though it gave way to a desperate frenzy of passion as the realisation sank in, that this was their final curtain of coupling that had lasted for fourteen years. Their climax had been simultaneous and more tears were spent by both parties as the melancholic scene ended. ‘Jane’ He whispered once more. He would never forget her – ever.

Jane rolled over to face him, through puffy eyes she looked directly at him.

‘Jacob, I will always love you.’ ‘And I you’, He replied, before bending towards her and planting a kiss on her forehead.

If he was being selfish it was actually better this way. At least he would not have to watch her age, see her health falter and eventually witness her demise. He would at least take, forever, the image of her in all her glorious beauty. Jane would be, as him, forever young, if only in his mind’s eye.

Wednesday 12th September 2001

15:15 hrs

The silence was worse than any argument they could ever have, as far as Connor was concerned. The drive back from the clinic was becoming unbearable.

‘Look I came didn’t I?’

She ignored him, choosing to stare out of the passenger window at the rushing buildings.

‘For god’s sake Sophie.’

‘You may as well have sent a cardboard cut out of yourself as a stand in!’

‘What’s that supposed to mean?’ He asked.

‘Your input was zilch.’ She began to rant and rave and lecturing him.

Connor could not hear her, wasn’t listening, his attention was focused on the BMW seven series, which filled his rear view mirror. He put his foot down hard on the accelerator, snapping Sophie’s head back against the headrest.

‘What the fuck are you doing?’ she screamed. The teacher/mother head had been replaced by hysterical head. If the tailing car hadn’t unnerved him he would have smiled.

‘See the car behind? Wanker has been following me all day.’

‘Why?’ like an unwanted, but timely reminder the words ‘stupid bitch’ flashed in neon lights behind his eyes.

‘How the hell should I know?’

‘He could be a policeman or something, Christ, Connor are you in trouble?’

He turned the wheel; the back end of his civic whipped, and slid as he turned off into a side street.

‘Yeah Sophie, I’ve always got police chasing me, didn’t I tell you, especially plain clothed ones in unmarked cars.’

The BMW was sticking like glue as Connor tried desperately to outwit him, weaving in and out of lanes and jumping a red light.

‘Don’t be sarcastic Connor, for God sake slow down, you’re scaring me.’

The smell of burning rubber filled the interior as Connor slammed on the brakes and swerved to avoid colliding with a slow moving van.

‘Maybe he is one of the sperm police, hired to keep tabs on us lesser mortals with low sperm counts in case we lose the plot in our inadequate capacity to reproduce!’

Connor steered sharply into a bend partly mounting the kerb. A couple of teenagers bolted out of the way, mainly in shock rather than because of danger. Still the BMW stuck fast, occasionally swinging from side to side and flashing its headlights.

Sophie punched her husband’s arm.

‘Stop the fuckin’ car Connor! You are going to kill us.’

‘What if it is a nutter? A road rage maniac, you want me to put us in danger!’

Her knuckles where white as she gripped the door handle.

‘If you don’t stop the car, you’re the one who’ll put us in danger, you maniac.’

That was it, Connor slammed on the brakes, throwing them both forward. He looked into the wing mirror and saw the BMW sitting directly behind. He turned to look at Sophie.

‘Satisfied?’ He said, through gritted teeth. He opened the door and pulled himself up and out of the civic. ‘Stupid bitch,’ he mumbled under his breath, but it was still loud enough for Sophie to hear.

Connor strode towards the black BMW. The driver got out, he was grinning like a mad man.

‘Nice driving man.’ he offered nonchalantly.

‘Fuck off; what the hell are you playing at!’

The tall man stared at Connor as if studying a painting in a gallery.

He pulled his lips downward and shrugged, as if in forced approval. Begrudgingly he liked what he saw.

‘How are the pains?’

Connor could not pinpoint the accent. Was it Australian or South African? Maybe neither.

‘What pains? Listen what the..

‘Chest and stomach pains, you’ve had them’ the man said, interrupting Connor.

‘How do you know about them?’

Connor was temporarily sidetracked. He was perplexed by this mans knowledge of an ailment he had told no one of.

‘It’s my job to know, ever had a serious injury Connor, serious illness?’

‘Look, how do you know my name? Who are you?’ Connor heard Sophie calling him from the car.

‘Stay in the car!’

The man smiled once more, his high cheekbones, blue eyes, roman nose and tanned skin gave him the appearance of a Southern European.

‘Lovely wife Connor, I guess she’ll be disappointed not to be conceiving your children, it’s a shame isn’t it, how we have to miss out.’

Connor shook his head in disbelief. 'I have no fuckin' idea where you have got this information, and I have no idea who you are or what the hell you want but stop following me!'

'We are the same Connor.' The man spread his arms wide.

'We are special, but you know this anyway. You're like the man who fell into the river in Egypt, you know in 'denile' a funny joke? Yes!'

As he finished his poor attempt at humour he began to laugh and in one sweeping action he produced a knife from inside his jacket and plunged it deep into Connor's stomach. He doubled over, pain swelling his belly and his fingers clutched at the wound as blood seeped through his shirt. The stranger forced his victim to stand up straight. He then grabbed at the bloodied shirt and ripped it open.

'Look at your wound Connor.'

Connor shook his head consumed with pain and scared for his wife's safety.

'Look at it.'

Slowly, Connor forced his eyes downwards and peered at the blood seeping through his fingers. Gradually he removed his hand from the wound. The blood was not a vast amount, not from the butcher type blow he had received anyhow, but more amazing was the wound itself. As he watched, his skin appeared to stretch and gather itself over the gaping wound. Within seconds, a perfect, small jagged length of scar tissue was all that remained.

'When you were growing up, I imagine your elders would comment on how quickly you healed. A skinned knee, a cut finger. I bet the most you've ever had is a slight cold.'

Connor nodded, it was all true.

The stranger was pulling stuff from his subconscious, stuff that he had maybe refused to deal with.

‘I fell ten feet from a tree once, not one bruise or a broken bone, everyone was amazed, so was I..’

The stranger placed a card into Connor’s hand.

‘Call me, there is much you need to know. Believe me it is no coincidence that our paths cross now, I will explain further when we meet.’

With that the stranger got back into his car and sped off, leaving Connor shell shocked and staring at a blood stained shirt but no source left, no sign of how the blood had come to be there.

‘What the hell is going on?’ he said aloud.

Connor looked at the business card. It read;

Phoenix Nagenda

Collector of Arts

Tel: 07881 517362

The card was simple, but smart with gold embossed lettering. Connor put it in his pocket and wandered slowly towards the civic. A million thoughts whirled around in his head. Not least how he would explain the last few minutes to Sophie. Christ he hoped she had her calm head back on.