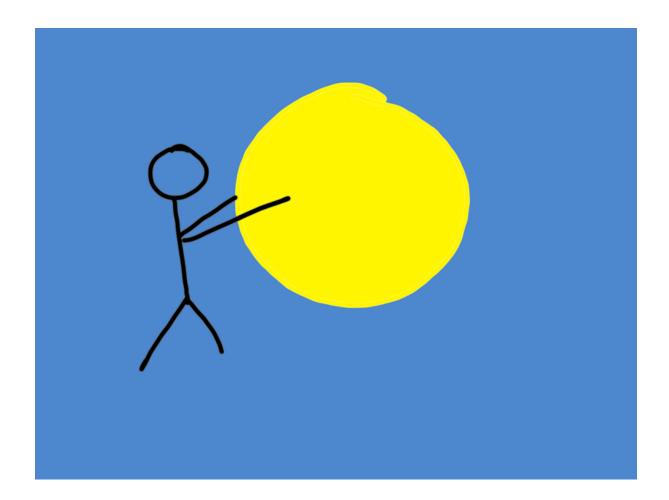
Hunter Of The Strange



I'm just a kid. Nineteen years old. That's right, just a kid.

The figure in front of me was, well, a little bit older. Except using the term "old" would mean they're alive. And the undead, as a rule, do not have life.

Varian Crosshater was over a thousand years .. old. She'd been around before the War of Blood. It's possible that she is one of the Primes, but I doubt it. The Primes that I know don't like me much.

Nineteen years old, and I hunt the strange monsters, the magical creatures, the myths and legends that you are afraid of.

Varian wasn't on my list. Currently.

For a reason I have yet to discover, Varian does not see me as the enemy.

"You are late Youngling. Perhaps I should teach you the cost of tardiness."

I wasn't happy. This hunt was important. Three monsters. Three magics. Three myths.

"I'm in the middle of a hunt Varian. What is it?"

Her shadowed face broke into a smile, laughter bubbling around me. "Such haste Youngling. Your monsters will wait. This cannot."

So I displayed great patience and stayed quiet.

"There is something amiss tonight. Darius has called his clan together. Bella is driving her tribe to the surface. And Rhemus has been woken."

Three Primes. Vampire. Zombie. Were.

This could get interesting. Oh, and Three. Ground into me is the truth, that there are no coincidences.

"You spark the old to life Youngling, just by being. Your blood calls to all of us, regardless of age or power."

I looked at her eyes. There was no laughter now.

Having no recourse, at least that I wanted to give, I waited some more.

Varian dropped her voice. "It has been a year since me met Youngling. I have watched, recorded the signs, listened to your heart. You are he. Bringer of the Sun. The Chaos Man. Promised and promised again, it is on you to save this city."

Foolishness. I could do many things out of the normal. I can remember the day of my birth. I can tell you what you did yesterday. I know the Five Ways of Blood, and can track the Were without sight. Vampire magics have no hold on me, and my touch will turn a Zombie to ash. But.

"I am not the one you want. He will be born under Sun and Moon. He will be broken once, twice and three times. He will betray his own. This is not me."

Varian smiled again. "We shall see. Regardless of what you think, you must help protect the City."

That part was true. This City was mine to guard and watch over.

Three Primes.

Darius lived in the West of the City. He ruled with a pretty big fist, and none had risen to challenge that rule in the last hundred years, so Varian told me.

Bella had taken her tribe underground a couple of years back. They mined silver and other metals deep in the earth. Zombies made for excellent miners. Who would have thought it.

Rhemus.

Rhemus was, from what I could tell, more dangerous than any other Prime. According to Varian he was a powerful Were, bitten by a Vampire King, and then granted his life back by Erasthmus, who put him into an endless sleep. Pretty nasty stuff.

And now it seems the endless sleep wasn't really all that.

"Youngling." Varian put her hand up, touching my cheek. I didn't flinch. "Be careful. I would miss you."

And she was gone with the wind.

I looked up at the moon. It was growing full. A howl broke nearby. To the south, a few streets over.

Moving into a slow run, I checked my weapons. Left and right swords. Knives. Bow bounced lightly against my back. Salves and liquids in their containers rattled against my thighs.

Primes or no Primes I had three monsters of the Strange to find. And the first wasn't far.

A scream nearby. I turned down an alley, moving faster. Blackness swirled around the end of alley. That meant a Vampire, or at least one of their Servants. Calling darkness wasn't as cool as it sounds, but it did the job okay.

Nearing the end, I sniffed. A Were as well, maybe more. I wonder ...

The black pellet I threw burst into light, destroying the darkness. And then I was around the corner.

A woman lay on the ground, bleeding from the neck. A man had lost the use of his left arm but was still fighting off a Were. He must be strong.

Standing nearby was the first of my Hunt.

"Ashael!" He was already looking, but the call of his name had some power. "I name you Ashael. And call you to account."

He didn't seem phased. Sniffing, Ashael pulled a handkerchief from his waist pocket and rubbed his nose.

I almost didn't hear. A Were sprang from the alley I'd just exited.

I'm fast. You have to be in this line of work. Some Were have been faster, but not many. This one, thankfully, wasn't.

However, having Ashael at my back wasn't a good idea. So I rolled to the right, sword swinging at the Were's belly, keeping my senses on the Vampire. Then, quickly, two thrusts and the Were lay still.

I was near enough to the other Were, who had brought the man down, that I might have stopped it.

Ashael laughed. "Hunter. Why do you bother?"

Arguing with a Vampire wasn't really my idea of fun. "I was born to Hunt the Strange."

"Ahhh yes." Ashael sighed. "Well, it was a good chase was it not?"

I made my move.

Moments later the second Were lay dead at my feet. I turned, but Ashael was gone. Not cool.

"Help."

The woman tried to rise, but the Vampire's poison was at work. Quickly I took out a flask at my belt, unstoppered this, then knelt by the woman.

"You must drink this, or it will be you I am hunting next."

Her eyes grew wild. And not all of it was fear. The *change* was happening very fast. Ashael was more powerful than I had thought.

All it took was a sip of the flask. Steam vented through her throat, down into her belly. Then outward went the magic, purging all the vampiric poison to be found.

"Thankyou." The woman closed her eyes, asleep straight away.

The man was dead. Torn apart by the Were.

Another lost in this madness.

He had to be dealt with before the *change* took him. Were poison worked a little differently to Vampire, but still resulted in a pretty big life change.

Ha ha. See, I can still joke.

The cross against my skin burned white and hot.

Oh no.

This time I wasn't quick enough. The Vampire's foot caught my hip as I lunged desperately sideways. Spinning, my arms flayed out, I managed to get upright.

But it wasn't Ashael attacking.

It was the woman. Which meant Ashael's poison was not affected by the antidote. That's not good. A rustling behind me brought a groan to my lips.

The man was rising. He wasn't a man any more. Were. This was turning into a troubling night.

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Hunter of the Strange.

But still, just a kid.