

CHAPTER THREE – “HOMEBOUND”

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For Cletus, the long walk home had begun. Behind him, in the cave, Jo lay next to her dead husband. He wondered if she was still sucking the final drops of blood from his now-chilling corpse. He understood what Father had done to them. He had made Cletus a full-fledged vampire without much fanfare. With Jo, he had been far crueler. He had given her the choice between life and death, and she had chosen life. Or, what passed for life. But, the real choice for her had been — her life or Donnie’s life? Jo had always been a selfish bitch and she had chosen her own continued existence over Donnie’s without a moment’s hesitation.

Tough luck, Donnie-O, Cletus thought as he walked through the woods, and he chuckled at his own cleverness. Donnie and he had been friends — damned good friends, truth be told, even if Cletus had sank his pink torpedo into Jo’s cave of earthly delights. Hell, everyone had fucked Jo. Cletus didn’t think Donnie would mind, what with them being friends and all. Better a friend get a nut with his wife than a complete stranger, right? He supposed it didn’t matter anymore. Nothing much mattered anymore. At least, nothing mortal mattered.

As he walked through the woods that glowed with an aura he had never seen before, he realized that his life had been pretty much a shambles till now. He was a chronic fuck-up, a loser that everyone

in town laughed at.

They won't laugh now, he thought. A wry smile crossed his lips. Part of him envisioned what he could do with his newfound immortality. For, he might be dumber than a sack of hammers, but Cletus understood that he was dead. He'd been bitten by a vampire and drained to the brink of death. He knew that the man whom he was to call "Father" had drained him just enough to turn him into one of the undead. If he had drained him further, Cletus would have died just like Donnie's dead ass back in the cave. Never mind that Donnie's heart had been torn from his chest and milked like a lemon; Donnie would have been a convert just like Cletus was.

Part of him wished he had been. Spending an eternity hanging out with his buddy would have been acceptable. As it was, he could outlive everyone he knew and loved. Jo was back in the cave, but Cletus could give two shits in Hell for her. She'd just been a moist place to stick his schlong when Momma was ragging, was all.

Momma, he thought. The realization that he would never lay between her massive breasts again almost brought a tear to his eye. He did love the woman. He didn't understand why she had chosen him when she could have just as easily gotten any man in Buzzard Creek or the surrounding counties.

He decided he wanted to see her.

When he exited the cave, he had no idea where he was. But, in the time he had walked the woods, he had seen familiar sites that gave him some bearing on where he was. There was a fence running along the outskirts of the woods, and he recognized it as Everett Wellbee's property. Everett could be an asshole about people trespassing on his land, and he had built the fence to keep hunters from walking through his fields to get to the wooded areas on the other side.

Wellbee's fence told Cletus he wasn't far from home after all. He climbed the fence and walked across the field. He didn't give a shit. Just let ol' Wellbee come out with his shotgun...Cletus would rip him a new ass. He'd rip out the bastard's spine and show it to him.

He stopped and stood in the field. He looked north toward Wellbee's house. The house was dark except for a light burning on the

front porch. Wellbee, like most farmers, had an “early to bed and early to rise” mentality. The old bastard was probably snoring away at that very moment.

Cletus thought about walking up to the house, calling Wellbee out. He knew from watching vampire movies that he would have to be invited into the house to enter, but that couldn’t stop him from making a ruckus and drawing Wellbee outside. Besides, Cletus wasn’t certain that all that vampire crap he’d seen in movies was really, anyway. He might just as easily be able to walk up to the door, knock it in, and kill Wellbee where he lay. There were so many things he wasn’t certain of. He supposed he had plenty of time to find out, though. An eternity, in fact.

“Later,” Cletus said to the house.

He turned and walked toward home.

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Thirty minutes later, Cletus stood at the old shed he stashed his tractor in. In the moonlight, the place had an almost ethereal glow. He thought about firing up the tractor and driving it on home, but decided against it. The thing rarely started, anyway. It was a piece of shit.

Cletus punched the radiator and was surprised when his hand went through it. Don’t know my own strength, he thought. Being a vampire had its advantages.

He pulled his hand out of the radiator and was equally as shocked when he saw the huge gouge that had been ripped in his skin. There was no pain, however. He stared at the open gash and watched as it slowly healed.

“Damn,” he said.

There was a stirring behind him and he turned. His prize cow, Bessie, was standing in the field adjacent to the shed. She stood there, looking quizzically at Cletus. He could hear her blood pumping.

“Hi, girl,” he said, smiling.

Bessie walked toward Cletus.

He reached out and touched her when she was close enough. He

ran his hand along her neck, feeling the pulse of the blood flowing through her veins. It was a thick, deep sound, like the bass woofer in a car driven by gang bangers listen to rap music. As he concentrated, the volume increased until it was almost deafening.

He had to stop it.

He couldn't let it go on.

The throbbing was driving him mad.

Cletus grabbed Bessie and threw his face into her flesh. His teeth sank into her vein and the warm, coppery liquid flowed into his mouth and down his chin. Bessie let out a thin, startled "Moo" and stood there as Cletus drank his fill.

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When he was done, Bessie lay on the ground before him. Her breathing was shallow. He had not killed her. He'd butchered enough cows to know there was a lot of blood.... but he had never known just how delicious that blood was. He thought about his poor dead mother and what she used to say when he wouldn't broccoli. "How do you know you don't like it if you won't try it?" she would say in her sternest tone. Of course, he'd inevitably say something smart-assed and she would slap the shit out of him, but she had been right. You just didn't know, did you?

Cletus had dropped to the ground with Bessie and he stood. "You go on and sleep, girl," he told her. "Go on and sleep."

Bessie slept.

And Cletus headed toward home.

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As he approached the shack of a house he and Momma lived in, he felt a certain apprehension. He knew, even before he stepped onto the porch, what was going to happen.... but he tried anyway. He reached out to touch the doorknob, but he couldn't do it. His hand was pushed away from the knob by some invisible force. It was like two positive poles on a magnet repelling each other.

"What the Hell?"

He tried it again, and the same thing happened.

The Dracula movies from his youth had gotten that aspect of vampirism right; he could not enter a home without being invited.

Certainly, Momma would invite him in, wouldn't she?

Cletus shouted, "Let me in, woman!" at the top of his lungs.

For a moment, there was no response. Then, the light to what he knew was their bedroom came on and his newly hypersensitive ears heard Momma moan as she got out of bed.

"Let me in!" he shouted again.

Momma came to the door then. She opened the door but left the screen door closed. She peered out into the night but could only make out a figure standing there in the darkness.

"Cletus, is that you?"

"Yeah, it's me, baby," he told her. "Let me in."

"Where the hell have you been?" she asked in a demanding tone. "You been drinking with Donnie again?"

He chuckled. *If only you knew*, he thought.

"I ain't. I swear."

He could see Momma clearly in the poor lighting. If there was one thing he'd always loved about Momma—besides her massive bosom—it was her eyes. There was something burning behind those eyes that no other woman he'd ever met possessed. He had never been able to put his finger on exactly what that was, but he knew that he loved her from the moment he met her because of it.

And, oddly enough, she had loved him, too.

"Then where the Hell have you been?" she asked.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," he said, hanging back in the shadows. He realized that he must look a sight. He knew that he was covered in cow and squirrel blood and he was fairly certain he'd soiled himself. He probably smelled like the shitter in a slaughterhouse, he reckoned.

Hell, Momma had seen worse. He'd come home after a three-day drunk with Donnie. It had been the dead of summer, hotter than Satan's cock. He'd vomited up moonshine all over himself.... and he was pretty sure it hadn't been on the last day of that three-day drunk. The vomit had soured so badly that Momma had made him

go down to the stream and bath. She brought him a bar of soap, some cologne, a change of clothes, and some matches.

She made him burn the defiled clothes.

They had ignited like they'd been soaked in gasoline.

Yeah, Momma had seen worse.

"Cletus?" she said, eeking the screen door open just a bit. "You okay?"

"I'm fine," he told her.

"Then come here, honey."

He shook his head. "You got to invite me in, Momma," he told her. "That's the way it works."

A strange look crossed her face, and she closed the screen door. "Cletus, you ain't making no sense."

He stepped out of the darkness.

Momma gasped.

"No," he said, "I'm making perfect sense."

She backed away from the door.

"Let me in," he told her.

She shook her head.

"Let me in."

She tried, but could not mouth her reply.

"Let me in!" he shouted.

Momma screamed.

Cletus jumped up onto the porch. "Let me in or you'll be sorry!" He glared at her through the wire mesh of the screen. He could see those beautiful eyes of hers. They were filled with tears; she was scared half out of her wits.

Cletus had never laid a hand on her, though...but, now, he wanted to. He wanted nothing more than to step inside that door and rip her to pieces,

He stared at her coldly. "Let me in," he told her. "I'll make it quick."

He stared at her breasts. He could hear the beautiful sound of blood circulating through them and he knew that, when she opened the door, he would rip her shirt open and sink his fangs into one of them. He wondered if he would be able to suck out milk and blood at the same time.

He hoped so.

He stared at her, reaching out with his thoughts, hoping that all the vampire movies he had seen in his youth were correct; that he could use his force of will to overpower her and make her do as he wished.

Let me in, he thought. *Open the door and let me in.*

She stood there, transfixed. She did not move.

“Let me in!” he shouted again.

In the bedroom, the baby awoke. It started to cry, screaming out its disapproval as only an infant could.

Momma turned her head and any connection he might have made was gone.

Cletus was about to yell at her again, but headlights gleamed in the distance. Someone had turned onto the road that led to his house.

For a second, he considered assaulting the driver of the vehicle. Then, he saw that there were two bumps on the roof of the vehicle. It was a police car. The only police car that ever came that far out of town was Sheriff Graff.... and Graff had a shotgun mounted in the front seat. Cletus had seen it plenty of times from the back seat.

Cletus knew that Graff wouldn't hesitate to use that shotgun on him. It was no secret that he wanted Momma for himself.

He stared through the screen door at Momma as one of the kids came out of the bedroom to see why she hadn't stopped the baby from crying.

“You'll let me in,” he told her. “Maybe not tonight, but you'll let me in...soon.”

Then, he turned and ran toward the woods.

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As Graff pulled into the driveway of Cletus Cuthbert's shack, he had a momentary glimpse of a man heading off into the woods. The night was warm and he'd already had his nerves rattled by what had happened at the circus, so he popped the shotgun out of its mounting clamp. Normally, it would have been locked in place, but he just wanted the extra security he felt with it unlocked.

He pulled up to the shack and saw Momma standing in the living room, surrounded by children.

From where he sat, he could see that she was shaking.

“What’s wrong?” he asked as he got out of the patrol car. He glanced back at the woods, but saw nothing.

“C.... Cletus,” she said in a stammer.

“Cletus was here?” he asked.

She nodded.

Graff stepped up onto the porch. He looked at Momma and the kids. They, too, were afraid. “Tell me what happened,” he told her.

Quickly, she went through the story. Cletus has shown up, covered in blood and filth, acting strange. “He wanted to come inside,” she told Graff.

“It’s his house,” Graff replied. “Why didn’t he just go in?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know. It was like he couldn’t come in. He wanted me to open the door and let him in.”

She cried. “I didn’t want to let him in,” she told him. “.... But I was going to. I couldn’t help myself.... *I was going to let him in the house.*”

“I don’t understand.”

She shook her head. “I don’t, either.... but I was going to let him in! I was going to let him in and he was going to hurt me and the babies! I couldn’t stop myself!”

Graff reached out and touched her shoulder. “Relax,” he said. “You don’t know that he was going to hurt anyone.”

“Don’t I?” she almost shouted. “He was covered in blood. Something’s wrong with him!”

“Which way did he go?” Graff asked.

She pointed toward the woods.

Graff nodded and started walking.

“Don’t go!” she shouted. “I’m scared!”

Graff stopped.

“Please! Don’t leave us!”

“Okay,” Graff said. “I’ll stay.” He walked back to the porch and looked at Momma. Even scared shitless, she was beautiful, he thought. “Put the kids back to bed,” he told her. “I’ll stay awhile.”

“Oh, thank you.” She moved forward and hugged him, being careful not to crush the baby in her arms. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” he told her.

He ushered them back into the house. He stopped at the door and turned and peered out into the dark woods. He could see nothing, but he felt something. He felt Cletus’s icy stare burning a hole through him.

“What the hell is going on?” he whispered.

Then, he stepped inside and closed the door.

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In the woods nearby, Cletus stood silently.

“You got what you wanted, Graff,” he said to the night. “It won’t be yours for long, though. Trust me.”

He stood there for hours.

Toward dawn, he returned to the cave.