

On Bad Starts and Not Too Shiny Bright Sides

Some nights you wake up just knowing that you might as well take a quick drink of blood and go back to bed. For instance, the evening I woke up to the smell of burning lab equipment. Stepping out of my sanctuary and into my haven, I found broken shards of glass and torn tubing everywhere. That and the occasional small fire which sporadically flared up.

With a shake of my head I stepped back into my sanctuary, got dressed, and began trying to figure out just what had happened. Almost my entire haven had been trashed. Something caustic had been splashed across my favorite chair reducing it to a smoking mess. Similarly, my warm-liquid storage area was a total loss. Pretty much everything had been destroyed, which really annoyed me. There had been several really good bottles of blood wine amongst the other stuff. And some of that other stuff had been pretty valuable in its own right.

It must have happened towards the middle of the day. Had it happened right after I'd gone to bed, there was a fairly good chance that I might have awakened. Same for the last couple of hours as sundown approached. But while the sun was high in the sky, I was dead to the world. Probably literally. And it was times like this that reminded me of this unpleasant and near unalterable fact. Reminded me and showed me possible consequences.

Looking around, I managed to find my sawed off, double-barreled 10 gauge. That it remained undamaged was good at least. After some additional looking around, I found that my box of shells had evidently been the epicenter of one of the fires. This, I supposed, explained a good deal of the collateral damage I was seeing. I also found one sleeve of my favorite leather jacket. Going back to bed was sounding better and better. But this mess would still be around whenever I got up.

On the up side, I still I had two perfectly good shells already loaded. "Geoff?!" I yelled. "What the hell happened here? Geoff?!"

No answer.

Muttering darkly to myself, I wandered over to my library. Most of it was still in good shape despite a little smoke damage. Thankfully, all of Gilch's books were intact. I'd probably have frenzied had they been destroyed. It did appear that my copy of Felber's Studies on Flamethrowers and Werewolves was a loss though. It had been located on the end of the rack closest to the lab. Shame. It had been extremely amusing and was hard to find... due in large part to the fact that werewolves have no sense of humor.

Trying not to think too much about what could have happened to my library, I instead turned my thoughts to the fury that was a good vampire frenzy. Actually, frenzies were overrated. You went nuts and destroyed everything in sight with no rhyme or reason while burning the blood within you to do super-vampire stuff at a frightening rate. It wasn't really useful in a battle because you went after allies as well as enemies. And the smart warrior could kill someone in a frenzy without too much effort. A little brain power and properly applied force was all it took. Well... That and not panicking in the face of an insane vampire.

A frenzy was usually a primal response. Kind of like a highly destructive tantrum that burned up most your body's stored blood supply. Looking down at my mostly intact books, I was grateful there'd been no need to do such a silly thing.

"Geoff? You lousy, good for nothing ghou! Where the hell are you?" Maybe he'd run off after the accident, fearing that I'd kill him. Hmm... if so, it's possible he was smarter than I'd given

him credit for.

Okay, the library was mostly good, but... the lab itself... not good at all. I'd had three large tables that I'd been using for my alchemical experiments on mixing elder vampire blood with a few little extras to form what I was calling a Potion of Brilliant Agility. This was actually a modification of a potion described in one of my alchemy books. Theoretically, my version would make the drinker permanently quicker. Not that this batch would be doing much of anything now - other than staining and etching the walls, floor, and ceiling. According to my calculations, it should have made ten doses. Selling off nine of those would have paid for a new lab thrice over. Two of the tables had been reduced to splinters. The metal table seemed to be imbedded into the wall of my sanctuary. Fortunately, I always make sure that my sanctuaries are extremely durable. At least I did when I had the time.

And the luck to find such a place.

Had Gilch ever had this sort of thing happen to him? If so, he'd never mentioned it. Then again, Gilch had been a much better alchemist than I was.

And now he was dead and I was out on my own with his precious arcane library. My precious arcane library. Shaking my head, I leaned against the wall for a minute. So much for this little home away from home.

After the explosion had killed Gilch, I'd jacked a car, loaded it down with the library and what few other possessions I'd had, and high tailed it out of L.A.. The war still raged and the man who'd been keeping me off the front lines was dead. I wasn't ready for that. Not yet at least. While I knew a lot of vampires in L.A., unlike Gilch, I had no pull with them. And to be honest, I didn't want to deal with them. Gilch was a good negotiator. I had a bad habit of running my mouth when I should have kept it shut. No, I'd been almost happy to see L.A. dropping behind in the rearview mirror.

Almost.

Absently sticking the shotgun into my belt, I moved on.

Walking around the remains of the lab itself, something crunched underfoot. Actually, stuff had been crunching with each step. Mostly the remains of my expensive, hard-to-replace glassware. But this was a different crunch than all the glass had been making and I immediately stopped to check it out. Carefully moving aside a section of scorched canvas, I found my lab assistant Geoff. From his burned condition, I determined that he was quite possibly the reason the canvas had become acid scorched in the first place. What a mess.

"What the hell happened Geoff?" I asked. Predictably, the dead ghoul continued not to answer.

At least now I knew why.

Hmm. He seemed to be holding an intact beaker despite being very, very dead. Prying it loose, I accidentally pried off most of his remaining fingers.

"Sorry about that. You don't mind do you?" I interpreted his failure to answer to mean that he did not in fact mind. With a tentative sniff I determined that the contents of the beaker had most probably been liquified and heated mandrake. A less tentative sniff confirmed this.

Why would he be holding this? It wasn't supposed to have been added into the potion until midnight tonight. "What the hell were you doing Geoff?" With him still holding to his silence, I decided to find out the answer myself. I walked through the hole in the wall the propane bottle had evidently made when it exploded. Out in the main warehouse there were just a few pieces and parts that had been blown out with the wall. Not much smoke damage at all out here. As remote as this warehouse was located, I didn't find it the least bit surprising that no one had come to

investigate...its isolation being one of the main reasons I'd chosen to move in. Stepping back inside, I spotted the reason the building hadn't burned down around me. The valve, and indeed the whole top assembly off the halon bottle, was missing from my fire suppression system. It had apparently blown the whole charge all at once. Geoff probably would have suffocated if he hadn't died in the initial explosion...or from being doused in acid.

"No wonder you're dead, dude," I told him, moving back into what had been the lab. "Now what started this whole mess?"

Alright, if Geoff was over here with the vial of liquified mandrake, the tables were over there, the gas cylinder had been under the metal table.... For a long while I stood there considering trajectories and the old positioning of the lab equipment versus the current positions.

After a long while, I reached one inevitable conclusion: he'd tripped.

"You stupid, clumsy bastard," I said quietly, shaking my head as I did so.

My lab assistant had probably been moving the mandrake across so that it would be ready to use tonight and had tripped over the hose to the gas cylinder. Spewing gas, open flame... boom. Of course, at that point in the process the potion would have been extremely caustic and with it not having been reduced, there would have been about twenty gallons of acid with which to destroy my equipment and possessions. And Geoff.

Dammit, I was really going to miss that jacket.

I began packing my remaining stuff. It was time to find a new city. Hell, a new state was sounding good now. My luck in California seemed to have run out. At least the good luck had anyway. And, despite how bad things appeared now, I knew there was still plenty of room for my situation to continue sliding downhill. Maybe somewhere further east would offer an opportunity that would work out better. The farther away from L.A. or this place the better. My luck had to get better. At least I hoped so.

On the bright side, it seemed that clumsy assistants were an ever decreasing variable in my equations. Damn. I really needed some brighter sides.