

The Ambulance Witch by Ron Riecki

My partner was pagan.

Very pagan.

Her name was Mary, although she pronounced it with a fake Eastern Euro-accent that made it seem to be not at all virginal.

Off work, she wore elven dresses and long hooded cloaks to Books-A-Million.

It was sexy and awful, awfully sexy.

Off work, I'd wear sweats and an old Detroit baseball cap to Bob Evans.

It was un-sexily awful.

At work, I wore my uniform according to textbook regulations.

At work, she'd have a spider web dress underneath her uniform.

She'd put on a thick goddess arm cuff as soon as we'd leave the base station.

Patients would compliment her on it constantly.

She reminded me of Isis, the old 1970s TV show character, not the 2000s news show jihadist group.

Mary'd have gotten fired by now if it not for the fact that she's good at her job.

The call we got sent on was for a Satanist.

We didn't know that until we got to the E.R.

She was a Baker Act.

Her name was Asmodeus, the "Hebrew devil of luxury and sensuality" I'd later come to find out, and when Mary mispronounced it as Amadeus, I braced myself for an *Exorcist* head-spin.

Nothing happened, other than Asmodeus whispered to me that within the night, she will have slept with me. Also, within the first couple minutes of meeting her, she asked if I could give her an AIDS test.

I had to explain that EMTs can't give *any* tests, none at all.

She had an inverted pentagram pendant and a T-shirt with a church on fire across her breasts.

The rule was that Mary'd get in back with the female psych patients; I'd take the male psych patients.

If I'd've known, I would have done things differently.

Within thirty minutes of leaving, Asmodeus said she had to pee.

Mary was smart; before we left, she asked Asmodeus if she had to go.

She said no.

Mary offered Asmodeus a bedpan. She hissed.

I should say this: Baker Acts, in case you're not familiar with the term, means the patient's on suicide watch.

And Baker Acts, for the most part, are quiet and internal.

Often, they don't speak for the entire trip.

And we've taken Baker Acts on six-, seven-, eight-hour trips.

For various reasons, they have to be taken to specific facilities.

Asmodeus was a simple two-hour trek.

Mary was encouraging me to speed and the traffic was light, so I was hoping we'd be there well under two hours.

With thirty minutes gone without too much incident, I figured we'd be safe.

I should also say this: sometimes Baker Acts are very dangerous.

It's rare, but it happens.

I had a guy with a tattoo on his forehead that said *Folish* elbow me in the elbow.

So hard that my hand went temporarily numb.

I asked that guy if he was Polish and he said no, that his forehead tattoo was supposed to read *Foolish*.

"Scheisse happens," he said.

There was another Baker Act that was near comatose so we didn't strap her in and two minutes after leaving the E.R., she sat up, pulled off her seatbelt straps, and kicked open the back ambulance doors.

Luckily, I stopped or she might have gotten killed.

She ran straight for a hospital pond next to the helicopter pad, swam across it, and stood in the middle of the pad waiting for a flight that never arrived.

Anything can happen with Baker Acts.

So Asmodeus was just one of a thousand.

In fact, there have been Saturday nights where we've pulled up to receiving facilities and had a line of ambulances waiting to take people in.

Apparently nothing is more depressing than a Saturday night.

It was Saturday day, late.

We were slowly heading towards night.

You could tell that the sun was starting to get exhausted, that it just wanted to get drunk and go to sleep.

Mary went to take a blood pressure and that's when Asmodeus grabbed it from her and wouldn't give it back.

The problem is that sphygmomanometers are pretty useful as makeshift tourniquets.

They also can be used to strangle.

Mary couldn't just let her have it, but she also couldn't get into a tug-of-war over the thing.

This is when the two started arguing about paganism and Satanism, with Mary telling Asmodeus that Satanism isn't even a real religion and Asmodeus telling Mary that she was ugly and would never find love in this life and her parents would be dead within the year.

Mary came up front and asked me what she should do.

I told her not to turn her back on the patient.

She shifted so that she could see Asmodeus who had kicked around so much that the straps were loose.

I told her to log into the Patient Care Report that the patient was refusing vitals. And I told her to ask what the patient wants, that patients usually act up when they want something specific.

Mary yelled to the patient, "What do you want?"

"For you to die."

Mary looked to me.

I've had Baker Acts who've made my hands shake from nerves, where I've lost my ability to think straight. I told her to ask again, but politely.

She did.

"I want for him to come in back and for your ugly hair to be up front where I can't see it."

I've never done this before, but I pulled the ambulance over, got in back, took the blood pressure cuff from Asmodeus, and Mary got up front and drove.

An hour later we were at the hospital.

Asmodeus was sound asleep.

Snoring.

Mary went inside.

Receiving facilities aren't very good at receiving.

Let me put it this way—the staff there doesn't want a suicidal Satanist for the night, even though that's their job.

They make it hard to get in, hard to get out.

Mary went knocking on different doors around the building, banging on windows, disappearing into the mess of boring rectangles where they store people.

I fell asleep.

Asmodeus was content, having peaceful dreams about Lucifer or horrible nightmares about Heaven, whatever was in that head of hers. I woke up to find a woman looking down at me.

I thought it was Mary. It was Asmodeus.

Her lips looked like they wanted to play a flute. She leaned back, against the shelves where we keep the glucose and lancets.

Six thousand calories right behind her. And fifty needles.

"I just slept with you," she said. Her eyes—I could tell she had been a kid not too long ago, had played on playgrounds, had sat immobile on swings and walked up slides.

I had slept with her, in a way. We'd both been asleep in the back of an ambulance, her on a gurney where probably a hundred patients have died and me on a bench where everyone lives.