

THE INVITATION

Bone like branches reached out like a skeleton's arm menacingly. The night was dark. The distant hoot of an owl was the only sound. The river moved quickly but stayed silent. An air of loneliness and sinister silence lingered. Above, the sky was illuminated by the full moon. Jagged, razor sharp stones lay threateningly, waiting to cut someone's shoe. Debris and rusty signs were scattered along the banks of the river, creating an unusually treacherous terrain. Abandoned, temple like buildings stood patiently, waiting for someone to inherit them. Moss and creeper plants had invaded the buildings, leaving them in chaos and darkness. Slowly, the melancholic pieces of architecture were coming apart. But an end to the silence was near. Something was going to happen. Something big. And not something good.

Draven Kravanovic, was possibly the most feared highwayman ever known. He gave up the thought of an academic life at 15 and decided to become a butcher's apprentice. Five years later he was plunged into debt and was sacked. He spent most of his time fighting other men in bars until he was caught and he spent 9 years in prison. He then decided that he would have to undertake a life of crime. Because of his amazing disguises, his powerful allies, his extreme wealth and his ability to escape from almost all unwanted situations, he became the most wanted criminal on the planet. Although Draven was a criminal, he was not considered an unpleasant man. People preferred to think of him as a fighter for social justice, someone holding the authorities to account. People despised his crimes, but sympathized with his intentions.

His gallant black stallion was stolen from an extremely rich landlord who was found guilty of tax avoidance. As he rode the well trained creature, he spotted an Elf riding a wild boar. Speedily, he decided to pursue them. But the Elf saw him coming. The boar turned and sprinted away and Draven and his horse crashed into a nearby tree stump, sending him face first into a river. The water was quick and cold. Draven managed to cling onto a fallen sign and struggled to his feet. He got up and felt a sudden bitter chill go up his spine.

"Oh dear me! You look very wet. Come to my cottage. You'll feel warmer after you have had some of my special Chicken Soup. It's a family tradition!" said an extremely ancient woman.

"I'd love to, but I have things to do tonight."

"No, I insist. I really enjoy having guests."

“OK. I’ll come for dinner, but I will have to go soon. I have a meeting with the mayor about the local economy to attend,” lied Draven.

“You don’t look like the sort of man that would attend meetings, let alone with the mayor. Now hurry up. The cat will be hungry.”

The woman’s cottage was coloured in purple and blue. In some places, the wallpaper was peeling off. Spider webs were visible in the corners of the rooms. Draven sat uncomfortably in the library. This bizarre woman, who was obsessed with books about cats and brooms, had managed to persuade the most renowned highwayman into having soup.

No one knows what happened that Friday night, but what we do know is that Draven Kravanovic was never seen again...

Alex B.