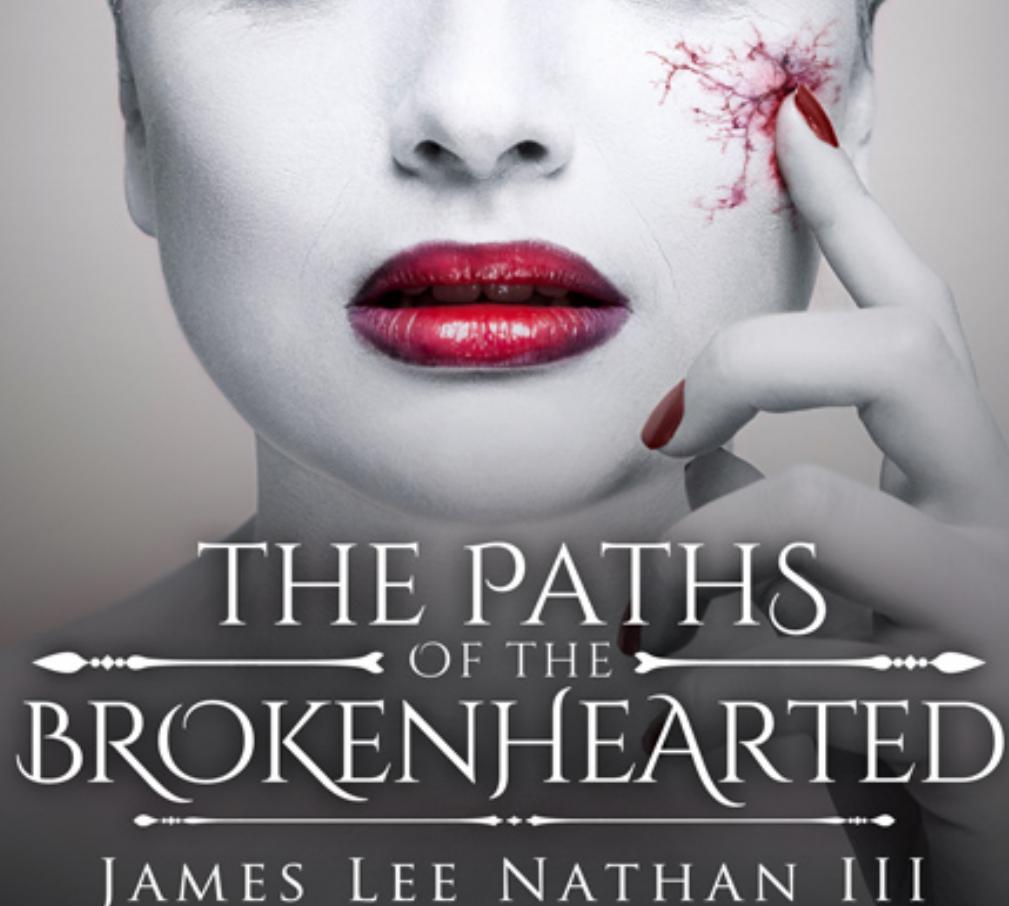


A STEAMPUNK BLOODLUST NOVELLA



THE PATHS
OF THE
BROKENHEARTED

JAMES LEE NATHAN III

Paths of the Brokenhearted

a bloodlust steampunk novella

James lee Nathan III

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*to those that continue to support my flights of
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Brokenhearted

Prologue

“There is neither destiny nor fate. Our future is determined by how we choose to live our lives; make no mistake, how we live has nothing to do with how we will die.” Katherine Pettigrew

Fall 1898 San Francisco; six dark figures move through the shadows of the cemetery bordering the city’s mission district. One can be seen directing the others; he is of average height and build but the others appear gaunt and tall with long appendages. Under his guidance the party fanned out in multiple directions as they crossed the broad street and walked towards the district 500 yards east of them. The long ones had a retarded gate to them resembling a slow shuffle. This part of the district had very poor street lighting so their movements could not be detected by the naked eye from a distance. They each made their way into the district using the cover of the early morning shadows.

In 1898 the city is as rambunctious as ever and there are multiple parties going on this brisk October evening. A typical night for the patrolmen gathered

at a local tavern in the mission district. Men too busy imbibing whiskey and beer to realize a couple in a deep and heated discussion. This couple went on for a good five minutes back and forth with accusations and allegations, until the woman had enough. She stood and slapped the man and then stormed out into the cold darkness. He gathered his wits and when he noticed that the patrolmen were now looking at him, the man pulled together what remained of his pride and ran after her.

The woman bolted from the establishment and turned towards the high street to get a coach if at all possible. Main street was a good three to five blocks to her right heading east but she was heading south in the wrong direction, towards the cemetery. There was energy and purpose in her steps as she continued to talk to herself about the goings on in the tavern. Her inattentiveness and otherwise neglect to pay attention to her surroundings made it easy for those lying within the shadows to notice and track her. Ten minutes passed from her exit of the tavern to where she stood now; away from the lights of the mission district and next to the cemetery.

“Oh this cannot be right at all. The high street should be here. Oh dear, there are no lights or coaches. I must have taken the wrong turn when I left.” She thought and turned heading east towards the lights.

This route took her through a multitude of side streets and closed shops. Her mind was set, so there was no retreating back to the tavern for her. So she hurried along the dark abandoned streets.

The doors to the tavern fling open once again, and this time the lover exits and gives chase. He assumes she has headed in the direction of the carriages for hire, so he heads there. Running at top speed he reaches the high street; a marvel to behold with a long line of steam coaches all gleaming under the gas lanterns. He begins to inquire if any of the cabbies have seen her. Most of the men are done for the day however there still were a few steam coaches warmed and ready. None of the men saw a woman approach the high street at all. Now he is confused. *Maybe she didn't come this way but where did she go?* He pondered as he ran back to the tavern.

This time making sure to look at each side street he passed in case he caught a glimpse of her. To increase his odds, he started to call out for her. A man calling out for a woman is not irregular, however it's 1am in the morning and a young man yelling Pauline at the top of his lungs is a disturbance. Two vendors ran to see what the commotion was about. They acknowledged that a young woman had strolled by in the direction of the cemetery. The young lover (Jack) thanked them and took off in that direction.

Jack again took note of the side streets, pausing at the end of two intersections looking up and down. Then at the next one he saw what looked to be a group of men moving swiftly in the shadows. Jack tilted his head to the side and could see the silhouette of his Pauline through the lights of the broad street. He turned and ran towards her and the men seemed to part in front of him, but then he saw them run towards her. He was steps from her when they rushed her away into a nearby alley. Her screams were faint.

Jack could hear the ripping of garments. Four more steps and he was where they had abducted her. He gasped at the site of her naked body now being bitten and ravaged by these.... men? They gorged themselves on her flesh and blood; these sub humans even began to rape her. As the life ebbed out of Pauline, a lone attacker grabbed her by the neck and bit into her hard severing the jugular vein and neck at simultaneously.

“Pauline.” the words eased out of his mouth and then realized he was next. He stepped back into the waiting clutches of the leader of the crew. Jack fought him off and then ran towards his dead lover. Why he did this made no sense to the predators as they encircled him and began to hound him like hyenas attacking a weak and vulnerable kill. He looked and saw her mutilated body. The silly spat and how it

could have been averted filled Jacks thoughts. Rage began to overtake his grief and just as it did, they were on him, and he did not fight.

The leader instructed the minions to lay the bodies together and within minutes they had slithered off back into the cemetery and beyond. Their purpose for tonight was not clear as yet, but in a few hours a solution will be summoned and that will signal the beginning of their end.

Strike balance

“The old religion is the magic of the Earth itself. It’s the essence that binds everything together. It will last long beyond the time of man.” Unknown

Throughout the existence of mankind’s consciousness, there have been two distinct natural truths. Dark and light juxtaposed with the moral good and evil. The “beautiful one” also named Lucifer made an observation before the rebellion in heaven.

“God creates all animals equally and accepts that they will devour and kill one another as a natural thing. He even creates Man who exemplifies this very ideal of a natural predatory nature. Yet when man kills man it is wrong. It is evil. Other animals kill their own and it never rises to this level of moral indignation, but when man kills man, the act descends into dark nature and evil doings.”

Religion offers us a moral perception of evil and the dark based on man’s primeval fears, but religion is man-made. This makes it inherently biased at its core, framing natural occurrences against fears. This takes it out of balance with nature. What does nature

or the natural way of things say of evil? Nothing, the natural way of things is to seek balance. If dark prevails nature finds a way for life to exist in the midst of it. If a predator grows too dominant, nature finds a way to balance or equal things out. The old religions and faiths knew this and honored it. The new faiths relegated this simple natural truth and hid behind icons and dogma, forgetting the natural ways of dealing with evil things in nature.

Such are the times we live in today where industry and machines have replaced our closeness to nature. Yet nature has a way of reminding us of just how close we are to returning to our predatory ways.

It is 3am in the bustling metropolis known as San Francisco. The Chief of Police Harrison Lindsey is pondering the “old ways” as he looks upon two corpses. The tattered remains of a young couple found in the mission district. These were murders nine and ten over the last three months. The killer or killers were working south of the Presidio, north of Strawberry Hill and between the two largest cemeteries. These last two homicides were the furthest east of the previous ones. *They're either getting bolder or sloppy, either way this does not bode well for the general population.* The Chief thought as he lit his pipe.

I will need to wake the Mayor on this. He likes to hear bad tidings when they're fresh and raw. The large

Irish man took a drag from his pipe and signaled an assistant.

“Sergeant Riley what do you see?” He knelt and peered into the eyes of the young woman spread out in front of him.

“Right; sir we have two young victims in their mid-twenties with multiple bite wounds and lacerations on their throats, limbs and torsos. A brief struggle and then it was over.”

“Ambushed perhaps?”

“Yes sir an ambush of sorts. Crime scene is consistent to the other homicides except this one is much closer to the city proper.”

“Good assessment and observations Sergeant. Was the victims’ attire discarded as the others?” The Chief knew the answer to this already. All the earlier murder victims were either barely clad or all nude. “Are there any signs of sexual deviancy or debauchery at hand?”

“Yes sir, I’ve taken the liberty to cover the woman and like the others there seems to be signs of rape.” The Chief took another pull on his pipe and surveyed the vacant city street now beginning to draw a small crowd of onlookers. “What a terrible way to die. Mauled and eaten in the midst of a city. This has the mark of evil written all over it; and the sexual nature of this slaughter seems more ritualistic than anything else. The Mayor will need to take action this

time. No more excuses. Secure the scene and cover the bodies. Only detectives in or out, and find me Detective Jennings as soon as possible. I am off to wake the Mayor.”

He wouldn’t need to venture too far for the familiar sound of gears and steam rolled through the dark alley. The Mayor’s vehicle was close by Lindsey lit his pipe and exited the alleyway. He took three short steps and stopped as a large steam powered cherry wood coach trimmed in black and copper, rolled up to the scene. It was the Mayor and he was in a mood. A small portal opened on the steam contraption and a familiar voice yelled over the mechanical vibrations.

“Lindsey come!” Scolded the Mayor Joshua Beard, as the door to the vehicle cranked open the mixed aroma of whiskey and cigars seeped out. The Beards are a rich and well positioned family (politically) from the east that traces their roots back to the medieval courts of Aragon in France. They are a respectable clan built on honor, tradition and something old and pagan.

The Chief entered the steam powered vehicle which he despised but always faked his admiration for its complexities. The Mayor played along on most occasions showing him different hidden treasures of its inner workings. This morning would be different as he is not in an entertaining mood.

“Chief these murders are a bit too close for comfort. What are your findings?” Joshua Beard always got right to the point. The relationship between the two men goes back to the Civil War when they both were part of a militia from White Plains New York. Both men were in their late teens at the time; made friends fast, and swore blood allegiance to each other’s families. They’re long time acquaintances with secrets and a tenuous relationship always on the brink of chaos. After the war, Beard went into politics, and Chief Lindsey was by his side protecting his “interests.” He cleaned up the mess the Beards left in their wake. When Beard came west so did Lindsey.

“Mayor my observations are not relevant at this moment. We’ve been over and under the mountain with my observations on all the other similar murders. I told you the minute they began that these were signs. I took certain precautions and liberties based on those observations. Now the time has come for us to follow a different path.” The two men held each other’s gaze as both knew what would be called for next.

“Harry please do not misconstrue the bounds of our relationship, your tone is off putting despite the topic at hand.” He then paused to let that set in; but the Chief was well beyond amicable boundaries now.

Yes I fucking get it, I saved your life and you gave me a life. How could I ever forget it when you

never allow me to get past such a blunder? The Chief thought as he eased back into his leather cushion.

“So you’re quite sure that the “Hive” is active again after all these years? Why did they break the treaty?” Innocuous and ridiculous as it sounds, a treaty has existed between the remaining Vampire clans in the west and the inhabitants of northern California. It goes back almost 150 years with the Spanish explorers and native inhabitants of the region, and was reinforced twenty years ago when Beard arrived. People say that the Mayor is the arbiter of this treaty and they would be accurate.

“Sir I do not know, but these killings have all the signatures of a Vampire strike. The Hive is active and wanting more. I say it is high time we eliminated this threat. Sheep cannot negotiate treaties with wolves. What I know and feel is that it is time for a solution of a certain sort.” The two sat in silence, or as much silence as could be had in the loud machine. No one uttered a word until the machine pulled in front of the police station. Then the words were succinct and to the point.

“Right then, you have my permission to commission the Vampire hunters you will need.” The Mayor paused so he could read the tension in the Chief’s eyes. The big man’s large lips slowly parted and he said the words they both had thought but did not want to

mention.

“We are in need of an old solution to this. A solution that I know is quite familiar with your honor.”

“Thank you for reminding me of my family’s history Chief. I am quite aware of what I need to do. Yet of what good will come of it I am not certain. Our hope is in one who never showed the aptitude for her craft, and a solution that very well could turn on us. But, given the status of current affairs I ask that you do this one thing first.” The Mayor presented a knowing look at the Chief and continued. “It will take time for the proper solution to arrive. I see these hunters as expendable; and I am in no great hurry to call on evil to eradicate evil. Yet it must be done before this Hive consumes us all.”

The Chief nodded in agreement. He was not in favor of sending Vampire hunters to their deaths. But realized this endeavor needed time for the true solution to travel all the way to San Francisco.

The Mayor’s steam carriage careened and churned its way onto the estate. He disembarked and hurried into the palatial house heading directly to his administration office. His assistant quickly recorded a message and then sent a wire to his niece Katherine Pettigrew in Wales. She would receive it two days later.

The wire read “*Similia similibus curantur* Similar

things cure similar things.” It was no code, no hidden message. It was sent in the plain and the deeper message it revealed had the desired effect as Katherine Pettigrew ran into the foyer of their ancestral home. She stood proud and defiant and shouted “Evil ones are on the move once again and once again it falls upon us to subdue them.” She lifted her hands to the sky and turned counter clockwise. “Smoke of air and fire and earth, cleanse and bless this home and hearth. Drive away all harm and fear; only good may enter here.”

A thick mist or a fog slowly appeared at the perimeter of the estate. It began to rise higher and higher as many of the staff watched in horror or in amazement it was hard to tell the difference. Two of Miss Pettigrew’s personal staff ran into the foyer the male was holding a ragged and tattered book and the female held a thick purple robe. They are the Boyds (Minnie and Livingston) from the West-indies. The two held their positions until their master turned to recognize their presence. She donned the robe as her manservant held and lifted the book of incantations above his head so she could read from it. The grimoire has been in the family for generations. A witch’s book of shadows is always burned upon their deaths; but this one still existed and is guarded.

“Minnie run out and let the rest of the staff know,

that this storm should pass over us soon. Go on off you go." The mist and fog began to dissipate but the "Velum protectione" (veil of protection in Latin), was now in place. With Minnie gone, Katherine focused her attentions on the book in front of her. An overwhelming feeling of dread had begun to consume her and made movements appear reluctant and drawn out. Katherine never wanted this responsibility; by birthright it was her older brothers. He was a powerful witch. On who practiced dark magic, which eventually drove him insane. Warren Beard ran to the cliffs on the far south of the estate where it is presumed, he leapt to his death. His head and torso lay scattered among the many boulders at the bottom of the cliff.

Katherine did not want this, but it was now all hers.

"Not to fret Livingston, I know the part I am looking for. There is a piece I want to re-familiarize myself with first."

Livingston didn't budge and acknowledged the governess. Katherine whisked through the book making sure to be careful with its frayed edges and all the while feeling regret in having being left this responsibility. Where are you? Oh there you are! The Vampire revolution and solution: A history of Caleb the Vampire Killer.