

No matter how hard he tried to ignore it, no matter how hard he tried to sleep, Jack Miller could hear Eleanor, his wife, going through her normal cycle in the living room downstairs—fumbling through the tapes in the entertainment center, laughing, crying, talking to herself, then answering back in a high-pitched, child-like voice.

During her pregnancy ten years ago, she and her ex-husband had kept a detailed video journal up until midway through her seventh month, when the fetus—a boy whom they named Daniel—died in her womb due to a rare heart defect that Eleanor had as well. Because of her own heart condition, every surgeon/specialist she consulted strongly recommended against surgery to remove the fetus, which meant that Eleanor Rigdon-Miller would have to carry her dead, unborn child to term, and deliver it stillborn.

She still had the antique baby buggy stroller—a huge, gothic-looking thing with whitewall tires—in what used to be her sewing room. Over time, the room had morphed into a shrine to Daniel right under Jack’s nose.

Jack always stepped quickly when he passed the room on his way to the only bathroom in the house. Afterward, he’d shake his head for allowing himself to be swept up in Eleanor’s psychosis. Had he known about all this before he decided to fall in love, he might’ve thought twice about taking on a woman with such baggage.

* * * * *

They met in late 1999, September, or was it November? Jack had a terrible memory when it came to dates. He was recovering from surgery to remove a benign tumor from his colon when Eleanor came into his room to deliver

an urgent message to Dr. Wettig, his surgeon, who introduced them.

Jack thought she was a nurse, but later found out that she worked in the radiology department filing documents and answering phones. There was something about her that spoke of maternal servitude, an aura that Jack's uber-religious friends would call angelic.

She was a little on the heavy side. Okay, a lot. But Jack was no prize himself; twice divorced, balding, and thin, but flabby. And for a woman her age (fifty-six), her face had a very youthful quality. She could've passed for forty-eight at least.

Twenty years ago, Eleanor's ex-husband had introduced her to Voodoo. She had been training to become a Priestess when Daniel died. The experience drastically altered her priorities. Her place of worship, the Southwest Temple of Voudon, with its glum pretense and its over-the-top rituals, just wasn't Jack's thing. However, the way he saw it, Voodoo was closer to their African roots than his old church (St. Thomas Episcopal), so he ultimately let the goofy shit slide.

The rest is, as they say, history.

* * * * *

As usual, Eleanor was a mess by the time she came back to bed.

"Good night, love," she whispered to Jack.

At first, he tried to act like he was asleep, which never worked. Eleanor lay facing him and waited him out just like every other time, her long, coffeestained teeth bearing down from the huge, gummy smile plastered across

her face, her lips quivering under the strain. The shaky smile contradicted her flushed hue, puffy eyes, and reddened nose. She looked like a clown, the kind that killed folks, then danced on their bodies.

“Good night,” Jack said. He rolled over and tried to will himself momentarily deaf.

“Good night, mommy,” Eleanor said in her high-pitched Daniel voice.

“Good night, Mister Jack.”

Daniel wasn't ready to call Jack “daddy” just yet. That's what Eleanor said.

Fuck if that voice didn't give Jack the creeps every time he heard it.

“Good night, Daniel,” Eleanor said as if Daniel was lying next to her.

Again she lay there waiting for Jack to respond.

“Good night, Daniel,” Jack grumbled.

* * * * *

Eleanor was talking to/as Daniel more and more frequently, and she was becoming less and less concerned about hiding it. And not only that, she was starting to fixate on Kevin Niles, the twenty-something, good-looking exotic dancer who lived a few houses down on the other side of the street.

Jack caught her watching him from the living-room window on more than one occasion. Once he overheard her talking to/as Daniel as she watched Kevin wash his car, shirtless. Even Jack had to acknowledge what great shape Kevin was in.

“I bet you would've been so handsome,” she said. “You would've put

poor Kevin to shame. I'm sure of it."

"Do you really mean it, mommy?" Daniel replied.

"Of course I do. I wouldn't lie ta you, precious. Not evah."

"Do you think I'll ever..." Although she immediately stopped talking when Jack walked in on her, Eleanor didn't seem at all startled, flustered, or scared like she used to get.

She sat dead center on the vomit-colored couch, arms folded across her chest, and she watched Jack try to come up with a reason for walking into the living room. She had a look in her eyes that seemed to say, 'Get the fuck out!'

So he did. Better not to get on Eleanor's bad side.

Crazy fucking bitch, Jack thought. As usual when he cursed, he followed it up with an apology: *Excuse me, God*.

* * * * *

Daniel was an official member of the family now. He ate, watched TV, and slept with Eleanor and Jack—all via Eleanor's high-pitched Daniel-voice, of course. Eleanor made sure to set a place for him at the table and to make room for him on the couch and in bed. And she finally convinced Daniel to call Jack "Daddy."

Jack was growing increasingly distant from her, from them.

The outdoors, especially public places with lots of people, had become Jack's safe haven from Daniel. Eleanor wouldn't dare risk other people seeing her talk to/as Daniel.

Looks great, Sean. Sorry I took so long to get back. Yesterday was my birthday so I banned myself from working.

Anyway, it looks like you might have put the blurbs for DBA on the Jesus Freaks page. Other than that everything is fine. Are you planning to include the gallery pics from the books?

I'm attaching short excerpts for The Bizarro Starter Kit, Undead and Undead: Fleash Feast.

Let me know if you need anything else.

-Andre