

Hail Hecate.

SNUGGLED WITH his bottle in a bathroom of the condemned building he called home, Victor cocooned safe and secure on a late October night. Dogs barked somewhere, heralding the passage or approach of someone or something, Victor knew not who or what.

Over many weeks, he'd collected lumber scraps, pieces of plywood, abandoned furniture and anything else that would burn. He was rich with dry fuel, all in easy reach adjacent to the bathtub. Victor basked in the heat of the fire in the bathtub. As unruly as a troop of Boy Scouts, flames blazed two and three feet high. Victor drained what was left in his bottle, closed his eyes against the light and fell into the arms of Morpheus.

Something in the fire popped and shot an ember. More pops shot more embers, large ones. A few of them fell on a chunk of Creosote-soaked railroad tie in the woodpile.

Victor felt warmer and warmer. Was someone shining a light? The rat that lived in the walls was agitated. You have to leave, the rat said.

Go away, Victor said.

He felt hot. He tried to kick off the blankets, but he'd wrapped them tightly around himself. The fire spread to the woodwork and the walls. The smoke was acrid.

It's not safe here anymore, said the rat. Her brood huddled next to her. She wore a tall tiara.

Who are you? asked Victor.

Queen Hecate, proclaimed the rat. *All hail the queen!*

Victor coughed and pulled at his blanket cocoon. I'm Victor! Hail to the Victor!

The bathroom filled with smoke. Queen Hecate and her pups escaped out the bathroom door. Victor coughed and coughed until he couldn't cough anymore.

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In his fourth floor apartment next door, Codell woke with a start. Light from outside reflected off his bathroom mirror and danced on the walls. Something roared continuously. Codell opened the bathroom window and the roar became ferocious. Flames higher than his building rocketed from Victor's building. Codell had no idea that fire could be so loud.

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The Detroit Fire Department report was dated the next afternoon, October 25 at 1400 hours. Contrary to speculation, the conflagration had nothing to do with Devil's Night. The investigators traced it to a fire in a bathtub. When they found Victor, his body radiated and glowed. His incandescence rose up through where the ceiling used to be, as if beckoned by someone. A woman crowned by a tiara, perhaps, with two torches. For a moment he colored the sky, an opaque red essence free from time.

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