

## Chapter I: Callahan and the Vampires

one

Pere Don Callahan had once been the Catholic priest of a town, 'Salem's Lot had been its name, that no longer existed on any map. He didn't much care. Concepts such as reality had ceased to matter to him.

This onetime priest now held a heathen object in his hand, a scrimshaw turtle made of ivory. There was a nick in its beak and a scratch in the shape of a question mark on its back, but otherwise it was a beautiful thing.

Beautiful and *powerful*. He could feel the power in his hand like volts.

"How lovely it is," he whispered to the boy who stood with him. "Is it the Turtle Maturin? It is, isn't it?"

The boy was Jake Chambers, and he'd come a long loop in order to return almost to his starting-place here in Manhattan. "I don't know," he said. "She calls it the *skölpadda*, and it may help us, but it can't kill the harriers that are waiting for us in there." He nodded toward the Dixie Pig, wondering if he meant Susannah or Mia when he used that all-purpose feminine pronoun she. Once he would have said it didn't matter because the two women were so tightly wound together. Now, however, he thought it did matter, or would soon.

"Will you?" Jake asked the Pere, meaning *Will you stand. Will you fight. Will you kill.*

"Oh yes," Callahan said calmly. He put the ivory turtle with its wise eyes and scratched back into his breast pocket with the extra shells for the gun he carried, then patted the cunningly made thing once to make sure it rode safely. "I'll shoot until the bullets are gone, and if I run out of bullets before they kill me, I'll club them with the . . . the gun-butt."

The pause was so slight Jake didn't even notice it. But in that pause, the White spoke to Father Callahan. It was a force he knew of old, even in boyhood, although there had been a few years of bad faith along the way, years when his understanding of that elemental force had first grown dim and then become lost completely. But those days were gone, the White was his again, and he told God thankya.

Jake was nodding, saying something Callahan barely heard. And what Jake said didn't matter. What that other voice said—the voice of something

(*Gan*)

perhaps too great to be called God—did.

*The boy must go on, the voice told him. Whatever happens here, however it falls, the boy must go on. Your part in the story is almost done. His is not.*

They walked past a sign on a chrome post (CLOSED FOR PRIVATE FUNCTION), Jake's special friend Oy trotting between them, his head up and his muzzle wreathed in its usual toothy grin. At the top of the steps, Jake reached into the woven sack Susannah-Mio had brought out of Calla Bryn Sturgis and grabbed two of the plates—the 'Rizas. He tapped them together, nodded at the dull ringing sound, and then said: "Let's see yours."

Callahan lifted the Ruger Jake had brought out of Calla New York, and now back into it; life is a wheel and we all say thankya. For a moment the Pere held the Ruger's barrel beside his right cheek like a duelist. Then he touched his breast pocket, bulging with shells, and with the turtle. The *sköldpadda*.

Jake nodded. "Once we're in, we stay together. Always together, with Oy between. On three. And once we start, we never stop."

"Never stop."

"Right. Are you ready?"

"Yes. God's love on you, boy."

"And on you, Pere. One . . . two . . . three." Jake opened the door and together they went into the dim light and the sweet tangy smell of roasting meat.

two

Jake went to what he was sure would be his death remembering two things Roland Deschain, his true father, had said. *Battles that last five minutes spawn legends that live a thousand years. And You needn't die happy when your day comes, but you must die satisfied, for you have lived your life from beginning to end and ka is always served.*

Jake Chambers surveyed the Dixie Pig with a satisfied mind.

three

Also with crystal clarity. His senses were so heightened that he could smell not just roasting flesh but the rosemary with which it had been rubbed; could hear not only the calm rhythm of his breath but the tidal murmur of his blood climbing brainward on one side of his neck and descending heartward on the other.

He also remembered Roland's saying that even the shortest battle, from first shot to final falling body, seemed long to those taking part. Time grew elastic; stretched to the point of vanishment. Jake had nodded as if he understood, although he hadn't.

Now he did.

His first thought was that there were too many of them—far, far too many. He put their number at close to a hundred, the majority certainly of the sort Pere Callahan had referred to as “low men.” (Some were low women, but Jake had no doubt the principle was the same.) Scattered among them, all less fleshy than the low *folken* and some as slender as fencing weapons, their complexions ashy and their bodies surrounded in dim blue auras, were what had to be vampires.

Oy stood at Jake's heel, his small, foxy face stern, whining low in his throat.

That smell of cooking meat wafting through the air was not pork.

four

*Ten feet between us any time we have ten feet to give, Pere*—so Jake had said out on the sidewalk, and even as they approached the *maitre d's* platform, Callahan was drifting to Jake's right, putting the required distance between them.

Jake had also told him to scream as loud as he could for as long as he could, and Callahan was opening his mouth to begin doing just that when the voice of the White spoke up inside again. Only one word, but it was enough.

*Skölpadda*, it said.

Callahan was still holding the Ruger up by his right cheek. Now he dipped into his breast pocket with his left hand. His awareness of the scene before him wasn't as hyper-alert as his young companion's, but he saw a great deal: the orangey-crimson electric *flambeaux* on the walls, the candles on each table immured in glass containers of a brighter, Halloweenish orange, the gleaming napkins. To the left of the dining room was a tapestry showing knights and their ladies sitting at a long banquet table. There was a sense in here—Callahan wasn't sure exactly what provoked it, the various tells and stimuli were too subtle—of people just resettling themselves after some bit of excitement: a small kitchen fire, say, or an automobile accident on the street.

*Or a lady having a baby*, Callahan thought as he closed his hand on the Turtle. *That's always good for a little pause between the appetizer and the entrée.*

“Now come Gilead's ka-mais!” shouted an excited, nervous voice. Not a human one, of that Callahan was almost positive. It was too *buzzy* to be human. Callahan saw what appeared to be some sort of monstrous bird-human hybrid standing at the far end of the

room. It wore straight-leg jeans and a plain white shirt, but the head rising from that shirt was painted with sleek feathers of dark yellow. Its eyes looked like drops of liquid tar.

“*Get them!*” this horridly ridiculous thing shouted, and brushed aside a napkin. Beneath it was some sort of weapon. Callahan supposed it was a gun, but it looked like the sort you saw on *Star Trek*. What did they call them? Phasers? Stunners?

It didn’t matter. Callahan had a far better weapon, and wanted to make sure they all saw it. He swept the place-settings and the glass container with the candle in it from the nearest table, then snatched away the tablecloth like a magician doing a trick. The last thing he wanted to do was to trip over a swatch of linen at the crucial moment. Then, with a nimbleness he wouldn’t have believed even a week ago, he stepped onto one of the chairs and from the chair to the table-top. Once on the table, he lifted the *sköldpadda* with his fingers supporting the turtle’s flat undershell, giving them all a good look at it.

*I could croon something, he thought. Maybe “Moonlight Becomes You” or “I Left My Heart in San Francisco.”*

At that point they had been inside the Dixie Pig for exactly thirty-four seconds.

five

High school teachers faced with a large group of students in study hall or a school assembly will tell you that teenagers, even when freshly showered and groomed, reek of the hormones which their bodies are so busy manufacturing. Any group of people under stress emits a similar stink, and Jake, with his senses tuned to the most exquisite pitch, smelled it here. When they passed the *maitre d’s* stand (Blackmail Central, his Dad liked to call such stations), the smell of the Dixie Pig’s diners had been faint, the smell of people coming back to normal after some sort of dust-up. But when the bird-creature in the far corner shouted, Jake had smelled the patrons more strongly. It was a metallic aroma, enough like blood to incite his temper and his emotions. Yes, he saw Tweety Bird knock aside the napkin on his table; yes, he saw the weapon beneath; yes, he understood that Callahan, standing on the table, was an easy shot. That was of far less concern to Jake than the mobilizing weapon that was Tweety Bird’s mouth. Jake was drawing back his right arm, meaning to fling the first of his nineteen plates and amputate the head in which that mouth resided, when Callahan raised the turtle.

*It won’t work, not in here, Jake thought, but even before the idea had been completely articulated in his mind, he understood it was working. He knew by the smell of them. The aggressiveness went out of it. And the few who had begun to rise from their tables—the red holes in the foreheads of the low people gaping, the blue auras of the vampires seeming to pull in and intensify—sat back down again, and hard, as if they had suddenly lost command of their muscles.*

“*Get them, those are the ones Sayre . . .*” Then Tweety stopped talking. His left hand—if you could call such an ugly talon a hand—touched the butt of his high-tech gun and then fell away. The brilliance seemed to leave his eyes. “They’re the ones Sayre . . . S-S-Sayre . . .” Another pause. Then the bird-thing said, “Oh sai, what is the lovely thing that you hold?”

“You know what it is,” Callahan said. Jake was moving and Callahan, mindful of what the boy gunslinger had told him outside—*Make sure that every time I look on my right, I see your face*—stepped back down from the table to move with him, still holding the turtle high. He could almost taste the room’s silence, but—

But there was *another* room. Rough laughter and hoarse, carousing yells—a party from the sound of it, and close by. On the left. From behind the tapestry showing the knights and their ladies at dinner. *Something going on back there*, Callahan thought, *and probably not Elks’ Poker Night*.

He heard Oy breathing fast and low through his perpetual grin, a perfect little engine. And something else. A harsh rattling sound with a low and rapid clicking beneath. The combination set Callahan’s teeth on edge and made his skin feel cold. Something was hiding under the tables.

Oy saw the advancing insects first and froze like a dog on point, one paw raised and his snout thrust forward. For a moment the only part of him to move was the dark and velvety skin of his muzzle, first twitching back to reveal the clenched needles of his teeth, then relaxing to hide them, then twitching back again.

The bugs came on. Whatever they were, the Turtle Maturin upraised in the Pere’s hand meant nothing to them. A fat guy wearing a tuxedo with plaid lapels spoke weakly, almost questioningly, to the bird-thing: “They weren’t to come any further than here, Meiman, nor to leave. We were told . . .”

Oy lunged forward, a growl coming through his clamped teeth. It was a decidedly un-Oylike sound, reminding Callahan of a comic-strip balloon: *Arrrrrrr!*

“No!” Jake shouted, alarmed. “No, Oy!”

At the sound of the boy’s shout, the yells and laughter from behind the tapestry abruptly ceased, as if the *folken* back there had suddenly become aware that something had changed in the front room.

Oy took no notice of Jake’s cry. He crunched three of the bugs in rapid succession, the crackle of their breaking carapaces gruesomely clear in the new stillness. He made no attempt to eat them but simply tossed the corpses, each the size of a mouse, into the air with a snap of the neck and a grinning release of the jaws.

And the others retreated back under the tables.

*He was made for this, Callahan thought. Perhaps once in the long-ago all bumblers were. Made for it the way some breeds of terrier are made to—*

A hoarse shout from behind the tapestry interrupted these thoughts: “*Humes!*” one voice cried, and then a second: “*Ka-humes!*”

Callahan had an absurd impulse to yell *Gesundheit!*

Before he could yell that or anything else, Roland’s voice suddenly filled his head.

six

“Jake, go.”

The boy turned toward Pere Callahan, bewildered. He was walking with his arms crossed, ready to fling the ’Rizas at the first low man or woman who moved. Oy had returned to his heel, although he was swinging his head ceaselessly from side to side and his eyes were bright with the prospect of more prey.

“We go together,” Jake said. “They’re buffaloed, Pere! And we’re close! They took her through here . . . this room . . . and then through the kitchen—”

Callahan paid no attention. Still holding the turtle high (as one might hold a lantern in a deep cave), he had turned toward the tapestry. The silence from behind it was far more terrible than the shouts and feverish, gargling laughter. It was silence like a pointed weapon. And the boy had stopped.

“Go while you can,” Callahan said, striving for calmness. “Catch up to her if you can. This is the command of your dinh. This is also the will of the White.”

“But you can’t—”

“*Go, Jake!*”

The low men and women in the Dixie Pig, whether in thrall to the *sköldpadda* or not, murmured uneasily at the sound of that shout, and well they might have, for it was not Callahan’s voice coming from Callahan’s mouth.

“*You have this one chance and must take it! Find her! As dinh I command you!*”

Jake’s eyes flew wide at the sound of Roland’s voice issuing from Callahan’s throat. His mouth dropped open. He looked around, dazed.

In the second before the tapestry to their left was torn aside, Callahan saw its black joke, what the careless eye would first surely overlook: the roast that was the banquet's main entrée had a human form; the knights and their ladies were eating human flesh and drinking human blood. What the tapestry showed was a cannibals' communion. Then the ancient ones who had been at their own sup tore aside the obscene tapestry and burst out, shrieking through the great fangs that propped their deformed mouths forever open. Their eyes were as black as blindness, the skin of their cheeks and brows—even the backs of their hands—tumorous with wild teeth. Like the vampires in the dining room, they were surrounded with auras, but these were of a poisoned violet so dark it was almost black. Some sort of ichor dribbled from the corners of their eyes and mouths. They were gibbering and several were laughing: seeming not to create the sounds but rather to snatch them out of the air like something that could be rent alive.

And Callahan knew them. Of course he did. Had he not been sent hence by one of their number? Here were the *true* vampires, the Type Ones, kept like a secret and now loosed on the intruders.

The turtle he held up did not slow them in the slightest.

Callahan saw Jake staring, pale, eyes shiny with horror and bulging from their sockets, all purpose forgotten at the sight of these freaks.

Without knowing what was going to come out of his mouth until he heard it, Callahan shouted: "*They'll kill Oy first! They'll kill him in front of you and drink his blood!*"

Oy barked at the sound of his name. Jake's eyes seemed to clear at the sound, but Callahan had no time to follow the boy's fortunes further.

*Turtle won't stop them, but at least it's holding the others back. Bullets won't stop them, but—*

With a sense of *déjà vu*—and why not, he had lived all this before in the home of a boy named Mark Petrie—Callahan dipped into the open front of his shirt and brought out the cross he wore there. It clicked against the butt of the Ruger and then hung below it. The cross was lit with a brilliant bluish-white glare. The two ancient things in the lead had been about to grab him and draw him into their midst. Now they drew back instead, shrieking with pain. Callahan saw the surface of their skin sizzle and begin to liquefy. The sight of it filled him with savage happiness.

"Get back from me!" he shouted. "The power of God commands you! The power of Christ commands you! The ka of Mid-World commands you! *The power of the White commands you!*"

One of them darted forward nevertheless, a deformed skeleton in an ancient, moss-encrusted dinner suit. Around its neck it wore some sort of ancient award . . . the Cross of Malta, perhaps? It swiped one of its long-nailed hands at the crucifix Callahan was

holding out. He jerked it down at the last second, and the vampire's claw passed an inch above it. Callahan lunged forward without thought and drove the tip of the cross into the yellow parchment of the thing's forehead. The gold crucifix went in like a red-hot skewer into butter. The thing in the rusty dinner suit let out a liquid cry of pained dismay and stumbled backward. Callahan pulled his cross back. For one moment, before the elderly monster clapped its claws to its brow, Callahan saw the hole his cross had made. Then a thick, curdy, yellow stuff began to spill through the ancient one's fingers. Its knees unhinged and it tumbled to the floor between two tables. Its mates shrank away from it, screaming with outrage. The thing's face was already collapsing inward beneath its twisted hands. Its aura whiffed out like a candle and then there was nothing but a puddle of yellow, liquefying flesh spilling like vomit from the sleeves of its jacket and the legs of its pants.

Callahan strode briskly toward the others. His fear was gone. The shadow of shame that had hung over him ever since Barlow had taken his cross and broken it was also gone.

*Free at last, he thought. Free at last, great God Almighty, I'm free at last. Then: I believe this is redemption. And it's good, isn't it? Quite good, indeed.*

"H'row it aside!" one of them cried, its hands held up to shield its face. "Nasty bauble of the 'heep-God, h'row it aside if you dare!"

*Nasty bauble of the sheep-God, indeed. If so, why do you cringe?*

Against Barlow he had not dared answer this challenge, and it had been his undoing. In the Dixie Pig, Callahan turned the cross toward the thing which had dared to speak.

"I needn't stake my faith on the challenge of such a thing as you, sai," he said, his words ringing clearly in the room. He had forced the old ones back almost to the archway through which they had come. Great dark tumors had appeared on the hands and faces of those in front, eating into the paper of their ancient skin like acid. "And I'd never throw away such an old friend in any case. But *put* it away? Aye, if you like." And he dropped it back into his shirt.

Several of the vampires lunged forward immediately, their fang-choked mouths twisting in what might have been grins. Callahan held his hands out toward them. The fingers (and the barrel of the Ruger) glowed, as if they had been dipped into blue fire. The eyes of the turtle had likewise filled with light; its shell shone.

"Stand away from me!" Callahan cried. "The power of God and the White commands you!"