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Opening Extract from...

Death of a Saint

Written by Lily Herne

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DeATH OF A SAint

A Deadlands Novel

LILY
HERNE



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A Short History of Cape Town City Enclave

(Transcripts of the War and its aftermath)

Name: Yolanda Visser (not her real name)

Previous occupation: Mortuary make-up artist

Current occupation: Resurrectionist amulet trader

Age: 27

Nationality: South African

(Date transcribed: July, 2015 [aka Year 5].)

Note: Yolanda is reported to be one of the first to have encountered a reanimate at her place of work.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing your story with us today, Yolanda.

Yolanda: Are you sure it's cool for me to talk to you? 'Cos, like, I've heard that the Resurrectionists don't like us to talk about what happened during the War.

Interviewer: Your identity will be kept confidential.

Yolanda: Uh. Okay then. Where do you want me to start?

Interviewer: Can you start on the day when you first encountered a reanimate?

Yolanda: Cool. So, at first it was, like, just a normal day. I was working at the Peaceful Sleep Funeral Home on Buitenkant Street, and I only had a couple of decedents to deal with that morning – that's what we called the dead back then; it's like an industry word, you know. Anyway, I started on Mrs de Beer. Totally straightforward. She'd died of natural causes, basically because she was, like, really old, and I was just going to add a bit of blusher. Anyway, after a bit I popped out for a smoke break, and when I came back in there was this young guy, couldn't have been more than twenty, in the preparation room. I could tell straight away that there was something wrong with him. I thought he was probably on tik or something, 'cos, like, although he was really cute, his eyes were just blank and he didn't blink or anything.

Interviewer: Were you frightened?

Yolanda: Nah. I knew Eric, my supervisor, was just down the hall, and so I said to the guy: 'You're not supposed to be in here.' But he didn't answer, just cocked his head to one side in a lank creepy way and lurched out. So, anyway, I was about to sound the alarm, let Eric know that another one of the freaks who were into dead people had broken into the funeral home, when Mrs de Beer started moaning.

Interviewer: How did you react to this?

Yolanda: How do you think I reacted? I totally freaked out. Look, sometimes the decedents used to burp and groan and fart and stuff – but that was just air escaping from their guts or whatever. This was different; it went on and on. And then Mrs de Beer sat up and started sliding off the gurney. So I was like, oh no, someone's made a serious mistake – like maybe she hadn't been dead, just in a coma or something. But then I remembered that she'd been in the cooler room for, like, I dunno, a day at least, and so I knew it couldn't be that. I was really scared by now – at first I just froze, it was like my brain couldn't deal with what it was seeing, you know? But then she

started reaching towards me, trying to touch me, and there was this weird white stuff snaking out of her mouth.

Interviewer: Can you describe it in more detail?

Yolanda: You've seen it, haven't you? Like this thin, wormy stuff. It sounds gross, but it reminded me of ... I dunno ... Thai noodles or something. It's what turns people into Rotters, isn't it? Part of the virus that infects them, right? Or keeps them alive and stops them decaying totally or whatever.

So I pushed my make-up trolley towards her, bashing it into her legs, and this gave me enough time to get out of there. I ran straight to Eric and told him about Mrs de Beer, but by now I was totally hysterical, and he was like, 'Yessus, Yolanda, what you been smoking?' And I swear I did my best to stop him going into the preparation room, but he was like, 'Whatever.' Of course he didn't come out of there, or if he did, he wasn't, you know, *alive*.

Anyway, there was no way I was hanging around, so I just ran for my car. I tried to call my boyfriend at work – he was in IT, although not any more obviously – but the network was down. So I went home, had a shower and few drinks to calm me down, and then I had a nap. I guess at that stage I was thinking that maybe Mrs de Beer *had* been in a coma or something, that there had to be a rational explanation.

I woke up hours later – three a.m., I think it was – the vodka and the shock must've knocked me out, you know. The first thing I did was switch on CNN. And I immediately noticed that the newsreaders looked really scared and lost – like when the whole 9/11 thing happened – and they were babbling about a virus and stuff. And then, suddenly, the screen went black.

I didn't know what to do. I was about to try and call my boyfriend again when I heard the screaming and I looked out of the window. It was chaos out there. I mean, I lived fairly close to the stadium, and with the FIFA World Cup going on and everything, all those vuvuzelas and tourists everywhere, it was usually fairly crazy, but this was different. People were running everywhere, and everything was lit up, bright as day. I finally figured out that it was because the city was on fire, like *totally* on fire, but that was only when I opened

the window and smelled the smoke.

I didn't want to stay in my flat – there were these weird banging and groaning noises coming from next door – so I ran outside. Everyone was screaming: 'Get to the stadium! Get to the stadium!' So I followed this crowd, and it was just like doing the FIFA Fan Walk, only, you know, more hectic and panicked and stuff. I mean, I was used to seeing dead people, but not them walking and running and attacking people.

But by then the stadium was totally full, and there were hundreds of infected people lurching around. There was no way I could get back to my flat, and so a bunch of us got together and made a break for it. We ended up in this restaurant in Green Point and we hid out in the kitchen, which was in the basement of this huge building. There were twenty of us or so, and we were there for weeks. It was horrible. We could hear the city burning around us, and the air force planes crashing, and then it was all, like, quiet, and then we just heard the moans of the Rotters. We had plenty to eat, of course, but with so many people and only one toilet ... Well, you can imagine. It was just like one of those zombie movies – you know, the one where they're all trapped in the mall – only, like, way more hectic and disgusting.

Anyway, so we were all sure we were going to die, and then we heard someone banging on the door. We'd boarded it up and stuff, but a couple of the guys looked out and there was this figure dressed in this long brown robe like priests or monks wear. Well, we didn't know what to think. We couldn't tell if it was a person with freaky dress sense or one of the Rotters. But it didn't take us long to figure out that it was going to help us. They're not called Guardians for nothing, you know.

Interviewer: How did you know it was going to help you?

Yolanda: The Guardian had brought us food, and it was keeping the Rotters away.

Interviewer: How did it do this?

Yolanda: I dunno. No one knows, do they? It's the Guardians' thing,

isn't it? Probably with its mind . . . Who knows? All I know is that when it was around us the Rotters kept their distance, like they were scared or whatever. Anyway, there were these really cute six-year-old twin girls with us, and the Guardian kind of gestured towards them. It didn't speak or anything, but we assumed it was going to take them to safety first. The kids' parents freaked out a bit, but they were also relieved to get the kids out of there – the place really stank.

The Guardian left us where we were for a few days. *That* was hectic; we were scared it wouldn't return, that we'd starve to death or whatever. But then it came back, and there were more Guardians with it. They gave us some clean clothes and food and stuff, and we followed them out.

It was really freaky being outside again. I couldn't believe it! The whole of Cape Town was trashed, with, like, Long Street and even the Waterfront just *gone*.

How much more do you need?

Interviewer: Can you describe the beginnings of the enclave?

Yolanda: Oh, right. Okay, so the Guardians took us in these big wagons to this huge empty space, keeping the dead ones from attacking us. One of the guys, this cute Malawian kid, said that it was where Khayelitsha used to be, but you couldn't tell for sure 'cos, like, most of the shacks and houses were all burned to the ground.

So we camped out for, like, ages, and then the Guardians started getting us to build this huge fence, and they brought us wood and bricks and stuff so that we could build shelters and toilets and things. And for the first few months we had this whole shanty-town vibe going on, you know.

I work on a market stall now. I know, crazy, right? Well, it's not as if I can go back to my former career. With all the decedents being thrown outside the fence so that they'll get infected and turn into more Rotters, no one does proper funerals anymore. (She laughs.)

Interviewer: Are you happy?

Yolanda: I guess it's okay. I mean, the Guardians look after us, right? Bring us food and stuff from the agricultural enclaves.

Interviewer: Are you a Resurrectionist?

Yolanda: Kind of. I mean, I'm not sure I buy into the whole worshipping the Rotters thing, but after seeing what happened during the War, I'm not really surprised that people worship the Guardians. They saved us. And the Resurrectionists say that everything's better now that we've all got a fresh start. They've kind of got a point. Before the War there was all this violence – hijackings and rape and stuff - and now there's none of that – no crime or HIV or anything like that. I mean, don't get me wrong, I miss *American Idol* and Friday night drinks and clothes shopping and stuff, but it could be worse.

Interviewer: Do you ever wonder what is happening out there in the rest of the world, the rest of South Africa?

Yolanda: Sometimes. But, I mean, what's the point thinking about that? It's not as if we can go outside and check it out, is it? (She holds up one of the carved Resurrectionist amulets she sells.) And who am I to complain? Business is good, right?

WANTED

For Crimes Against the Resurrectionist State

THE 'MALL RATS'

Name: Leletia (Lele) de la Fontein

Age: 17

Nationality: South African

Description: 5 ft 2, short (possibly shorn) hair, slight build.

Name: Saint (real name not known at this time)

Age: Approx. 19

Nationality: Motswana (assumed to be of Tswana origin)

Description: 5 ft 10, well built, unruly hair, known to use chains and fire as weapons.

Name: Ash (real name not known at this time)

Age: Approx. 20

Nationality: South African

Description: 6 ft 2, longish black hair, different-coloured eyes (grey/black).

Name: Ginger (real name not known at this time)

Age: Not known at this time

Nationality: British

Description: 6 ft 5, extra-large build, red (ginger) hair. Speaks with a pronounced British accent. Carries a chainsaw.

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO APPREHEND THESE
CRIMINALS AS THEY ARE ARMED AND EXTREMELY
DANGEROUS. IF SEEN CONTACT THE RESURRECTIONIST
GUARD IMMEDIATELY.

By order the Cape Town City Enclave.

Dear Jack,

The illness I have been hiding for so many months is now eating me up, and I know I do not have much time left.

I have many regrets, some of them trivial – that I will never again get to taste honey; that I will never again listen to you, Ginger, Ntombi and Lele bickering about which of Ginger’s awful horror movies to watch; that I will never leave Cape Town and see what is happening beyond the enclave’s walls. But the biggest regret I have concerns you.

I know I have not been a good person. I trained you – I trained all of you Mall Rats – to fight and defend yourselves, but I did not teach you what is important: I exploited your talents for my own gain, sending you out into the Deadlands to bring back what Lele calls ‘worthless crap’ from the mall to sell in the enclave.

You see, I always thought it was the dead – the Rotters – who were our enemies. You and I saw first-hand how they ravaged the population, turning our friends into empty, dead-eyed monsters. But now I know that it is not the dead who we should fear, but the living. The Resurrectionists who manipulate and feed the population their dangerous lies must be stopped AT ALL COSTS. This city is sick. It is corrupt; it is rotting; it is eating itself from the inside.

It is too late for me, but it is not too late for you.

The others are out there somewhere. You must find them; you must ask them to come back and help to stop this.

Please, tell them that I know now that they were right.

And tell them that I am sorry.

I love you, and I always have. Please give my love to Ginger, Ntombi and Lele.

Hester