

Dark Voodoo

By Michael Danese

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The rain falling tonight is helping to wash the trash and the smell of piss and beer off of Bourbon Street. It is a typically steamy night in New Orleans. The Rose Club hasn't changed a stick in 40 years, except the grime on the walls is a bit thicker. And that's the way they like it. The band has just finished a particularly bluesy number about unrequited love. The singer, an old white man wearing dark glasses, a pork pie hat and a tattered vest lets go of his guitar and feels his Braille watch for the time. "OK folks," he growls into the mic, "we're gonna take a short break, but don't go no place, keep ya ass in da seat, and please tip your waitresses and bartenders, they gotta listen to my drivel from now till two AM!"

A man sitting by himself in the back drains his beer and heads for the exit. He uses a few stools for walking sticks, and it's obvious that he's had more than a few beers. He stumbles out into the street. Soon another guy pushes his glass away, rises and also walks towards the door. The first man meanders down Bourbon to St. Peters Street and turns right. The second man, a large, bull of a fellow, pulls up the collar on his leather jacket to help to shield him from the drizzle. He follows the first guy at a comfortable distance. The first man stops briefly at Preservation Hall and peers in the window with the tourists, getting a free peak at the famous jazz band. He leans on the glass, nodding his head and tapping his foot to the music. After a minute or so, he continues along. He walks for three more blocks, then turns left into an alley. The second man silently follows.

The follower quickly catches up to the first man. He comes up right behind him and says, "Gary Dunbar?"

The first man turns around and says, "Yeah?"

In a second the follower holds a taser on Gary's neck. Gary falls as a blue flash lights up the alley. The follower scoops up Gary like a kitten. He walks to the end of the alley, then opens the back door of a large panel van. The van is piled full of heavy boxes, right up to the back door. The follower touches a small, almost invisible spot on one of the boxes which opens another door. The slender door opens wide enough for the man with the bundle to enter. He closes both doors, sealing them inside.

This isn't any normal van! Against the back wall are shackles. The man locks Gary's legs in the shackles and his wrists in suspended handcuffs. A locking metal band fits around his neck, and he is plopped onto a small bench. The man flips a switch and spotlights are focused on Gary's face as Led Zeppelin's Dazed and Confused is played very loud. The wall behind him and the floor under his feet are covered in thick rubber liners. Gary begins to moan. The man holds some smelling salts under Gary's nose and he wakes up violently, coughing and cursing. "What the..!" Before he can utter another syllable the man punches him across the face.

"Hi Gary, you are Gary Dunbar, right?"

"Yes! What is going on here!? Help HELP!" Gary begins to scream violently.

“Yes, let’s yell and scream! I simply love this part! Help! Some crazy bastard has me locked up! I think he is going to kill me! Yes, yell all you want! This place is completely sound proof! You are actually in my van parked around the corner from your house. It is the coolest van ever, isn’t it! We can do whatever we want – make all the noise we want and no one would ever know!” said the man with pride.

Gary stopped screaming and slumped onto the bench and muttered, “What is going on? Who are you? Why am I here?”

“All excellent questions! And I will answer every one of them! But first I have just a few questions for you!” said the man.

“For me...” questioned Gary.

“Yes, so we established that you actually are Gary Dunbar, the same Gary Dunbar who was acquitted of raping and killing two college girls, right?” asked the man.

“Yes, that’s who I am. Right, I was acquitted, that ugly mess is behind me, I told them a hundred times that I didn’t do it! It finally sunk in, they had nuttin’ on me. Over, done with!” said Gary.

“Aw, but not quite...cause you really did it, didn’t you?”

“No! NO! I could never...” Gary said as the man gently slapped him on the cheek.

“Well, this is a new trial, with me as the judge, kinda like that TV show, Judge Judy! Only in this court you will tell the truth, no lies, no legal bullshit from slimy lawyers, the *whole* truth!” said the man behind the bright lights. “So, here is your chance to avoid allotta pain. Did you rape and kill those kids?”

“No! No, Never!” said Gary.

“Aw, I was so hoping that you would say that! Now the fun begins!” said the man. “Oh, I’m not being polite, you had some questions, first, who am I, my name is Victor LaMacchia...”

“The football player?”

“So, you’ve heard of me! Great! But today I’m just plain old Victor, concerned citizen. Your next question was something like what is going on here? I think you pretty much figured that one out. The next was, why are you here. You are here because you beat the system, or at least you *thought* you beat the system, until *now*, that is!” gloated Victor as he held up some leads to a car battery. “So, what did you do to those girls?”

“Nothing! Nothing!”

“Music to my ears! You know, just between us, no one *ever* admits anything, at least up until this point. But, your tune will change soon, I *promise* you!”

“What are you doing with those?” whispered Gary.

“Well, it’s kinda an electric truth serum. One hundred percent effective! The negative lead is attached to your testicles, and, I gotta warn you, it hurts even without the current! The positive gets clamped right here, on your neck brace. So here’s a little physics lesson. Electricity loves metal, but it works pretty good on flesh too. It flows from a positive to a negative, so it will enter here, quickly flow down your spine, and exit at your balls! I’ll start off at a low flow then increase it so you can feel the full effect!”

“Wait, please, what do you want from me?” Gary said through the tears.

“Aw, the begging! Yes the pattern holds!” Victor sparked the leads. “Answer my question – last chance!”

Gentle reader, perhaps this is the right time to catch you up on how Victor LaMacchia got to this place. I may have given you the wrong idea about Victor. He is actually a pretty great guy, for a serial killer, that is... But, yes, he is a big man. He weighs in at about 250 pounds, he has dark hair, which he wears slicked back, and he has the darkest eyes, and a black goatee that comes to a point on his chin. He’s known for his signature look, a black tee shirt, black leather blazer, dark denim jeans, and motorcycle boots.

Victor’s size, athleticism and “killer instinct” made him the perfect football specimen. He led his high school team to the state championship, was highly recruited by all of the SEC teams, he played a key role in Alabama’s National Championship run as a terrifying defensive linebacker.

Victor went to the NFL in the first round, where his star rose, even as a rookie when he put a running back *and* a quarterback in the hospital by breaking their legs in acrobatic tackles. He claimed it was an *accident*. The press claimed that he didn’t know his own strength. On the down-low he became known as Bone Crusher. The team press corps tried to suppress the nickname whenever possible. In a few interviews when Victor was questioned about it, he asked the press to please stop using that. But, just hearing the words made his heart soar! He apologized to both players for the roughness, but the word on the street was that he just plain likes the sound of breaking bones. Things were going great. In year two, he made the Pro Bowl. But, halfway through his third year he tore up his knee. On the advice of his doctors, he opted to retire.

While he was in college he actually took advantage of the opportunity to get his diploma. Most guys in his situation majored in football only, but he knew that football was a fleeting thing. He studied hard, and earned a degree in finance, with a minor in accounting. He made millions playing football, and he managed it carefully. He invested his money in a company called Dark Voodoo that he created to fill a certain niche.

Dark Voodoo sells designer clothes and gear for the discriminating biker. Read as *expensive*. These items are for the bankers, rock stars, corporate executives, doctors and Wall Street types that are into riding motorcycles, you know, the high-end hobbyists. The clothes, bags and gear are all constructed of top-grade leather. They come in any color you want, as long as you want *black*. The company, headquartered in New Orleans, prides itself on using only American-made and-sourced goods and materials. Victor actually wanted to use an eagle and flag in his logo, but he didn’t want it to compete with his ally, Harley Davidson, so he went with a two-headed rattlesnake, coiled and ready to strike, a throwback to the Revolutionary War era “*Don’t Tread on Me*” flag. He decided to add the second head to the snake, and you can read into that anything that you choose. Banking on Victor’s name and reputation, the company quickly took off, and Victor made a ton on the initial IPO. Both Dark Voodoo and Victor are famous for giving back to the community, supporting everything from childhood cancer, to the inner-city underprivileged, to disabled veterans.

As you would imagine, Victor is a well-known man-about-town in the greater New Orleans area, and nationally, for that matter. His fame as a football star gets him recognized in most circles, and his stature as a businessman and concerned citizen covers everywhere else.

He was married young, and divorced last year. He has two young daughters, and they adore him as much as he adores them. He is on good terms with Yvonne, his ex, but she still feels the sting of his indiscretions, at least the ones that she is aware of. He is regularly seen out on the town with the starlet de jour. Alex Rodriguez and premarital George Clooney have *nothing* on Victor!

Victor keeps an apartment in the French Quarter, on Rue De Royal. It's convenient for when he needs to be social. But his estate is deep in the bayou, a few miles off of Highway 10. He's aware of his fame, and security is a priority. The only road in is wired with video surveillance, so he can never be surprised. He *abhors* surprises.

About two years ago, he was having scotch and cigars on his back porch with his old college roommate and teammate, Omar LaFontaine. Omar was the kicker. He's a slight fellow, with what used to be sandy blond hair. Now he's balding and has "*gone to seed*," as they say. He didn't try to keep himself in shape like Victor did. He has quite the belly, and he likes to keep it lubricated. The NFL didn't come calling, but he did parlay his college years into a law degree, and now he's the district attorney of New Orleans.

"Amazing, just listen to that!" remarked Omar as the symphony of frogs, owls, crickets and every other swamp animal were performing in tune together.

"Yes, the children of the night!" said Victor, quoting Count Dracula. "Why so blue tonight, buddy? The ladies downtown not throwing themselves at you anymore?"

"You wish!" retorted Omar. "No, that ain't it. It's just that...hey I didn't come here to talk about work..."

"Come to Papa, let it out, how can I help?" said Victor.

"I don't think that you could help, but this case that ended today..."

"Go on..." said Victor, leaning in, "I'm all ears."

"So this guy breaks into this old woman's house in broad daylight...clubs her to death with her own lamp, gets away with some jewelry and about a hundred and seventy five bucks. We HAD the guy cold. An eyewitness sees him leaving the house..." said Omar.

"I think I see where this is going..." said Victor.

"Right, the witness has a stroke and can't remember anything, and the bastard walks. The kicker is, as he's leaving the courtroom with this big shit-eatin' grin on his face, he looks me right in the eye and gives me the finger." Omar said. "It just made me wanna puke, ya know?"

"Well, maybe I can help!" Victor exclaimed. He topped off Omar's glass and re-lit his stogie. "Stay right here, I'll be right back!"

Victor scampered into the house. He came out a few minutes later with a cell phone. Handing it to Omar he said, "Text me everything about this scum that you know, then leave the rest to me!"

"W-what's your plan? What do you have in mind?" questioned Omar.

Victor clinked Omar's glass and said, "My plan is justice. Let's just say that I know people that won't be too happy to hear about this. The less you know, the *better*. I'll text you back on this phone when the problem is handled."

The next day Victor received a text. The perp's name was Jessie Ray Johnson. There was a photo, last known address, even a work address.

Victor sprung into action. He bought a large black panel van, then he painstakingly adapted it for his private venture. He was obsessed and possessed. He spent a lot of time up front planning for every situation. He designed and installed the shackles and the bench, the sound-proofing, the rubber mats, wash-out hoses, lighting and the sound system. But the false door was his *pièce de résistance*. He wanted to be sure that no one but him ever entered this vehicle. He designed a facade back wall with heavy boxes. If anyone ever opened the doors they would see that the truck was completely full. However, a small sensor on a box was programmed to read Victor's thumb print. This opened a door big enough to enter, then closed back tight.

Soon he was ready for the hunt. He quickly located Jessie Ray. He studied him like a snake eyeing a rat. Then, late one night, he pounced. He tased Jessie Ray, grabbed him and threw him in the truck. Jessie Ray was a skinny junkie, so Victor didn't even break a sweat.

When Jessie Ray awoke shackled in the truck, he bawled like a baby. Victor flipped on the sound system, which usually played classic heavy metal, Victor's favorite. After some wicked threats, Victor asked him to admit what he did and Jessie sang like a canary. As soon as Victor was sure of his guilt, he locked eyes with Jessie Ray and slashed his throat as Ozzy Osbourne sang about the *Crazy Train*.

Victor's life changed forever in that moment. He welled up and exploded with emotion, as if a sleeping giant was awoken! He'd never felt anything like this; it was better than winning, better than breaking bones, better than sex, better than anything he had ever experienced in all of his life! It was like he'd found his life's work! He took several minutes to appreciate what had just happened, and reflected on his joy. He then unshackled Jessie Ray and let him fall in a heap onto the plastic liner. He wrapped him in the plastic, then headed for home.

He headed out of town, singing along with the radio at the top of his lungs. As he was travelling up the road to his house, he stopped. He flicked on the outside lights of the truck, which illuminated the back and surrounding area. He got out and opened the doors. He removed Jessie Ray and left him on the side of the swamp, bathed in the light. Within minutes several alligators appeared and Jessie Ray was a memory. He took out his phone and texted, "Done."

In the past two years this story has played out several times. Each time Victor is as excited as a crackhead ready to tweak, or a teenage girl answering the phone hoping that she is being invited to the prom.

Which brings us back to tonight, with Victor toying with Gary Dunbar in his pleasure van.

Victor sparked the car battery leads again. "No please, please don't!" pleaded Gary, as Victor began to remove his pants.

"Tell me Gary, those two girls begged too, didn't they? They both cried and pleaded for mercy, right? Just like you are now!" laughed Victor, as if he were in a trance.

Victor hooked the lead to Gary's neck brace as Gary blurted, "Yes, they begged, they pleaded, I did it, I raped and killed them both! Please stop now, you got want you want! Why are you doing this?"

"Why? That's a fair question. If you were a TV reporter the answer would be, (in a stern voice) to rid the world of scum like you, to make the world a better place." Victor cackles as he continues, "but, between us, I just plain love it! I love it! I LIVE for it! That look in your eyes when you realize it's all over, that *feeling* when the life peacefully and silently tip-toes from your

body, it's glorious! But I'm not telling you anything that you don't already know! You've been there, you've experienced it yourself! The rush is amazing, isn't it?" Victor gloated.

Gary looked at Victor's eyes and saw that they were on *fire*. He said, "I..." but before he could make another sound, Victor cut his throat and maintained eye contact the entire time as the life drained from his body. This never gets old for Victor. He lives for the next fix like a junkie.

On the way home he fed the gators and texted, "Done."

A few weeks later Victor was immersed in an acquisition for Dark Voodoo. They were in the midst of buying out their largest competitor. He was in a board meeting when he got a text on his "other" phone. The text read, "Billy '*The Blade*' Benson. Pedophile – molested, murdered and butchered two children that we know of. Likely more. See attached mug shot. Thanks!" Victor excused himself from the meeting as an adrenaline rush came over him. He returned a few minutes later, but was unable to concentrate on business because all he could think about was Billy The Blade.

Later that evening he began his research. As usual, it didn't take him long to locate several possible places to begin to hunt his prey. It was getting late, and he thought it would be best to start fresh tomorrow night. He went to bed, but his head was buzzing like a chainsaw. He knew sleep wasn't an option, so he prepared his truck and went to begin his stalk.

He found Billy sitting at the bar in Whitey's Pub in the Tremé section of the city. He slipped out and positioned his truck on a dark street. Then he waited. About 45 minutes later Billy headed for the exit. He was a very large black man with a shaved head, a full beard and he was wearing a LSU jersey. The jersey was another reason for Victor to dislike him, since LSU and Alabama are bitter rivals. Victor thought he was as big as any lineman that he faced in the NFL. He hoped he was in shape enough to move him once he went limp.

As Billy rounded a dark corner he was greeted by Victor's taser and he dropped as the blue light blinded him. Victor opted to drag him behind a bush and drive over to him instead of trying to carry him to the truck. He pulled the truck close to the bush and struggled to lift Billy. As he had him hoisted over his shoulder, Billy's eyes opened and he realized what was happening. He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a stiletto, then buried it in Victor's back. The two big men crashed to the ground. Billy ran off as Victor lay there, bleeding out.

The vicious attack on this American icon made national headlines. It was the lead story on all of the TV and online news outlets, and social media exploded with comments. Every celebrity with a twitter handle had comments at #victor and #darkvoodoo. Politicians vowed to clean up our streets and churches of all denominations prayed for Victor's recovery.

Victor was in the hospital and it was touch and go. He had lost *a lot* of blood. The surgical team transfused him and repaired his wound, and he had a punctured lung. His family arrived shortly after being notified, and as soon as he was in recovery they were by his side. The doctors gave him a fighting chance, mainly due to his physical fitness.

About 24 hours after being attacked, his eyes opened. He was obviously disoriented, and luckily his first blurry vision was of his daughters on either side of his bed. There were hugs, tears and several messages thanking God. The girls could not hug him enough, and Yvonne also had tears flowing as she hugged the big guy. In true Victor fashion, this all happened in time for the 11:00 news. Social media erupted again with joyous messages about Victor prevailing against the odds. Soon the doctors cleared the room to allow their famous patient to get some rest.

The next day the room had more flowers than the Tournament of Roses Parade. Everyone who's anyone sent a bouquet, and it seemed like a contest to see whose bouquet was the biggest. Even the president sent regards and well-wishes. With the news of the company's acquisition, along with Victor's celebrity, shares of Dark Voodoo spiked to new heights, and stores had trouble keeping stock on the shelves.

Later that morning, Omar LaFontaine asked to spend some time with his friend. Omar was making a run at being the mayor of New Orleans. It seems that crime has been down the past few years, thanks in some way to Victor. It's funny, but none of Victor's victims seemed to be missed. The general thought to the people that knew them was that since they avoided jail, they were in the wind to avoid any more attention from the law in NOLA.

"Omar!" Victor said weakly.

"They just can't kill ya!" Omar joked. "I'm just gonna ask you once. *Billy the Blade?*"

Victor nodded and tried to talk.

"*Dead* man!" said Omar.

"No, *absolutely* not!" said Victor with as much voice as he could muster. "He's *mine!* You *owe* me that!"

"You just get better for those girls out there; let me take care of this for..." Omar tried to say.

"*MINE!*" exclaimed Victor, cutting him off.

"Okay, I get it." Omar said, giving in. "But now you just rest and get your strength back. We can talk again when you are back on your feet."

Victor nodded as they shook hands.

Victor's recovery was quicker than just about anyone that suffered what he had went through. Within weeks he was back at the gym, and a few weeks after that he was as good as new. Of course, he had his eye on the prize the entire time. The vision of Billy the Blade shackled in his truck was like an elixir to him.

Soon he was back on the prowl. He added a dark baseball hat and hoodie to his look, just in case anyone saw him. He didn't want to take any chances. He assumed that Billy was onto him. He certainly knew that it was Victor that tried to grab him. He stalked the same haunts as last time, and he found Billy at the third place. This time when he came out, Victor made damn sure that he turned up juice on the taser. *Way* up. When the taser hit Billy's neck the blue light lit up half of Dixie. The first thing that Victor did was to check Billy's pockets. Sure enough, he found the stiletto in his back pocket. He quickly loaded the package into the van and secured him with the restraints.

It took some time for Billy to regain consciousness. The lights were blasting him in the face and G 'n R was at full volume as Axl Rose welcomed Billy to the jungle. As soon as Billy was awake Victor punched him in the face. "Hi Billy, remember me?"

Billy nodded, still dazed from the shock and the punch. "Why...what do you want with me?"

"I really just want you to answer a question or two. Can you do that to me?" Victor said softly.

"What?" Billy replied.

“Tell me what you did to those kids!”

“I didn’t do nuttin’”

“Sure you did, and you probably even used this knife!” Victor said while slicing a small cut in Billy’s cheek.

“Nuttin’” repeated Billy.

“Fine. Now the fun begins!” Victor quickly took out the car battery and clamped one end onto the neck shackle, and the other onto Billy’s leg shackle. He wasn’t in the mood for chatting, so he just started to turn up the power.

It didn’t take long for Billy to start moaning. “Okay, turn it off! I did it, I did it!”

Victor turned it up quickly, then down again. “You did what!?”

“I killed dem kids, I did dem!”

Victor repeated the shock. “How many?”

“I don’t know! Lots, lots!”

Victor turned off the power then he positioned himself eye to eye with Billy. He slowly raised Billy’s knife, then, almost in slow motion, he opened an ear to ear slit. He took a minute to savor the experience, then he opened the locks so Billy would fall into the plastic.

Soon the alligators erased the last trace of Billy. All except for the stiletto. Victor kept that as a reminder to himself to be more careful.

He picked up his cell and texted, “Done.”

So, if you ever beat the rap in the Crescent City, be sure to be looking over your shoulder, because as sure as the heat rises in the Bayou, there is some *Dark Voodoo* in your future!

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