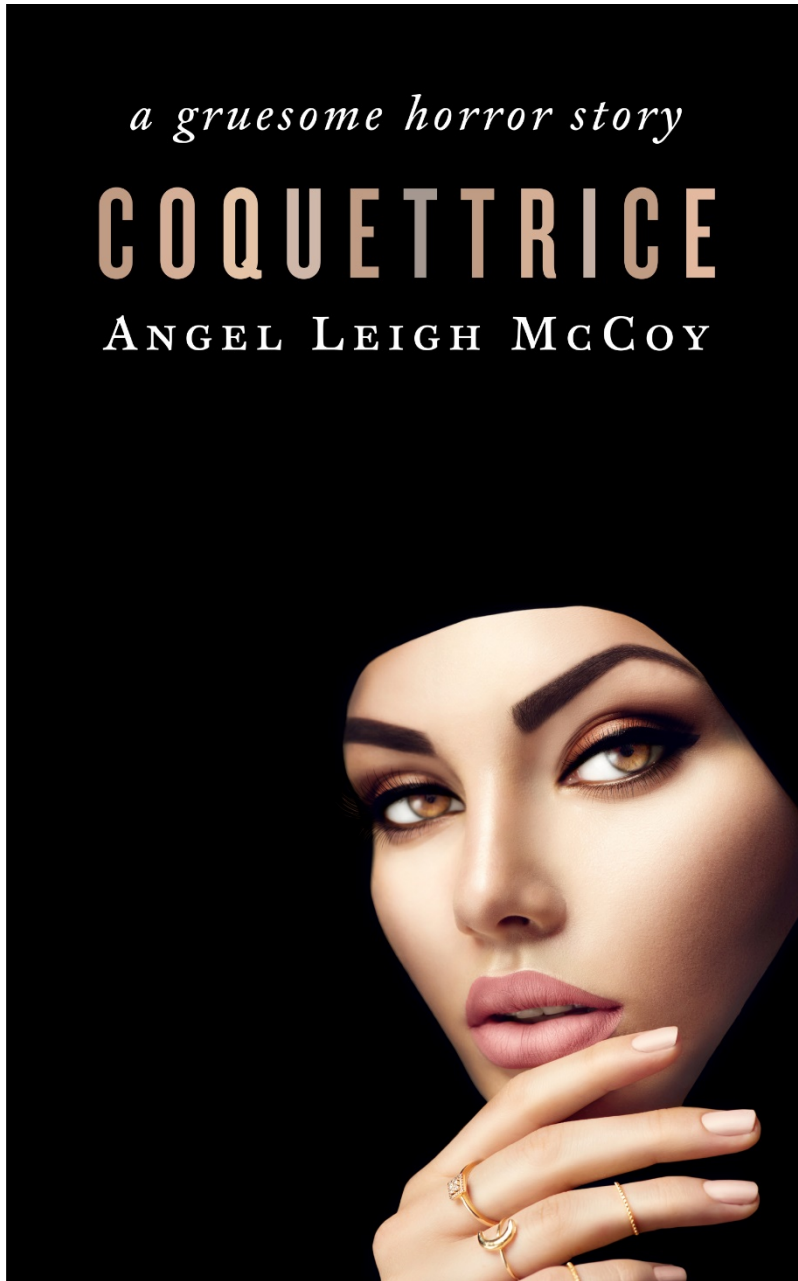


a gruesome horror story

COQUETTRICE

ANGEL LEIGH MCCOY



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COQUETTRICE

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TRIGGER WARNING: Graphic Violence



Coquette

By Angel Leigh McCoy

The cockatrice clucked its tongue and sniffed at the steam rising off the eviscerated corpse. It narrowed its eyes with pleasure. Gently, it pushed its hands through the coils of intestine and the lumpy organs to savor the dissipating heat.

A sound at the end of the alley alerted the cockatrice to the intruder. It lifted its head and peered through the darkness with black-amber eyes. Those eyes tracked the man as he fronted a wall and opened his clothing to piss upon the brick. The cockatrice stood slowly, unfolding its long, lean body. It swayed there seductively. Its bare skin reflected what little luminescence lingered in the twilight of the man's life.

Even intoxicated, the man sensed something. In mid-stream, member in hand, he turned sharply toward the cockatrice. He looked confused, shocked even, and the cockatrice smiled. In a heartbeat, his last, the cockatrice struck.



There was no warning, that morning, in the subtle shift of nebulae across the sky. I entered the bus, as usual, riding the same line to the same stop. The same dull faces shared my commute.

The same inane conversations grumbled at the periphery of my consciousness.

And then, “Hi,” she said, “Mind if I sit here?” It was such a simple opening to such a complex story. At the time, I didn’t hear the weight in her request. Remembering back, I don’t see how I could have missed it. Her smile alone, so sweet, should have made me wary.

I looked her over: high breasts, flat stomach, jeans tight enough to camel-toe in her fleshy crotch, long legs, pretty face and that smile.

Momentarily, “Sure,” I replied and moved my books off the seat, holding them in my lap with the spines facing her so she could see the titles.

She looked.

“Oh. You’re a doctor?” They all asked that once they’d seen the clues and always with that same feminine squeak of interest in their voices.

I gave my customary chuckle and response, “Soon. I start my internship this fall.” Offer the hand. Smile. “Name’s William. What’s yours?” Tip the head with interest and look straight into the eyes. My choreography worked every time.

“Tiffani.” She turned toward me and slid her hand into mine. I noticed how soft it was, how frail and light. The kind of hand a man loves to have stroking him.

I got her phone number and called her after my last class. I asked her out. She agreed. Readily. Dinner and a walk along the river led us back to my place.

I rubbed my fingertips in lazy circles at the base of her spine, naked with her upon the stain of our union. Her hand languidly coaxed me up from the languor into which I had drifted.

“What are you doing?” I asked dreamily.

“Playing.”

“Playing? Are you having fun?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Good. Me too.”

“Good.”

I realized that this was a woman I could love.



The German shepherd growled and bared its teeth, so the cockatrice twisted its head off. Afterward, the monster looked up at the house, holding the decapitation by an ear. Blood and other fluids drained from the dog’s neck onto the lawn. Stepping over the twitching body, the cockatrice rounded the corner of the house and peered through a window. It purred deep in its throat at what it saw. It cut through the screen with one, sharp claw and crawled inside. Television noise came from

another room. The cockatrice quietly shut the nursery door. It walked to the crib and held up the dog's head for approval, bobbing it above the railing like a puppet with a ribbon tongue and blank, button eyes. The child giggled. For several minutes, the cockatrice amused itself, making the baby laugh. Predatory peek-a-boo pleased it for awhile, but not forever. The sour-sweet aroma of infant-meat made its mouth water.



An idyllic summer, spent in the arms of my sunny-tressed Tiffani, turned into a cruel autumn. The leaves gathered age-spots; they cringed, dried up and died. Tiffani and I moved in together. I started my internship and began my decline.

Indian summer they called it, but that only brought images of hatchets and scalpings—blond hair clutched in my fist. She wasn't home when I returned. It wasn't the first time. Tiffani said she got bored while I was on duty. She went out with *friends*.

At first, I believed her. I waited with a book, pretending to read between glances at the clock, the door, the window. My mind buzzed with questions that grew more and more urgent, more and more bitter with each passing minute. Finally, the key turned in the lock, and I was up and at the bedroom doorway in a second. I watched her sneak into the darkened apartment and saw her surprise as she caught my eyes upon her.

"Hi, William," she said with that smile.

"Where have you been?" I accused.

"Out."

"Out where? Who were you with?"

"Shopping, silly." Tiffani set her packages aside and slithered up to me. She pressed her cold hands against my cheeks. Her lips grazed mine, and her tongue flickered to taste me.

My gut sensed another man, but I wanted desperately to believe her. I kissed her deeply, searching for hope. That night, we made love like never before. I had something to prove: my manhood, my love, my ownership. I proudly chained her to me with three solid orgasms. Foolish as I was, I thought that would be enough, enough to keep her satisfied and tied to my bed.

The pretenses helped for awhile. Tiffani and I discussed the weather. We made love. We did our weekly shopping. We curled up on the couch to watch movies. We kissed hello and good-bye. We ate, and we slept, but time and again, I came home to an empty apartment. I found bus tickets to odd parts of town. I smelled cigarettes on her clothes and in her hair, and I overheard quickly-ended phone conversations, "No. Don't worry. He doesn't suspect a thing. I have to go."

On a Sunday, a strange woman came to the door saying her name was Debora and claiming

to be a friend of Tiffani's. I let her in. Tiffani was dressing in the bedroom.

"So," Debora said with a conspiratorial wink, "you're the cock?"

"What?"

Debora looked past my shoulder, her face suddenly pinched with guilty secrets. I looked too.

Tiffani stood there. I caught the tail-end of her head shaking, her eyes hard with warning, then she showered me with one of her pearlescent smiles.

I left them to their lame excuses and isolated myself in the bedroom. The cock. The Cock. That's what they called him. My beautiful Tiffani was screwing the Cock. The crudeness of it turned my stomach.

Over the next couple weeks, I noticed dark clouds gathering under my eyes. I lost my appetite for food. My clothes irritated me, and finally, my libido left me. Tiffani swore it didn't matter, but I could feel the chains weakening.

My suspicions haunted me. The hallways of the hospital echoed with her name. Thoughts of her breezy, frail hands stalked me as I inserted catheters. Images of her thighs, spread wide, plagued me as I drove needles through the walls of veins. I saw her mouth open and willing as I threaded tubes down throats. The specters of her sexuality, however, had lost their eroticism. They bedded in betrayal.

October was coming to an end, burying the corpse of autumn in the grave of winter. Anyone who ever said winter didn't start until December had never lived in Minneapolis. The season cheated there. It snuck in early. It double-dealt doubt and dread throughout the city long before its victims admitted that it had arrived.

I remember the date: October 29. Tiffani wasn't home when I got off work. I pretended to read until midnight. From midnight to two, I paced. By two-thirty, I was cursing her and the Cock, raging and swearing. By four, I was in bed. She came home, and I pretended to be asleep.

With dawn came a new understanding of what I had to do. I climbed carefully out of bed. I showered, shaved and brushed my teeth. I dressed in my usual work clothes. I left the apartment at the usual time and walked to the usual bus stop. I got on the usual bus.

I got off again at the very next stop and sneaked back to spy.

Despite everything, despite her lies, and despite her slip-ups, a part of me still wanted to believe her. That hope-filled morsel stirred up enough doubt that I *had* to find out for sure. I couldn't just leave her. I'd wonder for the rest of my life whether I'd been wrong. Maybe she really had been telling the truth. Maybe 'the Cock' *was* just her pet name for me, as unflattering as it was. Maybe. Maybe. Maybe. Too many maybes.

For two long hours I stood on the street, in the cold, waiting for Tiffani to leave the apart-

ment. Following her was a lot easier than I'd expected. She didn't take a bus or a taxi. Her destination was a three-story brownstone only five blocks from where we lived. The front door of the building opened with a squeak as I followed her inside. It startled me. Guilt stirred in my brainstem, but I was beyond listening to my feeble conscience.

Tiffani's footsteps echoed in the staircase that spiraled squarely overhead. I could just make out the edge of her coat as she ascended. She was on the second floor, turning to climb to the third. Her slim hand wrapped delicately over the railing, gliding along as she went.

I tracked her with my eyes to the third floor. She knocked. I could tell the sound came from the rear of the building, but I couldn't tell which apartment. Cautiously, I climbed halfway to the second story, peering upward, and heard a door open on the third. I froze.

"Hi," Tiffani said. Simple, straightforward: that was her way.

I strained my ears, but heard no response aside from the eventual closing of the door and the slide of a deadbolt. I don't know how long I stood there on the landing between the first and second floor. My heart raced, and my head pounded. I considered leaving, forgetting the whole thing, but I couldn't. My need to know rooted me. I stared at the wall's chipped plaster and flaking paint. I imagined Tiffani upstairs in some other man's arms. Before I could change my mind, I climbed the rest of the stairs.

The light fixture on the third floor cast a jaundiced glow. Two apartments sheltered at the back of the building, numbers 11 and 12. One was fronted by a flowered mat. I discounted that one and turned to inspect the other. A Halloween decoration hung on the door, but not the usual cutesy witch or jangling skeleton. An oil painting, approximately five by seven inches, it flaunted the kind of imagination I would never possess and triggered a sort of morbid fascination that escalated as I studied it. A taxidermied snake framed the painting. The creature's markings were a subtle pattern of brown and black diamonds. Its skin flaked in places and its tail tucked neatly into its mouth at the top.

Upon the canvas, the artist had rendered the profile of a rooster, just the head. Its feathers were a bruised black-and-blue, iridescent. Its comb was swollen and ruddy; its visible eye was dark and dirty amber with a circular iris. As I examined it, I realized that the rooster's beak purposely resembled a penis, erect with a natural, downward curve. Its wattle hung below like wrinkled, scarlet testicles. The image disgusted me. Whoever this guy was, he was sick.

This guy was the Cock. The connection fired in my brain like a flare and left behind the acrid taste of fury. Of course.

I glared at the painting.

The rooster stared back at me, unblinking.

Tiffani's laughter whispered out to me--yes, she was in there. I raised my fist to knock, but

hesitated. The hackles at the back of my neck tickled and gave me a violent shiver. I tried to rub the feeling away.

The rooster stared at me.

Suddenly, I lost the courage to go on. I realized abruptly that if I knocked it would end my relationship with Tiffani, whether she was guilty or not. Defeated, I turned to leave.

A man stood at the top of the stairs behind me. I hadn't heard him approach. He wore all black: trenchcoat, shirt and twilled-cotton trousers. His head was ragged and scruffy, despite the clean lines of his body and the penetrating sharpness of his ice-blue eyes. I waved my hand negligently at the painting and muttered some pseudo-excuse for loitering in the hall, then tried to hurry past him. He stopped me with a hand on my arm. I bristled.

"Beware the Basilisk," he uttered, his voice full of apocalyptic melodrama. He nodded toward number 12.

"What?" I was flustered. The man stood several inches taller than me and was built for a boxing ring. Something about him regressed me into a child caught in a misdemeanor.

The man scrutinized my guilt. He said nothing more, but withdrew a flyer from his pocket and thrust it into my hand.

I watched him walk to number 11, unlock the door, wipe his feet on the flowered mat and disappear inside. I shoved the brochure into my coat pocket and hurried back down the stairs. In the foyer, I paused only long enough to read the name on mailbox number 12: 'P.J. Price'. I repeated it to myself, several times, and then I rushed out the front door. The cold air hit my cheeks like water on embers.



Through the peephole at apartment number 11, Father Matthew watched the young intern flee. Previously, he had only seen William in pictures taken by a local priest to document the coven and the people connected to it. Immediately, Father Matthew had recognized William's innocence. How could he have missed the brush-strokes of embarrassment upon William's cheeks and the pain in his eyes?

Humming a simple hymn, Matthew crossed his meagerly-furnished apartment and hung his coat in the closet. He made tea and plain toast for dinner, gave a short prayer of thanks for the meal, then ate in silence. When finished, he pushed aside his plate and settled in to study. First, he picked up the file on the intern, William Jason Leake. It included the young man's birth certificate, baptism certificate, I.Q. test scores, grade school report, high school transcript, university transcript, credit report, residential history, medical records, gun license, psychological evaluation, and finally, the

report on William's habits and internship. Matthew had already memorized nearly everything in it, but he knew the value of thoroughness. Browsing through the pages, Matthew wished he could do more to help William, but he had more to worry about than a young man who was going to walk away with only a broken heart.

The priest knew William was in no danger. The historical profile indicated that Tiffani Cerastes had probably chosen William as her cover. She lived with him to preserve an illusion of normalcy. His mundanity helped her disassociate herself from her crimes. Matthew figured Tiffani would dump William shortly before the ritual and move in with the Cock to raise the newborn cockatrice.

Matthew looked over at his rooster. It stirred, scratching its feet in the sandy floor of its cage. Matthew tossed it a piece of left-over crust from his toast and watched as the animal eyed the offering. The rooster didn't wait long before snatching up the bread. It ate with a ruffle of red-orange feathers. Matthew turned back to the table. He closed William's file and set it aside. Then, he picked up his Bible and opened it to "Psalms."

The light coming in the window turned from golden twilight to cold streetlight, and Matthew read aloud the words that most comforted him, "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side...." So many had died at Matthew's side. So many had given their lives in the Holy War that all mortal wars emulated. He knew that someday he too would die in the Lord's service.

"...And ten thousand at thy right hand." Matthew had killed in the name of the Lord. He had lost count, long ago, of the minions he had sent to Hell. Sometimes innocents got in the way, and that may have been a shame, but it was also a necessary price to pay.

"...But it shall not come nigh thee."

Taking a deep breath, Matthew closed the Good Book and said a short, silent prayer, finishing aloud with, "Lord, give me strength and wisdom to overcome Basilisk and his cockatrice. Amen."



In the candlelit room, the orgiastic pile of bodies writhed. The cockatrice had one in its mouth and one in its sex. It moaned its pleasure and lifted its eyes to gaze up the body of its future husband. When in its true form, as it was then, the change in its eyes gave everything a fire-shimmer, as if it were looking through an amber lens. It preferred this demon's form to the soft, weak femininity it hid in most of the time, but it had too many enemies to show its unvarnished visage to

the mortal world.

The cockatrice sucked and licked as its lover ejaculated into its throat. So succulent, he was. His musky-sweet seed tantalized the cockatrice's bloodlust. The taste thrilled the monster, but it wasn't beast enough to kill this one. No, this one had a purpose. The cockatrice growled as its own orgasm rippled through its body.



Back at home, I tossed my coat aside and paced, waiting. I barely noticed the shadows shifting across my apartment as night's darkness menaced the day away. All I could see was that genital-faced rooster and my Tiffani. In my mind, it pecked at her, and she laughed. She laughed again and again. Eventually, she was laughing at me, and then he joined her, crowing at the gullible boyfriend. I cursed them both, and I cursed my own stupidity. I was ready for her when she finally came in the door. By then, I had settled onto the couch like a crucified saint, ankles crossed and arms spread along its back. That's how I felt, me and my martyrdom.

I hadn't bothered to turn on any lights and I took some satisfaction in her startlement when I spoke to her out of the darkness, "Get enough?"

"Jesus, William. You scared me." She turned on the lights and must have seen the accusation in my face, or perhaps in my eyes. She did a double-take, then began to explain without having to be asked, "Debora and I went shopping."

"Where's your bags?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Your bags. You went shopping, but you didn't buy anything?" I liked the taste of self-righteousness.

"Oh. I must have left them at Debora's place. We stopped there afterward for coffee."

"Does Debora live in a three-story brownstone?"

Tiffani muttered something unintelligible and walked into the bedroom. I arose and followed. She had thrown her coat on the bed and was sitting beside it, removing a boot. I leaned against the doorjamb.

"Excuse me?" I said, cool as a snake, "I didn't hear what you said."

"I said yes, she does." Tiffani paused, then asked, "How do you know that?"

I ignored her question. I had to ask, despite or maybe because of the cliché, "Was he good?"

"What? Who?"

"The guy in number 12. The Cock." My mouth opened obscenely around the last word.

"You followed me?"

I responded with a crooked, drunken grin, even though I hadn't had a drop of alcohol. It fit.

"How dare you follow me!"

I used my doctor voice, the one she hated, logical and cold. "How dare you screw around on me."

"I'm not."

"No? Then who's P.J.? Who's the Cock?" I was beginning to like the vindictive, violent feeling that word had in my mouth.

"P.J.?"

"Yeah. P.J. Price. You know. The one you're screwing?"

"P.J.? Oh. You mean Paul. He's just a friend. I'm not sleeping with him!"

I should have expected it. How could I argue with that? I hadn't *seen* her in bed with the guy. I'd only seen her go inside and heard her laugh. She had blown my case right out of the water. She knew it too. She came over to reinforce her words with kisses and caresses. It was my word against hers, and all I had was jealousy and conjecture in my corner.

My confidence was abandoning me, but I made one last feeble attempt to rally my side, "Then why did you lie and tell me you went shopping with Debora?"

"Because," she pouted, "you're so jealous. I didn't think you'd understand if I said I'd spent the afternoon hanging out with a male friend. I'm sorry, honey."

A man knows when a woman has him by the balls.



The morning sun cast a flaccid light down upon Father Matthew. He stood on the street across from William and Tiffani's apartment building, rocking on his heels. He buried his hands in his pockets and tried to ignore the cold's saturation into his bones. He watched. Heaven only knew what he expected to see or what great influence he hoped to have by being there, but some divine hint of instinct had sent him.

Eventually, the young intern emerged from the building. Matthew noted William looked tired and tense. Innocent, the priest thought. Innocent enough that he sensed the truth about his lover only on a subconscious level.

Their eyes met. Matthew stood firm, knowing that William had seen him. He gave the young man his most intense stare. 'Listen to your gut, boy,' the look sent. 'Run. Run away as fast and as far as you can. Go. Go. Go.' A city bus drove slowly past. Matthew watched as William ran to catch it.



The hospital buzzed, coughed, gurgled, cried, and blip-blip-blipped. I hated it. I intended to go into private practice where I could diagnose my patients, then refer them to a hospital or specialist for treatment. I liked solving puzzles, but hated doing the hands-on dirty-work. I had learned two important lessons as an intern: one, that the textbooks did a thoroughly cosmetic cover-up on the truth of human anatomy—bodies were actually disgusting, filthy things that oozed, stank, and housed parasites—and two, that people were unbelievably stupid. They all thought they were invulnerable, that they could stick anything they wanted in any orifice, play with dynamite, or leap tall buildings in a single bound, and walk away in tact. They were usually wrong.

My dinner break came at seven p.m., and I took it promptly. Getting through the line at the cafeteria chewed up fifteen minutes; eating took another fifteen. To pass the rest of the time, I found a quiet phone cubicle and called home. It rang through, and I muttered to Tiffani to pick up. She didn't. I hung up and redialed only to reach more emptiness. The hollow rings sounded like sonar pings searching for something solid off which to bounce, but they found only a growing void. I began to feel sick.



Father Matthew saw her through his peephole. Tiffani Cerastes knocked on the door across the hall. Her delicate fingers brushed over the beak of the painted rooster. Matthew admired her beauty, as any man would. He had taken a vow of celibacy and dedicated his life to a higher purpose, but that didn't mean he couldn't feel the stirring in his loins at the sight of an attractive woman, especially a cockatrice. He briefly touched himself through his pants, drawing strength from the physical energy that fired at the sensation.

The door opened at number 12. Paul Jefferson Price stood there dressed only in a pair of blue jeans. His upper torso rippled with muscles--smooth, full and strong. The young man was handsome, of course. Basilisk would have it no other way. Matthew waited until Tiffany had entered, and the door had shut behind her, then he went back to the kitchen table.

The clock struck eight, with soft, reminder chimes. Matthew picked up his notebook, opened it to a new page and began to write in his economical, masculine script:

8 p.m. Tiffani Cerastes arrives at no. 12 and enters. Price inside. I no longer have any doubt that Cerastes is the Mother for the unholy birthing. She now wears Basilisk's mark upon her left hand. I saw it only moments ago while she waited for the Cock to let her inside the coven room. She will guide the ritual and tend to the Cock. Once the egg has hatched, assuming I fail in my attempt

to stop the entire process, she will mother the infant cockatrice to maturity.

The ward remains on the door, making it impossible to enter, even when the apartment is empty. They're careful. So much is at stake. Tonight, Basilisk will manifest, and once he is in this world I can banish him back to Hell. I pray for the innocent and ask that the Lord....

A knock on the door drew Matthew from his journal. He closed it, stood and crossed the room. Peering through the peephole, he spied a little devil with baby horns, rosy cheeks, and a pointed tail that bounced on its own. He unlocked and opened the door.

"Trick or treat!" the children cried in relative unison, holding up their bags.

Matthew smiled and reached for his plastic pumpkin of candy.



I called the apartment every fifteen minutes after that first time. My agitation grew with each unanswered ring. Finally, I made the hospital let me go home. My stomach had knotted up a half an hour earlier. I knew what I had to do.

The 8:30 bus arrived five minutes late. I pushed through the waiting commuters to get to it, my pardons growing more urgent and less polite as the bus's doors slowly closed without me.

"Wait!" I called, stepping up and pounding on the glass. The driver reopened the doors. I climbed in, paid my fare, found a seat near the middle and stared out the bus window. My hands clenched into fists over and over on my thighs, until I felt eyes upon me. I looked over to see a woman watching me. I caught her gaze, and she turned away. Irritated, I shifted my posture toward the window and stuffed my hands in my pockets. My fingers brushed the flyer. I thought of the strange man who had given it to me, and remembered seeing him outside my apartment that morning. I pulled it out and looked at it.

"Judas walks among us," it said, superimposed over a dull reproduction of 'The Last Supper,' and I almost threw it away right then and there. I had little interest in sanctimonious propaganda. I opened it, however, curious about the man himself.

Even as upset as I was, the interior text made me laugh, albeit wryly. It talked about demons and their servants. In particular, it mentioned Basilisk, the Snake King, who impregnated roosters that then laid eggs out their bowels. From these eggs, the cockatrice hatched. According to the flyer, the cockatrice were monsters that served Basilisk and could change form to become beautiful women. They "seduced innocent men into sin." The brochure went on to explain how they killed for fun, ate human flesh and had uncanny powers, including the ability to mesmerize their victims. I tossed the flyer on the floor of the bus.

When I got home, the apartment was dark.

“Tiff?” I called, on the one small hope that she had fallen asleep. No answer. No *fucking* answer. She wasn’t there. I knew what *was* there though: my gun.



Father Matthew’s evening dragged. He busied himself with scripture and prayer. He double-blessed his primary weapon: the rooster whose crow could return Basilisk to Hell. He also prepared his other weapon. The revolver felt good in his hand as he cleaned and then reloaded it.

Matthew had finished his last journal entry a few minutes earlier at 9 p.m. In it, he had documented the arrival of the other coven members, four of them, two men and two women. Finally, he had gathered up all his files and placed them, with the journal, in the Little Black Box. The clergy would look for that if anything happened to him. He locked the box and duct-taped it to the inner frame of the couch. As he replaced the piece of furniture, his scalp crawled and itched. He scratched it, turning slowly to stare at the locked door. The unholy rituals had begun across the hall. The rooster felt it too. It fretted, ruffling its feathers uneasily.

The priest sat at the table and prayed over his rosary, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death....” A sharp pain lit up his calf. Matthew cringed and drew his leg up protectively. He raised his pant-leg and examined the source of the pain. Two puncture wounds sat side-by-side on his calf, already swelling and bleeding. Looking down to the floor, Matthew spotted his attacker.

The snake wasn’t large, only about two feet long and meaty. It looked like braided leather, its markings a series of diamonds all fit neatly together. The beast lifted its ovoid head and swayed. It delivered its second strike to the priest’s other ankle, sinking fangs deep into Matthew’s flesh.

Matthew threw himself to the floor, toppling the chair toward the snake in an attempt to escape another bite.

The viper struck again.

Matthew grabbed the chair with both hands. He beat the creature. Chair-legs splintered and the sound of cracking wood filled the apartment. With desperate satisfaction, he saw portions of the snake’s body split and smear, flatten and bleed. He hit it again and again. His arms and back ached with the effort, but Matthew didn’t stop until the snake ceased moving. The animal died as it had arrived: silently.

Matthew dragged himself toward the counter. He reached up to pull himself to his feet and his gaze landed on the rooster. It lay wrong, one foot twitching. Matthew’s legs denied him and he slumped back to the floor. He easily imagined, if not actually felt, the venom coursing through his blood-stream.

“Help!” he shouted, trying to reach anyone. “Help!” He called again and again. Eventually, he whimpered his pleas, “Oh... Lord... oh please, God....” A heavy, black shroud enfolded Matthew. His eyes froze in place, unblinking, and his throat constricted on the prayer, unheard. He had failed.



I climbed the stairs to the third floor of the brownstone. The gun felt heavy in my coat pocket; its solid presence bumped against my thigh with each step. I had lost all feeling and all reason. Draped in a veil of sanguine rage, I stood at the door to number 12. Someone had removed the rooster painting.

Without hesitation, I reached for the doorknob and turned it. I swung the door wide and stepped across the threshold. A giant bed stood in the middle of the room, draped with red and black, sheeted with satin. Candles cast a carnal glow. Two faces looked over at me. His, so handsome, so smug, had a smile. Hers, so beautiful, so familiar, showed surprise. They were naked. He rolled over and sat up. I saw his erection.

“William?” she murmured, moving to the edge of the bed. “What are you...?”

I pulled my gun.

“William!”

I didn’t think. I just pulled the trigger. The explosion rebounded off my nerves and hit the wall. My finger twitched again. The second bullet threw the Cock back onto the pillows. He was bleeding. His blood drained slowly, creating a scarlet river that meandered down his heaving chest to pool in the basin of his stomach. He hissed, deflated and died.

Someone closed the door behind me, and I felt two people, one on either side, take my arms, take my gun, and take my freedom. I didn’t struggle. It was too late for that.

“What do we do now?” The others whispered among themselves. “The Cock is dead. We’re doomed.”

I began to shake.

Tiffani stood. She smiled that smile and tilted her head just so, “William. Will you never cease to surprise me?” She crossed toward me, her breasts swaying with each step. Dribbles of splattered blood, P.J.’s blood, ran down her hip. Her eyes looked strange. The whites slowly darkened to black crystal sparked with amber. Her pupils became discs of obsidian. As she approached, she changed. Like some walking special-effect, she transformed before my eyes into a snake woman with talons and rippling muscles where feminine curves had once made her so shapely. Her skin took on a snake-like texture, and her body swallowed her hair leaving her completely bald. The bones in her face elongated and her mouth widened into a slash with the hint of a cleft lip. When

her tongue flickered out, it had a forked tip. I stared, trying to see through the hallucination to the Tiffani I knew, but she eluded me. Hot urine ran down my legs and soaked into my shoes.

Tiffani announced, "We have a new Cock. Basilisk has sent us a sign." She touched her slim, cool fingers to my cheek. Her gaze mesmerized me. I relaxed.

Time and reality slipped away. They stripped me, the five of them. The two men held me in place while the three women bathed me thoroughly. Tiffani's friend Debora was there, but I had never seen the others. They bent me over an armchair. The enema made me uncomfortable. I cried. I begged.

I shat soup into an iron bucket.

Tiffani soothed me with tender caresses, as she always had. She assured me everything would be all right. She told me that Basilisk had chosen me. She stroked my penis with her frail, soft hand.

They tied my wrists to my ankles and placed me on the bed with my ass in the air. I turned my head to avoid looking at P.J. Price's gaping eyes and mouth. My cheek lay upon soft satin. Tiffani rubbed me with sharp-scented oils, massaging away my tension and fears. This *was* my Tiffani, after all. She wouldn't let anyone hurt me. She loved me. I closed my eyes. Her hands spread the oils over my skin and into my pores. She lubricated my anus with it, inside and out.

At some point, the chanting began. Deep and throaty, the lullaby made me sleepier. It wrapped me with a blanket of security. I even forgot that the underside of my naked body was exposed to the room. I wanted to forget everything.

"Soon, darling," Tiffani hissed into my ear. "It will all be over soon, and then we can go home." She blindfolded me, and I welcomed the darkness. No one could look at Basilisk and survive, she explained.

Their voices rose. I smelled burning hair and sulfur. I tracked their softly padding steps as they danced around the room. I was losing sensation in my hands and feet. I made fists and curled my toes to pass the time. Cool air fanned across my buttocks. The chanting grew louder, ecstatic and more insistent. The air itself crackled with energy, and the hair on the back of my neck stood on end. Someone touched me, and I instinctually tried to look behind myself. The blindfold denied me.

They were hands--large, masculine hands. They rubbed harshly over the fleshy hemispheres of my ass, kneading and spreading them. Something insinuated itself inside me. It was thin, limp and alive like a snake. Panic enveloped me, and my heart thundered. I cried out for Tiffani, for mercy and for God. I squirmed, but those hot hands held me firmly in place. The tentacle wiggled inside me, delving deeper and deeper. It swelled, filling me and spreading me wide. I screamed, I'm sure of it.

I thought my intestines would rupture from the sheer girth of it. It pulsed with a seductive

new rhythm, with an alien heartbeat that tried to derail my own. The pain was excruciating.

Suddenly, the hands viced down on my hips. Basilisk raped me with a hard, heavy beat. He grunted with each thrust, then abruptly, the expanding tentacle erupted. It released its load of molten semen into my body. I heard Basilisk's unearthly groan as the demon came inside me, and I felt hopeful relief thread through my soul. Soon, the pain would end. The tentacle slithered out of me and went away. Basilisk loosened his hold on my hips, and I swear I felt him caress me, tenderly, just like my Tiffani had done. My screams subsided into sobs. I think I lost consciousness.

When I awoke, my anus hurt. Sticky with drying semen and blood, it burned. I couldn't move. My testicles descended from their clutch of fear and horror, to hang between the A-frame of my thighs. My knees ached. The sheet was hot beneath my cheek, wet with my own spit and rank with the perfume of anointing oils. The skin of my face tightened with dried brine and my throat felt as if I'd swallowed a handful of thistles.

They gathered around me; their master had retreated to his unholy realm. I felt their kisses, their caresses and their licking tongues as they cleaned me and adored me. They plugged me up, to keep the precious seed from escaping. Tiffani untied me, pulled away the blindfold and smiled into my eyes. She loved me.

The next couple days passed in a blur. The others took P.J. away and put new sheets on the bed. Tiffani stayed with me. We slept, ate and held each other, always naked. Tiffani insisted on doing everything for me. She fed me, spooning an herbal pudding into my mouth, and held the cup as I drank honeyed tea. She washed me and combed my hair. I began to feel like a king.

The egg formed slowly, soft and tender at first. The pressure coalesced into one place, like beads of mercury all rolling together to form one big, shimmery pool. Tiffani explained it all to me. I was going to be a father.

On the morning of the third day, the egg was a solid presence in my body. The thought of excreting it frightened me, but Tiffani assured me that everything would be fine. She was right. The egg came that evening. I squatted upon the bed, tears streaming down my cheeks, my groans and screams echoing in my head. It stretched me. It tore me. I thought for sure I would die, but finally, it was out. The egg was large, the size of a man's fist, enough to hold a supernaturally tiny infant. The shell gleamed with black and blue opalescence. The others cleaned it off while I lay gasping on the bed.

Later, Tiffani and I curled around it, keeping it warm between our bodies. I petted its dappled surface with awe-struck fingers. My baby grew inside it. For two weeks, Tiffani and I took turns leaving the bed to stretch, wash and use the bathroom. Most of the time, we cuddled, stroked each other, and made love with our baby lying beside us. The bed became our love nest.

On November 13 at 7:53 a.m., the egg cracked. Tiffani and I cried together as our child

stretched a perfect, little arm out of her shell. We helped her emerge and cleaned away the thick, clear fluid in which she had incubated. She was beautiful and healthy. I loved her immediately. We had already chosen her name, Coquette. In French, Coquette meant ‘flirtatious.’ Lying there with my new family, I held Coquette’s hand carefully in mine and kissed the delicate, baby fingers with their tiny talons and cool skin. She looked up at me, beguilingly, with her mother’s black-amber eyes. I vowed to give her the world.

THE END

Thank You from Angel Leigh McCoy

I'm so grateful you took the time to read "Coquette." This story is near and dear to my heart and has been my most successful one to date.

It would mean A LOT to me if you took a moment to leave a review at your favorite online shop, such as Amazon USA, Amazon UK, Kobo, or even at Goodreads. The story will be published in those places by May 15, 2019.

I'd also love to hear from you directly, so feel free to contact me any time with your thoughts on this story, and if you don't mind, I'll keep in touch as I make new stories available. At AngelMcCoy.com, you can contact me via email or on my social networks, and read my blog.

While you're there, be sure to sign up for my newsletter—so I can notify you of new releases (of which there will be many in the coming months).

In appreciation, I'm giving you a taste of the next story I plan to release. It's classic-style Horror about a little girl caught in the worst storm of her life and fighting to stay hidden from the lightning. I'm proud to say that Ellen Datlow gave it an Honorable Mention in one of her "Year's Best Horror" anthologies.

Wishing you happiness and health!

Angel Leigh McCoy

<https://www.angelmccoy.com/>

Sneak Preview

Crack o'Doom

by Angel Leigh McCoy

The sky grew ominous and cast a gloom on the farm. Jeanie's mom had told her not to leave the yard. "There's a storm comin', kiddo. Stick close." The smells of imminent rain and eager pine mingled. The leaves on the oak trees turned up, thirsty and ready.

"Storm comin'," seven-year-old Jeanie told the dogs through the tall fence. She entered their pen, careful to close the gate behind her. Daddy's labradors, Sissy and Sassy, were excited. Their tails wagged their thick bodies, and their chocolate snouts snuffled her all over.

The dogs had run down any grass that might have once grown there. They'd dug around, looking for moles and buried bones. Mangy-furred tennis balls lay strewn amidst chew-toys missing appendages and ears, and there was an old red kickball to one side, half-deflated.

Jeanie set her doll, Dolly, to one side and got down on her hands and knees at the entrance to the doghouse. She pulled out the two woolen blankets, bringing a flow of dirt and dog-hair with them. She stood and shook out the first one. It tossed up a cloud of fur and dust, and the wind blew it at her. She turned her face away—eyes, nose and mouth scrunched together.

She folded the blankets in uneven squares and put them back inside the doghouse, pressing their edges into the corners and smoothing them as flat as they'd go.

The first big blast sounded. *Boom!*

Jeanie froze in place, and her heartbeat accelerated. "Crack o'doom," she said. Jeanie's Daddy had taught her to say that whenever she heard thunder. He had said it would keep her safe.

On her hands and knees, inside the doghouse, she crawled to the entrance and peered out. The dogs had stopped playing and were watching the main house. Jeanie looked, too, at the big, white farmhouse where she lived with her parents.

Sissy let out a bark, and then a long broken yowl—the sound Mama called singing.

Boom!

“Crack o’doom.”

The thunder was in the house.

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want you to miss the opportunity!

About the Author

Angel Leigh McCoy writes horror, suspense, and dark fantasy in various lengths. Much of her work has undertones of erotica—as do so many things in life. She gave up a longtime video game career in 2017 to finally turn her full attention to publishing her own writing.

She has stories in publications such as *Strange Aeons*, *Necrotic Tissue*, and *Pseudopod*. Her story “Crack O’Doom” earned her a mention in Ellen Datlow’s *Best Horror of the Year*, volume 4, 2012. She wears many other hats as well, including editor and audiobook narrator.



She is the creative force behind the [Dire Multiverse](https://diremultiverse.com) (<https://diremultiverse.com>) world, including the “[Dire Multiverse](https://diremultiverse.com/the-podcast/)” audio drama (<https://diremultiverse.com/the-podcast/>), the [Danika Dire](https://gamesomniverse.com) video game (<https://gamesomniverse.com>) (in production), and works of fiction to come. You might know her from her ten years as a narrative designer for the online fantasy game *Guild Wars 2* or through her work on many original World of Darkness roleplaying game supplements.

You can keep an eye on her whirlwind at [AngelMcCoy.com](https://angelmccoy.com) and @angelmccoy on Twitter and Facebook.

Also by this Author

As Short Fiction Writer

- "Creating Belle (<https://www.angelmccoy.com/blog/creating-belle/>)," short story—A talented artist in Paris attempts to ease his loneliness by creating the perfect woman.
- "Cookies for Gio (<https://www.angelmccoy.com/blog/cookies-for-gio/>)," short story—When martial law turns on its own citizens, a mother and her disabled son find ways to resist.
- "The Christ of St. Jozef Church," (https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07JK6YSYX/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=angelassociat-20&camp=1789&creative=9325&linkCode=as2&creativeASIN=B07JK6YSYX&linkId=7bfd48d49f5414f5ca7002419a7c6dd9) 2018, *Dark Rainbow: Anthology of Queer Erotic Horror*; Riverdale Avenue Books
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As Anthology Editor

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