

## Chapter 8 – A Sighting

The next morning, Eldritch was rolling a small bottle up and down a tiny ramp, when Meeker came thudding up to him. The large man started to speak, but paused, looking at Eldritch's tableau.

"What is that?" Meeker said. Eldritch pointed at the bottle.

"Imagine this is a barrel," he said. "When it rolls up the ramp, there's nothing to stop it from rolling back. I was thinking that a flat piece of wood could be hung inside the ramp with a counterweight. When the barrel rolls over it, the wood lies flat. Once it's past, the counterweight pulls it up, and it stops the barrel from rolling back, like a block of wood under a cart's wheel." The large man looked at the model and shook his head.

"It would have to be metal," he said. "Wood would be too thick, and make too big a hole in the ramp." Eldritch nodded.

"So you don't mind if I try making one?" he asked. Meeker shrugged.

"On your own time," he said. "Right now, I have a job for you."

"Don't worry," Eldritch said. "I've shoveled everything clear."

"Not that," Meeker said. "My daughter insists on bringing me food each day, and there are tales of ruffians about. I can't spare the other men, they're doing real work, so along with shoveling, you will also make sure she gets from home to here and back again."

"Very wise," Eldritch said. Meeker leaned a little closer.

"Be sure that *no* harm comes to her," he said. "I would be very angry."

"Understood," Eldritch said, looking worried to comfort the concerned father. "I'll be sure that everyone treats her as a gentleman should."

"Good," Meeker said. "Now get moving! I'm hungry."

"Could you tell me a story from your adventures?" Camille asked, just as they were leaving her house. Eldritch smiled.

"Very few are safe to share," he said. "But I know a story that I believe you'd like."

"Once upon a time," he began. "There were two good cats. Their names were Kiku and Kato. Kiku and Kato lived in their house with their people, and they were all very happy."

‘One day, when Kiku and Kato’s people had gone somewhere to do something unimportant (because it didn’t involve any cats), the two good cats had a right good post-breakfast bath, and were settling in for just a bit of a nap. Suddenly they heard someone clawing at the door. Well, they opened it, and there were Fluffy and Bangles, their cat friends!

‘Kiku wasn’t sure about letting them come in, because she knew how Fluffy and Bangles could be, but Kato was a polite cat, and invited them inside. Fluffy and Bangles wasted no time in coming in, and making themselves at home! Fluffy went and sniffed around the food dishes for any scraps of kibble that might be left, and Bangles pounced on Kiku’s little ball, and promptly batted it under the couch. Fluffy found nothing of interest, so they all gathered around where Bangles was staring under the couch.

‘What should we do now?’ they wondered, when Fluffy got the idea to make fudge! Now, both Kiku and Kato didn’t think that was a good idea, but when Fluffy and Bangles get an idea in their heads, it can hardly be dislodged with a crowbar and a gallon of spackle. Kiku gave them a look, and Kato ran back and forth, and said “Ank!”, but to no avail. Fluffy and Bangles trotted off to the kitchen. Soon after came a terrible racket; clattering spoons, banging pots and pans, and a strange ringing that nobody was quite sure what it was. This went on for a surprisingly long time. Little Kato Marie Sweet Potato was so nervous, she ran and hid under the bed, where one could only see her the tip of her little nose peeking out, and the tip of her tail would swoosh by now and then. Kiku stalked off to sit and look out the window, pointedly ignoring the noise.

‘After a while, the noise stopped. Fluffy and Bangles came out of the kitchen, and they were a sight! They had cocoa powder on their whiskers, and some smears on their fur, and they were tracking something into the carpet. But they proudly showed that they had indeed made fudge! The gave some to Kiku and Kato, who both noticed that Fluffy and Bangles only gave them very small pieces, but they knew fudge really wasn’t good for cats, and they were polite, so they didn’t say anything. Well, now that the fudge was made, Fluffy and Bangles quickly said goodbye, and left.

‘It didn’t take long for Kiku and Kato to figure out why! They looked in the kitchen, and it was a horrible mess! It seemed that Fluffy and Bangles used every possible pot, bowl, dish, and utensil that they could. What they didn’t use, they scattered about on the counters, and sometimes the floors. All the cupboard doors were open, and what’s worse, they didn’t bother to put anything away. To top it all off, it seemed that only half of the fudge they made ended up in the pan, for there were dark drips, splots, splashes, and puddles ALL OVER! It was terrible!

‘Well, Kiku looked at Kato, and Kato looked at Kiku, and they both knew what had to be done. Together they set to it, and cleaned. They cleaned the pots and pans. They wiped up the puddles and splots. They put away all the food that the other cats had taken out of the cupboards, and closed everything up. They washed all the dishes, and only argued a little over who should wash and who should rinse. It took them hours, but they finally got everything spotlessly clean.

‘After that, they were plumb tuckered. They settled into their favorite spots; Kiku by the window, and Kato hunkered on the back of the couch, and took a well, deserved nap. When their people came home, they exclaimed at how good and cute their cats were, but Kiku and Kato paid

no attention, because they were tired cats, you see. So Kiku and Kato's people never knew about how the Bad Cats Fluffy and Bangles made fudge, and how the Good Kitties, Kiku and Kato cleaned up after. And they all lived happily ever after."

Camille hugged him when he finished the tale.

"That was wonderful!" she said. "I liked the part about me!"

Eldritch smiled. "Of course you did."

Not surprisingly, Eldritch looked forward to their daily walks. Camille was not like other women he had known; she had a quick mind and unrelenting fascination with details of his life prior to his arrival in the city. Eldritch demurred repeatedly, but her dogged persistence wormed some details from him.

"I did not say that there were *no* creatures of the night in the city," he was saying. "Rather that one who has lived in the city all her life would not have seen them."

"Could you show me some, then?" Camille asked. Eldritch shook his head.

"Such things are not suitable," he said. "You have a good life with your father and mother. I would not see you brought into things of darkness. That is a life I've left."

"But it is so exciting!" Camille said, turning her imploring face to him. "I spend my days preparing to be a wife, visiting the ladies in the neighborhood, listening to them chatter about their husbands and children, and I only am allowed to go anywhere interesting when I come to see Father mid-day. I would like to see more than the places I've been every day of my life." Eldritch sighed, but still shook his head.

"Even if I would," he said. "Your father would never allow it. If I were to put you in danger... So, tell me again of your hat. Have you worn it to church of late?"

In the early morning hours, even before dawn, the night-time silence of the docks is broken by the first few citizens making their way through the streets to begin the day of work. Meeker was one who regularly first walked the streets to the warehouse, so it was him who was surprised one morning when he unlocked the warehouse doors, only to find Eldritch already there, lying under the wooden ramp.

"How did you get in?" Meeker rumbled, more curious than angry.

"It is a talent of mine," Eldritch said, waving off the question with one hand. "You said to work on my invention on my own time. See! I've done it." He showed the other man two blades of metal that rose from the ramp. With a prance to his step like an excited puppy, he rolled an empty barrel up the ramp. As the container passed over the metal fins, they receded into the surface, allowing the barrel to roll smoothly over. Once passed, they tipped back into place from the counterweights concealed beneath. Eldritch rolled the barrel a few feet farther up the ramp.

“Now watch,” he said. “Imagine the rope has broken.” He released the barrel and it rolled down the ramp, until it struck the metal blades, and stopped.

“Not bad,” Meeker said. “What if the barrel’s full? Are they strong enough?”

“I haven’t tested it yet,” Eldritch shrugged. “But I thought I could put another pair higher up, so the barrel can’t ever roll very far. It won’t get moving fast enough to roll over the stops.” Meeker nodded.

“Good,” he said. “On your own time.”

“Of course,” Eldritch grinned. “Oh yes, the best part!” He pushed the metal blades down flush with the top of the ramp. “These pins hold it in place, so no one will trip over them. Now I’m done. I’ll get to shoveling.”

“No,” Meeker said. “Ride with Migs today. He’ll show you what to do.” Eldritch nodded, trying not to let Meeker see how happy he was. Troyer would be very pleased.

Despite Eldritch’s attempts to dissuade Camille’s interest in the supernatural, she persisted in her request to witness something otherworldly. As is often the case, his misgivings were overwhelmed eventually by her interest, her earnest face as she begged him to show her something outside her familiar world, and her beautiful green eyes. These unrelenting assailants finally broke down the walls of resistance, and soon after, Eldritch stood beneath the one lighted window of the Meeker home long past the hour when respectable folk had gone to sleep.

He pursed his lips, and gave a quick, chirping whistle of a bird call. He waited. Silence. He whistled the trill again, louder. The only response was the rasping sound of a snoring neighbor from one of the nearby houses. Casting about on the ground, he picked up a few pebbles, and flung one at the window. It rattled off the glass. A short moment later, the curtain whipped aside, and Camille’s face appeared in its place. Eldritch held out his hands, palms up, in an obvious question. She flipped the curtain back into place, and the light in the room faded. Soon after, the door clicked and she stepped outside, carefully closing the door behind her. Eldritch put a hand to her elbow and they moved up the street, so the only indication of their departure was the soft click-click of Camille’s feet upon the cobblestones. When they were around the corner, she stopped and turned to him.

“What were you thinking?” she hissed. “If you had broken the window... My father...” Eldritch shrugged.

“I gave the signal, why didn’t you come to the window then?” he asked.

“You did?” she said. “I didn’t hear. You said you’d call.”

“I said I’d whistle the call of a Night Wren.”

“Oh,” she said. “Sorry. I guess I don’t know what a Night Wren sounds like. So that bird chirping was you?”

“No matter,” Eldritch said. “We’ve made your escape. Are you sure you wish to do this?” Camille nodded, with only slight hesitation. Eldritch considered pointing out how ideas that seemed wise in the daylight often lost their conviction after dark, but decided to say nothing. Camille would realize this on her own.

“Here, put these on,” he said, handing her a pair of soft-soled boots. Camille took them, looking at them suspiciously.

I trust that you have good reason to ask this,” she said. “But I cannot help asking why.”

“Reason enough,” he said. “We must travel a distance, and quietly. I’m sure your footwear serves well on most days, but it does not allow you to move quietly in the dark.” Changing her shoes took only a few moments, and they were quickly on their way. Together they walked through the darkened streets, moving through the pools of light around each streetlight to the next. After a time they left the comfort of the lit streets, and moved into the smaller, narrower, and unlit streets. Camille paced Eldritch gamely, but when the sound of a rat scurrying away at their approach came from a looming dark building nearby, she slipped her hand around his arm. He looked at her, and his expression asked an unspoken question. She nodded, resolutely, and they continued. Eldritch was pleased that she left her hand on his arm. All too soon they found themselves at the doors of a large church. They climbed the steps to the double doors under cover of the narthex and tried the handle. It was locked.

“How shall we get in?” Camille whispered.

“A fine question,” Eldritch murmured back. “Will you be all right if I leave you here, for just a moment?”

“Couldn’t I come with you?” Camille asked, with the slightest quiver to her voice nearly concealed.

“You’d just have to come back around to the front,” Eldritch said. “I need to climb a bit, and I think it best I do that alone. You’re hardly dressed for it.”

“No, I suppose not,” Camille admitted. “Very well.” The words ‘please hurry’ were plainly visible on her face, but Eldritch noted with admiration that she did not speak them. He patted her hand, which she correctly interpreted to be the signal for her to release his arm, and he slipped away into the shadows around the side of the church. Camille waited for what seemed like more than enough time, although she would have acknowledged that she didn’t know what Eldritch had to do to gain entry. She felt she should do something, but had no idea what she could, or should do, besides wait. She leaned in the shadows in the architecture beside the doorway, hoping that she was not visible to anyone or anything that may be observing the church’s façade. She was trying not to think about this when the door clicked, and she jumped, then quickly

pretended that she hadn't. The door swung open, and Eldritch leaned out, and she was pleased to see that he looked about with some anxiety.

"Camille?" he whispered loudly into the dark.

"I'm here," she said, in what she hoped was the nonchalant manner of one who frequently broke into churches in the dead of night. "You're back already? It seems you were hardly gone." Eldritch pushed the door farther open.

"Well, come in then, unless you'd like to wait here while I track down our quarry?"

"That's all right," Camille said. "I'll come with you. I believe I've seen everything of interest out here already."

Together they entered the nave, and Camille gazed about with interest.

"I've never been in a church so late at night," she said. "Won't the priest hear us?"

"Holy men sleep too," Eldritch said. "If we're quiet, nobody will know we're here." He led her to a small, narrow stair and they carefully stepped their way upward, pausing when the stairs squeaked. They made their way to the upper clerestory, where long rows of seats ran the length of the windowed space, overlooking the nave and altar. The darkness of the lower story was mitigated by the large windows, and in comparison the long gallery seemed far less gloomy.

"Here we should wait," Eldritch said. "I did not think to bring anything to make the wooden seat more comfortable. Sorry."

"Think nothing of it," Camille said. "I've spent many hours in a pew, I'm sure I will manage." They sat at the end of the seats, nearest to the stair. They sat for a moment, listening to the large quiet of the empty church spread out beneath them. Then Camille leaned close to Eldritch.

"When will he come?" she whispered, and he could feel the warmth of her breath upon his cheek.

"I know not," he whispered back. "He does not walk every night, and when he does, it is on his own schedule. He cannot be compelled." Camille thought about this for a few minutes, then leaned in again.

"How is it you know this?" Camille asked. "The way into a locked church? His habits?" Eldritch grinned in the dark.

"I get by on little sleep," he whispered. "And one must have something to do when not at work." Again, they sat in silence for several minutes before Camille leaned over to Eldritch.

"So we may not see him at all?"

‘No.’

If you’ve merely brought me here so that you could ravish me in secret, you will regret it,” Camille said. “But you may hold my hand, if you like.” Eldritch took her hand, and felt its slight tremble. She gripped his hand, firmly.

‘How long will we wait...?’ she started to say, when Eldritch raised his hand, still holding hers, to her lips. He pointed down the aisle of the clerestory, to the end near the transept. She looked, and saw a pale glow about the wall. As she watched, the glow bulged, and a shimmering form of a man emerged from the wall.

Camille gasped, and was on her feet without even realizing it. She pressed her hand to her mouth, still gripping his hand, and stepped back, effectively pinning Eldritch against the wall with her back to his chest and his arm wrapped around her. He put his other arm around her in a comforting hug as she stared at the apparition slowly approaching them.

‘Shhhh,’ he breathed in her ear. ‘He won’t harm us. You’re safe.’ She pulled his arms tighter around her and he could feel her shaking, but she held her ground. Together they watched the ghostly figure step slowly down the aisle. He held aloft a lamp, which gave no more light to their eyes than the rest of his spectral form, but his eyes followed where it would have illuminated had it been an earthly light. As he approached, Camille could see that he was an old man, with wild hair and a long, untamed beard. He wore a monk’s robe and sandals. Her breathing quickened as he neared within a dozen feet, but she did not cry out. Her eyes watched the ghostly form as he came closer still. She clung to Eldritch as the ghost stepped right in front of them, and she could see his eyes pass right over where she stood. For a moment she gazed into his eyes like a rabbit frozen by the unblinking stare of a serpent, but the ghost looked past her, and continued his search for an unknown object down the aisle. When he came to the wall he did not pause, but continued his slow pace directly into the wall. His shimmering glow ringed the stones for a brief moment, then faded, and no trace of him was left to be seen.

Camille stood for a moment, and Eldritch began to wonder if she had lost her senses to the mortal world, when she whirled to face him.

‘Did you see that?’ she squeaked, bouncing up and down. ‘He was *right there!* He looked right at me! I could have touched him! Do you think he saw us? That was the most... the most... *wondrous* thing I have ever seen!’ Eldritch did his best not to laugh at her earnest excitement.

‘Yes, I saw,’ he said. ‘Please lower your voice! Or we will see a living priest who will indeed see us, and be none to happy we are in his church.’

‘Right. Sorry,’ Camille said, lowering her voice, but still bouncing on her toes. ‘I saw a ghost! It was real!’ She beamed up at Eldritch, who was suddenly very aware that he held a very real, very attractive young woman tightly in his arms. Reluctantly, he released his grip, but was unable to step backward, as he was still pressed against the wall.

“Camille,” he said. “I should return you to your house. It would not do for your parents to know that you are gone.”

“You are right,” she said. “I wish I could tell them what I have seen!” She giggled at the panicked look that crossed Eldritch’s face. “Don’t worry, I would never do so. I wish there was *someone* I could tell. I’ll be forced to tell you about it, as if you weren’t here with me. I hope you don’t mind.”

“If it will keep you from telling your parents, you may tell me the story each and every day,” he said. “Come, let us go now. We have a walk to get you home.”

All the way back, Eldritch had to make repeated pleas for Camille to lower her voice. Her excitement and giggles of pleasure kept bubbling up until her voice nearly echoed in the silent streets. Eldritch was regretting that he had ever agreed to this venture, when they finally arrived back at the Meeker’s residence. Camille unlocked the door, but turned to him before she entered.

“I don’t know how I will ever sleep tonight,” she said. “Not that I’m scared. I was at first, but I knew you would keep me safe. I know it must seem tame to you, but I have never seen the like, and I have you to thank for it. Thank you for taking me to see my first ghost, and for keeping me safe, and for letting me go on about it. I will never forget it.” With that, she leaned in against his chest, raised her lips to his and kissed him. A trifle surprised, Eldritch was not one to resist, and he gently folded his arms around her as they held the embrace. When their lips parted, she smiled, and laid a gentle hand upon his cheek.

“Good night, Eldritch,” she said.

“Good night, Camille,” he said. He would say more, but she turned and quickly slipped into the door and was gone. With the warm memory of her lips upon his, he turned his feet toward his own residence. He too, would not sleep much that night.