

# *Violetta*

*By Paul Kershaw*

*I'm putting these details together, trying to make sense of what happened two years ago, because I think it has something to do with what I saw today. I was sitting on my park bench (and I call it that because I've sat there during my lunch hour every workday since Darkcloud gave me what I didn't want, and Violetta didn't give me what I wanted).*

*Every once in a while, I catch something out of the corner of my eye, but when I turn to look, it's gone. Creatures, children maybe. Watching me as I watch for them. But there's only one I'm really looking for, a girl who's older than she should be.*

*I'm fairly certain I've gone insane.*

"I do not want this": The last thing I remember saying.

"Yes, you do": The last thing I remember hearing.

(I woke up alone, in my own bed. I considered that possibility that it had all been a dream, but it seemed so real: Her teeth on my throat, her thighs clenched around my waist, her fingernails scratching my back until the skin bled.

My back bled: That part I remembered, and even the thought made the skin taut again, and sting. Or maybe the pain was real.

I checked the mirror in the bathroom, twisting around like an acrobat to see my own back. There they were: Thin red lines marking trails of torn skin.

And if that part had been real, perhaps the other part...

No, that had been a dream.

It had to have been.)

Two weeks before, I had been talking to an acquaintance of mine who went by the name Darkcloud. I'd never really considered Darkcloud a friend, and his name was only the tip of the psychodrama iceberg.

I'd pretty much written him off as a poseur. He was too *tres*, even going so far as copying the face painting from Brandon Lee's version of the Crow. He wore black, of course, from head to toe, and he was equipped with the appropriate number of piercings (six on each ear, three more on his face [nose, tongue, and lip], a few on his hands, and perhaps some others in some more private areas).

And, of course, he liked to brood and write deathly awful Vagon poetry.

But he was where I was, and I was talking and he was responding, so I suppose I was voluntarily carrying on a conversation with him. It's sheer elitism that leads me to present the conversation that way, but I'll freely admit that I'm an elitist. None of my friends are poseurs.

(I remember the kiss. I touched my lip, and examined it. It was still raw from the night before, just like the skin on my back. But that had been different: The kiss had been a singular event, despite all the other intimacy that had occurred.

She'd kissed me once.

Once was enough. Once was, perhaps, too much.)

"The thing about magic is—" That was how it started with Darkcloud. People like him are dragged in with conversation starters like that, without fail, even when they're not wanted.

"Go ahead," he challenged.

I looked at him tiredly. I'd been talking to Ryan and Bev, who shared my penchant for having derisive conversations about people who thought too much of themselves. Like Darkcloud, actually.

“The thing about magic is, it just doesn’t work.” I did my best to ignore him, keeping my attention on Ryan and Bev. “The people who swear by it can never give any decent evidence.”

“I can prove it,” Darkcloud said.

(Those breasts: I remember those breasts. Full, firm, soft, comforting perfection.

I washed my face in the sink, the wave of cold water cleansing my pores. My lower lip stung as the water hit it, but I resisted the flinch.

I was alone: The house was empty. She was gone.)

“You can’t prove it any more than any of the thousand other wannabes who’ve read too many Llewellyn books can prove it.” I snorted, while Ryan and Bev looked nervously at Darkcloud. They didn’t like him any more than I did, but they let their fear of him show.

I wasn’t afraid of some two-bit Trent Reznor faker.

“You consider yourself a religious person?” he asked.

I shrugged. “Sure.”

He nodded. “Sure.’ Great depth of conviction.”

“What’s your point?”

“My point is, you seem awfully skeptical for a religious person.”

“Expecting someone to be able to prove their claims is healthy skepticism.”

“But what do you believe?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, what do you *believe*? If all you are is skepticism, you can’t believe much.”

I noticed that he’d moved up chest-to-chest with me, close enough I could smell his breath as he spoke, and it made me uncomfortable. I stepped back. “What’s your game, Darkcloud?”

“Proof. You say you want, I say I got it, and I say you don’t really want it.”

(I sat on my couch. I was naked. I was staring out the window.

It was Saturday.

I was looking out the window, but I didn't really see much. I was too busy remembering.

I felt numb, drunk, high, just plain confused.

Enamored with the night before.)

I still don't remember what possessed me to go there. It was Darkcloud's house, for goodness sake.

This was a week after the incident in the bookstore, with Ryan and Bev. He'd made me promise to show up. That's why I was there, because I'd made a promise.

That, and I was looking forward to showing him up.

"Bring a wish," he'd said. That was easy: I was lonely. Not that it mattered anyway, because he couldn't fulfill it anyhow.

He was going to conjure something up. Make my wish come true.

So there was also morbid curiosity. I wanted to see what sort of show he was going to put on.

*I only see the little girl for a heartbeat, in my peripheral vision. She shimmers, and I can see in her eyes my own sense of emptiness. I'd had all the answers, I knew everything there was to know about the universe. There were rules. Everything made sense. I could lie to myself about superficial religious beliefs to fit in with my friends, while holding to a closet atheism: That was my dirty secret. That group didn't know better anyway. Those pagan circles never talked about religion in anything more than the most generic, non-threatening ways. No confrontation, not even a hint, not even if it was, "So, what do you believe?" It was safe to be an atheist there.*

*But not anymore. Now that look of confusion was in my eyes, and in the girl's eyes as well, as if some component of her reality didn't make sense either.*

*I wish I knew her name. I'd call it out.*

*For whatever difference it may make.*

(Legs entwined. Arms entwined. Torsos and tongues.

A night of bliss. That's what she gave me.

And she took, too.

Her name was Violetta.)

I rang the doorbell. It bonged ominously throughout his house.

I should say that I was impressed with Darkcloud's house, although I guessed he still lived with his parents. It was a nice Tudor in the tony part of town. White: The door, the siding, the brickwork of the basement. It was all white.

I'm sure he hated it.

I moved to ring the bell again when the door opened. It didn't swing, it poured open.

There was Darkcloud, looking downright Satanic in his black cowl.

I resisted the urge to laugh. "Ok, Anton—" I started, but he shook his head and pressed a finger to his lips. Oddly, I obeyed.

He led me into the front room, which was the antithesis of the façade: The curtains were drawn, and the walls and sparse furnishings were black, pitch black. A fire blazed in the fireplace; the log on the top was gnarled and knotty.

Darkcloud handed me a slip of paper. On it was written a simple instruction:  
THE QUERENT WILL STRIP NAKED.

"Oh, this is too—" I started, then felt his eyes on me again, and shut up.

I wanted to run, but knew I'd crossed the line and couldn't go back. Inside, I felt as if I were watching the beginnings of a car crash: The brake line had cracked, the collision could still be avoided, but for arrogance and ...

And for morbid curiosity.

(It was somewhere between the passion and the panic that I lost my memory.

I said she'd kissed my lip, but that wasn't quite true: She bit it, tugging it away from me until the skin broke. I tasted blood, my blood, on her tongue. There was

that blinding moment of agony, and then the sweet taste of iron, and then the panic, the knowledge that it had gone too far.

I wanted her to kiss me again.

But she wouldn't.)

I was torn. On the one hand, standing naked in Darkstorm's living room, I felt like a total idiot. On the other, I felt pulled in further. Part of me wanted to burst out laughing at the situation, and part of me wanted to pull myself as deeply as possible into this world.

He went to the doorway leading to the rest of the house, then turned and looked at me expectantly. I followed him obediently.

I wondered how his parents put up with this bleak decoration. The first thought was that he didn't really live with his parents, that he was independently wealthy. Maybe he'd inherited it after they'd died tragically. Yes, that was it: They'd died some painful death, and the emotional trauma had turned him into this dark soul. Maybe he'd killed them: That thought stirred a giggle, which I fought to suppress.

Another thought entered into my mind, but I pushed it back down. But as I walked through the hallway, it came back up again, spurred on by the pictures there. One was a middle-aged man who looked vaguely like Darkstorm sitting in a throne with pig's feet for arms and a moose skull as a canopy. He was dressed in a black satin gown, and he scowled menacingly at the camera. Another was of a naked middle-aged woman on all fours, her face blocked by her hair. A burning black candle, a knife, and a skull were artfully arranged on her back. I passed another picture, this one of a man that could have been Darkstorm's grandfather, likewise dressed in black and surrounded by an array of similarly appointed men and women, one of whom I recognized, and whose signature – "To John, who scares even me, Anton." – was in the corner.

For the first time, I realized Darmstorm wasn't playing.

My skin went cold, and I wanted to turn and run, but I just kept walking forward.

(I sat on my couch, staring at the world outside, and tried to remember meeting Violetta. I couldn't. All I could remember was the sexual blur of the previous evening, from the moment she led me by the hand into my bedroom to the moment I'd blacked out.

I tried to concentrate on meeting her... in a bar? On the street? Had she just knocked on my door out of the blue?

But every time I tried to focus, it blurred away again, and all I was left with was the passion and the panic.)

I was led into a room in the back of the house. In a normal house, it would have been the den, I think.

The room was lit with black candles, a quantity that made me think of the fire code. There were arcane symbols written on the walls, and not the sort of flimsy symbols one finds in a cheap New Age bookstore grimoire. These were complex symbols, coiling and wrapping around each other in a chaos that made sense.

One said, "Satan is Lord." I startled myself by knowing that, but as I examined the marks, they disentangled themselves. Another said, "The Meek shall inherit an Empty Shell; the Powerful shall have Dominion." Yet another said, "The Lord is my Liberator: I Shall Not Need."

I looked at Darkstorm, who was looking at me expectantly again. He motioned to a spot on the floor, and I noticed a cushion where he was pointing. It was situated in front of an altar like the one I'd seen in the photo, with a small table in place of the woman. Over the altar was a mounted goat's head.

On the altar cloth, a disentangled scrawl read, "Kneel, and Demand your Will."

I knelt.

*This came out of my research on the fey realm. Unfortunately, I didn't write down the proper citation, but here it is anyway:*

*"Ours is not the only plane of existence. There are realms that exist only at the bounds of our imagination. There are those who can see them: Sometimes just out of the corner of their eyes, but children have been known to see them full-on. There are also those who move between the realms, either to interact with us or – so say some legends – to mate with us. Those in the other planes are as fascinated with us as we are with them."*

(Where did we meet?

Creamy thighs, so smooth and sweet, milk on the lips...

Where did we meet?

Her soft moans as I suckled her breasts, rolling my tongue around her stiff nipples...

Where did we meet?

Her talons raking against my back in pain and pleasure, her teeth on the back of my neck...

Where did we meet?

Perfumed fur, moist clit, tight hole playing at my probing fingers...

Where did we meet? – but it was no use.)

I should have gotten up.

I should have run from the room.

I should have grabbed for my clothing.

I should have jumped out the living room window, if that's what it took.

That's what one voice inside me was saying, the irrational part, the instinctual part, the part I rarely listened to.

My rational voice was laughing at it, telling it that it was silly.

But, if this was all silly, and pointless, why didn't I leave? I'd seen the show, after all. It was disturbing, three generations of Satanists, the serious kind. Okay, all right, I got it, Darkstorm's messed up, end of the show.

"Kneel, and Demand Your Will."

I looked nervously at Darkstorm.

I looked down.

I should have said nothing.

"I want someone who loves me."

Then again:

"I want someone who loves me."

(I was crying, and holding my head.

What had Darkstorm done to me?

What had Violetta done to me?

What had I done?

It had all been a dream. It had to be.

It *had* to be.

My lip started bleeding again, as I bit into it. For a moment, I could taste Violetta again.

How did I even know her name? I couldn't remember her ever telling it to me.

And then, my lip bleeding, my back raw, my shaft throbbing, she'd tied me down to the bed, spread-eagle. I was shivering, on the verge of tears. I was terrified, I was joyful, I was horny, I was the loneliest I'd ever felt.)

"Ex nihil loc omnis diabolos," Darkstorm intoned. It was Latin gibberish, and I knew it, but I was barely concentrating anyway. "Omnis potentia coppula sic eam. Victimus corpora non veni veneras."

There was no fanfare, just several minutes of overwhelmingly heavy silence.

"Thy Will be done," he said at last. "You are excused."

"But... That's it? How long—"

“One week.” Then he repeated, “You are excused.”

I was going to protest, but as I looked around the room, the scrawl was scrawl again; it had retangled itself. The candles were all out, and the room was now lit by a stark, overly bright overhead light. Under the light, the accoutrements that had moments ago looked ominous now looked ridiculous, and I felt absurd.

I’d been had, I was sure of it. I don’t know how he did the trick with the candles, but the rest of it was just some clever mirrorshow.

“One week. Right.” I scoffed and tried to cover my embarrassment at standing naked in Darkstorm’s den.

He raised an eyebrow, having pulled his hood down. “Mockery won’t make the magic ineffectual, but it *will* taint it.”

I laughed again, then went to get my clothes.

(“I do not want this.”

“Yes, you do.”

And then she mounted me, my shaft entering her.

And then I passed out.)

Two days after Violetta seduced me, I found Darkstorm. He was looking rather proud of himself, curled up around a book on a sofa in the same bookstore where I’d challenged him.

“What did you do to me?” I demanded, lifting him up and holding him against the wall.

“I proved you wrong,” he said smugly, barely daunted by his position.

“No, you didn’t. You paid someone to mess up my head.”

He smirked. “I don’t even know what happened, I just know from your reaction that something *did* happen.”

“You cocky son of a – you’re behind this.”

He shrugged. “Believe what you want. Did you get what you asked for?”

As a matter of fact, no. I'd asked for someone to love me. That hadn't been love, that had been a disgusting display of lust. I was revolted by the thought that I'd enjoyed it...

... but even as I tried to assert that thought, the memory of the taste of my own blood on her tongue flooded back in, and blocked out my negative feelings.

"Yes," I said. "I think."

"Good. Are you going to let me down now?"

*I'm sitting on my parkbench again. It's been two years since Violetta appeared, then disappeared, without a trace. Two years of obsessing on the loss of whatever shreds of sanity I thought I'd had left. Two years of –*

*There's that little girl again. My head wants to turn in her direction, but I can't. She has to stay at the edge of my view.*

*She's smiling today. It's the second day in a row that I've seen her, but the first time I've seen her smile.*

*She says it, quietly, in a whisper so only I can hear: "I love you, Daddy."*

*I turn to look, and then she's gone.*

July 26-31, 2002