

# Midnight In The City of The Living Dead

by Brin Londo 5

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Rating: T

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"Kent, Lane, I've got a real juicy one for you two," Perry White said, looking Lois straight into the eyes. As soon as Lois mouth started to open, he cut off the ensuing tirade. "It's that girl who got buried alive over at Mayfair Cemetery, Mary Woodhouse. I need you two to interview her, Kent, and then you, Lois, can haul ass down to the medical examiner's office to find out just how in Sam Hill a girl gets certified as deceased and buried alive in this day and age! It's perfect for you two, Kent for the human interest angle, and Mad Dog Lane to sniff out whatever incompetence or corruption allowed this to happen."

As the pair left the main conference room, Clark shook his head in disbelief, and Lois turned to him. "Okay, Clark, when you get ahold of this 'Mary Woodhouse', lay into her and don't let up, don't play nice with her, she's almost certainly lying about being Mary Woodhouse in the first place, either that or she's somehow managed to scam the Metropolis Coroner's office with some other poor girl's dead body and managed to fake her own funeral. In fact, I'd bet on it, after all, the guy who supposedly heard her screaming in the casket was Peter Bell from that scandal-rag the National Whisper..."

"It certainly seems hard to believe, especially in this day and age, Lois, but then again, remember that guy down in Arkansas last year? Ran the town mortuary and crematorium for decades, then they found out that instead of actually cremating the bodies, he had them stacked out back while the families got a urn full of barbecue-grill ashes and soot." Clark actually got a double-take out of Lois on that one.

"That, Clark, is just an example of redneck yokels being taken in by a con-man of used-car-dealer morals. This, either way it tumbles, is going to be bigger than that. Meet me at the Ace O' Clubs in a couple of hours to compare notes?"

"What about Dulin's? Isn't Bibbo's joint Jimmy's hang-out?"

"Jimmy got banned from Dulin's. Again."

"Again? He needs to learn to leave the camera in the car. I thought he'd learned that the last time Finnegan set off the flash and half the squad reached for their weapons."

"Which is why we're meeting him at the Ace O' Clubs. Gotta go if I want to nail the M.E. down on this. I've had to pump him for information before, I hope this is a hoax put on by the Whisper, Clark, because if this really is gross criminal negligence, I'm going to lose one of my best contacts. I'll have to blow the whistle, and just try getting candid data from the examiner's office after that will be like pulling teeth. Our own teeth."

At four twenty-two, Bibbo walked over to the table where Jimmy, Clark, and a visibly

pale and shaken Lois Lane were seating themselves at a corner booth.

"Ey, Jimmy, Mistah Kent, Miss Lane, what ken I get fer yah?" Bibbo asked in his slightly punch-drunk way.

"Beer," Jimmy said, looking queasy.

"Tequila," Lois said. "I need something with more of a kick then beer after today."

"Same for me, for the same reason." Clark rejoined, taking his hat off and shrugging off his suit jacket.

"What? YOU, Clark? Tequila?" Lois' jaw dropped open.

"Really has been that kind of day for Mister Kent, Miss Lane, trust me." Jimmy chimed in.

"Two tequila's an' a beer, comin' up!" Bibbo said over his shoulder as he left, his speech impediment turning the word tequila into "tur-key-la".

"Mary Woodhouse was gone for the day, but her downstairs neighbor, Theresa Aste, let me know that she was going on a trip to upstate New York, to a small town called Dunwich."

"Theresa Aste?? You mean The Great Theresa? That con-job psychic? This just gets better and better. Clark." Lois ran a hand through her hair, dropping a file folder on the table. "Theresa Aste is one of Metropolis' biggest fake psychics and self-proclaimed 'occultists', Clark. Between that, the angle with Bell, and what I got from the M.E., this all adds up to a publicity hoax to sell the Whisper." She slid a series of extremely graphic and gory autopsy photos from the manilla folder. "Mary Woodhouse died, all right, Clark. They performed a full autopsy on the body. Cardiac failure, cause unknown. There's no way in hell this so-called 'Mary' who was dug out of Mayfair could be Mary Woodhouse, because people just don't 'wake up' after being embalmed for burial, much less after having their brains and internal organs removed for verification purposes!"

Clark Kent, the reporter who had covered some of the worst cases with Lois that she had had seen in her days as a reporter, visibly blanched. He reached behind him into his jacket and pulled out a folder of his own. "Lois, take a look at this. Chief Henderson gave this to me himself."

Lois picked up the folder, which was marked "Property of the Metropolis Police Department:, Case #10291980-83". She opened it up and went through it page by page.

Her hands were shaking as she set it down.

"This is impossible, Clark."

"I know. But both her face and fingerprints match those of the body the ME worked on in the city morgue. And the DA subpoenaed Mercy General's records of her ER visit, when they treated her for trauma after being exhumed. Check the CAT scan images. Those faint marks on her skull and rib cage? Scarring, old scarring, from what appears to be standard autopsy." He leaned in. "What we have here, Lois, is not only not a hoax, or someone who got mistakenly buried alive like in an old Poe tale, but has actually died and come back to life, right here in Metropolis."

"This could be the biggest story to hit the Daily Planet since Superman, you guys." Jimmy added in total seriousness. "Mr. Kent, you gotta interview her, now. The Chief will have all of our heads if we don't get it."

Lois stood. "Jimmy, you take these files to Perry, I'll drive Clark to this Dunwich that Mary Woodhouse has gone to. And tell Richard and Jason not to wait up, this is BIG."

"Clark, how in the hell did you see the road for the last hour?" Lois asked as they pulled

into the small town of Dunwich. "I couldn't even see the front of the car, the fog was so thick! I'm beginning to think that Superman isn't the only one with x-ray vision."

"You're right, Lois, it sure is thick, but I flipped on the fog lights so that I could see the road markers. Old trick I learned as a kid in Smallville, it gets foggy at night near old man Harris' gravel quarry near the river." While that much was true, Clark had indeed cheated with his x-ray vision, as the fog was almost totally opaque. He shut the engine off in the parking lot of the old church they had pulled into, and got out.

"Hey, Smallville, there's a car pulling up over at that old graveyard over there." Lois pointed over at a near-mint condition mid-70's maroon Buick that was pulling up at the cemetery gates. A bearded man in a tweed jacket got out, opened the front gate and walked inside with a visibly unsure gait. "Let's see if we can get some directions."

"Lois, wait..." Clark shook his head and jogged to catch up with Lois, who had already ran across the street and into the graveyard. "What is this, some kind of Italian horror movie?" He muttered. Thick London-style fog in the middle of the day, creepy graveyards, and Lois acting like some scream-queen heroine, running into the unknown.

"Well, well," she said to Clark when he caught up, "looks like we won't need directions after all. Clark, this is Peter Bell right here!" Peter Bell looked like your average 1970's television detective or reporter, dressed in tan slacks, a turtleneck, and a corduroy jacket with the Mod-era styled leather patches over the elbows. "Bell, what the heck are you doing all the way out here?" Lois glared at the Whisper reporter.

"He offered to drive me up here, so he could get a story." The woman who spoke up was tall and slender, with piercing eyes. "I'm Mary -"

"Mary Woodhouse. I must say, you're looking rather well for someone who was being helped out of a grave a few days ago." Clark Kent said, offering her his hand. As she shook it, her eyes widened and she gasped. "I'm sorry, Miss Woodhouse, did I hurt you? Sometimes I don't know my own strength."

"I should have warned you, Mr... Kent? I happen to be mildly psychic. I was acting as the channel in a seance when I had my...attack. You are far more than what you seem, and I'm sure you're very aware of your strength." She gave Clark an ironic little smile. "So what brings Metropolis' top two reporters all the way out here for a story?"

"Actually," Lois interrupted, "we came to interview you about your ordeal. However, when we stopped at your apartment, your downstairs neighbor, Theresa Aste, told us you were traveling here to Dunwich."

"Yes, I need to find the grave of Father William Thomas."

"William Thomas, the priest who got defrocked last month? The first American Catholic priest to be defrocked under charges of Satanism in nearly a century?" Clark asked. "He's dead?"

"The very same, Mr. Kent," the bearded man interjected. "I'm Doctor Gerry Mayo, I'm the town's only psychiatrist. Although with the events this week, I think I should have become a para-psychologist instead." He shuddered. "We've had five mysterious deaths so far, dead bodies from the local funeral home that keep vanishing and reappearing in people's locked houses, walls that bleed when cut into, and worse."

The wind picked up, swirling the fog and stirring the fallen leaves on the ground. "Father William Thomas was not a satanist, as far as the modern usage of the term, but he was a demon-worshiper. Last week, during the very moment Theresa and I were holding the séance, Father Thomas hung himself from a tree here in the cemetery, as part of a ritual to open the

very gates of Hell itself." Mary said in a low, almost whispering voice. "If we cannot find his grave before Midnight tonight, the gates of hell will open and Dunwich will become a city of the walking dead, the first of many."

"That's insane! How do you know this?" Lois demanded.

"He performed a ritual known as the Covenant of Orcus, culminating in him hanging himself from a tree-limb over a tombstone. I observed the ritual in my vision, and the ritual itself was described in the Book of Eibon."

"The Book of Eibon, are you sure?" Clark said, visibly agitated.

"You are familiar with the *Book of Eibon*, Mr. Kent?" Mary asked.

"Yes. Lois, do you remember the interview Mr White had me do that very last Halloween before I left to, er, travel the world?" Lois shrugged. "I interviewed the occultist and demonologist Jason Blood. He had a number of books in his personal library on dark magics and prophecies. *Al Azif*, *De Vermiss Mysteriis*, and two copies of the *Book of Eibon*, one which was mislabeled as the *Book of Enoch*. According to Blood, those books are seriously real black magic."

"Indeed, Mr. Kent, and to make matters worse, this very cemetery rests over one of the seven accursed Gates to Hell itself."

"Seven?" Peter Bell asked, scribbling in a notepad.

"Yes, this area, as well as one in New Orleans, one in the Antilles islands, two in southern Italy, one in southern Spain and one north in the mountains between Spain and Portugal, underneath the ruins of the old Templar headquarters castle." She stared intently into Clark's eyes, "According to the Book of Eibon, the Seven Dreaded Gateways are concealed in seven Cursed places; Woe be unto Him who ventures near without this knowledge. Woe be unto him who opens one of the Seven Gateways to Hell, because through that Gateway, *Evil* will invade the World, and on that Day, the Dead Will Walk the Earth. Father Thomas used that knowledge to do the most harm possible when he chose to do the Covenant of Orcus here, in Dunwich."

"Assuming any of this is true," Lois said, "Exactly HOW do you plan to stop this from happening?"

"Well," Peter Bell said in his rough whiskey and cigarettes voice, "we find his grave, open it, and perform an old-fashioned vampire execution. Stake him, remove the head, and burn both head and body. Folks do it all the time in eastern Europe, even today. If it works on vampires, it should work on someone who wants to release the undead, right?"

The wind began picking up, quickly turning into a loud roar. Clark reached into his jacket. "Lois, I'm going back across the street into the church and use my cell phone to call this in to Perry. If I stay out here, there's no way he'll be able to hear over the wind."

"All right, we'll look for this Father Thomas' tombstone."

"Try yelling for Superman or something, okay? I have the feeling we're going to need the help!"

Lois watched as Clark ran towards the fog-shrouded gates and across the street. "Yell for Superman, he says. Like I have his phone number or something..."

"It's worth a try, Lane." the tabloid reporter said. "If Mary's right, we'll need the help."

"Miss Lane, Mr. Kent's suggestion just might work. I have the distinct feeling that Superman just might be listening for you."

"All right, here goes nothing. SUPER- meh! Ptoo!" she said, spitting out an errant wind-blown leaf. "Okay, turn the other way... SUPER-MAN! HELP! KAL-EL! SUPERMAN,

WE'RE REALLY IN IT DEEP THIS TIME!"

Suddenly, there he was, sliding smoothly from the sky in all his red and blue glory, the Man of Steel. "Is there anything I can do to help, Miss Lane?"

"Yeah, here you go, this should explain everything." Bell said, handing Superman his note-pad.

"This... is incredibly bad. If it weren't for my experiences with Dr. Fate, Jason Blood, and other sorcerers, I wouldn't have believed that something like this was even possible, but I know better." he looked at the setting sun, then over at Mary Woodhouse, "Have you found the grave?"

"Not yet."

"Then stay here." Fallen leaves blew up into the air as a blue and scarlet blur sped through the graveyard. "Found it!" He called out, and the others rushed over. Superman was standing in front of a rather humble mausoleum, what looked like a simple granite above-ground vault inscribed on top with the names of the Thomas family members entombed in the chamber below.

With the same ease Jason would have had lifting the lid of a cardboard box, Superman lifted off the granite slab and propped it against a nearby oak tree. He peered down into the mausoleum. "I'll be okay, but anyone who follows me will need flashlights." With that, he dropped down into the gloom.

He looked around in the dark chamber. Polished granite plaques covered the walls, inscribed with the names of those sealed within. One was broken, the mouldering body inside visible, a rat gnawing on the remains before scurrying away.

Soon he heard the clanking of boots on the rungs of the rusty iron ladder that had probably been added sometime in the 1970's, as Peter Bell, Mary, Lois, and Gerry descended with flashlights retrieved from their cars. Peter and Lois both had heavy-duty mag-lights, while Gerry's was a small hand-cranked survival flashlight. Lois had also traded her business heels for a pair of sneakers she usually kept in the car.

Light beams played around the mausoleum walls, then they converged on the plaque marked "Fr. William Thomas". A large crack split the stone into two pieces, one one-quarter sized, the other three-quarters sized. Peter Bell grabbed a chisel-ended crowbar and stepped towards it, but Superman held up one hand. "Allow me." He dug his fingers into the concrete behind the plaque and the stone came away in his grip with a loud sound like cinder-blocks breaking. Behind him, Mary gasped as she looked over his shoulder at the empty hollow, the other end broken outward into what appeared to be some kind of cavern underneath the cemetery.

"My god!"

"Someone must have broken in from the other side." Lois declared.

"Or broken out." Gerry countered.

"Well," Peter asked, "now what do we do?" He dropped the crowbar with a clang.

"I'm going to go take a look." He started to climb into the former resting-place, when Superman stopped him.

"Let me, if Miss Woodhouse is right, we can't afford to waste time." Two super-powered kicks, and a hole large enough to simply step through if one ducked was smashed into the chamber.

On the other side, a hard-packed tunnel had been dug, leading into a large underground chamber that had been hollowed out underneath the graveyard. Here and there, most of the

graves had collapsed into the cavern, leaving a few embalmed bodies draped and partially buried, while skeletons dangled from other collapsed graves. Gerry gasped as a figure moved into sight. Straw-blonde hair topped a figure of rotting flesh, and the psychiatrist recognized the clothing from a funeral earlier this week, Emily Robbins, whose death was made all the more mysterious when the coroner discovered that all of her internal organs had proved to be missing, despite a total lack of incisions or injuries on her body.

There was a noise like a crack of thunder, and she vanished from the spot she had been standing, only to reappear behind Peter, her claws digging into his skull with a lethal crunch. Both Lois and Mary screamed as he toppled lifelessly to the ground, and as Gerry instinctively stepped away, Superman struck the reanimated cadaver hard enough to fling it into a hardened tree-root, staking the creature like a Hollywood vampire. Mary began crying, the tabloid reporter had saved her life and become a friend.

Superman peered around, looking for any more of the creatures.

"Since when do zombies teleport?" Lois all but yelled.

"Not -- not zombies, Miss Lane," Mary began to explain, bringing herself under control. "Zombies are individually created by a practitioner of Voudun, or voodoo, and do not feed on the living. Emily, like father Thomas, has become a heucuva, a type of undead gifted with supernatural powers to vanish and reappear elsewhere, as well as to cast deadly curses. Gaspard Du Nord described in his tome *Livre D'Ivon* that they are often created from fallen priests. Heucuva often surround themselves with other types of hungry undead, such as barrow-wights or wampyr."

"The only thing I understood out of all that was 'not a zombie'," Lois hissed, praying that there weren't any more 'teleporting zombies'. Gerry silently agreed as he moved forward.

"There," he said in a stage-whisper, "Towards that light."

"I see it. It appears to be a sort of solarium, those were in vogue during the funeral practices of the 19<sup>th</sup> century."

As the four carefully crossed the cavern, mindful of the dangling bodies that could conceivably reanimate at any moment, they had to fight to keep from flinching at the bodies that had fallen free only to be reburied by the collapsed soil. Unfortunately, those bodies began stirring, as some dark force began to reanimate the remaining leathery tissues of their frames.

"Kal-El..."

"I see them, Lois. Keep going. I won't let them touch you," he murmured into her ear as they climbed the ledge the chamber of the solarium, then turned and used his heat vision to turn a desiccated corpse that had drawn too near into ashes.

The stained-glass roof of the solarium let a faint amount of sunlight in, filtered through colored glass and fallen leaves., but as greater numbers of the the walking dead began to block off the way back, they saw the pale, bloodless corpse of Father William Thomas appear across the room, eyes wide and bloodshot, their irises almost entirely swallowed by the enormous pupils, surrounded by pale flesh tinted the blue of apnea. The Huecuva seemed to almost sigh with a faint air of tedium, then it locked gazes with Mary Woodhouse. Mary gasped, then flushed as capillaries in her skin began to burst imperceptibly, then blood began welling from her eyes like tears.

Superman tore a wooden support beam from the wall of the solarium, then hurled it forward, impaling the undead priest to the wall like an undead butterfly. With laser-like precision, his heat vision flashed, severing the head from the body, then incinerating both. Behind them, a moaning wail erupted from the mouths of the walking dead as they, too, began

to spontaneously combust, mirroring the fate of the one who had granted them false life. One by one, the corpses returned to rest with a deep groan, bodies aflame, collapsing like burning skeletal puppets with their strings cut.

Mary wiped the blood from her eyes, and Lois then pointed out that they needed to get out of there before the smoke became a problem.

"Cover your eyes," Superman said, then flew upwards and sheared away the stained glass dome of the solarium, before lifting each of them into the twilight of the graveyard.

"Did we succeed in time, Miss Woodhouse?"

"Yes, the ritual would have been irreversible once midnight struck, but it's only six fifty-eight. We're safe. It would have taken much longer if not for your assistance, Superman. We almost certainly would have gotten there too late."

"In that case, then, I should be going. Stay out of trouble, Miss Lane."

Lois arched an eyebrow at the colorfully-costumed hero. 'Who does he think he's kidding with this 'Miss Lane' crap? It's not like we don't have a son together!' she thought, as he arced off into the night.

"Lois! Lois!" Clark jogged up, out of breath. "Where did you vanish to? I tried to call Perry once I got inside the church, but my cell-phone battery was dead and then these - "

Lois sighed. "You know, Smallville, it doesn't matter right now. I smell like smoke and dirt, and I'm probably going to have nightmares for a month because of this. Right now, I just want to go home, soak in a nice hot bath, change my clothes, hug Jason before I send him off to bed, and type up my report on my interview with the medical examiner. Since Mary needs a lift back to Metropolis, she can ride with us. You might even be able to talk her into that interview that you wanted during the trip." She pulled the keys out of her purse, and started marching towards the gates of the cemetery.

"I'll give you that interview, Mr. Kent, but you have to promise me something in return."

"And that would be, miss Woodhouse?"

"Talk to her. Soon. She is the mother of your child after all, she deserves to know the truth." She smiled at the look on Clark's face. "I told you when we first met, Kal-El, I'm psychic." With that, Mary Woodhouse began walking after Lois.

End.