The Eternal Curse

By : JanaNa

"I have seen six centuries and ninety odd years; I have roamed through nearly ten lifetimes, watched kingdoms, countries, leaders, even worlds, rise and fall. Through all of this I have not perished and perhaps never will. In this way I am eternally cursed." This is the story of an immortal struggle that transcends time and place and reflects a universal dilemma inherent in all mankind and manifested in the mysterious and dangerous supernatural counterparts lurking within their race. Follow one of these sinister transformations of a mere innocent mortal man into a timeless and charming, but agonized, being capable of terrible destruction. He will traverse the troubling dark ages in Elizabethan England in which the black plague ravages with no mercy; he will settle in the hot, lush island of Sicily for close to a century, preying secretly off the boats traveling through the Strait of Messina; he will escape from his own and stumble through early eighteenth century Europe only to land on a festering, dangerous ship bound over the Atlantic for North America; there he faces new lands, new humans, new enemies,old enemies, and steadfast allies; he will weather centuries of monumental and remarkable mortal events from all over the globe while battling with terribly dangerous demons both outside and inside himself on an eternal journey through the soul.

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The Eternal Curse : Chapter 1

I have seen six centuries and ninety odd years; I have roamed through nearly ten lifetimes, watched kingdoms, countries, leaders, even worlds, rise and fall. Through all of this I have not perished and perhaps never will. My body, forever young, has been frozen in the vast course of time, but my mind has not; the knowledge I have accumulated over the many years would eclipse even the smartest human. I possess more strength than the strongest man, more beauty than the most beautiful woman. I prey on the humans and live forever from their lives; their thoughts are my thoughts, their flesh is my flesh, and their blood is my blood. I am the protagonist and the antagonist, the most tangible and the most abstract. Juxtaposed like devil and angel, I am. I am the supernatural, the unremarkable. I am eternal.

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AN END TO A BEGINNING, AND A BEGINNING TO AN END

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However, I had a beginning, like all creatures, mortal or immortal, do. It was not, as some enthusiasts are inclined to believe, in the majestic, aesthetic city of Paris, nor in any lovely province of that country. Nor was it in New Orleans, or other such part of the sultry, passionate South. In fact, the New World, as it was earliest called, was very new in my mortal life. My beginning started in Elizabethan England. I was born in 1543, into a well bred, aristocratic family; I grew up in the royal court of Elizabeth I and eventually became a young courtier myself. As a child and adolescent I was remarkably quiet and deceivingly observant; I was intelligent and quick-witted, excelling at everything I did: Literature, history, art, music, sport, mathematics, and philosophy. I had been surrounded by a remarkable era, the era of Shakespeare, of the Renaissance and its intellectual pursuits, as well as political and social upheavals; it was the era of art and of science. I was engrossed in the works of the brilliant Leonardo da Vinci, and the sculptor, Michelangelo, and Peter Martyr d'Anghiera's work *De orbe novo*, which described the mysterious and newfangled Americas.ï¿½

Nonetheless, just as this century seemed monumental and unchallenged, so was its destitute and pauperized underbelly. The nobility and the royalty was simply a faï¿½ade, and behind it was a heinous, repulsive swell of death and decay: The poverty-stricken cities swarmed with emaciated creatures, the streets flooded with garbage and human wastes; vermin overran the houses and alleyways, unperturbed. The people were lawless and unprincipled in their innate need to survive; vagrancy and death reigned supreme. The pestilence, or bubonic plague, would reoccur sporadically through the decades, claiming thousands each time. But for the most part, as I recall, the nobility remained largely untouched by all this: There were luxurious banquets and splendid costumes with the Royal Court, and extravagant entertainment. For a young man, such as myself, these lush and exuberant years were the best of his life; unhindered and unbridled with youth and the indestructibility of prime manhood; the gentlemen of my social class and myself seemed to be the center of this burgeoning era. It was all ours for the taking, it seemed. Unfortunately, I would soon find that this was not quite was so.

In 1563, London experienced one of the worst outbreaks of the plague; its death-grip had even shattered the beautiful royal courts and its dark tendrils had seeped into the most grand of England: Queen Elizabeth began to take measures to protect herself and her court from the inexorable pestilence. The Queen moved her court to Windsor Castle and erected gallows on which anyone coming from London was to be hanged. My family was quick to establish themselves amongst the patricians of Windsor Castle; they insisted on leaving immediately with the rest. However, the real danger of the plague had not yet laid hold of us, and, being the youngest male in my family, I placed upon myself the duty of keeping up our estate back in London. My two older brothers, who were, without a doubt, relieved the duty had not been placed upon them, were eager to

leave in haste. My elderly mother and doltish father merely thought it noble of me to stay behind; little did they know that after their departure they would never see me again.

Our estate was a lavish one, and whereas some other nobleman would have prided lengthy grounds over grandeur, my father had one of the most lavish manors in London. My father was not a hunter, not even for sport, and that in itself was enough to affirm the vast extent of my family's wealth. Nonetheless, all that wealth was not enough to save my family or myself: The plague had run rampant and so had the proletarians. By the time Queen Elisabeth and her court had occupied Windsor Castle a month, nearly three-fourths of the servants in my household had succumbed to the plague and I frequently received news of riotous commoners overthrowing and destroying noble estates and ransacking the wealthy; this news became more and more alarming with each week that passed by, until, finally, the monstrous ordeal reached its peak...

There were two maids and three manservants alive, not including the deceased butler's only son, my own loyal valet and friend, Simon Prewitt. Keeping up the estate was not a priority now; I had silently acknowledged the inevitable: Five horses had already been stolen and the mansion unsuccessfully broken into, but nonetheless vandalized. It was a question of what to do and where to go now. I made it clear to the servants who remained that they were free to go, that I myself would have to leave to escape certain death. Seeing as some did not have places to retreat to they lingered, but with each passing day at least one would be missing, gone of their own volition or as another victim to the plague.ï¿½ Simon adamantly insisted that he would remain with me, and I much appreciated his loyalty. We planned to hold out as long as we possibly could before the proletariats ran us out, or worse.

I remember the last two days in my childhood home: Quiet, drear, and utterly empty. The mansion had become a solemn and foreboding dwelling; the gold-inlaid ornamentation, satin fabrics, ivory and marble trinkets, and elaborate furnishings sat in desolate silence, dust collecting on their surfaces; they lay in wait for grimy, blind hands to plunder them. I couldn't stand to be in the house while it was in such a state, but Simon insisted that as long as the plebeians held off we were safest in the estate. On the third day, while the world was lying in the darkness of night, I woke to an unintelligible roar of commotion outside the manor. In an instant I knew the time had come to make some decision, that perhaps the time to make it had already slipped by me. In my nightclothes I rushed out onto the balustrade and found below me the dirty masses swelling against the barred front doors. The manor groaned and creaked with the pressure of their efforts. In a hurry, I dashed into the hall to find Simon who was waiting for me at the top of the spiraling staircase, a flickering lamp held up to his face. I perceived the pale horror upon his countenance and knew there was no time left.

"Some of them have already come into the house through the servant's quarters," He whispered hurriedly as I came closer.ï¿½ I grabbed the lamp from him and quickly snuffed out the light. We stood for a long moment in the twilight; I could hear the mob yelling obscenities from downstairs, their howling muffled by the giant heavy oak doors. I could also catch the distinct exclamations of triumph from somewhere deep in the house. I grabbed Simon's arm and began to move in haste,

"Take heart, Simon, and hope that they do not want bloodshed. Let them take whatever else." I murmured as we hastened down the stairs to the main floor. I was planning to find some means of escape in the opposite direction of the men already in the house, but as we moved to pass the front entrance the monstrous doors finally gave way and a sea of angry creatures crashed in. I seized Simon and we quickly turned and ran. As far as I knew, no one had yet seen us, but we were coming upon the other men already in the house. Simon and I exchanged no words as we pressed further into the darkness until we caught the flicker of fire in the rooms ahead and joyous, almost maniacal laughter.

"If we pass by, maybe they will pay no attention to us," Simon's words were hardly audible, and though I could hear them I made no answer.

We had to pass through the kitchen to escape successfully, but a group of three men had already staked claim and were gluttonously exploiting whatever delicacies were left there. I saw my mother's favorite silver knives and forks gripped in their filthy hands and the satin embroidered napkins smeared with grease. I was disgusted and angered by their indecency, but the fact that there was a whole multitude of them quieted my ire. From our hidden position I could clearly see our escape across from us; Simon looked at me inquiringly, the fear in his dark eyes clear even in the half-light.

"We will run," I decided. It was all we could do. I was about to indicate to Simon when we would make our getaway, but my plans were foiled when I was suddenly struck in the head from behind. All I remember next was hearing alarmed voices and Simon's yelling as I collapsed to the floor. I vaguely remember seeing two men enter from the entrance in which we had been hiding. I was grasped firmly and abruptly hauled to my feet; I was coherent enough to see that Simon and I had gotten ourselves into quite a fix. However the whole predicament did not last long; the men were uncoordinated and wholly unprepared for our arrival. In a fury I lashed out at the man closest to me, seized him by the throat and smashed his head into the countertop. The others stared in horror as the man fell to the floor and then two of them fled; I myself stood in utter shock at what I had done. Blood began to seep out onto the ground from the still body. The attacker who held Simon seemed to have more of a head on him and quickly pulled a knife on my companion. I had put us right back into a dire situation; one I had been hoping to avoid. There was no time to think about a solution, so I made the mistake of charging the man. I successfully overwhelmed him, but not before he could plunge the knife into Simon's side. As Simon let out a scream and doubled over I took the chance to get a clear aim at our assailant. I struck the man in the face with all the force I could muster and he fell back and tripped into the fireplace.

I had enough sense to take this opportunity to get Simon and escape the place while we still could. Simon was bleeding profusely and he could hardly stifle the screams of pain as I maneuvered the both of us into the dark sanctuary of the night outside. I set Simon down in the camouflage of thick lilac bushes and, with the cover of semidarkness, I ran to the stables to see if any horses had been spared from the pillaging. I found one mare and a foal left; the mare was old, but sturdy. Without saddle or rein I mounted the horse and rode swiftly back to Simon. He could hardly stand now and his face had paled unnaturally; he gripped his side and looked up at me with eyes that were losing their focus. At my friend's worsening condition, fear and panic flared in me; I refused to accept that death might be near. However, what certainly was near was a group of violent drunks; they had either seen me or heard the horse. I jumped off the mare and roughly grabbed Simon up in my arms just as the approaching men realized who we were; a few began to yell and run. I managed to get the both of us on the horse, but not quite in time enough to escape a laceration to my arm by one of the attackers; the horse whinnied in alarm and bolted away... finally ensuring our escape...

Chapter 2: The Lockwoods

The monstrous trees of the Lockwoods were ebony silhouettes against the gloaming. Looming up like sable giants, the forest was wholly unwelcoming; a premonition set in me that I could not shake, but we pushed on anyway, only stopping once so I could reposition Simon to be more comfortable. We had been traveling deeper into the forest for over half an hour at a steady pace when the age of the mare suddenly caught up to her; her stride waned until we were going no faster than a crawl. I took the time now to assess Simon's wound; he sat against me feebly, his breath was labored but nonetheless audible. I kept an arm around him to steady the effects of the mare's slightly jarring gait and could feel the rise and fall of his breath slowly dwindle. I shook him gently and he groaned, his ability to express the extent of his anguish was being numbed by eminent death,

"Don't fall asleep," I ordered; the fear of losing my boyhood friend made my words rough. Even with the sway of the mare I could feel his head nod against my chest,

"Help meâ¦" He breathed, the pain of speaking was discernible in his voice but to hear him speak at all was music to my ears. I thought frantically about what to tell him, what could I say to him that would help his pain? I thought miserably that my words would perhaps be the last ones he would hear; do I articulate my distress over the death he was most certainly facing? Did he even know he was succumbing to its dark embrace? I was unaware that I had been silently grieving before Simon, with effort, placed his bloodied hand on mine and whispered brokenly,

"Don't weep, Alastair." He took in a sharp and painful breath, his body tensing noticeably and then relaxing; he moaned and stifled his own sob. I held his hand desperately,

"I'm sorryâ¦" I murmured, "I'm sorry." He shook his head again,

"Tell meâ¦a story." He cringed with the endeavor, and from his voice I could detect the faint gurgle of blood deep in his throat. I swallowed my sobs and tried to compose myselfâ¦

"Do you remember" I choked, "when this horse was still young? When we were children?" He did not answer, but I knew he remembered. "She was beautifulâ¦We loved horses, especially the stallions my father bought from Spain." I stroked Simon's hair and humorlessly chuckled, "Do you remember when my brother was almost trampled to death? I said at the time he deserved itâ¦" Now that death was so close, that wish on my brother made me sick. "Do you remember how we ran as children through the mansion yelling and screaming until my mother and father and all the rest of the household could not bear us anymore? Do you remember the summers out in the gardens? We were so youngâ¦" Suddenly, as I looked out around the dim forest that had unexpectedly become familiar to me, I recalled another memory, one that had eluded me since it occurred so many years ago. "Do you remember we got lost once?" I said peculiarly. Simon made no sign of acknowledgment. I spoke as I gradually remembered the details of that dayâ¦

"â¦It had been my brothers and I, and they wanted to go into this forestâ¦" The Lockwoods were not far from our lands; from my bedroom window I could see the tops of the gnarled bare trees towering in the distance. It was a summer afternoon when my brothers and I had decided to venture out into the Lockwoods; Simon had been there as well, but he stayed at the entrance, clearly frightened by the sight of the daunting forest, although he would never admit it. I was significantly younger than my brothers, who found it amusing to play tricks on me. When we had mistakenly lost our way while exploring deep in the forest they thought it would be entertaining to leave me. Upon realizing they were gone, I panicked. I remember the feeling of utter desolation and fear I experienced then. Angry tears sprouted as I went yelling for them; I fumbled over logs and streams, unsuccessfully navigating the woods that were now growing dark.

I was about to give up when I stumbled into a garden. Or, more precisely, what had once been a garden. The clearing was reminiscent of what had once been a magnificent estate; beneath the tangles of brier bushes and grasses, wilted ancient rose bushes, pale sprouts of lavender, and bouts of honeysuckle peeked at me. I cut myself on the thorns of blackberry bushes while trying to get out onto a broken path; following the path I came upon the core of this sprawling dismal and well forgotten property: A manor much larger than even my own squatted silently before me; it's architecture was redolent of an era far before my own; with it's towers, arches and small buttresses, it was more of a castle than anything else. It was clear that it had been sitting there for centuries, and though it should have been dilapidated and ravaged by time, it was in a peculiarly well-preserved condition although no indication of ongoing maintenance was visible.

Naturally, my boyish curiosity was peaked by this anomaly, but something about the place was dark and the aura tangibly oppressive; the strange feeling in my gut stopped me from exploring the vast and prodigious fortress. On the other side of the manor I located the road to my freedom: A monstrous black iron gate, intricately designed sat in my way, however I was small enough to find somewhere to squeeze through. On the other side of the gate I turned to gaze back at the strange visage of this lost sanctuary, and in one of the windows in the east wing I spotted, to my horror, a face peering back at me. I bolted from the gate and ran blindly all the way down the decrepit lane; I remember vaguely finding my way back out of the forest, but it had not been by the road, I had fled off into the thinning woods and never found the end of that mysterious trail. I had chalked up the face in the window to being the product of a boy's imagination, and now, as I sat upon my horse with the body of my dying friend in my arms, I became determined to find that abode and take refuge there.

Miraculously, however, that inexplicable estate seemed to find us. As if by some sort of twisted fate, the mare stopped complacently before the open gates of a glittering and very much alive castle. I stared in bewilderment as the memory of a decaying old demesne was replaced by the magnificent and luxurious sight I suddenly beheld; the fortress was awash with light and music: the vibrant and passionate sound of an orchestra and the laughter of men and women pervaded the air I had once remembered as being so still. The gardens were no longer in ruin; they blossomed, even in the dead of night, in rich and exotic colors and types. This haven seemed completely untouched by the outside worldâ¦protected and embraced by it's own transformed opulence. I directed the mare through the gates and down the lane until the face of that ancient sumptuous fortress stood over us; I felt Simon stiffen against me and knew that he was seeing it too,

"Iâ¦" Simon's voice was laced with some emotion I could not comprehend, "Iâ¦don't like it." He whispered strangely just as the grandly ornate entrance swung open and from the lavish and palatial soirÃ©e inside a man came out onto the wide marble steps and outstretched a hand in greeting, a knowing smile gracing his lips,

"Welcome, Alastair Clayne." He said, "We have been waiting for you,"

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