

Sherwood

By

Ty Ragan

Dedicated to

**My Mum & Dad,
Who believed in me when even I did not,
A true couple that has lived out the love of Robin and Marian
before my eyes.**

A Ballad...

Down through the years.

Stories have been told.

Songs sung.

Poems wrote.

Plays enacted.

Movies made.

All have caught

The love story,

That is timeless.

Locked in a battle against injustice.

Robin and Marian.

Falling in love.

Many believed to be the Hood but never de-hooded if you will.

As vile villains plot to seize England from the king.

Starve the masses.

A political coupe overthrown by a rag tag bunch

Of forest men and women.

Scholars' debate,

Which tale is true?

Which is nothing more than fiction.

But as I write these last few notes,

My time is drawing near.

The wolves of hell are baying the last.

Another battle fought,

Evil over turned.

Damned crusades no more...from one bloody revolution to the next.

Probably should have let Will or Alan write this, well that would be hard, all things considered...

But I digress for this is not about what happens to the "Merry Men" as history remembers us, but rather the eternal love that binds together the seeking of justice.

That eternal love that always brings Robin and Marian together...regardless of time or space. Am I saying these two are immortal? Heavens no, that is me writing this little treatise, no, Rob and Mary, will they suffer from a slight condition called reincarnation. For you see that there love never ends well.

I still remember holding Rob, as he shot that arrow out of the abbey that one time...that was the hardest grave I ever had to dig. It is about time though that they came back together. This city is in trouble, sure it's a new country, but I remember them in Italy during World War II, and North Korea, Vietnam working the orphanages, and the Cold War.

But injustice is rampant, strip mining, people not able to feed the children and pay the rent. Atrocious what this wealthy land has done to those who built it.

Maybe if we are lucky Rob and Mary will come again.

Prologue

What is hope? It is a question to be wrestled with by academics and philosophers yet here I am holding her fiery red hair while she vomits out stomach acids and orange liquids, Reesa my beloved. Wondering if this is what creates hope in another person.

This is yet another example of feeling like nothing more than a band-aid, checks that, the water on the wound before the band-aid. Another prime example of those I love being injured for what I am attempting to do.

Just fighting to make this world a better place. And here I am, crying out to a God whose existence even I have begun to question the existence of, yet know this is a calling on my life from that Holy Mystery—creative force.

Sirens wail in the background. Roll Reesa slowly onto her side as she begins to convulse. This all seemed so much easier years ago when we started, just kids.

The vibration on my hip. Stroking her hair as her head rests on my lap. Flip open the phone, "Daemon here."

"Hood maybe we should keep cover."

"Damn it Sax, Reesa is down, Nott is gone."

Line goes dead. Call dropped. Shit.

This seemed so simple, another little adventure of Hood and his Merry Gang on the streets of Sherwood. Unfortunately it all went horribly wrong.

The screech of tires. Hustle and commotion. A gloved hand on my shoulder.

“Hood. We got her.”

The paramedics move quickly, her vomit is soaking into my jeans; the green hood I wear hides the tears in my eyes from the paramedics. My leather jacket is sticking to my t-shirt and skin. The warehouse is sweltering.

My boots crunch shattered glass from the skylight I had been thrown through. It was an ambush; Nott had kidnapped Reesa to draw me out. How I miss the days when Nott was with the crew, not the opposition.

Knows our secrets and played us like a ten buck guitar. The ambulance pulls away. Police begin to flood in. Took out five of Nott’s crew before Reesa went down.

Time to go, duck out a back door and vanish into the night shadows of the alley, the cold rain feels good in the cool prairie night. Hip is vibrating again. “What?”

“Reesa’s enroute to Scarlett Hospital.”

Sax's voice brings some consolation. That is only a few blocks over.

"On my way, have Malcolm meet me. Contact Sister Clare and John."

"Already on it bro. And Dae, I'm sorry."

Fight the catch in my voice; this was my idea a means to clean up the city. Then it wall went south, been doing this for fourteen years since grade eleven, and then tonight. Please God don't let her die on me.

"I—thank you Sax."

The rain is like a cool shower washing away the pain. The jog to the hospital is a fog, but there is the man mountain Malcolm. All six and a half feet of him, 300+ pounds of Albino muscle, just looking defeated entranceway of the hospital.

I pull the hood off, my burn scars ache, but then my soul is dying. The hood is shoved into my jacket pocket as we walk in together.

I hate not having the hood on, feel like everyone is staring at me, judging me for the sins of a parent, the pain of a childhood. A lifetime is what each of us has spent together. Cast aways in the stream of life, finding the love of a true parent. Sister Clare opened her dying convent house to us all, and raised us as her own.

The emergency desk. "Hi, I am looking for Reesa Fritzwater?"

The nurse turns away tapping away at keys. Malcolm is an imposing man mountain, his eyes scanning the room. Nott did this, or to be more accurate Rex MacCurtis, Mac, our brother.

"And you are sir?"

"Daemon Locksley, I'm her fiancée."

A few keystrokes, never making eye contact, but rather staring at my scarred face and scalp the permanent reminders of a mother who saw me as a money maker to feed an addiction. "She is in the operating room. Take a seat, and I will have a doctor connect with you."

Malcolm and I lower ourselves into the world's most ergonomically incorrect plastic mould chairs in the known multi-verses. My hip vibrates and an orderly points at the sign, I rise and exit the building before flipping it open. "Daemon."

"How is she?" The voice so sweet how I imagine God's voice sounded when the dove descended on Jesus of Nazareth at his baptism, the voice of Sister Clare.

"In the OR. Where are you?"

Silence. "John and I are in Ottawa honey. I am so sorry; we are working on getting a flight back right now. What happened?"

What happened? In all the confusion I forgot that they were at the Street Level Conference being held in Ottawa. Damn. Shouldn't put this on them, they have been through enough.

"Mac."

A slow intake of air on the other end of the phone. Mac was John's little brother; he came to live at Convent House was raised as part of Clare's crew.

First to agree with me on that Halloween night fourteen years ago, Covenant House Halloween Party, crashed by Nottingham Crue. I drove out the Crue in the green hood with my brothers and sister. Not taking any gruff from the hoodlums was what Clare was about, they threatened our den mum and learned what family was about.

The rush was incredible so much so that despite Clare and John reprimanding us and trying to get us to promise to hang the hood up, an idea was born to free the streets of Sherwood from the fear that was taking over. So was born The Hood and the Merry Crue.

Thirteen years we had fun, cracked thug heads, and held darkness at bay. Three months ago something cracked. Mac kissed Reesa; I decked Mac (hey brother or not, she's been steady with me for thirteen years). He walked out of Covenant House.

Two months ago, a black hooded figure calling himself Nott emerged and seized control of Sherwood's underworld by unifying the street gangs we had left in tatters.

Two days ago, Reesa was grabbed.

Three hours ago I was sent careening through a skylight in the industrial park after being pummelled on a roof by punks clothed in all black.

Dazed and sore there was Reesa lying on the ground just a meter or so away from me. Crawled over. Tried to get up when the black leather fist slammed into my hooded face.

Nott. He unmasked to reveal who he was.

Then vanished as smoke filled the warehouse.

The Reesa started convulsing and retching.

"He took Reesa, I tried to get her back." It was the only words that came to mind as the tears came down again, "I failed."

Muffled sounds on the other end, like Latin. "Dae you did not fail, she is safe and God will provide." I wish I could believe my mum, but I just don't know anymore.

A tapping on the glass, inside Malcolm is motioning me back in. "Got to go Mum, looks like there's word on Reesa."

"We're praying for her, should be back in town late afternoon."

"Thank you, love you."

Turn the power off on the phone and walk back inside.

Malcolm looks even more dejected than before. There is a doctor with him. No one is smiling, that sinking feeling enters my gut.

“Mr. Locksley, I am Dr. Tuck. Ms. Fritzwater is...”

PART ONE:

HOPE'S FLAMES

Chapter One

"...Stable." Dr. Tuck finishes his sentence. My heart raises, one of those stereotypical lumps in the throat moments. Stable. That was better than I ever dreamed of after what happened with Nott. Not even sure I will ever get that full story.

I feel the tension leave my body. "How long before I can see her?"

Dr. Tuck is a shorter middle-aged obese man, with a blue stained shirt and argyle tie that is loosened. "She is on the third floor in recovery, one of you may go."

With that the doctor leaves. Malcolm's hand rests on my shoulder. "Give me the hood, Dae. I'll be out tonight, you stay with Reesa."

I pull the hood from my pocket and hand it to my brother; Malcolm was abandoned on the literal doorstep of Covenant House. Clare actually acquired forged documents so that his birth mother, a strong out child sex trade worker in the city would not be arrested for abandonment and attempted murder. Malcolm became Malcolm Little, Clare's "biological" son.

Rapidly after that the Diocese defrocked and excommunicated Clare, Nun's are not to be sexually active. The challenge though arose with Covenant house, that is where John MacCurtis came in, bought

the property lock, stock and barrel from the Diocese for all us rugrats and Clare. It took some time, but Clare softened, and soon John moved into her room at the house.

So Malcolm was always the little brother (big little brother?). Always they're for one another and the hood is more than any one of us alone but rather the summation of all of us: Malcolm, Sax, Reesa, Natan and Mac.

Back when we were teenagers we believed we could change the world. Now this.

Stepping into the room the smell of ammonia hits my scarred nostrils. Hate that smell brings back trauma from my past. Waking up. Clare claiming me from my pains just like each of us.

"Reesa." Some beeps from monitors. Her chest rises and falls slowly. Sleeping but alive. A lounge chair next to the bed, I just crumple into the chair.

Sleep.

Alarms ringing. No. Groggy, nothing is coming into focus. Where am...hospital that sanitary smell again. Reesa in the bed. "Shit." It floods back to me.

My failure.

The door is creaking open. The 5'0 frame of Sax steps into the darkness. "Dae, we got a problem."

"Really Sax, I never would have guessed with Reesa in the hospital that we would have a problem."

"It's not that. Malcolm and Natan have been hooded and out tonight."

We are the Hood.

"What's up?" Sax looks tired. That look I had when we had heard that Reesa had been taken. That look I prayed never to see on anyone else's face. "Nott?"

Sax's massive shoulders slump, he runs his large thick hands through his dirty blonde hair and exhales slowly. "Tried to reach you Dae, but you were here so your cell was off."

"What happened?"

Sax looks up at the television suspended from the ceiling in the room. Reaching up he turns it on to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Newsworld. The red banner along the bottom of the screen screamed all we needed to know.

Breaking News---The Hood in fight for life—Breaking News---

The screen was filled with the emerald coloured hood and a black hooded figure. The large albino hands revealed Malcolm as the one underneath the hood.

Nott had Malcolm pinned to the road a gun to his head. "My name is Nott. This is not the hood, but rather an underling. Hood has twenty-five minutes to confront me or I will kill this lame-ass impersonator."

I could feel my muscles tense. Bad enough whatever unknown horrors he visited upon Reesa, but now threatening to kill a brother. No, no one dies tonight.

"Where are they?" I whisper to Sax. Thankfully Nott has enough niceties left in him that he did not unmask Malcolm for the nation to see.

The voice over chimes in. "This feed is coming from an unknown server in Sherwood City, Alberta. What we first thought was the Hood in a fight for his life has been revealed as possibly a member of the Hood's team."

The background commentary of Peter Mansbridge drones onwards. A recapping of the Hood's career for the past sixteen years, the hope that the Hood has brought to Canada either by fighting crime, finding food reserves for the hungry, rent money or mortgage money for those about to lose their homes...little miracles accomplished with a simple note pegged to doors signed "The Hood".

The bringer of hope, the one who ousted government corruption and simply was the public voice for those without voice and here and now there was

Another boot to the rib cage and I grimace, Malcolm was tough but even he would have a hard time with broken ribs. "Sax, where is Natan?"

"That's just it Dae, he's vanished off comm."
That's impossible, the communication link connected each of us in the field with Sax running the mainframe, when Clare was in town she did it so Dae could be in the field it was essentially why the Hood could appear to be everywhere at once.

"I don't..."
"We were talking, and then there was just road noises."

Nott hit us where it counts the most, and knew how it functioned. The Hood brought hope, hope was gutted by a family betrayed by their own blood.

"You got a..." the sentence is not even finished and Sax hands me the hood. We both know that Nott does not want just any Hood wearer, but rather me. For him it has always been about me.

I take the hood from my brother. "Stay with her."
He just nods as I leave the hospital room, a final glance at the screen; the beat down on Malcolm is happening in the garden of

Covenant House, I would recognize those rose bushes and lilies anywhere.

Time to go home and take out the trash.

Hitting the street I flag a taxi down, okay I realize the embarrassment factor, but what do you do without a vehicle or better yet a license.

Thank you Master Card, that pays for the destination. Walking towards the sound of steel toes on flesh, I pull on the hood. With where technology is I am sure he has a webcam hidden somewhere's but I could care less, this is about saving family.

"Ask and you shall receive." I swear that Mac is grinning underneath there. The antithesis of hope is what stands in Mum's garden right now, our family's very own Darth Vader but will it end like Vader or Palpatine for him.

The toe of his steel toe pushes Malcolm over to his back. Blood has soaked through the green hood.

"Ah Hood. Time to die."

The flash is too quick but the sound is unmistakable and the searing pain before lights fade to black.

Chapter Two

A light skiff of snow danced across the cobblestones in front of the modern steel and glass city hall structure. The architect said it was designed to look like an arrowhead; the feminists called it a glistening phallic symbol for a city that had never elected a woman to the city council.

Rex MacCurtis' cowboy boots crunch on the snow covered grass as he enters the foyer of city hall. An overweight and elderly security guard snores away at the desk. Rex leans over the desk and notes the office number he desires.

Within a few steps he is at the escalator and ascending to the next floor. A quick turn at the top and his ascension to the third floor is complete, a left hand turn and a walk down the hallways. Straightening his jacket and shirt he steps into the reception area of the Mayor's office.

The administrative assistant is a petite woman wearing a hijab. "Hello sir how may I help you?" Her accent is faint, but more London than Indian.

Rex smiles with his white teeth glistening, the boyish charm others had known him for firmly on display. "I have a one o'clock with the mayor."

"Your name?"

Turning the wattage up on his smile, "Mr. Nott."
She giggles lightly under her breath as her fingers dance across the keyboard of her computer. "Mr. Prince is not expecting you."

"Ah, well you see we are old business associates and I wanted to surprise him. Could you just let me slip into his office please? Our little secret you know." Nott slides a folded Borden (hundred dollar bill) note across the desk at her.

Nott picked up on her discomfort, yet her eyes would not leave the burgundy coloured bill. Her fingers reach out and touch the edges, her eyes down.

"Bingo." At the sound of Nott's voice she looks up as the bolt flies through her face. Nott steps past the desk to the closed oak double doors.

A half step back and Nott kicks forward where the doors connect. A splintering sound as they burst open.

A heavier set form with a receding hairline and salt and pepper moustache jumps out of a swivel chair and draws a gloc. The mayor rises, a trim (almost sickly thin if you will) tall form around 6'4" tall, his pinstriped Armani suit hanging from his tall frame like a raincoat on a coat rack.

"Who the hell are you?" The mayor stammers out.

Nott smirks. "I am Nott." He reaches inside his jacket and pulls out a folded up piece of paper. "I am here to collect on a wish Mayor Prince." The man with the gun moves slowly towards Nott's outstretched hand with the folded up piece of paper.

"And what wish would that be, Nott?" The one with the gun has found his voice.

Nott smirks, reading the name just above the badge, ah the police chief. "Chief Gisbourne, it is the wish that you filtered through the underworld with that communication." Gisbourne unfolded the paper and there was the emerald Hood staring back at him, wanted dead or alive and the bounty of half a million dollars.

"Where's your proof?" It's Prince that has found his voice again. Nott pulls out of inside a sleeve an emerald hood drenched in blood and a disc.

"Here. The Hood is dead."

Gisbourne takes the hood and disc he shuffles back to the mayor at his desk, the mayor pops open the DVD drive on his laptop and inserts the disc.

His laptop screen is filled with the feed off of the CBC with the image of Malcolm at Nott's feet in the garden when the Hood enters, the gunshot and the Hood falling.

"Kill shot?" Nott simply points to the hood to answer Prince's question. Prince lifts the hood off his desk, with a clean bullet hole right through it. Prince nods, Gisbourne walks back towards Nott and hands him a key. "The money is in that bus locker. Cash, small bills, untraceable."

"And?"

"And what, it is concluded now leave." Gisbourne Said.

"I think not. For you see, I control the crime syndicate of the city, I have been recording this whole conversation, so what is it worth to you as a Mayor and Police Chief to not have this released on the web or media?"

"Or I could shoot you." Gisbourne said.

Nott's smile broadens at Gisbourne's threat. "Doubt it."

Gisbourne pulls the trigger.

Prince's jaw drops at the speed of Nott for the shot is aimed at the ceiling. Gloc skids across the hardwood as the aged frame of Gisbourne slams down hard, Nott straddled to pin him down with a short dagger held to his throat. "Say the word Prince, and he dies."

The mayor stammers and stutters. "What do you want?"

"The city. You work for me, or you both do not leave here alive."

Prince's eyes fall onto the blood soaked emerald green hood with a bullet through it. With his hope fulfilled, Sherwood's hero dead, there was no one that could stop this monster.

"Alright, we will do what you want." Prince concedes.

Nott rises and the dagger vanishes.

"Good choice. I will be in touch."

Nott walks out of the office. Chief Gisbourne struggles to his feet and exchanges glances with Prince. "We're fucked sir."

"Yes we are Gisbourne, by Lucifer himself."

Chapter Three

One week later at Covenant House.

Reesa's fingers brush across the black eye patch that Daemon wears, the bullet had exploded his occipital lobe, but it was only the eye that was truly lost. The porch swing lightly swayed back and forth, she could feel Daemon's faint breath on her auburn hair as he slumbered with her curled up into him.

One week and it seems like forever since she had left the hospital. Since Nott had kidnapped her. She still had not told Daemon what had happened to her under captivity.

Her eyes watched Malcolm, sitting cross-legged on the spot where Nott had taken him down. Meditating, the cast on his left arm just added to the bulk of his form.

The backdoor opens and Sister Clare, still wearing her habit despite being defrocked so many years ago, simply said it had formed a habit in simplicity. Reesa looked quizzically at her mother.

Her face had aged since her and John's return from Ottawa hearing that Reesa was in hospital then watching the show down with her brother-in-law. Almost losing her children, the Hood had vanished since that night as they healed and rethought if they should do what they had been doing, the fun and games gone from it and the hard reality of life and death settling in.

"How are you, honey?" Her voice despite the visible concern for her children, was still even as she talked to Reesa.

"Tired, sore. But happy to be home." Clare's eyes looked deep into her daughter's eyes. Asking the unspoken, for Reesa to open up with the truth, but Reesa was not ready for that. "Heard from Sax & Natan?"

Clare smiled serenely at the thought. "Yes, Natan finally popped the question, up in the mountains at Lake Louise, Sax was overjoyed." The young couple had escaped away to the mountains after the chaos of the night that saw Malcolm taken down and Daemon shot. Sax was fearful that Nott had killed his lover, but Natan had been active in another part of the city unharmed. A gut check for all involved.

The door swings open again and John comes up behind Clare, wrapping his arms around her from behind he snuggles her neck causing a blush to rise up from the base of Clare's neck to flush her cheeks.

John was in his mid-fifties was Reesa's best guess, but he had never self-disclosed his age. Though John had aged well. His short cropped flat top was greying at the temples and he stayed clean shaven, talking of time he spent with Canada's Joint Task Force Two, admitting to having been a Lay Preacher with the United Church of

Canada for awhile, and just a rambling handy man until finding Clare and her about to close convent.

They never married, but on their right fingers wore matching Celtic bands as a symbol of their unity as one soul under one God.

"Covenant House will have a wedding."

Reesa smiled at the thought. "That'll be awesome."

Daemon stirs from his slumber. "Who's getting hitched?"
"Natan and Sax." John answers.

"`Bout bloody time." The voice is a bit gravely, and causes Reesa to look past her mum and dad to Malcolm who had come back from his meditations.

"It is about time for many things." Daemon responds. Malcolm nods. Reesa cringes a little inside knowing the heart of her lover. Clare and John feel apprehension at the words. "Tonight."

Malcolm smiles. "Tonight brother."
Reesa exhales slowly. "Tonight."

John steps away from Clare, from his jeans back pocket he pulls out an emerald green hood and hands it to Daemon.

Daemon smiles, the first time in a week Reesa had seen something so beautiful on Daemon's scarred face. "We are the Hood."

Reesa responds, "The Hood lives tonight."

Chapter Four

Damn the wind is cold on rooftops. The hood is itchy on the eye patch; almost like Velcro it sucks the hood in that area. Nothing like telling the scum I have only one eye. The Bluetooth in my ear though does make it easier to stay in touch with Reesa whose running communications. Somewhere out there in a van is John and Malcolm.

"Dae, there has been a sighting of activity two blocks from you."
"Thanks."

Moving to the fire escaped side of the building and heading down towards the alleyway. Reesa is relaying the details, a break in at the local jewellery store. Chances are good the culprits are still there and working for Nott.

There's the store. Very subtle, broken in the glass door and bent out the security bars, slip inside. Rustling in the back area. Yep they are still here.

Walk through the dark shadows of the store eerily lit by the streetlights. The backroom is small but there's the safe. "Hello gentle people. Please cease and desist from this cri—" the glint. A constable's badge? Can't be. Or can it?

"He's here."
Sirens. WTF???

"The cops!"

"Dae that makes no sense, cops? Then that means--"

I can't here what Reesa finishes with as I dive role out of the small back room into the store, bullets fly, they have drawn their guns.

"Need a pick up. Now!"

I hope she's not too shell shocked to hear that. One constable is on his radio. "The Hood's alive, repeat the Hood is alive."

Damn it. Here's hoping that some media person is still monitoring police communications cause this is a big story for them to break, the rumours of my death are greatly exaggerated.

Out into the street, there's the green mini van, side door slides open and I jump in sliding it shut, two Sherwood Police Service SUV's are behind us.

Malcolm is smirking with John behind the wheel. "So how did you become public enemy number one?" Malcolm said.

"They seemed kind of shocked that I was alive. Expecting someone else."

John takes a hard right down a darkened alley, the two SUV's fly past us. He kills the engine and we set in the darkness for a beat. "This is bad, Reesa was right, it means Nott has infiltrated government."

"We knew that was coming, Dad." Malcolm takes the lead on reminding Dad of the obvious.

“Yes, but for it to happen this fast, it means that his televised ‘killing’ of you meant more than we thought it had.”

“You think the hit on me was not personal?” This is creepier by the minute, it was easy to work through the pain inflicted by Nott if it was all tied to his pain over Reesa rejecting him, but for it to be something deeper ingrained within the leadership of the city was just too much to handle.

“Now what?” Okay I admit asking this in desperation, taking on the underworld is one thing, a lark if you will, taking on the city...damn.

John grins widely. “We win.”

Chapter Five

Clare shifted uncomfortably on the tall stool of the table in the Forest Lounge, the local University hangout, a restaurant in an old gutted two storeys. Main level is a family restaurant, second storey is sports lounge and this is where she connected with the media.

Alan A. Dale to be precise, page three columnist for the Sherwood Sun, rabble rousers and trouble maker for the buffoons of silly hall as he trumpeted in his daily column, six days a week, Fridays off so he could go to Mosque.

He wasn't here yet, and that was strange, Alan was always on time. Clare played with the Celtic band on her finger; this would be the biggest story of his life if he would get here though.

The cold breeze blows up the stairs, the chime of the door. The clumping of boots, the Imam had arrived.

Alan has a fringe of hair that is salt and pepper, a sturdy physique honed by years of playing basketball, and a close cut beard, he dressed in business casual.

"Alan, bout time." Her crow's feet tighten as she notices the pain in his eyes. "What?"

"Mayor's office called...she's dead."

Clare gasped. It wasn't the most pastoral response to her friend the reporter Imam, but it's not every day you hear of an administrative assistant in the mayor's office dying. "How?"

"Murdered. Random violence." Alan can barely hold back the tears; Clare feels the pain emanate from him. Alan slumps into the high stool chair. "Keisha's dead. Murdered. Where the fuck was he?"

Clare's hand pats his arm. "I am sorry."

"Seriously Clare there is this great myth of the Hood, and my beloved is murdered and he is no where to be seen. Why? Why did he have to die? He could have saved her." The words were almost inaudible.

Clare motions to the waitress for the regular, two ginger ales. "He's back Alan. The Hood is back."

Alan's teary eyes look into the wizened features of Clare. "Too damn late for Keisha." Clare just nods. "Or is it the passive-aggressive Canadian racism towards a Muslim?"

Clare just shakes her head. "Nott took Hood low, almost killed him. Took awhile to get back, he was back last night broke up a jewellery store robbery."

"Wow rich white folks material things are protected..."

"Stop it Alan, or I will take you over my knee like when I used to babysit you." The Imam-columnist falls silent. "The two robbing the

shop were cops, Sherwood Constables and squad cars set upon him.”

The eyes of Alan widen as Clare’s story continues. “The Sherwood Police Service were in shock Hood was alive, not a good shock, but a shock that says—we were had.”

“But...that means...”

“Nott was working for someone high up in government.”

Alan gulps down his ginger ale. “Days like this I wished I drank.”

“Ah you Ahmadiyya Muslims so funny.” Alan chuckles. The Muslim sect he had converted too (former good Baptist boy) was out of Pakistan and was under heavy persecution for not being Muslim enough in Pakistan.

“You know what you’re saying?”

“Yeah, Nott controls the police.”

“Gisbourne killed Keisha?”

Clare nods. “At the very least covered up for whoever did.”

They order their meals and continue the discussion. “Been awhile since I did the investigative journalism stuff.”

“Those skills never die Alan, you’re a troubadour, a story teller. The voice for those without voice in Sherwood.” Clare has never been more direct.

“Read tomorrow’s Sun.”

Chapter Six

Her name was Keisha Fayed. She was a religious refugee from Pakistan. Persecuted in her homeland for not being "Muslim enough". She came to Canada to be safe. She had worked for the government back home, coming west she found another government job.

My fist cracks the small bone in the punks' nose causing blood to stream. Alan had broken the story as only he could. The murders of a highly placed City Hall Administrative Aid...hate crime with all the allusions to corruption.

A Mule kick drops broken small bone nose's partner in the alleyway. The woman is cringing; the Star of David dangles from her neck, a Rabbi on her way home from work when these Neo-Nazi wannabes set upon her. Do not know or care what their plans were, but two of the five are immobilized.

The sound of a switchblade followed quickly by a face hitting brick wall. Ah we are Hood is not just a battle cry, but also a truth. My eye locks on my brother, Malcolm in his scarlet hood.

Two left. They stumble back to the shadows. Another mistake.

The hiking boot connects with one's jaw and then the other's temple.

An employer that would lie to her betrothed saying she had been murdered on her way into work. A random act of violence in a city

with a criminal leadership vacuum. All lies, as I would later discover over a beer with a source close to Hood.

John may be old, but the brown hood masks that he is still one of the toughest sons of a bitch I have ever know. Malcolm is helping the rabbi up. "Thank you." Her eyes fall on me, locking on the sunken in part of my hood. My missing eye. "The Lord bless and Keep you."

With that she leaves the alley.

For this source revealed the truth. The mayor had lied blatantly at the pres conference. Hood was not dead. He/she has not given up on the city but rather is back.

The murder of Keisha Fayed was not a random act of violence.

In my ear Reesa is talking, how I love her. "Sweetie, we got word Natan and Sax are coming back tonight." That is music to my ears; our little troop will be complete, for the next phase of the challenge of reclaiming the city.

Sirens. The three of us fade to the shadows.

For a tale was told of Hood's return, breaking up a jewellery story heist, and the culprits? Constables of the Sherwood Police Service, a trap set...shock written on their faces that Hood yet lived.

Digging as only a reporter can I have discovered hardcore capital "T" truth about our Governance and City Hall and the mystery villain known only as Nott.

The van rides bumpier, but we had another call, Clare had tagged this one. Mysterious activity outside of the East Side Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints, to that end John was speeding in the emerald express (yes we need to name things better) to arrive on scene before something else happened.

For it was Nott that killed Keisha Fayed and Chief Gisbourne with Mayor Prince that covered up the murder. Why you ask gentle reader?

Traffic was heavy, it took fifteen minutes to reach the church building, rounding the corner is when it happened.

For someone has bought city hall, starting with the mayor and chief of police, the Alberta Advantage has always been centred upon greed, profits over people. Keisha Fayed paid the ultimate price for this culture born of oil blood money, will we accept it as our reality any longer?

The explosion rocked the whole block, close houses caught ablaze, sirens blazing, it was all John could do to keep the van upright as we skidded into a front lawn.

Gawkers were coming. Forms running from the scene. Malcolm is first out in pursuit, I am not far behind but he is the distant runner of the group.

Two forms wearing Halloween masks of Satan.

They crumple.

WTF? Stepping into the streetlight rubbing his fist is the five-foot tall stocky form of William Sax. Just behind him is the six-foot lanky and very androgynous looking form of Natan. We really have no clue what Nate's last name is; the story we got is—well creepy.

"What's up Hood?" Nate Said.

"Nott is on the offensive. This is the second religious attack tonight."

Natan shakes his head. The van pulls up to us and we load in.

"Reesa filled us in, a Rabbi and now this. Why?"

John mutters a bit under his breath before chiming in. "Mac and I had a rather unique childhood." It was the first time I could ever remember John speaking of his childhood; it was one of those great mysteries of life.

For we need to stand up to corruption, not just put our head in the prairie soil as we are wanted to do. We do not exercise our franchise so some observers may say that we have the governance we warrant; yet I challenge you that no one warrants corrupt officials willing to allow the wanton murder of its citizenry.

It is time to stop evil and corruption, before Nott runs the city.

-30-

Chapter Seven

The lamp flew across the mayor's office shattering just behind Nott. "You said he was dead." The next thing was that morning's paper hitting Nott's chest.

"That I did Mr. Mayor, and trust me, spiritually he is dead, it is just a matter of making it complete." Gisbourne stepped between the Mayor and Nott, his hand on his holstered weapon. "Chief I could kill you even before you draw that weapon. Do you not see this is what Hood and his cronies want."

Nott stoops down and scoops up the paper open to Dale's article. "This Imam will sing as to who his source is." A low guttural laugh emits from beneath Nott's hood. It would just be fun to put a hurt on Clare's friend if nothing else.

The paper slaps into Gisbourne's chest. "Just remember the plan, Gisbourne, when you get the call." With that Nott exits the office past the new administrative assistant to the mayor.

John paced slowly back and forth, almost methodically like a cat stalking a mouse within the small convent kitchen of Covenant House. This was the day that things had gone topsy-turvy. When had the focus been lost?

Clare had gone to Alan; the story broke this morning, and now silence on the streets. The eerie sort of silence that always bespoke an ugly storm yet to come.

A creak of the old floorboards, the wait on them reveals which child it is. "Sax, you really need to work on your stealth."

"So sayeth the old man." Sax smirks.

"The old man that can still kick your ass boy." John laughs at the end, the arthritis in his back was getting worse and he felt every lump of the last few nights out on the streets helping Daemon out—not that he would let any of the kids know that.

John looks closer at the young man whose eyes carry the pains of years gone by. Years when he was used as a means to supply his mum and dad with crack till Clare rescued him. John glances at the jagged scar on the back of his hand. It's where Sax's biological sperm donor of a father stabbed through the night John put him out the fifteen-story apartment window.

Sax still did not know the full story of the rescue and John wanted to ensure he never did. "So how does it feel to be married?"

Sax chuckles. "Wonderful, but now..."

John knew that look; he had seen it on many of his friends in the life he had led. The look that he remembered the night in the abbey when his best friend died because of treachery.

"You're worried about not coming home."

"Yeah how did you..."

John smiled knowingly, like an old sage out in the desert with his new learner. It was time to reveal a little bit about his story. "I too have worn the hood, and I too had to make a choice when I met Clare." Sax almost looks shocked at the confession. "In fact I chose to step back."

Chapter Eight

The warehouse was packed; Nott smirked under his mask, Hood had family but he had the army. Nott's Army, Hood would die, then Reesa would be his as the city already was. But first the city had to go into chaos.

"Hello my beloved children." Cheers arose. Working gangs was like working congregants that wanted to buy indulgences back in the day to get their family out of purgatory and into heaven. So needy and wanting something to believe in, like baby llamas suckling at their mummy's tit.

"It is time. Time to assert our authority and remove those who have not joined our cause." Ah, two gangs had not joined them, the Circles and the Ninth Avenue Killers. "Today we declare war on the Circles and Ninth Avenue Killers. There will be a thousand dollar bonus for every head brought to me." Blood would bath the streets, it would be glorious, the audacity of Mayor Prince to say that he had failed. Not failed just had a different approach than anyone else to breaking Hood.

The legend would die in shame. That Nott could guarantee. His smirk beneath his hood broadens as he watches his army disappear into the night of Sherwood. Squealing tires. Gun shots. Sirens. Nott's opus begins.

"You gave up?" Sax said.

John shook his head, it was so hard to explain to his children the moments in life when you have to make the tough choices. The moments when you need to decide for selfish reasons to choose the health of yourself over others.

"I did. I chose your mother."

Sax's brain was working overtime. The hood that Daemon had found, the catalyst all those years ago was not just part of a costume, it had been found in the dusty old trunks in the basement. The trunks that Hood was born, more accurately re-born.

"But..."

"I let Daemon and you kids take up the mantle, a mantle that has haunted me for centuries."

"Centuries? Your old Dad, but not that..."

The echo voice of Natan enters the conversation. "But he is hon. isn't that right Dad?"

John motions to the couple to sit at the kitchen table with him. "It's true. There have been many weird things and people that have come through Covenant House, we each have our own story. Mine is quite old. It starts back in the tenth century across the pond."

Natan's eyes are like darkened pools, not expressing any emotions. Sax's are a shining emerald green that betray his disbelief at this claim of his adoptive father. "You look like you don't believe me Sax, but think of who the father of your bride is."

That struck a chord for Sax. Natan Morningstar, his dad was mythological evil, the rebel of heaven if you will. "You need to remember that the story of Hood is as old as time. Every generation has had a Hood, someone willing to be the voice of justice when injustice reigns. That is what you kids are bringing to Sherwood with your adventures. We live in an unjust province where the wealth is centred in more than likely the top ten percent. Where big oil is strip mining the northern parts of our province and the southern farms can light their well water on fire due to sour gas. Where we have had the same governing party for close to forty years." The boys had heard the history lesson before, how any governing party this long unchecked in power would grow corrupt on its own patronage and monies. How an untrained monkey could have eliminated Alberta's deficit without having to gut the social safety net like the Progressive Conservatives of Alberta (P.C. Party) have.

How it saddened John, that Sax was a card carrying P.C. Party member. Yet there was still hope in the world, that hope was centred

in this city on Daemon, Malcolm, Reesa, Sax and Natan and what they were trying to do by donning the hood.

"My journey with the hood started back with Robin of Locksley, a noble made outlaw during the Crusades, when Richard the Lionhart was away and his brother tried to seize England."

It had been familiar bed time stories for the boys, they knew the many different versions of Robin Hood, like other families knew the Christian New Testament, and thanks to Clare they also knew the Gospel of Jesus well.

"I held my friend in my arms after the ultimate betrayal as he fired the arrow into the forest."

"Who else knows this about you John?" the scepticism drips off of Natan's lips.

"Clare and Mac."

"So you want us to believe pops that you are actually John Little?" It was Sax this time raising the question, but where his husband had scepticism, Sax had earnestness of sounding like he wanted to believe.

"Yes. I have been apart of many Hood legends since then, even tried to be Hood myself while you boys were growing up, but it got too close to me dying, and I couldn't do that to your mother or you kids."

"But its okay for us to die?" Natan yelled.

John shakes his head. "No, it was supposed to be Mac who became Hood, not you boys."

"What went wrong?" Sax was always the rational one in some ways, or it could just be his people pleasing nature.

"Mac wanted more."

Within Covenant House there is a small chapel, the sisters had used it for times of contemplation, prayer and Eucharist together. Yet if there is not too, the Eucharist cannot be celebrated and so as the sisters went back home, Clare was left alone, closing off the chapel.

That was until tonight, sitting in the hardened oak pew staring at the dust covered altar, her brown eyes move up the wall to the crucifix. Her saviour hanging there, as the artist thought of it having happened two thousand years ago.

Abandoned by friends, family, except a few trusting women.

A few.

That's what made the world a better place, a few people willing to risk and live outside of fear. Clare was trapped in fear. Fear of the death of her children, the loss of her life partner and all for what; love nope, power that is what drove Mac.

Now here they were. Daemon was out there, Reesa was his contact, and Malcolm was his sidekick. Sax and Natan were in the kitchen with John. Through the piping she could here the reveal.

Here she sat, with her God.

“Why God?”

Chapter Nine

John Prince sat in the comfy chairs of Second Cup on the main floor of city hall. It had been an insane night so far. The reports had started coming in. Gunplay, murder, and looting, general carnage in the city tonight, someone had opened the gate to hell. The councillors had been phoning him incessantly as their constituents phone them.

Hell had been let loose, Nott was supposed to keep the underworld in check, yet he had decided to take by force that which would not join him. John smells deeply the white hot chocolate before he sips need to calm the nerves.

The bells above the door jingle, and Gisbourne walks towards the counter first, from the petite high school girl behind the counter he orders his large black coffee and upon receiving it heads to the other comfy chair opposite the mayor.

“What’s happening to my city Gisbourne?”

“Mr. Mayor—John, Nott is insane.”

“Really Guy, I think I missed that part of the eruption of the fucking gang war!”

Gisbourne motions for the mayor to lower his voice. “Call and emergency session of the City Council, we need the army, my men and women can’t contain this.”

John looks at the haggard and defeated face of his friend. Never in the years they had served the city together, nay, the years growing up together had he seen Gisbourne look so destroyed.

“Okay, give me your cell.”

Chapter Ten

Nott stared at the carnage that CBC Newsworld was showing. Who knew that it would be so easy to ignite a state of emergency within a small city centre like Sherwood than to turn close to one hundred armed adolescents loose on the streets? Who knew, he knew of course. The plan was coming to fruition, the next step though was to turn the city against Hood, as the news was reporting, Hood was in the thick of it, with his sidekick that one reporter had overheard being called Scarlett.

By the size and albino skin it was Malcolm. Time for Nott to send a message, but not before part two was in place.

A lovely oriental female reporter fills the screen. "For those of you just tuning in, Mayor John Prince of Sherwood City, Alberta has just called an emergency meeting of the City Council to address the all out gang war that started tonight on the streets of the city."

Part two was to come into play, now, time to put the religious into fear.

Clare's hand shook as she lit the old Christ candle in the dilapidated and dust filled chapel. In her hand she slowly rolled the rosary beads.

"God why us? Why Now? This is not fair, this demon in our midst, our city ablaze. Guide us damn it! Are you omnipotent or impotent?"

St. Mary Magdalene Roman Catholic Cathedral, Shi'a Mosque, St. Vladmimir's Orthodox Church, St. Francis of Assisi Anglican Cathedral, Beth T'zedic Reformed Synagogue, Knox Presbyterian Church, Centennial United Church, the Hindu Temple, Sheik Temple, Buddhist Ashram, and all the other religious buildings in the city shadowy forms running away at two minutes to midnight.

Alan A. Dale pecked away at the keyboard of his laptop while sitting in the Council Chambers waiting for the session to start. It was insane with the quickness that the city's character had been turned from peace and security to terror.

The crime beat reporter had already told him that the Circle Gang was out of action; it was now the Ninth Avenue Killers standing their ground or at least trying to. The gang responsible wore the colours of Nott.

Keisha's killer was the mastermind.

Now the city was paying for its cover up in carnage and blood. The police service had already admitted their powerlessness at the

onslaught of violence. Alan breathes slowly, rhythmically as he typed the title of his column tomorrow.

“Between the City and Chaos: Hood”

The doors open and the councillors in their bleary eyedness shuffle in. What would decide the trajectory tonight?

I look out the window of the mini-van. Reesa is in my ear relaying all the points of disorder. Malcolm is behind the wheel; if possible his knuckles are whiter than normal. My knuckles and body ache, have taken down close to twenty criminals, not even sure anymore if they are part of the gang war or just opportunists.

Pretty sure my nose is broken, crooked nose to go with the scarred face and missing eye. Malcolm’s breathing is belaboured I think a rib or two of his are cracked or bruised.

“We need help Reesa...Sax or Natan available?”

“Will check.”

Malcolm slows the mini van down towards the Synagogue. There had been reports of suspicious movement, knowing that the Circle was the criminal front for the Neo-Nazi party in Alberta made us wonder if they would strike here or not.

Check my watch, 11:59 p.m. As John would say, it is too bloody quiet.

Reesa steps into the kitchen where Sax, Natan and John are seated at the table. It's Sax that picks up on her emotions first.

"What is it?"

"They need help. The city is coming unglued."

Natan glances at John, "What did Mac do to become Nott?"

John's eyes move to the floor then to the LED clock of the microwave: 12:00.

The house shakes...

Chapter Eleven

I shake my head, Malcolm isn't stirring, but our van is upside down. The synagogue exploded as we pulled into the parking lot flipping us over. Glass from houses shattered and rained down on the street my eye can see blood pooling everywhere.

My seatbelt is jammed. There's static in my one ear and the other one is ringing. What the hell just happened?

Alan's eyes search the councillors, the mayor is missing. Where is John Prince? He was the one that called this emergency session and yet he was nowhere to be seen. The other councillors looked just as perplexed, when it is Chief Gisbourne that speaks up first.

"The mayor was delayed due to an urgent emergency situation."

Councillor Smith from district six speaks first; she is an out of shape Caucasian woman originally from Arizona. "What situation?"

"Over one hundred and seventy five emergency calls have come in, someone bombed every single religious building in our city."

Alan's fingers type furiously at this news. The all out attack on the gangs, now this act of terror, Alan types what he feels at the announcement:

A city without hope needs a hero like Hood.

Mayor Prince looks out the window of his office at his city, now ablaze. He wipes tears from his eyes at the sound of his office door opening. "Whose..."

"Mr. Mayor."

His eyes turn and catch sight of the emerald hood. "Hood, thank God you're here. We need your help."

"I am here to serve the city, Mr. Mayor." The figure in the emerald hood walks across the office to stand just behind Prince, his eyes stare at the flames of the city, a smirk emerges underneath the hood.

Clare uses the edge of the pew to get back to her feet. What had just happened? The rattling had shattered the simple stain glass window of the chapel and sent the crucifix crashing to the ground, the Christ candle had toppled and extinguished.

Alberta did not get earthquakes, something big had happened.

She thumbs her Celtic band and heads out of the chapel to find her family. "John! Reesa! Sax! Natan!"

I dig a pocketknife out of my jacket and use that to cut through the seatbelt. The knife drops as I use my arms to race my body and

crab walk out of the window. There are sirens from all sides, but there's no telling if they are coming here or not.

My leg is bleeding; I feel the stickiness against my calf. Limping I make my way around to the driver's window, it is burst, Malcolm is bleeding badly.

His breath is shallow. Please God let those sirens be coming here. I look around the block of carnage; hear the people's cries. Blood and tears. Reaching to my hip I draw out my cell phone and flip it open. It's cracked, but I can still achieve an analog signal.

Sax is first up to his feet rushing to the window. Reesa hears Clare's voice first. "We're in the kitchen mum!"

Natan helps John to his feet.

Sax lets out a low whistle at the flames mere blocks away.

Clare's eyes freeze as she sees where the flames are coming from as well. "They blew up the church." J.S. Woodsworth United Church was the local pastoral charge they had attended for years.

John used a chair to balance. "It's Mac."

"How do..." Reesa begins to speak.

"He hates religion, he was an altar boy back in the 1970's."

Clare wraps her arms around John's waist and rests her head on his back. "You don't have to say it dear."

Reesa straightened. "Like hell he doesn't." She feels a vibration on her hip. Flipping her phone open she hears Daemon's voice.

"What?"

Sax looks to his sister. "What happened?"

"The synagogue was hit too...Malcolm is unconscious, Dae is in bad shape."

Clare squeezes tighter to John who looks at his children. "Reesa, you go and get Dr. Tuck. Sax and Natan, you're with me to retrieve Daemon and Malcolm, we'll take the station wagon."

Clare's eyes don't leave the billowing flames as her family departs to try something.

"What if God was one of us, and saw us for how we act, we would be fucked." Tumbles from her lips as tears tumble from her eyes.

Chapter Twelve

I slump down against the upturned van. So many people's eyes are staring at me. They have heard the rumours and whispers and look to me as some sort of hero. Yet today I am just like them, trapped in insanity unsure of what to do or say.

All I know for sure is that my brother could be dying; this is far worse torment than anything I endured before going to Covenant House to live with Mum and Dad. Yet it is from the heart of Covenant House that these attacks are coming, for Nott was one of us.

And for some reason he is now not one of us. But would he have gone so far off the deep end as to cause all this pain?

Reesa stands at the check in desk of the hospital. "Hi I need to speak with Dr. Tuck."

The nurse nods and pages him.

Dr. Tuck looks tired, obviously working overtime with all the commotion in the city, but he has eyes that say he recognizes his former patient. "Miss Fitzwater, is everything alright?"

Reesa scans the crowded room of human carnage, and knows definitely the city is in pain tonight. "My Dad, John MacCurtis sent me to get you, my brother Malcolm has been in a bad accident."

Tuck looks to the nurse then to Reesa, John was a dear old friend and he knew how much he cared for his children, but the city needed every available hand.

"I..." Reesa's eyes bore deep into the Doctor's soul. "Let's go."

John flips open his cell phone. "Good job Rees, bring Tuck to the spot where Daemon and Malcolm are."

John glances to the backseat as Natan turns the station wagon down an alley shortcut to the area of the city where Daemon's phone call had originated.

"So what's the story with Mac?" Sax asks again, having the conversation still left like a dangling percale over their heads.

"He was an altar boy in the 1980's and was badly abused by a priest. It was covered up and the priest was moved as happened in those days, but he was also sexually battered by his counsellor."

"K, but that does not explain the psychosis."

John exhales again slowly; this whole stretch was making him feel all his years. "You are right Nate. What it explains is his current pain. Not his lifetime of pains, see Mac has a glitch. He was born old, de-ages through his lifetime, then re-ages again. It is a cycle; unfortunately it has led to many horrors being visited upon him."

Natan still has the look of scepticism, while Sax appeared to believe. It did not matter to John if they understood or accepted the reality as it was, only that they knew what it was all about.

The car screeched to a halt at the street of carnage. John is first out and racing to the overturned van. He glances back to see his sons helping out others in need.

“We are Hood.”

PART TWO

HOPE NOTT

Chapter Thirteen

The emergency session of City Council was beyond all expectations. I had spent a few hours awaiting the arrival of City Councillors, but then the mayor was missing. The questions began to fly for it was the mayor who had called the emergency session of the council to deal with the gang uprising that was spreading blood throughout the streets.

Alan straightened the collar of his jacket as he ascended the steps to city hall. A blustery morning as the city burned, the fires were no all but under control, thick ash filled the air. Casualties were being tallied.

It was still, one of those two quiet moments like out of an action movie when the doors to the council chamber burst open. An administrative assistant holding an emerald hood, panting that Mayor Prince had just been thrown out of his office window. Hood raced by him in the halls, he grabbed the mask off and went looking for the Mayor.

At 12:52 a.m. Mayor John Prince was declared dead. Chief of Police, Guy Gisbourne issued an arrest warrant for the mystery man known to the city only as Hood.

This is one writer though who believes a mistake was made and that it could not possibly be Hood that assassinated the mayor. For it

was Hood that was working to reveal corruption at City Hall, there are far better ways to deal with those issues than murder.

-30-

Alan stands before the memorial in the concrete courtyard of city hall, the flowers and small monument to the spot where the mayor hit the outside of the building. Peering straight up at the window with the plastic whipping away due to the wind.

Alan feels a tap on his shoulder. He turns his head just slightly. "John. What are your thoughts?"

"Despite what Gisbourne said, Hood did not do this." John states. Alan simply nods. "But I can't prove the truth." Alan nods again. "The city is in rough shape, we need a hero." Alan continues his nodding.

"That's all fine and good John, but the vote never went through, the city has decided to call for an election for a new mayor instead." Alan looks disappointed at this decision of the council. "Tell Hood we need him."

John winces. "Nott's taken it out of him a few times now." "Doesn't matter John. What do we have left for hope in this city? The religious institutes are shattered, the cops and emergency services are over run, and the mayor is dead. The province is incommunicado. Evil triumphs only because we stand idle."

John watches as his friend walks away. It had taken many years for Alan to find happiness; of all the residents of Sherwood he had lost much, his mosque and his love. Nott took hope.

John descends the staircase, thoughts whirling around his mind. He was right, it was time to talk to Daemon, time to take the fight directly to Nott.

Chapter Fourteen

Nott had at last count fifteen LCD Flat Screen televisions in his office wall mounted to track the news and carnage his soldiers were inflicting. A smile was spread wide on his mouth as he stroked his beard.

"Beautiful." The message had been sent. A phone rings; he presses a button on the high backed leather chair he is seated in.

"Nott."

The voice on the other end confirmed what Nott was waiting for. "Premier Banks has accepted your offer."

Nott's smile broadens as he ends the call. The pieces were beginning to fall together. He depresses another button on the chair's armrest. "Dagger, call back in the troops."

Reesa's hand ran down t-shirted back of Daemon in the living room of Covenant House as they both stared at the screen of breaking news out of Edmonton, Alberta. Premier Banks' press conference in relation to Sherwood's current state of affairs.

The premier clears his throat. "I want to reiterate that at this time, Chief of Police, Guy Gisbourne assures the government that everything is under control in Sherwood. As such I nor any member of

this administration will be asking the Government of Canada to send in the army to intervene.

Furthermore, Rex MacCurtis is hereby named as interim mayor to take the city through this current crisis. Mr. MacDonald brings a very fine background of former service as a Sherwood Police Service Constable as well as tours for the Canadian Armed Forces in Bosnia. He is also a local small businessman. This choice is just interim and once the current crisis is abated the city will go ahead with normal civic elections to replace the mayor by vote of the citizens of Sherwood.

Any questions?"

"Son of a bitch." Reesa covered her mouth quickly after the utterance, Daemon just smirked for it was definitely the response he was feeling she just uttered it sooner than he had.

"Mac got the power, all the power." Daemon whispers. The newsfeed switches to the steps of City Hall in Sherwood, next to the ad hoc memorial for the fallen mayor. Chief Gisbourne and the members of City Council are behind the podium flanking the man at the centre like an honour guard for a new monarch.

"Yes the Premier's announcement came as a surprise to me and you, but in times like this decisive action is necessary. That is what the Premier and city council did. I am without partisanship or ties to

the political system, my only concern are for the safety and well being of the citizen's of Sherwood. I would like to thank the city and the province for this opportunity to serve, and hope that I am as equal to the task as those who have put their hope in me."

Reesa seethed at the words, how is it that evil could win?

"Dae..."

"It's time to do something." Daemon said.

Clare steps softly into the room. "He did it." She gathers her shawl around her shoulders. "Took the city, those were the last words he told John, that he would take the city."

Behind Clare the doorway fills with the broad form of Malcolm, the stitches still fresh and a neck brace on. "We need to take him down."

"How Mal, he's the saviour of the city endorsed by both civic and provincial governments." Sax chimed in as he came through the kitchen to the living room, having been listening in through the heating vents.

Reesa's hand slips into Daemon's and squeezes. Twice Hood had come up against the machinations of Nott, and twice Hood had been beaten. Now it was make or break time. Would they be equal to the task?

Rex MacCurtis (Nott) continued his press conference. "Our first order of business is returning peace to the city streets. Through peace by ending the gang war, will order be restored and good governance can one again reigns here in Sherwood. For it is Peace, Order and Good Governance that the Constitution Act 1982 guarantees to all residents and citizens of Canada. That is my goal, that is my commission and that is what I will return to you is my vow."

With that Mac stepped away from the microphone and Gisbourne took over fielding the tactical questions, answered with the traditional non-answers of the body politic that is Alberta at all levels.

"Tonight I visit the new mayor." Daemon said.

Chapter Fifteen

Alan was at his desk late; the column needed some touch ups before going in to print. The premier had thrown a curve ball into the day. A curveball that could spell the end for any hope of this lone writer using his column to redeem the character of the city's hero Hood in this time of crisis.

A crisis that had produced an unelected mayor to carry through, made Alan wonder if Rex MacCurtis had bought his seat, would not be the first time there was a story of political power being purchased. The memorial was already being removed from the steps of City Hall; it was dubbed the first step in healing.

The city now waited for how this new mayor would move to end the gang war. A war that still raged, although one side was now eerily quiet. Nott's forces had vanished leaving the Ninth Avenue Killers to mop up and takeover what remained of the Circle Territory.

Another shift and Alan pondered if there was to be a power vacuum at the end of this for the city's underworld or if it was all just simple smoke and mirror optics so the new mayor could solidify a hold.

"Working late Alan?"

"You stalking me John?"

Alan looks up at his old friend. "Maybe, but you're not that cute buddy. Saw the press conference?"

"Yep, this MacCurtis, any relation?"

"Truth is told he's my brother."

Alan's fingers stop typing and he focuses intently on John, motions for the open chair next to his bullpen desk. "Uh huh. How?"

John steepled his fingers after lowering into the rickety office chair that squawks under the strain of actually supporting a human being and not just the dust mites. "Well you see mummy and daddy had a little fun and nine months later Remy popped out."

"Smart ass. I mean how did he wind up where he is?"

John chuckles to himself. How to explain the sordid story, how much to reveal, for there was nothing truly off the record with the press, and the story of the new mayor was one that had yet to be told.

"That's an interesting story, and sadly one I can share, but there is no corroborating evidence for you to find."

Alan's curiosity was even more piqued. Clare and John had given him some of his best headlines and inside information in regards to Hood, the city's underworld and political (secular and religious) scene, as well as a big donation to help build the mosque (that was now in smouldering ruins).

Here he was now with Alan sharing that the new mayor designate was actually his brother, new information for Alan who only knew John as a puzzling enigma on the scene that was with the former nun in the convent and had adopted some kids no one else wanted.

Yet now there was a new piece to the puzzle, one that John was going to open up and share. "But before we begin, any of that horrible gunk you newspaper writers try to claim is coffee around?"

Alan's turn to chuckle "yeah I'll get us each a cup."

Chapter Sixteen

Nighttime was quiet around City Hall. With all the weirdness that had happened one would assume the police presence would be high and that one would assume wrong. Nobody around the darkened halls but the janitor listening to her mp-3 player.

Just distracted enough that if I stick to the shadows I can travel through City Hall towards the mayor's office unnoticed (especially since the security guard was sleeping at the information kiosk in the foyer).

Slip through the darkened hallways to be able to find my goal. This conflict with Mac has to end, tonight preferably. Before anything can happen further to injure my family.

The office door looks ominous in the dimly lit building, but the brass nameplate had already been changed, Rex MacCurtis. Mayor.

The very thought made my stomach turn. That much authority given to someone so dark souled it just spoke too the corruption of our provincial government that interim or not Mac could make it as Mayor of the city.

The door was locked. I swing kick and it flies open, from behind his desk Mac rises. He has aged since the last time I saw him without the hood. The age lines are striking, with the flickering office lamplight.

"Mac, this needs to end."

"Who's going to end it Daemon? You. Please you are but a child." Mac steps out from behind the desk and moves towards me.

This is going to be quick. The guy is aging, and was never that good to begin with. Time to open up the body politic of the city.

My fist flies he blocks me and I catch him with an upper cut. He staggers back a little; this is going to be too easy.

I feel a sharp pain in my side. Rabbit punches into my rib cage. It becomes harder to breathe. I slip back and attempt to sweep kick.

My knee screams. The snap is an unearthly sound as Mac's boot comes down on the side of my knee with a horrendous crunch followed by a left uppercut that takes me off my feet. The pain is searing through my body.

Mac's boots hit my ribs again. Breath becomes shorter.

Cover my head. His boots hit my forearms.

Trying to refocus. Pain causing bleary vision; can't catch my breath.

Try to push up. Leg screams as his knee hits me square in the mouth and nose. Gasping for air through my mouth, nose is toast.

Eyes popped, can't see. Already beginning to swell.

Feel my fingers crunched under his feet.

A laugh.

"You are a pitiful little freak Daemon. Coming here like this all false bravado. Pretending to be this city's Robin Hood. But like Robin, you'll die before the final victory."

His hand wraps around my throat and he lifts me up. Rips my hood off, I simply spit blood and teeth into his face. A twist of his arm and I fly through the air in the office hitting hard against the window. The glass gives a little against my back.

Can't move, like Raggedy Andy in a toy box. Should have brought back up.

My earpiece is out.

Feel the vibration on my hip. A call. Reesa probably wondering where I am, sorry honey, I love you but this is an A-1 classic fuck up.

Mac grins at me. "Good bye Hood."

The toe of his boot cracks hard into my jaw and I feel the pane glass slice through my scalp and the cool rush of the night air...

Chapter Seventeen

The mug of coffee hits the linoleum of the newsroom and shatters spilling mud like cold coffee on the floor. Alan's eyes move from the shattered mug to his friend John's face and then back to the television screen in the corner of the newsroom.

The anchor was from the financially troubled media conglomerate station. She was young and new with a last name that not even her co-anchors could pronounce, but here she was on the steps of city hall in another night when Emergency Services of the city had responded.

The body had come from the mayor's office. As the reporter rambled about yet another attempt on the life of a civic official the camera zoomed in on the blood soaked emerald mask that lay on the steps.

One of the kids, John curses silently. This was too much to take in. Why would Mac go this far?

"The mayor's talking John."

"Bastard."

The image of Mac fills the screen. "Hood tried to assassinate me as he had my predecessor. Unfortunately for him, Hood is dead."

Alan glances at John or more accurately where John used to be for his friend has left.

Moving down the hallway towards the elevator John flips open his cell phone and hits his short cuts for Clare.

"Turn on the news."

"We saw it hun...it's Daemon."

"Fuck me."

PART THREE

HOPELESS

Chapter Eighteen

Alan wiped the sleep from his eyes as he finished up the last sentence of the news article. **Hopeless...Death of a Hero!**

Hood the mystery man that has defended those without voice within Sherwood for generations tonight was murdered... no ... assassinated by our interim mayor Rex MacCurtis. I say assassinated for this is the truth, our mayor has bought his position from the Provincial government.

And it has now cost the life of a true hero. This day may be the day that we stop to ponder whether or not Hood was a hero or vigilante, yet we must remember the good this man has done in our city, province, country and world.

The age of the fallen man shows that Hood is an ideal, generational with new individuals taking up the mantle. This leaves me to query whom will be the hero next? Who will become the advocate for that society disenfranchises?

Who will be Hood? Are we not all responsible?

I am Hood?

-30-

Alan wiped some fresh tears from his eyes. How could he tell the world the true identity of Hood? Even though that is the story his

editor would want him to break, but that was gossip. John, Clare and the kids deserved to mourn in private before the circus started.

For a circus it would be as the mystery man is dead and unmasked.

Clare stared down at the picture, John's arm around her waist. He was stoic, fighting back the breakdown as both their eyes stared at the sacred headshot.

"Its him." The constable nods and walks out of the room. John buries his head into Clare's shoulder. His body shakes as he sobs.

"It was my fault, my idea." She runs her hand up and down his back, softly whispering encouragements in his ear. "Someone has to tell Reesa luv." The hardest conversation in the world to tell someone that the love of their life was gone.

John squeezes Clare close his lips brush her cheek.

"Time to see the family, John." He nods. Too many years, too many lifetimes behind him with too many young buried while his years keep rolling on. Hood has claimed one more lifetime.

Covenant House was quiet like a cemetery on Halloween Night. Not a creature stirred. Natan sat with Sax reclining into him in the living room...darkened.

In the bellows of the basement Malcolm sat leaned against the wall, body wracked in pain. Fighting to keep the emotional pain separated from the physical pain. How did Mac do it? Where he almost crippled him, but he killed his brother, Daemon was not coming back.

A bedroom. Darkened. Pink bed sheets crumpled by the form face down in the pillow. Red hair cascades down across her back covering her face. Her shoulders shook. The news took the wind out of her sails. From talk of wedding bells to funeral pyres and all because Daemon could not stand seeing his family in pain.

The scars he bore that were physical came at the neglect of his mother and a drug cooking accident. The emotional scars of abandonment and loneliness, a phobia of being abandoned that love only came conditionally ran deep through to his soul.

A soul that he constantly told her she was the light into his dark night of.

Her cheek tingles as she feels his silky touch on her skin. She moves her head away from her pillow and just sees darkness.

Chapter Nineteen

The brothers and John lower Daemon's casket into the framework over the open grave. Sister Clare is in her brown habit, the habit she has not worn since the church excommunicated her, in her hands is a tattered and weather beaten white leather bible. She opens with a simple prayer...

What follows is A Funeral Liturgy from the Anglican Tradition¹, that Sister Clare used to lay her son to rest in God's loving embrace.

The Gathering:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is his faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Matthew 5:4.

The Minister Says:

We meet in the name of Jesus Christ,

who died and was raised to the glory of God the Father.

Grace and mercy be with you

Clare's eyes look through the burn unit glass to the small child.

Wisps of hair sticking out of burnt scalp not yet fully formed, now

¹ Adapter from Common Worship of the Church of England found at:
<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts/funeral/funeral.html#service>

eternally deformed at the hands of the addiction that gripped his mother. The doctor saying the child may be maladjusted, there are no signs of healthy intimacy that a child needs.

Clare wipes a tear from her eye.

The minister introduces the service in these or other suitable words

We have come here today

to remember before God our *beloved Daemon*;

to give thanks for *his* life;

to commend *him* to God our merciful redeemer and judge;

to commit *his* body to be *buried*,

and to comfort one another in our grief.

John's face crinkles into a smile as only he can, winking at Clare as they watched Daemon kneel down before Reesa on the night of graduation. The small black box coming from his pocket, tears of joy in their eyes as Reesa lunge into his arms.

The minister may say one of these prayers

God of all consolation,

your Son Jesus Christ was moved to tears

at the grave of Lazarus his friend.

Look with compassion on your children in their loss;

give to troubled hearts the light of hope

and strengthen in us the gift of faith,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

And all God's children say "Amen".

"Dae, you and Sax have the right idea. Sherwood needs a hero."

Daemon looks at the Forest Green hood in his hands. It had felt exhilarating to literally play superhero. John's hand comes to rest on his son's shoulder.

"I am proud of you."

The Gathered sing Amazing Grace

Reesa's hand slips into Daemon's as they stand in the pews of the old United Church. The only ones under seventy in sight, yet they feel something moving. The piano strikes up, and the congregation while gathering opens up with Amazing Grace.

In the stillness, Daemon hears a voice. "It'll be alright my son."

The Tribute:

Reesa slowly opens up a leather bound book and reads the story of Robin Hood saving the life of Much the Miller's son from being killed by the sheriff's men for poaching a deer because his family was hungry.

"Malcolm, we need your help. If Hood is to be real to the people, Hood needs to be active for all."

Malcolm looks at his brother. "I'm in Daemon."

These or similar words may be used to introduce the confession

As children of a loving heavenly Father,

let us ask his forgiveness,

for he is gentle and full of compassion.

Silence may be kept.

Natan looks at Daemon as the hood is pulled on, just his brother's stature changes with the hood on. "Dae, I..."

"He kidnapped Rees, could have killed her Nate. It's time to end it. With or without you and Billy."

"I'm sorry."

These words may be used

Minister: Lord have mercy.

All: Lord have mercy.

Minister: Christ have mercy.

All: Christ have mercy.

Minister: Lord have mercy.

All: Lord have Mercy. Amen.

Sax's fist connects with his bride's face. "Where's Daemon?!"

"He went after Nott."

"Why didn't we go?"

Natan rises and wipes the blood from his lips. "Nott will kill him...I could not face your death too."

"You are a cowardly shit." Sax goes to leave the house.

"You walk out Sax, we are through, your choice."

The minister invites the people to pray,

Merciful Father,

hear our prayers and comfort us;

renew our trust in your Son,

whom you raised from the dead;

strengthen our faith

that all who have died in the love of Christ

will share in his resurrection;

who lives and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Reesa's face buries into Malcolm's broad shoulders as she sobs.

How does someone of thirteen stop from feeling aroused when the hottest girl in school comes to the freak for comfort.

"He broke up with me."

"It's okay Rees, it'll work out, karma...he'll get his in the end."

Sister Clare moves to the readings, she reads the story of Creation in Genesis 1 where God calls his children blessed and very good, she

follows with the familiar Psalm 23, then to Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 about the cycles of life and closes off with John 15...Where Jesus of Nazareth teaches that all are equal and called friends.

Merciful Father and Lord of all life,
we praise you that we are made in your image
and reflect your truth and light.

We thank you for the life of your child *Daemon*,
for the love *he* received from you
and showed among us.

Above all, we rejoice at your gracious promise
to all your servants, living and departed,
that we shall rise again at the coming of Christ.

And we ask that in due time
we may share with our *brother* that clearer vision,
when we shall see your face in the same Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Daemon's lips cause her heart to skip a beat. His hands move up and down under her shirt slowly, electrifying her skin. Her hands fumble with his belt. He kisses her neck. She feels the passion surge through her at his touch.

"I love you Reesa, my Maid Marian."

"I love you my Robin Hood."

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and forever.

Amen.

Mac's eyes fall on Daemon and Reesa sitting underneath the crab apple tree in the Garden. Curled up together, watching as the scarred one nibbles the neck of his beloved.

Mac scowls. "She will be mine."

"We have entrusted our *brother Daemon* to God's mercy, and we now commit *his* body to the ground:

earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust:

in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life

through our Lord Jesus Christ,

who will transform our frail bodies

that they may be conformed to his glorious body,

who died, was buried, and rose again for us.

To him be glory for ever. " Clare still remembered the funeral rubrics from her time in the convent. As a woman she may never have had the opportunity to use them, but she would be damned if she would let anyone else bury her son.

"We gather here today to celebrate a young life that changed much for the better in this world. Daemon Locksley, my son, your brother, lover...he got what the message of Jesus of Nazareth was. World transformation for the better." A sharp icy breeze cut through the small gathering.

John had his arm around his daughter, Reesa. Malcolm, Natan and Sax were an honour guard of Paul Bearers. Alan stood stoically off to the side sent by his paper to cover the burial of a hero, a hero whose hearse driving across town had been pelted with rocks, rotten vegetables and at one point Alan swore a baggie of urine and fecal matter.

His eyes watched the hands of the gathered each held a pink carnation, Daemon's favourite flower.

"For the Gospel of Christ was about the Queendom of the Holy Mystery being near. Knowing it was near, Daemon answered the call of Hood to become the voice and advocate for the less fortunate of this province due to our corrupt governance.

Daemon never shirked his duties even in the times that he felt tired, run down or plain wore out."

Reesa sobbed loudly as Clare laid the Holy Bible on the casket. It was opened to Daemon's favourite passage in the Gospel of Luke (Gospel being a political statement, saying this is our manifesto of life change).

"Blessed are the poor."

The casket is slowly lowered downwards. Each member of the family approached the lowering casket and dropped their carnation in with it.

Snowflakes began falling softly.

The wind became more brisk. As the huddled family moved back towards the hearse for the trip to Covenant House, one less person for family dinner.

Reesa felt an extra squeeze of her shoulder, and the tender kisses that raise butterflies in her stomach.

Chapter Twenty

The ride back was painfully quiet. No one knowing what to say to the other, upon arriving home the boys had vanished into the basement, and Reesa into her room.

Alan sat at the kitchen table with Clare and John. "I am sorry I have to write about this." John dismisses the statement of his friend with a curt hand gesture.

"Don't apologize, at least we know you will tell the truth."

Alan nods. Hopefully his editor would allow the truth to be told as it should be and not cleaned up to the line that the conglomerate wanted to take on this story. That was his fear and would his friends in their grief be able to tell the difference?

"It was a beautiful service Clare, Daemon would be pleased."

"Thank you Alan. It seemed right in this whirlwind everyone's saying evil Hood this, evil Hood that...but so many have forgotten what he meant to this city." Clare said.

Alan hears the kettle click off rises and pours the steaming water into the teapot and returns to the table as it steeps. "Will there be another Hood?"

John slowly shakes his head. "Whenever the world has needed Hood he has been there for hundreds of years. Daemon was the last in the line."

"There will always be a Hood, John. Write that Alan. Daemon did not die in vein. The spirit of Hood lives on in each and every one of us that takes a stand for justice in our corrupt world." Clare's words echoed in the now silent kitchen.

Alan writes the quote down. What an opening statement for the front page story:

Hood Lives

On a chilly winter day the city of Sherwood buried a great young man. One who had the courage to act where many of us stay silent or justify the status quo. Daemon Locksley a.k.a. Hood stood up for justice.

His mother, Clare Fritzwater stated the truth for the people of Sherwood "The spirit of Hood lives on in each and every one of us that takes a stand for justice in our corrupt world."

A truer statement in these dire economic times has never been uttered. A young man had the courage to stand up to a corrupt institution that allows our children to be raped; our lands strip mined; water poisoned and individuals to be worked into the ground trying to make ends meet as basic living costs skyrocket. One man tried to make a difference and lost his life for that...

Do not make Daemon Locksley's death in vein...be Hood.

-30-

Mac throws the morning paper across the mayoral office cursing under his breath. Hitting an intercom button the temp that is filling the front desk responds. "Get me Gisbourne!!!!"

The mayor slumps into his high backed leather chair behind his grand mahogany desk and swears some more. It seemed so simple, kill the boy, the whole movement of Hood dies. Now this claptrap in the morning paper about speaking up for what is right.

Mac picks up the phone and dials. It was time to deal with Covenant House. "Now."

Chapter Twenty-One

John sipped his morning coffee, a smile on his face. Alan's article had led page one. A challenge lay down to the city if nothing more. Clare was quiet; it was their normal morning ritual after Morning Prayer according to the United Church of Canada *Voices United* in the chapel area together to start their day.

Reading the morning newspaper was a continuation of contemplative prayer after the time of reflection, prayer and song that the hymnal provided for. Reesa was still asleep, Malcolm had disappeared as usual before sunrise, and Sax & Natan were still in the basement.

This was the moment of peace before the storm.

Yet there was a sinking feeling in the pit of John's stomach. His brother was not yet done with this family despite the execution of Daemon.

Alan straightened his tie as he stood outside of City Hall, a rather ecumenical group that had gathered, city council was blocking rebuilding permits from the firebombed religious sites. Directly in contrast to the mayor's message of wanting to renew hope.

It was going to turn ugly as a SWAT team came out to the demonstration, Alan had to act and now he was on the steps motioning for quiet.

"I understand why we are here. We are here to help our city renew hope." Alan waited a beat, timing was everything, his eyes caught the collars, an Orthodox priest, Roman Catholic Bishop; Anglican Bishop; other Imams he knew and some rabbis. A smattering of monastics from Eastern faiths, and who looked like a spiritual leader from the Scientology church had gathered. "The city is making choices to not aid our rebuilding, but if we remember none of our faiths began as institutions. They all began with a few believers willing to work to change their corner of the world for the better. That is what we are. A remnant, decimated but not dead. Who is with me to show the world what it means to drink deeply from the River of the Holy Mystery no matter the well we draw the water from."

The SWAT team started to close ranks. Alan's hair bristled on the back of his neck. This was not a good scene.

"I ask for calm as you can continue to build Nirvana here and now, not waiting for the afterlife. But if we continue upon this demonstration the storm troopers of Satan...the illustrious Mayor MacCurtis will silence us."

The response was silent, yet powerful. The religious began walking away.

A cell phone rings.

Natan's eyes watch the feet outside the basement window. He rises a little in the bed and nudges Sax. "Billy, we got a problem." Inaudible mumbling is his response. Natan again pokes his partner. "Someone's outside."

Sax slowly rolls out of the bed, pulling on jeans and a t-shirt, Natan follows. Thumping above.

Sax slowly ascends the staircase; the back door is on the first landing. Natan motions for Sax to continue upstairs as he twists the door knob.

"` Bout time you two love birds crawled out of bed."

"Yeah well Nate noticed someone moving outside."

"Malcolm's back, doing his Tai Chi in the garden."

Natan's head turns to John, "Really? It didn't look like him moving—"

The backdoor explodes inward with flaming shards and bullets. John dive rolls out of the kitchen into the living room, "Clare! Reesa! Get out!"

Sax dives toward Natan . . .

PART FOUR

HOOD WINKED

Chapter Twenty-Two

Natan's bloodstains Sax's jeans. Sax's green eyes stare into what he had always thought were blackened eyes of the son of Satan, but the black was gone to reveal grey eyes. Coloured contacts.

"It is time to end this brother." A huge albino fist slams into Sax's temple knocking his head through the dry wall of the entry.

The front door slam shuts as John scampers down the hall. The squeals of tires say that Reesa and Clare were out. Another explosion. Flames and heat felt underneath the upper level floors. John moves to the bedroom. His eyes look out to the garden, flames growing. He wipes a tear away as his eyes move to the dresser. Open on top is a Bible to the book of Revelation, the story of the whore of Babylon.

The corruption of the world pulling the globe into darkness and death with only the good to stand against evil, a few willing to risk to win.

The heat outside causes the windows to blow in. Shards of glass rain down slicing at John's face. He pulls open the bottom drawer of the dresser, the emerald green hood shimmers in the heat.

"Old friend."

John it is once again time?

"Yes Hearne. The hunt has been called, darkness is in the land."

Then let the bright light shine into the darkest night.

John pulls the hood on and moves back towards the kitchen. Pieces of floor collapse in.

Turning the corner Malcolm tackles John into the living room, crashing through a couch.

A large left hand wraps around John's trachea and begins to squeeze. A right hand rises up ready to come down.

"Now Hood you will stay dead."

A rush of air. "Fuck you brother!" A steak knife buries into Malcolm's neck causing the giant to reel backwards screaming. John fights the urge to wretch into his hood.

Sax stumbles into the living room, blood flowing from his temple, his eyes bruised, blood dripping from his mouth. A switch spin kick brings an eerie crack to the burning house and Sax joins Natan in eternity.

A swift upward motion with John's left arm up between Malcolm's legs brings his son to his knees. Mac wasn't done with them, the worst thing than a brother turning, the betrayal of a child against their very family. Killing two of his siblings.

Now as a parent, John facing the choice of what to do with Malcolm as John struggles up to a standing position. A series of lefts

and rights bloody Malcolm's face and John hears his son's nose break with a left jab.

A roar erupts from Malcolm and a massive left shoulder knocks the air from John as son carries father across the living room to the bay window and through.

A final eruption...
Covenant House collapses in flames.

Sirens echo into the day light.

Chapter Twenty-Three

John feels the burns bubbling up on his back mixing with the cuts from the glass as he lay on the lawn. Malcolm is struggling to his feet. Covenant House is burning. Sirens in the background and two more sons dead because of the hood that John wears.

John rise. The monster will vanquish us.

"That's my son not a monster."

"You're wrong, Dad, I am a monster. Or should I call you Uncle? That's right, I know who my true parent is."

John shakes as he rolls to his knees and then works up to a standing position. "Malcolm, Mac gave you to me and Clare called you a monster and a freak."

A fist flies and connects with John's face sending him back onto his back. "You lie. My father loves me."

Good job, John, get the kid that can break you with his pinky angry.

"Hearne, shut the fuck up."

"What did you say to me Uncle?"

A sweep kick aimed directly at Malcolm's knee. A pop and the big guy goes down howling. "You always had weak knees." It's a struggle to stand and John feels all the lumps physical and emotional

of the last few days. "Stay down kid. I don't want to hurt you anymore."

A growl that sounds more animal than man as Malcolm lunges at John.

The squeal of tires.

Buzz of camera crews, shouts of the fire department, hoses opening up to stop the blaze from spreading.

A chopper in the sky.

"Hood has been spotted. Yes you heard right. Hood lives!" One reporter shouts.

* * * * *

Alan stands there with his cell phone in his hand. The voice on the other end he had heard many times. "Alan, thank you, now leave my steps."

"No Mac. You need to come out here."

* * * * *

Reesa looks at her Mum in the driver's seat. They were heading towards city hall. Clare kept repeating it was time to end it. Reesa had no idea what that meant, but she could see in the rear view mirror the fireball rising where Covenant House, there home, had previously been.

* * * * *

John was witnessing what happened in slow motion as police vehicles arrived. Malcolm's lunge. John could feel the flames behind him, the water raining down on them.

Then heard the weapons fire.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The front wheel of Clare's vehicle hops the curb outside of city hall. Reesa glares at her mother, as both women exit the vehicle. Alan descends the staircase towards them. "What?"

Clare motions for Alan to be quiet. "It's time to end this. They hit the house."

Alan exhales slowly; his eyes meet Reesa's. "How bad?"
"As far as we know my three brothers and dad are dead."

Glancing over Alan's shoulder the doors of city hall open and police constables come out, just behind them is the chief, Gisbourne, and behind Gisbourne is the Mayor.

Clare pushes past her daughter and friend ascending the stairs. "Mac!" The mayor grins, the plan was falling together nicely. His brother would be broken completely.

A constable yells at her to stop. Clare keeps moving. Gisbourne moves between her and the mayor. "Ma'am we are asking you to stop your advance on the mayor."

"Mayor, that asshole bought the office and you know it. Now move before I move you."

Alan and Reesa move back up the stairs.

Gisbourne stands firm. "No ma'am, you need to stand down."

* * * * *

John stares through the hood at the body of his son sprawled on the front lawn. The bullet had exploded through his head. The heat of the fire burning behind him causing sweat to soak through his clothes and stifling a smoke inhalation cough, John continues out onto the roadway as more emergency vehicles arrive.

A reporter shoves a microphone in his face. "Hood, we believed you were a young man named Daemon Locksley, so you the replacement?"

"No, I am out of retirement, my son was the Hood that died." John continues walking past the reporter to a vacant sedan across the road. A quick elbow and the driver side window break, a squeal of tires.

* * * * *

Clare shoves Gisbourne and head toward the Mayor. A constable fires a taser.

The three lines hit Clare square in the chest.
"Stop!" Alan charges.

Clare crumples.
Reesa watches her mum's chest fall.

Mac smiles. "Bitch is dead."
Gisbourne whips around and locks eyes with Mac. "What the..."

A shot.

Gisbourne crumples, the constables turn to the shooter...one of their own, five shots, five constables dead.

Alan freezes at the sight as Reesa kneels beside her mum checking for a pulse.

"Amazing, you three killed the chief of police and five members of Sherwood's finest."

"That's a lie Mac."

"Alan, do you really think anyone is going to believe you? You the washed up Imam without a mosque who writes for the rag that is the Sun?"

Reesa rises. "They'll believe me."

"Really? The bastard bitch of the defrocked nun? I highly doubt your word is credible. I have one. John is dead, now get the fuck out of my city."

Mac turns to head back into city hall.

"I'm not dead brother." The voice is smoke filled and gravelly, shaky not strong like it used to be, but still unmistakable. Sirens are echoing in the background, Alan winks at a female camera operator from the CBC news van that pulled in. The demonstration of the religious had ended, but the final show down was here.

"Mayor MacDonald, I call you out for crimes against the citizens of Sherwood City, Alberta as the masked criminal Nott. Looking at the

carnage I charge you with the murder of Mayor Prince, and the conspiracy to assassinate Chief Gisbourne.”

Mac’s grin gets wider. “You will die Hood.”

John looks at the body of his soul mate, it no longer mattered if he lived or died through this, what mattered was stopping evil. Nott knocks Alan down as he heads toward his brother.

Hood swings up wards with a roundhouse kick catching the younger man off balance and sending him rolling down the concrete steps of city hall towards the street.

Nott slowly staggers to his feet as Hood leaps off the mid-steps towards his brother in a flying tackle knocking them into the middle of the asphalt road.

Tires squeal, as Hood rolls to a standing a coupe slams into him rolling him over top of it and face planting back onto the road.

Nott walks over the hood and lunges down onto his brother. Quick shots into the tender rib areas, John’s breath tightens with each rib that snaps.

Alan moves to Reesa’s side, holding her as she sobs over her mother’s body.

A sidekick and John’s knee buckles out from under him. Gritting his teeth he sends an upper cut into Nott’s groin bringing his brother down to the road.

A flurry of fists bloody Nott's mouth, nose and eyes. John continues to rain blows down, connecting with the ribs and throat. Nott begins to gag and choke.

Nott slams his head forward into the hood that hides John's face; blood explodes through the linen as John's eyes blacken shut.

Reesa rises from beside her mother and shrugs Alan off. She wipes tears from her face as she walks towards the fallen Chief of Police.

Nott struggles to his feet, struggling for air unable to breath through his nose, his breath shortened by cracked ribs. John collapses as his knee that is left supporting him is kicked out from him.

Nott's arm wraps around his throat, the other rests behind his head a swift turn and John's body becomes limp in his brother's arms.

"Hey Uncle Mac where is your brother?"
"Am I his keeper Reesa?"

"The ground calls out with his blood."
Nott drops the body of John and begins walking back towards City Hall. "What's this whole Cain and Abel routine about? You won't use that gun you are aiming at me."

"Why?"
"Simple you are my brother's daughter, you, like God in the Cain story believe in restoration, not vengeance. "

Reesa pulls the trigger. Nott's brains explode out the back of his head.

"God believes in restoration, you fucker killed my family." The gun falls from her hands. Reesa walks down the stairs to her father's body. She kneels down and pulls the hood from his head and shoves it into her back pocket.

Rising Reesa vanishes into the gathering crowd of onlookers.

Alan watches his friend's daughter vanish.

A Prayer

Once each generation
Times darken
Out of the darkness comes love
Through love
Triumph
Two lovers
Destined to find
One another
Rob and Mary
Entwined in life
Soul
Mission
Death
Resurrection
Rebirth
To come again
They will
When the world
Is in need the most
Once
And forever.

Amen.

Sherwood Nights

By Alan A. Dale

The last few months in Sherwood have been illicit tales of murder, plots, corruption and intrigue. We have seen two mayors live and die on the steps of our own City Hall. The Premier of our province to be indicted on bribery charges, our police chief Gisbourne being murdered, and our new police chief Kerri Scarlett moving in.

The election polls are closing to reveal our new mayor, will it be Mayor Lionheart or Mayor Windsor?

Yet from the ashes come our religious organizations without buildings, but inspiration. Inspiration as the land has been turned over to the city to use for low cost housing initiatives and safe injection sites, as the religious move into free space in public schools and community halls.

A new hero is out at night, Robyn Hood, and war has been declared on the remnants of the gangs. I personally thank this hero for their loyalty. May our Creator always smile upon you.

Our city still bears the scars of transformation and grief, but the tissue is getting thicker as we move forward.

Allah be praised, we are stronger for that which we have survived, and may we continue to shed our tears of healing for those who have gone to paradise before us.

