

Dean Koontz's Frankenstein: Book 2 - City of Night

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CHAPTER 1

HAVING COME TO LIFE in a thunderstorm, touched by some strange lightning that animated rather than incinerated, Deucalion had been born on a night of violence.

A Bedlam symphony of his anguished cries, his maker's shrieks of triumph, the burr and buzz and crackle of arcane machinery echoed off the cold stone walls of the laboratory in the old windmill.

When he woke to the world, Deucalion had been shackled to a table. This was the first indication that he had been created as a slave.

Unlike God, Victor Frankenstein saw no value in giving his creations free will. Like all utopians, he preferred obedience to independent thought.

That night, over two hundred years in the past,

had set a theme of madness and violence that characterized Deucalion's life for years thereafter. Despair had fostered rage. In his rages, he had killed, and savagely.

These many decades later, he had learned self-control. His pain and loneliness had taught him pity, whereafter he learned compassion. He had found his way to hope.

Yet still, on certain nights, without immediate cause, anger overcomes him. For no rational reason, the anger swells into a tidal rage that threatens to sweep him beyond prudence, beyond discretion.

This night in New Orleans, Deucalion walked an alleyway on the perimeter of the French Quarter, in a mood to murder. Shades of gray, of blue, of black were enlivened only by the crimson of his thoughts.

The air was warm, humid, and alive with muffled jazz that the walls of the famous clubs could not entirely contain.

In public, he stayed in shadows and used back streets, because his formidable size made him an object of interest. As did his face.

From the darkness beside a Dumpster, a wrinkled rum-soaked raisin of a man stepped forth. "Peace in Jesus, brother."

Although that greeting didn't suggest a mugger on the prowl, Deucalion turned toward the voice with the hope that the stranger would have a knife,

a gun. Even in his rage, he needed justification for violence.

The panhandler brandished nothing more dangerous than a dirty upturned palm and searing halitosis. "One dollar's all I need."

"You can't get anything for a dollar," Deucalion said.

"Bless you if you're generous, but a dollar's all I ask."

Deucalion resisted the urge to seize the extended hand and snap it off at the wrist as though it were a dry stick.

Instead, he turned away and did not look back even when the panhandler cursed him.

As he was passing the kitchen entrance to a restaurant, that door opened. Two Hispanic men in white pants and T-shirts stepped outside, one offering an open pack of cigarettes to the other.

Deucalion was revealed by the security lamp above the door and by another directly across the alley from the first.

Both men froze at the sight of him. One half of his face appeared normal, even handsome, but an intricate tattoo decorated the other half.

The pattern had been designed and applied by a Tibetan monk skillful with needles. Yet it gave Deucalion a fierce and almost demonic aspect.

This tattoo was in effect a mask meant to distract the eye from consideration of the broken

structures under it, damage done by his creator in the distant past.

Caught in the crosslight, Deucalion was sufficiently revealed for the two men to detect, if not understand, the radical geometry under the tattoo. They regarded him less with fear than with solemn respect, as they might stand witness to a spiritual visitation.

He traded light for shadow, that alley for another, his rage escalating to fury.

His huge hands shook, spasmed as if with the need to throttle. He fisted them, jammed them in his coat pockets.

Even on this summer night, in the cloying bayou air, he wore a long black coat. Neither heat nor bitter cold affected him. Nor pain, nor fear.

When he quickened his pace, the commodious coat billowed as if it were a cloak. With a hood, he might have passed for Death himself.

Perhaps murderous compulsion was woven through his very fiber. His flesh was the flesh of numerous criminals, their bodies having been stolen from a prison graveyard immediately following interment.

Of his two hearts, one came from a mad arsonist who burned churches. The other had belonged to a child molester.

Even in a God-made man, the heart can be deceitful and wicked. The heart sometimes rebels

against everything that the mind knows and believes.

If the hands of a priest can do sinful work, then what can be expected of the hands of a convicted strangler? Deucalion's hands had come from just such a criminal.

His gray eyes had been plucked from the body of an executed ax murderer. Occasionally, a soft luminous pulse passed through them, as though the unprecedented storm that birthed him had left behind its lightning.

His brain had once filled the skull of an unknown miscreant. Death had erased all memory of that former life, but perhaps the cerebral circuits remained miswired.

Now his growing fury took him to seedier streets across the river, in Algiers. These darker byways were rank and busy with illegal enterprise.

One shabby block accommodated a whorehouse thinly disguised as a massage and acupuncture clinic; a tattoo parlor; a pornographic video shop; and a raucous Cajun bar. Zydeco music boomed.

In cars parked along the alleyway behind these businesses, pimps socialized while they waited to collect from the girls whom they supplied to the brothel.

Two slicks in Hawaiian shirts and white silk trousers, gliding on roller skates, peddled cocaine cut

with powdered Viagra to the whorehouse clientele. They were having a special on Ecstasy and meth.

Four Harleys stood in a hog line behind the porno shop. Hardcase bikers seemed to be providing security for the whorehouse or for the bar. Or for the drug dealers. Perhaps for all of them.

Deucalion passed among them, noticed by some, not by others. For him, a black coat and blacker shadows could be almost as concealing as a cloak of invisibility.

The mysterious lightning that brought him to life had also conveyed to him an understanding of the quantum structure of the universe, and perhaps something more. Having spent two centuries exploring and gradually applying that knowledge, he could when he wished move through the world with an ease, a grace, a stealth that others found bewildering.

An argument between a biker and a slender young woman at the back door of the whorehouse drew Deucalion as blood in the water draws a shark.

Although dressed to arouse, the girl looked fresh-faced and vulnerable. She might have been sixteen.

"Lemme go, Wayne," she pleaded. "I want out."

Wayne, the biker, held her by both arms, jamming her against the green door. "Once you're in, there *is* no out."

"I'm not but fifteen."

"Don't worry. You'll age fast."

Through tears, she said, "I never knew it was gonna be like this."

"What did you think it *would* be like, you dumb bitch? Richard Gere and *Pretty Woman*?"

"He's ugly and he stinks."

"Joyce, honey, they're all ugly and they all stink. After number fifty, you won't notice anymore."

The girl saw Deucalion first, and her widening eyes caused Wayne to turn.

"Release her," Deucalion advised.

The biker—massive, with a cruel face—was not impressed. "You walk real fast away from here, Lone Ranger, and you might leave with your cojones."

Deucalion seized his adversary's right arm and bent it behind his back so suddenly, with such violence, that the shoulder broke with a loud crack. He pitched the big man away from him.

Briefly airborne, Wayne landed face-first, his scream stifled by a mouthful of blacktop.

A hard stomp to the nape of the biker's neck would have snapped his spine. Remembering torch-bearing mobs with pitchforks in another century, Deucalion restrained himself.

He turned toward the *whoosh* of a swung chain.

Another motorcycle aficionado, a leering grotesque with a studded eyebrow, studded nose, studded tongue, and bristling red beard, recklessly joined the fray.

Instead of dodging the chain-link whip, Deucalion stepped toward his assailant. The chain lashed around his left arm. He seized it and pulled Redbeard off balance.

The biker had a ponytail. It served as a handle.

Deucalion lifted him, punched him, threw him.

In possession of the chain, he rounded on a third thug, whipped him across the knees.

The struck man cried out and fell. Deucalion helped him off the ground by throat, by crotch, and slammed him into the fourth of the four enforcers.

He rapped their heads against a wall to the bar-band beat, creating much misery and perhaps some remorse.

Already the customers wandering from porno shop to brothel to bar had fled the alleyway. The dealers on wheels had skated with their wares.

In rapid succession, the pimpmobiles fired up. No one drove toward Deucalion. They reversed out of the alleyway.

A chopped-and-stretched Cadillac crashed into a yellow Mercedes.

Neither driver stopped to provide the other with the name of his insurance agent.

In a moment, Deucalion and the girl, Joyce, were alone with the disabled bikers, though surely watched from doorways and windows.

In the bar, the zydeco band jammed without faltering. The thick, damp air seemed to shimmer with the music.

Deucalion walked the girl to the corner, where the alleyway met the street. He said nothing, but Joyce needed no encouragement to stay at his side.

Although she went with him, she was clearly afraid. She had good reason to be.

The action in the alley had not diminished his fury. When he was fully self-possessed, his mind was a centuries-old mansion furnished with rich experience, elegant thought, and philosophical reflection. Now, however, it was a many-chambered charnel house dark with blood and cold with the urge to murder.

As they passed under a streetlamp, treading on the fluttering shadows cast by moths above, the girl glanced at him. He was aware that she shuddered.

She seemed as bewildered as she was frightened, as if she had awakened from a bad dream and could not yet distinguish between what might be real and what might be remnants of her nightmare.

In the gloom between streetlamps, when Deucalion put one hand on her shoulder, when they traded shadows for shadows and fading zydeco for louder jazz, her bewilderment increased, and her fear. "What . . . what just happened? This is the Quarter."

"At this hour," he warned, as he walked her across Jackson Square, past the statue of the general, "the Quarter is no safer for you than that alleyway. You have somewhere to go?"

Hugging herself as if the bayou air had taken an arctic chill, she said, "Home."

"Here in the city?"

"No. Up to Baton Rouge." She was close to tears. "Home don't seem boring anymore."

Envy seasoned Deucalion's ferocious anger, for he had never had a home. He'd had places where he stayed, but none had truly been a home.

A wild criminal desire to smash the girl raged at the bars of the mental cell in which he strove to keep imprisoned his bestial impulses, to smash her because she could go home in a way that he never could.

He said, "You've got a phone?"

She nodded, and unclipped a cell phone from her braided belt.

"You tell your mother and father you'll be waiting in the cathedral over there," he said.

He walked her to the church, paused in the street, encouraged her forward, made certain to be gone before she turned to look at him.

CHAPTER 2

IN HIS MANSION in the Garden District, Victor Helios, formerly Frankenstein, began this fine summer morning by making love to his new wife, Erika.

His first wife, Elizabeth, had been murdered two hundred years ago in the Austrian mountains, on their wedding day. He rarely thought of her anymore.

He had always been oriented toward the future. The past bored him. Besides, much of it didn't bear contemplation.

Counting Elizabeth, Victor had enjoyed—or in some cases merely tolerated—six wives. Numbers two through six had been named Erika.

The Erikas had been identical in appearance because they had all been engineered in his New

Orleans lab and grown in his cloning vats. This saved the expense of a new wardrobe each time one of them had to be terminated.

Although extremely wealthy, Victor loathed wasting money. His mother, otherwise a useless woman, had impressed upon him the need for thrift.

Upon his mother's death, he had not stood the expense of either a service or a pine box. No doubt she would have approved of the simple hole in the ground, excavated to a depth of four rather than six feet to reduce the gravedigger's fee.

Although the Erikas looked identical to one another, numbers one through four had different flaws. He kept refining and improving them.

Just the previous evening, he had killed Erika Four. He had sent her remains to an upstate landfill operated by one of his companies, where the first three Erikas and other disappointments were interred under a sea of garbage.

Her passion for books had resulted in too much introspection and had encouraged in her an independent spirit that Victor refused to tolerate. Besides, she slurped her soup.

Not long ago, he had summoned his new Erika from her tank, in which universities of digitized education were electronically downloaded into her absorbent brain.

Ever the optimist, Victor believed that Erika Five would prove to be a perfect creation, worthy of

serving him for a long time. Beautiful, refined, erudite, and obedient.

She certainly was more lubricious than the previous Erikas. The more he hurt her, the more eagerly she responded to him.

Because she was one of the New Race, she could turn off pain at will, but he did not allow her to do so in the bedroom. He lived for power. Sex was, for him, satisfying only to the extent that he could hurt and oppress his partner.

She took his blows with magnificent erotic submission. Her many bruises and abrasions were, to Victor, proof of his virility. He was a stallion.

As with all his creatures, she had the physiology of a demigod.

Her wounds would heal and her physical perfection be restored in but an hour or two.

Spent, he left her on the bed, sobbing. She wept not merely because of the pain but also with shame.

His wife was the only member of the New Race designed with the capacity for shame. Her humiliation completed him.

He showered with much hot water and a verbenascented soap made in Paris. Being thrifty about disposing of dead mothers and wives, he could afford some luxuries.

