

Hail Hecate.

SNUGGLED WITH his bottle in a bathroom of the condemned building he called home, Victor cocooned himself 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.

All summer and into the fall, he'd collected lumber scraps, pieces of plywood, abandoned furniture, anything that would burn. He was rich with fuel, all in easy reach adjacent to the bathtub. Victor basked in the heat of the bathtub fire. As unruly as a troop of Boy Scouts, flames blazed, jumping two and three feet high as if they wanted to get out. 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 fell on a chunk of Creosote-soaked railroad tie in Victor's woodpile. He felt warmer and warmer. Was someone shining a light? The rat was agitated. *You have to leave*, the rat said.

Go away, said Victor.

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

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

Who are you? asked Victor.

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

Victor coughed and clawed without effect 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 didn't cough anymore.

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In his fourth floor apartment next door, Codell woke with a start. Lights, unnatural lights from outside danced on his bathroom 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 600 hours. Contrary to speculation, the conflagration had nothing to do with Devil's Night. The investigators traced the fire to a bathtub. Next to the bathtub they found what was left of Victor, radiating heat. His incandescence floated 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 few moments, his essence colored the sky pink, opaque and free from time.

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