

Dialogue With Fury

by Greg Stolze

Walt, a lapsed Christian without enough concern to go atheist, was not expecting paranormal vengeance when he killed his brother Stan.

“Jesus!” he nonetheless exclaimed when the fury emerged from the shadows of the trees, the needles on the pines rasping against something upon her that was neither feathers nor scales.

“Thy dying god cannot spare thee my wrath.” Her voice was like a rattler’s hiss, a cat’s scream, the howl of a bitten rabbit. It was somehow a sound of pure beauty.

“No, I’m not... it’s just, you startled me,” he said, leaning as slowly as he could towards the shotguns.

“Thy mortal weapons shall avail ye naught against a child of Nyx herself. I am the very scourge-hand of Hell.”

“Well shoot,” Walt mumbled.

For a second they were still. His bleary blue eyes gazed into the pitiless white light that streamed from her face.

“If I’d a known that...” he gestured vaguely in her direction, “...all this was real, I might not of done it.”

“I assure thee, real I am.”

“Yeah, I couldn’t never make up one a’ you. Not a lot of, you know, imagination.” He tapped his forehead with one forefinger.

“There is nowhere thou canst flee that I will not pursue,” the Greek monster warned.

“Do I look like I’m fleeing? Shit, I’m... I’m tuckered, OK. It was a lot of work. Harder than I expected.” He gestured at his brother’s corpse.

The looming monster gracefully stalked over to the heap of guts beside a prone form clad in orange and cammo. In shape, her body was long and sinuous as an otter or a hellbender, but vast. “Disemboweled,” she said, that one word a perfect movement from a stygian symphony.

“I kinda had a plan,” Walt sighed. “It’s... I said, ‘Hey Stan, we should go huntin’ this weekend, head on out to the Blue Woods and get some deer before the season ends.’ And I told him not to tell anyone I was going, ‘cause—this is what I

said to him, the lie—'cause I told my boss I'd get some work done from home. So yeah. Ol' Stan, he just thought his little brother was sneaking out to hunt with him in the Blue Woods. 'S what he told Sally. Um, Sally's his wife. Sally and Stan and Susie and Steve. Uh. Then when we were in the car I brought him here and he said 'I thought we were going to Blue Woods' and I said 'What? No, I said Driesen's Forest' and that was that. When he goes missing, they're going to look for him about a hundred and ten miles west-northwest from here."

"There they shall seek thee and he alike."

"Oh. Yeah? Well, so it goes. I dunno. I thought about killing myself after him, in all honesty, but that seemed like it would be... our family, you know. We been here five generations. Got a reputation to uphold." He shook his head. "Plus it's a sin, I guess."

"I thought thou lacked faith."

"OK, well... suicide seems like a cheap way out for cowards then." He looked away. His hand started towards his neck, as if to rub it, but when he saw all the blood on it he put it down again. "If he just vanished, that would be... a story, a tragedy, and if they found his body after critters got it and there was no marks on the bones, well. But then I asked myself how to do me? I can't quite spill out my own guts. A gun though, that... that's gonna leave a mark," he chuckled. "The story that Stan and Walt went into the woods and Walt got his head blowed apart point-blank and then Stan died *too*? Yeah, that's the kinda thing they do podcasts on."

"Indeed. Thy family honor demands a secret sacrifice, that thy shame go unknown." The fury shifted, casually as a cat curling up in the sun, but was somehow at his side in an eyeblink. "Think not to persuade me to forebear upon thy death," she said, licking some of Stan's blood off Walt's hand.

"Hey!" He flinched hard. "Sheesh! Hands off the merchandise!"

"The lure of thy shame shall not buy aside my anger."

"I'm not tryin'a... do anything. What are you, anyway? Some kinda monster?"

She drew herself to her full height, forcing Walt to crane his neck. "I am Alecto of the Erinyes, named for wrath without ceasing, avenger of those who dare spill the blood of their kin."

"Fuck," Walt whispered, staring in awe.

The creature scoffed.

"I think I read about you," he said at last. "When I was a kid. It was... I was at Uncle Joe's for Thanksgiving and his TV went out, so no football and all the adults were taking naps after the turkey. The only book that looked interesting

had a woman's head with snake hair, and I just got pulled in, it wasn't like anything else I ever read. Aren't there 'sposta be, like, three of you?"

"It is our busy season," Alecto said.

Walt was not equipped to judge if this was a joke or not.

"So I reckon you're gonna kill me," he said at last.

"Quite."

"Don't suppose you want to say what happens after?"

The monster tilted her head. The features of her human face were lovely beyond compare in their abject chill.

"Thy body I shall fling high into a tree," she said. "The marks of tooth and claw shall preclude any talk of suicide. Thy corpse will attest to monstrous wrath or the judgment of an angry goddess."

"So there's that podcast then," Walt said. "But maybe I won't be remembered as a murderer or a suicide. Good, that's... mighty nice a'ya. I meant though, more like what happens to my soul, or whatever."

"Dost thou fear judgment?"

"Not really. I did what I did. I had my reasons. I... saw a lot of hurt in this world when people judged people, and I never wanted to. Though, I guess, here I am. Now Stan, bless his heart, he was the Christian. Doesn't that beat all? Had a Bible verse for everything. Every shitty thing he did, there was a verse where Lot did it, or Abraham or somebody. And he talked about forgiveness but I tell ya what, judging was what he *did*. Me, Sally, his kids, everyone he worked with, everyone he *wouldn't* work with." He scowled.

"In thy tome of Hellenic lore," the fury said, her voice lower, strangely intimate, "Didst read of Minos?"

"Uh...?"

"Minos the king demanded seven youths and maids of Athens for sacrifice, every nine years. They died in fear, pursued by a beast through a labyrinth. This was his revenge, the law he laid down. Upon his death, he was made a judge in the afterlife."

"Was he now? How come?"

"Perhaps the gods approve of bloody-handed justice. Perhaps it was a punishment, because the judgment of others is a painful and wearying thing. Perhaps the gods felt that only one who did cruel deeds of vengeance was fit to judge others with red hands."

"Huh."

“Is thy heart ready to cease its toil?” the creature said, her body noiseless as she neared.

“If I say no, does that change anything?”

“I could give thee a moment to compose thyself.”

“Nah, I’m good.” Walt stood and closed his eyes.

“It gives me no joy to kill thee, though thou art thy brother’s murderer.”

“If you don’t mind... how ‘bout you just say I killed my niece’s rapist?”

“Agreed,” the fury replied.