5-1-2009

Leopard

Frances Bonner
Concordia University - Portland

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Recommended Citation
Bonner, Frances (2009) "Leopard," The Promethean: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 15.
Available at: http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol17/iss1/15

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Witness here, a burning man.

In every cell, hellfire screams for purity of cause. But he is nearly done...and he wonders about the life he has left behind. What will become of him when the puzzle is complete.

The Dead Man, still feeling the blood coagulating on his right hand, stops in his tracks; refusing for the first time to simply follow the tugging of the leash in the Devil's hand. He stops in the middle of an intersection, freezing in the wake of tail-lights and cast in high-contrast by onrushing headlights.

"Monica?"

For the first time, the Dead Man's thoughts stray to the woman. So long drowning himself in blood, he has banished the softness from his heart. What of his Monica?

"All in good time." The leash tugs, but the Dead Man holds firm.

"Now." He whispers. He won't be dissuaded so easily.

The headlights draw closer.

A battle of wills, the clash of glacier and earth, resounds in every bone of the Dead Man's body. Claws sluice through grey matter. Muscles twinge with a thousand tiny cramps as the Devil fights to send the man-who-was back on his way.

Heartbeats now until steel meets flesh and the vessel is broken.

The Devil goes slack and The Dead Man knows that he has won. He obligingly steps out of danger and back onto the pavement, his steps directed toward a new destination...one which does not resonate with bad blood and cordite-sapphire nightmares. But rather something sickly-sweet and perhaps yet grimmer.

"So be it."