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## **DONUTS**

By Michael Lauck

There are some things you just can't quit. You know, like when Pacino said "They keep pulling me back in!" in whatever the fuck movie he said that in.

I think that sometimes it's you, you know? You have some innate need to fulfill that got you there in the first place... so you can't quit. Sometimes it's drugs and for some people it's bad relationships but for me it's my fucking job.

I tried like Hell to quit. I left. I changed my name (well, I changed it back to my real name). I got a normal job and tried to get a normal life with semi-normal hours. Dammit, I even let myself get fat.

But you can't just walk away from some things. I was still up all night and slept a good part of the daylight, like I had for years. Turns out all those years I wasn't missing much in the daytime anyway but traffic and checkout lines and really shitty TV, so who gives a fuck if I'm stuck in a graveyard shift world? And the instincts. I didn't work anymore and, like I said, I even let myself gain like 15 pounds but you can't run from the instincts. Whenever I walked into a room I knew, I sensed, every motherfucker in the place. I knew, without looking, exactly where every human being was in my general vicinity at all times. Maybe that would go away eventually... I don't know. Like I said, I tried to walk away but sometimes they just pull you back in, like it or not.

But my old job wasn't on my mind at all when this started. It was about 3 in the morning and donuts were on my mind. Part of letting go of the old job was letting myself indulge in whims and cravings and at 3 AM during the top of the hour news break of the UFO radio show I was listening to, I realized I needed some donuts. And a hot, black cup of shitty coffee to wash them down. So that's what was on my mind. Just trying to break away from the rigorous training and self-denial of the job.

The donut shop was about a mile from my place, but it wouldn't have mattered if it was a forty five minute drive. I had known from childhood that it was the only decent overnight donut place in town. It had to be donuts from Donut Drive Thru, which, for some stupid ass reason nobody knew, had never had a drive thru in the 30+ years I was aware of or the 20 or so years it had been around before that. I ordered half a dozen custard filled with chocolate icing and was getting my change when the old job bum rushed me. There was a vague twinge in me, like I wanted a cigarette even though I hadn't smoked or wanted a cigarette since I was a dumbass high school kid. Maybe I should have really let myself go and started smoking again. I had been thinking about it. I missed rolling my own cigarettes more than I actually missed smoking them. And besides, maybe deep down I knew I couldn't get too fat, too out of shape. Maybe I knew deep down that I couldn't run away from the job after all. That sucks.

It really sucks.

That 'I want a cigarette' feeling came when the little bell over the door rang to let everyone in the shop, everyone meaning me and the tired looking old guy with the prison tats behind the counter, know that someone had come in. Except this time, well, this time it meant something had come in because those senses that I couldn't shake, they told me there was only one other human in the room and he had just handed me my 87 cents. But there were footsteps. Two sets.

"Motherfucker," I mumbled as I turned to look at them. "Motherfucker!" they exclaimed when they saw me. They knew I knew their secret and I

advertised mine. At six foot, two hundred and eighty pounds (okay, more like two ninety five but I was letting myself get fat and out of shape to try to run away, remember?) with a shaved head, Misfits t-shirt and tattoos much better than the guy behind the counter, I wasn't exactly hiding myself. The Oriental ink was of no concern to them; it was the tat of the Lord's Prayer on my neck and the Ten Commandments on my hands, one on each finger in Latin and Hebrew, that told them all they needed to know:

I knew who they were. I knew what they were. And I hunted them.

I hunted vampires.

Except I couldn't say that anymore. I couldn't say hunted. I hunt them. There was no turning my back on it anymore. How could there be? How could I run from it when it was right fucking there in my neighborhood donut shop? Damn it all, this was my worst nightmare come true. Vampires in my hometown.

See, being a vampire is a pretty good deal (if being a freakish Hell-bound undead soulless fuck sounds like a good deal to you), except that modern times made the hunting grounds a bit harder. They didn't want to make themselves known because if the world at large believed in them, in this day and age, us humans would wipe them out in days. Not to mention the fact that there would be a huge upswing in attendance next Sunday if CNN started showing footage of a bloodsucking corpse cursing and cringing at the sight of a Bible. So they had to stay in places where driver's licenses weren't so hard to come by in the name of your choice and no-one really noticed or cared how many people disappeared.

I mean, they weren't exactly hiding in the sewers or anything. But they stayed places like Rio and Russia. Places where life is cheap and easy and people with money can have whatever they want. And they have money, believe me. The movies get that right.

Vampires, by and large, are pricks. They are demonic frat-boys who know that they can party all they want because they don't have to work since Daddy founded such a big company, only it's eternal life and that

makes them 80 times bigger pricks. Even if vampires weren't Hell's shock troops that would use me, you or any of our friends and families like a weird combination of slave and cattle, I wouldn't fucking like them. They are just bastards, like assholes who put "Live Simply" bumper stickers on the rear windshield of their Mercedes. And on top of it, being immortal tends to make you a total know-it-all. Ever met some trust fund fuck who opens a trendy art gallery and spends one weekend a year building homes for Homes For the Homeless or some shit and they are just so smug and so all-knowing and so empathic and above everything? Vampires are like that, except that they also want to party like 18 year olds in Cancun for Spring Break forever.

And don't forget that their idea of a party caps off with tearing out your throat, drinking your blood and snacking on your brain.

Yeah, that's something the movies have wrong. Vampires are more like movie zombies when it comes to table manners. None of that two quick pokes and they drain you of blood like your neck is a straw bullshit. It's a fucking mess. Blood everywhere; Hell, half of them go straight for the heart, so you can imagine the gore there. And they will eat flesh and organs and they seem to go for brains. Which gets back to why they usually live in places where you can mutilate people with regularity and not draw too much attention. Like I said, Rio is a good place for vampires. Mexico City. Russia... they fucking love Russia. It's all money talks and bullshit walks there. Life is very cheap and there is always a party for those who can afford it. That's fucking Vegas for vampires. Perfect combination... you'd think they would flock to places of turmoil, like Iraq. People dying everyday, so who notices a few more? But there ain't no clubbin' in Baghdad.

All of this leading to these two soulless motherfuckers and me having a stare down in the rather small lobby of Donut Drive Thru in the heart, and I mean the heart, of the great American Midwest. They both looked younger than me. One was all Armani-ed out, or whatever the fashion of the day is. I mean, I'm standing there in a Fiend Club t-shirt and jeans, so don't expect haute couture out of me. The other had the whole white-boy gangsta thing going on. They both tried to look hard. Maybe it is

just my own ego, but I am pretty sure they were scared. At least spooked. Dickheads definitely were not expecting to meet someone like me anymore than I expected to run into the undead as part of the last-call crowd. Big difference was I had undoubtedly fought, and killed, way more of their kind than they had of mine. And by mine I mean the hunters, not just humans.

“Well, looks like the whole neighborhood is going to shit,” I said, putting my box of donuts back on the counter without taking my eyes off the corpses. I hadn’t picked up my coffee yet; I still had 87 cents in my left hand.

The ex-con behind the counter started to say, “No trouble in here, fellas, so,” but the Armani corpse, he was the bigger fish of the two, I could already tell, hissed at him. It shut him the fuck up. It would shut anyone who hadn’t seen it before up.

I can’t explain the vampire look. They can’t hypnotize people, at least in my experience, but who knows? I’ve seen some pretty crazy shit over the years and maybe some of them can... but I haven’t seen it and it isn’t that. It’s just the look they give you. It can shake you to your fucking core. It just cuts through you like a cold knife to the spine because it just isn’t human. It just isn’t right. No movie style fangs (yeah, their teeth are a bit pointier but not freakishly so). No special effects style red eyes. They are predators, you are prey and worst of all they just aren’t human, and that’s a pretty fucked up thing to come against face to face. It shut up the donut guy.

And then Armani did something stupid. He tried it on me. Now, I don’t like the look. I can’t say I’m used to it, but it doesn’t shake me. I’ve seen it way

too many times for that. So when he tried the look on me, my instinct wasn’t fear anymore. I didn’t want to run anymore. I wanted to fight. My right hand came from the donut box to his nose a Hell of a lot quicker than he expected any human hand to move. I got my hip into it as I connected and knocked him flat. I felt the old energy surging back

through me; the Eminem looking corpse took a step and my left tossed the 87 cents at him. I was betting he was too young to really have any fight-sense and I was right. He used all of his magnificent undead ‘gifts,’ the superhuman senses and speed and agility, to dodge three quarters, a dime and two pennies... which left him perfectly open to the side kick I threw. Even though I had retired, at least I had tried to retire, I had carved the Lord’s Prayer into the sole of my work boots out of habit. It blasted him, and I caught him just under his center of gravity. The kick combined with his mid- dodge twisting made his legs shoot out from under him and he landed hard. It’s funny when vampires fall. They are like cats; they are so used to catching themselves that when they actually go down it shocks them.

But the sirens shocked them more. Imagine that? Cops pulling up to a motherfucking donut shop! The sirens and red lights were barely on and the corpses were out the door. A cop charged through the door, gun in hand and all like “Is everything alright in here Frank?”

“Yeah, yeah. Those punk-asses tried to rob the place,” the donut dude said. Guess his name was Frank.

The cop’s chunky partner had gone after them, but he wasn’t going to catch them. He was back inside in a couple of seconds. “I don’t even see where they went.”

“Maybe we can make them from the tape,” the first cop said nodding up at a dirty old security camera.

“Like that thing fucking works,” Frank said. Frank was going to make the next hour of my life a lot easier. I could tell that he wanted to ask me what the fuck had just happened, but he couldn’t do it. Not just because of the cops, he just couldn’t do it. We answered a bunch of questions. The chunky cop ate one of my donuts. I gave them a very valid driver’s license with my picture and someone else’s name. The fact that I never left the house without it was probably another clue that I couldn’t really get away, even if the undead hadn’t interrupted my donut run. I just couldn’t let go. It must be something in me.

But it didn't matter if I was going to go back or not, because now there wasn't a choice. If this wasn't a fluke, and I didn't think it was, then Hell was literally coming to the Midwest. Retired or not, Armageddon was one fight I couldn't fucking sit out. This was going to be war.

So I didn't go home after that. I couldn't anyway, not until the sun came up just in case the corpses had any revenge fantasies. After I washed up in the sink in the kitchen of Donut Drive Thru (I had Count Armani's blood on my hand and vampire blood is stale and putrid smelling. Fun trivia fact: vamp blood disgusts us but they absolutely can't stand the smell of their own kind's blood) and answered way too many questions for five-oh, I headed out on the highway. Even if it had been sun up I couldn't fucking go home.

War was coming and I had to report for duty.