Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

The Scarlet Gospels

Written by Clive Barker

Published by Macmillan

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

CLIVE BARKER

The Scarlet Gospels

MACMILLAN

For Mark, without whom this book would not exist



First published 2015 by St. Martin's Press, New York

First published in the UK 2015 by Macmillan
an imprint of Pan Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited
Pan Macmillan, 20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Basingstoke and Oxford
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-1-4472-6698-3 (HB)
ISBN 978-1-4472-6700-3 (TPB)

Copyright © Clive Barker, 2015

The right of Clive Barker to be identified as the
author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means
(electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise)
without the prior written permission of the publisher.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, organizations
and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously.
Any resemblance to actual events, places, organizations or persons,
living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Macmillan does not have any control over, or any responsibility for,
any author or third party websites referred to in or on this book.

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way
of trade or otherwise, be lent, hired out, or otherwise circulated without
the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than
that in which it is published and without a similar condition including
this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Visit **www.panmacmillan.com** to read more about all our books
and to buy them. You will also find features, author interviews and
news of any author events, and you can sign up for e-newsletters
so that you're always first to hear about our new releases.

His friend demanding what scarlet was, the blind man answered: It was like the sound of a trumpet.

—John Locke,
Human Understanding

PROLOGUE

Labor Diabolus

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring—
It mingled strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

1

After the long quiet of the grave, Joseph Ragowski gave voice, and it was not pleasant, in either sound or sentiment.

"Look at you all," he said, scrutinizing the five magicians who'd woken him from his dreamless sleep. "You look ghostly, every one of you."

"You don't look so good yourself, Joe," Lili Saffro said. "Your embalmer was a little too enthusiastic with the rouge and the eyeliner."

Ragowski snarled, his hand going up to his cheek and wiping off some of the makeup that had been used to conceal the sickening pallor his violent death had left on him. He'd been hastily embalmed, no doubt, and filed away in his ledge within the family mausoleum, in a cemetery on the outskirts of Hamburg.

"I hope you didn't go to all this trouble just to take cheap shots at me," Ragowski said, surveying the paraphernalia that littered the floor around him. "Regardless, I'm impressed. Necromantic workings demanded an obsessive's eye for detail."

The N'guize Working, which was the one the magicians had used to raise Ragowski, called for the eggs of pure white doves that had been injected with the blood of a girl's first menstruation, to be cracked into

eleven alabaster bowls surrounding the corpse, each of which contained other obscure ingredients. Purity was of the essence of this working. The birds couldn't be speckled, the blood had to be fresh, and the two thousand, seven hundred, and nine numerals that were inscribed in black chalk starting beneath the ring of bowls and spiraling inward to the spot where the corpse of the resurrectee was laid had to be in precisely the right order, with no erasures, breaks, or corrections.

"This your work, isn't it, Elizabeth?" Ragowski said.

The oldest of the five magicians, Elizabeth Kottlove, a woman whose skills in some of the most complex and volatile of magical preservations weren't enough to keep her face from looking like someone who'd lost both her appetite and her ability to sleep decades ago, nodded.

"Yes," she said. "We need your help, Joey."

"It's a long time since you called me that," Ragowski said. "And it was usually when you were fucking me. Am I being fucked right now?"

Kottlove threw a quick glance at her fellow magicians—Lili Saffro, Yashar Heyadat, Arnold Poltash, and Theodore Felixson—and saw that they were no more amused by Ragowski's insults than she was.

"I see that death hasn't robbed you of your bitter tongue," she said.

"For fuck's sake," said Poltash. "This has been the problem all along! Whatever we did or didn't do, whatever we had or didn't have, none of it matters." He shook his head. "The time we wasted fighting to outdo one another—when we could have been working together—it makes me want to weep."

"You weep," said Theodore Felixson. "I'll fight."

"Yes. Please. Spare us your tears, Arnold," Lili said. She was the only one of the five summoners sitting, for the simple reason that she was missing her left leg. "We all wish we could change things—"

"Lili, dear," Ragowski said, "I can't help but notice that you're not quite the woman you were. What's happened to your leg?"

"Actually," she said, "I got lucky. He nearly had me, Joseph."

"He . . . ? You mean he hasn't been stopped?"

"We're a dying breed, Joseph," said Poltash. "A veritable endangered species."

"How many of the Circle are left?" Joseph said, a sudden urgency in his voice.

There was a silence while the five exchanged hesitant looks. It was Kottlove who finally spoke.

"We are all that is left," she said, staring at one of the alabaster bowls and its bloodstained contents.

"You? *Five?* No." All the sarcasm and the petty game playing had gone from Ragowski's voice and manner. Even the embalmer's bright paints could not moderate the horror on Ragowski's face. "How long have I been dead?"

"Three years," Kottlove said.

"This has to be a joke. How is that possible?" Ragowski said. "There were two hundred and seventy-one in the High Circle alone!"

"Yes," said Heyadat. "And that's only those who chose to be counted among us. There's no telling how many he took from outside the Circles. Hundreds? Thousands?"

"And no telling what they owned either," Lili Saffro said. "We had a reasonably thorough list—"

"But even that wasn't complete," Poltash said. "We all have our secret possessions. I know I do."

"Ah . . . too true," Felixson said.

"Five . . ." Ragowski said, shaking his head. "Why couldn't you put your heads together and work out some way to stop him?"

"That's why we went to all the trouble of bringing you back," Heyadat said, "Believe me, none of us did it happily. You think we didn't try to catch the bastard? We fucking *tried*. But the demon is goddamn clever—"

"And getting cleverer all the time," Kottlove said. "In a way, you should be flattered. He took you early because he'd done his homework. He knew you were the only one who could unite us all against him."

"And when you died, we argued and pointed fingers like squabbling schoolchildren." Poltash sighed. "He picked us off, one by one, moving all over the globe so we never knew where he was going to strike next. A lot of people got taken without anybody knowing a thing about it.

We'd hear about it later, usually after a few months. Sometimes even a year. Just by chance. You'd try to make contact with someone and find their house had been sold, or burned to the ground, or simply left to rot. I visited a couple of places like that. Remember Brander's house in Bali? I went there. And Doctor Biganzoli's place outside Rome? I went there too. There was no sign of any looting. The locals were far too afraid of what they'd heard about the occupants to take a step inside either house, even despite the fact that it was very obvious nobody was home."

"What did you find?" Ragowski said.

Poltash took out a pack of cigarettes and lit one as he went on. His hands were trembling, and it took some help from Kottlove to steady the hand that held his lighter.

"Everything of any magical value had vanished. Brander's urtexts, Biganzoli's collection of Vatican Apocrypha. Everything down to the most trivial blasphemous pamphlet was gone. The shelves were bare. It was obvious that Brander had put up a struggle; there was a lot of blood in the kitchen, of all places—"

"Do we really have to go back over all this?" Heyadat said. "We all know how these stories end."

"You dragged me out of a very welcome death to help save your souls," Ragoswki said. "The least you can do is let me hear the facts. Arnold, continue."

"Well, the blood was old. There was a lot of it, but it had dried many months before."

"Was it the same with Biganzoli?" Ragowski said.

"Biganzoli's place was still sealed up when I visited. Shutters closed and doors locked as if he'd gone on a long vacation, but he was still inside. I found him in his study. He—Christ, Joseph, he was hanging from the ceiling by chains. They were attached to hooks that had been put through his flesh. And it was so hot in there. My guess is he'd been dead in that dry heat for at least six months. His body was completely withered up. But the expression on his face could have just been the way the flesh had retreated from around his mouth as it dried up, but by God he looked as though he'd died screaming."

Ragowski studied the faces before him. "So, while you were having your private wars over mistresses and boys, this demon ended the lives and pillaged the minds of the most sophisticated magicians on the planet?"

"In sum?" Poltash said. "Yes."

"Why? What is his intention? Have you at least discovered that?"

"The same as ours, we think," Felixson said. "The getting and keeping of power. He hasn't just taken our treaties, scrolls, and grimoires. He's cleared out all the vestments, all the talismans, all the amulets—"

"Hush," Ragowski said suddenly. "Listen."

There was a silence among them for a moment, and then a funereal bell chimed softly in the distance.

"Oh Christ," Lili said. "It's his bell."

The dead man laughed.

"He's found you."