His rumbling moan hidden by outside ambience.

Distant shouts and screeching sirens from miles away. The smell of ancient wood burning. Howling winds. A warm paw on my abdomen. Fingers caressing around my bare cock, freezing in the cool air underneath a rusting roof. His grin as he panted down at me, making my chest warm and my bushy tail twitch. Of all the days of the year throughout my young life in Riviere, I never expected to lose my virginity on Devil’s Night.

The date was October 30th, 1994. Seemingly just another lazy Sunday. My parents called me down for dinner—tuna casserole, again—as my little sister Mara paused the family room’s VCR midway through her tenth viewing of that *Beauty & the Beast* tape, Billy paused his half-completed puzzle on the carpet, and I finished my trigonometry homework upstairs.

“How was work, hun?” Mom asked as she scooped slices onto our plates. She gave a dirty look to me when I put my elbows on the kitchen table. “I hear there were some early fires on Wyoming and Orangelawn before lunch. Did you pick up the call on that?”

“Not me.” Dad swallowed a fork full of his slice in one bite, licking his lips. “Joey. Joey Radovich got the call. So did Shelley and Kevin. Meanwhile, there I am telling a prank caller not to call 911 unless there’s an actual emergency. Like a shooting or a stabbing or, God forbid, something’s stuck right up some fur’s a—”

Mom cleared her throat just in time, or else Mara and Billy would have likely learned another swearword. Billy already knew how to say, ‘fucking bitch’, thanks to the seven-year-old raccoon listening to Dad watch the Riviere Kings get their asses walloped by the Packagers earlier in the football season. Meanwhile, Mara learned how to say, ‘goddammit’ and ‘pussy shit’ one morning, when Billy didn’t put away a Lego piece away.

“Anyway,” Dad chuckled nervously as he dug back into his meal, setting his beer can aside, “You finish your homework, Alex?”

“Yeah, it wasn’t that hard.” I shrugged as I scooped some ketchup onto a warm bit of casserole. “Mr. Fitzsimmons wasn’t in today, so the substitute teacher made a mistake and gave us last week’s homework. Same questions and answers too.”

Dad scoffed, “Our tax dollars at work...” he muttered between sips of his beer. “So, Sue, I put up the bars in the backyard windows like you asked. The shed’s locked too. Don’t want to wake up on Halloween tomorrow and find out we’ll need a new lawnmower.”

“Can we watch *Beauty & the Beast* again?” Mara pleaded, “Please, please, please?”

Everybody at the table suppressed a groan, while Billy pretended his plastic knife was a scalpel and his slice of tuna casserole was a cadaver. I could have waited a bit longer. Then I imagined not finding another opportunity, and immediately asked, “Mom? Dad? Can I spend the night at Sid Serafin’s house, please?”

“Nope. You can’t.” Mom answered me blunt and on-point. “It’s a school night and Devil’s Night.”

“Sid’s literally closer to the school than we are!” I counterargued before she could say ‘period’. The word she told whenever her mind was made up and couldn’t be changed. “Don’t forget, he still struggles with trigonometry, and he didn’t even do last week’s homework.”

“Valid point,” Dad mused aloud. We both shrank slightly from the dirty look she glared at us, particularly at him. “Sorry, hun.”

“You had all of Friday and Saturday to meet up with Sid, mister.” Mom countered my seemingly strong counterargument. “Tonight’s too dangerous to be out. If you don’t want to watch TV or a VHS movie with the family, you can go to bed early.”

Damn. Why did mothers always have to be so good at never being wrong?

“Fine…” I groaned with folded ears. My fork scraped at the bottom of the casserole as I sliced it in another slice. “Can I be excused afterward? I might as well finish those comic books Grandpa got me.”

Mom smiled softly. “Help me dry the dishes and you got yourself a deal.”

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Thank God being a heavy sleeper rang in the family.

As soon as dusk began to descend on the horizon and they went off to bed, bringing Mara with them and sending Billy to his room, I pretended to go to the bathroom and sneaked out the back door without anybody being the wiser. The lights upstairs didn’t even turn on from where I stood on the vacant street.

Beneath the pajamas I’d discarded and placed in my backpack (emptied of all things save for several rolls of toilet paper and permanent markers), the clothes I had on me were my custom black sneakers, dark blue jeans, and a hoodie jacket I’d kept hidden from my parents since I’d first started the night’s tradition a few years back with Sid.

Every cub, preteen and teenager in Riviere knew about Devil’s Night. No, not just Riviere, the rest of Michigan and even the world, knew about Devil’s Night. The night before Halloween when neighborhoods and houses across the city would burn while vandalism reigned supreme. Nobody knew why or how it all began, but it gave angsty teens like me and Sid a chance to go out and release teenaged aggression.

Well, provided we didn’t do serious damage or killed anyone, let alone get arrested on the spot. Otherwise, my parents would do more than ground me for life. At least Mom’s backyard garden would have better flowers in springtime.

Sid’s place rested a good eight blocks or so from my house, past the old car factories and adjacent to the avenue leading to the school. I could already hear distant sirens over the rows and rows of dilapidated houses, prompting me to be quick on my toes and wary of any approaching car along the cracked sidewalk leading deeper to Riviere’s west side. Broken bottles, cigarette butts, a muddied pamphlet preaching salvation, and emptied spray paint cans could not be missed along the way to his house. Not to mention the shuttered windows, some of the small shops outfitted with bars too.

“Oi! Axel!”

(For years, I’d tried to get him to call me Alex, ever since he misread my name back in third grade, but he never relented. Plus, it made me sound cooler.)

There I spotted him, casually standing against one of the graffitied wooden columns holding his porch’s roof aloft. The well-built rottweiler’s black-dyed headfur, unchanged since Friday, was covered in an ear-fitting baseball cap surprisingly worn the correct way. Dozens of political and inappropriate buttons were pinned on the semi-tattered dark jacket he’d wear every Devil’s Night, highlighting the muscular frame beneath it and an oversized wifebeater underneath. Belt chains dangled along his left hip as red boxers peeked from his torn jeans.

His smile could not have been any bright than a spotlight through the dusk, and he ran up to me from the house’s unkempt front yard.

“Axel, you’re here!” he laughed, pulling me up in a big bro hug, then let me go and quickly added, “No homo, hehe.”

“No homo, bro.” I almost hesitated in my reply but shook it away to smirk at the tall canine, standing only an inch taller than me. “So, let’s leave this pukehole before your Dad chases me away like last year.”

Sid laughed. He’d honestly called his home and the surrounding city much worse terms.

“You still gonna riff me on that, Axel?” he asked, to which I rolled my eyes and stuck my tongue out at him. He responded by nicking me in the shoulder. “My Dad wasn’t drunk that night like usual. Told you not to knock on the door that night, didn’t I? Told you not to knock, didn’t I?”

“You sure did, bud.” I scratched the back of a nervous ear, chuckling lightly. “Learned my lesson this time…”

Sid subsequently pulled up a black bandana over his snout, tying it up behind his head. He tossed me a bundle of a bandana too, only it was light grey.

“Learning’s for fags. C’mon then!” He motioned his multi-colored muzzle down an adjacent road leading towards the source of the sirens and a distant billow of smoke. “Let’s get outta this fucking pukehole and tear shit up!”

Sid and I went out on Devil’s Night for different reasons. He went out to release the pent-up aggression and testosterone always boiling inside his canid body. Me? I just got bored one evening years ago and asked Sid what he planned to do the night before Halloween. The cackling rottweiler bluntly told me on the bus ride, “Devil’s Night, babe!”

Me and Sid Serafin weren’t in the same cliques or clubs at school, not that he ever attended any, but we were close. My parents somehow liked his company when he didn’t swing curse words like conjunctions. They saw enough under his punk exterior to know why I loved being best friends with him. His gruff in-your-face exterior never scared me. He could be hilarious to speak with and incredibly insightful, if a little paranoid about ‘the Establishment’, while managing to be empathetic. When he often visited my house for dinner, Sid didn’t even need to be asked to help wash the dishes. He just did it.

If only my folks knew what we were doing. Then, they’d never let me see him again.