The Avenging One

 Samuel gripped his seat, knuckles white as he stared wide-eyed at his TV screen. No, he thought, this can’t be happening. The news broadcast played on, the word “acquitted” flashing across the screen.

 “And now, the breaking news. The charges against Father Iscariot, were dropped for lack of evidence,” said the blonde reporter. She didn't look like she cared. To her this was just another news story. “Multiple pedo-” Samuel abruptly turned the TV off and stared at the black screen. How, he wondered. It wasn't a question. He knew how, he knew why, he just couldn't believe it. After everything, Iscariot was free because of lack of evidence? Is this what justice came to? Knowing what had happened, but not doing anything because of lack of evidence? Innocent until proven guilty, they said, they knew he was guilty, they just couldn't prove it.

 Samuel stared at his bedroom ceiling. He didn't remember moving from the living room, nor changing into his pajamas. The only thing he was aware of was feeling like a plane crashing and having nothing to do but wait for the impact. Utter powerlessness, laced with alarming distress made him want to crawl under his skin. He was trying to forget and move on with his life. Do something good to balance the evil in which he had grown. That was, until he saw the news broadcast. The broadcast that gave him hope that wrongs could be righted, that justice could finally thrive. That maybe, God did exist. That hope dimmed and burn as he stared at the TV screen and the reporter that didn’t care. He remembered Father Iscariot drilling the evils of sin into his head during the day, than snaking into his room later at night. But Father Iscariot was free, justice wouldn’t thrive.

 The next morning Samuel stepped out of the shower, and still wet, looked at himself in the mirror. He saw a chiseled face with a structured jaw, like he was carved out of the smoothest of woods. He looked at his long eyelashes, fanning out over his high cheekbones, dripping water like he was crying. At his strong nose that stood proud over his plump lips. His face was all angles but not brutally so, his halo of chestnut curls softening the look. He looked at his body. He was tall but not lanky. Muscles from hefting book crates around his bookstore, and a lightly golden skin from his runs in Central Park. Finally, he looked into his eyes. His eyes that made people look twice at him. One icy blue and the other emerald green. Today, they were empty. Two dead orbs hollowly staring back at him. Eyes were the doors to the soul, they said. And maybe that was true, because they perfectly reflected how he felt inside.

 People often told him that he belonged on the cover of GQ Magazine and not in his bookstore, but that’s where he felt the most at ease, surrounded by other people’s lives and stories. He liked the idea that there were so many possibilities to live. He was classifying biographies when the bell on the front door rang. He looked up and saw a woman walk in. She was in her 20s, tall, wearing a tight jacket and even tighter jeans. She turned towards him, and he saw her face. She was wearing too much eye makeup but was still attractive. Light filtered through the stained glass windows, splaying color on the walls, while the tall shelves casted shadows on the floors. She looked at him up and down, gave him an approving smile and strutted down the “mystery” aisle, vaulted ceilings echoing her steps as she disappeared into the shadows, hips undulating exaggeratedly. She was attractive, and she knew it. He looked down at his books, knowing that she might have come in for a book but now, she also wanted him.

 A few minutes later, she emerged back from the rows of books, her jacket now hanging around her waist. Underneath she was wearing nothing but a thin tank top, red roses inked on her shoulder, trailed and disappeared into her tank top, attracting the gaze to her chest.

 “So, Samuel,” she crooned in a low voice, reading his nametag. “I need your help.”

Samuel trailed his eyes back to her face. She was a bottle blonde, he could see dark roots growing, like weeds in a beautiful garden.

 “How may I help you, Miss?”

 “Nikki. Call me Nikki,” she said lowering her eyelashes. She was obviously flirting, and she was a good flirt, which meant she’d had practice. “I’m looking for a romance novel,” she breathed, pausing slightly after romance, “by Eliza B. Vickley.”

 “If we have it, it’ll be in the “romance” section, left row, top right shelf,” he drawled dismissively, purposely not using her name. She stretched, her tank top riding higher and her jeans lower.

 She grabbed his arm. “Come with me, Sam, I’m not sure I can find it,” she pouted. Sam? He frowned. She acted like she knew him. Not wanting to argue, Samuel shrugged her off, walked around the counter and lead her into the organized jungle that was his bookstore.

 In the romance section, Samuel found the book. She could have found it, it stood on a shelf gaze high. She stood close to him, too close for comfort. He wasn’t in the mood, not after yesterday. He gave her a warning look that would have made most people back off, but she either ignored or didn’t notice. Lust. He could see it all over her body. In the way she looked at him, like a predator stalking his prey. The way she stood, looking up at him chest thrust forward, her mouth slightly open. Lust was a sin. A deadly one. One of the most familiar. They were alone in the near the back store, where the ceiling were lower and sound was muted. Didn't she know what danger she could be in? He could easily overpower her, not that she would mind. Her cluelessness angered him, turning his mismatched eyes shades darker. He took a step towards her. She seemed happy until she saw his eyes. They were two ominous gemstones. She looked uncertain and took a step back. Their gazes met; his dangerous and forbidding, hers confused, aroused and slightly scared.

 Samuel could tell she knew something was off, yet she continued. Licking her lips, she advanced on him, coming from the shadows into the light turned red by the stained glass. She put her hand on his arm, seeming confident, but he could see a sliver of uncertainty.

 “There are other things you could help me with, Sam,” she said breaking the silence. Bothered that she called him Sam again, her innuendo made him angrier. Lust is dangerous because it makes you blind to danger, he thought. He’d had enough; he sidestepped her and went towards the cash register. He heard her chuckle, her breath whooshing out, partly in relief.

 People, men and women, had tried flirting with him in his store, but never so wantonly.

 “That’ll be $12.50,” he growled, his voice low, dangerous, “will that be it?”

 “Not if you don’t want it to be,” she teased biting her bottom lip.

“Babe, you done?” a man asked, from behind, in a thick New Jersey accent. Nikki had a boyfriend.

 “Yes. Just finishing up.” She handed Samuel a $20 bill and at that she turned around and left walking into the bright afternoon, her arms around her boyfriend’s waist. Lust, he thought, it’s dangerous because it makes you want more.

 Samuel decided to walk home that night. He needed time and space to think. It was getting dark and suddenly the city came to life. Neon signs lit up the darkness as people came out. Impatient drivers were honking, while a businessman ran into an overweight man staring at a bakery display without stopping to apologize, not noticing the man giving him the middle finger. On the other side of the street, a woman was staring at a happy couple waiting for a cab. Tonight, he didn't notice the people and high attitudes that made New York “The city that never sleeps,” and the city he loved. Tonight, he noticed the other side of his city. Wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy and gluttony. The seven deadly sins. He saw them all, they were everywhere. He wondered how he had never noticed it all before. Sweat pooled at his temples as his vision swam. Too many people, too many lights, too many sins.

Samuel couldn't breathe; he needed to get off the street. Stomach churning, he walked up to a red-bricked building with wide windows pouring light onto the street. He stumbled into the diner and fell onto a seat, trying to calm down. A glass of water was set in front of him. Startled, he flinched. An old lady in a pink-checkered apron had brought him water. Her nametag read Maggie. She had snow-white hair and wrinkles on her face, but her ocean blue eyes shone like a 20 year old. She didn’t say anything. Seeing the trouble in his eyes, she gave him an earnest smile and went back behind the counter. Samuel drank and glanced around the dinner. He was the only one, beside an elderly couple in the back. The benches were worn from thousands of people sitting over the years, yet still comfortable. The place was rich with history; the walls were covered in pictures and other decorations from past decades. Black and white pictures of young couples, smiles captured in a happy moment. Snapshots of other lives, other times. Signed vinyl of Aretha, Diana, Elvis and many more decorated the walls, hinting at times long gone. As Samuel looked around, his gaze stopped on the painting of a majestic sword-yielding angel, seemingly out of place in the 50s style dinner.

 Without realizing, Samuel, got up and moved closer to the painting. The angel stood proud in armour, about to defeat a demon.

 “Archangel Michael. The Avenging One,” he heard behind him. “The warrior angel that stands up for the weak and the in needy. He vanquished Lucifer in the War In Heaven,” added Maggie.

 Samuel thought about that. Michael had defeated evil. He stood up for the greater good. He took justice in his hands, to punish the people who hurt others with their sin. He helped people that couldn’t help themselves. He was a warrior, a saviour, a model.

 “You look just like him,” she offered and quietly walked away.

 That was true. Samuel did look exactly like the image. Same curly chestnut hair, tall and broad shouldered. An angular yet soft face, and a muscular body. The only difference was their eyes. Not only the colour, but the archangel’s eyes glowed with a flame of soft determination. Michael had something to fight for. Samuel’s eyes were two empty orbs of colour. Like their essence had faded after being battered by the elements. Michael had something to stand for. His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the small TV perched over the counter.

 “Dozens of victims of Douglas Harrison gathered in front of the courthouse this afternoon, asking for the condemnation of the man that had stolen their life savings. Ex stockbroker and investment specialist Douglas Harrison purloined over $7 billion from his investors in the biggest Ponzi scheme of the past century. Harrison will be under house arrest...”

A Ponzi scheme. The epitome of greed. Not only had that man sinned, but he had hurt others. He had ruined dozens of lives, stealing life savings and leaving people penniless for his own profit. Getting rich at people’s expense. He couldn't trust the court system, not after they had let Father Iscariot free. No. But these people needed justice, only who would give it to them? His eyes went back to the painting. A warrior, a saviour. Samuel’s eyes started to glow as a plan formed in his head. Wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy and gluttony. They hurt people who did not deserve it. People like his 7 year old self. They needed to be vanquished. One by one. 7 sins, 7 people to symbolize the end. No, not 7, 8. Father Iscariot had hurt too many too often, he didn't deserve to live.

 Samuel walked out of the dinner with new purpose. He walked tall, amidst the people, his face half conceal by the shadows, the other bathing in New York City lights. Two sides to every person, one light one dark, one good the other evil. The wind blew, sending his hair flying behind him, his mismatched eyes finding their fire. The fire that would engulf and burn Harrison, Iscariot, and 6 others. He walked into the night, tall and regal. The Avenging One, reborn.

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