

A Brian Denman thriller

ÎNVIEREA



BRUCE T. JONES

Author of *The Lost Reflection*



This book is dedicated to my family and friends.
If you have ever shared a laugh or a smile, tears or anger,
or even a hangover, you have influenced me
more than you know.

To my publisher John and editor Joe, thank you for
your patience, wisdom and faith.

The roads we travel and tales we shared, all go into the creative
process that unwinds in the pages that follow, and will follow
for years to come.

I am grateful for the time spent and The Lord for bringing each
one of you in my life

For the memories and those yet to be,
Thank you.

ÎNVIEREA

The Legend of New Orleans Continues

BRUCE T. JONES



Journal of the Ursuline Guardians
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Final entry

Învieerea, in native Romanian tongue, is *The Resurrection*. It is the raising of Lazarus, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, and at the Final Judgment, the multitude of our beloved dead. But it can pertain to an unholy curse, an enslaving misery that can only beget darkness ... or does it? I have lived a lifetime, serving the affirmations of my ancestors, bearing true witness to the miracles of Învieerea, both the good and the evil. It is from this duty, I take my leave, the obligations of my ancestors now fulfilled.

Daniel Constantine
Order of the Dragon
The Old Ursuline Convent
New Orleans, Louisiana



CHAPTER ONE

CAST INTO THE bowels of Hell—Dante’s words so understated my torment. For three days I willed myself to die, but God would not answer, nor did Satan. With each hour I grew weaker, decimated by a lack of the forbidden nutrition my body yearned. Curled up in darkness on the bathroom floor of this vacant room, I was consumed with rage, self-pity, and thoughts of self-destruction. All of my grand plans for a life renewed with Samantha would never come to pass. My fate was sealed.

There had been many opportunities for the Reaper to claim me. Cheating death, this retribution was cruel beyond compare. I deserved this fate, but Samantha did not. Why must she suffer love’s callus heartbreak again? Not knowing what evil I was capable of, I could not trust my ability to control this growing, unrelenting appetite. For her safety, I could never see her again.

Renaldo had given me the key to this room two days ago. In the process of being refurbished, the workers were not scheduled to return for another week. Laying in the dust and scraps of construction debris, feebly, I battled to repulse blood lust. Into the darkness of night I would venture for quarry, but first I needed to seek out Daniel. After nearly fifty years of attending to the vampires of the convent, surely he could help supply the sustenance I required.

Secondly, I would track down those responsible for my hideous transformation and finish my work. Then, when all was done, I

would decide how to end my own miserable existence.

My senses of smell, hearing, and vision were intoxicatingly keen. I pushed my key card into the lock of my original room, returning to the scene of now bitter memories.

Before the door opened, I sensed I was not alone.

“Good evening, Mitch.”

“How’d you know I was here?” Lacking the stealth he desired, his voice was tempered with disappointment. “Renaldo tip you off?”

I should have been happier to see Mitch. After all, it’s rare having a seasoned cop on your side while committing murder. True, arresting me at the Chamber proved to be a rocky start, but once convinced of the lethal blood-sucking tendencies of our adversaries, his assistance with the NOPD and Sam proved invaluable. “I have not seen Renaldo in two days,” I replied wearily.

“Where in the hell did you disappear to? We’ve seen no signs of the others. Did you kill them without me?”

“No, I have not seen them, and I have been just down the hall the entire time. The million dollar question you’re about to ask is *why*.” I walked to the dresser and tossed the contents of my pockets on it. “How long have you been waiting?”

“About six hours. I was determined to find you. Your boy in the lobby, I don’t think I could have beat the information out of him,” Mitch smiled. “Fortunately, I know a certain lady that was more than eager to assist in locating you.”

“Please don’t tell me she is back in New Orleans.”

“No, she’s still safe in New York. What the hell’s wrong? You look like shit.”

I pushed past Mitch and stared through the window. I knew I had to return to the world outside. “Something has gone wrong, Mitch. Horribly wrong.” I glanced to him, as he searched my expression for a clue. “I do not know how ... but I am one of them now. I am a vampire.” The words rolled off my lips all too easily, lacking any apparent anguish.

“You’re kidding ... right?” Mitch nervously smiled.

“Look at me. Does this look like I am kidding?” I pointed to my face, directing him to study the image surely altered by the newborn evil within.

Mitch studied my appearance, then tensed as he saw ...

something. "How? *When?*"

"I blacked out after I killed Monique. It must have happened then. But as far as I can tell, she never drank my blood, and I do not recall drinking hers. I don't know how I became ..." The repeated confession proved to be too painful to vocalize.

"Are you sure?"

I walked back to the dresser. "Come here." I waved him towards me.

Mitch looked uneasy. Having seen the viciousness *we* were capable of, I did not blame him.

"It's okay, Mitch, if I wanted to kill you, you would already be dead." As we gazed into the mirror I held onto a fading hope; two familiar faces would be looking back.

"Holy shit," Mitch exclaimed as he waved his hand in front, and then behind me, observing the anomaly with fascination. He turned and poked me in the arm, while watching in the mirror. "Damn Brian, what in the hell are we supposed to do now?"

"I need to ... feed ... then I need answers, then retribution. Then you will have to finish me."

"*Finish you?*"

"Yes, you know what I am saying. I cannot be left like this." I knew Mitch was going to have a problem with the concept, but at this point, he was the first person I thought capable of actually completing the task.

"You'll forgive me if I seem less than enthusiastic, at the moment. You don't seem so evil to me, yet."

"Yes, I know. But keep the *yet* in mind."

"I'll think about it, if you promise to do me a huge favor," Mitch said as he stepped back and studied my familiar attributes. "Let me know if you start feeling hungry," he smiled uneasily.

"Mitch, I am incredibly hungry."

"What can I get you?"

"How about some O negative?" I joked, trying to lighten the mood.

"Forgive me if I refuse to acknowledge that request, in fact, I'm going to pretend like I never heard it," Mitch said, shaking his head.

"You do that Mitch." I stepped away from the mirror scoffing, "I can only assume I need to clean up a little. Mirrors are pretty damn

useless now.”

“You have looked better, my friend, or should that be ‘my fiend?’”

I hissed at Mitch, revealing my canines. “You are killing me, Mitch.” I opened the drawer and pulled out some jeans. “Oh never mind, I forgot. I am already dead.”

We both grinned and tensions eased. “Seeing as how you are refusing to pick me up some dinner, I could use your help with something else.”

“Name it.”

“Find Isabelle. Have her bring what I need to their secret playhouse. Make sure she understands it is not an option. Maybe she can shed some knowledge as to how this happened to me as well.”

“I don’t think she will voluntarily acknowledge the existence of said nutrition or the location of their secret crib. We’ve raided the Chamber over the years, and have never found one single drop. Doing so would confirm our suspicions, and she knows that would eventually lead to us close down their clubhouse.”

“Try your best, Mitch, but don’t tell her what it’s all about. With or without the blood, I need her there.” I picked up my cell phone and scrolled through the missed calls.

“You might want to call that pretty lady and those friends of yours. They’re really worried.” Mitch had his hand on the doorknob to leave. “Brian, get yourself cleaned up, you look, and worse yet, smell like one of the homeless right now. And that pains me more than knowing what happened to you.”

I flashed a crooked smile. “Hey Mitch, if the dispatcher calls about a Red Cross break-in, how about taking care of it buddy. I’m ready to bite the first ...”

“Don’t even think about it. We’ll hook up after I have corralled Isabelle. I’ll get you what you need. Last thing I need is you committing any more crimes. That will only make more work for me.”

Leaving the door slightly ajar, Mitch left me in a somewhat better mindset than I had arrived in.

I gazed at my phone. Samantha, Phillip, and Jimmy had all called, multiple times. Jimmy would be first, as he and Chuck would be instrumental in completing clean-up duty. As for Samantha and Phillip, I was ill prepared to speak with either, if I chose to speak with them at all. What could I possibly say but goodbye?



CHAPTER TWO

I CALLED JIMMY while en route to the Old Ursuline Convent to find Daniel.

The call could have gone better. He and Chuck were pissed off over my disappearance. Jimmy sounded relieved, but he was not about to concede it. I did not elaborate, other than I would meet them at *Crawdads* at twenty-three hundred.

Having discovered it painful to tread before the sacred symbols of the Ursuline Convent, I was forced to leave a phone message for Daniel. Would he receive it, or respond to my request? I didn't know. But I knew I would have to adapt to my newfound limitations, and I needed help.

Passing through the French Quarter, scents I once found appealing no longer aroused my desires. The variety of rhythms, which previously blended, were now isolated, down to a single stroke of a guitar string. I could pinpoint the origins of conversations deep inside crowded bars. The night had a new brilliance, the darkness exploding in hues previously undetectable. These phenomena occurred in microseconds, previously impossible to fathom, much less comprehend.

As I traversed Bourbon Street, one element was painfully absent; the presence of another of my kind. They were gone. Quite possibly, Chuck and Jimmy had completed our mission. A more somber

thought: The remaining vampires had fled from New Orleans. Either way, I could send Chuck and Jimmy packing. With Samantha safely in New York, there was nothing more to lose. Gone was my anxiety; no loved ones or innocents to suffer my foolishness and fate. Approaching the safe house, I spotted Daniel standing a block away. Once he recognized me, he approached.

“Daniel, I am glad to see you got the message. It is good to see you again.”

“Likewise,” he said, as he extended his hand. “I have missed you over the past few days.”

Extending mine out to greet him, he withdrew his hand and stepped back. “Apparently all is not well with you.” His hand retreated into his trademark Armani sport coat.

“Please don’t. I mean you no harm.” Obviously he could sense the curse and was preparing to defend himself. “All is not well, and for that, I am prepared to die. But first, I need answers.”

“Then you are as I suspect, one of the undead?”

“Yes.”

“How did this happen?”

“I don’t know. Three nights ago, before I killed Monique, she drugged me with something. It burned inside with excruciating pain. I was so disoriented, but never passed out. She never drank my blood—unless she drank it through some kind of telepathic osmosis. I have no bite marks, anywhere. Believe me, I checked.”

“How did you kill her?” Daniel stepped cautiously forward.

“She took me to an abandoned house. We had sex,” I explained, images flashing like a broken movie reel.

Daniel cut his eyes in a glare of disapproval.

“I was drugged. I would never have done it otherwise. I was completely under her powers. But somehow, when she tried to bite me, I overpowered her and killed her with my bare hands and maybe, my teeth ... I think.”

“Did you drink her blood?”

“Drink no, swallow ... maybe. When I defended myself, I think I may have bitten her neck, attempting to sever an artery.” Justifying my actions, I foolishly hoped he would tell me it was okay, just a temporary thing. Something a transfusion would fix.

“Vampires use their own blood for two purposes. The first is

mind control. She must have had you ingest her blood at some point. When did you first begin to feel ill?"

"In the bar, I let her have some of my drink. She must have spiked it then, shortly after the burning set in."

"I am unaware of any painful effects. Usually, the victim becomes acutely susceptible to the vampire's will for several days. In larger doses, the effects can last for weeks or months and sometimes, bring on complete madness." Daniel paused, allowing me to absorb his wisdom. "The other purpose is to turn its victim into the undead. But to succeed in the process, the victim's blood must be drained to the point of death. I am thinking you probably would have remembered such an event. Unlike simple ingestion, as I told you before, this process is most painful."

"Is that it?" My disappointment was obvious.

"It is all I know," Daniel said "But a book exists, *The Journal of the Ursuline Guardians*. It's locked away in the Convent. It contains much history surrounding the ten women. We have no need for it anymore. The book is yours; there you may find the answers within its pages."

I turned my head away, distraught with my predicament.

"Do not be downcast. All is as it was meant to be. Remain true to your purpose."

My expression did not convince Daniel I was onboard with his optimism. "Have you located the remaining four?"

"No, I was hoping you would tell me they were dead," he replied. Daniel added more rain on my parade. "If they are, I am unaware of it."

"Great! They are gone, and I am ... I am a fucking vampire. And you want me to believe this was God's grand design for my life?"

"You walked the steps that led you down this path. At any time, if this was not your destiny, God would have intervened. The fact we are here is all part of a scheme too divine for either of us to comprehend. Monique's death could not have been accomplished by just any ordinary man. You must look past your own perception of circumstances, and forge ahead with the task that is of your own making. In that journey you will answer the call of your purpose, my friend."

"Play the hand you are dealt. Always comes down to that, doesn't

it?"

Daniel nodded, confident I would follow through with my mission.

"You will bring the book to me?"

"I will leave it with Renaldo, at the front desk," he said.

"Is there anyone in this town you do not know?"

"I do not know Samantha, yet," he confessed. Daniel turned to leave.

"Daniel?"

"Yes," he replied, turning back.

"I don't suppose you might know where an average guy with a drinking problem might find a little type A?"

"As a matter of fact, I had not thought about disposing of the Convent's supply, just yet. Do you know of someone that might be in need?"

"Possibly." I pulled the office key out of my pocket. "There is a fridge inside." Daniel snared the key with cobra-like reflexes. "Just leave the key inside, I have a spare."

Daniel hesitated as he began to leave. "Brian, I know God's purpose, although shrouded in mystery, will ultimately reveal goodness in the end, when all has come to pass."

With his parting words of wisdom, Daniel turned and walked silently away. Dumbfounded, I stood and watched his departure. I just could not wrap my arms around this whole *destiny* concept. Certainly Samantha did nothing to deserve any part of this. Why did my dark and twisted fate have to be so tangled with her seemingly innocent life?

I remained in the street, aimlessly staring into distant shadows when my cell phone rang.

"What's up, Mitch?"

"We're at the house," he said.

"Send her inside. Wait for me outside. I'll be there in ten minutes."

"We'll be here," Mitch assured.

I made it across the Quarter faster than expected, surprisingly not even breaking a sweat in the stagnant heat. O'Reilly was waiting outside the house, motionlessly leaning on his car, watching my rapid approach.

"Hey Brian. You sure got here quick."

Mitch was doing his best to make small talk with a vampire.

"I've got a little something for you," Mitch teased. He reached inside and pulled the trunk release. Inside the cluttered trunk lay a white and red Igloo Cooler.

I pulled the bag of blood from the trunk as Mitch produced a knife and straw from his pocket. "Thought you might need this," he said, offering the utensils. "Brian, I gotta know you won't harm her. I can't let you go in there if you plan on killing her."

I poked a hole in the bag and stuck the straw in. "Let's just say I am not in a huge hurry to give you any excuse to stake me, just yet. Cheers." I raised the bag and turned away. I was not particularly ready for this whole blood consumption thing, much less in front of Mitch. As I headed to the opened front door, I pulled the straw to my lips, struggling with the thought of what I had to do. Inevitably, to remain strong enough to defeat the remaining vampires, I would have to drink in the evil I once deplored.

With a deep breath, I drew the cool crimson fluid into my mouth. The sweet nectar quenched the unfamiliar newborn desires. I accelerated my consumption as I entered the house. Now drinking frantically, the blood filled voids beyond a physical hunger. The strength and confidence that shrouded me could only be described as supernatural.

I did not have to look; Isabelle's presence in the upstairs bedroom was revealed in acute sensory perceptions. I glided up the rickety stairs, silently, almost floating until I gazed upon the backside of her silhouette.

"I knew you would return to me," Isabelle announced in a sultry voice.

She turned; her eyes filled with all the desire a man could ever crave to command. Fantasizing the softness of her neck, the rapture of puncturing her flesh, savoring the first drop of her blood, these involuntary thoughts raged like a wildfire. "Are you alright?"

She saw it, the wild gleam, the insatiable hunger. For the first time I saw a fear inside her. How could I concentrate on my purpose? I summoned every ounce of strength. "Isabelle, how can a person become a vampire if they are not bitten?"

She tipped her head to the side, and stepped toward me. "Why do you ask, Brian?"

“Monique, the woman I warned you about, she was truly vampire. I do not know how, but ... she ... changed me.”

“Monique? She and I are one in the same.”

“No, Isabelle, you are not. You are nothing like Monique.”

“I am,” she protested.

“No Isabelle.” Angered by her fantasy-world beliefs, my voice bellowed. “Do you have these?” I flashed my newly altered glistening canines. Grabbing her jaw and forcing her mouth open, I sought my validation. “Can you do this?” Without thought, I raised my hand in the air and without laying a hand on her, Isabelle’s airway constricted. I forced her backward by sheer will. Terror welled in her eyes, attacked by a force she had never experienced. My actions were channeled by some inner force, one that suddenly overpowered my conscious thoughts.

“I see what you are, Isabelle. And you are not like Monique, or me.” I reached out, tenderly clutching her jaw, and turned her face to the mirror. I placed my face beside hers. “Tell me, Isabelle, what do you see?”

Speechless, she stared in the mirror. Witnessing the evaporation of her fairytale existence, her mouth agape, she stared at her solitary reflection. Perhaps, for the first time in her life, the truth of what she was, or was not, was an inescapable reality.

With her satin-like flesh against mine, the scent of her body aroused my appetite once more. I allowed my face to caress hers.

She melted into the sensation as a tear trickled down her cheek.

“Tell me ... why I have been married twice and the men I love grow old and die. Tell me why everyone I know grows old and dies. *Everyone except me.* I have seen sailing ships and horse-drawn carriages. I have seen the light bulb invented and a man walk on the moon. I have lived through plagues and famines.”

Her tears grew in intensity. She turned to my face, her lips quivered. “Tell me why I thirst for blood.” Isabelle’s lips met mine. “Make me like you,” she pleaded softly as she brought her hands to my face.

“I cannot,” I insisted.

“Then end my life. I do not want to live this way anymore.”

“Isabelle, I cannot end your life, and I will not make you like me.”

My connection to Isabelle intensified. Its origins held some invisible clue. She honestly believed she was over a hundred years old.

I was, in fact, over sixty. Yet we both appeared no more than thirty-five. Was there some piece of a puzzle I had overlooked, something unknown buried deep in my past, and hers?

Her lips pressed against mine again. "Isabelle, I cannot do this," I pleaded.

"Please," she whispered, turning her neck to my mouth. Her veins bulged in anticipation of my weakness.

I pushed her away. "Isabelle, I won't deny I have an incredible desire to consume you, a vexing need to be with you. But I cannot do this. For me to take you, I would lose control of myself. I would lose everything."

"I understand. I feel it too. But I do not wish to contain my desire. I want to explore it to the end of time, to be yours forever," she pledged.

"What we feel, and what we allow to happen are two entirely different issues. Our fates *are* intertwined. I think I have known it all along." I explained, searching for any shred of reason to fight off the overwhelming desire that burned inside of me.

My love for Samantha was forced to end. But that love was entirely different from this blood-lust rage. This was primitive and instinctive, more akin to my desire for Monique. I desperately needed a distraction. Memories of my first night in this room flashed back. "The first night I met you, you drugged me, you brought me here. What was that all about?"

"Initially, that was Cindy's mischief. She decided to drug you. She wanted you for herself. As I danced with you, I began to realize that you were different. There was something about you that I could not grasp. It was while we were dancing I decided to take you for myself."

"Okay. But what the hell were you trying to accomplish by biting my leg?"

"I told you already. I do not know why, but periodically I crave for blood, especially the blood of a lover. You aroused my desire."

"Why not just cut my arm? Why the puncture wounds, down there?" I asked uncomfortably pointing to my crotch.

"The fang, as we call it, is mainly a symbolic device for those of us born without."

"And down there?" I prompted for further explanation. It

occurred to me, this was the only occasion that I received a bite wound.

“That was all of my doing. I knew you would not remember any of the night. I wanted to ensure you knew where I had been,” she said with a lustful gleam.

Ready to walk with me, or die by my hand, her truthfulness was now apparent.

“Isabelle, I do not know what my life holds beyond the next hour, but I will make you this promise: if I survive, I will not leave you to a life of isolation and despair.”

“If you will not take me now, then stay. Be my lover, just for tonight.”

“Isabelle, I love another. I cannot be with you.”

“Is she like you?”

I did not dare divulge the honest answer. I knew the danger it would bring Samantha.

“She is very much like me.”

“Then she is the luckiest woman I know.”

If only that were true.

“I have to go; Mitch will take you back to the Chamber.” With Monique dead, there was no reason for her not to return to the only place she belonged.

Isabelle drew near and hugged me securely. The fragrance of her skin intoxicating, the warmth of her body exhilarating. Placing my hand behind her head, I pulled her close. Holding her tightly, a soulful connection ignited. I pushed back enough to look into her eyes.

“I will come back for you, I promise.” I kissed her forehead softly, left the house and passed out to the street.

Mitch was still standing vigil by the car. “Tell me you didn’t kill her?” he asked sarcastically.

“Not yet,” I joked, as I looked back to see her staring out the transom window.

“Keep an eye on her for me, Mitch.”

“As best as I can,” he replied. “What’s next for you?”

“I think the others left the night after I killed Monique. First thing I would do, contact all of the casket shops and have them check their inventory. If they have any missing, I would check traffic or surveillance cameras near the shops. I would be looking for a rental

truck or anything big enough to transport them.”

“Sounds like a good place to start. I’ll put a few guys on it tonight. We should be able to know something by tomorrow.”

“Thanks,” I said, as I checked my watch.

“You want me to see if I can get you a good deal on one while I’m at it?”

“No thanks, Mitch. For now I will settle for the bathtub and a blanket. I am not quite ready for casket life, just yet.”

“Just let me know,” he offered with a smile.

“Call me if you get any more bodies, or missing blood supplies. I honestly think they are gone, but if anything suspicious should turn up, I need to respond quickly.”

Mitch nodded.

“If you don’t mind, Mitch, I think I might grab a pint to go.”

“Help yourself, I’m trying to cut back.” Smiling broadly, he popped the trunk.

Grabbing a pint and a fresh straw, I turned my back and quickly drained the bag. With every swallow, my strength magnified.

I dropped the empty bag in his trunk and closed the lid. “I appreciate it.”

“Call me if you need a delivery. I’d rather be the delivery boy than fill out morgue reports all night,” Mitch winked. The feisty detective was not about to quit busting my chops.

“Will do,” I said, as I turned my attention in the direction of Crawdad’s.



Învierrea: In Romanian, it is the resurrection—of the dead, of a curse, or of a legend. Brian Denman’s legacy continues with all hope vanquished and all reason to exist only a distant memory. Brian must complete the epic task he began in the Crescent City.

With the world on the brink of an apocalypse of his making, and handicapped by a new affliction, Brian must adhere to a new way of life in an attempt to protect an unsuspecting population from encroaching evil.

From its origins on the sweltering streets of New Orleans, to New York and the secret world of Romania, Denman’s journey leads him to confrontations with his CIA roots, and the legendary origins of his family curse and the inescapable destiny set down centuries before his birth.

Bruce T. Jones’ first vampire thriller, *The Lost Reflection*, was set in New Orleans and featured Brian Denman as the protagonist man on a mission. The series continues now with *Învierrea*, and Denman traveling from New York to Romania in an attempt to unravel the bonds of a generational curse.



Bruce T. Jones is a classic horror-film buff, from which the roots of his writings draw inspiration. Upon his conception of *The Lost Reflection* and now *Învierrea*, he has always reached for historical foundations on which to weave these tales of action and intrigue. Jones was recently a featured writer at Book Expo of America in New York with the Horror Writers Association. Visit BruceTJones.com for details about Bruce, the New Orleans experience, and many novel extras.

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