



Way Of The Bone

James Chambers

AMONG NEW YORK'S GRIMY BUILDINGS AND THEIR PATCHWORK OF rooftops spread the telltale flickers and momentary distortions of light that signaled the presence of Gorge's enemies. They gathered in the shadows and quiet places of the city's high perches, forsaking the beauty of the Faerie Kingdoms for this world of coarse landscapes and ugliness. No doubt their spies had spread word that Gorge was gathering magic in the mortal world, and though they couldn't know what he planned when he took the stage tonight, they couldn't let whatever it might be go unanswered. In less than eight hours, Red Gorge would perform the biggest show of their long career.

The most important of Gorge's life since his exile.

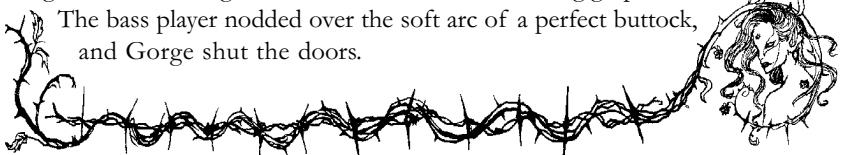
And there's still much to do, thought Gorge.

He turned from the window to where half a dozen unconscious people lay scattered like wilted flowers. Dev, his drummer, was dead to the world, still dressed in his immutable costume of denim and motorcycle boots, entangled with three sleeping women on one of the couches. Empty bottles and mounds of pills peppered the room. Someone had smashed a torchiere lamp through the widescreen television. Gorge opened the first adjoining room. Inside, Roald, his guitarist, sat meditating on the balcony, his bed empty, his room clean.

Gorge retreated. Next door, his bass player, who looked like he hadn't yet slept, entertained a handful of women in bed. Three of them stared at Gorge's naked body with open lust.

"Sound check at four o'clock. If you're late, I'll have your balls," Gorge said. "I fucking mean it, Tank. Don't screw this gig up."

The bass player nodded over the soft arc of a perfect buttock, and Gorge shut the doors.



10 • Way Of The Bone

He cherished the chaos and abandon these people brought to their celebrations, sweetened so much by their mortality and the very real possibility of dying for a good time. Gorge had known excess before his exile, but it had been bland in comparison, without consequence and therefore cheapened. Here, life was lived on the hard edge of a genuine abyss, and he found it addictive. He'd participated fully for many years, but drugs and alcohol didn't affect him the same way they did the others, and anyway it was the atmosphere of risk and the sense of blind defiance that got him off. This was the way to live: with one's ego and libido unchecked, forever ready to flip the bird at convention.

Back in his room, Gorge opened the curtains and let his skin drink in the midday heat. An old melody from the Faerie Kingdoms flashed through his thoughts, and he sat on the edge of the bed, picked up his guitar, and strummed while he sang the tune in a whisper. He felt a sense of falling into his past, when every day had been a thousand times more glorious than this one, and he had been worshipped, and lived among kings. But the melody Gorge heard perfectly in his mind could not be played as intended here. He put down his guitar and chose that moment to tell himself, as he had every day for more than half a century: *Now I am free.*

Behind him, Delilah uncoiled from the sheets and cupped herself against Gorge's back, wrapping her legs around his waist. Her skin, still damp with sweat from a morning spent in passion, plastered to Gorge. The gnarled knobs of flesh over his scapulae tingled as she cleansed their weeping scar tissue with a moist washcloth from a bowl on the nightstand, and then caressed them with her fingertips and her lips. Electrified with anticipation of tonight's concert, she and Gorge felt more playful and intimate than they had in years.

Delilah hugged him tight, so that her words reached Gorge on the palanquin of her honeyed breath, as she said, "Tell me again about how it was in the Faerie Kingdoms."

Gorge settled against her, caressing the silky tops of her thighs. "Which version do you want today? The paradise I sacrificed for my life here with you, or the gilded cage from which I broke free to save my soul?"

"How do *you* see it today?"

"Today, I see through new eyes. Today it's a delicate fruit rotten at its core, and I will destroy it before it spreads its taint."

"How will you do it?"

"I will find the way, the Way of the Bone."

Delilah glided her tongue over Gorge's neck and slid her hands downward along his chest and abdomen, but he stopped her with a gentle touch.

"You'll keep me here all day if I let you," he said, with a wicked grin. "I've got interviews and a sound check."

Flashing Gorge a luscious pout, Delilah rose and moved to the bathroom. Gorge watched, captivated by her deep, blue-black hair, the shapes and textures of her body, and the sublime way her curves and muscles shifted when she walked. She hadn't aged since he met her more than five decades ago; he'd brought