

The Left Palm

Evelyn Klebert

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by Evelyn Klebert

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Wolves

“Wolves.” His eyes widened from behind the rather well-worn spectacles that he wore precariously perched on the edge of his nose. He wasn’t a young man, but in contrast a wiry, elderly fellow, who didn’t much like change and even less surprises. So in a procrastinative fashion, he removed the glasses, pulling an old handkerchief from his back pocket and leisurely wiping the lenses while his still razor sharp mind contemplated a backdoor out of this dilemma. He sighed, again positioning the glasses on the end of his nose and giving just the hint of a smile that said he was just an old fool, running a curio shop in the French Quarter. Taking a deep breath that felt clearly as though it rattled deeply somewhere in the recesses of his brittle ribs he played his best cards. “Is there something in particular I could help you with today?”

There was the finest flicker of a smile across a pair of young and dark red lips. The eyes in a fine-boned oval face stared back at him as though they were neatly and concisely ripping away the layers of his well-contrived façade. The eyes were green. His wife Roberta of nearly sixty years had green eyes as well, but not at all like these. His wife’s were filled with light and color. But not these, these were dark like a forest on the verge of night. Any light that tried to reflect was muffled out by something unseen within.

The mouth was moving and he was watching it in a curious way; compelled perhaps, he thought somewhat distantly.

Was she trying to enthrall him or suffocate him? At this moment both felt like a tangible probability.

"Wolves," she murmured again. Of course, he knew of what she was speaking. He might play the fool from time to time, but he certainly wasn't one. Long ago he was told when it was first placed in his keeping that someone would come for it one day with only that single word as their calling card. And he out of more than obligation — out of a binding indisputable agreement — must surrender it. Of course at the time he was well-paid, in fact had never been better paid for any single acquisition in all his years. But it was so long ago, thirty, perhaps closer to forty years back. And that payment was just a distant, fleeting memory now. While the object itself, well it was worth an untold fortune.

Abruptly interrupting the meandering of his mind, he felt a slim hand come to rest on his. His eyes looked down; they were long slender fingers, flesh that was more pale than warmed by the sun. But then the delicate hand began to squeeze with a strength he did not understand. "I don't have time for this old man. Give it to me," she rasped. Those lightless eyes were wide now and so very frightening to him.

"Give you what?" He choked out. But it was his final lie. For in his mind as clear as though he were seeing it before him, his building, his store of so many years, and him within were being engulfed in flames. It must be happening now, in the moment for the flames were wildly everywhere, burning him, scorching his flesh on his arms until he could see the white of his very own skeleton. "Uoohh" he gasped, the unintelligible and desperate words of a dying man.

And then clearly, sharply penetrating into the horror of his own hell, he heard a voice; a voice speaking to him within his own mind. "Now let's try this again," she whispered, because there was no need to shout. She had won. "Wolves," this time it rolled off her tongue like the sweetest poetry.

"This is foolishness, pure foolishness my dear."

She grimaced, "So you've said." She perched the cell phone a bit unstably on her shoulder and checked the rear view mirror. What was foolish was taking a call on an unfamiliar highway while she was driving an unfamiliar rental car.

"Where are you now?"

"I'm driving." Luckily it was a clear stretch this last piece of the journey between New Orleans and the small south central city that was her destination.

"You're not going to tell me are you?"

"It's best not. I'll fill you in when everything is done."

"And you my little sister, will you be done too?"

She sighed deeply. How she loved her older brother, his protectiveness. Ostensibly, he was the only family she had now, except for certain unknown factions. But just now, his protectiveness felt more than a bit smothering. "Well, let's hope not."

"Are you sure you're reading that thing right? What if you end up with the wrong one?"

"Charles, you have to have a little faith. I am not without my own gifts."

"Cecile, I don't want to lose you."

"I know. Just have a little trust in me."

On the way into town, she picked up a street map so she wouldn't be entirely clueless as to where she was going. And then just off the highway she checked into a motel. It was one of a moderately priced chain. She'd stayed in better. She could most certainly afford better. She and her brother had money. Her parents had left them well off, well, when they died. But just now the surroundings didn't matter much. She only needed a place to regroup.

Cecile placed her small suitcase on the bed and sat down quietly beside it, contemplative. What she'd done to the old man in the antique shop had been cruel and unfair. And certainly on some level she was ashamed. But she'd sensed his greed, his reluctance to relinquish it, the thing she needed.

Steadying her nerves, she reached into her black leather purse and drew out the bundle of material that she'd wrapped it in. It was a fine white, raw silk piece of fabric. Rather gingerly she laid it on the bed and began to unwrap its folds. Already her fingertips quivered from the emanations of power although she had not even touched it. It sat there in its own mahogany box latched with a clasp of pure silver. It was quite valuable, perhaps priceless in its construction, certainly in its origin. It was understandable that the old man did not want to part with it.

She rubbed the palms of her hand together briskly trying to drive away the chill that had settled into her fingers. She had spent enough years studying the magical arts to know that handling such powerfully enchanted tools did come with a price. Taking a nearly painful breath, she quickly flipped the latch, opening the box of the Houdin Trouveur.

That it was stunning was undeniable — beautiful, quite ornate, constructed purely of platinum and black onyx. The platinum arms of the antiquated compass fluttered for a moment and then swirled in a deliberate direction, markedly toward the southeast. She sighed. He would be there; the murderer of her parents was somewhere in this city.

Something was off. He'd felt it all day, deep down in his skin, actually the night before as well. And irritatingly the dreams had come, a sweep of redness and then fire, fire exploding pure and white. What it all meant he wasn't so sure. He'd given up this divination business, this reading of dreams some time ago — in fact two hundred years ago to be exact. For some time, with the exception of a few minor lapses, life had become quite placid for Christian Amorant. That was the name he'd adopted several decades earlier. And he had to admit he'd grown fond of it. This part of the country was quite welcoming to those of a French descent, and he'd been born nearly five hundred years before in a small province near modern day Avignon.

Christian continued to polish a heavy, black oak wardrobe mirror that he'd just put the finishing touches on for the

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festival today. He enjoyed working with black oak; there was something depthless about its sheen. But then again black oak, pine, maple, cherry wood, they all had their respective charms. For a moment he glanced at the reflection serenely staring back at him from the long oval mirror. From his appearance, he could not be mistaken for a man of more than thirty. His light blue-grey eyes and thick blonde hair suggested an almost innocent quality that his soul did not agree with. He'd been alive too long and seen too much to be naïve about much of anything.

He finished polishing the wood of the mirror, more interested in his creation than anything else. He'd found some solace through the long years and endless solitude in developing this craft. There was a strange contentment he'd found in working with the wood that eased the burdens that his unusual life had deemed he should carry. In some ways he felt as though he imbued his creations with small pieces of his soul in his work. After all, even he couldn't live forever. Not with so many people trying to kill him.

"How will you be able to find him with it? Doesn't it just seek out any werewolf?" Charles had asked her this among other questions before she'd set out from Boston nearly five days ago.

"Well I haven't spent all these years studying and developing my own gifts without the intent of making use of them. I will work an incantation that will affix the Houdin Trouveur solely toward him, toward our parent's killer."

He'd stared at her with a great deal of anxiety within his acute, dark eyes. "I don't like it. And regardless of your intentions I don't think our parents would like it either."

She frowned explicitly, "Well they're not here to give us an opinion, are they?"

He looked away, clearly disturbed by her words. "I know they would want you to get on with your life Cecile, not become obsessed with vengeance."