



Master of the Crossroads

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About Kadrey:

Richard Kadrey is a novelist, freelance writer, and photographer based in San Francisco. Kadrey's first novel, *Metrophage*, was published in hardcover in 1988 by Victor Gollancz Ltd., and went on to various other American and foreign printings in paperback. Mac Tonnie's *Cyberpunk/Postmodern Book Reviews* calls *Metrophage* "one of the quintessential 1980s cyberpunk novels," going on to describe "a gritty acid-trip through an ultraviolent L.A. where nothing is what it seems... . Alongside novels such as [William Gibson's] *Neuromancer* and Lewis Shiner's debut novel *Frontera*, *Metrophage* helped establish the cyberpunk aesthetic: relentless, paranoid and playfully cynical." Kadrey's second novel, *Kamikaze L'Amour*, is described by the same source as "mesmerizing... a surreal (and distinctly Ballardian) account of synesthesia and mutant desire set in the jungle-choked ruins of L.A." Kadrey's short story *Carbon Copy: Meet the First Human Clone* was filmed as *After Amy*. The publisher website, Amazon booksellers, and other sources list a July 15, 2007 publication date for Kadrey's next book, *Butcher Bird: A Novel Of The Dominion* (Night Shade Books). Other works include collaborative graphic novels and over 50 published short stories. His non-fiction books as a writer and/or editor include *The Catalog of Tomorrow* (Que/TechTV Publishing, 2002), *From Myst to Riven* (Hyperion, 1997), *The Covert Culture Sourcebook* and its sequel (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993 and 1994); Kadrey also hosted a live interview show on Hotwired in the 1990s called *Covert Culture*. He was an editor at print magazines *Shift* and *Future Sex*, and at online magazines *Signum* and *Stim*. He has published articles about art, culture and technology in publications including *Wired*, *Omni*, *Mondo 2000*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *SF Weekly*, *Ear*, *Artforum*, *ArtByte*, *Bookforum*, *World Art*, *Whole Earth Review*, *Reflex*, *Science Fiction Eye*, and *Interzone*. Source: Wikipedia

Also available on Feedbooks for Kadrey:

- *Butcher Bird* (2005)
- *Metrophage* (1988)
- *Zombie* (2002)
- *A Cautionary Tale* (2002)
- *SETI* (2002)
- *Mudrosti* (2002)
- *Second-Floor Girls* (2002)
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I went down to the crossroads to sell my soul to the devil. I was shocked to find my high school sweetheart there trying to do the same thing.

"Belinda?" I called. "Belinda Porter?"

She was catty-corner from me and looked around when she heard her name, which was kind of ridiculous as we were completely alone on a deserted country two-lane in northern California.

"Johnny Frankenheimer, is that you? Hi!," she called brightly across the road. "Long time no see. What are you doing way out here in the middle of the night?"

I set down my bag and held up some of the cigars, candy, chicken and rum I was carrying. Not offerings to Satan, technically, but to the voodoo deity, Papa Legba.

When she saw what I had, Belinda grinned and held up an expensive bottle of 15-year old Demerara rum. We both laughed, seeing that we'd both chosen to invoke the powers of darkness at exactly the same time. She motioned me over.

"How long has it been?" Belinda asked. "Fifteen years?"

"More like seventeen," I said. "But who's counting?"

"What a funny place to run into each other. Have you been planning on selling your soul for long?"

"No, not really," I said. "It was kind of spontaneous."

"Me, too. That's so funny."

"Yeah, it is."

"So, what have you been up to all these years?"

"I got married. Hooked up with some friends from college and rode the Internet bubble til it burst. Then, to settle some debts to some very questionable characters, I dealt guns for them to even more questionable characters. Turns out the whole thing was some kind of sting government operation. They seized my passport and froze all my bank accounts. My wife ran off with one of the loan sharks who got me into this mess in the first place. Oh, and I think the Mossad has a contract out on me. How about you?"

"Wow. Rough," said Belinda. "What have I been up to? Remember how I always used to say I'd never end up like my mother? Well, turns out we both have the same bad habit of marrying alcoholic pedophiles. Who would have thought that's something a parent could teach you with the potty training?"

"Maybe it's not her fault. Maybe it's a genetic thing. I mean, I never wanted to be a business hotshot, but there was some part of me that wanted to be the kind of grown-up my dad was. I had with two cell

phones, a portable fax machine, a Palm Pilot with the name and number of every Fortune 500 twonk I ever brown-nosed."

"I just wanted a kitchen with all marble counters and an in-ground pool."

"I owned my own shredder. The company didn't buy it for me. I bought it on my own. I never felt more important or better about myself than when I got that shredder home. It made my cock harder than my wife ever did."

"That's how I felt about the hand-made Mexican tile in our bathroom. Until I found the Polaroids, of course," said Belinda. She fished in her bag and pulled out an unopened Sherman Fantasia pack. Tearing off the wrapper, she opened the box revealing yellow, pink, blue and green cigarettes. Belinda chose a bright pink one and lit it with a small gold lighter. When she offered me one, I shook my head.

"I quit," I said.

"Smart."

There was a moment of awkward silence. Then Belinda piped up, "We've fucked up pretty bad, but, you know, we could just go into therapy."

"That takes too long. I've wasted years of my life. I don't want to waste another decade and a hundred grand I don't have whining on some quack's couch."

"You're right. We're too far gone for ordinary solutions. We screwed ourselves up because we lived extremely badly. It only makes sense that the cure be just as extreme."

"Spiritual chemotherapy."

That made Belinda laugh. Hearing her, I suddenly remembered how much I'd loved that laugh back in high school.

As if she were reading my thoughts, Belinda said, "We used to have fun together."

"Yeah, we did."

"Why'd you break up with me?"

"So that you couldn't break up with me." I looked at her sheepishly and shrugged. "I figured a girl as cute and fun as you would get bored pretty quick and dump me. Back then, that would have killed me. So I dumped you first."

Belinda puffed on her candy-colored smoke and looked at me. "Boys are so stupid."

"I'm living one's skin and I don't have a clue what's going on."

"You really hurt me back then."

"I'm sorry. If it's any consolation, breaking up with you like that has been a source of constant pain and wonder for me ever since."

"Aw, that's sweet." She kissed me on the cheek and I felt a stirring in my gut that was not unpleasant.

Belinda sighed. "It's along way from the backseat of your Camaro to this road."

"I had my dad's old Rambler. Chuck Yarboro had the Camaro."

"Right. Sorry. Chuck and I went out after you broke up with me." Another awkward silence. "So, what are you here for? What are you going to ask Legba for?"

"I'm not actually looking for Legba. I'm aiming really high these days. I figure if this Legba character is who everyone says he is, then he can put me in touch with the big man. Lucifer. Satan. I'll do a soul deal with him for wealth, power over my enemies, eternal life, you know."

"Interesting," said Belinda. "Interesting. I hadn't thought of that approach. I'd thought about the Devil, too, but probably had the same questions you did. How do you get his attention? What if you do a human sacrifice and nothing happens? How embarrassing! And then there's a body to get rid of." Belinda flicked the pink Sherman into the road. "I like it. Let's do it."

"What? Both of us?"

"Yeah, why not? You always had the best ideas, even back in school. And what's Legba or the Devil got to complain about? They get two for the price of one." Belinda reached out and slid her hand into mine. I felt like I was sixteen again.

"I was going to ask you if you thought that this was incredibly significant that we both ended up at the same crossroads at the same time on the same night."

"Smells like destiny to me, Johnny."

"Destiny smells good." I leaned in to kiss her.

"Shit," she said. "I was starving on the way up here from the city and I ate all my chicken. I have the booze and the smokes, but I can't meet Papa Legba without some roast chicken to offer."

"No problem. I bought lots of everything. I have a ton of chicken back in the car."

Belinda squealed. "My hero! Okay, you go back and grab some wings and thighs. I'll keep an eye on all our stuff and shoo any losers away from our crossroads. Deal?"

"Deal," I said. She kissed me hard and swatted my ass even harder. "Get going, devil boy."

I smiled the whole way back to the car, then cursed when I realized I'd left my keys hooked over the top of the rum bottle by the side of the road. I turned to call to Belinda, but she was gone.

I ran back to the crossroads, to the exact spot where we'd kissed not a minute before. All of the offerings were gone and there were scorch marks on the road. I backed away from the spot, tense, craning my head in every direction.

I crouched beside the car for a while, hoping Belinda would come back. I guess it really had been pretty significant that we'd both been on that road at the same time. Significant, but no coincidence. She'd gotten to Legba first and had been lying in wait for me. It never occurred to me that she could still be this mad after all these years. I thought about breaking into my car, getting my offerings and performing the ceremony anyway, but if Belinda had already gotten to Legba, then it seemed like I'd better choose another deity to help me hock my soul.

I stood by the car for a few more minutes, but by then I knew Belinda wasn't coming back. I checked by the road where we'd been standing, hoping that she'd dropped my keys before she'd disappeared. No such luck. She'd hadn't crushed out the pink Sherman. She'd only smoked about half of it, and I could see it glowing on the road. I picked the cigarette up and puffed. The smoke was sweet in my lungs.

Then a truck came out of nowhere and ran me down.

When I reached Hell, it wasn't the Volkswagen-size Palm Pilot the demons strapped to my back that scared me, or the enormous Rolodex treadmill I was forced to run on all day and night. It was that shredder. I knew it was out there in the dark. I could hear giggling demons sharpening the blades. It was just a matter of time.

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