

Gone

By: Charles Kanoy

The village was proud and optimistic that day. Street vendors carried around their baskets of goods ranging from fruits and vegetables from local gardens to small trinkets and jewelry. They were gleaming because of all the business they were getting from both insiders and outsiders of the village. People from neighboring villages had come from far and wide today for a reason no one living in the village really knew. Some ferry must have docked at the nearby river. Contrary to these cheery vendors, a particularly grim looking individual held his own basket on the corner near an unlit lantern. The lantern would not be lit for another hour or two, so no one paid much attention to him.

He wore a brown robe with a cloth belt that tied loosely around his midsection and a hood over his head. It appeared as if gravity were defying itself by allowing the belt not to fall off the frail, old man. In his box, he displayed a Bible, a crucifix, and a vile of holy water. On any other day, he would have preached the word of the lord. A small child, about nine, came up to him. Anyone else would have barely even made eye contact, for both of his eyes were cloudy white, and he wore the most menacing frown.

"Hey mister, what's all this?" The kid asked, both genuinely curious and a little scared.

All the man had to say in response was, "They're here."

"Who's here, mister?"

"They're here."

"I know that. You just said that, but who is it that's here?" The girl barely finished what she was saying to the robed man before he knelt down and lifted his hood from his head. His eyes clouds looking onto the ocean of her brilliant, blue eyes. These clouds were angry. Seeming to darken right before the girl's eyes with the furrowing of the brow, the blind eyes stared.

"They're. Here." The man's tone was low, calm, and threatening. He handed her the vile of holy water and closed her hand around it. Though he only uttered two words, the girl gave room for a novel before she finally responded.

"Hah... You're pretty odd, old man." Then she walked away into the sea of merchants, diving into the mountainous waves. The old man shook his head and muttered something under his breath. The sky turned orange, and he began to pack his things.

An hour later, it was dark in the village, but that did not stop the festivities of the market. This village did not have any policies or ideals on closing up shop, so as long as there were customers, there were merchants. Under the lantern, the old man could not be found. Light was cast on the area he should have been in as if presenting an invisible monument.

If someone wandered from the festivities and made their way up a series of steps, they would find a hut at the top of the hill. This was the home of the old man. He gazed out over the village on his front lawn, stiff as a board. Though his eyes were blind, his hearing was keen as a bat. He visualized the events unfolding as they had every decade. New merchants had come since the last, and old ones had left with a new clutch.

The merchants were tired now, so they did not pay much attention to the transformation of rags to cloaks. The transformation of bats to men. The transformation of teeth to fangs. All at once, it seemed the friends from far off lands had become foe. A man held up the last of his “humongous ole carrots”, exposing his vascular wrist. One vampire swooped from behind the merchant and tore into the wrist, blood streaming down his face. Another vampire grabbed the seller of chickens and opened his mouth wider than it should ever go, enveloping the chicken salesman’s entire skull. A third vampire ran after one shocked child, gripped him beneath the armpits, sprouted wings from his back, and flew in the direction of the nearby river.

The crowd was in a frenzy now, those that weren’t vampires. Those who were vampires no longer had composure within them. They were bloodthirsty beasts sent from the deepest bowels of hell to tear into the flesh of the living, and they were doing exactly what they’d set on this village to do. Remaining merchants sprinted in all directions. Remaining children either ran like their adult counterparts or balled up on the ground into a fetal position, rocking back and forth. Three merchants went through an alleyway and were met with exactly three other vampires. With their terrific speed, the vampires reached the merchants and were devouring them before any of the merchants would have seen them move. The children curled up into balls were easy targets, and were hauled off in the direction of the river by more winged creatures.

Just as suddenly as it had begun, the event was over. The vampires had fled the gruesome scene. Cobblestones streets were painted a deep shade of red. Not even bones remained. The vampires had a funny way of cleaning their plate when they were done with their food by storing the leftover bones for their camp. Wisely, the old man wandered back into town. It was silent, and the scent of iron could be smelled from miles away. He walked as if he had all

the time in the world through the streets of the village. Taking in the contrast of the day prior to the moment he stood in now. As he strolled, pondering who the new merchants would be that would come to occupy these buildings, he heard sobbing.

Beneath the lantern, the girl was balled up, an empty, glass vile in her hand. She heard the footsteps, looked up and ran over to the old man. She hugged him harder than she had ever hugged any of her family members, most of which lived in the town, those who did were dead. "Thank... Thank you, mister." She let out between sobs.

The old man put a hand gently on the back of her head, as if he were her grandfather. He knelt down and grabbed the girl gently by the shoulders, night and day from the behavior he had shown earlier. After a long while of letting the girl weep, the man said, in a relaxed tone, "They're gone."