

The City of Sins



The night was hot as hell. I was in a lousy room in a lousy part of a lousy town. My head felt several sizes too big and was throbbing at the pulse of my heart. Stacy was lying next to me. The heat prevented her body from cooling down so I didn't realise something wasn't right. And still, I felt as though something bad had happened in this room. I stood up, looked out into the dark night rising over the huge urban area and lit a cigarette.

When I turned my head to look at Stacy I realised what was wrong. Her naked body was not moving by the rhythm of her breath. I came closer and saw she wasn't breathing at all.

Damn it. Stacy had been killed while I was lying next to her, hearing nothing because of the litre of liquor pumping threw my brain and burning my stomach. Why do the innocents always die? Another poor girl murdered in this bloody city. That son of a bitch.

I felt pain and sorrow for Stacy. I had known her for years. In the beginning, she wasn't different than all the other hookers in this town. But quickly she became more for me. She had the most beautiful soul a person born in this shithole could ever have. I promised to kill that bastard, whoever he was, for Stacy and for me, and the luck he took from me.

I got dressed, walked out of the room, down the staircase and out in the street. Only two of the seven street lights were lit. The pavement was in a bad condition. In the distance, the skyscrapers of the city centre were shining brightly.

I could hear the police siren roaring in the distance, coming closer, until a few dirty cop cars finally appeared behind a street corner. They turned with squeaking tyres, pushing the throttle down to the floor and passed me, as fast as a bullet.

I spat on the floor. Never would someone like me call the cops. Only by seeing my face they would arrest me and throw me into a rat hole until the end of my days. No, those cops were not to be called if you needed help. None of them. It has been a while since cops were not taking care of the security of this town anymore. The chief of the police had shaken every dirty hand that you can find in this city.

Some people say this city is cursed. The longer you stay, the harder it is to leave. As much as you hate the never-ending night, the dark clouds hiding the sun every minute of every day, the city catches you in her sticky tentacles to suck out every bit of happiness until you become mad, or die.

I couldn't hear the police siren anymore; the cars had disappeared at the end of the avenue. I started to head east, away from that hotel

where Stacy was lying, dead. Every clue was leading to me, so I had better work something out quickly. My mind was still blurred, trying to think of whom was responsible for her death. A professional bastard for sure, if he could kill Stacy without a single noise. There were a few potential candidates, but which one of them wanted me to suffer?

I had done bad things too, but never killed a helpless girl. I had to find Rick. He had some ways to get information, and he knew all the rumours downtown...

I was crossing the square near the banks of the dirty and weird shining river. The smell of a dead animal was floating in the air, or maybe a human, in this river, you'll never know. On the bridge, I stopped, lightened another cigarette and peered over to the next side of the river.

The bridge was totally built out of cold, black metal. It was nearly 250 meters long, and the under clearance was about 35 meters, enough to shatter the bones of a body when hitting the surface. In the past decades, hundreds of people were found dead on the river banks, mostly

suicides they say, but who knows? Anyway, the citizens named the bridge "The last flight".

I started walking again, without meeting anyone, except a big black car, driving ominously without headlights.

A few moments later, I arrived at "Macy's". The bouncer, a huge black man, wearing a black leather jacket and black sunglasses, nodded barely and let me in without a word. Before the door closed I heard him warning some punks to better piss off.

Behind the door, a dark staircase was leading deep under the ground. The room was filled with the weirdest people you could find in this city. In the back a band was playing some music I couldn't define, I had never liked that crap. People were dancing, sweating alcohol, kissing and smoking. Some of them, were eating some little yellow or pink pills. Closer to the bar, 4 strippers were dancing on their podiums, dollars wedged between their thong and their painted hips. The girls were surrounded by a cluster of men drinking, laughing and yelling things I couldn't hear.

I went straight over to the bar and sat on a stool. The barmaid came over and smiled.

- Hi Negan she said, it's been a while since we last saw you down here.

Bess was a dark-haired young woman. Her almond-shaped eyes were of an intense green, sparkling with intelligence and energy. I couldn't prevent myself from smiling back. Ever since I've known her, Bess had been the good soul down here, never judging people on their appearance, but I was still wondering what a smart young lady like her was doing in this club. She didn't ask me what I wanted to drink and brought me a glass of "death". This liquor was unique to this bar, black with a white smoulder running down the glass. I loved the feeling of the freezing cold liquid running down my stomach, immediately followed by a burning sensation all over my veins, reaching my toes and fizzing in my head.

- Are you here for business or only for fun, honey? Asked Bess.

- Business, I guess. Have you seen Rick tonight?

- I thought he was doing something with you. He hasn't come here in days. I don't know what he's doing...
- Ok. What about Macy? Is she here?
- She's in her office. I'll give her a call and tell her you're coming up.
- Thanks, Bess.

I left some money on the bar, with an extra tip for Bess, she would need it more than me. If I was going to find Stacy's murderer I might not even survive the night.

Macy's office was situated just under the ceiling. It was a big black square box, built out of tinted glass what allowed Macy to watch over her place. I arrived upstairs threw a hidden elevator in the central column standing in the back of the bar.

Macy was sitting behind a big black wooden desk. In fact, she was always sitting, never standing, because she hadn't even a bit of her legs left. The rumour said her mad ex-husband had cut them off, before she killed him with a double-barrelled shotgun.

- Negan, what brings you to me? Are my girls down there such a bad company that you're coming up to see me?
- Don't worry, I answered. They are as beautiful as ever. I came to see if you had some information for me?
- Depends on what.
- I'm looking for Rick. Have you seen him? I feel like something strange is happening.
- There's always strange things happening in this city, you know that better than me, don't you? And about Rick, he was found this morning in the river, with a bullet in his head.

I wanted to say something, but no words came out of my mouth. Macy poured me a full glass of scotch, she already had one, and we drank silently.

- Macy, I think this time, somebody in this city has taken steps against me. Stacy was killed this morning, that's why I was looking for Rick. Damn it! Two murders in less than 24 hours, and both people I cared about.

- Are you telling me, that the great and dangerous Negan doesn't know what is going on here? Doesn't sound good.
- If you're saying it like this, then yeah, it feels like a thunderstorm is rising above my head.
- And now you hope I know what is happening?
- Who else could?
- No one you can trust. My guys are already looking for Rick's killer. You know he was my protégé.
- He mentioned it. How long will it take?
- Not too long, I hope. Come over, I have something you will enjoy.

I lifted the big leather armchair and put it next to her silver wheelchair, facing the bay window. Macy took two cigars out of a drawer and handed one over to me.

- Cubans, she said. Strong and spicy.

I grinned. We lit our cigars and looked down on the people in the bar.

An hour passed, while we were talking about the city and the different gangs craving for power and blood.

Macy's phone rang. She answered with a quick "yes" and hung up.

- They're coming, she said.

I took the armchair back to the other side of the desk and sat down.

It knocked, a man and a woman came into the room. Both were wearing motorcycle clothes and holding helmets. Both looked at me, then to Macy. I didn't know their names, but had seen them before.

- Speak freely, said Macy, he knows.

- We followed the killers trail until the train rails. It wasn't very hard. Looks like Rick had a chance to wound him with his knife. The blood drops led us to what is left of Roger's club.

- But Roger is dead, said Macy.

- That's what everybody says. Either way, that's where the trail leads. There, we lost it, too much dirt, water and ash.

Macy looked at me. Was it possible? No, I threw this bastard over the bridge myself some time ago, when Macy had asked me to, in exchange for money, a lot of Money.

- I thank both of you, you can go now. Tell Bess to give you something to drink, on the house of course.

When they had left, I could feel Macy was going to say something but I was quicker.

- I know what you think. But it is impossible.
- Did you pull a bullet in his head?
- No, I threw him in the river, he couldn't have survived those injuries, he must have drowned.
- Then you better go and check Negan. For me, you and your two dead friends.

I stood up.

- Wait! Take this, she said, with a smile on her lips.

I was in an awkward situation. Chasing a guy, who was playing with me for the last 48 hours and whom I was supposed to kill a year ago. I still couldn't believe Roger was still alive. I had met him only once. The day I killed him, or did not. I had to know.

I walked out of the office, down into the bar and up again, out in the hot and moist night. It was near dawn. I didn't follow the rails. Instead

I walked to the end of the block and turned right. Some cars were parked in a line. I looked and chose an old Ford Pickup. It only took me seconds to break the window, rip off the plastic cover under the steering wheel and start the engine.

After 20 minutes driving I stopped at Roger's. There wasn't too much left of his club. After I threw him in the river someone had burned down the entire Bar. Maybe another gangster waiting for money from Roger. Crazy town, I thought.

A yellow plastic tape was hanging around the house, warning to stay outside of the burnt perimeter. I ignored it, walked over it and started to check the floor. The place was bigger than I thought. It took me one hour to find some bloody footsteps in the ash. But there they were, and then they were gone. I looked harder. Nothing. Think Negan, think! I said to myself.

A light grinding sound made me look down. Of course, the underground. Like always in this city, you had to look down if you wanted something interesting.

I kneeled, and let my fingers examine the ground. They found a thin but straight gap, about 60cm long. I tried to open the hatch with my nails. It didn't move a bit. I looked around and found a crowbar. Within seconds I was down in a dark tunnel, again. The tunnel was quite big, with many rooms on each side. I moved forward slowly, and at the same time loading the sawed double-barrelled shotgun Macy had given me before I left. The tunnel was deep underground - by the sound and the vibration the subway had to be very close.

At the end of the tunnel was a room with light and the sound of speaking people coming out of it. I reached the end of the tunnel and stayed in the shadow, close to the wall, on the right side of the door.

- What's next Boss? Are we going to kill that madman? I heard some scary stories about him. I don't want to be close to him when he finds out who killed his little girlfriend.
- Today we'll look for him and finish him off tonight. I want revenge. And you, stop acting like a faggot, answered Roger's rough voice.

- What about Macy? Asked a woman. She's not going to be happy Rick got killed.
- What about her? She will never know who did it. There are more murders than marriage in this city.

That was enough for me. I kicked the door open and fired my shotgun. The man standing in front of me was thrown back by the explosion and crashed into the wall behind him, his chest filled with lead.

The woman fell on the floor, hit by the door. Still laying on the ground, the girl took out a gun and fired. The same moment the bullet penetrated my body, I fired again and the girl screamed. The adrenaline liberated by the pain gave me the necessary energy to throw my empty shotgun in Roger's face. He had been trying to grab a gun under his desk but he was too slow.

I jumped over the desk and took Rogers dazed head between my hands before smashing it against the wall. Then on the floor. I stood back and sat down on his chair. I gave myself a second to take a breath. The bullet in my shoulder felt like a burning coal under my skin.

- Now Roger, who is going to kill whom, huh?
- Fuck you Negan!
- You know, last time on the bridge. That was business. But you have made it personal. Don't look at me like that, with all that blood on your face you don't look good at all. You know that, don't you? Now take a chair, we must talk.

Roger did as I asked. I stood up, and tied his arms and legs.

- Please Negan. I swear. I didn't mean to kill you. I swear, I will never think of you again. Just let me go.
- Oh, Roger. Did you really think this is about me? You should have killed me when you had the opportunity to. Instead of killing an innocent girl.
- What do you care about that bitch anyway?
- You better shut up Roger. You have gone way too far. But don't be sad, I have a special way of killing you tonight. No pain, and there will be nothing left of you, no body and no memories. How do you like that?
- Do you know whom I working for? They will come for you Negan!

- I wasn't afraid last time, I won't be this time. Look.

I took a red stick out of my jacket.

- Do you know what this is? This is dynamite, old stuff, our grandfathers were using it in the mines. But it's still working nicely.

I stuffed the stick between his teeth. When I light this wick, you'll have another 60 seconds to think about your life and pray God that he takes you in his arms.

The only thing he could do with the dynamite in his mouth was a mumbling sound.

- Huum hmm huuuhuhmm.

- I can't understand you Roger, I said, sorry.

I took out my zippo and lit the fuse. Without looking back, I walked swiftly to the ladder, climbed up and closed the hatch.

Ten seconds later, the sound of an explosion, followed by a collapse of the ground and a light earthquake.

The bullet in my shoulder was burning. I had to find Macy, she would take the bullet out for me.

I turned around, and started walking. The sun had risen and the noise of distant cops' siren were audible in the distance.

Another mad night in this city. Another night with too many people being killed. Another night being alive. Just another night, in the City of Sins.