

Kat Vagen

DWARF EIGHT



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Excerpt from the unpublished novel



8

Sinister

Sinister lies in bed, his body only half covered by a rumpled sheet soaked through with the night's sweat. He'd picked up the woman beside him right outside the bar, after he'd put the bruiser on the floor. Her hungry look had done it for him — she knew exactly what she wanted, and he was more than ready to give it to her.

The room, steeped in a sharp mix of sex and alcohol, wears the marks of the night before. Dark stains of unknown origin litter the worn carpet, the wallpaper peeling at the corners like rotting skin. Through the grimy windowpane, dawn pushes in, exposing every flaw of the room without mercy.

Beside him the woman lies asleep, sated, her face still marked by the violence of their passion. Her lips, swollen and red. The sex wore her out — she was willing, almost greedy for it, and he enjoyed it. Not out of any need for control, but because it simply turns him on. She was

horny, he was horny, and they took what they wanted without holding back. It wasn't about power, just about the moment.

Sinister sits up, his body a map of scars. A gash over his left eye — a trophy from last night — draws a bloody line down his cheek. He tastes the metallic tang of dried blood on his split lip, and a smile flickers across his face.

In the mirror across the room, he studies his frame. Small, true — but every fiber of his body screams strength. His body, a machine of perfectly tuned muscle. The tattoos are like armor of ink, hiding what's inside him. On his back, a black snake coiling around broken angel wings; on his chest, a circle, pierced, a red dot above it.

His skin is naturally tanned, his eyes icy blue, his aura magnetic. Women want him — and once they get close, they find out fast that not everything about him is small. He doesn't fuck for power — he fucks because he just fucking loves to. God, few things feel as good as thrusting his cock — throbbing with lust — hard and deep into a soaking-wet, tight cunt.

His gaze drifts back to the woman, who stirs in her sleep. Her long blond hair lies tangled across the pillow, her bare back gleaming in the dull light. The worn sheet clings to her full tits. She was willing, he gave her what she wanted, fucked her until she screamed with pleasure. But inside him there's nothing but a numbness no amount of hard fucking can drive out.

Sinister rises, his movements fluid, dangerous. He brushes the tattoos, each sting an echo of his battles, of his break from everything that once was. Seven brothers he left behind — seven fools in an oh-so-perfect fairy-tale land.

The drugs in their drinking water keep them docile and blind to reality. He'd despised them — not just for their weakness, but for their utter ignorance. They were puppets, their brains washed soft by chemical happiness, polishing their own chains. With every sip of water, they drank down the lies — certain they were the happiest people in the world.

He gets dressed, his gaze falling once more on the sleeping woman, then leaves the room. The cold morning air meets him outside, another day in the shadows of

Slaughter Row beginning. Blisswood is far away. Here, at least, he gets to decide when and how he fights.

9

Filter

Dusk settles over Slaughter Row. The biting stench of rot soaks the night, mixing with the acrid reek of stale beer and rancid fast food as Sinister crosses the empty alleys.

Suddenly, a garish splash of color rips through the shabby monotony — a bus, its side dominated by a grotesque image of Rapunzel. Her radiant smile is an obscene insult in this world of filth and despair. The slogan beside her flawless face brags: “Rapunzel’s Secret — For Hair That Makes Dreams Come True!”

Sinister stops, his stomach clenching as bile rises bitter in his throat. A scene from some shitty commercial surfaces in his memory: Rapunzel, tossing back her impossibly long, full hair with a flourish, her voice sugar-sweet as she coos: “With Rapunzel’s Secret, you too can have hair every prince will want to climb!”

The ad cuts to Snow White, biting seductively into a bright red apple. “And for the perfect complexion,” she

trills, “trust Snow White’s Apple Skincare line with bio-peptides. For fairy-tale-flawless skin!”

Snow White. Her skin really was white as snow — or more like the corpses you find in the dark corners of Raze. In her eyes, the defiance she hid behind the painted smile. Her trembling hands, the stink of booze and vomit. A wreck, trapped between chemical bliss and raw horror.

“You can’t save her, only fuck her out of her fantasy world,” he’d thought back then, pulling her to him, a bloody haze. What she gave him wasn’t release, just the illusion of escape.

Sinister grinds his teeth, rage boiling up in him. Those motherfuckers in Blisswood — that goddamn so-called fairy-tale land — secretly pump filth into the residents’ drinking water. Some damn chemical — a kind of oxytocin modification — that keeps them docile. They go soft in the head, don’t even notice they’re being screwed the whole time. “They swallow the stuff and believe in their Happy Ending, wading through the filth like zombies,” he mutters bitterly.

His gaze falls on Rapunzel's radiant smile on the bus. He thinks of her rescuer. The prince was slowly suffocating. His perfect white teeth were a prison of porcelain. A flawless facade, behind which his true nature rotted. He played his part like a trained animal. His forced heterosexuality was one more chain Blisswood used to bind him to his fairy-tale role.

Sinister can smell it — the stench of suppressed feelings the prince carries inside him. It's not weakness that Sinister despises. No — it's the sheer desperation that disgusts him. “No pity for you, pal,” he thinks. “But you never had a choice.” The prince has to live a fairy-tale life while he slowly rots away inside himself.

He shakes his head, trying to drive the memories out. Blisswood. The city of eternal illusion. “They don't just let you go. Not alive. And if you make it out, they catch you and make you disappear. Blisswood never lets you go,” he mutters.

Sinister clenches his fists so hard his knuckles stand out white. It's this hatred of the fairy-tale land that drives him. And the clear mission: destroy this system and

expose its lies. The people he surrounds himself with stand with him in this.

With one last contemptuous look at the bus, Sinister vanishes into a dark alley. Here, in the shadows of Raze, he feels at home. Here he can breathe and fight. Until Blisswood lies in ruins, or he rots in the filth himself.

Synapses

The storm roars over the roof, as if the sky means to tear the rusted hall apart. Grimm circles silently, his gaze a quiet radar. Vince crouches in the haze of flickering monitors, the whirl of overheated machines pulsing around him like a fever. His eyes are locked on the glowing green code, his fingers racing over the keyboard. Every flash of lightning briefly lights the gloomy interior through the thin slits of the blacked-out windows. But Vince is long since lost deep in Blisswood's digital rabbit hole.

Rain hammers the tin roof, but Vince barely hears it. He drifts through an ocean of zeros and ones, surrounded by data packets that dart through his field of vision like glowing fish. So close to the breakthrough.

Vince rubs his burning eyes, reaching for the half-empty can of Red Bull. The sweet-sour taste explodes on his tongue as he takes a big swig. A new challenge rises up before him, stubborn as a hydra: an adaptive security

barrier, a next-gen firewall with machine-learning capabilities.

“Fucking hell,” he mutters, his pulse hammering at his temples. For a brief moment he pauses, adrenaline tearing through his body, his heart pounding.

With trembling fingers he leans over the dirty mirror on his desk and snorts the line without blinking. The burn shoots into his brain like a current.

Focus.

Clarity.

Madness.

Then he forces himself to keep going, his shoulders aching with tension, every muscle taut in anticipation of the breakthrough. He fires up a Python script he wrote himself, an automated exploit that tricks the firewall’s security protocols. It uses a zero-day vulnerability in the SSH protocol to pass itself off as legitimate traffic.

“There you are, bitch,” he growls as the barrier flickers — and the first gap opens up.

He pushes deeper into the system, using a privilege escalation to gain root access. After a few more minutes of feverish hacking, he lands in an encrypted folder locked behind a complex AES-256 algorithm.

Another barrier.

Vince feels the hair on the back of his neck stand up.

“You don’t scare me,” he whispers, and starts cracking the key. He sets a brute-force script loose, boosted by a neural network he trained to spot patterns in encryption algorithms. Time loses all meaning as he drives deeper into the system. The code grows more chaotic, heap overflow errors and buffer overruns cropping up — he’s close.

Then, after endless minutes, the folder clicks open — quiet, but as sharp as someone thumbing the safety off a gun.

Vince holds his breath.

A string of file names appears on the screen — cryptic codes and medical reports.

“Finally, goddammit,” he gasps, relief mixing with a stabbing sense of dread.

He clicks on a file marked “Project Sleeping Beauty.” The monitor flickers — then they surface: clinical notes, test reports, schematic drawings of a brain, threaded with rows of numbers like burn scars.

His eyes dart over the words, his mouth going dry.

The details are deeply disturbing.

Sleeping Beauty’s coma was no natural sleep.

It was something far crueler.

Vince stares at the screen. The euphoria of success fizzles out in seconds — what he’s looking at isn’t a revelation.

It’s a glimpse into the abyss.

Adrenaline

Dead & Bloated drives his fingers across the keyboard, the aggressive bass perfectly in sync with his speed-driven heartbeat. Vince trembles as he reaches for the tiny USB stick — the damn thing’s barely bigger than a fingernail. With a soft click, he slides it into the slot on the side of his laptop.

“Shit, this has to be backed up,” he mutters, his voice rough with tension. The data transfer begins, the progress bar crawling agonizingly slowly — as if even the code can’t believe what it’s transferring. His eyes dart across the screen as he opens more files. Every new document lands like a punch in the face.

A web of lies spanning all of Blisswood unfolds in front of him.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Vince breathes, his voice barely more than a whisper. He grabs the can of Red Bull, knocks back the last gulp. The caffeine pulses through his veins, mixing with the adrenaline into a toxic cocktail.

Suddenly he leaps up, the chair crashing to the floor.

“Guys!” he yells, his voice almost cracking. “Get over here, now! You have to see this!”

Hurried footsteps echo down the hall. The door flies open, Sinister storming in, Grimm close on his heels. The wolf growls low, muscles tense beneath his shaggy coat. Mara and Rook follow, their faces a mix of confusion and alarm. Keen hangs back in the doorway, half-hidden in shadow — as if waiting for someone to throw him out again.

“What the hell’s going on?” Sinister asks, his voice cutting. His eyes lock on the screen, as if he could decode the data by sheer force of his gaze.

Vince turns to them, his face ashen in the bluish glow of the monitors. Pupils huge, hands shaking — as if the stuff is tearing him apart from the inside out. He reaches for an energy drink, takes a big gulp. The extra hit of caffeine, taurine, and sugar ramps up the cocktail of chemicals in his blood.

“This,” he points at the screen with a trembling hand, “this is going to blow all our minds. This is hell, man. Absolute fucking hell.”

He clicks through the files, his words tumbling over each other.

“It’s all here. Everything we suspected, and a hell of a lot more. Medical reports, financial records, internal memos. Blisswood isn’t a fairy tale — it’s a nightmare.”

Mara steps closer, her eyes going wide. “Holy shit,” she whispers.

Rook’s face hardens. “How deep does the rabbit hole go?” he asks, his voice a deep rumble.

Vince laughs without humor. “Deeper than we ever imagined. This” — he taps the screen — “this is just the tip of the iceberg. There are ties to politicians, businessmen, even to goddamn intelligence agencies. Blisswood isn’t a fairy-tale land — it’s a fucking empire of evil.”

The data transfer beeps — finally complete. Vince pulls out the USB stick, holds it up like a trophy.

“In here,” he says, his voice trembling with suppressed rage, “in here is enough to tear Blisswood down to the ground.”

Sinister’s eyes narrow to slits, his gaze fixed on the tiny stick. “Good,” he growls, his voice rough. “Then let’s strangle these sons of bitches with their own lies.”

The group stands there in silence. Rook clenches his fists, knuckles standing out white. Mara’s gaze flicks back and forth between the screen and Vince, her lips pressed into a thin line.

Grimm lets out a soft whine, as if he can feel the tension in the room.

Vince stares at the USB stick in his hand.

“And now?” Mara asks softly, her voice barely more than a whisper.

Sinister snorts in contempt. “Now,” he says, lighting a cigarette, “now we show the world what kind of fucking nightmare hides behind the fairy-tale facade.”

25

Noose

The night lies heavy and humid over Raze. Draven moves through the shadows, his steps soundless on the cracked asphalt. Piss, puke, the sweet-rotten breath of the city — as if it's sweating itself out.

In a dark corner he finds his prey: an emaciated junkie, skin gray and pocked, eyes sunk deep in their sockets. The guy shakes uncontrollably, his scrawny arms covered in track marks.

Draven grabs him by the collar and slams him against the damp brick wall. The pale light of a flickering streetlamp throws grotesque shadows across their faces.

“Spit it out, you piece of filth,” Draven growls, his breath hot on the junkie's sweaty face. The stench of cheap booze and rotting teeth hits him.

“Where's the entrance to the Veins?”

The junkie whimpers, his bloodshot eyes darting around in panic. Spit drips from the corner of his mouth, mixing with blood from a split lip.

“I... I don't know... please...”

Draven's grip tightens, his fingers a vise around the scrawny neck. He feels the wild throb of the carotid artery under his hand.

“Wrong answer, you piece of shit.”

“Okay, okay!” the junkie gasps, his voice a hoarse rasp. “Behind the old slaughterhouse... there's a manhole... hidden under a pile of scrap... Please, man, I need a fix...”

Draven lets go. The guy crumples to the ground, wheezing and gasping for air. Without another glance, he turns away and melts into the shadows.

The old slaughterhouse looms ahead of him, a rotting colossus of concrete and rusted metal. Draven finds the manhole hidden under a mountain of scrap and rusted machine parts. He lifts it, the manhole cover grinding as

if the city itself were screaming. The stench of rotting flesh and shit hits him — the breath of the underworld. Draven forces down the urge to gag and climbs down into the darkness.

The darkness wraps around him like a straitjacket, tight and scratchy. His boot sinks into something soft and wet — warm as entrails. The weak beam of his flashlight reveals damp walls, coated in a carpet of mold and something that looks like pulsing veins. Rats scurry away ahead of him, their eyes catching the light like tiny diamonds. A fat cockroach, big as his palm, crawls over his boot. Draven suppresses the urge to crush it. In this hell, any sound could mean his death.

The steady drip of water echoes through the tunnels, an eerie heartbeat in the silence. At a junction, his flashlight catches something metallic — a camera, cleverly hidden among rusted pipes and rotting cables. A faint light blinks sluggishly, like the eye of a sleeping monster. Draven shrugs inwardly. In this city, everyone's got something to hide.

After endless minutes of creeping through the rotting guts of the city, he reaches a larger space. Graffiti covers the

walls, obscene artwork in the gloom. Empty bottles and syringes crack under his boots like brittle bones.

Suddenly, voices.

Draven squeezes into a slimy alcove, his heart hammering against his ribs. The stench of rotting flesh fills his nose, but he barely dares to breathe.

Two figures appear, their outlines blurred in the deep gray of the tunnels.

One of them, a burly guy with a shaved head and neck tattoos, speaks in a rough rumble. "...I'm telling you, the guy's a goddamn genius at gambling. Cleaned my buddy out completely at the *Rusty Anchor*."

"Who was it?" the other one rasps, his voice rough with booze, his silhouette trembling in the faint light.

"Aw, that little fucker. The dwarf. Heard he hangs around there a lot."

Draven's eyes narrow.

The dwarf.

Sinister.

Finally, a solid lead. His pulse quickens.

The men vanish into one of the tunnels, their coarse laughter trailing long after, a ghostly echo in the dark. Draven waits until the silence returns, then leaves his hiding spot. His mind races.

The Veins, the *Rusty Anchor* — the noose is tightening.

When he finally climbs back to the surface, the stink of the Veins clings to him like a second skin. But something flashes in his eyes. He's closer to Sinister than ever before. Draven heads back into the city, his thoughts on the hunt.

In the distance, a siren wails.

Raze never sleeps — and neither does Draven, not as long as his prey runs free.

Horror

The air in the room hangs still, warm and stale. Someone stopped breathing a while ago; someone holds the tension between them like a loaded gun. Vince sits hunched forward, hands on the keyboard, as if it's the only thing keeping him steady. His shoulders tremble faintly — from exhaustion or adrenaline, hard to say. But something burns in his eyes. No shine, no light — a flicker of certainty.

He takes a deep breath as the first files open in front of him.

“This isn't some shitty bedtime story,” he mutters, casting a grim look around the room. “Sleeping Beauty. The fairy-tale land sells her as a princess sleeping peacefully. Truth is, she had depression. She tried. Wanted to end it. But Blisswood?”

He looks up now, his voice rough.

“They knew her face was worth more than her life. So they decided not to let her die. Not to wake her. Just to preserve her.”

With a quick tap, he opens the next report.

“Nerve damage, muscle atrophy — the whole package. They’re letting her rot away slowly while they market her smile. She’s nothing but a cash cow, a goddamn fairy-tale figure they’re bleeding dry.”

No one says a word. The words still hang between them like toxic smoke. Mara presses her hands into fists, knuckles white. Rook’s brow knots into a deep crease of rage.

“So they’re just keeping her in this state... because it’s profitable?” she asks quietly, her voice trembling with rage.

Vince nods. “Exactly. They use her because they know the fairy-tale world is hooked on that image of the sleeping princess. She’s worth more in a coma than alive or dead. That’s why she’s stuck in this fucked-up limbo.”

He takes a deep breath and clicks on the next file.

“But that’s not all,” he goes on, pulling up Rapunzel’s data. “Rapunzel. They force her to take some cursed hair-growth drug every day. The shit makes her hair grow endlessly. She’s a goddamn symbol of beauty, of the old fairy tales Blisswood dreamed up.”

He scrolls through the details.

“But the stuff is destroying her. It throws her hormones completely out of whack, causes migraines and other physical problems. The worst part? Hair grows all over her body, excessively. Every. Fucking. Day. She has to shave her whole body just so she doesn’t look like a yeti.”

Every gaze is glued to the screen, as if looking away could erase what they’ve seen.

“This isn’t just sick,” Mara hisses, her rage building with every word, “this is pure torture. Blisswood tortures her just to keep this fairy tale alive.”

“And they have no intention of stopping,” Vince growls. “Her body’s breaking down, but she’s too valuable to them to just let her die.”

No one dares to breathe.

Vince clicks on, the next file opening — the Frog Prince.

“This one... is even worse,” he begins, shaking his head. “The Frog Prince. They didn’t just abuse him — they completely mutilated him.”

Vince taps the first notes. “They altered his genes, turned him into an amphibious creature. His limbs are deformed, he can barely walk. His skin? It tears if it’s not kept constantly moist. And that’s not even all of it.”

He pauses and points to the rest of the details.

“They cut his vocal cords. Now all he can do is croak — like a goddamn toad. And then they flipped the fairy tale on its head. He lives in a sealed-off lab. No contact with the outside world. They keep testing the poor bastard, wanting to see how far they can push this genetic shit. To them, he’s nothing more than a goddamn experiment.”

The group sits stunned, and Vince takes a deep breath.

“Blisswood destroyed him, and they won’t stop. To them, this is all just another fairy tale to manipulate.”

The monitors glow cold. Not a word that doesn’t cut. Not a look that doesn’t stay caught. No one speaks, each trying to process the horror opening before them.

“This is only the beginning,” Vince says at last. “There’s more. Dozens of other files, but the encryption is stubborn. It’ll take a while before I can crack it all.”

He leans back, massaging his fingers.

“We’re nowhere near done, guys.”

Sinister stares at the monitor, the muscles in his jaw working. For a fleeting moment, Unity’s face flashes in his mind’s eye — her wild curls, the crooked smile. He shoves the thought aside at once, half annoyed, half relieved. There’s no time for that shit right now, and he doesn’t want it anyway. The world around him is falling

apart, and he's got more important things to do than let some goddamn feelings distract him.

“All right,” he growls hoarsely. “Let's hunt these sons of bitches down.”

The night is still young. In the distance, a siren wails, as if the city itself were weeping for its lost innocence.

Eight

The night seeps like pitch-black tar through the cracks in the crumbling factory walls, a dark presence filling every corner with heavy air.

Sinister tosses naked on his worn-out mattress, the sheet clinging to his sweat-soaked body like a second skin. Sleep crouches somewhere in the corner — too scared to come back. In his head, a storm of images and memories rages, sharp as broken glass. Unity’s warmth, her full breasts, the green eyes that seem to look into his soul. Her moans as she surrenders herself to him completely.

“Goddammit,” he growls, rubbing his burning eyes. He shoves the thought aside — a mix of rage, rising lust, and something he won’t name, can’t name.

Last night’s revelations press against his skull like rusty nails — slow and merciless. The taste of puke rises in his throat. A lot of it he’d known, some of it he’d suspected. But some of it...

“Fuck,” he mutters.

The truth is even more twisted than his worst nightmares. He sinks into the shadows of his past, into the honey-sweet hell of Blisswood. The stench of artificial flowers and rotten magic fills his nose.

Sinister sees himself again as a child — nostrils flaring with rage, defiant in a world of frosting and manicured lies. The other children in their perfectly pressed fairy-tale costumes, their faces grimaces of forced happiness. He’d refused to play along, raged through the gardens, ripping out roses and trampling fairy dust, as if he could claw the system apart with his bare hands.

“Put your cap on already!” his mother shrieked, the fake smile flaking off her face like cheap paint.

He sees himself hurl the ridiculous red cap into the dirt, stamp it into the mud.

“Kiss my ass,” he’d hissed, his face twisted with rage.

School, a nightmare of pastel walls and forced cheer.

“Sinister!” His teacher’s stern voice echoes through his memories. “Why can’t you just be like your brothers?”

He’d stuck his tongue out at her, savoring the horrified faces of the other kids like a sweet triumph. Always the same: detention, scrubbing, penance — as if rebellion could be washed away with warm water. The classroom walls seemed to close in, trying to smother him. He scribbled dark pictures in his notebook — visions of burning fairy-tale castles and screaming princesses behind gilded bars, an echo of the turmoil inside him.

His mother, her face a farce of put-on cheer and buried despair. “My little basketball player,” she’d said — a desperate attempt to turn his difference into something positive. At five feet, he towered over his brothers like a giant among ants. But to Blisswood he was just the eighth dwarf, reduced to his size, condemned to some degrading servitude for a capricious bitch like Snow White.

The looks from the women, greedy, hungry. Even back then they saw something wild in him, untamed. The bad boy who made the flawless princes look like dickless wimps.

“You’re different,” they’d whispered, their hands roaming greedily over his body.

He’d fucked his way clear across the fairy-tale land, every fuck a middle finger to the system, every orgasm a scream of rebellion.

And then the escape from the sugar-coated nightmares. Grimwood Vale — not some mystical forest with dangerous bogs and lurking monsters, but a goddamn fucking war zone. The stench of gunpowder hung in the air of that no man’s land. Kraken agents with cold eyes and high-caliber weapons, firing at anything that moved. He heard the bullets whistle, felt the warm blood of the wounded wolf pup on his hands.

He managed what likely no one before him ever had: he escaped.

Sinister sits up — memories clinging to his back like a film of rage and helplessness. Vince’s revelations all fit together like a sick puzzle. The picture that emerges is a nightmare that surpasses his worst suspicions by far.

He gets up, his dry mouth desperate for cool water. Outside lies Raze, a Moloch of concrete and rusted dreams. The biting stench of exhaust fumes seeps through the cracks in the factory. But even this dung heap is a thousand times better than the gilded hell of Blisswood.

“They didn’t forget me. They counted me — and then crossed me out,” he mutters bitterly. “Etched out of their goddamn story with hydrochloric acid.”

He clenches his fists, feeling his nails dig into his skin — as if pain were the last language he still speaks.

The night throbs — like an exposed nerve, filled with everything he’s swallowed down for too long. In the distance, a siren wails — the scream of a dying city.

Sinister grins, a wolfish baring of teeth.

He has a vision, and he won’t rest until the last page of this cursed storybook goes up in flames.

HE WAS THE FLAW IN THEIR FAIRY TALE. NOW HE 'S THE TRUTH THEY CAN'T CONTROL.

The fairy-tale land of Blisswood seems perfect — but its people live in a constant high without ever knowing it. The drug ›Euphorigen‹ is hidden in the drinking water, keeping every impulse in check.

Only one sees through the lie. They call him ›Dwarf Eight‹ — too wild, too unpredictable, impossible to break. Sinister sees what really lies behind the glittering façade: greed, manipulation, the systematic erasure of free will.

So he escapes — to Raze, a city of shadow, filth, and untamed desire. There he finds a group of outcasts, and together they forge a plan: Blisswood must fall. But the regime sends a hunter — merciless, efficient, programmed to destroy. His mission: silence Sinister and everyone who follows him, once and for all.

Caught in a spiral of violence, betrayal, and forbidden truth, Sinister faces the one question that matters:

Who owns freedom — and who pays the price?

A novel like a knife.

Sharp. Precise. Uncompromising.