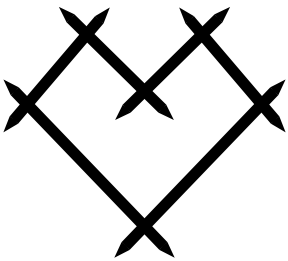
Train Station Strays

A Blasphemess Story

by Miss True



Take You Away

My hands trembled to unlock the shrine hall's door. Too little time remained. The vile mob could not be far behind, nor the chosen few orchestrating the violence.

They wanted **her.**

"Hellcatt!" I ran to the bedroom. "Wake up!"

A bleary-eyed catgirl greeted me at the bedroom door. She rubbed her eyes clear, her cat-like ears pricked up.

"What is it, Rennita?" She adjusted her robe, and re-tied the belt around her waist.

"I know it's late, but shake yourself awake and pack essentials to go, we've got trouble coming."

Hellcatt frowned and flattened her ears back.

"Come," I said, "Ice rimes the road tonight, and while this place sheltered, its refuge cannot last. They come with flames and chains."

I paused to quell my tremors.

"Devout saint that you are, they'll burn you."

Hellcatt spun and gathered her belongings. Mementos and crucial supplies snatched up in a rush, and she questioned haltingly. I answered briefly.

"An old-ways conspiracy moved into the open. They seek to restore the masters. Making you an example to steer us into obedience."

Hellcatt dressed in simpler road clothes than her usual preaching robes. Ocean dark skirts, ashen tights, and a light blue tunic. All beneath a black heavy wool cloak. She put her hood up and nodded.

I said, "Beware hate. Stay unseen. Follow."

We dashed out the back, went up the hill, and tense minutes later a backwards look revealed that the mob had just set a blaze. Flames licked upwards, as much of her work vaporised in smoke.

I bitterly recalled all the hard work of framing and erecting that shrine with all our friends a decade ago.

Too close. Mere moments to scrape by, *this time.*

Hellcatt touched the icon of her faith around her neck and whispered a prayer for safekeeping.

My voice quavered as I joked, "Giving the divines a call? Should they have actual help, let me know."

"Faith is solace in moments of fear," Hellcatt said. "Thank you for coming to my aid, dear. The divines only ever cursed me with one gift."

I shrugged and spread my hands out. “As long as it helps. You’ve my utmost respect. But your devotion to distant divines I shall never understand.”

“They are symbols of greatness beyond myself.”

“You’re great already, dearest,” I said. “But then… Your divines haven’t earned any room in **my** heart.”

Hellcatt took my hand with hers, squeezed, then said, “Let’s not dwell there. We have each other.”

“It’s us, it’s just us…” Anywhere but here would help. I frowned in thought. “You got any magic up your sleeves to get us out of danger quick?”

Hellcatt gave me a cautious, thoughtful look. “Nothing so convenient. If I could be rid of problems with but a wave of a magic wand or by singing the holiest note, do you think I would have hidden it from you?”

I shrugged. “We all keep secrets. Train station?”

Hellcatt gave me another meaningful look. I slowed our pace, and looked back at her. Vague outlines of her face, and the glint of her slitted eyes. She could see more clearly than I in the dim night.

“Have you any secrets?” She asked.

"Of course. None so important at present. Not many, for you see much of me. Maybe one day I'll further share."

"Good answer," she said. "You're always a heaping helping of sanity in my life, Rennita."

I grinned like a fool at that. "You can't slip anything past me, I know I drive you crazy."

"In the best ways, I assure you," she said.

We broke into a jog toward downtown's station. Once we arrived, she hung back as I arranged travel.

"Next train is in the evening," I told Hellcatt.

"Where to, then?"

"I have some friends. Always said that if I had to go, they'll take me in, no questions asked."

We left, with our tickets safely stowed for later.

Furtive glances and our midnight scurrying carried us to the town's outlying houses, where yards grew bigger and fewer people travelled in the night. Any mob tails would stand out same as we did.

Taking the straight-path was not my goal. I added in a few loop-backs and side routes just in case.

Symmetricia's place was a plain town house, part of a tract. We slunk to the porch and Hellcatt leaned against the wall. Minutes ticked on before Symmetricia answered the door.

"No questions asked," I told her. "Thanks, if so."

"Rennita?" She leaned out to see. She recognised my black and white plaid welding shirt, since I had gone from work directly to the town hall then to Hellcatt's shrine hall. "Come in quick."

With a wave of introduction, I said, "This is Hellish Tumult Of The Cat. The sainted one."

"Hellcatt, this is Symmetricia… And friends." The whole household had risen.

Symmetricia hung Hellcatt's cloak on a hook. "Can I get you something for a long night? Tea?"

"Milk with tea, please," Hellcatt said. "No sweetener."

"We're skipping town, need a place to lie low until tomorrow evening," I explained.

Symmetricia folded her arms. "What happened?"

"A witch-burning mob. One aiming to bring back the old masters."

"Who roused them to that? It's been a decade, I thought we'd taught people better."

"Probably a demon we missed," Hellcatt said.

Symmetricia shook her head, then looked aside. "Jurianna, break out the guns."

Jurianna pushed off from the wall and left. Tea came out for us, and we settled down in the common room to talk.

"Did you lead them to us?" Symmetricia asked.

"We detoured to avoid that," I said.

"So sure, are you?"

"Yes," I replied simply.

Symmetricia turned to Hellcatt next. "You're infamous 'round these circles. How exactly did you manage to enamor our divine-hater, o' sainted one?"

Hellcatt finished her tea then snuggled up beside me, so I pet her behind the ears. She purred, albeit more muted than usual.

"Godliness has no place in the space between her and me," Hellcatt said. "There's just mutual awe."

"Are you an immortal?" Symmetricia asked.

"Not to my knowledge."

“Hence the midnight flight,” I said. “We both stand to lose our futures should they find us.”

“How’d you get tangled up in this, Rennita?” Symmetricia sighed, with her fingers on her forehead.

“Sainthood, divines, demons, I don’t care. Nobody comes at Hellcatt. She deserves better.”

Hellcatt stretched out with head on my lap. Her eyes stared up at mine.

Symmetricia retrieved a handgun from Jurianna. “What’s it that you always said? When divines are at play, there’s nothing but trouble for us mortals.”

Hellcatt nodded. “Sounds like Rennita. Trouble is an understatement. Once upon a time, divines graced me with a gift. No matter faith or calling, the gods will test you to your limit. I long struggled to contain the gift.”

“What was it?” I asked.

“For good or ill, I saw the world for what it truly was. I can’t say more than that. Understanding? Enlightenment? Those don’t capture the whole of it.”

Silence circled the room. I chuckled to break it.

“Hence why I place my faith in the mundane, not the divine. They have hooks in everything and puppet strings to make us dance.”

Hellcatt smiled at me, and held her tongue.

Symmetricia said, “I wish you two luck, and happiness through strife. Be careful dragging into matters, because in the old war between masters and divines, we get crushed like ants.”

I winced and nodded. “I know… But I’ll also remember, when I had nowhere else to go, you had to take me in.”

“Home is where you are,” Symmetricia said. “They’ll be at the station… Need a loaner gun?”

Hellcatt and I shared a look. I quietly admitted, “I’m not much good with one.”

Hellcatt smiled. “No need for any. I have faith.”

Symmetricia said, “Suit yourself. Stay safe.”

We passed the wait, with quick cat naps for myself and Hellcatt. Casual catch up chats ensued, and when we departed in the afternoon, we were all glad for the peace holding out that long.

Hellcatt and I departed for the train station. It took little time to head directly there in broad daylight.

As we neared, our hearts pounded, palms sweated hand-in-hand, and eyes scanned fast.

The train rolled into station, and we pushed off from the corner of the courtyard to board it.

We got close, so close.

Then I stopped fast. Hellcatt almost pulled away. But she saw it too. *The trap sprung.*

They streamed out of normalcy. People posted up on benches, in food courts, or leaned against walls. Yet when I stopped, they broke out knives and closed in. Alert bystanders fled the swelling violence.

"Hellcatt…" I murmured. "You know they come with knives and wicked intent."

"Well! My dear," Hellcatt said unevenly. "Have you a line on any odd ones? Leaders for this mob?"

"No."

"Then we stall until we do. Look around."

An instigator closed in, with a pipe rapping his hand rhythmically. His bright blue eyes jittered from Hellcatt to me and back again.

My arms raised defensively as I stepped in front of Hellcatt. As long as I could buy Hellcatt some time, some safety, something… It was hopeless, but what else could I do? I had to try to resist, for her sake.

His eyes locked onto my hands, and the pipe swung. I missed the grab, and the blow rung metallic alongside a fleshy thud as it met my forearm.

Pain immediately took over, and I was lucky to have not broken anything. Yet.

The second blow half-collapsed me when it hit my thigh, and the third thumped my ribs. I nearly sprawled.

Then he kicked my legs out from under me.

"Had enough yet?" His grin turned to Hellcatt.

"No," I groaned.

He turned back to me, and raised the pipe overhead. "The fuck you say?"

I flinched. It could be a deadly skull-splitter.

He laughed. Just a petty power trip for him.

By now most of the mob had encircled us.

Hellcatt had her hands in the air as she crouched down slowly, nearer to me. "Please, we just want to leave."

“Don’t touch the blasphemer,” someone called.

The weight of all their stares landed on me like a crushing boulder. I knew.

“And what about the witch’s friend?” Asked the man with the pipe.

A few shrugs, and a few more nasty grins.

“She’s not dangerous or important,” one calm voice said. Probably the demonic leader of the mob.

“I’m sorry dear,” Hellcatt whispered. “I’ve held on this long.”

“Held onto what?” I asked.

The mob leader shouted, “Stop her!”

Hellcatt smiled, deathly calm and unafraid, as she opened her mouth.

She unleashed herself, and Hellish Tumult Of The Cat took her turn protecting me. My pains lessened, but I wept harder.

Magic streamed from her mouth in ribbons of blues and golds. The magic slithered into heads, through eyes and ears. In scant moments, the mob transformed into kneeling, screaming masses.

Through teary eyes, I watched transformations rip through the crowd. Some sprouted feathered wings,

others wisped away into entities of light and geometry. One melted into a molten gold puddle.

The demon leading the mob fell to their knees, and clawed their face. Burnt, blackened skin peeled away under their nails. Beneath the streaks of missing skin, a sheen of pure gold grew. The demon burst entirely aflame, until all that remained was a statuesque being. It still moved, despite its metal flesh.

I was not spared.

My flesh strained and bones screeched as magic reshaped me.

Someone grabbed my arm, and dragged me aboard the train away from the mewling masses. I staggered, and saw a face.

Beauty like I had never known, and she glowed radiantly. Yet I could not place the face, even as it felt so reminiscent of Hellcatt.

She bundled the both of us up onto the second level of the train, and grabbed a pair of seats as the train pulled out of station.

My focus fell upon her, but nothing quite fit.

Not 'familiar.'

"Hellcatt?" Even my whisper sounded strange.

"Rennita," she replied, through tears. "I couldn't hold it forever…"

I patted the back of her hand, and bursts of sensation overcame me. Nothingness, and everything, and something in between that I drifted towards.

"…What?" I asked, when I came back to myself.

"I'm just sorry," Hellcatt cried. "One day, my hope is that you can forgive me, dear angel."

"Don't call me that—" I began. Then it hit me.

What did it mean to be an angel? What did it mean, to see the world for what it is?

The last trace of magic rose from Hellcatt's mouth like a thin smoke signal. Her radiance dimmed, and sobs renewed.

There was nothing of the divines left in her.

"Why would your divines want me?"

She looked away. "Nobody knows why they do what they do. It's why we call it faith."

At long last, I asked "Why'd they give you up?"

She shook her head. "It was only ever temporary. Just a vessel, a saint, not an angel."

A flicker of anger lit within me, that Hellish Tumult Of The Cat would devote so much — only to be discarded in the end by the divines.

“Please, Rennita?”

“Yes?”

“Stay with me.”

Outside the window, countryside passed along in a rush. I lost myself in its infinitude.

Hellcatt cried beside me.
Our hands entangled…

