The Ballad Of Gabriel Baal

Chapter One — Ghosts

Amber Bane-Ryan.
Abigayle DeLune.
Mac Bane.
Matthew Knox.
Teryl Fexxfield.
Ken Davison.

So many things had changed in the months since Gabriel had allowed his creeping tendrils out into the world - one by one he'd begun to weave himself into the story of The Hurricane and The Rapture. First Rogan, then Lucy. She had connected Gabriel with Kyra - Amber's best friend and Ken's wife. Then Gabriel had faced Abigayle herself. And Teryl Fexxfield. And then Mr. Bane-Ryan.

It felt strange to attach such a title to someone when he was so often given similar. Mr. Morgan-Baal.

And then had come time for him to finally meet the Hurricane herself - painted red in the blood of all who had fallen and the flames of her burning desire for pain. Her own. That of those around here. It mattered not - beneath the surface lay a kind of torture reserved for but a handful in this world. Few could receive it and survive. Even fewer could wield its fury.

Amber Bane-Ryan was one.

She had been such an interesting case for Gabriel to review - A Study in Red. And with it came Abigayle. An altogether different prospect, yet one that piqued Gabriel's interest just as much. A broken demon in human form - one whose mind would never tire like her body. News of her demise had reached Gabriel's ears and, in the moment he would admit, it saddened

him. It wasn't the loss of the woman - for she and Gabriel had shared little more than a pleasant tea and a shared attempt to calculate the ferocity of one another's impact upon the other.

He mourned the loss of another experiment.

For when the time came for Gabriel and Amber to meet, the hurricane had turned and tore his tendrils from the world. Gone were his place in the minds of Kyra Johnson or Mac Bane. Gone from the world was Abigayle DeLune. Gone from his view was whatever little hold he'd had over the distorted chaos that had plagued him before and after the birth of his son. And in the months since, Matthew Knox had returned from his self-imposed exile. Amber had rid herself of her Masqued demon. Teryl was long gone and Ken was much like Gabriel had been all those months before - waiting for the birth of his child.

Gabriel had watched Amber's return to active competition - the close-run contest with her brother for Pro Wrestling Valor. Not a word had reached his ears before she had been announced as part of it's rebirth. His counsel was no longer wanted. His threat as no longer recognised.

Once again, Gabriel Baal had been forgotten by a world that once feared his gaze.

Gabriel sat with his back to the room at large, his eyes moving over the rose bushes that lay outside the window of his office. The summer bloom had been kind this year - and the rain had supported their continued strength. He would have to thank the gardener for his work - though, he suspected the sight of his wife lounging by the pool had something to do with why these particular roses had seen such due care and attention.

Gabriel allowed himself a brief smile at the notion - Eden had always had a positive motivational effect.

He turned a letter opener over and over in his hands, turning it on it's tip against his finger. And suddenly the enjoyment of the roses were tainted by a bitterness in his mouth that made him want to spit. He realised that the taste came from the taint of the unspoken words that sat upon his tongue. And so he did spit - in a fashion.

"It would appear that the world has moved on." Said Gabriel, to himself. He turned slightly until his eyes caught sight of the sheet of paper that lay upon his desk. And when he brought the point down into the wooden top, it skewered the list of names that resided not in the note, but on a typical piece of writing paper. He had planned to place their names for collection - and yet found himself shy.

"They don't love you like we do." Came a voice from behind him. Gabriel smiled as he felt hands rest upon his shoulders, those hands began to rub the tension from his neck. "They don't realise what we're capable of."

“No.” Said Gabriel quietly. “No, they don’t.”

“But that doesn’t matter.” Said the voice in a whisper, delivered directly into his ear. “You don’t need anyone else - you have everything you could ever want.”

“Almost everything.” Gabriel said quietly. He reached to touch the hand that rested upon his shoulders but found nothing but his own body. He turned in his seat, and felt his breath catch.

“What’s wrong Gabriel?” Asked the young woman who stood before him, blood staining the front of her white nightdress. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“You could say that.” Said Gabriel, his eyes focused upon Samantha. The ward of his old friend, the woman who had died in his arms having impaled herself upon…

His eyes lowered to the letter opener which stood tall from his desk - the paper upon which he’d written the names was stained red with the blood. Was that really the same letter opener? Had he truly kept it for all those years?

“Why is it someone so capable of such terrible things strives to find people who would love him?” She asked - except… It wasn’t her. When Gabriel looked up again, he found that she wasn’t alone. The sunken eyes that looked back at him from the couch were ones he’d not seen for some time. Lilith. Starved and beaten by his enemies, released in the final moments of her life to bring him a message - a warning that her fate awaited all that Gabriel loved if he refused to comply.

“It’s a strange mix of narcissism merged with an inferiority complex.” Gabriel said matter-of-factly. “I suspect there’s a touch of god complex sprinkled in there as well, although I’m not sure there’s much grey area in a god complex.”

“My Gabriel - you always were complicated.” Said Lilith.

“You can fuckin’ say that again.” Came a third voice - this one, however, was masculine. Strong. With the unmistakable drone of Texas. “Hello brother-mine.”

“Quentin.” Said Gabriel. His mouth was quite dry now, as his brother moved from the shadows. It was odd how his injuries were somewhat similar to those of Samantha - a stab-wound. Although this had been applied from behind by a man paid by the same organisation that had starved Lilith to death.

“You have a family now, brother. The fuck are you doin’ with this shit?” Quentin asked, his hand waving over the list upon the desk. “You’ve more to live for than this horse shit.”

“You know me.” Said Gabriel with the faintest hint of a laugh. “Can only ever sit still for so long - never happy unless I’m chasing the next dark cloud.”

“Except now you have my daughter to protect.” Said a fourth voice - one that Gabriel had only heard once before in person, in days long before he and Eden had pledged love for one another. A voice that had always been an advocate for another Brit. “And my grandchild - they are important above all else.”

“You think I don’t know that?” Asked Gabriel. “I think about that every night”.

“DId you think about them when you tried to involve yourself in a war that had nothing to do with you?” Asked Samual Morgan.

“I doubt it.” Said Quentin. “My brother’s an intelligent man, but sometimes he can be dumb as fuck.”

“I see that.” Said Samual.

“I’m right here…” Said Gabriel, looking up at the two men for whom his son had been named. “And yet, this is the life we’ve chosen. You think by staying home and hiding away that threats won’t rise? I have to be ready.”

“I was ready.” Said a fifth voice, one that Gabriel had not been expecting. “I was ready to die before I met you. And then for a while, I begged for death but no-one could hear me.”

“Nate.” Said Gabriel. This really was a night for all the ghosts of Gabriel’s past. For Samual Morgan and Nathanial Korpi along with Gabriel’s brother had been caught up in his last great war.

The Order of the Inferno.

Sam, Nate and Quentin were all executed in the pursuit of Gabriel, Eden and to both of their regret, Jet Somers.

“I saw things. Things that I could never forget. And for the longest time, i wanted to die but I feared being dead. Then you turned me into… You broke me… And you remade me into something terrible. And then I begged for death, but… No-one… No-one could hear me.” Said Nate.

“Nate, I…” Gabriel began.

“But then you fixed me - as best you could and… I couldn’t see those… Things anymore. And those final days I could enjoy my family and friends.” Said Nate. “War is… Horror. Not just for those who live it, but those who witness the repercussions.”

Gabriel swallowed hard.

“I don’t know how to walk away from this.” Said Gabriel. “With every day that passes I can feel myself… I can feel Eden. This is what we do - and being parents will always be the best and most important thing we will ever do…”

“It won’t be the only thing.” Said Quentin, with a half smile. “Yeah, I… I understand that.”

“As do I.” Said Samual. “My children were my greatest gift, and yet… Being their father wasn’t everything that I was meant to be.”

“We only ask that you be careful.” Said Lilith. “We love you.”

“But I above all understand that need.” Said Samantha. “I did not pass my life to you and Eden so that you could live out your days within four walls.”

“I know.” Said Gabriel.

“But that note… It corrupts.” Said Samantha darkly, her eyes lingering over the death note. Over the record of all the victims that had come before. Those belonging to Gabriel, and before him, Ichabod. “I knew it when it belonged to him and I knew it better when he handed it to you.”

“Yes.” Said Gabriel. “I’m aware of that…”

“It changes nothing.” Said Samantha. It was a statement of fact, not a question. “So be it. Then you must write our names within it.”

“What? No.” Said Gabriel. “No, I never wanted any of you to die - I refuse to attribute you as my victims.”

“But we were, brother-mine.” Said Quentin with a smile. “We forgive you, but that doesn’t change the fact.”

Gabriel’s eyes moved from one to another, desperate for any of them to disagree. But not one of them did - instead, by the second, he could feel their disappointment in him growing. That he would not admit his fault in their deaths. That he had made them victims even if he had not intended them to die.

After what felt like an eternity, Gabriel turned the pages of the note, and one by one he wrote their names.

Samantha.

Lilith.
Quentin.
Samuel.
Nathaniel

And when he finished, he closed over the book, and ran his fingers over the cover. He climbed to his feet and closed his eyes for a moment. And then he felt it in his hands again - the letter opener. He felt the warmth of the blood on the handle and he felt his fingers tighten around it. And when he drove it downwards, he felt the point break through the leather and down through the pages until it stopped against the desk.

When he opened his eyes, he found himself looking down at the original note that had belonged to Ichabod, now skewered shut with the knife that had killed his ward. To the side lay the new note - the note emblazoned with only two names.

Amber Bane-Ryan.
Abigayle DeLune.

When he looked up, he realised that he wasn't alone.

"How long were you stood there?" Gabriel asked. But by the look in Eden's eyes, he knew the answer before she said it.

"Long enough." She said, her arms folded across her body - not from the natural temperature, but from the chill of what she'd seen. "Are you okay?"

"I am." Said Gabriel. "Just exorcising a few demons."

"Are they gone?" She asked. Gabriel glanced around the room, before smiling.

"They're gone." He said.

"Okay good." Eden said, softening a little. "Does this mean you want to go back? Working I mean? Not just… The psychiatrist stuff."

"How would you feel about that?" Gabriel asked.

"Like… I don't want you to do it alone." Said Eden.

"Eden, you said you never wanted to risk…" Gabriel began.

"I know, I know." Said Eden. "And I'm not saying I want to get back in the ring, but that doesn't mean I don't want to be with you if you do. I have many strengths that lie outside of punching people in the face."

“You certainly do, love.” Gabriel said quietly. “It will be sometime before I return - afterall, I have allowed retirement to get the better of me.”

“Oh shut up, you’re just as hot as you always were.” Said Eden rolling her eyes.

“The gardener says the same thing about you.” Said Gabriel with a smirk.

“He does the rosebushes for free.” Said Eden with a sparkle in her eye. Gabriel smiled. “Dinner will be ready in ten minutes - I’m not cooking, obviously, just letting you know.”

“I’ll be right out - just have to tidy up.” Gabriel said with a smile. Eden walked towards him and placed a kiss upon his cheek. He smiled.

And when she turned back to the door, Samantha, Lilith, Quentin, Samuel and Nate all stepped aside to allow her to pass. The door closed behind her, and Gabriel’s eyes began to dart.

“You can be my little secret.” He said.

“As will I.” Said a new voice, that placed a hand upon Gabriel’s shoulder.

“Hello Daniel.” Gabriel said, before closing his eyes as a low rumbling laugh began to play out through his mind.

