

Part Four

IN THE BLUE MOON'S SHADOWS

By Madame Morpheme

The reunion of medium Madame Morpheme and her lost ghost lover, Javier, was interrupted by the horrific sounds of a violent murder in the hall outside her hotel room. Madame Morpheme and her gaggle of ghosts watched in terror as blood pooled under her door. Madame Morpheme has summoned darkness. The murderer behind the door is our heroine's next client, but it's clear he wants more than a séance.

New York City, 1967

THE first boot kick clatters against the door frame. There's no time for spells now. But when I look around the room, the light of the moon shines through the window like an ancient mystic power for our side. I focus my energies to call forth an arsenal of old umbrage and fury from the watery depths of my unconscious. I summon rage.

I turn and nod at Javier, who is crouched in a fighting stance. Ace is the first to break off from my trio of spooked roommates, grabbing his guitar. I know he's on my side. Chardonnay nods and crosses her arms in allied defiance, and though Harmony's faded and scared, flitting back and forth in anticipation, she doesn't scream. It's time to rally.

"Get ready to fight," I say as the

second kick crashes through, sending wood splinters flying. I can see the malevolent man take a step back and heave his shoulder against the splintered door. His beast-sized weight wrenches the weakened hinges from the frame. The metal lock pops with a creak, and broken door panels fall into the puddle of coagulating blood.

The man in black steps on the fractured panels like they're a medieval drawbridge and he's come to destroy the castle. Light shines in from the hall behind him. His face is obscured in shadow, but I see him flex his gloved hands. He raises his antique metal saw in the air.

"You could have knocked," I say. "My guests usually do. Emma Goldman did."

The figure pauses, calculating.

"And you're quite late," I add. "Don't think I'll be extending your appointment beyond the hour after the mess you made."

The barbed words buy just enough time for Javier to spring forward and lunge at the man's throat, shouting, "You shouldn't have followed me back here!"

The man growls a loud, bass-like rumble, and saws Javier's arms off, sending ghost blood in all directions. Javier shouts, but the stench of the ghost blood surprises our nemesis. Just

as he steps back, Ace hurtles forward at full velocity aiming the body of his guitar squarely at the man's gut. The spectral guitar goes straight through the man with some force, knocking him off balance, and forcing him to drop a knee into the pool of blood.

I grab the fat volume of Madame Zee's spells and tuck it behind my back as the man looks down to wipe a bloody gloved hand on his pants. "What do you want from me?" I demand.

"I know you re-materialized him," says the stranger, nodding toward Javier, "even though I cast a spell to prevent that. It was a good spell. No one should'a been able to see him or find him after that. But you knew of a way."

Ace sails into the hallway on his knees, and plays a distorted chord in A minor. I see him look down the hall and shudder, before flying back into the room and perching on the ceiling.

"It's the guy who runs the office," Ace says. "Dead. Limbs all chopped off."

Javier, whose arms have already regenerated, pushes against the intruder's chest, but this time the thug doesn't wobble.

"Not Harold!" Javier yells. "Come on, he wasn't a part of it, and you know it! That's against code."

"I write the code," the man's low voice booms and then he points at me. "And it's you I want."

"Oh, dear. It's so rude to point," my mother whispers in my ear. She has the odd habit of showing up at the most inopportune times. "Who is this thug client of yours?"

Chardonnay flies across the ceiling, loops the blue feather boa around the man's neck and tugs, trying to strangle him with it. The man gasps a raspy war-cry and severs the boa with his mind. His powers are strong.

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Feathers float everywhere, some of them sticking to the bloodstains on the man's dark pants and jacket. He looks so miffed by the glam effect that Chardonnay starts dropping cheap beaded necklaces from my collection over his head — until he rips them off with one hand and hurls them in her direction. She dodges them, but they hit the wall so hard that the multicoloured beads embed into the drywall in an abstract pattern.

"Pretty," Chardonnay says, touching the beads with a finger.

I start to think we're gaining ground (more by irritation than by might) when the man points again, this time

at Chardonnay, and directs a spray of dark energy in her direction. She dims, then flickers out. I throw the Madame Zee book at the man's head, but the volume bounces off his skull. He's unfazed.

I look around and for a moment I panic, thinking my roommates are gone, abandoning me to face this monster alone. But then I see a curl of Harmony's hair peeking out from behind the curtain, and there's a slight glow emanating from under the bed where Ace is hiding. I can feel Javier behind me, at my back, waiting to make another move.

To my surprise my mother decides to materialize then, for the first time in years. She looks formidable, standing fierce and proper in her teacher's stance — like a true disciplinarian.

"What do you want with us?" she demands. "Come on, spit it out then. This behaviour of yours is rubbish."

"This is between you 'n I," he says, fixing his eerie gaze at me, eyes iceberg cold and piercing.

I can't help but smirk.

"Between you and me," my mother corrects. "Between is a preposition, and pronouns after prepositions are always in the objective case."

My grandmother's ruby ring sparkles on my finger. She's somewhere here, too, sliding in the light of a moonbeam.

Of course the thug goes ballistic after the grammar lesson; he runs at me. I sashay quickly to the left. Javier grabs the man's head and smashes it at the window, cracking the glass. Javier gets set to yank it again, when

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the man flails his arm and the blade of his saw catches my bicep. Blood drips down my arm and onto the ruching of my favourite pink chiffon cocktail dress.

“Mi corazon!” cries Javier.

The man, taking advantage of Javier’s momentary lapse, sends him flying with a powerful, magic flick of his massive, gloved hand. The man then takes a vial out of his pocket and tries to collect a rivulet of my blood.

“For the lab,” he says. “I need the genetic code for your type of clairvoyance.”

“Morpheme is a synaesthete,” my mother corrects, smacking the vial to the floor where it smashes. “Although you were quite correct about the bloodline.”

“I’m always right,” the man insists. He swipes at my mother with his saw, but she glares and ducks his lumbering arm swings.

I take the offensive, kicking the man hard with my stiletto, sending us both to the floor and we tumble, each trying to gain control, wrestling limbs and focussing our minds on images of each other’s destruction.

I visualize him with a black box over his head, containing his wrath, but he splits the box apart. I picture the bones in his arms and legs crumbling to dust; he wobbles at first, only to hit back with a very solid knee to my kidneys. I scream in pain and, finally, I think of The Alamo, the cube sculpture at Astor Place, where

Javier and I met for our strange date so long ago. I send it spinning in the opposite direction. I push and hurl it through space until I feel the same vertigo I felt that fateful night. A cloud scuds past the moon and the whole room darkens in shadows. I feel the iron weight of the thug’s body ease off me by a fraction. It’s just enough for me to reach down and grab one fallen stiletto off the floor, channel a life’s worth of vehemence, and crack him in the temple.

The heel punctures his skin, and sinks in. I manage to push him off, but he’s still writhing. His hand grips something on the floor and I see the glint of metal again. It’s the saw. I try to roll, but he grasps my wrist, pulling me closer.

There’s a sudden, ghostly shriek. I look up. It’s Harmony. She has the scissors, the real ones, and she’s gouged both her eyes out, practising. She hurls the scissors with all her strength. They land



in the thug’s left eye, sinking up to the handles. He stops moving.

There’s a long silence. We’re all in shock.

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Then Javier helps me sit up and makes a tourniquet for my arm from a torn curtain. Ace crawls out from underneath the bed and begins to play a triumphant riff on his guitar. Harmony circles the room with nervous adrenaline.

My mother leans over the man’s lifeless body. She shakes her head dismissively, reaches down, and pulls at the metal handles.

“These are good scissors,” she says, handing them to me as she de-materializes. “You’ll want to keep them. They’re worth a pretty penny, I’m sure.”

I look around the room at the cracked window-pane, broken door, and pools of blood. There are bloodstained

blue feathers stuck everywhere, and a huge body to either report or dispose of. A body that still, no doubt, has living friends.

“My God, I am sorry,” Javier says. “I was no match for him when he came for me. But you were.”

“Well, we’ve a team now,” I gesture at my roommates and bow. “Though we have to find Chardonnay, or we won’t be nearly as fabulous.” I already miss her.

“I won’t leave again,” Javier says. He sweeps my hair to the side and kisses me on the neck and earlobe. I feel so fortunate I didn’t lose him forever. Then I realize the dead man on my floor could still come back to haunt us all. I pick up the copy of the Madame Zee. I have a great deal of spiritual housecleaning to do.

Tonight my ghosts and I braved our way through the darkest gloom to avenge old wounds. Javier is by my side. I can still feel dark tendrils in the corners, yes, but the moonlight’s shining through again. My hotel room is a ruin, and it’s crowded now, too, but it’s still my sanctuary. □



To separate the sheep from the goats is to identify the worthy among the unworthy. The idiom comes from Jesus Christ’s prophecy that the compassionate sheep of humankind will enjoy God’s favour, while the unsympathetic goats will be damned for eternity.