With Axe In Hand

by

Stewart Felkel

PUBLISHED BY:

Stewart Felkel

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With Axe in Hand

It’s really weird to me that I still dream. I know that’s normal but nothing else about me is. Being dead has a lot to do with it. But dreams, why should I still have them? After all, I don’t need air. I don’t need food or water but I can eat and drink. I can even still drink beer but I can’t get drunk. But I still dream when I sleep. Not that I need a lot of sleep. Most people sleep every night but for me it’s about once a week.

Tonight was my weekly rest session. I fell asleep in Ashley’s bed. Who is Ashley? Well, she works at the brothel. Some things still work like they used to but I won’t go into details. I tend to split my time between the brothel and the church down the street. I know, I know, the dichotomy of life. Or death. Whatever.

All this chatter leads me back to my point, my dreams, or in this case singular. In my dream I’m sitting next to a stream. Trees line the water on either side of the rock I’m sitting on. I’ve sat on this rock by this stream before. I turn to my left and sure enough there is my old buddy in his black suit and spectacles. This can’t be good.

“What is it this time?”

He pulls his glasses off to wipe the lenses with a handkerchief. When they pass his inspection he puts them back on and looks my way.

“We’ve got another job for you Michael.”

“Wasn’t the last one enough for you whoever you are” I ask.

He sighs. “My apologies but it will never be enough. There is much to be done and believe me you don’t have the worst of it.”

I grunt in reply. What do you say to cryptic nonsense like that?

“What is it this time? Please no more primitive storm goddesses. I still jump every time I hear thunder.”

He smiles my way. It’s not a real smile though. It’s like crocodile tears. It’s there but it’s like it’s painted on. I don’t know how I know this and I can’t explain it any better than that. It scares the hell out of me though.

“Just check your paper when you wake up.”

He pulls out a gold pocket watch and looks at the time. I crane my neck to take a peek at it but I can’t read it. There aren’t any numbers just strange symbols and there are too many hands all running different directions and speeds.

“Speaking of waking up, you should be doing that right about……… now.”

My eyes jerk open to see sunlight streaming through the window. The door bangs open and Ashley comes in with a tray of food. I can smell coffee. It must be brewed really strong if I can smell it.

“Wakey Wakey, Eggs and Bakey.”

She’s smiling. I love seeing her first thing in the morning before she puts on her makeup. She looks genuine. And her smile lights her whole face up. I have no illusions about her profession or our relationship but hey, I can’t help but Like Ashley. She’s good people.

I sit up and rub my hands together as she sets the tray in front of me. She kisses me on the forehead as I spear eggs with my fork.

“Oh, and I brought you the paper.”

Of course. I should have known. She plops it on the bed beside me and I debate finishing the plate before I read the paper. Duty wins out however. Once a soldier always a soldier. On the front page is another story about the Axeman, a serial killer who has been terrorizing New Orleans for months. I’m not sure what this has to do with me though. And then I see that something new has happened. He’s written a letter to the paper taunting the police.

*Hell, March 13, 1919*

*Esteemed Mortal:*

*They have never caught me and they never will. They have never seen me, for I am invisible, even as the* [ether](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ether) *that surrounds your earth. I am not a human being, but a spirit and a demon from the hottest hell. I am what you Orleanians and your foolish police call the Axeman.*

*When I see fit, I shall come and claim other victims. I alone know whom they shall be. I shall leave no clue except my bloody axe, besmeared with blood and brains of he whom I have sent below to keep me company.*

*If you wish you may tell the police to be careful not to rile me. Of course, I am a reasonable spirit. I take no offense at the way they have conducted their investigations in the past. In fact, they have been so utterly stupid as to not only amuse me, but His Satanic Majesty, Francis Josef, etc. But tell them to beware. Let them not try to discover what I am; for it were better that they were never born than to incur the wrath of the Axeman. I don‘t think there is any need of such a warning, for I feel sure the police will always dodge me, as they have in the past. They are wise and know how to keep away from all harm.*

*Undoubtedly, you Orleanians think of me as a most horrible murderer, which I am, but I could be much worse if I wanted to. If I wished, I could pay a visit to your city every night. At will I could slay thousands of your best citizens, for I am in close relationship with the Angel of Death.*

*Now, to be exact, at 12:15 (earthly time) on next Tuesday night, I am going to pass over New Orleans. In my infinite mercy, I am going to make a little proposition to you people. Here it is:*

*I am very fond of jazz music, and I swear by all the devils in the nether regions that every person shall be spared in whose home a jazz band is in full swing at the time I have just mentioned. If everyone has a jazz band going, well, then, so much the better for you people. One thing is certain and that is that some of your people who do not jazz it on Tuesday night (if there be any) will get the axe.*

*Well, as I am cold and crave the warmth of my native* [Tartarus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/tartarus)*, and it is about time I leave your earthly home, I will cease my discourse. Hoping that thou wilt publish this that it may go well with thee, I have been, am and will be the worst spirit that ever existed either in fact or realm of fancy.*

*The Axeman*

Ok, the Axeman claims to be a demon. I can buy that. I’m a dead man after all so who am I to judge. But a demon who likes jazz music stretches credulity. I set the paper down and regretfully move the food aside to get dressed.

“What’s the matter, don’t like my cooking” Ashley asks.

“Darlin, I like everything you cook. But I’ve got to go see a man about a horse.”

Ashley frowns at me and I can’t help but laugh a little. She’s just so cute with her brow furrowed. Dressed I reach for my ever present gun belt. This revolver has been to the grave and back with me. I don’t go anywhere without it. Not even to church.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be back. I have to go see the good Reverend about how to catch demons.”

“Well that’s ok then; just as long as you aren’t off finding a girl to replace me.”

“Never fear, I couldn’t ever replace you.”

t

I stopped in the street facing the cathedral. It didn’t look any different from the first time I had seen it. At least there wasn’t a sharpshooter in the bell tower this time. I shoved the door open and walked into the cool interior. Already the days were starting to heat up. To my left I could see pews with bullet holes still in them. I shook my head and walked towards the reverend’s office in the back. Throwing the door open I stomped in and stopped with hands on my waist. He loves it when I burst in unannounced like this.

“How long are you going to leave those pews like that? It’s disgraceful for a church like this to have bullet holes everywhere.”

The reverend looks up from whatever he was writing and stares at me over the top of his glasses. He’s a pudgy little man with very little hair left on the top of his head. He still has a stare that would intimidate any parishioner.

“I would gladly replace them, if there were any funds available to do so. It would have been far more preferable to not have a shootout in here to begin with.”

His eyes dart down to the gun on my hip and his lips purse.

“Hey, don’t look at me. I didn’t volunteer to be shot at. Well, not that time anyway. The Powers That Be drafted me.”

The reverend just sniffed at me. “What do you want?”

“Can’t a guy just come speak with a man of the cloth and visit his local church?”

“You’re dead. And a devout sinner. You never just come to visit.”

Did I forget to mention that the reverend knew about my condition? The back from the dead part doesn’t bother him what with resurrection being kind of a prime tenant of Christianity and all. It’s more the method of my coming back that he doesn’t approve of. I spare him any more witty repartee and drop the newspaper on his desk. He pushes his glasses back up on his face and picks it up. After a minute he lays it back down. He looks nervous.

“Do you believe what this letter claims?”

“Hey, I don’t have any trouble believing in demons. And the Man in the Suit hinted that I should take this seriously.”

He starts tapping his finger on his desk rapidly.

“What do you need from me?”

“Information mostly. They didn’t cover how to kill demons in basic training.”

He nods his head for several seconds while he stares into space. I’m not sure he realizes that he he’s doing it and I get a little afraid that his head is going to roll off of his shoulders.

“Uhm, reverend?”

“What? Oh. Yes. I’ll need a little time to do some research. We covered exorcisms of course but we never covered demons with axes. Come back this evening about 6:00.”

I tip my hat at him and stomp my way back out slamming his door behind me. I told you that he loves it when I dropped by unannounced.

/j

Beignets. That’s what I need. Especially since I missed breakfast. I start walking towards Café Du Monde. I can already taste my first cup of coffee laced with chicory. Someone bumps into my shoulder hard enough to spin me around. I turn and shout at whoever it was but they don’t even turn my direction. I can see him as he walks away. He isn’t any taller than me but damn is he wide. Heavy set and built like a steam engine. I can tell that even under his long coat. A slouched hat rests on his head. I really want to chase him down and kick his ass. I even start his direction before a hand catches my arm. I jerk around to see who has grabbed me.

“Hey there sugar, what’s with all the aggression?”

I see Ashley and I realize that I’m scowling. I relax and let the tension drain out of my shoulders.

“Sorry darlin, that man back there almost knocked me down without so much as an apology. I was thinking about going to teach him some manners.”

She looks which way I’m pointing and shivers. “Don’t chase him honey. I don’t have a good feeling about that.”

I smile. “Well, you are the psychic so I’ll take your word for it. I’m headed for beignets. Interested?”

She puts her arm through mine. “Ooh, I would love too. But I can’t afford to get plump. You might not love me anymore.”

I poke her in the ribs and she giggles. “You know I like my women a little plump. More of you to love.”

We laugh but I can’t help and look back over my shoulder as we walk.

t

The bell was chiming 6:00 when I walked into the church. You can say what you want about me but I’m a very punctual person. I even made it to my death on time. The reverend met me at the door to the sanctuary. I whistled when I saw that he was wearing his full robes. He rolled his eyes at me and sighed.

“Follow me” he said.

“Where we go preacher man?”

“To my idea of hell. Confession.”

“Uhm, what?”

“What part did you not understand? You and I are going to the confessional booth.”

“Whoa there reverend, I ain’t the confessin’ type.”

“Of that I have no doubt, but if you are going to hunt a demon you’ll have to do it with a clean soul.”

I pushed my hat back to run my hands through my hair. “Exactly how much confessin’ do I need to do.”

“Just get in the damn booth already. We don’t have all night.”

“Now now, no need to be swearin in the house of the Lord. Even I wouldn’t do that.”

But I did hop in that little booth as fast as I could. If I spill all my sins then the soonest begun the soonest done. There were plenty of them after all. I have to confess, see what I did there, that my soul did feel better afterwards. Maybe not squeaky clean but it felt good to get everything out. I’m not sure the reverend felt the same way. He was white as a ghost when he came out. He looked at me and just shook his head. He motioned for me to follow him and we went back into his study. He undid his robes and unceremoniously draped them over a chair.

“Sit.”

I sat. He opened a cabinet behind his desk and pulled out a small wooden box. I reach out to take it when he hands it across the desk. Inside are six bullets. Ok.

“These should fit your service revolver Michael.”

“Not that I don’t appreciate a few more rev but I could have bought a whole carton of these without telling you my deep dark secrets.”

He rolls his eyes again. “You could have bought a thousand rounds and they would avail you nothing. These I had made just for you today. The brass casings were made from a cross I had melted down and recast. The lead bullets I personally blessed while they were being made.”

I’m not sure what to say. I’ve never shot holy bullets before. He reaches under his desk and pulls out a canvas sack and hands it across to me. Tugging the drawstring open I find a neatly folded stack of clothes. Not just any clothes though. It’s my old uniform.

“I also took the liberty of having your uniform mended and washed in holy water. I don’t know how much protection that will afford you but it cannot hurt.”

“Reverend I don’t know what to say. Thank you.”

He waves his hand like he’s shooing away my gratitude. “It’s the Lord’s work. Now, come on, there is one last thing to be done.”

Slipping his robe back on he leads me to the altar and has me kneel. He picks up a glass of wine and a wafer and gives me communion. When we have prayed, I know I don’t seem the prayin type, he pulls a small golden cross from around his neck and places it on me.

“Go with God my son.”

I nod and stand back up. I feel lighter and heavier all at the same time. I’m clean for the first time in ages but I have dark things left to do. I step out into the night and go hunting.

/j

Seven months. That’s how long I’ve been looking for this bastard. Seven months and one attack later I still haven’t found him. Poor Sarah Laumann. At least she survived the attack. Every time I think of that poor girl being bashed in the head while she slept I’m compelled to look again. I’ve spent hours, no days, roaming the city. At least my searching involves plenty of time in bars. Looking for a serial killing demon is thirsty work.

I’m leaving one bar when I notice a man by the door. Wearing a rumpled linen suit and newsie cap he’s leaned against the wall rolling a cigarette. He sports a fairly impressive mustache too. I’m a little envious. I’ve never been able to grow much facial hair.

My eyes narrow while I concentrate on his face. I’m sure I’ve seen him before. I’m also certain that he’s watching me out of the corner of his eye.

Outside I hurry to the alley between the bar and the next building. I sink back into the shadows and wait. Sure enough I hear footsteps coming my way. They slow down as they close to the alley. He’s good. He’s also definitely following me. I see him stop at the entrance to the alley and pause a moment before walking further in.

Leaping forward I grab him and try to push him against the wall when I feel myself leave the ground. The ground and I make our re-acquaintance rather suddenly. Stars explode into existence around me when my head strikes the pavement. Before I can move there is a knee pressed into my neck and I hear a click next to my temple.

“Don’t move.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it pal, but I expected an axe not a gun from you.”

The barrel of the gun pulls back from my head. As the stars fade from my sight I see a look of confusion on his face. Not what I anticipated.

“Get up” he says while stepping back. I’m slow to move until he gestures with the gun. I highly doubt a gun would kill me but I’m still not willing to test that theory; especially since he’s aiming his revolver at my head from five feet away. That just might do the trick. Who knows what would happen next. I might get sent back again for all I know.

I put my hands up as I stagger back to my feet. “Ok, ya got me. Now what are you going to do with me? Gonna bash my face in like that poor Sarah Laumann?”

He frowns at me. “Why do you think I’m the Axe Man?”

“Because I’ve been looking for him for months and you keep popping up everywhere I go, just watching. Like you’re looking for prey.”

“Funny, I was thinking the same thing about you.” He pauses for a moment and then suddenly holsters his pistol under his coat.

“Detective Thomas O’Bryan. New Orleans Police Department. Who are you and why are you chasing the Axe Man?”

“I’m Michael, but most people just call me the dead man. I’m chasing him because a man in a black suit told me to in a dream.”

He twists one end of his mustache. “You’re the dead man?”

I cock my head at him. “You’ve heard of me?”

He gives me a half smile. “Oh, I’ve heard a thing or two.”

“I take it you aren’t any closer than I am?”

He shook his head. “I’ve spent hours searching the bars. You?”

“The same. I even sent some letters to the newspaper taunting him but nothing.”

“Those letters were from you? I’m surprised you didn’t get a response from all the things you said.”

I just shook my head. I was as insulting as I know how to be, which is plenty insulting, in my letters is but I didn’t get so much as a reply.

“I take it if you are looking for him then there is something to this demon nonsense.”

Only in New Orleans do the detectives actually believe it when you tell them it’s a something supernatural.

I nod my head at him. “Believe me, there is something to it. If I had a choice I would be putting this off on someone else.”

“How did you get involved in this?”

“It’s a long story that started with me getting shot and ends with me getting judo tossed across this alley. How about we go back inside and compare notes over a beer?”

O’Bryan plopped two beers down on the table in front of us. I took a long pull of mine before wiping my mouth with the back of my hand. Not good manners I know but hey, nobody comes to a bar to practice social graces.

“So, what’s the story” I finally ask.

“Not much to tell really. I’m a detective with the NOPD. I’ve spent the last several months looking for Axeman, so far without any success.”

“Where is your backup?”

He shook his head. “No back up. My boss thinks I’m wasting my time. He took me off the case last week.”

I paused with my glass halfway to my lips. “You’re out here on your own? That’s not very safe.”

He smirks at me. “Oh, I’d say I can handle myself wouldn’t you?”

I can feel my face grow flush. “Well, nonetheless, you need backup. How about we join forces?”

“I think I’d like that arrangement.”

I spit in my palm and reach across the table. He stared at my hand for a moment before spitting in his own and clasping hands with me.

/j

“I’ve got an idea” O’Bryan said.

I threw another rock across the roof. We had spent hours sitting on this roof overlooking the bar below. Hell, we had spent weeks staking out one place or another.

“Tell me.” Any idea was better than spending another minute on this roof.

“I know a woman who is a psychic. Perhaps she could help us track this thing down.”

I nodded. Why hadn’t I thought of using a psychic or fortune teller? “I like it. What’s this woman’s name?”

“Ashley.”

I whipped my head around. “What did you say her name was?”

“Ashley, why?”

“Where did you meet her?”

He shuffled his feet. “Well, I sorta met her where she works if you know what I mean.”

I rubbed my forehead between my eyes. Well this was awkward. “I know Ashley.”

“Oh, are you a client?”

“Not exactly, she and eye have a relationship of sorts.”

His eyes went wide. “Oh, I didn’t mean to….”

I held up a hand. “Believe me; I don’t want to talk about this anymore than you do. Let’s just see if she can help.”

We climbed down from the roof and I found myself walking much faster than I normally do. The Madam who runs the brothel waved me to go to the back. That was our signal that Ashley wasn’t with a John. I don’t know her real name. All the girls just call her Madam.

“Honey, I’m home.”

Ashley was sitting on the side of the bed brushing her hair. She turned around and smile at me.

“There you are” she said to me. O’Bryan walked in behind me. Her face lit up when she saw him. “Thomas! How nice to see you.”

She jumped up and gave him a kiss on the cheek. My stomach did flips. I won’t lie. I seriously considered taking a swing at him. To his credit he looked abashed. His face turned bright red and he looked down as he mumbled his greetings. There is a reason I don’t come to the brothel while Ashley is working.

“We need some help Ash. We’re looking for someone and it has us stumped. Think you can use some of that psychic mojo to help find them?”

She set down her hairbrush and stood up. “Of course I’ll help. Go wait for me in the sitting room. I’ll be there after I’ve prepared.”

Ten minutes of awkward silence passed that was only punctuated by the two of us shifting in our seats. Finally she entered the room carrying a silver tray. Placing it on the table she began sorting the items off of it onto the table. A bronze bowl went in the center of the table. She filled it with water from a glass carafe. When the water was still she pulled the stopper of a small bottle. The scent of sandalwood filled the room. Tilting the bottle Ashley let a few drops fall into the bowl.

Setting the oil aside she closed her eyes and inhaled deeply. When she opened them she leaned over the bowl and stared at it for several minutes. I had to fight the urge to let my foot tap with impatience. Finally Ashley lifted her head. Her eyes were glassy and unfocused.

“He’s going to strike again soon. Tonight I believe. Bring me a map.”

I jumped out of my seat and ran to Madam’s room. I pounded on the door until she opened it. She was blinking sleep from her eyes and holding her nightgown closed with one hand.

“I’m sorry that I woke you. I need a map of the city.”

She looked confused but went to her closet and pulled out a rolled up map. I remembered seeing it one of the first times I came to see Ashley. Snatching it out of her hands I ran back to the sitting room to roll it out onto the table. Ashley’s head was lolling from side to side by this point.

I took her head in my hands and patted her on the cheek. “Come on baby, stay with me baby.”

She rolled her head my way. “Hey baby, there you are. Have I ever told you how much I love you? I’m even thinking about quitting this job for you.”

Excitement raced through me at her words. I had never been brave enough to ask her to do that. I had to stay focused though. “I love you too honey. Now can you show us where to go?”

“Oh sure, no problem.” She rolled her head towards the map and put her finger on the map. As soon as she did she started screaming in agony and fell to the floor thrashing. I knelt beside her and tried to calm her. It didn’t seem to help. She began clawing at her eyes and I had to grab her wrists to keep her from hurting herself. Madam and several of the girls rushed into the room.

“Help me” I yelled at them.

They helped me hold her hands and feet but nothing stopped her pain. Think Michael think. I felt a hand on my shoulder. Looking up I saw O’Bryan standing beside me.

“Did you get the address?”

He nodded at me. “We need to go.”

“I can’t just leave her like this” I snarled at him.

“We can help her” Madam told me, “as much as anyone can help the poor dear. What happened?”

“She was finding a demon for us. It looks like he found her too.”

She crossed herself. “Heaven help her.”

And there it was the help that I couldn’t think clearly enough to see. I jumped to my feet. “Get her to the Reverend. He can help. We’ve got to go stop a murderer.”

I followed him outside. He had to pull me along because I kept looking back at Ashley. I felt guilty for leaving her even if it had to be done. We raced to the spot marked on the map. Luckily it wasn’t that far. It was a nice house in the suburbs. We stopped in front. O’Bryan leaned forward on his knees as he caught his breath.

“It seems quiet enough” I said.

He nodded his head but hadn’t caught his breath enough to speak. That was when the screaming started.

I jerked my head up to see a woman stumbling out of the front door of the house. She fell to her knees in the damp grass. I ran to her.

“What happened?”

“My husband. He killed my husband” she sobbed out.

“Is he still inside?”

She shook her head no without raising it up. She pointed off to the right before she collapsed again in tears.

“Come on O’Bryan. We can’t let him get away.”

He nodded his head wearily and we took off again at a run. We ran for several blocks until up ahead I saw him. He was about my height but built heavier. He wore a long trench coat and slouch hat. And I realized that I had seen him before. I had literally bumped shoulders with this bastard and hadn’t chased him down.

“You!”

He turns around and I see him smiling at us. He gives me a jaunty little wave before walking to his right. Straight into a cemetery. I came to a dead stop at the entrance and O’Bryan slammed into me from behind.

“What’s the matter” he asks.

I just shake my head. “I have a thing about cemeteries.”

Thing doesn’t describe it well enough. I have an irrational fear of them. You can probably imagine why. I haven’t set foot in one in years and I shiver every time I walk past one. None of that lets me off the hook this time though.

“Well deal with it and lets go” O’Bryan shouts at me.

I draw my pistol and step through the iron gates. Beside me he pulls out a Bowie Knife with bible verses etched into the blade. I glance at it and he just shrugs his shoulders at me.

“What, you thought you were the only one who knew a priest?”

We keep walking deeper into the cemetery. In the center stands the largest mausoleums and on impulse I walk straight for them. We arrive to see our man, or whatever, standing in front of one waving his hands in circular passes and chanting. So I shot him in the back.

Unfortunately that just pissed him off. He spun around and charged us. I put another round into his chest which causes him to scream in pain. He keeps coming though. O’Bryan and I leap aside at the last second. A blow to my back sends me sprawling and I feel a weight on top of me.

I squirm trying to get free when the weight is suddenly gone. I rolled over to see O’Bryan wrestling with the demon. As they turn I see the knife stuck between the demons shoulder blades. Master judo ka that he may be he isn’t strong enough to take this thing on. I clamber back to my feet to get back in the fight.

The first thing I want to do is slow it down at least. So I spent two of my remaining rounds blowing out its knees. Roaring in agony it collapsed losing its hold on O’Bryan. He fell down and backpedaled away from it. Four rounds down with only two to go. I have to make them count. I rush forward and grab the knife hilt and twist. It screams again and goes down to all fours. I put the barrel of my revolver on the back of its head, cock the hammer and then it isn’t a threat anymore. One bullet left so I plug it in the head once more just to be safe.

O’Bryan is looking up at me wide eyed. I reach out a hand and help him to his feet. Dusting himself off he makes a circuit of the thing on the ground.

“What do we do now?”

I shake my head. “We take this thing to church and let the reverend figure out what to do with it.”

He nods. “I’ll find a wheelbarrow. You watch it just to make sure.”

A minute later he comes back with a wheelbarrow and a tarp. We loaded the body up and covered it before making our way to the church. The reverend met us at the door.

“Why did you bring that abomination here” he demanded.

“Because I didn’t know what else to do with it.”

He sighed at me. “Very well, get it inside off the street before someone sees.”

We rolled the body through the entrance and there was a sound like cloth ripping. Sparks began to fly. I threw an arm up to shield my face. Lights flashed blindingly. When they stopped the body was gone.

“Someone really didn’t want that thing in here” O’Bryan commented.

“Tell me about it” I said. “Most days I’m surprised that I’m allowed in.”

I turned back to the reverend. “How is Ashley?”

He pursed his lips at me. “The girl is fine. I’ve prayed over her all night and anointed her head with oil.”

I’m not sure what he hates about her more, her profession or her abilities. It doesn’t matter much to me as long as she is alive. I follow him to the room where she is laid out. As I enter the room she opens her eyes and smiles at me. I sat on the edge of her bed and brush the hair out of her eyes.

“How are you doing beautiful?”

“Oh, you know, been better. Did you get him?”

“We got him. You did great.”

“How’s Thomas?”

Now it’s my turns to purse my lips. I shouldn’t. I’ve known all along what she did. Besides, Thomas did save my life. I can’t help but be a little jealous.

“He’s good. He’s outside with the reverend.”

“That’s good. So, about what I said earlier.”

I perked up at her words.

“I meant it. I’m done. I told madam when I first woke up. I wanna be all yours. How does that sound?”

“Darlin, that’s the best news I’ve heard all day.”

I hug her and I have to resist the urge to squeeze too hard. Maybe things are shaping up after all. I mean, what can stop a psychic and a dead man?