

Baba

By

Gabriel King

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VII: Demons

Andrea's heart races as she bolts down a dusty street, thick fog engulfing the Middle Eastern cityscape. Cries of agony echo off the alley walls, radiating through the darkness.

"Get away from me!" Andrea exclaims.

She makes a sharp right turn, nearly tripping over herself as her feet pound against the cobblestone path. The screams intensify. She clamps her hands over her ears, straining to focus.

"Please! Stop!"

She glances behind her. A young silhouetted boy stands aimlessly in the middle of the alley, staring intently back at her. She quickly returns her gaze to the path ahead, making a left at the end of the alley.

Andrea stops dead in her tracks.

A pale figure concealed beneath a gray cloak blocks her path, towering over her like a mighty colossus. Andrea shudders, chills running down her spine.

"Leave me alone!" she shouts, "You...you can't...I won't-!"

The figure lifts his hand and points to something behind her, then vanishes into the alleyway shadows. Andrea slowly turns to look, her eyes gaping with horror.

Hanging from a protruding ledge, a rope dangles, tied in a hangman's noose.

"NO!"

Andrea rushes away, frantically trying to escape. Her foot catches on an uprooted cobblestone, sending her tumbling to the ground. Her head slams against the sidewalk, busting her nose and forehead. She pushes herself off the ground, blood trickling down her lips as she gets back to her feet. Dazed and confused, Andrea struggles to regain her balance. She staggers

*backwards into someone and quickly turns to find the boy, now joined by several other children.
Light reveals their deformed bodies, flesh burned and charred.*

“Why?” the boy asks.

*The question sends violent chills through Andrea. A tear trickles from her eye as she
turns to escape, only to find more children encroaching upon her.*

“Ppplease,” she stutters, “I-.”

“Why?” another child inquires.

They are joined by an onslaught of voices, all asking the same question.

*Andrea clutches her head tightly, screaming at the top of her lungs as the mass of
children loom over her, their eyes filled with fire.*

“Mrs. Leavensly!”

Andrea bolts awake, sweat pouring down her face. She turns to see Baba, his head turned in her direction as his hand rests on hers. She glances at Nazim and Bongani, who are staring directly at her, having stopped the jeep.

“Are you alright?” Baba asks.

She hesitates.

“I’m fine,” she retorts, ripping her hand away from him and wiping the sweat from her forehead.

“Another dream?”

She glares at Baba.

“None of your business.”

“A very volatile one, it must have been.”

“Yeah? What makes you say that?”

“You were crying out,” Bongani replies.

Andrea turns to Bongani.

“Are we going somewhere,” she snaps, “or are we just gonna sit here in the middle of nowhere and burn to death!?”

Bongani glances at Baba, who nods in affirmation. He turns to Nazim, who puts the jeep back into “Drive”, resuming their trek across the African landscape.

“Where is it we’re going anyway?”

Baba smirks.

“Patience,” he replies.

“Now, you see, that just doesn’t fly with me anymore! You either tell me where we’re going or I jump out this jeep.”

Bongani lets out a hearty laugh.

“I’m sure the lions will keep you company,” he says.

She throws her hands up in frustration.

“You still want your story, do you not?” Baba inquires.

“You mean **your** story.”

Baba snickers.

The jeep continues on its course, its four occupants remaining silent as tires rumble over crumbled dirt.

“Tell me, Mrs. Leavensly,” Baba starts, “when did these dreams of yours begin?”

Andrea turns to him and glares.

“Why is that any business of yours?”

“A mere inquiry is all.”

He pauses.

“Dreams are a portal, Mrs. Leavensly,” he continues, “they reveal to us deeply hidden things our conscious mind would wish left buried.”

A lump forms in Andrea’s throat. She turns away from him, trying to hide her sudden fear.

“However, if we allow these secrets to remain in the depths of our subconscious, they will fester and grow into demons that will haunt our every step for the rest of our days.”

“Is that why you brought me here?” Andrea interjects, “To be your freakin’ priest?! What, you can’t live with your actions anymore?”

Baba hesitates.

“You know what? I think you’re just some flippin’ psychopathic power monger who craves attention and can’t stand to not be in control. I think you brought me here to take your story and share it with the world, so you could have your time in the spotlight and show the globe just how bad you really are. You might as well stop this jeep and shoot me, even make me kitty food for all I care, cause I’m not gonna be some pawn in this sickening game you’re playing!”

Baba looks up for a moment. There is a tense pause.

“Very well,” he finally states, “Nazim, pull over please.”

“Sir?” Nazim asks with surprise.

“Do as he says,” Bongani replies on Baba’s behalf.

Reluctantly, Nazim slows the jeep down and veers to the side of the dirt road. Baba turns to Andrea as Bongani steps out of the vehicle.

“I thought you were a truth-seeker, Mrs. Leavensly,” Baba states, “It appears I was mistaken.”

Bongani opens Andrea’s door, a canteen in hand.

“Give her the canteen.”

Andrea stares at Baba with a look of confusion as Bongani hands her the canteen.

“Wait!” she demands, “What are you-?”

“You are free to go. The airport is only a few hundred miles or so northeast of here.”

“Northeast? You expect me to-?”

“You’re a survivor, are you not? I’m sure you will figure it out.”

She hesitates for a moment, the suddenness of this whole series of events overwhelming her. She shakes her head and steps out of the jeep.

“However,” Baba continues, “should you find yourself out here, your **true** self, we will be camped only a day’s journey up this road.”

She looks at him, still dazed.

“Goodbye for now, Mrs. Leavensly.”

He nods. Bongani shuts the door. He glances at Andrea with a hint of concern, then quickly gets back in the jeep and closes the passenger door. The engine revs as they pull away, leaving Andrea in a cloud of dust. She stares at the jeep as it slowly shrinks into the distance.

“I hope you know what you are doing,” Bongani states, watching Andrea fade into the distance in the rearview mirror.

“Have faith, my son,” Baba replies, “She will come around.”

He bows his head.

“We must have faith.”