



# Mama's Boy

AND OTHER DARK TALES

FRAN FRIEL

# ONE NIGHT STAND

By Adhemar le Fey (John Miller)

A Review of Fran Friel's "Mama's Boy"

"I care for you, Adhemar le Fey." Mary held the present for me to take. "I hope this gift seals our love."

The present was wrapped in bright blue wrap with a red bow, the sort of contrast in color I liked. I myself dressed in bright contrasts, and that day I wore bright blue pants and shirt with a red-cloth belt and red bandana with black skulls.

I reached for the present and noticed my hands shaking.

"Adhemar?" she asked. "How do you feel about me?"

We sat in her bookstore around the desk in the backroom. Months before I had been a part of the Seelie Court in the Dreaming, the land of the Fey. My courtly duties consisted of making mortal women fall in love with mortal men. They called me Cupid for slang. I was banished forever for abusing my Glamour, my Fey magic, making women fall in love with me, seducing them easily and breaking their hearts in One Night Stands. My disdain for reading was well known, and Queen Shal-la-Bal cursed me to require a new sustenance. "You are cursed to do that which you hate for the remainder of your life: consume books." I could no longer eat or drink without vomiting; my existence depended on words. One Night Stands held new meaning for me, and Mary, blessed Mary, she understood.

"Ahdemar?"

I pulled her close and kisser her. Before I was banished, I could have used Glamour to seduce her, cause her love me. Now, powerless as a mortal, she loved me freely.

"Open it, Adhemar."

I opened it and found a book by Fran Friel called Mama's Boy, a collection of her work. I smelled its print and pages, whiffed the darkness within. My heart beat faster as delicious terror wafted into my soul, and I knew this was an exquisite meal.

I took a chance and told Mary my secrets the previous month, and she became my confidant and ultimately my lover. She smiled with wide eyes capturing this moment, and I wiped a tear from my eye.

“Thank you.” I whispered, afraid my voice would crack. I was a Fey and was supposed to be in control of my mortal emotions, yet there I was close to tears and falling in love with a human. “This means a great deal to me, Mary.”

“Do you love me, Adhemar?”

My response was to kiss her. After some time, she pulled away.

“I’ll leave you alone, Adhemar.” She stroked my face then walked to the doorway. “I know you like to be alone... for your One Night Stands.”

Mary was right. Not only did I receive sustenance from books, many times I sensed the author behind the words, and it became personal, almost a relationship. She closed the door and left me with Fran Friel’s *Mama’s Boy*.

I held it against my chest and let it sweep into me, breathing in the odor of her stories. I licked my lips and opened the book to the forward by Gary A. Braunbeck, recipient of the Bram Stoker and other awards. He wrote:

“(Fran)... manages to hit harder in 55 words than some writers can in five-thousand.”

*Beach of Dreams* bled across my mind leaving a red smear of dark fantasy, and at the end it tantalized me with human emotion such as remorse, sacrifice and justice. How can a horror story end on such a positive note? It does marvelously.

*Gravy Pursuits* filled the backroom of *Mary’s Bookstore* with a pungent odor I’m glad Mary couldn’t smell herself. The stench of broiled librarian wafted hellishly throughout the room, and I couldn’t help smiling sadistically. My heart sped as my eyes devoured what once I abhorred: words, wonderful words of delightful naughtiness and horrific tales.

“Feed me, Fran,” I whispered, as I turned to *Mashed* and continued reading.

*Mashed* reminded me of another author by the name of Bentley Little. Mr. Little often takes normal people and/or objects and formulates them into objects of horror. Fran does the same in *Mashed*, the object of horror being potatoes. You’ll like yours *Mashed* with bloody lumps. You’ll get it, too, by reading this story. It takes great skill to render ordinary objects horrifying, and Bentley Little and Fran Friel have this skill.

Of all the stories, *The Sea Orphan* may be my favorite. It reminded me of life itself, of reality hidden within dark fantasy. Poor Will Pennycock, an orphan at sea among pirates. He has special... advantages. Remember Alfred Hitchcock? Think of all those seagulls hovering on warming currents above the seas, and you still haven’t touched the depths of horror nor the heights of emotion within this story guaranteed to satisfy all.

With all the flooding happening across the land, authors have begun to depict floods in stories. *Orange and Golden* is such a story about a man and his dog in a flood, but the only danger for the reader will be a flood of tears from reading the short-short.

*Under the Dryer* is about a dog that is there to protect his masters, even in the throes of possible doggie-dementia. Or does it, in fact, happen? Do *they* exist? The family doesn’t believe and they punish Goliath, the family dog, as he tries to protect them from the *Longtooths*. At the end of the story, you will sigh heavily.

*Fine Print* made me think of the countless “Faust” stories, of making a deal with the devil, but it is MUCH MORE than that. Fran sucked me down into her soul, showed me what true love was as the main character, Donovan, sacrifices for his family while enduring extreme loneliness because he is forced to live apart from them. Fran revealed cold calculating evil that shows no remorse, and she showed me the potential of the human spirit, of a father’s undying love for his family, especially for his daughter. It is so much more than a contract with the devil; it is perfection in motion through words,

showing both the heart of darkness and the heart of love, a true treasure like *Sea Orphan*.

*Mama's Boy*, for which Fran Friel became a Bram Stoker Finalist, took my mind to places it had never been before, and serious horror enthusiasts will cringe in both horror and shock, as a psychiatrist is taken for the ride of her life via the mind of the deranged and severely psychotic *Mama's Boy*. This story will do what a good number of writers claim but can't accomplish; it will scare and shock you.

"Mary?" I'd just finished reading *Mama's Boy* and felt a chill run down my spine. I didn't wish to be alone. "Are you there?"

I heard snickering beyond the door, and it squeaked open. Mary stood in the doorway with a knowing smile.

"Did you read it?"

"*Devoured* is a better word."

I patted my stomach and leaned back in the swivel chair. Chills of terror and heartrending emotions swirled through my soul, and I was content.

"How did you like it, Adhemar?"

I smiled. She smiled and sat in my lap.

"Hmmm?" She placed her face against my neck and purred.

I couldn't express myself. I couldn't tell Mary how I felt about her, and I couldn't explain how wondrous the book was, how far it took me into the heart of darkness, into insanity and dark fantasy, how it showed the best and worst of humanity. I was a Fey, damn it! Fey were strong, not prone to succumbing to emotions or being controlled by them.

"Very nice, and you're a lovely friend, Mary, but I'm not mortal. I am beyond human emotions and—"

She grabbed my face and made me look her in the eye.

"Adhemar, shut up and kiss me."

And so I did.