

Yeah, I've been a bit quiet recently - [finishing the first draft](#) of *Night's End*\*. Now it's done, I'm up to my elbows in edits. Today, well. *Today* saw me add in 2,000 more words, and leave 5,000 other words on the cutting room floor.

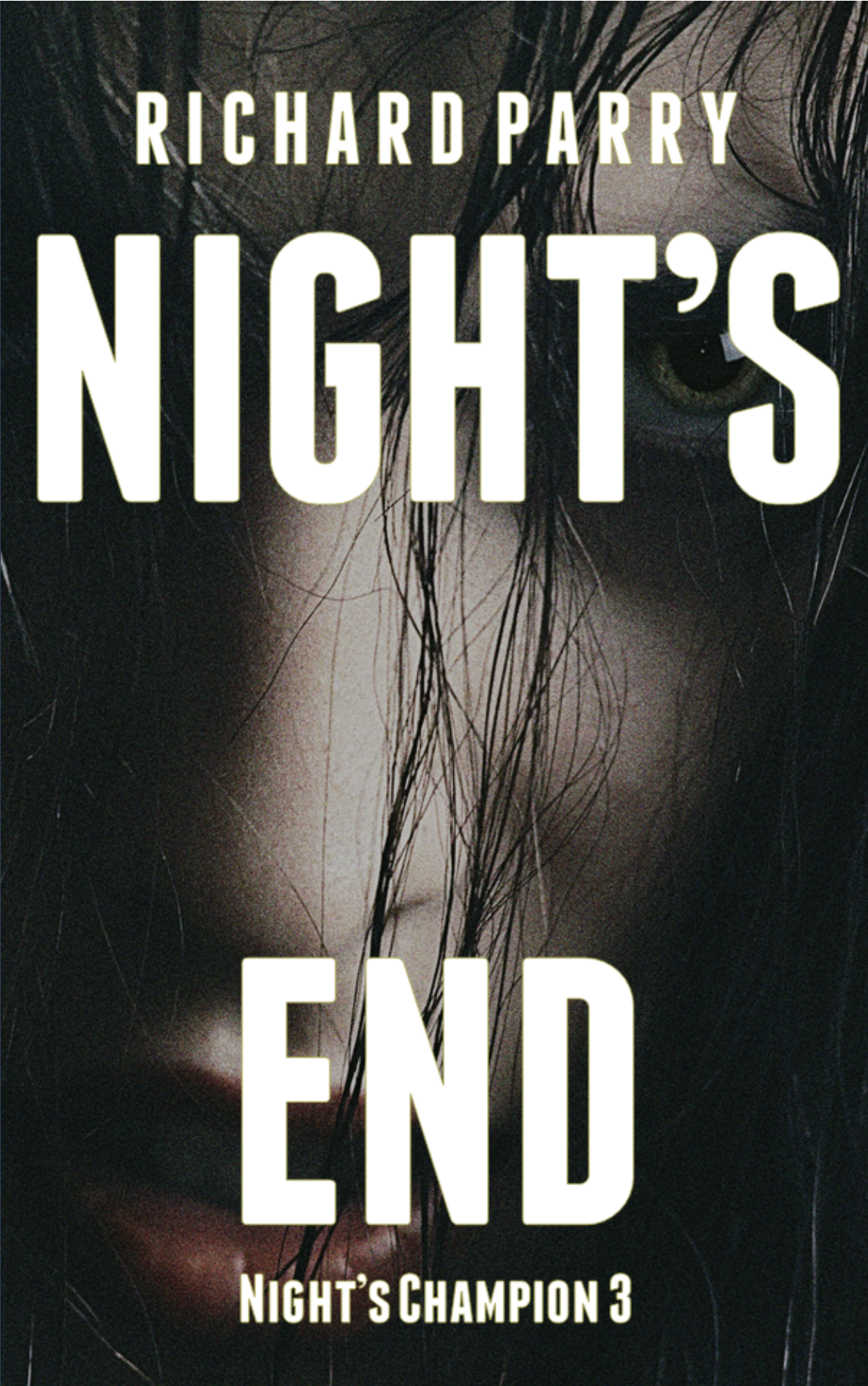
It would suck to be one of my manuscripts.

I thought you might like to check out the first chapter of *Night's End*, along with the cover. Aside from people who *make covers*, you're the first to see this. Let me know what you think! I really hope you don't run away crying.

*\* Night's End is the third book in the Night's Champion trilogy. It'll be out soon, promise. I'm doing new covers for the whole trilogy - more on that in a later email.*

Catch you next time :)

R



**RICHARD PARRY**

# **NIGHT'S**

# **END**

**NIGHT'S CHAMPION 3**

“What the hell is this?” Carlisle leaned on the pitted wood of the bar with an elbow, holding up the glass with her other hand. “There some kind of world shortage of gin?”

"You're working," said Danny, draining her third beer.

"I don't want to be tense when I'm working," said Carlisle, frowning into her glass. "Is there any alcohol in here at all?"

"It's what a single shot tastes like," said Danny.

"Doesn't taste like much," said Carlisle. "I don't think there's any risk of this becoming a habit."

Danny spared her a sideways glance. "You told me to make sure you didn't have too many before—"

"Hell," said Carlisle, "I remember what I said. I didn't mean I wanted to drink water." She brushed off some of the rain that lingered on the dark leather of her jacket, then flicked her hand to dry it. "There's enough of that outside."

"Relax," said Danny, starting on another beer.

Carlisle gave her a hard stare. "That's what the gin is *for*."

"I've been here for an hour," said Danny. "You don't know what waiting even means. Besides, he's not late. Yet."

*You're nervous, Carlisle. You get cranky when you're nervous. "I hate waiting."*

Danny shrugged, leaning back against the bar. She tugged on Carlisle's sleeve. "Here's number seven."

"Seven what?" said Carlisle, watching as a man walked towards them. Confident swagger, like his balls were so big he couldn't easily get his legs together. Carlisle wanted to punch him in the face almost immediately. She took a drink from her gin instead.

"Evening, ladies," said the man, the confidence in his walk making it to the smile on his face. "Can I—"

"Fuck off," suggested Carlisle.

The man's smile flickered slightly. Carlisle could almost see the thoughts going through his head. It'd be something like, *hey, this is unexpected, or maybe my fly is undone or these bitches are lesbians*. He rallied though, the smile coming back on in full force. "Well, it's a bit early, but—"

"Seriously," said Danny. "Fuck off. Go over there—" and she pointed with her chin to the back corner of the bar "—and when you get there, fuck off some more. Once you get to where you can't go any further, turn right, and fuck off again."

The man's smile snapped out like a candle flame in a hurricane, and he turned on his heel and stalked off.

Carlisle watched him go, then took another sip of her gin. "You had six

more like that?"

"Not exactly like that," said Danny. "But similar."

*She still looks thirty, thought Carlisle. Or twenty five in good light.*

"Let's hope Sam gets here before you bruise every ego in Manhattan."

The door at the front of the bar opened, a man ushered in by both the huge doorman — *is he technically a bouncer if he's big enough to block out the sun?* — and the rain in equal measure. Carlisle recognized the man immediately. He was a little older, a little thinner, but still the same Sam. Two men followed him in, both pretty big pieces of machinery, which made Carlisle frown a little. Even when Elsie Morgan was heading Biomne, she didn't have hired muscle following her around. Their jackets didn't fit quite right — *probably packing a little heat in a shoulder holster* — but the tailoring was otherwise immaculate. *Top shelf* pieces of machinery, then.

"I don't like those guys with him," said Danny.

"You don't have to like them," said Carlisle. "Remember: the last time he saw us, his company's super-important secret base had been burned right down to the foundations. By us. It'll make him feel a little more relaxed."

"Maybe he should have a gin too," said Danny.

Sam saw them, inclining his chin and starting to make his way through the room. It was early, the night outside still fresh and new, the bar not as busy as it could have been. When Sam made it to them, he held out a hand. "Detective."

Carlisle winced. "It's just Carlisle," she said. She shook his hand.

"I know," said Sam Barnes. "But you are what you are." She could feel something in his grip, a little like a cross between desperation and hope. Carlisle heard the catch in his voice.

She smiled, letting his hand go. "Truth," said Carlisle. *This man was in your corner when no one else was.* She — *they* — needed to find out if he was able to be saved, or if he was lost. "You remember Danny?"

"Ms. Kendrick," said Sam, shaking her hand in turn. He frowned.

"Where is Mr. Everard?"

"You know," said Carlisle. "Important wolf stuff. You want a drink? Only, don't let her," and she jerked her head at Danny, "order for you. You'll get a glass of water with ice in it."

Sam didn't do the usual *allow me or I'll get one of my lackeys to get it.* He just nodded, and gave a small smile. "I'd like that."

They found a table — its availability helped a along by the presence of



Hulk and Gigantor. The table was round and small, tucked along the back wall of the bar. Hulk and Gigantor — whose names turned out to be Ben and Ernesto — turned their backs to them, watching the crowd. Giving them some space. Or, if you were the paranoid type, making sure no one heard something that would need to be ... cleaned up. “Excuse the presence of Ben and Ernesto,” said Sam. “They’re not for you.”

Danny’s eyes flicked between the muscle and Sam, the muscle and Sam. “They’re not?”

“Ms. Kendrick,” said Sam, “last time we saw each other, you jumped out of a research building many floors up. A fall that would certainly kill a normal ... *person*. At the time, you were ... a little larger, if memory serves. I very much doubt that either Ben or Ernesto would be much use against you.”

“Then what are they for?” Danny leaned closer. “*Who* are they for?” Sam’s eyes, nothing involuntary in the look at all, moved to Ben, then to Ernesto, and finally back to Danny. He sighed. “I’m sorry. This was a mistake. I shouldn’t have agreed to come.”

“Then why did you?” Danny leaned forward an inch, maybe two. “Sam, we’ve been hunting something—”

“How is Charlie?” said Carlisle.

Sam’s eyes narrowed. “What did you say?”

“Charlie. Your kid.” Carlisle played with the straw the fool bartender had put in her gin, then tossed it on the table. It was blue plastic, in her experience useless for stirring and drinking both. “He’s got to be ten years old.”

“Eight,” said Sam, who looked like he wanted to say something. The man swallowed, then said, “He’s fine. Detective? Why did you ask to see me?”

“You were in town. We were in town. Seemed a good time to catch up. On old times,” said Carlisle. “Remember that time when we all went out and played pool for hours?”

About fifty emotions went across Sam’s face, then he nodded. “Yes,” he said. “I remember. Pool. Except I didn’t know the rules — I’d never played. Still don’t, really. Know the rules, that is.”

Carlisle pushed her glass away. “I can teach you,” she said. She looked at Danny. “We can teach you.”

Danny said nothing. She knew they’d never played pool with Sam Barnes. She started making slow circles on the table with her beer

bottle, the knurled bottom making a grinding sound against the wood.

"I don't think ... I don't think I can play anymore, Detective." Sam shrugged, then stood. "Well, it's been a pleasure."

"Sure it has," said Carlisle.

Sam looked to Danny, looked to her like he wanted to shake her hand or hug her or run away or all three. "Ms. Kendrick."

"Sam?" said Danny. Her voice was soft. "Sam, you take care of yourself, okay?"

He gave a harsh laugh, something nasty in it. "That's all I do these days." He shuffled towards the back, Ben and Ernesto flanking him.

"That was weird," said Danny, after a moment.

"Not really," said Carlisle. She lifted up Sam's glass, the whiskey hardly touched. She flicked aside the coaster, finding the paper she'd seen him slip under it. A small scrap, worn like it had been folded and refolded many times.

"What's that?" Danny picked the paper up, unfolding it with care. She smoothed it out on the table between them. The text on it was brief. *Know that we have your son Charles. Know that he will come to no harm if you do as we say. We are keeping him safe, and safe he will remain as long as you do as we ask. If you speak to law enforcement, he will die. If you talk to this world's media, he will die. If you seek help of any kind, he will die.*

*We are not without gratitude. Do as we ask, and you both shall know wealth and power everlasting. This will be handed to Charles on his twentieth birthday. Until then, he shall remain our ward, learning our ways. He will be your successor in all things. What you sow, he will reap.*

— ☉

Carlisle's eyes met Danny's over the table top. "You know what that symbol is at the bottom?"

"It's an eye," said Danny. "Or, it's the Eye." Her teeth pulled back from her lips, teeth showing in what was definitely not a smile. "We've found them."

"I'm glad," said Carlisle, "because otherwise I'd have felt bad about what was about to happen to Ben and Ernesto."

"I know, right?" Danny frowned. "Still. I'm surprised at how easy this has been."

"It's not been easy," said Carlisle. "We had to get that clown Miles a job, remember? Interviews, dressing nice, trying not to talk. It was

tough.”

Danny smiled at her. “Right. Well.” She stood up, smoothing the front of her jacket. “Time to get to work.” Her eyes had found a reedy man towards the front of the bar. Danny nodded at him. “That one, I think.” “How can you tell?” Carlisle adjusted the back of her jacket, feeling the comforting weight of the Eagle at her spine.

“He’s looking for someone,” said Danny. “Like, really looking. And he’s ... unhealthy. I don’t know. It’s been a long, long time. And ... Melissa? It wasn’t even me. I don’t know if I’m remembering this right.”

Carlisle looked over at the man. Danny was right, the man *was* unhealthy. If she’d seen him elsewhere, she’d have thought he was in dire need of a burger and fries, probably supersize, washed down with a jumbo fat Coke, no ice. The guy was thin, like he didn’t make eating a habit. His complexion was washed out, leaving him pale, reedy. What really got her humming was the look in his eyes, a kind of fanaticism she hadn’t seen except that one time she’d had to face down a guy with a bomb strapped to his chest, another to a little kid he’d held in front of him like a shield.

That had been a bad day.

The reedy man saw them. Or really, if Carlisle was being honest, he saw Danny. Completely ignored Carlisle, eyes skipping right over the top of her like she was just a piece of furniture. Carlisle could almost see the wheels moving in the guy’s head as he sized up Danny, whether to come on over and start some shit or walk the fuck away. If she was behind honest with herself, Carlisle was hoping for *walk the fuck away*. Danny and Everard had talked about what these freaks were, what they could do.

If Carlisle hadn’t been on the ride with them so long, she’d have called them crazy. She swallowed, looked up at Danny, and said, “I think you’re remembering it right. Go kick his ass.”

Danny rolled her shoulders and strode forward. The reedy man took one look at her and made a break for the door at the front of the bar. Which was more or less expected. They’d prepared a contingency for that.

The reedy man didn’t run, more like he flowed around people. They’d look away, or lean forward, or spill their drink, or a dozen other things at just the right time to let him move right towards the bar’s man door. Right towards Valentine Everard.

Speaking of contingencies, he wasn’t a bad one to have. Everard was

brushing the water from his coat. The reedy man looked around him, back towards the rear exit where Carlisle and Danny were, then to the front, blocked by Everard. *Caught.*

He bared teeth at them, teeth that were just too damn long, then grabbed a passing waitress. She had a moment to say something — it might have been hey or watch it, asshole — before the reedy man sank those teeth into the flesh at her neck. There was a bright spray of red as he sucked at the waitress, the life leaving her like water down a drain. Just like that, she was gone. Color bloomed in the reedy man's face, a flush of power as the waitress's blood gave him vigor.

The screams hit like a wave, people panicking as they surged away from the reedy man. Bouncing off walls, off each other, surging for any exit. Carlisle watched as they streamed around Everard, not moving him at all — he was like a rock.

*"Come,"* said the reedy man, hard voice carrying as he turned to Everard. *"Come and die."*



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