

Don't Cross
the Devil

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by
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To those that love unconditionally..

"I made this simple prayer to God. Make my enemies foolish."
Voltaire

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Chapter

One

"What's with the bird?" Silka said.

"Early warning. He can see spirits come in and out of the room. He squawks when they do."

"I see. Does he have a name?"

"Snooker," I said.

"Snooker—as in to snooker someone, or the billiards game?"

"Oh, you've played?"

"I've played before."

"My, my, an accomplished billiards player yet. I should have guessed. You grow more interesting by the hour," I said.

"How can you tell that I am good?" Silka asked.

"If someone is a shark, he never lets on from the get go, and if someone is a lousy pool player, he says he is lousy because he doesn't want to be taken for a shark, if by chance he is much better than his

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opponent. If someone is good, but not a shark, he, or she in your case, won't make it sound like she is so very good because one never quite knows the level of abilities with whom she is speaking or playing. I find you interesting. What else do you do?" I said.

"Well, I see no subtlety is lost on you. I don't know. You'll find out, I guess: if there is some reason for you to."

"I have no plans to go anywhere. You may be the one," I said.

"The one what?" Silka said.

"The one that saves me."

"How's that pot roast coming?" she said.

I had met Silka first in a dream and next while getting coffee at what became our favorite bistro. We became acquainted when she lived above me in the shabby apartments I moved into after I was forced to leave my wife. She helped me move, in fact, or rather she would have helped me move. She did help with a few little odds and ends. It was tense seeing my wife again and so soon after what she had done to me. To have a young, pretty gal in her early thirties at my side was a fortunate circumstance for me, and an excellent way to rub salt in my wife's pustule of an open wound upon failing to kill me, but in all, it was most unpleasant to be so burdened with a woman, and I mean my wife, who was destined to finally, after needless years of union, become my ex-wife.

Silka was a thin, gangly woman with dangerous good looks and an intent gaze, which either masked a secretive anger or some underlying fear. I could not tell which really. She was complex and a good lover. She did not go on about things easily, nor was she one to complain much. I learned immediately that she was a good poker player and had a head for numbers. She enjoyed bluffing, but I am difficult to bluff ,

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and am not hoodwinked often by fabrications. Silka did, as a routine matter of course, keep matters tucked tightly in her vest. That was prudent as I saw it.

She was from the Midwest, somewhere in Kansas, a small town named Hiawatha I believe, near the Missouri border, the "Show Me State," an hour and a half or so north of Kansas City. She spoke plainly and without accent, as it is with true Midwesterners, and was the only daughter and had six siblings. Her parents had farmed and raised hogs like their parents before them and on the same plot of land. She described her parents as a simple lot not unintelligent, just unsophisticated, as they had no need of sophistication or putting on airs. Silka was a practical woman in need of some refinement and more formal education herself. She was well read; however, the nights on a farm are lonely without a partner. She had enjoyed only one or two boyfriends in her years and the affairs had not ended well. She seemed afraid of venturing forth too much, or rather more precisely of being left behind.

I found Silka clear of mind and an independent woman, self-assured and understanding except for that irksome knowing look she would shoot me frequently, when it was more likely the case she knew nothing of what I spoke. She did not believe in much I said either, thought it some sort of wild tale, but thankfully knew almost no one here besides me and found my intricacies of personality appealing. For Silka, my reputation did not precede me, which was good luck on my part. I needed for her to believe in me, if, in fact, she was the one. I had no way of being certain she was or when I might discover the necessary information about her.

She had landed near Orlando, Florida. I was from here and well known in my city, owing to my artistry chiefly, popular paintings and sketches of my life and surroundings. That's not the only reason I am well known. I have led a rough, coarse life and have many detractors, foes even, I would call them. There are those among my city, witless, vapid drones, waiting earnestly to spit on my grave. Or perhaps put