

The Strange White Man 49

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Published on Stories Space on 19 May 2015

<https://www.storiesspace.com/stories/supernatural/the-strange-white-man-49.aspx>

It was shortly after sunset that Carpenter exited his hiding place in the cave and headed to the house. Brother Sebastian was already up and waiting for him. The Monk did not share his latest discovery with Carpenter and proceeded to place him under hypnosis. Once again Carpenter's mind went racing back in time. He was once again in the wizard's secret lair deep within the castle. The wizard had just departed for his audience with the King and Carpenter returned to bed of straw and was soon sound asleep. He awoke shortly after sunset and discovered that the wizard had not returned. He had an uneasy feeling about it but he waited as patiently as possible. Finally, hours later, his patience had reached its end and he decided to look for his friend and mentor. As he was about to head to an exit door when heard his name being called from the other side of the wall. It was the voice of Felsar and he used a whisper, knowing that only the prince would be able to hear him. He followed the voice and found his friend slumped against the wall. He quickly pulled him inside and effortlessly carried him to his lair. The prince struggled to control his outrage upon seeing that the wizard had been beaten half to death. The prince filled a cup with wine and raised it to his friend's lips and held it while he drank. The wizard finally opened his eyes and with an effort managed to sit up. He took the cup from his friend's hand and drained it. He sat there gathering his strength and then spoke. "It is as I feared, the king is quite mad." His voice sounded ragged as he spoke. "What happened?" "He questioned me at length about you and wanted to know where you might be hiding. I told him that I had no knowledge of that. He then flew into a rage and accused me of hiding you. He screamed for his guards and ordered them to place me in the dungeon." "Oh how he will pay," Carpenter responded. "Several of them attempted to restrain me until I used one of the devices in my robe to make them release me. As I headed for the door, the king ordered them to shoot me and arrows were sent flying at me. I used another device to fill the room with smoke to mask my escape but the arrows found be anyway." "We must flee from here," Carpenter responded and he attempted to help the wizard stand up. "There will be no fleeing for me," Felsar responded, ignoring Carpenter's outstretched hand. "I will carry you then, you know I am strong enough to do that." "Yes, you are more than strong enough. But I refuse to be carried like an infant and besides it is too late for that." Carpenter only stared dumbfounded at his longtime friend and teacher. Then he understood and soon blood tears filled his eyes and rolled down his cheeks. He took a seat next to the old wizard and took him in his arms. "You can stay here undetected for many years, and I pray that you do. Read all the books you find as there is a large amount of knowledge in them that will help you," Felsar said in

weak and feeble voice. "I cannot survive without you." "Yes you can, and will. You were going to outlive me anyway, the ending just came sooner than expected." Carpenter's response was to hold his friend tighter. Now, my prince, there is only one other task that you must perform. You must swear that you will do as I ask." "What is it?" "You must burn my body and then scatter my ashes deep in the forest. There is a small cave about a mile from here where no one will see the smoke," the wizard said as looked at his young friend. "I will do as you ask," Carpenter heard himself say. The wizard smiled at his friend one last time and then closed his eyes forever. Carpenter screamed out his rage and sorrow. Those in the castle heard the wailing and crossed themselves a dozen times. "I think it's time we seek a new place to live and toil," one of the guards said to his partner. "Aye, this place is cursed because of the king." They doffed their uniforms and crept out of the castle, leaving their weapons where they had been standing guard. The new king was made aware that two more guards had fled, he ordered that the Captain look in the academy for two replacements. "They are not ready, sire," the captain respectfully told his king. "We have no choice," the king responded. That night under the moonless sky, Carpenter carried the body of the wizard to the cave he mentioned. He coated the body with a liquid the wizard had shown him and then put a spark to it and instantly flames covered the body. He took seat on the cave floor and recalled all the happy times spent with his friend as he watched the flames consume the wizard's body. The fire would burn all night so he would return tomorrow and finish his friend's final request. He returned unseen to the castle and shortly afterward the king was awakened by someone calling his name. When he opened his eyes he saw the dead prince standing next to his bed. He opened his mouth to yell for his guards but an instant later an icy cold hand was placed across his mouth. "You killed the Princess and murdered the wizard. You will wish that you were never born before I am finished with you," Carpenter hissed in the king's ear. The king managed to roll out of bed and Carpenter's grasp. As he did, he grabbed a sword hanging on the bed post. "Vampires are not indestructible. I will find your weakness and hiding place and kill you," the King snarled and called for his guards. Carpenter flew through the balcony doors and was over the railing just as the guards entered the room. From his hiding place he watched as the guards searched the grounds and the woods, finding no signs of him. He returned to the balcony later and stood off to the side in the shadows so he could not be seen and listened to the conversation the king was having with Mirchaud, the prime minister. "Can these creatures fly?" the king asked his prime minister. "No one really knows, sire." "Can they become invisible?" "Again, the only person that has knowledge of these things is the wizard Felsar, and he has not been seen in a few days." The king remained silent and dismissed him with a wave of his hand. Carpenter dropped noiselessly to the ground and headed to the entrance to the secret lair. He followed the passageway and soon was behind the wall of Mirchaud's room. The prime minister was so engrossed with what he was reading that he never heard Carpenter enter the room. He remained unaware of Carpenter's presence until he heard someone call his name and when he wheeled in his chair he came face to face with the dead prince. His eyes grew wide and all the color drained from his face as he stared at the face of someone he knew to be dead. "Do not fear me as I mean you no harm," Carpenter said softly. Hearing the young prince's voice seemed to snap him out of his fear stricken state. He took a long

pull from his tankard of ale and then rose from his seat and bowed. "Prince Karl," he intoned. "There is no need for such ceremony, I am no longer prince." "In my eyes you are and will always be. What do you want of me?" "It was the king that killed the princess," Carpenter informed him. "We were told you had used her as a shield to save yourself." "A story created by the king and a few of his loyal followers," Carpenter responded. The prime minister searched the face of the former prince for any signs of deception. When he saw none he realized that he was being told the truth. "Is the wizard dead?" "Yes. Also the King's doing." "I thought as much. What service can I be to you?" "For now tell no one that you saw me or that we spoke." "No one would believe me if I did." "We will speak again soon. Now walk out onto your balcony and remain there for a few moments." Mirchaud did as requested and when he returned the room was empty. He took another long drink from his tankard and pondered all that had just occurred.