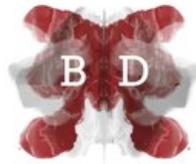


BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW
BEY DECKARD

BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW - EXCERPT

BEY DECKARD



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CONTENTS

[License Notes](#)

[Author's Note](#)

1. [The Monster](#)

2. [The Man](#)

[Buy This Book](#)

[Soundtrack](#)

[Other Books by Bey Deckard](#)

[About the Author](#)

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I'm going to make you read the warnings, even if you've read them before, so what follows doesn't take anyone by surprise.

This horror novel contains:
Graphic torture, forced incest, and rape

This is a work of *fiction*.

If you're ok with all that... carry on.

†

Thanks to Starr Waddell for the amazing editing job and to Varian Krylov for the gorgeous pic for the cover. Thank you to Sarabeth Miller and Joseph Lance Tonlet for beta reading for me.

I'm dedicating this book to the folks out there that love a good psycho.

Stand back, Tom Devil, Lord, I'm gonna rule hell by myself.

—Staggolee by Pacific Gas & Electric

THE MONSTER



B yron slowly pulled apart the loose knot in the sash, then let the robe fall from his shoulders. It gave him a frisson as it slid, cool and soft, down his back. With a smile, he gathered up the slippery, blood-red material and draped it over the back of the Queen Anne chair that sat just inside the entrance to his sanctuary.

Drawing out the anticipation, he purposefully kept his gaze away from the dais as he crossed to the other side of the room. A teak panel opened in the wall at a touch, and he pressed one of the buttons within. A moment later, Broschi's "Ombra Fedele Anch'io" stroked the air almost tentatively with its opening notes. Byron filled his lungs and closed his eyes, letting the music infuse him with the quiet joy it always brought. When the male soprano's supple voice began to rise above the strings, Byron breathed out slowly and finally turned his attention to what awaited him in the centre of the rotunda.

The young man's eyes were wide and wet, his pupils huge with the cocktail of drugs coursing through his veins. He let out a strangled, animalistic moan as Byron climbed the stairs naked, his cock primed and bobbing stiffly as he neared.

His victim was pretty... so very pretty—blond and pale, with smooth skin and beautifully rounded, pert buttocks for someone so thin. He reached out and stroked the hollow of the young man's cheek, gazing down at him benevolently like a priest about to give the Sacrament. As his thumb brushed the sutures where he had sewn just the corners of the young man's mouth shut, he smiled. Byron had made him even more pretty when he had turned him into the perfect vessel.

The boy made another gurgling sound at the touch, and more red-tinged saliva ran down his chin. Toothless and with his bloodied jaw propped open by small nails embedded in the pits where his molars once sat, he knelt, ready to receive Byron. Not that he had a choice *but* to kneel—the hooks set into the flesh beneath his thin clavicles were attached to chains that hung from the ceiling, supporting him in the position. However, the way he listed slightly and the tearing around one of the metal hooks suggested that perhaps one of his bones had finally given under his weight. It was no matter. Byron was nearly done with him anyway.

With a warm smile, he grasped the boy's head in his hands and brought his cock into contact with the perfect-sized hole he had made of his mouth. Slowly, almost gently, he pushed his swollen glans past the constricting *O* of the young man's sewn lips and then timed his first hard thrust with the rising crescendo of the singer's rich voice as it echoed in the round chamber. He sunk his cock deep into his victim's throat, crushing his face to his pelvis; the young man convulsed against him, his throat muscles tightening around his shaft as his body fought to expel him. Finally, he pulled all the way back, and his cock popped from the young man's ravaged mouth, slimed in blood and fluids.

"Glorious," he whispered. "You are glorious."

The young man's breathing had a slushy quality to it as he struggled to take in air, and it was obvious that he wouldn't last much longer. He was barely holding on to consciousness, and Byron knew that no amount of drugs could continue to prolong his usefulness. He'd been his vessel for nearly a week now.

"You should be proud," he murmured as he fed his cock into the bloody, torn mouth once more. "You're doing so well..."

The boy's eyes bulged, and though Byron couldn't hear anything over the music, he could feel the vibrations of his muffled sob before the thick cockhead plugging his throat cut it off. However, before Byron could get into a good rhythm, a spasm shook the young man, and his eyes rolled up in his head. Cursing, Byron pulled his dick out of his victim's mouth and watched him twitch hard, the hook in his broken shoulder dragging further through flesh as he sagged and let out one last rattling breath.

Byron sighed. So frustrating.

Why couldn't he have lasted just a minute longer?

For a moment Byron only stared at the dead body hanging limp in his chains, the young man's face slack and eyes unseeing. He was useless to him now, of course; Byron wasn't some sick pervert who liked to have sex with corpses. With a headshake, he closed the drip of the IV that fed into the young man's neck, and stretching his expression into a bright smile, he turned to the figure strapped to the metal chair.

Slow tears leaked down the man's face as he stared at his son's body, but no sound came from him save for a breathy hiss that escaped his gaping mouth. The cut across his throat was healing nicely under the neat sutures, but the same couldn't be said about the myriad other incisions spaced along his chest; most of them were inflamed, and despite the antibiotics, there was only a pitiful amount

of dark urine in the bag at the man's feet. Byron knew that his kidneys were shutting down as he succumbed to sepsis.

Byron pulled on the catheter that trailed from the bandaged cauterized wound in the man's crotch. As the bloody tubing slid free, the man shuddered in his bonds, and had Byron not severed his vocal chords, the hitched gasp would have undoubtedly been a cry. Something occurred to Byron then, and he frowned, glancing back at the corpse. Hollowing out parts of the man's severed penis and filling it with Plaster of Paris to harden it into a dildo had been a *wonderful* idea at the time. Having the man watch his own disembodied cock plunder his son's virgin ass had been worth the effort alone. But, when Byron had lost his grip on the slippery thing and it penetrated further into the young man's body, out of reach, he hadn't really thought much about the consequences. Play had brought him to a heightened pinnacle of arousal, and messy little details like that tended to fall by the wayside. Thinking about it now, he realized that having a rotting penis lodged in his rectum hadn't helped prolong the young man's life any. He made a mental note to attach some sort of cord to the severed member, should he try such a thing again.

Humming along to the next track on his *Lustrations* playlist—Cassidy's "Vide Cor Meum"—he unrolled his leather medical kit and slid his favourite scalpel out, placing it on the stained ivory surface of the antique pedestal. The man strapped to the chair shook his head as vigorously as his weak state allowed him, and Byron laid a kind hand on his shoulder.

"It will all be over soon. But you have one last thing to do for me since your son couldn't perform," he said gently. He reached for the small bottle containing the potent mix he had designed to keep his victims alert but also shield them somewhat from the effects of shock—benzo, lidocaine, DMT being the main components—and mea-

sured out a large dose in the antique glass syringe. Almost as soon as he had injected the drugs into the man's venous catheter, his victim's face slackened and his movements became even more sluggish. Head hanging to the side, breath whistling past lips gone bloodless, the man barely twitched as Byron slid the scalpel's blade through skin and muscle, into his diaphragm.

Byron's erection had begun to flag, but when the man's thin blood began flowing down his chest, his dick stiffened to rock at the anticipation.

The previous times he had used the man's body like this, he had simply severed skin from muscle and used the tight pockets he created in the man's flesh to bring himself to climax. Afterwards, he had simply sewn the offerings he'd left behind into the skin. This time was different... He wanted to feel the beat of his heart against his cock.

Carefully, he cut into the man's body, thrusting his fingers deep into the hole he made in the pleura; by attempting to free up space in the thoracic cavity, he effectively cut the left lung away. Blood bubbles popped and splattered Byron's chest as he worked as quickly as he could to make the man ready to receive him. He didn't have much time left.

Byron grabbed a second syringe and sent a milligram of atropine directly into the man's jugular. The man's head lifted instantly. He hissed out a thick-sounding breath, the tendons rigid in his neck as Byron straddled his thighs. Then he slumped backwards, a bloody foam on his lips, and Byron pushed his cock up into the incision beneath his sternum. With a grunt, he thrust hard and felt tissues part and the edge of rib slide against the top of his shaft. He wrapped his arms around the man's head, holding him to his breast as gently as a lover as he fucked his body cavity for a few short plunges before he

went deep. And then... There it was... The heart had gone tachy with the shot, and it vibrated against his cockhead.

"Yes!" Byron pressed his face to the top of the man's head, just holding himself in place while the dying heart danced against his cock. The man's one good lung swelled with his irregular, rapid breathing and squeezed and caressed him. Tears trickled from the corners of Byron's eyes as he crushed them shut, transported with ecstasy as the soprano's note held in Mozart's "Der Hölle Rache," the sound pure and beautiful. With a cry, he finally climaxed, bathing the heart with semen as it slowed.

By the time he had finished, the heart had stilled and the aria had ended. Only his own panting breaths marred the silence for a moment before the gentle strings of Handel's "Cara Sposa" crept quietly into the space.

With a wince, Byron climbed off the dead man's lap, his cock a gory, dripping mess. He lifted his eyes to the stars visible beyond the glass dome above his workspace and raised his arms, bloodied nearly to the elbow, and silently thanked whatever forces there were for the desires that drove him. He was a god among men; it was a heady gift indeed.

Behind him, the door opened quietly, and he heard the click of Gloria's heels on the travertine. He smiled and turned around. Dressed in an exquisitely tailored slate-grey Alexander McQueen suit, she stood tall and elegant at the foot of the stairs. Gloria's dark eyes took in the mess atop the dais, and she arched a shapely eyebrow at him.

"You're done, I imagine?" she asked in her velvet-smooth voice. She stepped gracefully to the side to avoid the rivulet of blood that was inching its way towards her Louboutins.

Byron laughed and nodded. He descended the stairs and twisted the knob in the small open shower space set into the wall. He tested the water before stepping into it and watched diluted blood swirl down the drain set into the floor.

“Shall I have the cleaners come tonight, or would you rather tomorrow?” asked Gloria, coming closer. She held her tablet against her forearm, finger held above its surface.

Soaping himself quickly, Byron pondered for a moment. He disliked having strangers around while he was at home, but he had no plans for the evening.

Gloria noted his hesitation and spoke up.

“I think I may have found something promising for you,” she said with a smile. “That is, if you’re not too tired to go out.”

Byron frowned. Tired, no—sated... yes. But that wasn’t a bad thing when it came to new quarry. It just meant he was more likely to draw things out.

“No, I’m fine,” he replied after a moment. “What did you have in mind?”

“You’ve made a new friend on one of your accounts. I’ve been messaging with them, and it seems like a good match. It’s a man... Is that all right?” she asked, looking up from her tablet.

Nodding impatiently, Byron finished rinsing himself and turned the water off. Gloria handed him a towel as he stepped out of the shower.

“He’s young, attractive, has no family to speak of... Hmm, let’s see. He has good taste in music, restaurants... Oh, and I took the liberty of making reservations at *Le Clin d’Oeil* for tonight in case he piqued your interest.”

Byron glanced at her. Part of him was irritated that she would just assume he’d want to go, but knowing Gloria, she already had a

contingency plan should he turn down the suggestion. He smiled.

“Yes... Why not? What time?”

“Eight fifteen. I reserved your favourite table.”

It didn't give him a lot of time to get ready, but he nodded again. He dropped the towel on the floor and accepted the robe from Gloria.

“Sounds good. Have the car brought around at seven, and make sure that the cleaners arrive only after I've gone. Oh, and I wasn't happy about the way they moved everything around last time. I want to come back to a pristine room with everything in its proper place.”

“Yes, sir,” Gloria said, typing on her tablet. “I'll see to it myself.”

“Good.” With the silk of the robe sticking to his back where he was still wet, he tied the sash and walked across the cool floor to stop the music, cutting off Caballe's soaring soprano mid-aria. Keeping in step, Gloria followed him down the richly carpeted hallway to the grand staircase where she stopped at its base. As he climbed the stairs, she called up to him.

“The Richardsons were satisfactory, then?”

Byron paused on the step, hand on the mahogany railing, and thought back to the moving heat of the man's heart against his flesh. He chuckled low with a nod.

“Yes, Gloria. They were quite satisfactory. You did well.” He glanced over his shoulder at his assistant. A subtle smile curled Gloria's full lips before she turned away, fingers flying over the tablet's keyboard as she got things ready for his date.

THE MAN



B yron's favourite table was in the very back corner of the restaurant against the big windows overlooking the bay. It commanded a spectacular view of the city, and he often came here on his own to watch the boats sail in and out of the harbour whilst he ate his duck pâté and herb-crustéd calf liver. Though he was almost twenty minutes early, the traffic on the bridge having been light, the man he was meeting was already there. He was seated with his back to the room and seemed to be lost in thought as he looked out over the water. Gloria had shown Bryon a few encouraging pictures, but the young man was even more compelling in person. He had dark hair, kept a little longer on the top than what Byron normally liked, and he was bearded, which was a change from all the clean-shaven men Gloria tended to pair him with.

However, his profile was attractive with a high forehead, straight nose, and lips that had an interesting fullness to them. When he noticed Byron's approach and turned, his eyes widened, and Byron guessed that they would be a warm chocolate-brown in the sun—they were beautiful eyes. Kind, trusting eyes. A bright smile lit up the young man's face, and he quickly stood.

“Hello! And here I thought I would have more time to get over my nerves,” said the young man with a self-conscious laugh.

With a smile, Byron looked over his shoulder.

“I could leave and come back, if you’d like?” he said in a light tone.

The man laughed again, a rich sound against the quiet classical music coming from the speakers overhead.

“No. That’s ok. I think I’ll be fine,” he replied. “Michael.” He held out his hand, and Byron tilted his head. None of this awkward hug or kiss-kiss business that a lot of men and women normally imposed on him. He gratefully accepted the handshake.

“Byron. A pleasure,” he said, his smile widening, and gestured to the table. “Sit, please.”

As soon as they had taken their seats, Angélique arrived at the table in her starched white shirt and black slacks.

“Bonsoir, Monsieur Smith,” she said. With her accent, the fake name he liked to use came out as “Smeet,” and it never failed to bring a smile to his face.

“Bonsoir, Angélique. *Le Château Pradeaux 2008*, s’il vous plaît... avec”—he turned to Michael, and the young man nodded quickly—“deux verres. Merci.”

“Je vous en prie,” murmured the blond woman, and she left them to find the red wine he so enjoyed.

“You know French?” asked Byron, surprised.

Michael grinned a little shyly and looked down for a moment, his dark hair falling into his eyes. He brushed it back and nodded, meeting Byron’s gaze again.

“Yeah. I’ve picked some up over the years... here and there.” There was something incredibly charming about the way he licked his lips a little nervously before giving him another demure smile.

Byron thought Michael looked oddly familiar, but he couldn't bring to mind where he could have seen him before. The height of his cheekbones, the slant of his eyebrows, the way the tip of his nose moved subtly as he talked... It was like a memory...

His thoughts were interrupted when Angélique reappeared with the wine and two glasses, and he and Michael sat in silence, watching her open the bottle. After depositing the cork carefully on the table, she held the wine up, the question evident on her face. Byron gestured to Michael, and Angélique poured a small amount of wine into his glass. Michael picked it up but didn't immediately put it to his lips like Byron expected him to. Instead, he swirled it twice in the glass and then held it beneath his nose. When he seemed satisfied, he took a tiny sip. His eyes widened.

"Wow. This is really good," he said, looking up at Angélique. The woman smiled and ducked her head in a pleased nod before pouring a measure in each of their glasses. After she had recited the day's specials and taken their orders—*Le Clin d'Oeil* didn't believe in printed menus—Michael shook his head at Byron.

"Are you trying to impress me with what I figure's going to be an *outrageously* expensive meal? Because... I'm impressed. My wallet, not so much, but... this"—he held up the glass of wine—"is amazing."

Byron held up his own glass and brought it close to Michael's.

"To first... and lasting impressions," he said. Michael laughed and repeated the toast before touching his glass to Byron's.

Despite the fact that he was only there to lure Michael back to his abode—should he be suitable—and set him up in the converted atrium he used as his workspace sanctuary, Byron found him-

self thoroughly caught up in the conversation. Michael, although he claimed a strictly blue-collar background, peppered his speech with phrases in Italian, French, and German, among others. Byron liked the way he gestured enthusiastically as he talked and traced out shapes on the white tablecloth with a fingertip to illustrate his points. Michael was intelligent without being arrogant and optimistic without seeming overly naïve. The longer they spoke, the more Byron became... unsure of himself.

Byron frowned at his crème brûlée. The problem was that he was honestly enjoying himself just talking to Michael. He couldn't remember the last time he had felt a similar connection with another human being, and it was confusing him. He glanced up and saw Michael was watching him, his dark eyes curious. For a moment, Byron thought about simply paying the check, kissing the young man on the cheek, and walking out of his life. He smiled at Michael and let out a silent sigh at the shy attraction he saw soften the young man's face in return—he was so beautiful and selflessly charming. Maybe it was the earlier play session with the Richardsons that had put Byron in this mellow, forgiving mood. Yes, maybe he would spare him...

Michael reached across the table and put his hand on top of Byron's.

The contact made Byron's heart kick up in excitement, and for the first time, he saw something a little darker in Michael's eyes.

"I hope you're not thinking of calling it an early night," said the young man softly. "I thought we might, you know, go somewhere more private?" His thumb slid under Byron's palm, and Byron stared down at their hands. "I want to get to know you better."

No, you don't...

If he brought Michael home, Michael wouldn't survive the encounter. The moment stretched out, and when Byron glanced back up, Michael licked his lips and frowned. He began to pull away, made unsure by the long silence, but Byron's hand turned of its own volition and captured Michael's in a soft hold.

"Yes. Yes, that sounds like a good idea," he said, making a decision. "Your place or mine?" It was such clichéd line, but the answer would decide Michael's fate. Byron thought he saw something in Michael's face that gave him pause—something shrewd—but it was gone in an instant, replaced by another endearingly shy smile. Byron pushed his glass of whiskey away; sometimes drink made him paranoid.

"Yours—if that's ok? I have a feeling you have the nicer place," said Michael with a quiet laugh.

Well... that's that then, Byron thought.

With a wide grin at Michael, he nodded and squeezed his hand before signalling to Angélique for the check.

Byron groaned softly as Michael licked the head of his cock with a soft, flat tongue, teasing him. His other hand was cupping Byron's testicles and squeezing them in a way that made him squirm and wish he could rid himself of his pants entirely. The backseat of the Audi A8 was roomy, but it was still awkward, and despite his driver's discretion, the man's presence was a little distracting. Thankfully, the road was clear of its usual spring fog, and they were soon pulling into the huge circular driveway that fronted his property. After they'd tugged their clothes somewhat back into place, Byron helped Michael out of the car and chuckled at his expression when he gaped up at the house.

"This is where you live?"

Byron looked up fondly at the turn-of-the-century manor with its big windows and neoclassical façade.

"Yes. I inherited it when my parents passed about ten years ago."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Michael, and he placed a hand on Byron's lower back. Strangely rattled by the unexpected heat that rose inside him at the gentle touch, Byron thought again about sending Michael home alone to the little apartment in the Heights he had mentioned. He might be disappointed or even angry with the outcome of the evening, but he would be safe... safe from the terrible, *beautiful* things that Byron would be unable to keep himself from doing once they were through those doors.

However, before he could speak, Michael climbed the stairs and closed the window of opportunity. With a grim smile, Byron followed him up the steps and punched in his code. Michael opened the door and let out a low whistle as he entered.

"Holy shit. Jesus *fucking* Christ... oh sorry"—he glanced over at Byron, his cheeks dimpled—"sometimes I can't control my mouth, but this is some pad you've got here, mister." He trailed his fingers over the top of the carved rosewood table that sat in the middle of the entrance and stared in amazement at the walls with their heavy, dark mouldings and huge oil paintings. His eyes went to the grand staircase, and he craned his head back with a grin. "Shall we?"

Byron smiled indulgently but shook his head. No, the bedroom was not for Michael.

"I thought we would have another drink first... I have a particularly fine artisanal bourbon I think you might like."

Obvious disappointment flashed across Michael's face.

"Ok... I guess that sounds good," he said, his tone begrudging. However, his wide-eyed enthusiasm returned when he took in the

sumptuously appointed living room with its thick carpeting, soft, black leather couches, and marble fireplace. He crossed the room and sank into one of the sofas with a contented sigh.

Byron walked to the bar in the corner and set about pouring drinks for the two of them. With his back to the room, he mixed some Ketamine into one of the vintage lowball glasses.

“So you live here all by yourself?”

Nodding, Byron crossed the room and handed the drugged bourbon to Michael. Michael touched the rim of his glass to Byron’s and took a small sip as his host settled down next to him on the couch.

“Doesn’t it get lonely?” Michael’s brown eyes were shadowed by lashes that were long and dark—when he looked up searchingly at Byron, the older man felt something that was very nearly pity. He took a mouthful of his own bourbon, savouring it for a moment. The drug would take full effect in a few minutes; he had time to kill.

“Yes. Sometimes, it is a little lonely,” he replied in all honesty after he’d swallowed. However, the loneliness was just a small price to pay for what the privacy allowed him.

Michael moved a little closer to him, his face flushed.

“Well, I’m here now...” It was an invitation to kiss those soft lips again, but Byron didn’t dare. Instead, he lifted a hand and threaded his fingers through the hair at the back of Michael’s head, massaging his scalp gently with his fingertips.

“Mmm...” Michael brought the glass to his lips again and swallowed down the rest of the bourbon before closing his eyes and leaning into the touch. “That feels really good.”

Byron curled his fingers and tugged on Michael’s hair, eliciting a small pleased sigh from the young man. Then he deposited his glass on the marble coffee table and plucked the empty one from

Michael's hand before it fell to the floor. Michael's eyes fluttered open drowsily.

"I really like you," Michael whispered and stroked his hand up Byron's thigh. It seemed like the drug had taken hold.

"I don't often say this," replied Byron with his brows knit, "but I like you too." He'd take his time with Michael... Make him last. Be careful and slow. Michael's dark hair was soft and silken, and he ran his fingers through it again, marvelling at the feeling of it against his skin. Michael stared up at him, his beautiful face made smooth by his vague, sleepy expression.

Byron found his eyes drawn to the licked wetness of Michael's bottom lip, the way it caught the light as he breathed. Plump bottom lip... healthy and pink—Byron would sink his teeth into it. Shaking his head, he blinked a few times to rid himself of a little light-headedness and then leaned forward to press his mouth to the side of Michael's neck.

Smooth, warm skin... a hint of cologne. He breathed in deep.

"Yes, perfect," he murmured and then frowned in confusion when he realized his hand was no longer stroking Michael's hair. It took a bit of effort to open his eyes, and he looked blearily around. "What's... happening?" Everything looked slightly out of focus, and it took immense concentration just to sit up. His body felt heavy... strange.

Michael let out a low chuckle, his eyes bright and alert as he stared down at Byron slumped over on the sofa. Bewildered, Byron watched as his grinning guest lifted one of his nerveless hands to his lips to bestow a mischievous kiss on his knuckles.

"Drugged... me?" Byron mumbled through numb lips. "How?"

"Ah, just a simple trick, my dear sir," replied Michael with a smirk, all traces of meekness wiped from his face. He dropped By-

ron's hand in his lap and reached over him to grab Byron's glass from the table. There was still a finger of the golden liquid inside, and Michael lifted it to his lips. Frozen in his husk of a body, Byron watched him drink it down—though all his senses felt muffled, his brain sped along a terrible, confused path. Fear began to take hold.

"Whu..." he tried, but couldn't make his tongue or lips form the words. His saliva felt thick in his throat, and he attempted to swallow but failed. A strangled moan came from his open mouth.

Michael licked his lips and looked at the empty lowball glass.

"You were right. That was very fine indeed," he said and then tossed the glass at the fireplace where it shattered on the marble. "But I've had better."

He stood and rubbed his hands together.

"Now... Why don't you show me where you do your best work? I've been *dying* to see it with my own eyes," he said and laughed at his choice of words. He gestured with one hand. "Shall we, *Herr Un-mensch?*"

As if Byron were being lifted by invisible hands, he rose to his feet, head lolling and limbs slack. When Michael began to hum softly, Byron could only watch as he was marched forward like a puppet on strings, leading his guest directly to the house's hallowed inner sanctum.

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