

Guardians II

by Christopher R. Rice

“Damn it, Moyra that was not how that was supposed to go!” Al growled out in annoyance. The aswang had lead them a merry chase under the school and into an old bootleggers tunnel before he and Moyra had managed to burn them out.

“What? We’re both alive, the monsters are dead, the Pact is happy. Right Pact?” said the blonde sidhe woman.

The blonde haired, blue eyed magical construct nodded once and then simply vanished as if she had never been there.

“I’m going to go drink. You should get out of here and blow off steam, Al.”

“Unlike someone people I have work to do,” I said annoyed.

Moyra just laughed and waved bye at me as she left my backroom. Sam was covering the bar right now and I needed a shower and to wipe the blood off of my boots. I sat my flamethrower on the floor. It needed to go down to the basement with the rest of my “things I don’t want cops to find” stuff, but I was tired. There was supposed to have been a small nest. Instead, there had been a good three dozen of the creatures and their offspring. I’d run out of napalm and then we’d been forced to go hand-to-hand with the buggers. It was not as easy as I’d been lead to believe. The Pact couldn’t lie. It was incapable of that - but she could be wrong. And anything that could make her wrong about something in this city was . . . profoundly disturbing. The Pact in a sense *was* the city.

I trudged up the back staircase of the bar to my apartment above it and went immediately to my shower. I’d remodeled the place when I moved in and ditched the bathtub for a larger shower with a raindrop showerhead. I removed all my clothing and shoved them in a corner of the shower stall. I’d need to wash them before I washed them. Maybe I’d just throw them away. There was a *lot* of blood. And I really liked those boots. They’d been a gift from Sam when I started to ride a motorcycle and they’d lasted many years and through many dangers. Now they were slightly singed and squishy with blood.

“I’ll just get a bannik to clean the boots and toss the clothing,” I said to myself. Banniks were fae who hung out in public bathhouses that kept the place free of other riffraff, monitored the comings and goings, and generally were the keepers of such places. Originally of Slavic origin they’d spread all over in the 18th century and could be found anywhere. The one I was thinking of was name Uri. He was a nice fella who I bothered once in a blue moon to help me clean something. Banniks could clean just about anything with a touch restoring it to perfection and it’s best state. No one knew how they did it, just that they did it. Of course, they also had the limited ability to foretell your future and that’s what most people sought them over. A bannik’s foretelling might not detailed, but it would be accurate.

I let the water wash over me as I let my mind wander scrubbing and washing as my thoughts drifted. By the time I’d come back to myself my skin was pink from the scrubbed and exfoliated skin instead of with blood. Grabbing a nearby towel I dried off and then went hunting for clothing. Tuesday was the usual laundry day for me so I ended up wearing some of my older clothing. I tugged on some underwear and then a pair a sweats and went through a pile of clothes until I found my “gently used” Metallica tee-shirt that I’d worn the night before. Aneira tended to take my older clothing to sleep in (and my newer stuff too if I didn’t stop her from snatching it up) when she was away.

I momentarily thought about laying down for a bit, but then remembered all the paperwork I needed to do that stay lay on my desk downstairs. I sighed.

“Never done,” I grumbled and made my way downstairs and to my office.