

In the Teeth of the Night

By Ian Healy

Sometimes when you're a cop you have to go looking for trouble.

Sometimes it finds you.

My name's Harry Blaine, and I'm a pretty good cop. I don't mean to imply that I'm a superstar or hotshot or anything. Hell, I've been up for Detective twice and failed the test both times. It's okay, though. I'm more than happy being a simple beat cop. And I like to think I'm decent at that part of the job. It helps that I've got a good partner in Fred Grimes, who keeps me on my toes. He's ten years my junior and doesn't hesitate to remind me of that fact every time we have to chase down a runner.

Of course, it also helps that I'm bulletproof, something I make sure to remind him of every time we're in a situation requiring our weapons. And if that wasn't enough, I'm also strong enough to tip over a fully-loaded semi truck. Being a parahuman has its privileges, but I've tried to keep it a secret. I don't know if I'd lose my job if it became public knowledge, but I suspect it wouldn't reflect well on the department, having a super-powered cop busting run-of-the-mill perps.

Grimes and I had been on nights for several months. It was a welcome change during the hot spring and summer months in Bay City, and there was still plenty of nighttime activity to keep our shifts interesting. My wife Alisa had adjusted her own hours to match mine and the only thing that changed was that we ate dinner at eight in the morning. Our daughter Dannan, who had parahuman powers like mine, tended to stay out all night anyway with her own superhero team, so if anything we remained pretty close as a family.

This particular evening, we were on a patrol on the east side of town, where the hills rise up from the bay into ritzy neighborhoods full of paranoid executives and their private security contractors. The security contractors didn't like us cops much because in their eyes, we interfered with their jobs, and we didn't like them much because their jobs seemed to smack pretty highly of vigilantism and petty vendettas.

Grimes and I had just eaten lunch from an all-night Korean deli at the bottom of the neighborhood when we got the call.

"Three Mary Thirteen, proceed to one eight nine one Hawthorne Place to investigate an Eleven Forty-Four."

Grimes, driving, reached out for the radio. "Ten-Four; Three Mary Thirteen on route..."

"Eleven Forty-Four," I mused. "That's a dead body."

"Geezer Geezer, should I turn left or right at the next intersection?" asked Grimes.

"I don't know, rookie," I replied evenly and switched on the GPS display. "Bad lighting up here in the hills. All these streets look the same."

Keeping one eye on the directions from the GPS and one on the road ahead, Grimes navigated our cruiser deeper into the hills. Trees rose up on either side of the road like huge, misshapen giants; dark shadows against the high clouds.

We passed a large house with a lot of cars parked in front of it. Echoes of merriment and mayhem ensued from within. It sounded like someone was throwing one hell of a party. "Looks like a good time," I said. "Maybe we should stop by on our way back."

"Rich kids!" scoffed Grimes. "For God's sake, it's after *three!*"

Eighteen ninety-one turned out to be the next *mansion* up the road. I say *mansion* because it was one of the richest houses I'd ever seen. A high, wrought-iron fence lined the street. The house itself was bathed by spotlights

and floods, pretentiously announcing to all who happened by that *this* was the house that you could *never own* unless you were making eight figures.

A security contractor's jeep was parked by the gate. The two rent-a-cops waiting by it sucked in their guts and puffed out their chests as we pulled alongside.

"*Security contractors*," grumbled Grimes with the same venomous tone he usually reserved for child abusers.

"Easy, sunshine. These are the bright lads who probably clued us in about the body."

We got out of the car. I made note of the name of the contractors' company, *Dayton Security Associates*, and the names on their badges: *Ortiz* and *Klostermeier*. "Evening, fellows," I said. "Somebody find a body?"

Ortiz nodded self-importantly. "That's right, officer. Mr. Drury's dogs happened upon it tonight while taking their evening constitutionals."

"Evening constitutionals," repeated Grimes as if he hadn't quite heard clearly. "And Mr. Drury would be..."

"William C. Drury, Esquire, the owner of this property."

"I see. And would Mr. Drury be here this evening?" I asked.

"No, he's in Puerto Rico," said Klostermeier.

"I thought it was Porto Vallarta," replied Ortiz.

"Some kind of port," continued Klostermeier. "Anyway, it was the maid who took the dogs out and found the body. She's in the house having a lie-down. It was a pretty shocking sight for her."

"Is someone with her?" asked Grimes.

"No. We thought it would be better for us to wait out here to meet you." Ortiz grinned a mouthful of gold teeth at us.

Grimes looked at me and rolled his eyes. I could practically read his mind. *Rent-a-cops*.

"All right," I said, "Grimes, you go talk to the witness and I'll take a look at the body."

"I'll show you where it is!" said Ortiz quickly.

"*Dude*," said Klostermeier, betraying a surfer's heritage, "She doesn't speak a word of English! You gotta *translate!*"

Ortiz grumbled something under his breath. "Okay, but remember I saw it first."

Grimes looked like he was about to suggest switching roles, so I ordered Klostermeier to lead the way.

"Jerk," muttered Grimes at me.

"Privileges of seniority, rookie," I replied cheerfully.

Klostermeier escorted me along the long driveway coated with bright white rocks so clean they must have been washed regularly. We went around the side of the house, sticking to established paths so as not to tread along the pristine, country-club-quality grass.

"The dogs were pretty upset by the whole thing," said Klostermeier. "Mr. Drury shows them competitively, and they're high-strung."

"What kind of dogs?" I asked, more because Klostermeier seemed less dangerous when he was talking than quiet and thinking.

"Beagles. Purebreds." Klostermeier clicked on his flashlight and led me deeper into the woods to one side of the house. "Listen, uh...This body, it's kind of...messed up."

"Messed up?" I turned on my own light, sweeping it to either side.

"Yeah. There." Klostermeier's light illuminated a pair of boots. He swept the light up the body.

I felt the spicy beef rolls I'd eaten earlier rumble around restlessly as I saw a body that looked like it had been savaged by some kind of wild animal. I gulped and tried to recreate a clinical image of the victim. Male, age indeterminate but in pretty decent physical condition. He

was wearing practical, outdoorsy clothes: hiking boots, jeans, a cotton shirt and a fishing vest. At least, that was the best recreation I could manage given the shredded nature of his clothing.

I found his gear much more interesting than his dress. A set of military-grade night-vision goggles laid near his head, the lenses shattered. He had a large, shiny knife I tentatively identified as a Bowie. It would be easier to be sure once it was removed from his abdominal cavity - something I was neither willing nor qualified to do. He had a quiver of arrows slung across his back, which made me wonder if he might be a hunter, although I didn't see a bow.

If not for the knife sticking out of his guts, I'd suspect he'd been attacked by coyotes or wild dogs. That knife was bothersome, though. Unless he'd stabbed *himself*, which was possible but unlikely, he'd been killed by something with thumbs, which cut the number of suspect species down significantly.

"You didn't touch this body, did you, Klostermeier?"

"No *sir!*" The big blonde idiot drew himself up proudly. "I know what to do when a body is found."

And that, of course, was to call the *real* cops. However, as a representative of the boys in blue, I simply

didn't have a clue how to proceed from here. The important thing, though, was to maintain appearances for the security contractors.

I clicked on my radio to fill Grimes in on what I'd found. He acknowledged me and then called me a dirty name for sticking him in the house with Ortiz and the Chilean housekeeper.

I called into dispatch and requested a coroner and a forensic investigator, and then turned my attention back to the body. I carefully pulled on a pair of latex gloves so as not to contaminate any evidence.

One of the arrows had fallen on the ground near the body and I picked it up, looking more closely. It was heavier than it looked. I'd never shot a bow in my life but I imagined this arrow wouldn't fly very far because of its weight. It seemed to be made of solid metal from tip to fletching. Although a bit tarnished, it definitely had the same sparkle as Alisa's good tableware that we got out for holidays. *Silver?* I wondered.

Looking more closely at the body, I realized it was clutching something tightly in one hand. I glanced up at Klostermeier, who was grinning beatifically at me, basking in the glow of *real* law enforcement. My curiosity got the better of me and I carefully removed the object. It was a

small parcel, about the size of a cell phone, wrapped in plain brown paper and taped shut. One corner was slightly torn open.

"Klostermeier, why don't you head back down to the gate?" I suggested. "The evidence tech and coroner will need directions up here."

Klostermeier saluted smartly. "Yes sir!" He ran off. I didn't tell him that coroners didn't work night shifts and that he might have to wait a few hours.

I returned my attention to the parcel. "Don't do it, Harry," I said aloud. "That's evidence." Thus having warned myself away, I felt I had done my job and could fairly feed my curiosity.

I tore the parcel a bit more. Inside was a flip box covered with fine black velvet, like a box which holds a gift watch. I snapped it open. Instead of a piece of jewelry, which is what I'd expected, I found a syringe full of thick dark red liquid which looked suspiciously like blood.

"Curiouser and curiouser," I muttered, holding up the syringe and shining my flashlight on it.

And there, standing behind a bush, was a man watching me with a peculiar expression on his face.

I don't startle easily, but I was in a dark forest in the middle of the night with a very dead body in front of me and my imagination was running a little crazy. My hand found the handle of my nine-millimeter and I yanked it free from the holster in a credible fast pull.

"Freeze!" I cried, barely keeping my finger from crushing the trigger back into the grip with my superhuman strength.

The man grinned, showing a mouthful of pointed teeth that must have been filed, winked at me, and ran.

I froze, unable to fire a shot.

His eyes had been sulfurous yellow and wholly inhuman.

"Shit!" I jammed my gun back into its holster, knowing that I'd inadvertently squish it if I held it while running, and took off after the man.

He could have been some kind of parahuman, I thought - some of them didn't look normal. He was certainly quick enough running through the dark forest, moving with a peculiar loping gait. I went crashing through the underbrush after him, making up for my lack of foot speed with utter disregard for dodging obstacles; my strength and bulletproof skin were sufficient to bull straight through almost anything in my way.

"Grimes!" I puffed into my radio. "In pursuit of suspect, heading...heading..." I had no idea what direction I was running. "Away from the house," I finished lamely.

"Roger, Harry. I'm on my way," he called back.

The man bounded over a six foot fence with no effort at all. Obviously a parahuman, then. "Double shit," I grunted, panting for air. As he leaped, I saw he was naked with a wild mane of hair stretching halfway down his back. The reason I could see this so clearly is the fence he jumped led into the yard of the house further down the hill where the party was still going on.

Screams erupted from the partiers as the man pulled up short from his headlong rush and I crashed right through the fence. He turned to face me. No wonder the kids were screaming.

His face was lengthening, as if his nose and jaw was pushing outward. His mane of hair was spreading across his skin with the speed of time-lapse photography, and his back was arching forward.

"Hold it...right there..." I wheezed, refusing to believe that I was confronting an actual werewolf. Surely this was some new parahuman. I wasn't really up on all of them, but I'd picked up bits and pieces from Dannan's animated conversations at the dinner table about her

exploits with the Young Guns. I didn't recall her ever mentioning a shapeshifter in her tales.

The man, if he could still be called that, growled at me menacingly. The sound chilled my bones.

Kids not any older than my daughter ran screaming for their BMWs and sport utilities parked in the front drive while others hid in the house, peeking out windows.

I reached for my gun and discovered that my entire holster was gone, apparently having been ripped away at some point during my pursuit. Ditto for my radio.

"Wonderful," was all I had time to sigh before the wolf-man sprang at me, clawed hands lunging for my throat and slavering jaws seeking to tear and rend.

I wasn't having any of it. I put my fist right into that furred face. The shock of impact flipped the wolf-man backward, sending him ass-over-teakettle into some lovely rose bushes.

Almost immediately, he was back on his feet, snarling. I was impressed. I'd never traded blows with any other parahumans before and had never brought more than a fraction of my strength to bear against a normal human, but this guy had taken a solid hit from me and looked ready for more.

He approached me a little more cautiously this time, growling curse words at me in a mouth unsuited for human speech. He circled me and I turned, keeping my face toward him and my arms raised, ready to defend against him when he next attacked.

It happened faster than I believed possible. One moment he was circling, the next he was in my face, bowling me over. Not only was he of comparable strength to me, he was *much* faster. I was going to have my hands full. And a moment later, I did as I tried to lock my fingers around his throat to keep him from getting his jaws on my face. Deep down, I knew I was bulletproof and probably had nothing to fear from his teeth, but didn't want to take the chance that my toughness didn't cover werewolf bites.

We rolled around, breaking things that sounded expensive. I winced more in sympathy than in pain as we crushed a dual-tank, triple-level gas grill. It was all I could do to keep those gnashing teeth a few inches from the tip of my nose. The creature's breath was foul, reeking of stale blood and fresh fury.

Finally I caught a break. We smashed into a garden shed and a cross member caught him hard enough that his grip weakened and I was able to throw him off of me. Quick

as a flash, he rebounded off the wall of the house and was back in my face, but this time I was ready for him.

My fingers, questing for some kind of weapon, closed around a reinforced handle and I clocked him hard across the jaw with what I had grabbed - a chainsaw with a dull, rusty blade that snapped from the blow, sending the chain whistling away. The next implement I found within easy reach was a square-headed shovel. I swung it upward like a home run hitter and lifted the wolf-man off his feet. He flew through the air to splash into the pool

I was at the side of the swimming pool a moment later, brandishing my shovel as if it were Excalibur itself. "Come on!" I yelled at him as he floundered in the water. "Plenty more where this came from!" I twirled the shovel through my fingers until it whistled.

I watched him thrash around frantically in the pool. He didn't seem to be making any progress toward the edge. Then he dropped under the surface, still flailing away. A moment later his head broke the surface and I saw a look of pure panic on his face, stuck halfway between wolf and man.

"Crap!" I said, realizing of all the stupid things, he couldn't swim!

And thus the dilemma: save the werewolf and probably get torn to shreds in the process or else let him drown and

spend the next shift filling out paperwork. No choice at all once I looked at it that way.

I jumped into the pool. I'm not much of a swimmer, but I get by well enough, and I was able to drag the sodden and subdued wolf man to the edge of the pool.

"Freeze!" yelled Grimes from the hole in the fence where I'd crashed through earlier. He had his gun out and was standing braced in a firing stance.

I felt the wolf man tense up, as if he was considering leaping from the pool. I forestalled those thoughts by firmly rapping his head against the tiled edge hard enough to crack one of them. "Bad dog, Fido," I admonished.

"Harry, you all right?" asked Grimes.

"Good enough," I replied, blowing some water out of my nose.

"What you got there?"

I grinned at him. "Good question." I looked at the wolf man, who was wearily raising one hand while holding onto the pool edge with the other. "What are you, anyway?"

He snarled, tired and barely intelligible. "I don't have to answer. I know my rights."

"You do? Good. Then we can all say them together." I smiled. "*You have the right to remain silent...*"