

VIII.

The Charm

Over the course of the week, and with Salvador's help, I managed to make a full recovery after the museum trip. The oil painting of Viscount Radoslav wouldn't leave my head, and when Salvador wasn't around, I tried to research the enigmatic figure to see if Salvador really was descended from him. There wasn't much information. I gathered that he was Romanian, and was alive in the early 1700's. His body was buried in his estate, which was now in disrepair somewhere in Romania itself. Radoslav was his first name, and his last name had been lost to time.

I played with the little coin that Salvador had bought me, fiddling with it between my fingers. It was odd to think of him as being superstitious, especially since I wasn't, but it wasn't anything to argue about. Weather it worked or not, I appreciated it for the gesture it represented. He wanted me to be okay. It was probably just pure coincidence, but I hadn't had a nightmare since he got me the coin a week ago, and my strength had more-or-less returned.

Before bed that night, I placed the little coin on my nightstand. It twinkled in the light as I slid myself between the sheets. I reached over and shut off the light on my nightstand, and then closed my eyes and drifted off to sleep.

The nightmare returned that night. Darkness swallowed my room until nothing was left but a featureless void in which prowled a beastly shadow, hungry for me. I could see its eyes, always those same pale blue eyes, glowing. As it lunged for the bed I felt my body react without my input. I sat up straight, and reached out to the side, grasping something in my hand.

I woke with a sharp inhale. The little coin was clutched tight in my hand. I must have grabbed it as I woke, and wondered if it had indeed ended the nightmare before it reached its usual, painful conclusion. I wasn't superstitious, but I fell back asleep with the coin still held in my hand.

The next morning, Salvador and I had an interesting conversation over lunch.

"Hey, uh, Basil?" he ventured. "Did... Did you have that nightmare again last night?"

"Yeah, how did you know?" I asked, giving him a puzzled look.

"I didn't," he began. "I had it myself. But uh... as the shadow was prowling on the floor, my dream-self reached under my pillow and grabbed the coin, and when I woke up, I found I had somehow fished the coin out from under my pillow."

"Are you trying to tell me that it worked?"

"Seems that way."

"Mmm... The same thing happened to me," I said finally.

"Oh?" Salvador's ears perked up and I had his full attention.

"Yeah. It was that same damn nightmare, but I grabbed the coin off my bedside dresser in my dream, and woke up with it in my hand."

"I told you it would work," he said with a smirk.

"I'm more worried that it did, honestly. That's some spooky stuff, and I'm not sure I wanna mess with... whatever this is."

"Look, we're fine, okay? The coins work, and you have that salesman's business card in case something else goes wrong." Salvador gave me a soft smile and reached across the table to hold my hands in his. "By the way, how do you feel today?" he asked.

"Fine, I guess. Why?"

"Because the last two times you had that nightmare you ended up really messed up. Especially the most recent time," he pointed out, giving my hands a squeeze.

"I was just sick. Hell, getting sick is probably the reason I had that nightmare." I was trying to convince myself as much as him.

"Sure, sure, uh-huh. Well I dunno about you, but I'm gonna be sleeping with the coin tucked into the waistband of my underwear, right up against my skin. Not taking any chances." He let me go and pushed the last of his sandwich into his mouth and got up from the table.

"Yeah well. Maybe I'll do the same." I got up as well, my chest tight with unease. I couldn't finish my food for the queasy feeling that had taken a hold of me. The recent events, and Salvador's superstitious nature were getting the better of me.

I had another nightmare that night, Sunday, but this one wasn't about me. I was outside my body, floating over a scene like a bird or a ghost. Salvador was below me, on a circle of white in a sea of black. He looked scared. The shadows were closing in on him, shrinking his little white island into nothing. A pair of ghostly blue eyes lit up the dark, and the sea of darkness reared up, collecting itself into a monstrous version of the feral shadow that stalked my nightmares. It lunged at Salvador. He shrieked, and was swallowed whole.

I snapped awake and grabbed the coin from under my pillow. I kept it in a balled fist as I threw off the sheets and tore open my door. It was illogical to keep hold of the trinket, but I was filled with dread. It felt like something terrible had happened to Salvador. I raced down the hall and pounded on his door, shouting his name and rattling the locked doorknob.

Minutes passed with no reply, and my panic grew until I couldn't bear it any longer. I slammed my shoulder against the door, putting all my weight behind it. The frame splintered and the door blew open. I practically fell into Salvador's room. I looked around; from the bed, to the desk, to the closet. His little silver coin was laying on the floor and his bedding was strewn across the floor. He was nowhere to be found.