

**Dipsomapolis:**  
A wrecked promenade through horrors of the North

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Cover Art by  
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**NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED,  
BUT THE FEAR AND BEWILDERMENT OF WHAT FOLLOWS ARE VERBATIM**

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Ten years had passed since I had last been within the Minnesota borders. I spent several early teenage summers vacationing there, in both the North and South regions, but the populace and I did not part amiably. When an assignment was offered to assess the economic strain in Minneapolis however I couldn't contest, largely considering my own wavering financial stability. I agreed to the assignment, even though it meant going straight into the heart of where I was not welcomed anymore. Four days in a once hostile environment, with a free hotel and per diem for lunches and dinners. It had been over a year since I had an opportunity to step out of Chicago anyway. I agreed and drove the tumultuous rode to the unsuitably nicknamed North Star state.

My arrival was poorly timed, coinciding with the Vikings inexplicably losing to the Cleveland Browns in their first home game of the season. If you know anything about football, you know it is

NOT acceptable to lose to Cleveland, especially on your home turf. The penalty for doing so is long-standing ridicule, and total loss of credibility as a sports team and the fans of said team. This hypothetical humiliation was becoming a reality spreading over the streets of Minneapolis as I was pulling into town. Between inhospitable Football fans, superstitious hotel clerks, and sour dealings at some bar called Turner's that double-botched my dinner order, Minnesota failed to reclaim any appeal it lost on years before. I already could not wait to leave for home, Chicago. The assignment was scheduled for four days, and I knew it was not going to be done without Herculean intakes of alcohol; which I initiated immediately, while still at Turner's. I noted the desolateness of the city streets when stumbling back to the hotel. I was accustomed to Chicago, where you typically reach your destination by ricocheting off other pedestrians like a pinball. The sun was just retiring and Minneapolis had become a ghost town. Ever more curious, I noted that all I could see one direction was a stretch of bars and taverns, and the other was a stretch of strip clubs and sex shops. None are establishments I am opposed to, but it is a problem when the only choices for activity are *booze & grease food* or *booze & breasts*. Both options are going to be detrimentally expensive, and neither was anything more long term headache disguised as a potentially good time. But of course, none of these places appeared to have any sign of life in them.

Although I felt opaque the next morning, I got straight to work. Interacting with Minneapolis daytime citizens was equivalent to taking census from zombies. Even when they did reply, it was brief, nonsensical, and hasty, as if they were afraid. Something was definitely wrong in Minneapolis, and the whole place felt unsettling. Whenever I was off duty I drifted from bar to bar, drinking over-priced cocktails and discovering greatly disconcerting establishments. Every place was filled with listless, almost hypnotized patrons who did not eat their meals or drink their drinks; or meals and drinks were served to empty tables. Even stranger was a Jazz club called the Last Stop. I found it at an intersection I passed several times during the day, but it was not visible in the sunlight. With large

windows and purple neon lights projecting through them, it should have been quite easy to spot someone inside. I went to open the entrance door, but it was locked. Roaring and vigorous tunes could faintly be heard coming from inside, so I assumed they were open or getting ready to. I stepped up to one of the windows and looked inside. The chairs and bar were set up for service, but no one was around – or not visibly at least. Staying there for a moment, I heard the distinct blare of crowd chatter rise up to blend with the music. The auditory evidence of life inside notwithstanding, the place was empty, without presence. I backed away slowly, not wanting to disturb whatever haunted the Last Stop.

Immutably, once the sun was down, the streets became deserted. Minneapolis is a lonely place. Despite the incredible crime rate, Chicago is a more welcoming city than any other I have been to. I searched for anything that felt homelike, and surprisingly I came upon one to the far East side of the city limits.

It was called Skyway. An enormous Iggy Pop poster hung behind the bar, and David Bowie played on the stereo. Skyway was a diner by day and bar by night, furnished with red vinyl booths and barstools with silver chrome lining. Dust and dirt caked over the glittery floor, and the lights were dim enough to cause accidents. Like everywhere else, few people were inside. At the bar sat a dazzling redhead reading a newspaper and drinking vodka neat. Even without making eye contact and only seeing her from the side, I sensed her ethereal aura. She dressed simple, in jeans and t-shirt, because her presence was sufficiently impressive. I could not help but sit down next to her. She looked up, and with a sigh dropped the newspaper on the counter, then grabbed her drink as she walked behind the bar. She turned out to be the barkeep, and asked what I wanted to drink. Her name was Belle and she was extraordinarily exquisite, with a voice like wind blowing through autumn leaves that had fallen to the ground. I told her I was from Chicago, which thrilled her as she wanted to visit there for years. Our conversation was interrupted when a skeletal figure materialized through a

wall in the back corner and started strutting noisily around the place, sitting at booths or on stools for seconds at a time and then moving to another spot. At one point, he stood very close to me and talked to Belle. From their exchanges, one could easily see he was a gentle, old soul. I introduced myself, and he cordially asked me to call him J. Then he chattered his teeth ghoulishly, cackled wishes of pleasant evenings to Belle and calmly left. Belle said J was an artist who worked on a barter system, and that he never paid for anything around town if he could trade some of his work for it instead. Subsequently, she said that his appearance was the signal to close up. I said goodbye to Belle respectfully - a truly remarkable person in an unremarkable town.

Having few other options, I continued drinking at the hotel bar, where I spoke with an androgynous figure who called themselves Sydney Curie. They looked like they came off a Punk rock line of a porcelain doll set, and insisted I visit a place called D.D.'s. Sydney bought me whiskey on the rocks until I blacked out.

When I regained consciousness the next morning in my hotel room my eyes were bloodshot and my tone was pallid. I was starting to resemble the locals. This neglected to make transacting with them any smoother. In fact, it appeared they were getting worse: incomprehensible and hostile. That day was long and turbulent, and I was losing care for my assignment. I gave it little thought and effort by this point. Giving up early that evening due to lack of progress, I decided on dinner at a Tiki bar and grill I had read about in one of the hotel brochures. It was called Bettie's Asylum and was said to serve paramount burgers and remarkable cocktails. The place was located on the other side of the river, so I would have to take my car.

The Asylum's parking lot had "10 Minute Parking Only" signs in every space. It made sense to me though: Anyone who wanted to venture this far out in town had to be quick. They didn't have time to say hello - nor had the capacity to, I would guess. They walked in, were served, and ran out before finishing their meal...before the sun went down. Oddly enough, all spots were occupied, and I

ended up having to park on the street a block up before making my way for the patio section. Two servers escorted me to a table in a far corner. The formation of one of them in front and the other behind me might have seemed like I was a prisoner being escorted into a cell. Although, I do not believe anyone noticed this. I did not hear any conversations as I trailed passed the packed establishment. People were there, just not interacting with each other. After I was seated, I noticed the large spider-web just off to my side, one I somehow missed when walking by. There was another web, an immense one, over the head of a woman at another table. That web housed an alarmingly big arachnid. It was rubbing its pedipalps and chelicerae together, savoring the moment before the predatory pounce. While I contemplated if this creature would run me down if I made a break for it now, the bartender jabbered on about their evening specials. There was a moment between him finishing and me responding, when I calculated there was no leaving Bettie's Asylum until that arachnid fell into a food coma following his master feast. I order their 'Psycho' burger a few tropical apéritifs to dull the pain should the massive tarantula turn to me for dessert. Once my burger came, I ordered a vodka based dinner cocktail and a digestif. The food was indeed marvelous, and the drinks too. After a while, I noticed the arachnid had ventured off somewhere, and the woman he sat above was gone. During my whiskey based digestif, a semitransparent Curie appeared and reasserted their recommendations for D.D's. I was feeling thorough relieved to make it through dinner alive, and was ready to celebrate. So I agreed to let the apparition lead the way.

D.D.'s was an eerie lounge not too much further up the river. It had tiger print carpet and black padded booths. Human trophy heads hung above the booths in place of Buck heads. A world worn guitarist played Blues riffs from his stool near the entry way. The doorman and bartender were splattered with blood, and they spoke with some ancient accent. I was seated and given a menu. Their drinks were sensational cocktails named after porn stars or zombie movie heroines. A Kung-Fu Zombie film was playing on the television. I watched the film until a waitress floated in from behind

me. She wore a black, backless, floor-length V-neck evening gown and emanated an orphic allure. Though she never looked up from the floor, our minds locked and I gleaned fragments of her history. She was born before time as we understood it, had witnessed genesis along with the countless complications that ensued. She saved select civilizations and condemned others, and the only reason art was invented was to capture her likeness: Ghostly pale and devilish, with a gaze that crushed your will and instilled hers. She impassively took my order; she wasn't interested in men, only their blood. I ordered something containing Absinthe. I am an Absinthe connoisseur, and it is hard to find in bars, let-alone one mixes cocktails with it. The waitress coasted behind a divider of black velvet curtains, and emerged instantly with my drink. With a touch of contempt, she set it down. The drink was a translucent yellow, served in a champagne saucer with a cherry garnish. One sip made you levitate, and a second set ailments ablaze and rendered them ashes. I had several. They unleashed my mind to slither into the atmosphere, leaving my body an empty dipsomaniacal vessel anchored to the chair. I became nothing going nowhere to no end. By the time mind and body had reunited – it could have been hours, or days later - I found myself back at the hotel, completely uninformed of how I made it back.

The following morning was excruciating. The Sun was so bright that it slathered virtually everything to a yellowish hue. And the void of sound the voiceless day trippers made was being substituted with an obnoxious static, that made it impossible sustain any sort of concentration. I did not even think about work; it was difficult enough to recall that was why I had come to Minneapolis. My reflection looked more decrepit, too. The whites of my eyes were almost red and dry, and my skin appeared to be fading to a pale green. All rationality told me to stay indoors, sleep this foulness off before driving back to Chicago the next day. No doubt this hotel had room service like any other; even if I decided to waste the day away, it could be done from the comfort and safety of my rented bed, in front of my rented television set with pay-per-view channels featuring the same programs I got

for free back home. However I knew that I could not leave Minnesota without having some concept of what was happening just inside its Southern border, that undefined strangeness which had the potential to stretch thru the line between Minnesota and Wisconsin, and even down into Illinois and beyond. Forget whatever the original assignment had been, I was now on a reconnaissance mission. I threw on some fresh clothes and sun glasses, and roamed the streets while the sun was still up, hoping to find answers. But the locals had gone mute, or at least inaudible in the ambient static, which naturally was louder outside than in the hotel room. No one even responded when I began pushing them into each other out of frustration. They merely regained their balance and pressed on whatever path they had been inching at. They would be no help. If I wanted any type of lead that reveal some clues, then it had to be at what I assumed was the heart of the beast. Since it was barely dusk, I decided to walk across and up the river.

Back at D.D's right as starlight seeped through the twilight, the same employees from the night before waited just inside the door, like they expected my return. They wore the same clothes, and the same movie was showing on their TV set; the same Blues guitarist still jamming. They were oblivious to the fact that the sun had come up and gone down again, that the day had changed and it was a new evening - Time was one endless night for them. There was also the possibility to consider whether I had left at all. Maybe it *was* the same night, and I had walked outside only to turn around in Absinthe stupor and strolled back in. Truth was, one way or the other, that I found myself inside once more and they were ready to receive. The waitress escorted me to a table where a drink was already set. I did not say anything, just sat down and grabbed the glass. The mood in the place had changed radically. It was now grave and cold; inviting but with ulterior motives and evil forewarnings, as if the lounge were actually the lid of a massive ossuary and psychogenic outcries from the remains beneath bled through the floor, into the oxygen. I surveyed the place. There was not another soul

besides the employees, who starred at me with flared pupils and licked their lips with elongated, blood-stained tongues.

I nervously gulped my drink, aiming to leave immediately. The early, brave detective I was that day crumbled in the vibrations of my timorous and fainthearted mind underneath at the foundation of me. There was no good reason to stay any longer. The best thing to do was leave before the situation became even more tense and unreal. The waitress flashed over as I stood up. She effortlessly forced me back down with one hand and slid another drink down with the other, wordlessly commanding I continue imbibing whatever the hell they were giving me. She would not walk away until I took a sip. That once distant, comely inamorata revealed herself as a jezebel. Her mind penetrated mine as means to subdue my anxiety, keep me calm so I would sit a while longer. But she did not account for this magick trick permitting me to see her thoughts too. Everything was detailed out of me as our minds joined as one: I had stumbled into a camouflaged abattoir. They were minutes away from locking the doors and devouring me. These freaks were not zombies like the people outside, they were vampires. They deployed tamed zombies as an igniter, pushing visitors to drink heavily because of the strange encounters. Extended stay in downtown Minneapolis meant elevated alcoholism, and victims ended up at D.D's searching for stronger concoctions. Tranquilized by their unique cocktails, they were eaten alive. The zombies disperse at sundown because a vampire might make do with them for breakfast. Somewhere buried deep in the hippocampus of their mushy brains was the memory of fear. Immune to this incubus was Skyway. It was an asylum for precocious travelers who managed to escape. Belle found a way to suppress, even inoculate the effects.

I had to return to Skyway for any chance of surviving this trip. But three vampires now guarded the exit to D.D's. I stood up, anticipating the waitress' swift appearance, and asked to be shown to the rest room. Hesitantly she glided towards the Men's Room, opposite of the front door, which from what I could tell was the only way out. I made a break for it, mindful that there were still

two vampires to overcome. Unprepared for this flee attempt, the doorman and bartender floundered to stop me. I smashed my Champaign saucer against and bar stool and drove the sharp edges into the doorman. The bartender seemed stuck in place after that. I ran out the door and into the night.

Blue flashing lights came from multiple directions once I reached nearest intersection. They must have been signals to my location, because the typically empty night streets were suddenly swamped with twisted junkies unlike what I saw during the days. These things were more coherent than the zombies. They chased me the whole way back across the river, up until I finally got inside Skyway.

Belle mindlessly wiped down the bar, as if she was not aware of what was happening outside. I unintelligibly tried to explain what I had uncovered about Minneapolis, and sweetly she patiently listened to every word I exclaimed. After I was done, hyperventilating from talking without break, Belle simply laid her soft hand on my shoulder and told me to *Just pass through*. That was the key to everything, she said: do not fret over whatever obstacle was thrust in your way, *Just pass through*. This incantation of hers made a silence drop outside, and nothing could be seen or heard around the place. Slightly more than embarrassed, I asked Belle if she would walk with me back to the hotel. It seemed safer to go with someone more cognizant and calm. She agreed, but asked me to wait outside while she closed up. Which, I did, nervously. The streets were abandoned once more, but I feared anything could come running around the corner of the block at any time.

After waiting five minutes, I pulled on the door to go back inside but it was locked. I looked in the window and gasped at seeing thick layers of dust and cobweb covering everything inside. Belle was gone.

I turned and faced the streets, alone.

Clusters of people sporadically hovered about aimlessly, apparently no longer instructed to attack. I slowly passed by them. These same clusters vanished once I was far enough away. So long

as they were no imminent threat, I wondered the whole city searching for Belle. If one piece of consolation was still out there, I wanted it more than I knew it to be hopeless.

I wound up at the hotel empty handed, no luck found, intending to sleep a few hours before getting the hell out of Minneapolis. I could not though, not after the last few days. There was no peace to let your guard down enough in that damn city, where the villainous benefited from your insensibility. I did not waste another minute. I gathered my things, packed my car and got on the interstate just as the Sun peeked over the horizon from the East.

I've told few people in my life, but I am a sick lover of sunrises - the overture of a new day and onset of new chances. It is a reminder that what goes around comes around, and that all things must pass. There is nothing more beautiful on this planet than the sunrise. I took off my sunglasses, and smiled as the Sun guided me home.

