

Best Served Cold

By Deborah Rae Cota and Anthony Slawson

After he consumed one too many cocktails with a stripper named Caramel, Steven Ray Broadhurst, decided to drive home to his wife through the winding, deserted canyon; far too fast, much too carelessly. His silver Lexus careened the curves of the rural road as he tried to focus in the darkness and keep from going over the rocky ridge.

Something made the car buck and jump, as if hitting a speed bump. The shocks of his car took the brunt of the impact, but so did his lip as he hit the steering wheel. Angrily, he pulled to the side of the road, shut off the engine and viewed his physical damage in the vanity mirror.

“Shit!” he screamed, looking at the broken veneer on one of his once-perfect front teeth. His lip had swelled to twice its size, and was tender to the touch. He winced, then sighed, and looked to the rest of his appearance and as usual, approved. Smoothing his hair, he saw the tooth again and became enraged. Steven opened the door, clumsily lifted himself from the car, and staggered back to see what he ran over. He moved quickly, and cursed at the crushed and scattered mass in the road. He closed in, his gait slowed as his hand came to his mouth in a feeble attempt to keep his stomach from lurching. It didn’t help. There, in the road, was a body.

Unrecognizable as to male or female, clearly he was not the only car to pass this way. Parts were missing, smashed, or lay a short distance away; probably thrown on impact. The site sickened him, yet he was unable to look away. He'd seen a dead body before. Hell, he'd made several of them himself. He heard the revving of an engine and panicked. Steven ran to his car, threw himself in, turned over the engine and sped away. He talked to himself as he drove, trying to quell the questions his mind was relentlessly pounding at him.

“You ran over a body.”

“It was already dead.”

“What if it wasn’t?”

“But it was.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course, I am...”

“What if you could have helped?”

“You saw it! No one could have helped.”

“But, what if...”

“Oh, well. What’s done is done. And you clearly weren’t the first. Shut up!”

Steven yelled at the specters in his head, and punched the gas.

Finally arriving home; he saw his wife, Dorothy, was already there. Her pristine, white Volvo sedan parked perfectly under the car port. He blew the vehicle a kiss, and thanked the heavens for all her Daddy's money. Steven locked his vehicle with a chirp, dragged himself to the front door and prepared to be raked over the coals for his tardiness by the prim little missus.

“Yes, I am late. Yes, I’ve been drinking. Be glad I came home to you at all, you rich....”

Steven was alone. In the dark. The house was silent, save for the constant tick-tick-tick of the antique grandfather clock in the foyer. He reached for the light switch aside the front door and flicked it on.

Nothing.

He left the door open behind him. The dim light from the street lamp as his only guidance, Steven moved towards the table by the stairs to turn on the Tiffany lamp, but he was stopped in his tracks.

“It won’t work. I’ve cut the power,” the voice said. “Close the door. We have much to discuss. I know who you are, and I know what you did.”

Steven reached under the table for the forty-five taped to the bottom.

The crack of the gun, fired from somewhere in the dark, startled Steven as the Tiffany lamp beside him crashed to the floor in pieces.

"It isn't there, Mr. Broadhurst. Not that I need it. I could kill you in an instant, here and now, if I wanted to...but I prefer to play a little game. Similar to the game you played with her...before you attacked her."

"Who are you? What are you talking about?"

"My name is Malachi Thorne. You brutalized my wife, Dara. And I want you dead."

The silent swallowing sound of a terrified individual crept across the expanse of the room and whispered its music to the ears of one born long before the humans were climbing down out of their trees. The memories of a beloved wife pulled against Malachi's dead heart, in fact, her memory...and his delicious vengeance were all that gave life to what others fully have come to know as eternally dead.

Thorne blinked slowly and unseen there in the embrace of the shadows, and secretly dined on the aroma of fear which even now bathed the filthy maggot of a human....the man that spread his wretched filth upon Lady Dara.....the man that will pray to new god's for mercy as his soul is ripped alive from his still living flesh.

"I don't know anyone named Dara...never heard of her...you got the wrong damned house...get the fuck outta my home before I call the police, you FREAK!!"

Malachi's lips began to slowly etch upon themselves a very evil grin, as age old fangs quietly birthed their presence...he licked them slowly, caressing the tools of his trade. A tender welcome to the moment.

Steven panted like a terrified animal, caught by an unseen predator. The front door slammed shut behind him with great force, taking his breath with it as an icy cold rolled over him. There in the dark, he gasped a stuttered breath. An uncharacteristic reaction that played upon his memory.

His memory of her.

The writer.

She was signing books at a local book store. He even bought a copy of the meaningless tripe. Asked her to sign it, flirted with her mercilessly, and then he waited for her. She spurned his advances politely, trying coyly not to anger him. Told him her husband would be there any minute. He dragged her into an alley. She fought him.

He loved it when they did that.

She pleaded with him to stop, and gasped a staggered breath from beneath the weight of him, "My...my...husband. He will...he will kill you."

Steven laughed at this as he picked up her limp, beaten body and threw her into the brick wall. Heard a crack. Was it her head against the brick façade or her neck snapping. He didn't care...until now. Reality brought an overwhelming wave of angry heat from somewhere deep inside, and he remembered one more thing.

"Dorothy!"

"Dorothy is lovely, Mr. Broadhurst. How in the world did one as small and petty as you gain the arm, and the money, of such a grand lady? We had a long chat, she and I. She told me all about you two."

"Had?" Steven asked, turning from side to side, trying to keep up with the ever moving voice.

"Yes, Mr. Broadhurst...Had. Past tense of have. Has happened. Previously. Are you not familiar with the term?"

"Of course I am familiar with the term," Steven snapped. "What have you done with her? With my wife?"

"Wife," Malachi thought. "The sacred word a man should have forever burned upon the walls of his heart when he has finally reached a maturation of creature, and taken unto himself the other half of his nature intended. A word that is supposed to be the same as every definition and meaning of the term, forever. Yet before me stands a beast that cared not for the sanctity of oath, nor of bond....the man that robbed me of my storyteller, my friend...my eternity of togetherness."

Liquid obsidian softly began to flow in his ancient vampiric eyes as Thorne silently unchained and summoned forth earth's oldest dark majicks...the one's which had been pleading to be unleashed from the chasms of his soul. Stepping from the shadows he faced the one called Broadhurst and looked down at him with a gaze that would freeze the spirit of even the most brave.

Steven gasped without sound as he looked into the eyes of death and realized for the first time what suffering looked like...what pain looked like...what unbridled agony looked like.... a small trickle of urine seeped from his underdeveloped penis and slid warmly down the inside leg of his Carcinian Silk slacks creating a tiny visible wet spot to openly display his truest pathetic nature.

"Mr. Broadhurst...Steven.....you are truly going to suffer this night and you may believe that God will not come to save you. You would be correct."

Steven took a feeble breath to scream, thrust his arms out in front of him to ward off his attacker and felt the fibrous, dusty weave of a wall tapestry. Realizing it was just a weird dream, he felt his crotch to find it dry as before. Breath returned to his body, and left just as rapidly from a sudden and intense sense of Deja vu when he fingered the rug again.

"Dorothy's best friend. A school teacher. Timid little mouse. I rolled her up in a fake tapestry from the basement, and then dumped her body in the waterway."

"She was terrified wasn't she, Mr. Broadhurst? You fed on that fear, didn't you? Got off on it, yes?"

Steven jumped as the voice whispered in his ear. Icy breath crawled across his neck. What he thought was a mere dream, was in fact a reality. He reached for the wall to keep it behind him, as he slid across searching for safety. Making his way to the stairwell,

he made a mad dash upstairs, trying door after door searching for his wife. Arriving at the end of the hall, he entered the library and found her standing at the window. Her silhouette outlined by the light of the full, glorious moon.

"Dorothy, are you all right? Dorothy? Dorothy, are you listening to..."

Steven reached to turn her around and stopped when he saw that it wasn't her. It was Dara. She grabbed Steven's wrist with her cold hand, hissed at him, and then released a cry of torment that rattled the house to its foundation.

"I told you, Mr. Broadhurst. You killed her. You killed my wife, and I did the only thing I could to save her. Now, she is what you see before you. A shell. A ghost of the beautiful and loving woman I once called my own. The love of my life. *My soul*. But you wouldn't know anything about that...would you, Mr. Broadhurst?"

"What are you?"

"Some call me a *monster*...which I find rather comical now that I have met you. You and I are nothing alike."

"What have you done with my wife?"

"*I've* done nothing with *your* wife...although I can't speak for mine. I thought about it, but after speaking with her at length we came up with a better solution. Dorothy and Dara are...very close now. Like sisters."

"Where is she?" Steven asked. He turned and faced Dara and screamed, "Where is she?"

"Shhh," Dara said. "She is sleeping."

"Sleeping? What do you mean sleeping? Sleeping, how? She's dead isn't she? You killed her! You killed my Dorothy, didn't you?"

"Calm down, Mr. Broadhurst...you are not a widower. You are *not* a millionaire. Did you really think it would all come to you that easy?"

"*Dorothy*," Malachi thought. "*The insect standing before me speaks her name in a tone as if he truly understands what it means to love a wife. His vocal expressions have become a destructive army, hell bent on sickening me.*"

The room begins to fade from view as Malachi looks inward to the realms where unspeakable agonies patiently wait to unleash their venomous bite. Distant thunders from ethereal dimensions begin to roll as the hatred for Steven summons forth the imprisoned demons which are chained to the walls of Malachi's soul. They begin to moan as they awaken and tug hard at the chains which bind them, seeking the freedom to wash the world in a flood of wrath.

Visions of suffering materialize around the room as the arcane powers breach the veil which separates illusion from reality. He blinks slowly as his vampiric eyes watch Steven being pulled by unseen arms into the pits of damnation and pain. Horrid agonizing cries erupt from the lungs of the human who is so rightly being punished in both body and soul. His flesh peeled from the limbs while creatures of the most ancient darkness seize his mind, and rape the very breath from his lungs.

A slow moving snarl forms at the corner of Malachi's mouth as he gently succumbs to the intoxicating deliciousness experienced with every moment Steven is in pain. He licks his fangs intimately...caressing them...aching to sink them deep into the core and living spirit of Steven...wanting to taste the final exhale of his inferior existence...drink his life until he hears death laughing in the shadows.

"I don't know what you are talking about!"

Malachi laughed, "Oh, yes, *we* thought you'd say that."

Steven heard the sound of a match strike and saw the glow of a candle light the face behind the resonating and eerie voice that he had been tormented by and was avoiding in the dark.

"*He is just a man,*" Steven thought. "*But if he's just a man, why am I still so terrified. What is wrong with...?*"

Malachi and Dara laughed together; deep and heartily. Steven shivered. He could feel the connection between them and knew the laughter was at him. Steven moved back towards the door, but he was stopped by the man who was suddenly there to block his way.

"What *exactly* did you discuss with my wife? Where is she? What did you do to her?"

Malachi laughed, "We talked and talked about her concerns and woes. We laughed about...life, love and the pursuit of happiness. *Her* happiness."

"Concerns and woes? She has no concerns and woes. She is the richest woman in the country. As for happiness, she can buy all the happiness she wants."

Malachi waves a finger at Steven, scolding him, "No, apparently she can't because she bought you and you, well, you are her greatest disappointment...ever."

"What are you talking about, I..."

"No...you didn't. She was your wife in name only. You never wanted to do the things she wanted to do...you weren't *there* for her. You never were. You never loved anything about her...except her money."

A moan rises from the love seat facing the window. The moonlight shines through the panes and across the armrest where a familiar hand with a large Sapphire wedding ring perches.

"Dorothy?"

"You see, Mr. Broadhurst, I wanted you dead for what you did to my wife and what you took from me, but then I learned that Dorothy felt the same way, too. That's when we formed the perfect plan."

"Plan? What plan?" Steven says, distracted by the woman standing up from the loveseat by the window.

"Dorothy knew your greatest love was her money, so she decided you would never have any of it...ever."

Steven tries to make out the face of the woman coming towards him in the moonlight's glow and the candlelight's flicker. The hair is loose and curled, and the clothes are provocative and form fitting...*it can't possibly be Dorothy.*

"She chose to keep her money for all eternity and we were more than happy to oblige. I originally wanted my Dara to take you as her first kill, but this is much more poetic, is it not? My Dara takes Dorothy as her first kill, taking any chance of you ever getting your hands on her money, and Dorothy takes...what was her name? *Caramel?*"

"What? Who is Caramel? I don't know anyone named...!"

"Yes you do. You were just with her this evening. You beat her to within an inch of her life. Then you ran over her with your car."

"That was...? No. No, you're wrong. She was...I...!"

"No," Malachi says. "I am not wrong." Malachi moves to Steven's side and gently blows on his face. Steven is transported to the parking lot of the club he was at

earlier. He sees the stripper at his feet, her face a mass of broken flesh and bone...and in his hand the crowbar from his car. He sees himself drive away, and his wife glide to the body's side. She cradles the girl as she fights to breathe, smiles wide exposing her long, white fangs, and sinks them into the girl's neck ending the pain and agony that he inflicted. She lovingly lifts the body and sweeps her off to the road where Steven would surely pass by...

Steven gasps as he returns to reality and he finally sees the face of his wife hovering over him. Pale, ashen skin surrounds her blood-red eyes. Stark, white fangs emerge from her once delicate smile as she snarls like a beast preparing to attack.

"Dorothy?...Dorothy, please, I'm sorry. I can change. I can. I will. *I will*. Don't do this, please? I beg you. I, I...I love you."

Dorothy grabs Steven by the collar, and pulls him in close, hypnotizing him with her gaze, and breathing in the scent of his fear. She leans in and whispers in his ear.

"Liar!"