

Hellbounce

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For the family Harrill:

Tricia, Ben, Scotty, Sammy, and Jess

Prologue

Madden Scott jammed his foot on the brake pedal of the stolen Chevrolet Malibu, causing the car to skid to a halt.

“I’m right. You’re wrong. Get used to it.”

Several white Toyotas blew past the end of the alleyway, their blue lights flashing and filled with Montego Bay constables, oblivious to the fact that their prey had, for the moment, eluded them.

He took a moment to gaze up, through the pouring rain, at the building in front of him, the air conditioning only just enough to clear the moisture from the windshield. White. Colonial. Classic Jamaican Imperial architecture. He let the wheels find their grip on the dirt track.

“See? Where are we?”

“Canterbury,” came the reply from Turell, the gang leader and mastermind behind their failed robbery on the local branch of the bank of Nova Scotia. Despite their argument, he kept his eyes trained on the road. “Let’s go, man. They gonna notice we not there any minute now, man.”

With voices of assent from the other two gang members, Joseph and Delon, Madden took a breath to steady his nerves, and eased the car back out onto the road. His heart thumped hard in his chest, the sound thudding in his ears. Sweat made his palms slick and he squeezed the steering wheel to regain control. He edged the car back out, fearing pursuit. The wide road allowed a good view, dense woodland on one side in stark contrast to the dwellings of the rich and shameless on the other. Madden gunned the throttle, and the car lurched into action, back down towards the center of Montego Bay.

In the passenger seat next to Madden, Turell turned to keep a watch out the rear window, his rancid breath causing Madden to turn his head away from the stale after-effects of a jerked-chicken feast.

Turell caught sight of his brother. “Damn, Jo. You got hit.”

“I’ll live. Bullet went right through. Babylon can’t aim right.” Joseph cradled his arm as Delon tied a makeshift bandage tight, blood seeping through the material almost as soon as it was complete.

Madden concentrated on driving. “So where to? You will have to tell me at some point, or we will run out of road.”

“You concentrate on the driving, buccra,” Turell used the Jamaican term for ‘White Man’ in such a way that Madden was left with no illusion that this was going to end well, “and I will tell you where to go. We are on Upper King Street. Head for Gloucester Avenue; let’s blend in with the crowds.”

Madden did as instructed, intending to blend with the busy traffic in downtown Montego Bay. Driving with purpose, but not too fast to be singled out, he considered the choices he had made to find himself in this position. He was not without regret.

Madden was a loner by nature, flitting from place to place, not really caring how he was received, using charm to wheedle jobs and women alike, his good looks and shoulder-length brown hair a natural attraction. He had developed a taste for fast cars, and in recent years, had come to settle in Jamaica, the laid-back lifestyle suiting him. His love of the underground street-racing scene had earned him the nickname ‘Mad One’, a play on words on his own name. And with time, he had come to know Turell Banks. Small courier jobs had become bigger and more illegal. Now he had reached the point that he was a getaway driver, albeit a reluctant one, in a robbery. He had to see this through to the end. Turell was not a man one said no to.

The rain beat down, and Madden opened the window of the Chevrolet for a better view, as the moisture inside threatened to render the air conditioning redundant. Water sprayed in, adding to the sweat on his hands. Taking a couple of back streets, he avoided the highway that had been the scene of the chase.

“Man I’m hungry,” Joseph complained. “Mad One, there’s a KFC up ahead. I’m bruk-pocket. Go get me.”

“Yu mussi born back a cow,” Turell admonished his brother. “No food till we make it safe.”

Madden stopped the car in traffic, attempting to appear nonchalant. They were in the busiest part of town now, near the beaches. Even in this mild tropical storm the streets were busy. He had no choice but to move slowly. As he did so, he spied the blue-and-whites of more Jamaican police. One officer saw him, and raised a walkie-talkie to his lips.

Turell warned, “Them seen us! Drive!”

Several police cars converged toward their spot, sirens blaring. Madden had no choice but to floor it. The car lurched forward, beaches and stunning ocean to the left, with police in pursuit. People jumped out of the way, but they were a blur as Madden focussed on the road, becoming one with the car. “We are on Gloucester,” he shouted above the noise of the engine, and the ricochet of bullets on the road as their pursuers tried to take out the tires, “but the road is blocked up past the Coral Cliff Hotel and that’s only a kilometre off. So if you have a plan, tell me now.”

Turell just stared ahead, his wits deserting him.

“Damn it Turell, where? The Coral Cliff? Burger King? The sea? Where?”

“Tru dem barrier.” Turell answered.

“What?”

Turell brandished the glock he had taken from his police victim. “You drive, tru dem barrier, or I kill you myself, Iree?”

Madden shook his head and concentrated. Behind them, several police cars were jostling for position, each trying to get around him. He held the line of the road and the beaches flashed past all too quickly. The so-called ‘Hip Strip’, known for its restaurants and bars disappeared in moments.

The road veered away from the coast for a moment. “You had better be right about this,” Madden growled.

As the road swung back to the coast, Madden saw flashing lights ahead. By the Margaritaville restaurant, perched right on the edge of the water, several police cars blocked

the road. A small army of police waited behind, guns already raised. Waves burst over the rocks, blurring with the slate-grey sky. Madden aimed for the small gap between the middle two cars, preferring the attempt to a bullet to the head. About ten metres out, a boat was moored; white with a pale-blue underbelly, it rolled with the waves churned up by the storm. In a moment of clarity, Madden saw one officer raise his gun, take aim, and fire.

The bullet smashed a hole in the windshield, whistling past Madden's ear. In the rear view mirror, Madden saw red mist and gore all over the back window.

"Joseph!" Screamed Turell, "Joseph, No!" Turell tried to climb to the back seat to comfort his already-dead brother as more shots were fired. The front left tire exploded.

The car swerved, skidding on the wet surface, and jumped as it hit the curb. The momentum lifted the car up over the all-too-small sea wall and out through the spume over the cerulean water.

"Hold on!" Madden shouted, and threw his head forward, protecting his neck with his arms.

Screams from passengers rang in his ears. The car flipped upside down as it flew through the air, and Madden felt the air blast in through the now-smashed windshield. There was a crunch as the car landed atop the boat, and then an instant of heat and darkness.

Madden found himself adrift in the water, a couple of feet from the surface, and propelled himself up with sure strokes. Unsure how he got there, he floated for a moment to get his bearings. He ached, but it was more of a tingle, and not the pain of someone recently in a car wreck. Just metres away, he could see the mangled mess of car and boat, on fire in places and mostly submerged, a small oil slick being whipped up by the waves.

He swam away, using the momentum of the waves to push him toward the shore where he climbed the rocks, and sat shivering against the sea wall. Behind him, the lights of the police vehicles flashed blue, magnified by the addition of his pursuers. Police approached, and stood beside him.

"Man, ain't nobody gettin' outta dat alive," one said to his fellows. "There's four bodies to be pulled out. Them say it's Turell, his brother, cousin and them white boy driver. Let's go grab a brew and wait."

The police stared for a moment, and moved off, seeking the refuge of the Margaritaville. Madden sat there confused, staring at his shaking hands. Something swelled beneath the skin. Madden closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened them, his hands were normal again. The police were chatting in the distance. They hadn't even noticed him.

Chapter One

The ABC logo flashed up on the television set, white letters on a blue circle. The logo glinted for a moment and disappeared.

“Welcome back to ABC news with Jeanette Gibson,” blared the strong male voiceover. The screen showed an elegant woman approaching her middle years with the confidence of a consummate professional, along with the knowledge that she was fronting one of the biggest media outlets in the world.

It never failed to impress Eva Ross, who had wished for a career in media as a child, but through happenstance and a natural aptitude for the human mind, had studied hard to become a psychotherapist. She tried to work out the depths of the human psyche, specifically in those who lacked morals. Her career path had led far from her home of Sioux City, Iowa. She had studied at several universities, gaining accreditation that had eventually led her to the Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts, a post she had held for two years now.

“In other news,” Jeanette Gibson announced with a look of mock severity on her face, “there has been a wave of amnesia attacks in Marblehead, a small town in Essex County, Massachusetts. The coastal community has been plagued by sailors who, dressed as eighteenth-century smugglers, seem unable to remember their names or how, in fact, they even arrived at the town.”

The screen cut to footage of a group of men with wide trousers, flared sleeves, all bearing the three-pointed Tricorn hats of the era in brown and black.

“Those affected are undergoing treatment in a local hospital, but lacking any credible proof, police suspect it to be either a local hoax, or as one officer put it: ‘Something in the water’”.

Eva let her mind wander, no longer paying any attention to the police officer that the reporter was interviewing, trying to sound grave and sincere about such a light-hearted topic.

On her break between counselling sessions, she relaxed by watching the world outside, wishing she was there. It was late autumn, a hazy afternoon that showed yellow leaves

clinging stubbornly, in an all too common attempt to deny the onset of winter, to the grove of American Linden that grew around the hospital. It was a lovely time of year, and for a moment, Eva could forget exactly where she was and why.

“And finally, the strange case of a convenience store clerk who was held hostage while the kidnappers ate everything in sight.”

Eva flicked the television off, and tied her shoulder-length brown hair back with one of several hair bands she habitually kept on her right wrist. Donning her red sweater, Eva set off for her office. Tradition held that they should all wear the white coats so typical of their profession, but only her boss stuck to it, and despite his apparent officiousness, never insisted on anybody else doing the same. It reminded the convicted criminals with which they dealt too much of where they were.

On her way through the corridors of the rotting clock tower that was basically all that remained of the old hospital, Eva mulled over the questions she was going to ask her current patient. A clever man, highly intelligent and, in no small way, devious, Harold Fronhouse presented a challenge. Unlocking his mind was a gradual process. She was so preoccupied with her plan of attack that she jumped when a hand touched her shoulder.

She turned to see the grinning young face of Jenny Slater, all blonde curly locks and movie star visage. “I’m sorry, Jenny, I didn’t hear you.”

“I shouted loud enough, four or five times,” the grad student replied in a husky voice that belied her relative youth. “I’m joining you today. I was told you are interviewing.”

“Oh, you are?” Eva gave her a sly look and began to walk on, amused by Jenny’s attempt to include herself. “What you mean is that you were nosing over my schedule trying to see whether what I was doing today would help advance your studies.”

Jenny had the credit to look embarrassed, a slow flush creeping into her cheeks. “Well yes, there is that. But Doctor Homes has given me permission to sit in today.”

Eva stopped and turned, putting her hand on the wall, the whitewash chalky under her hand.

“He doesn’t have the right.”

“Well that’s what he told me. He said I had to find you and sit in on the Fronhouse interview. He said it would be a good case to study an extreme case of borderline personality disorder.”

“There is more to it than the Wikipedia definition of borderline personality disorder you know,” Eva warned. “We used to call them ‘psychopaths’ and this one is as bad as they come.”

They passed through secure doors to the interview rooms. Fading light bulbs gave the corridor a sinister feel.

“Are you certain you wish to do this?” Eva asked, placing her hand on the younger woman’s shoulder. There was an eagerness in Jenny’s eyes that screamed innocence and a lack of caution.

“Yes. I started this, and now I need to be responsible for my decisions. Even if I don’t like what I am getting into.”

“You get immune to it after a while.”

“If you look at them as animals, I am sure that you do.”

“Save the psychoanalysis for the patient, Jenny. You can tell me later just how you convinced Gideon to approve this.”

Outside the room, a guard waited. “Dr Ross,” he said by way of a perfunctory greeting, “our boy is acting up today. You sure you want her in there with you?”

Eva turned to observe Jenny, who still didn't look right, and could feel the guard's eyes on her. She dismissed the puerile male stirrings. "You are fine, aren't you, Jenny?"

"Yes... yes. I am fine."

The guard shrugged meaty shoulders as if he didn't care either way. "Don't say I didn't warn you."

He led them into a white room, bare of all furnishings except two seats and a small table. Sterile luminous light gave the room a pale eerie glow, but it was the other occupant of the room that drew the eye.

Harold Fronhouse was a short man, not far over five feet in height. He sat secured in a straightjacket, and strapped to a wheelchair. He wore no mask. As Eva and Jenny entered the room, he watched, unblinking. As Jenny sat down, he gazed at her with the eyes of a predator. "Nice."

Eva glanced at Jenny, who watched Harold the way a small child watched a stranger, not taking her eyes off him. She was uncomfortable.

"Harold. How are you today?"

"Hungry," came the reply, although Fronhouse still had not taken his eyes off Jenny. This was going bad quickly.

"Well I see from your records you don't appear to have had much problem with your meals."

Fronhouse eyed Jenny up and down once more, and then turned his head to Eva. "Unsatisfied." His eyes widened slightly and he fidgeted.

"Nothing changes then," agreed Eva, motioning Jenny to take notes, more to give her something to do than for the need. "Harold likes to play games," Eva lectured. "One-word answers can go on for days if he feels like it. It's a shame. He is such a conversationalist. But I know what you love to talk about, don't I?" Eva spoke as she would to a pet.

In response, Fronhouse grinned, the vacuous smile of one not in possession of all their mental faculties. "The bomb."

Eva leaned forward, a conspirator to his cause. "Yes the bomb. Why don't you tell us the story of the bomb."

Fronhouse trembled with excitement, and looked at Eva as if seeking to please a master. "I was young, not more than a child. We lived in a farmhouse in the hills. My parents used to have parties. The sorts of parties where you put your car keys in a jar and the wife left with whoever owned the keys she pulled out. They loved that sort of thing. It gave them excitement.

Over time, my mother pulled the same keys repeatedly. My father grew suspicious." Fronhouse cackled to himself at some perceived vision.

"He took me with him once and showed me my mother and her lover through a window in the house. He was behind her. They were naked. She was moaning." Fronhouse again watched Jenny as he said this, evidently gauging the impact of his words. Jenny had dropped her pad and pen in her lap, just staring.

Fronhouse, restless now, fidgeted more. "My father took me home and told me he was going to make my mother pay for this, and he wanted my help. We built a bomb, and fitted it under her car." He turned his head to one side and growled: "Yes, I can feel it, too."

"What can you feel, Harold?"

Fronhouse smiled, a cold, calculating mask. "When she shifted into fourth gear, the bomb blew, and the car was incinerated. There was nothing left. As for the man, my father cut his throat. We cooked him and I ate his face. GET THESE SHACKLES OFF ME. HE IS CLOSE!"

“Who? Harold, who is close?”

“I can’t tell you that. The mere thought of it would send you into madness, a despair of such black depths you would end yourself in moments.” Fronhouse shook his head, and his eyes focussed once more. “I have shared myself, with you. Now you can share yourself with me. An eye for an eye, Dr. Ross.”

Jenny was clearly shaken. The experience was nearly too much for her. “No, I don’t think so. That is enough for today.” Eva went to pick up her notes and leave the room.

“No. It is not.” Fronhouse’s voice was commanding. “Your brat wants to taste a little more, to see into my brain. Am I not right?”

Despite everything, Jenny answered. “That is correct. I want to know what makes you tick.”

“You want to know why I do the things I do. Pain. I am in pain.”

Eva put her hand to her forehead, rubbing her eyebrows. “Aren’t we all?”

“I will share my pain with you, little bird, when you tell me about how your father abused you as a child. I can see it in your eyes, read it in every fiber of your being. You are broken, and you seek redemption through understanding, knowing that there was something that drove him to it, and not just his own small-minded cruelty.”

Eva had warned her, and despite everything, Fronhouse had her. Jenny had put her hand to her mouth, and wordless sounds came out. Pain beyond description welled from every pore. He had hit right on the mark.

“This ends now.”

“No!” Jenny contradicted her. “He is right. There is always a reason.”

“Jenny, you do not have to do this.”

“Oh but she *needs* to, to find out who she really is.” Fronhouse continued, and his face grew angry. “My skin, it tingles. I can end this all now. Let me out!” In an instant, his demeanour changed back to the intelligent, cold mask of a killer. “How to describe what I am? Bound but not gagged. Never gagged. How to describe you? Slut. You drove him to it. You encouraged him, and you loved it.”

Jenny fled, throwing the door open, her feet echoing off the stone of the hallway as she ran.

Fronhouse grinned, satisfied. “Well wasn’t that fun?”

Ignoring him, Eva looked to the guard. “What is his medical condition?”

“Fine, last time we checked.” He implied that next time, Harold Fronhouse might not be in such a good condition.

“See that he stays that way.”

It was meant to be comforting to the patient, since Eva was a firm believer that while many patients needed a strict regimen, those not in authority far too often took it upon themselves to impose revenge.

Fronhouse screamed at her, a wordless expression of rage and anguish; the impotent struggle against his bonds not deterring him at all. “I need to get free! He is near!”

“Who, Harold? Who is near?” Eva stepped closer.

“One weaker than I am. I can prey on him. The pain. It is everywhere. I can feast and then I am free.” He howled at the walls once more. “Master, I can do it. Unbind me!”

“Who is your master, Harold? Tell me. Who are you seeking?”

Fronhouse twisted yet more, wriggling beneath the straightjacket, his legs taut against the straps. His narrow eyes focussed on her.

“You think anything you do matters? You think this matters? Release me, and it will be over quickly. Leave me here, and another will do my job. But others will make it last forever.”

“What others?”

“To describe what they do would drive the sanity from your being. We flee. You would do best to run and hide, though they will find you. They find everyone.” With that, the fight in him evaporated, and Harold Fronhouse sat motionless, looking through her.

Eva recognised this particular state of catatonia. “We won’t get anything more from him, now. Take him back to his room.”

The guard wheeled Fronhouse out, and Eva stared at the walls without noticing, her heart thudding in her chest. She screwed her hands into fists, her nails digging painfully into her palms. She had almost reached him. The words of Harold Fronhouse still echoed from the walls. “Others will make it last forever... I can feast and then I am free... He is near...” The phrases left her uncomfortable and nervous.

Chapter Two

Outside, Jenny stood waiting as Eva closed the door. Her face was a mask of horror, pain mixed with the re-emergence of memories that had been repressed for far too long.

“Jenny, I am so sorry.” Eva enfolded her in a hug, feeling the warmth of tears on her chest as Jenny’s shoulders trembled with each sob.

At length, Jenny calmed down and stood back, taking the tissue Eva offered to dry her face.

“Satisfied now?”

“Dr Ross, I didn’t mean to undermine you in there. I just wanted the chance.”

“Yes, you did,” Eva replied with genuine amusement. “I am afraid you are a little too much like I was once for your own good. You will learn.”

“You still don’t think it was a good idea?”

“No, as a matter of fact, I don’t, but I promised you that we would abide by Dr Homes’ decision, and that is exactly what we did. It is your decision whether the end justified the means.”

Eva handed Jenny a file and started down the corridor.

“Take a look at that on the way and consider carefully what I said to you earlier about BPDs.”

As Eva walked, she could sense Jenny trying to keep up, and falling farther behind as she became engrossed in the notes. The silence became oppressive. As they descended to the first floor where the more dangerous patients were housed, Eva looked back to find Jenny had stopped, her face drained of colour. “Do you see now what you were dealing with?”

“He... He actually did this? Ate a man’s face? While he was still alive?”

“Yes, and he was shot and wounded as he tried to escape. The victim is still receiving treatment in Miami, six months after it happened. Harold was transferred here within a month of being detained for evaluation. Dr Homes recommended an extended term given his particular characteristics.”

“Which are what?”

“He has an uncanny ability to get inside your head. He is extremely intelligent. If you are not careful, you end up feeling like you are the interviewee and not the interviewer. He can get right under your skin. The point is he knew exactly what he was doing when he started to feed on that homeless man, much as he had a plan of attack the moment you stepped through that door. I want you to consider everything you witnessed in that room, not as the victim of his cruel abuse, but as a future Doctor of Psychology. Put away emotion, and look at what was said, the stimuli for each of his responses. You might have been an innocent in that room, but you damned well came near to unlocking him. I’ll expect a report in the morning, but for now, I have questions of my own that need answering. Go on home. My next conversation may not be for your ears.”

Jenny turned toward the exit. “Eva, thank you.”

Eva smiled at her, and resumed walking.

The long white, sterile corridors glowed eerily under the lights did nothing to put Eva at ease. The air conditioning whined in the background, straining as it sought to keep the old building at a reasonable temperature. Eva sometimes imagined there were voices whispering behind that noise.

Reaching the top floor of the hospital via narrow stairs crowded with faded paintings of Worcester in its infancy on the walls, Eva avoided the temptation to seek refuge in her own office, instead knocking on the door of her colleague and mentor, Dr Gideon Homes.

Dr Homes was considered pre-eminent in the field of compulsive mental disorders, and over the time she had known him, he had molded her in his image. A once rash and outspoken young grad student had become a thoughtful, introspective doctor under his tutelage. *That is what Jenny hopes I will do for her.* Eva thought as a voice called, “Come in”.

Eva opened the door and entered the room. Gideon Homes turned in his chair from a bank of screens that piped feed from all over the hospital directly to his office. Bespectacled, and with a shock of iron-grey hair, her mentor, friend, and colleague greeted her with a smile. Standing up, he towered over her, at several inches over six feet, and, with a frame one could only call ‘brawny’, he cut an imposing figure.

“Quite a session, don’t you think?” he observed. “What do you make of it?”

Eva shook her head. “Ravings of a paranoid delusional. It could be the key to his present state, or it could mean nothing at all. You know these cases as well as I do. Better in fact.” Eva shuffled her notes and sat opposite him, the ancient leather of her seat creaking in protest. “What should not have happened there is Jenny. You should not have given her permission to attend. Harold saw right through her, and toyed with her like a damaged hare given to a pack of wolf cubs. The poor girl could be scarred for life. How dare you presume to treat one of our own staff like that? What were you thinking?”

“The girl learned a valuable life lesson,” Gideon countered, the smirk on his face betraying his amusement. “Never run before you can walk. I don’t think we will see her attempt that again, not until she is much more mature. Wanting and having are two different things altogether do you not think?”

“Jenny thought that an interview with such a deranged mind would be good for her, much like children dream of petting animals at a zoo. Did you give her that impression?”

Gideon responded by picking up an apple and crunching into it, waving the fruit around in the air with his left hand as he mulled the idea over.

“Interesting,” Gideon replied as he leaned back on his desk, “that you describe them as such. They have minds, and at some point in their lives have had the capacity to make rational choices, yet you label them with a common denominator. They are in here against

their will, and we view them without any necessary attachment, yet this is not the zoo you claim to think it is.”

Moving to lock a cabinet he nearly always kept shut, Gideon continued, “No I think this is more the result of a ploy for you to keep our little fledgling safe, Dr Ross. It sounded like a great idea to me. There are times when we should act with caution and others when we should go with instinct. If this bird believes it is time to fly, who are we to clip her wings?”

“But Harold Fronhouse...”

“Is unstable, impulsive, has, in the past, shown cannibalistic tendencies, and you don’t know from one second to the next what mood he will be in. Yes, he is an interesting ‘animal’.”

The way Gideon used her words against her was not lost on Eva.

“He is also bound in a straightjacket, and has guards with him at all times. If he needs sedating, we have Thorazine. If you fear what he might say to her, please remember that you were similar in age when I first spotted you, and you were already deep into a thesis on stress-related paranoia and had interviewed several inmates at Cedar Junction. That is a maximum security facility, not unlike this.”

Eva stared at Gideon, aghast that a man she had trusted to guide her so many times in the past had acted with such recklessness.

“Are you saying that this was all part of an experiment? Just so you could sit up here and observe from afar, the dismantling of a young mind? You could have ended that young woman’s career in there.”

“And you could have made it your triumph. Consider it a lesson for you and her both. As you rightly said, you nearly unlocked the mind of one seriously beyond redemption.”

His tone infuriated her. “That is not just wrong, it is unethical. What happened to you, Gideon? You never treated me this way when I was a student. I am going to my office, and then home. I have had enough of this for one day. If this is your current approach to medicine, I don’t expect much in the way of results. Not if you don’t have any staff. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Gideon had already turned back to his research, and Eva had been taught very early on that was his method of dismissal. Never before had it been used on her.