

TAILS FROM THE TOMB
WORDS & ART: JADE



The invitation was delivered in the morning, though Rick had no idea how it had found its way onto the phone table in the hall.

The postman had not been; a courier would have rung the doorbell, but at ten o'clock the house was still quiet as a crypt — just the way Amadeus liked it. Not gloomy and dingy like a tomb, but just as quiet as one.

The boss had been asleep for an hour when Rick yawned his way down the wide curved stairway, headed for the kitchen with coffee on his mind, and nothing louder than the tick of a grandfather clock in his ears. The doors and windows were all locked up ... and there on the polished walnut phone table was the proverbial engraved invitation.

It was the old fashioned kind, gilt-edged, ivory card, hand-written in the kind of copperplate only seen in greetings cards these days, where it was computer generated. Nobody was expected to actually be able to write copperplate anymore. But the person who had sent the card could certainly do it:

*Tonight, moonrise, Saint Jude's, the Tomb.
Cordially, as ever,
Jake M.*

Rick spent several minutes trying to remember anyone Amadeus had ever spoken of who went by the name of Jake, but there was no one. The card was probably from one of the antique dealers or auction houses he dealt with. There was a Jean, and a Jules, and a Jacques — copperplate would be just their style — but no Jake.

Thinking nothing more of it than to wonder how it had materialized on the phone table, Rick stuck the card into the back pocket of his jeans as he headed into the kitchen and followed through on his coffee plans. Like the rest of the house, the kitchen was vast, fully-fitted, and almost as old fashioned as Jake M.'s card. Amadeus liked antiques as much as he liked quiet. He had no affection for computers, but he did possess a laptop and a cell phone, which he viewed as unfortunate necessities, like the blood-scarlet sports car which was parked in the old coach house that had been converted to a garage.

The quiet saturated the house — like a tomb, Rick decided, and pushed the earbuds into his ears, turned on the MP3 player to remedy the situation. When Amadeus played music, it would be Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Bach, Vivaldi. He had no desire to give house-room to Johnny Cash or John Barrowman. As he would say, “That’s what MP3 players were invented for, Rick” ... and Amadeus was the boss.

Coffee in one hand, a yesterday’s croissant heated up in the other, Rick drifted into the drawing room and cracked open a curtain to peek at the weather. Amadeus might be happy to drowse away the daylight hours, but Rick had things to do —

But not today. The sky was gray, already low and still lowering. It was shaping up to be a dark and stormy night, if the wind did not shift by a few compass points and move this weather front to north or south. Rain flecked the window glass, and Rick shivered as he turned on the laptop, looking for a weather forecast. The trick or treaters would be in for a drenching, unless the wind changed.

And according to the forecast, it would. Winds gusting in the afternoon, shifting easterly, showers clearing ahead of a calm though humid evening. Perfect for the kids in the ghoul masks and witches’ hats ... which meant Amadeus would be inclined to keep the rendezvous at ‘The Tomb,’ at St. Jude’s.

It could only mean the old churchyard. The tombstones were so old there, the most ancient dated back to the Napoleonic Wars. Then again,

so did Amadeus, and there were times when he seemed much more comfortable with things of the past than the present. It was probably an occupational hazard when you were so old, you remembered wanting to toss salad at the stage on opening night of *Hamlet*.

Not that Amadeus would *actually* throw vegetables at an actor, Rick allowed as he turned on the gas fire and sank into one of the winged leather armchairs. He remembered the invitation card in the nick of time before he sat on it, and put it on the mantel, propped up against the clock. The boss would sleep way past noon, as he always did. He would make phonecalls and set up a few deals in the late afternoon — there was big money in antiques, and Amadeus was not so much an expert in the field as simply someone who knew gems from junk because he had been there at the time.

He would see the card propped against the clock when he came in for the phone and laptop. Rick had other things to do and promptly forgot about it as he began to tap his toe in rhythm to Johnny Cash and thought, *whatever they're paying this porter, it's not enough.*

He remembered the invitation at six, when the strains of Handel wafted out of the sound system in the office. Xerxes. Amadeus was singing with the tenor part in a rich voice, dead in tune. Rick was not about to ask how he knew the words. He looked into the office to see Amadeus combing the long, snow-white hair that was his signature, the only part of him that had ever changed with the years. He had had raven black hair in his youth, and for reasons unknown his hair gradually became white as Gandalf's with the years, while the rest of him retained the smoothness of skin and tautness of muscle of a thirty year old.

"We're going out," Rick guessed, seeing Amadeus's choice of black silk tunic.

"We were summoned," Amadeus observed.

Rick's memory jogged. "Oh yes, the invitation."

"You don't get *invited* to a tomb." Amadeus finished combing the white silk and hunted for a clasp.

"You might, on Halloween," Rick argued.

"Perhaps," Amadeus allowed. "But in this case, I'm being summoned. There's a difference."

"The summons could be for *us*." Rick watched him fiddling with the gold clasp. Silver gave him a rash but he liked gold.



“Jake doesn’t know you,” Amadeus said unconcernedly.

“Oh. Which means I don’t know him.” Rick might have been waiting for Amadeus to say, *well, duh*, but it was not the kind of thing Amadeus was ever likely to say. “He doesn’t mind if I come along?”

“I shouldn’t think so. It’s me he’s after. He always is.”

The remark made Rick’s brows rise, but he wisely made no remark. People had pursued Amadeus for more centuries than he cared to recall. Rick knew a few of the stories.

There was Lady Jean Hargreaves, who pursued him from London to Italy, where Amadeus managed to get her engaged to a Count Enzo Bertolucci, and made his escape with the Baroness Greenbrough, who was flattered because she thought she was old enough to be his mother, when in fact was off by at least a thousand years.

Then there was the wealthy widow, the Right Honorable Mrs. Alexandra Campbell-Hay, who claimed she was pregnant with his child for three years, at which point even the most skeptical of Amadeus’s critics realized something wasn’t quite right, and Amadeus made his escape with Madame Alicia Cuvier nee-Jones, the Welsh wine heiress who was tragically drowned in a tank of Chablis when the ladder she was climbing collapsed during an earthquake.

And the famous artist, Oscar Riverside, who expressed his ardor by panting Amadeus in the nude in 1894, and had to go to court to recover

the painting when it was confiscated by the morality police — seized right out of the gallery where it was on exhibit, much to the chagrin of the manager, who had never before seen ‘standing room only’ in his gallery. Amadeus was briefly famous (some said notorious), and retired to the south of Spain for several decades to let the dust settle. Oscar Riverside painted famous nudes till a Zeppelin raid on London in 1916 ended his career — as Amadeus said, you had to be fatalistic, because Ossie had spent far more time in Granada than in London for the last twenty years (and make of that what one would); and in any case, what kind of idiot would go back to London with the Zeppelins headed that way?

Sometimes Rick was more than halfway convinced Amadeus made it all up — but then he would remember that the passageways upstairs were lined with portraits. Lady Jean was a big-busted beauty with apple cheeks, a sweet little smile and a psychotic look in her baby-blue eyes. Baroness Hortense Greenbrough was a stout matron of sixty, with henna-red hair and enough rouge to paint a fire engine. Sandy Campbell was a whey-faced twenty-something with her eyes fixed on some spot in the fourth dimension. Allie Jones was a reed-slender lass with a big nose that looked as if it would glow in the dark. And Ossie Riverside was a tall, broad shouldered, long legged show pony, if Rick had ever seen one, with big green eyes and red pouty lips, and a penchant for curling his hair and wearing it six inches longer than the current fashion.

The fact was, you couldn’t make this stuff up, Rick decided as he watched Amadeus get ready to go out. Well, you could, Rick allowed a moment later, but Amadeus was not the type to make it up. He had grown stupefyingly rich as an antique dealer. He owned six houses around Europe. He was the patron of a major symphony orchestra. He owned an art gallery in London and a vineyard in Provence. He had dated movie stars — Margaret Lockwood and Rudolph Valentino; and he had the snapshots to prove it, insofar as Amadeus *had* anything to prove.

The weather had improved during the afternoon and evening. As the wind shifted to the southeast, it actually felt warm, and the wave of air coming through from Europe was heavy, humid. Amadeus never felt the cold in any case, being what he was, and Rick was soon sweating as he opened up the garage and aimed the remote at the car. The lights flickered and the car issued a yelping sound, as if someone had stood on the

tail of a very small dog. He shrugged out of his windbreaker, pulled the black teeshirt off over his head, and put the windbreaker back on.

“You look like you’re ... *cruising*, is that the word?” Amadeus’s voice was startling, from the doorway of the converted coach house.

“Don’t con me,” Rick admonished, “you speak the language.”

“I’m sad to say, I do,” Amadeus sighed. “Modern English is rather *faff*, don’t you think?”

“Not if you were born after 1995,” Rick snorted. “You don’t want to know what kids call English the way you speak it.”

“Not *faff*, I take it?”

“Get in the car.” Rick brandished the ignition key. “We’re late.”

“He’ll wait.”

“This guy, Jake M. Someone I should know?”

“You’ll know him soon enough ... in fact, you probably already do, you just don’t realize it.”

“Ooooooh, that’s so ... so *Amadeus*,” Rick accused. He watched the tall, lean body slide into the passenger seat and asked, “You, uh, hungry?”

“Not today.” Amadeus ran up the seatbelt. “Tomorrow.”

“Your call.” Rick started the car and backed out.

He turned the car and headed down the long, curved drive toward the tall black iron gates, which opened automatically before the car, and closed up the same way when it had pulled out.

Saint Jude’s was an old church with an overcrowded cemetery. It was probably past due for clearing. The developers were



Jake 2012

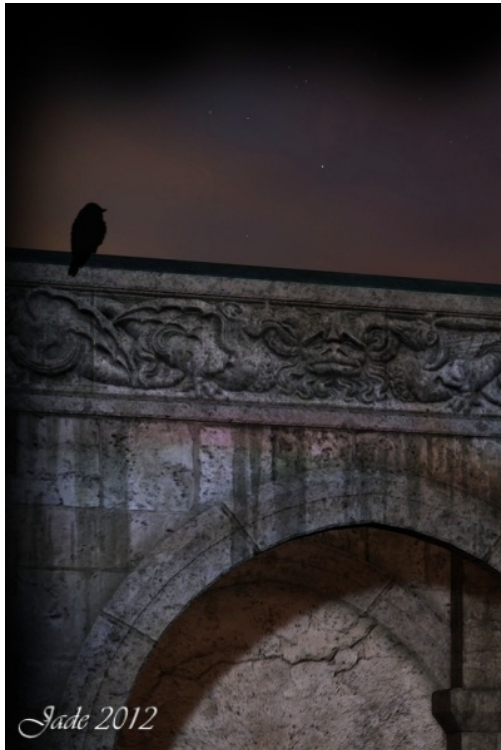
dying to get in because there was at least half a billion's worth of real estate there, in anyone's currency. But until the ground was deconsecrated, the church demolished, the historic tombstones salvaged, the ground turned over in search of someone's earthly remains to be relocated, Saint Jude's would remain, drowsing in the south of the city like a square kilometer levitated right out of another time zone and plunked down in 2012, through the use of some "wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey stuff" which Rick did not understand but seriously suspected to be perfectly genuine.

"Never a blue box with a spinner on top around when you need one," he remarked as he stopped the car under the line of skeletal sycamore and chestnut trees. He turned off the engine, opened the door.

"Blue box with a spinner?" Amadeus slid out and closed the door.

"Don't give me that. You've been saving it to the harddrive every week," Rick scoffed. The car locked up with another stomp-tailed yelp. "Any tomb in particular?"

"Follow me."



He had been here before — this much was obvious. He knew the way to the old lych gate, knew which way the bolt worked without even looking down ... knew the path to take, around the bare trees and ancient headstones ... the weeping angels that gave Rick the heebie jeebies lately (and where was that itinerant blue box when you needed it?), and the memorial garden where cremated ashes were scattered.

And there was the tomb, like a small house with an open archway, inside which was the barred gate, padlocked, securing the steps leading down to the crypt. Above the gate was a

flourishing, stylized letter M. As in, ‘Jake M.,’ Rick observed as he and Amadeus stepped in under the arch. A few lamps lit the graveyard, their light shimmering on a faint mist that had begun to thicken in the chill humidity.

Amadeus cast about in the short passage leading to the crypt gate, and murmured as he discovered a lantern. It smelt strongly of oil. He flicked a cigarette lighter, lit the wick, and handed it to Rick. “There. For your poor human eyes.”



“And of course you see in the dark like a fox,” Rick said dryly.

“I’d better.” Amadeus was amused.

“You’re nocturnal,” Rick added.

“Like all my kind.”

“You could say, like the pubbing, clubbing rentboys, swingers and assorted nightlife,” Rick snorted. “Urban wildlife.”

“One *could* say that.” Amadeus’s lip curled slightly. “But if *one* wanted to drive the Lamborghini the next time we go to Rome, *one* might think twice about it.”

Rick chuckled. “It’s hell being your minder.”

“You took the job.”

“The way you advertised it, how could I refuse? Besides,” Rick admitted, “I’d had enough of bouncing.”

“You make it sound as if you were a rubber ball.”

“I was a *bouncer* ... and don’t you dare say you don’t know what it means! The language might be faff, but you speak it well.”



“I speak it.” Amadeus looked out across the old cemetery, where the trees were mere skeletons and, beyond them, the sky over the city was definitely lightening. “It’s almost moonrise.”

“That’s what the dude said — moonrise at The Tomb. He’s late.”

“Jacob is never late,” Amadeus said with acerbic humor.

Rick angled a look at him. “You’ve done this before.”

“Many times.”

“You’ve been summoned many times?”

“When I’m in London at this time of year.”

“And this Jake M. — Jacob, is it? — *summons* you, and you just toddle along when you’re told to?”

“I don’t *toddle* anywhere. I have never *toddled* in my life.” Amadeus gave Rick a disdainful look, but the dark eyes glittered with amusement.

“Me Londoner,” Rick intoned, tapping his chest. “You ... come to think of it, where are you from originally?”

“Iberia,” Amadeus told him.

“Where the hell is —”

“Spain. Shush now. The moon’s rising, Jake will be here in a moment.” And some note in his voice said, ‘Here we go again.’

Sure enough, the moon was rising over the city, and Rick set aside his thousand-odd questions to enjoy the sight. Bodyguarding for Amadeus had many, many perks, not least among them the fact that, being nocturnal, Amadeus was waking up and getting motivated at about the same time as the city’s party animals. Switching from bouncing at The

Hare and Hounds to minding for a reclusive international billionaire had been a challenge, but at least the hours Rick was expected to keep were about the same.

And Amadeus badly needed a minder. In fact, Rick often thought he needed a keeper. He had his areas of terrible fragility that needed to be jealously guarded. It was a very long time indeed since a mob had been known to bay at the heels of one like him, but it was still far from impossible, and being what he was, he was vulnerable. Rick had learned all this a piece at a time, as Amadeus let first one secret slip and then another. Eventually, Rick put two and two together and got five, which turned out to be the right answer.

The wind was shifting again and the passage to the crypt was not the warmest place to be. He shivered animatedly. “Trust the likes of you to hang out in a crypt on Halloween.”

“The likes of me?”

“You know what I mean!”

“I know what you mean,” Amadeus admitted. “And you know full well, I don’t *hang out* in crypts by choice. It’s just a convenient rendezvous when I’m summoned.”

“Jake makes a habit of it ... when you’re in London at Halloween.”

“He does.” Amadeus frowned at the graveyard. “His family is interred all around here. They were buried here for centuries. There are none left now.”

“Except Jake,” Rick said glibly.

“Not quite.” Amadeus seemed determined to be cryptic.

“Meaning?” Rick groaned.

“Take it up with Jacob.” Amadeus nodded toward the rising moon. “He’s here.”

Rick muttered the kind of language that would have got his pocket money docked when he was a kid and in his mother’s hearing, and followed the line of Amadeus’s eyes to the other corner of the structure which housed the upper levels of the crypt. A figure had appeared there, though Rick had not heard him approach, and he must have had an LED torch somewhere on him, because he was enveloped in pale blue light. The wind was in his hair —

And that was when Rick realized there was no wind. The graveyard was absolutely still, the trees were not moving ... and the blue light was

not issuing from a torch, it was emanating from the figure himself, while his long blond hair floated as if he were in freefall, and his body *shimmered*.

“Omigod,” Rick whispered.

“Hush, now,” Amadeus admonished.



“But I can see right through him!”

“Of course you can. Jacob! Jake, it’s been — how long, seven years?”

“Seven very long years,” the apparition agreed, coming closer. “You look great. You never change.”

“And you’re looking very good indeed,” Amadeus told him.

Looking good? Rick blinked both eyes as hard as he could and peered at the figure, which had drifted to a shimmering rest just outside their archway. He swore again. “He looks — he looks like Brad bloody Pitt!”

“I suppose he does,” Amadeus mused. “And I don’t suppose there’s any reason why he shouldn’t.”

“He’s a — a— he’s dead,” Rick said lucidly.

Jacob frowned at him, head cocked. He might look like Brad Pitt, but his voice was entirely English. “Who’s the brat, Amadeus?”

“My bodyguard,” Amadeus told him. “It’s been a few years, Jacob. I needed a bodyguard.”

“A minder. You would,” Jake M. said thoughtfully. “You being what you are.”

“Oh, don’t be judgmental, old friend!” Amadeus spread his arms. “Every time I’m in London on October 31st, I get the summons, and I don’t let you down. And every time you say the same thing. Me being what I am.”

The apparition shrugged. “It’s my job. You know it all by heart by now ... how many years I spent buried in the counting house, doing business and missing being *mortal* and *human* and *decent* ... and how mankind was my business, and all the stuff you don’t do in life you’re doomed to do in death.”



Amadeus was looking at Jake’s feet. “I don’t see them.”

Rick’s heart had stopped hammering on his ribs as if it was trying to get out. He was listening, now, to what was being said. There was something horribly familiar about these words. He had heard them before, somewhere. In a movie? Actually, in several movies — the subject matter had been filmed so often, everybody from Jim Carrey to the Muppets had taken a crack at it.

“I got rid of them,” Jacob said, preening visibly. “Took a while, but if you get your head down and do the job right, you can work through the penance and unload the ironmongery. God knows, it’s been over 170 years ... enough’s enough, right?” He struck a pose, like Achilles on the beach at Troy. “Major makeover. What do you think?”

“Suits you,” Amadeus said honestly. “It’s a good look for you.”

“It was time for a change.” Then Jacob dropped back into character, taking on enough gravitas to sink the RMS *Titanic*. He pointed a sharp,



hard finger at Amadeus. “It is well that you answered the summons, for the time has come for repentance. The sins of the past —”

“Oh, give it a rest,” Amadeus scoffed. “You said you’ve done the penance, got rid of the iron-mongery. You can quit the job now.”

Jacob seemed taken aback. “I got used to the work. I kind of like it now. Going around, putting the breeze up characters like you. Saving souls.”

“Doing *what?*” Rick demanded. “Who the hell are you?” He took a half step forward, put himself in front of Amadeus. “I’m his

minder. You want to take a pop at him, you gotta get through me.”

“Rick,” Amadeus began.

But Rick was adamant. “Hey, you hired a bodyguard, remember? What kind of useless twat would I be, if I just let him have a go at you? He’s not exactly the Grim Reaper!” He shot a quick look over his shoulder at Amadeus. “Is he?”

“Not exactly.” Amadeus actually chuckled. “He’s a third cousin, twice removed, of the Grim Reaper’s. Jacob is here with the warning ... if I don’t mend my ways, it’ll be doom for me ... a marble slab in the new churchyard over at Saint Bede’s.”

“Not while I’m minding for you,” Rick said loudly. He pinned Brad Pitt with a glare. “Okay, you, Jake, Jacob, whatever your name



is. Drop it. Right now.”

The apparition seemed nonplussed, as if he had never run face-first into a bodyguard. “Whatever my name is? Look around you, boy. There are scores of Marleys interred here.”

“Yeah, well the only Marley I know about is *Bob* Marley,” Rick began, and then skipped a beat. “Uh, Jacob?”

“Marley,” Amadeus finished.

“But he looks like Brad Pitt.”

“Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t,” Jake challenged. “I’ve been dead for 173 years — it’s not as if I have a body left to look like. You want me to go around looking like the bunch of rags and bones in the tomb?” He made a face. “Now, that would be gross.”

“Yeah, well, no, well, I suppose,” Rick admitted, “but ...you’re real.”

“I’m a ghost,” Jacob said patiently. “Nobody ever thought to send for a decent exorcist and get rid of me — or the other three on the team, come to that — so I’m still here.” He flicked back the ends of the long blond hair. “I got to like the job, scaring crap out of people to make them get off their bums and be halfway decent for a change.”

“And save their souls,” Amadeus said doubtfully.

“Well, it doesn’t actually work like that,” Jacob admitted. “I mean, look at me. You can either do the good works while you’re alive and kicking, or you can do them when you’re dead. Your choice, actually. The fact is, like the saying goes, you’re a *loooooong* time time. You get bored as all hell if you don’t find yourself a proper job.”

“You mean, like haunting someone’s house?” Amadeus was teasing.

“But ... but ...” Rick swallowed hard. “You were in a book.”

Jacob chuckled richly. “I would have asked for a share in the royalties, but I was dead when it was published, and Charles was too dense to hear me when I came knocking ... and even if he’d split the royalties with me, how was I going to spend the dosh? That’s the thing about being dead. They don’t have shops where I live.”

“No shops?” Rick was beginning to doubt his sanity, and turned to the older, wiser head for guidance. “Tell me I’m hallucinating.”

“Trick or treat,” Jacob mocked, making ghoulish faces, and then dropped back into the character, the gravitas, and stabbed the sharp, hard finger at Amadeus again. “You will be haunted by three spirits. The first shall come on the stroke of —”



“But it’s Halloween,” Rick protested. “That’s supposed to happen on Christmas Eve!”

“Says who?” Jacob argued. “Charles set the story at Christmas because he wanted to write a book about Christmas. There was no market for books about Halloween back in those days.”

“Rick, shush,” Amadeus said with exaggerated patience. “I rather like this part. It’s where he tells me I’ll be haunted by the Ghosts of Lives Past, Lives Present, and Lives Yet to Come. It’s something of a blast,

actually, to use the vernacular. If we hang around here, and you hitch a ride, you can come back with me and catch a glimpse or two of the places where I grew up ... the big, dark, drafty castle where I lost my virginity, the garden where I tasted human blood for the first time —”

“Aha!” Jake interjected. “This is where the sins and the atonement and the good of mankind get into gear. Time to save your soul, my dear boy.”

“Jacob.” Amadeus folded his arms on his silk-shirted breast. “In the first place, I was *born* the way I am, not made.”

“Vampire.” Jacob’s nose wrinkled, and he looked at Rick. “You know about all this, do you?”

Rick shoved both hands into his jeans pockets. “I, uh, know about it. What’s it to you?”

“Me?” Jake shrugged. “I just like saving souls. I suppose I do it on

a hobby basis, now I don't actually have to." He gestured at his feet. "See? No more chains."

"In the *second* place," Amadeus said, louder, "I can't *stop* being what I am, any more than you can stop being a ghost. I'm already a philanthropist, Jacob, as well you know. I fund a symphony orchestra, and a dramatic society, an art school, and a publisher of arcane literature. What more do you want?"

"A hospital," Jacob suggested.

"All right, a hospital," Amadeus agreed.

"For orphans." Jacob looked satisfied.

"A hospital for orphans. It's perfect. Why didn't I think of it myself?" Amadeus demanded with scathing humor, and lifted a brow at Rick. "He was always like this, even when he was alive. He'd like to tell you dying changed him, but he was always manipulative. He got it from his father and his paternal grandmother."

"You knew them." Rick wondered why he was surprised.

"I knew several generations of Marleys," Amadeus mused, "and there wasn't a Robert among them."

"Bob," Rick corrected. "It's *Bob* Marley. Or it was. He's dead now. And he was Jamaican." He glared at Jacob. "Not one of your mob."

"I've never even been to Jamaica," Jacob said thoughtfully.

"Why not treat yourself to a vacation," Amadeus suggested. "You can go right there from here. It's nice at this time of year."

The apparition frowned at him. "The hospital?"

"You've got your hospital," Amadeus promised. "For orphans, specifically ... which I take to mean we toss all the other sick children back out into the street."

"Amadeus!" Jacob might be dead, but he could still roar.

"Not just for orphans, then," Amadeus said smoothly, not in the least threatened. "Orphan *friendly*, perhaps, yes?"

"Then, I can tell the rest of the team not to bother coming tonight —?" Jacob relaxed visibly. "Saves them the time and trouble, which puts the smiles back on their faces — they can be a disagreeable, taciturn bunch, especially his lordship, Yet to Be. All these years, and I've never managed to wring a word out of him. Never even a syllable. He just does the skeletal finger thing. In fact, I'm not even sure it's a *him*. Could be a *her*, for all I know." He thought over the turn of events and said speculatively,

“Jamaica.”

“Where the rest of the Marleys come from,” Rick said wryly. “Reggae, rum, cricket, the works.”

“Vacation,” Jacob said, and his voice was becoming thin and pale, as was the rest of him.

Amadeus took a step forward. “Jake, you’re fading out. Are you leaving already?”

“I — what? No.” Jacob seemed to notice what was happening, and looked around wildly. “Omigod — no. *No!*”

“What?” Rick was beside Amadeus, watching the apparition panic. “Jake, *what?*”

“I — I’m being exorcised,” Jacob wailed, shouting, though only a tendril of sound made it through to Rick’s ears. “I don’t want to be exorcised! I want to go to Jamaica! Amadeus — Amadeus, do something!”

But the vampire was obviously at a loss. “I’m a vampire, not an exorcist, Jake, I’ve never even attended an exorcism! I wouldn’t know where to begin to stop one.” He reached out to Jacob as if trying to touch him, but his hand passed right through the insubstantial stuff of the ghost. “Jake! You’re fading fast, tell me what to do!”

The apparition looked pained, distraught, panicky. “Clap your hands,” he whimpered.

“Do what?” Rick strained forward toward him. “Jake, do what?”

“Clap your hands,” Jacob moaned, “and say, ‘I do believe in ghosts!’” He wailed, as if in agony. “Say it, say it!”

He was fading rapidly now, just a thin, wavering remnant of him was left, and Rick clapped his hands hard, echoing the sharp raps of Amadeus’s palms. “I do believe in ghosts,” Rick said loudly.

“I do believe in ghosts,” Amadeus called. “I do — I do!”

Rick stopped short in mid clap. “Just a second. Just one *bloody* second — that’s Peter freakin’ Pan.”

“It’s what?” Amadeus looked sidelong at him.

“It’s the part where Tinkerbell swallows poison to save Peter,” Rick said coldly, and pinned the apparition with an accusatory glare. “You ... you toerag.”

The ghost brightened till he looked almost corporeal, and doubled up with ribald laughter. “*Got* you. Trick or bleedin’ treat! Got you, got *both* of you!”

“Got me. Us,” Amadeus intoned. “Are you happy now, Jake? Are you satisfied, now you’ve embarrassed me in front of my bodyguard?”

Jacob smothered his amusement. “I meant it about the hospital.”

“One children’s hospital, orphan friendly, on the fiscal agenda for 2013,” Amadeus said with all due solemnity. “Jamaica?”

“Jamaica,” Jacob agreed, “where the rest of the Marleys come from. I wonder if we’re related?”

He was fading once more, but this time without the performance. “I’ll see you again, Amadeus.”

“And my soul?” Amadeus called after him.

The ghost guffawed. “Like *you* have to worry about some marble slab at Saint Joseph’s. Vampires are immortal.”

Then he was gone.

Amadeus stooped to blow out the lamp and set it back on the shelf just inside the archway. “Clap hands and say, ‘I do believe in ghosts.’ Damn it, I must be getting slow.”

“Either that, or you never saw *Peter Pan*.” Rick stepped out into the graveyard.

“I’ll rent the DVD.”

“I’ll get you it for Christmas,” Rick muttered. “That and *Dracula*.”

“I’ve seen *Dracula*.”

“Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee?”

“Frank Langella. In fact, he signed a picture of himself when I met him at the London premier.”

Rick’s chin dropped for the second time that evening. “You met Frank Langella?”

“Of course. There was a charity event, I gave thirty thousand pounds. Mr. Langella and I drank champagne. He was most charming.”

“And soooo good looking,” Rick crooned. “And he never never guessed he was talking to the real McCoy.”

“The real what?”

“A vampire.” Rick plucked the carkeys from his pocket and surveyed the graveyard critically as they started down the path back to the lych gate. He hurried the pace, wanting to get out of the dampness. The high humidity and rapidly chilling air were causing a thick mist to form. It wound and coiled around the gravestones, and those damned weeping angels. “This place,” Rick said succinctly, “is giving me the creeps.”



“It’s full of Marleys.”

“All this time, I thought he was out of a book.”

“He *was* out of a book.”

“Only because Charles Dickens put him in it!” Rick jingled the carkeys. “So ... did Dickens meet Jake while he was alive, or after he was dead? Jake, I mean. Dickens probably had to be alive to write the book.”

The vampire’s brows rose. “I don’t know. I honestly have no idea. You know, I never thought to ask. Next time.”

“In another seven years? The next time an invitation card materializes on the table in the hall, at Halloween?”

“That would be the time.”

Rick groaned. “I need a beer.”

“You need dinner,” Amadeus corrected.

“I’m not hungry.”

“But I’m starting to feel a little ... peckish.” The pink tip of Amadeus’s tongue flicked out across his lips. The moonlight glistened on the too-sharp point of a canine tooth for just a second before it was gone again. “You need to get some food inside you, so I can feed.”

“Oh. All right.” They were at the lych gate, and Rick aimed the keyring at the car. It yelped as it came to life. “Fish and chips again, on account of *you* can’t stand garlic, so *I* can’t have French or Italian.”

“Try Indian. I’ve a fancy for something spicy. Have a nice Madras

curry, with naan and pappadums on the side.”

“And a beer,” Rick growled as he swung open the door.

“With a whiskey chaser. I like the way it simmers in your blood.”

Pausing with the key on the way to the ignition, Rick regarded the white-haired young man over the roof of the car. “You know, I got a lot more than I bargained for, when I answered that ad in the paper. I only signed on as your minder.”

“Regrets?” Amadeus wondered.

For a moment Rick stopped to think, and then shook his head. “Only when you drag me into crypts in the middle of graveyards on Halloween.”

“You don’t have to come next time.”

“I might, though, if you take me along for the ride, when Lives Past shows you the creepy old castle where you got laid for the first time, and the garden where you first tasted human blood.”

“Even I was young once.”

“You still are.”

“Only on the outside.” Then Amadeus was in the car. “Where are we going?”

“The Bombay Umbrella Club,” Rick said promptly. “You want Indian, you get Indian. Nothing but the best for the boss.”

“You’re too kind. What did I ever do to deserve you?”

“Put an ad in the paper,” Rick told him glibly. “You wanted a bodyguard, remember?”

And Rick had wanted to move onward and upward from the job of bouncing at a rowdy pub. He revved the engine and flicked the indicator, but no traffic was coming. The November night was calm, damp, cold, sharp with the promise of winter right around the corner — but first, fireworks in a few days’ time. On the fifth, it would be Rick dragging Amadeus out to see the spectacle, if several tonnes of exploding gunpowder could rival meeting an actual, genuine ghost, face to face.

I do believe in ghosts, I do! Rick mocked himself and turned the car in the direction of the best Indian restaurant on this side of London.

Happy Halloween, 2012!

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<http://3d-adventures.blogspot.com.au/2012/10/tails-from-tomb-happy-halloween-2012.html>