

~~Julias~~

“Tonight, you’re going to communicate with a rat.”

“Delightful.”

Julias smirked down at his childe, and gave him a pat on the head, the sort he knew would infuriate his friend. “Don’t like rats?”

“I think rats raised by humans are awesome creatures. Rats who grew up in a sewer? Not so much.”

The two of them stepped out of the car, and Julias waved the driver off before turning to walk toward North Side. Dolareido was a city, a very large city, and that meant crows, cockroaches, and rats. Maybe the kid would prefer trying this with a crow? Later. For now he knew where he could find rats in large quantities.

“I was hoping we could talk about relationship troubles,” Jack said.

Relationship troubles. Kid did love to be blunt. “Oh? Having issues with the Prince?”

The two of them walked further and further from any ears, any pedestrians, any traffic, and further out again toward the edge of the city. The driver had taken them out a ways, but Julias preferred to walk the remainder. And the kid had said he wanted to talk to him about something; so now worked.

“Not exactly? In fact, she seems to already know about Clara... liking me. No idea how she knows, but I guess that’s why she’s the Prince.” He shrugged, hands in his jacket pockets, eyes on the sidewalk. No one around anymore, just the two of them surrounded by empty factories and emptier streets. “Just, uh... she’s, um... Ok, yeah I... saw her breasts.”

Julias rolled his eyes and combed his hair back with his fingers a single time. God damn this kid. “Alright, walk me through what happened. Spare no details.”

And thus followed an asinine tale of an idiot boy who didn’t know how to say no to a pretty girl. Jack could say no to most people about most things, with a straight face held in the cradle of cold logic. A valuable trait, that went out the window the moment a beautiful woman fluttered her eyelashes at him.

“She could have covered up!” He threw up his hands, utter dismay chiseled onto his face. “She didn’t have to let that woman lift up her shirt!”

“Sounds like she saw an opportunity to let you see something she figured you’d like.” He sighed and flicked the kid in the temple, hard enough to make him yelp and jump to the side. “Maybe you should lay off seduction hunts for a while, and do some regular hunts? Less sexual, less likely to get you into trouble with a girl trying to get into your pants.”

“Arg, I’ve never had this problem before! I didn’t really... I don’t know, expect her to get that... that...”

“She likes you. And she’s not some simpleton teenager, she’s a woman, and judging from what I know of the other Uratha, she’s older than she looks.” Clara was a beautiful woman to be sure, looking perhaps in her late twenties or early thirties, with the body of an athlete and a beautiful face. She took care of herself, and managing a full head of box-braid hair down to her hips couldn’t have been easy. “You seem to attract older women.”

“I guess so.” Upon reaching a corner, Jack walked into the lamppost. Into it, hard enough to make a clear, resonating thunk as he planted his forehead into the metal. The kid leaned against the pole, arms dangling like weights pulling at his wrists, and his forehead stuck to the lamppost. “Antoinette said she trusted me, but... I don’t know, I’ve never been in this position before. Can I trust myself? I don’t think I’d ever betray Antoinette, but I’ve never had a girl approach me like this, not since her.” A low, whining sound came out of the kid, and he banged his head a couple more times against the pole.

“Jack. Come here.”

With time, Jack eventually stood back up, and waddled his way over to Julias.

Until Julias smacked him upside the back of the head.

“Ow! What the fuck man!”

“Kid, you’re an idiot. A lovable idiot, but an idiot. The fact you’re deliberating this so much, when nothing has even happened yet, means you’re giving this far more thought than any cheating man would. So give yourself a little credit, you’re a faithful man and I bet Clara could literally tie you up, pin you down, and rub her naked self all over you and you wouldn’t even kiss her.”

“I mean... I guess yeah. I can’t get the image of her out of my head though.”

“Yeah, you have a sex drive, same as everyone else. Figured you’d be used to that by now.”

“But—”

“And you’re feeling super anxious and paranoid, which is making you run the thoughts through your head over, and over, and over, like you always do. That’s why you can’t stop thinking about her. You and Natasha both, always running a million thoughts through your heads all the time, organizing and analyzing.” This kid, god this kid. Such a great friend to have, someone he could trust, someone who would dig through things with the utmost tenacity until he’d filtered a million bits of information, and gotten to the bottom of things. Until he’d become an expert — or at least learned — in whatever he needed to know, he would obsess about something until it consumed him. Think about things until he paced his brain into a ditch, and then a grave.

“So I should do... what?”

“Nothing. That’s what I’m saying. Maybe next time don’t take the girl who likes you to a sex club, but other than that, nothing.” Chuckling, he put his hand on his friend’s shoulder, and started walking them down the street again. “Really, you think too much.”

“I know, I know. It’s just she’s my first girlfriend, and I really love her. God I love her, and she spoils the fuck out of me, and—”

He shook the little man by the shoulder, just enough to get him to cut his worrying to a quick halt. “Worry less about Antoinette. Worry more about the Prince. Do anything like that suicidal trip into the tunnels again, and if I don’t kill you, she will. And, if by some strange fluke, she doesn’t, then Michael or Maria will.”

That got some raised brows. Good, kid needed to stop worrying about girls so much, and worry a bit more about his own hide.

“Rats,” Julias continued, “are intelligent creatures as you know. Observant, but not the best eyesight. Great sense of smell, great hearing. And because there are so many of them, a Kindred would be hard pressed to suspect a rat. Be careful when using them to spy on particularly crafty Mehket, or any elders, and you’ll be surprised at how much information you can get from a rat.”

“I’m confused though. How’s a rat going to convey the information?”

“You’re going to talk to it.”

“... say what now?”

With a laugh, Julias brought him to the end of the street, where a couple of decayed large buildings sat abandoned and decrepit. Dolareido was an old city — for the US — and had gone through many phases, many revolutions of technology, many changes as the old died and the new arrived. Areas that couldn't adapt fell apart, and such was the way with certain corners of North Side. Old factories that used to make things like string, or newspapers, or clothes, or anything that the manufacturer couldn't update for the modern era lead to such buildings being vacated. Someone would buy them eventually, tear them down or replace them, refit them, but for years, sometimes decades, many of the buildings sat useless.

Rats loved it.

Julias slid open an old door, and brought out a couple of LED flashlights. No power and with old, dirty windows, the outside light wasn't getting in; the rats counted on it. So Julias set the flashlights on the table pointed up to act like lanterns, and stood in the center of the empty room. A lobby of sorts, maybe for a small hospital, with a large desk and some doorways that led into dark hallways. Around them were a few small, worn couches, some stools, and some magazines on a table from the eighties.

"I can hear them," Jack said.

"Yeah. Thousands of them. More rats in Dolareido than there are people. Ten million, twenty million maybe."

"Damn... reminds me of when Viktor summoned all those rats."

"An advanced discipline. Summoning the swarm is something I'm sure you'll be able to do someday, and with proper preparation, to far greater effect than Viktor's on-the-fly decision to use it. We needed a way to get past Jessica's rifle." Not a fun night, dealing with that Daeva devil. But the memory of Beatrice ripping her in half, so her literal ashes scattered to the wind, was a happy memory indeed.

"I could summon a swarm?"

"Given the years to practice and grow your strength and skill? Yes, definitely. And more besides. There is far more to being Kindred than simply being strong or fast, or not needing to breathe, or being able to mesmerize kine with your eyes." And, to demonstrate, he squatted down, and waited.

Rats were cautious and crafty creatures by nature, but given time, darkness, and quiet, they came out of their holes. First one, and then another, and then another. They scurried along the walls, into holes that must have taken years to make, up scratched door frames, down counters, and eventually onto the center of the floor.

And once one of them looked his way, Julias met its beady little gaze with his own.

“Come here,” he said, voice quiet, calm, and direct. Each letter enunciated, each marking the instrument of command to penetrate the rat’s alien mind. The bad eyesight, the great hearing and sense of smell, the tiny body, the feet and tail. It was one thing to own a pet rat, but to establish a dialog with such a creature took a different level of understanding. And to a Ventrue, animalism was simply giving commands to animals instead of people.

The rat walked up to them, and stood up on its hind legs.

“God damn,” Jack said, chuckling a little as he squatted down beside Julias. “Really doesn’t feel like a Ventrue thing to do, talk to animals.”

“While both Gangrel and Ventrue have a natural talent for animalism, and animalism may seem, perhaps, a discipline you’d expect from only a Gangrel, to give commandments is as natural to Ventrue as drinking blood. Whether it be to kine, animals, or once you are strong enough, other Kindred, Ventrue are rulers.” The whole Damien situation aside.

“Daaamn.” Jack’s smile reached across his cheeks, ego growing before Julias’s eyes. He reached out as well, and touched the rat. Before the animal could bite the finger, Julias made a few, tiny chirp sounds and high-pitched clucks of the tongue, and the rat nodded, giving Jack freedom to touch it. “Did you just... speak rat?”

“I did. Sort of. When you learn to speak in feral whispers, you can use words, but you’ll also find it’ll come natural to make animal sounds to better fit the way the creature’s mind works.” He held out his hand for the rat, and made a few more quiet clicks with his tongue. The rat nodded, and climbed into his palm. “It’s a thing we have in common with the werewolves, the beast inside us. Much as you don’t want that beast coming out and making a mess of your life, it does provide some significant advantages. It is an animal, it speaks animal, and can communicate with other animals.”

“I’ll say. So, I can talk with rats?”

“Talk, give it orders, ask it questions. Here.” He held the rat up in front of the boy, and gestured to it. “Tell it to turn around.”

“I’m... not sure how I’m supposed to do this.”

“You have to stop thinking in terms of contracts, suits, shoes, clubs, taxis, and money for a moment. Let the beast in your gut come to the surface; it’ll show you how to think in terms of smell, blood, hunting, hunger, territory, and all the animal things you normally suppress. And once you’ve let a little of that beast out of its cage, focus on the rat.”

“Right, beast... right.”

A sore spot, and Julias knew it. Kid didn’t like listening to that part of him, didn’t like that he had a beast in there, something that had driven him to murder an innocent woman, Mrs. Pavala. Part of being Kindred was understanding that you were no longer human, but also never letting go of your humanity, lest the beast take you over and turn you into a mindless animal. Forever a tug of war, using but controlling the animal inside.

Kid was going to have to learn how to use both sides, sooner or later.

With a deep, unneeded breath, Jack set his eyes on the rat. Like watching a child learning to ride a bike, there was a balance to be found that took practice, that took trial and error, that had Jack frowning as he attempted to communicate with a rat. A weird direction to take the brain, which was exactly where Jack’s problem was; his brain kept getting in the way. But Julias had given him decent instruction, and he trusted the kid to figure it out.

“... turn... around,” the boy said. The rat tilted its head to the side and stared at him. “God damn it.” Again, the boy stared at the rat, and leaned in to make better eye contact. Julias almost interrupted with more advice, but he could see Jack was in ‘Jack’ mode, his ‘don’t disturb me while I figure this out, even if it takes days’ mode. “... turn around.”

The rat turned around. Jack grinned a grin Julias knew all too well, the Ventrue grin of ‘I’m a god damn Ventrue and I did this’ accomplishment.

Julias smiled at his childe. “Well done. Now, ask it a question.”

“Like what?”

“Whatever you want.”

“Whatever I want, right right. Um, how was your d—”

“Something a rat would understand, Jack. It’s a rodent that spends its days scavenging for food and fucking other cute little rats.”

Jack rubbed his buzzed head, took another sigh, and tried again. "... how many Kindred are in this room?" The rat stood there, unmoving for several moments, before it held up two fingers. And a squeak to go with it. "... did I just understand it squeak? Can I speak squeak language now?"

"After a fashion. The noises help bridge the gap for your mind to understand how the rat communicates. And now, if you tried to talk to the rat using rat-like noises, you'd find it quite natural."

"Natural. Ok." And the kid made a few little squeaks of his own, which enticed the rat to do a slow full body turn again. "Wow I'm the Rat Whisperer."

"Viktor had a natural affinity for commanding others, as do you and I, be it Kindred or kine or animal. Viktor and I are also comfortable with physical combat, which, despite my best guess, you seem to be as well."

"Ha, I doubt it." The kid clicked his tongue a few times, and the rat crawled out onto his awaiting palm. Rat-equipped, Jack stated to walk around the abandoned building, and scanned the walls up and down with his eyes. "I got very, very lucky with that spider creature."

"Still, given some training, I think you could learn to use more than a gun." Julias shrugged and stood back up. Squatting for extended periods was a bitch, even for a Kindred. "And it may come up, if things go sour, that all Kindred in the Invictus will receive some proper training with a knife."

"A knife? Why?" Jack approached a corner where a rat hole was, and clicked his tongue a few times. A few more rats emerged, and they stood in a row while Jack put down the first rat to join them. The rats did not flee, but stood there longer yet, and nodded a few times as Jack offered them a few squeaks. Kid caught on fast, very fast. Scary fast even.

"You would be hard pressed to use any discipline on a werewolf, and unless you learn how to use a knife in proper combat, a silver knife will be useless."

"Silver... knife." And reality came crashing down on Julias's childe in the most obvious way, with collapsing shoulders and a low groan. "Thought we were on good terms with the Uratha."

"We are. That's why we're slowly setting up our Kindred with silver knives, instead of arming everyone overnight with both those, and silver bullets."

"Putting me in a weird position as the middle man for the Uratha and Kindred. You know Avery's looking into Barry's death too?"

Barry. Julias frowned as he started to pace, and raised a hand to stroke his chin. “Barry was nobody. That was part of why we liked him. I could trust Barry to pursue a goal, a contract, and not only would he do it, but I didn’t have to worry him drawing attention to himself. At least until this Mirrden business. And you know Avery and Garry are friends right?”

“Think she killed Barry to slow down our takeover, for Garry?”

“Seems extreme.” But the Uratha lacked the subtlety of the Kindred. What was extreme to a vampire was a regular night for a werewolf. “Whatever’s going on, it has to do with the Mirrden business. Monica could have been caught in a fire as well if she hadn’t moved.”

“Yeah, but I found nothing that could help me track down who set either fire. No footage, or what little footage Amanda got was useless.” Jack stopped, looked at him, and then at the rats standing before him. “... I should have asked the animals.”

Now the kid was catching on. “Being a Kindred is a cold war, most of the time. Information. And the information you can learn from an animal is better than no information at all. Rats, and crows in particular, have surprisingly good memories.”

“But—”

“And you can use that information to prevent fights as much as win them, Jack. I’m happy with the way Dolareido is now, far more than my peers, and I struggle every day to keep them from ruining it. Garry, Michael, and Maria are almost desperate to fight each other, but a little nudge here, a hint there, and I help them settle their issues without Kindred getting caught in the middle.” He motioned to the rats. “Now, try again, more elaborate orders, more elaborate questions.”

The two of them spent the next two hours working on the kid’s feral whisper, and each passing moment made Julias all the prouder. Kid was good. Kid was damn good. Some Kindred bloodlines seemed to water down with the generations, but Viktor had been a natural, Julias even more a natural, and Jack was proving to continue the trend. Kid was going to become a powerful man, given the time to grow. It wasn’t long before Jack had several rats fetching him things, disappearing into rooms, only to return and describe the room contents, and he had some other rats besides standing in formation.

“Excellent,” Julias said. “Keep at it, and soon you’ll be raising similar animals from the dead to be your devoted familiar for a few nights.”

“Raise the dead? Are you fucking serious?”



“That is basically what I did to you when I sired you, Jack.”

“Touche.”

“Once you can do that, then we’ll see about summoning animals to you, and perhaps possessing one.”

Jack’s eyes opened wide as he looked at the rats, then back to him, then the rats. Kid just didn’t get it, didn’t understand how profound and insane a Kindred’s abilities could become, how amazing his abilities could become. Still thought small. Julias would weed that trait out of him, and then there’d be no stopping the kid’s growth.

Chuckling, he put his hand on the boy’s shoulder, and guided him back onto the street.

“So, only Ventrue and Gangrel can do do this?” Jack said, voice a tiny whisper now that they were out in the open.

“Other Kindred such as the Daeva can learn animalism with practice, and a Ventrue can learn to move with Daeva speed, but to dominate a mind like a Ventrue can would require teaching from a Ventrue. And vice versa. For a Ventrue to learn how to enrapture people with the awe and majesty discipline of the Daeva, you would need to learn from a Daeva. Each bloodclan comes with their own, unique discipline as you know.”

“Maybe I could ask Antoinette to teach me?”

Julias laughed, no longer whispering; no need for it when nothing they were talking about was secret. “There are Daeva in the Invictus who could teach you instead, but I think you’ll have your hands full learning from me for many decades yet. And besides, you’d need to taste a Daeva’s blood to unlock their unique discipline. Antoinette wouldn’t let you do that.”

“Oh... yeah, you’re right. That makes me wonder, about Vivienne and Natasha—not the blood tasting, I mean, just the fact they... don’t really talk anymore, not like you and I do.”

Julias winced, but nodded, and gave his little childe a half-hug, half-shake of the far shoulder. “I respect Natasha a lot, but I had my doubts she’d be able to be someone’s sire.” And it was such a shame, cause the girl was brilliant. Lot of similarities between her and Jack, not just their small size. “It’s... it’s not the same, when you sire a friend.”

“Is our relationship much different, now that we’re childe and sire?”

“No, and that’s because I knew what I was doing.” He stopped by a lamppost, and turned to face the boy. This was too important to talk about casually, he needed to look the kid in the eyes. “The day may come when you want to sire someone, and you may get permission to do just that. If you sired someone very close to you, like your mother or sister, the relationship is going to be damaged. You’re not the same person anymore, the beast changes you, and your relationship with others. When you and I became friends, I saw potential in you, and made sure our friendship always had this sire and child dynamic, right from the start.”

“That’s true, isn’t it?” Jack looked up at him, and smiled one of those smiles that was frustratingly good at disarming people, even Julias. The exact opposite of Viktor. “I… sometimes I think about my family, and what it’d be like to bring them into the fold. Just a fantasy, I know, but—”

“But it never leaves you. Letting my wife think I was dead, letting her move on without me? Hardest thing I’ve ever done.”

“Your wife… you never talk about her much.” It was Jack’s turn to reach out this time, and give Julias a small pat on the arm. “You don’t need to start now. Shit must be fucking painful.”

“Yeah.” And that was one of the reasons he loved this damn kid. Never got a ‘cry on my shoulder’ request from him. “Yes it is. But that was a long time ago. Times are different now, and better in every way. I have a woman I love, you have a woman you love, Dolareido’s in a state of peace, and even the Begotten and Uratha aren’t stirring up much trouble.”

“Yeah, yeah we do have women!” Jack said, eyes lighting up. Figures the kid would focus on that of course. One of these days, Julias was going to have to teach him how to resist a woman’s charms, before it got him killed.

The two of them started walking again, though Jack was closer to a skip than a walk. Very unbecoming the suit.

“Think we should go on a double date?” Julias said. Bad idea, hilariously bad idea, but the thought was entertaining nonetheless.

“How would that even work? Can you imagine Beatrice and Antoinette sitting across from each other at a table?”

Yes, he could. Strange, maybe even awkward, but the Prince had a way of cutting through those sorts of issues; in her favor, at least.

“You know, I know you’ve seen Beatrice’s breasts,” he said. She’d sent the picture of her topless to the kid with Julias sitting right next to her after all. And that time in his apartment too. Girl was shameless. “And Antoinette’s, and her ghouls’, and now Clara’s. Who else should go on this list?”

“Hey! Hey! D-Don’t say shit like that!” Jack checked left, checked right, and shoved Julias as best he could; not at all, and Jack pushed himself away a few feet for his efforts. “Christ. I mean, Antoinette’s been super forgiving about that sort of stuff, but even she must have her limits.”

“Don’t kiss or fuck any other girls and I think you’ll be fine. Same goes for me you know? This Jennifer woman has been pretty upfront with her desire to get into Beatrice’s bed, and by extension my bed. No idea if that’s a good idea or not.” Well, the conversation had taken a strange route. But the kid wasn’t a kid, he was an adult, and Julias had no one else he could talk to about these sorts of problems. There was Beatrice, but she wasn’t exactly a neutral body in the discussion; girl was practically a sex addict. Which he could understand, considering she had twenty years of unwanted celibacy to make up for. Understand and enjoy.

“I remember talking to Jennifer at the ball. Sexy, very sexy, and seemed pretty intelligent. I could see why she’d like you, but Beatrice?”

“Hey!” He gave his childe a small shove, but Jack being Jack, a small shove sent him a fair ways. “I like Beatrice.”

The little Ventrue smirked at him, and the two of them started walking once more. “So do I.”

God damn it was nice, to just walk down the street with his childe, and talk about girls.

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~~Natasha~~

Natasha expected that, sitting around and talking about boys, would eventually get old. But for some reason she found herself smiling, and giggling more than a few times, as she talked with Jessy. The two of them were in Natasha’s apartment, sitting at the counter and drinking a bottle of blood again. Far more giggling and laughing going on this time though.

“In the alley, really?”

Natasha nodded. With no blush of life, she was free to be as embarrassed as she wanted to be without having to blush red. And she was very, very embarrassed.

“Y-Yeah, they uh... had to have me, and I had t-t-to calm them down... B-But even after doing that, they... had me anyway.” And unlike Jessy’s ghouls, they didn’t use pharmaceutical aid. They were simply ridiculously healthy, fit, strong beasts. And apparently, extremely horny beasts.

“Wish I was there.”

“Hey! D-Don’t... don’t touch my boys. They’re mine.” Mine mine mine. First time she’d ever had a relationship this sexual, this searing hot. It was also the first time she found herself wanting to hang out with her lover, purely for the fun of it, to laugh at the TV or to joke about politics.

First time she’d ever had a romantic relationship that felt fun. And it was so weird that it was with two boys. Men. Wolves at that.

“Quite attached to your lovers. Am I sensing love in the air?”

“W-What? N-N-N-No... I... we only just... it’s only been a week together, and... I only knew them a little while b-before then, and—”

“Yeah, it’s good that you’re going slow and not declaring your love the moment you felt a connection.”

“Hey! I’m just as old as you, J-Jessy, I... I’m not a child, some juvenile little girl.”

Her friend smirked at her, winked, and took another sip of their drink. “Yeah, but love can turn anyone into a silly little girl.”

“We’re n-not in love!” More frowns for her friend, before she took back her bottle and refilled her glass.

“Glad my advice for them didn’t backfire at least. I had a feeling you liked them, but I could have been wrong.”

“I still owe you f-for that. I... they... d-did things to me you know.” Pinned down on a bed, trapped between two massive walls of muscle, with the two of them buried to the hilt inside her.

“Bet you came your brains out too.” The chuckle Jessy made could have come from a hyena.

“That... that isn’t important! You t-told them personal things! Things I... things I never told you!”

“Yeah well, it didn’t take a genius to see where your eyes were going those few times we had fun with the boys. Speaking of, damn they are going to be sad.”

“Sad? B-But they still have you. With your thighs and butt and—”

Natasha squeaked when her friend flicked her in the nose.

“You’d think after all this, you’d have grown some confidence! My boys really, really wanted to have you, all of them, at the same time.”

Oh good god. She lowered her forehead to the counter, half out of shame, half cause she was picturing it now. Eight hands on her, four penises fighting to find somewhere to penetrate, her buried in flesh and heat and sex. Too much, way too much. Two men was more than enough.

But the image made her smile anyway.

“They... really were attracted to me, weren’t they?”

“Fuck yes they were. Tight little thing like you? And the way you spoiled them with the blowjobs, ugh, making me look bad.”

“I’m sorry! I... I just...” Just seemed to really like it when men were groaning and squirming in pleasure because of her hands, her lips and tongue. It was a very unexpected development from the sexual hazing Jessy had put her through, but very real, and her two boyfriends seemed to love it too. And were more than willing to repay her for it.

Hehe, two boyfriends.

“Any bisexuality in there?” Jessy said.

“W-What?” Natasha sat up straight and raised a brow, then considered. Jessy’s ghouls were more than willing to do anything Jessy asked, and that occasionally included touching each other. “No, I d-d-don’t think so. They’re best friends, and, um, d-despite how close everything gets, they never t-touch or even look at each other.” Always her, always all their attention on her, spoiling her rotten.

“Well, I’m sad that you won’t be joining me anymore, but pretty happy for you. Enjoy it.” Taking another sip of the blood — from the bottle — Jessy reached over and slid the laptop closer. Pictures of the

burned building were open, as well as pictures of the Mirrden area. Natasha and Jessy were no longer in the same covenant, but dead Kindred was a problem worth talking about.

“Invictus h-have any leads yet?”

“Nope. Dragons?”

“No. The Prince has D-Daniel keeping an eye open, I’m sure, but... but there’s no reason to really suspect the Uratha yet.”

“How about those monsters? We know there’s this Azamel chick hanging out in the tunnels, just squatting and being ominous and shit. Think she has anything to do with it?”

“... maybe.” But unlikely. Someone killed Barry, but the Carthians weren’t so stupid as to invite war on themselves to kill simple Barry. Barry was Barry, and Natasha doubted Garry even knew the man’s name.

“Ok, enough talk about work,” Jessy said.

“W-What? We said three words about wo—”

“So you going to take the boys out? Or just eat in all the time? I wonder if they’d enjoy going to one of the clubs.”

Natasha frowned her meanest frown, but like usual, it did nothing to deter Jessy and her one-track mind. “I... I might take them to a club.” Dolareido was at no lack of options, not in the Invictus part of South Side anyway. “But it’s really not me, you know? And I d-don’t think it’s them either.”

“Well you wouldn’t be taking them there to dance. You’d be taking them there to fuck.”

“W-We can do that at home!”

“Yeah but it’s not the same.”

“I p-p-p-prefer it when the city c-can’t all see me naked. Unlike you! Everyone looks at your window every Saturday evening!”

Insults were useless against Jessy, not when it came to her shamelessness and her sexual desires. The Gangrel shrugged and sipped more blood, as if Natasha had just commented on the weather.

“If they like what they see, all the hotter for me.”

Natasha frowned again, but quickly gave up. Jessy was Jessy, and there was no changing her.

“And you wear that thong, so uncomfortable! Whole city p-probably just—”

“How do you know I wear a thong when I’m having fun by the window?” Jessy’s smile grew into a terrible, evil grin, and she leaned further across the counter the more it grew. “Been watching me?”

“I uh... sort of? Just once! B-By accident.”

“Uh huh.”

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“How goes your new relationship, with the two Uratha, my apprentice? Any new developments?”

Natasha whined and shrank into her seat; even Antoinette wanted to talk about her new boyfriends. Her and the Prince, alone in the laboratory where the Prince conducted her experiments, seeking to communicate with the other side, the Hisil. Perhaps Natasha would ask her boyfriends for help with that someday, if Avery didn’t kill them for it.

“You know about Arturo and M-Matthew?”

“We discussed them not long ago, did we not? You confided in me, told me you Kissed one, told me they flirted with you, that they were interested in you, and you them.” A wicked smile appeared, and she shrugged. “And of course, information travels quickly in Dolareido.”

“... oh god.” She sank into her chair some more, and then let her forehead drop to the table. Everyone knew she was in a relationship with two men, two werewolves at that.

“Natasha Vola, are you embarrassed?”

“... yes.”

“Whatever for?” The Prince paced about, a tablet in her hand showing her some different camera feeds of the symbol in the center of the room. Each feed was fed through some sort of filter, so the feeds were different color. But the lights were on in the laboratory, letting Natasha take notes of the strange object in front of her: a tiny carving of a crow.

“For... y-you know, d-d-doing... b-being in a... uh, relationship... like that.” No use in denying it. If Antoinette knew—if everyone knew, then they knew what kind of relationship it was.

But the Prince just laughed, a comely and warm sound, before sitting down across the table from her.

“Natasha, my dear, you are a silly little creature. Being friends with that animal friend of yours, Jessy, I had assumed such trite shames were abandoned already. Or, soon to be.”

“... you did?”

More laughter, but not in a taunting way. The sound of the Prince laughing was almost soothing.

“You are precious. Part of me believed that your shy demeanor was merely the mask you wore in public.” She smiled down at her, leaned in, and set the tablet aside. “Half a century of unlife to your name, and you are still concerned about sex, and the views Kindred share of it?”

“A l-little, yeah!”

Antoinette rolled her eyes, leaned back, and combed her hair over one of her shoulders onto her chest, where she continued to comb it with her fingers. “Jessy engages in such crude, sexual pursuits, because she knows that no Kindred — at least any older than a fledgling — care. And I encourage it. In so many cities, Kindred lose their taste for the physical as they age, and I have labored to prevent that from happening within my city, for myself, and for the others.”

“Y-Yeah, and I love that, b-b-b-b—”

“Natasha.” The Prince craned her head a little to look at the door; probably checking for Daniel. But it was just the two of them, thank god. “Do you have any inkling of the sort of sexual depravity a Kindred may sink to, seeking pleasure?”

“I... I um...”

“When I was your age, little Vola, or perhaps a little older, I once had twenty men enslaved to the power of my discipline majesty. And while four of them were dedicated to pleasuring me, filling my body completely with finger, tongue, and shaft, the other sixteen bathed my breasts and body in their white seed. They stood about me, masturbating, and when one was ready to climax, they soaked my breasts, for another man to massage into my skin. And during all this, I sipped blood from a wine glass, and let the pleasure, and the overwhelming smell of sex and blood and life, let the moment lull me into contentment and orgasm.”



Holy. Fuck. Natasha stared at the woman, eyes wide, and taking more than few up-and-down glances of her. Twenty men, just covering her in cum, and massaging and fingering and fucking and rubbing and stuff? Good god.

“... all... all over you? R-Really?” She almost said gross. And it was gross! In the after math when the arousal was gone and you had to clean up. But, in the heat of the moment, getting a man’s cum on your skin was... carnal, and thrilling.

Antoinette nodded, and shrugged when they made eye contact. “It was an interesting time, exploring one’s body, one’s self, exploring desires and breaching barriers. Coming into the power of the age of ancilla, as you have, I took the time to discover what appealed or did not appeal to me. I wholly encourage your relationship with these two, Natasha, if for no other reason than to explore what will make you happy.”

“I sense a... b-but coming.”

“But be careful, Vola. They are Uratha. You are not. We have different goals, different reasons to exist. And sometimes those goals do not mesh.”

“... you don’t think... it’ll c-come to a conflict, d-do you?” Cause she really didn’t want that. Really really didn’t want that.

“Just be aware, my little apprentice. You are smart, clever, quick, and I will be relying on you more and more as the years go by. If it ever does come to blows with the wolves... Fetch my purse for me, would you dear?”

Purse fetching? A little odd, but she nodded and got up. The purse the Prince was carrying was a black thing, fairly large, large enough to be gaudy and unusual; not something the Prince would wear in public considering her perfect fashion sense. And it felt a little heavy.

Once it was on the table, Antoinette opened it up, and withdrew a small sword.

“For you, my apprentice.”

“Uh, o-ok?” Not to seem ungrateful, but she already had a sword, and Antoinette knew it. “Wha—”

“Draw the blade.”

Natasha blinked, but did as requested. The sheathe was a simple thing, some sort of sturdy material, perhaps black leather, and maybe fifteen inches long. The handle was similar, though as Natasha looked at

the grip, she noticed a subtle pattern carved into the hard handle: a dragon, almost invisible unless you were looking for it.

But it was the metal of the blade that locked Natasha's vision. There was a glint to it, a shimmer, a shine she didn't expect to find on metal.

"... s-silver."

"Indeed. And I expect you to keep that blade with you, Natasha Vola. That is not a request. If you forget to keep it with you, I will do far more to you than shake you by the jaw. Understood?"

"Und-d-derstood." She gulped, and ran her eyes up and down the shortsword. She didn't normally walk around with her usual sword unless she felt the mission was dangerous, and now she was being ordered to keep a blade on her at all times.

What would Matthew and Arturo say? They'd understand, surely.

"And be under no illusions, Vola. The other covenants will be doing the same."

"Feel like we... m-m-might trigger something."

"With luck, my love and his new role will prevent that. That does bring me to a new task for you, Natasha," Antoinette said. New task, and she was holding a new silver sword. Uh oh. But, the Prince shook her head, reading her mind. "Nothing to do with the Uratha. In fact, with your new relationship, I feel I should leave tasks involving the Uratha to Daniel. No, what I ask of you, is to keep an eye and ear open for a similar weakness in the Begotten."

"Oh! S-Silver for the werewolves, but the monsters, I uh... yeah, what is there weakness?" They were literal nightmares, but that didn't explain any weakness, didn't provide any real hints on how to deal with them if things went bad. "You've d-d-dealt with them before, and... in centuries, you haven't found a weakness?"

"No. They hold their secrets close."

"I got the impression, from F-Fiona... that they actually... like bonding with other beings, like us, like the werewolves."

The Prince sighed, got up, and began to pace about the room, her hands together behind her back, and her head down as she dug through her thoughts. "They do, from the few I have met. But they enjoy their own motives, Azamel in particular. Feeding their hunger is not just a need of the Begotten, it is their reason

for existence. The ramifications of their ravenous appetites changes from monster to monster, and if at all possible, I require the means to defeat them should their hungers prove too great a thorn in my side.”

“I’d hate t-t-to have to kill Fiona.” Fiona was fun. Really fun. And nice. She needed to see her again, and thank her a few more times for everything she did with Jack and them.

“As would I, my little apprentice. But I have lived too long to make silly mistakes such as trusting others. We will look for a weakness, but only to use if absolutely necessary. And do not tell the beasts we are looking for this information. I do not wish them to think this will be a city operating under a policy of deterrence.”

“So... if we... d-d-discover a weakness, don’t tell them. They’ll think we c-can’t defeat them, but they’ll also be... less l-likely to be difficult to deal with.” It was a smart plan, assuming she could get such information without them knowing. And that was easier said than done, considering how alien these creatures were. Werewolves were weird and had unusual motivations, but the monsters may as well have been literal aliens from another planet, for all she could understand them.

“Indeed.” Antoinette walked over to the symbol on the floor where she performed her experiments, and stared at it. Apparently her mind was wandering, probably devouring some of the experiments they’d been doing in trying to summon different things. A few minor successes, summoning a few things that had as much intelligence as an insect. Nothing as profound as Safe.

“... d... d-did you really... have that many men... cum all over you?” The image was too vivid to just drop it.

The Prince burst into a loud laugh, and winked at Natasha before she returned to her analyzing of the summoning circle. “I did indeed.”

“But that was so long ago! How... d-do you remember something from back then?” Careful. Elders did not like admitting to their bad memories.

“It is true the memory is nothing more than a haze, but I quickly realized the value of journals when I was younger. I detailed such sexual exploration, and took note of many things.” She stepped over the circle, and analyzed it from the other side, fingers on her chin. “Perhaps you would prefer a more recent memory?”

“Recent? L... like...” Oh, Jack. She was talking about Jack. “I... um, that’s personal, right? You can—”

“Natasha, I know that you and that mongrel Jessy are close friends, and she has the tact of a grenade. If you would like to talk sex, then please, ask me. It is a passion of mine.”

Sex was a passion of the Prince’s? Well, she was Daeva, but with her age, Natasha continued to have the impression that her boss didn’t care for sex like younger Kindred. She knew that wasn’t true, but she’d dealt with Maria for so long, it was hard to shake the idea.

“I, I uh... um...” Awkward, so awkward. But then it was Natasha making it awkward. Jessy never felt awkward, and Antoinette was literally ten times older than Jessy. Making her feel ashamed, embarrassed, awkward, was impossible.

“Personally,” the Prince said, “I prefer to have multiple women in the bed, with the one man. It is such fun to tease the man, to hang him on the edge of bliss, before the insurmountable size of three women’s sex drive combined crush him.” She came back over to the table, sat down, and took a few more hidden notes on her tablet. “With you, I imagine it must be quite different. Two wolves, aggressive animals, large, and tiny you?” With a twinkle in her eye, the Prince leaned in, set her elbows on the table, and netted her fingers together for her chin to rest on. “Delicious.”

First Jessy, now Antoinette. But at least with Antoinette, she didn’t feel like she was talking to a teenager in an adult’s body. Antoinette was a real, mature woman, who could say a word like penis without laughing, and could describe sexual acts in extreme detail without ever breaking eye contact, apparently.

“They... they uh... sort... p-pinned me d-d-down... on the bed. And um, they both took me... same time... one in front of me... one behind me.” How would her boss react to that level of sexual admittance?

“Pinned?”

“Oh! Um, no no, I had a safe word, and it w-was... weirdly romantic? Cause they were kissing me, and t-touching me, and then... fucking me, at the same time, and they were gentle! Gentle, and nice... b-but also... aggressive and... hungry.”

“That sounds utterly rapturous.” Antoinette sighed, a long, calming sort, and let her eyes drift upward in some memory Natasha could not fathom. “I have forever been the mightier of my bedfellows. I do not know what it is to be in danger from the strength of whoever shares my touch. I envy you. It must have been intoxicating, little you, to be surrounded by such muscle, raw strength, blood and life capable of tearing you limb from limb, yet only concerned with two things: pleasuring you, and relieving themselves within your awaiting depths.”

Yeap. That was it. That was what was making Natasha's head spin every time she remembered that night. The feeling of being trapped and helpless and even in danger, and yet knowing the two who could easily kill her, wanted only to fuck her into a helpless mess, was overwhelming and intoxicating.

"It was... it w-was really good."

"It must have been! In my own experimentations, I have found that I could never quite truly enjoy anal penetration, to my dismay." The Prince shrugged, lowered her hands, and leaned back in her chair again so she could start combing her hair once more. "Of course, to each their own. And I must admit, the thought of you trapped between those two beasts is a very pleasing thought, Miss Vola. You are a beautiful little creature, and the juxtaposition of their size against yours, is a magnificently erotic image."

"Th-Thank you." Natasha smiled, even beamed with pride, and nodded a few times. The way the Prince described things made them feel so empowering, so delightful, so amazing. Not like Jessy who practically made her feel guilty; course her friend was only teasing her, but still. "You have such a beautiful way with words."

"Thank you," she said in return, smiling a warm smile Natasha found quite rare on her master's face. "As I said, sexuality is a passion of mine, and I am morose for not having a fellow Kindred to speak of such things with anymore. Would you care to indulge me?"

"Indulge, P-Prince?"

"Share with me details of your exploits, and I will share with you mine. Your relationship with the two Uratha is unique, and one I could not hope to experience on my own. Through your words, I may gain a taste of that experience. And I do hope you will enjoy my own tales."

Girl talk! Except, not the sort of girl talk with Jessy where it was all chuckles and teasing and dirty gossip. Antoinette actually seemed to approach the topic with the heart of an artist, looking to find the joy and eroticism in the words. And that, Natasha could definitely agree to.

"Ok."

"Wonderful." Antoinette made another sigh, another smile, and let her gaze drift upward as she combed her hair over her chest. "But only a week ago, perhaps a day more, I was lying back in the arms of one of my ghouls, my precious Ashley. Jack sat upon my waist, leaning forward, shaft buried in my breasts. Ashley took me into her hands, and used my breasts to massage Jack's length, until his white fluid coated me." Another sigh! The third sigh sealed it; it was her dreamy sigh. This was the noise the Prince

made when she was swooning. “The look of sheer, total, overwhelming sexual bliss on Jack’s face was enough to make my knees weak. And of course, to my ever delight, the feel of fingers massaging his warmth into my skin was lovely.”

Well, that was an image Natasha was never going to get out of her head. And yet, with how elegantly the Prince described it, she was more than happy to keep the image. Jack was a very attractive little man, and the scene Antoinette described was pretty amazing, if not exactly Natasha’s cup of tea. Perhaps that’s what these exchanges were all about?

“Jack m-must have really enjoyed that.”

“Oh, the boy is obsessed with my breasts.” Antoinette chuckled, and shrugged as she looked down at her fingers, and where they mingled with her hair. “And I adore him for it. He has brought me to near climax through my breasts alone, ever doting on them, massaging, caressing, kissing, suckling. Sometimes, I will simply lie there, and let him feast upon my breasts. It will take him twenty, perhaps thirty minutes before he at last feels the need to move on, and by then, a touch of his breath on my neck is enough to bring me to orgasm.”

And not at a single point in any of this vivid describing did Antoinette even blink. Not for jadedness though; if anything she looked head over heels in love, and swooned a fourth time.

“But, please,” Antoinette said, “this is supposed to be an exchange. Regale me with a tale, Miss Vola, of what your two beasts have done to you?”

Natasha gulped, peeked left and right like someone might be spying on them, and leaned forward. “The... d-day after our first... time, they...” She almost squealed, and buried her face in her palms as she shook her head. “Had their tongues... between my legs. B-B-Both of them did.”

“Your new lovers sound quite comfortable with each other and your body.”

“T-Too comfortable! It was... I mean, it was... really good, just...”

“Natasha, you are Kindred, and have been for five decades. You have no reason to be embarrassed by your body, or reason to worry for the hygiene issues of the living. Your lovers seem delighted to indulge you such salacious acts; embrace it. You will be happier for it.”

Embracing it wasn’t so easy when she had a couple lifetimes of antisocial behavior to fight, and one of those lifetimes included bodily functions that would deter someone from sticking their tongue in such

places! But, like Jessy said, she hadn't had a period or bowel movement in half a century, so feeling self conscious about things like that was stupid.

"I did... did um... really enjoy it. And then they... lifted me up, and both had me again. But this time... it was standing up. My toes c-couldn't reach the floor." And by the time they were done, their cum had dripped down her legs to her knees, and her own had reached her ankles. But she couldn't say that! Too much, way too much. For now.

"Truly delicious." Another sigh, another smile. "Enjoy it while you can, little Mekhet. Such joys make our second lives worth living."

"... uh, and—"

"And do not fret. Our tales are secret between you and I."

Mind reader.

"Thank you... f-for being... I d-d-don't know, more mature about this than Jessy. I love Jessy, b-but she... I could never talk about this in so much detail! She... can't take anything seriously."

"I understand, Miss Vola, quite well at that." She leaned in to match Natasha's posture, like the two should have been whispering when they weren't. "You are not Jessy Herrington. Jokes and teasing are not how one such as yourself would prefer to discuss such delicate matters."

"E-Exactly!" Getting exposed to this new side of the Prince was doing wonders for Natasha's comfort. Always she thought of the Prince as some sort of deity, and always it came back to Antoinette being very much a woman. A confident woman, intelligent and self aware and all the things Natasha wanted to be.

A friend, maybe? The Prince seemed to like the idea, at least.

"If I may make a suggestion, my apprentice? One for the bedroom. And please, request that I cease if this conversation proves too personal for your liking."

"N-No! Please, go ahead." Sex tips from a half-millennia-old Daeva were bound to be good.

"I suspect that you keep rather girlish, cute things in your possession, yes? Stuffed animals, bright clothes with butterflies, similar things, and I suspect that you spend much of your time attempting to convince yourself that these are childish things? Instead of placing your animals upon your bed, you threw them away, and the few you keep you hide in your closet. Instead of embracing colorful thigh high socks,

you force yourself to wear only regular white socks, and would never be caught shopping for such juvenile clothes. At war with your intelligence, you convince yourself to pursue cold efficiency in everything, despite a secret want to play with brighter colors, to experiment with different hair styles, to... wear pink.”

She blinked at the Prince. Blinked, and blinked a few more times. Did she know about her stuffed animals she hid in her closet? Her pink journal she kept hidden in a secret drawer?

“I—”

The Prince put up a hand, and offered Natasha a gentle smile. “You are a clever, brilliant woman, Natasha. But like Daniel, I see that you deny yourself much of what you consider juvenile, when in fact, it is these things that give you both such unique and compelling personalities.” The Prince raised a hand to her lip, eyes looking down as she vanished in thought for a moment. “... come with me.”

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Deeper into the Prince’s tower the two walked. Natasha had never walked these stairs, spreading out with flourishing designs that opened into entirely new depths, with black or white marble dragons on stands, and similarly shaped etchings in the black marble that the Prince loved so much. This tower was huge. Was it twenty floors deep, or maybe even thirty?

Antoinette stepped into a hallway, and Natasha scampered after her, though her eyes continued to drink in the sights. One of the rooms had a pool! A full sized pool, with a hot tub beside it. Another room was filled with mirrors and all sorts of colored drapes. One of the rooms was filled with metal, locked crates, that Natasha could only assume was either filled with gold bars, or dangerous occult objects.

Another room’s purpose was blatant, and Natasha stared at it as Antoinette brought her into its walls. Clothes. There were clothes everywhere, hanging from hundreds, thousands of hangers. Wardrobes too, many open with all sorts of clothes inside. But they couldn’t have belonged to the Prince, they were far too small for her, and much of the clothes came in colors like aqua, pink, lime, violet, and a dozen shades and variations for each.

“... Ashley and Julee’s clothes?”



“Oui. They are taller than you, but the clothes will serve well enough to demonstrate.” She reached into one of the wardrobes, and plucked from it a set of socks. Pink socks that went up to the thigh, and had little white flowers on them. “These to you, are silly, cute things, non?”

“I uh... I d-do... yeah.” Wearing something that ridiculous would make her die of embarrassment. But the color was appealing, the design was appealing, and she knew it was scratching that guilty pleasure part of her.

“And you, once tasked with the horrible burden of being Maria Turio’s servant, along with being the sheriff’s childe, must have thought such things were not to be worn by one in your position? Believed that you needed to prove yourself, due to your small size, that you were mature and reliable?”

“... y... yeah.” It was true, much as she hated to admit it.

“Then you are a fool.”

Natasha lowered her head, and sighed. Ouch.

The Prince came up to her, and poked her once in the forehead. “While you performed business for the Invictus, and while performing business for me, a certain presentation is expected. But when time is yours, when you are free to be yourself? Please, embrace your guilty pleasures, Natasha Vola. I suspect it will not only make you a happier individual, but your new lovers as well.”

“Art and Matt? Why—”

“I suspect they are attracted to the qualities in you that escape your pitiful attempts to hide them.” Ouch. Again. Her new friend was proving to be real mean. But the Prince sighed again, and pat her on the shoulder. “This is a good thing, Natasha. It means you can indulge yourself in their presence. And, I suspect, if these two massive, deadly predators ever found their little Red Riding Hood wearing naught but red thigh high socks, and silk boy shorts of the same color, they would utterly ravage you.”

Ravage her. She squirmed, but raised her head as a smile forced its way onto her lips. “R... Ravage?”

“Oh yes. Perhaps if also wearing a petit red tank top, the two men would be slaves to their own desires. They would pin you down, force themselves upon your tiny, wriggling body, and devour you many times, until you were a mess of exhaustion, sweat, and pleasure. And only then would they both take you between them, penetrate you, fill you, and fuck your weakened body until they were satisfied.”

Good god this woman! No idea, Natasha had no idea Antoinette had this sort of side to her. Dominatrix? Sure. Queenly and confident? Obviously. Motherly and tender with her lover Jack? She could even see that. But she never, ever expected Antoinette to be a connoisseur of sexuality. And to be so eloquent and... arousing, in how she described it.

“How... d-d-d-d—”

“Natasha, my sweet dear, you are terribly easy to read, as you no doubt know. And for ones as old as I, we recognize behavior in others, behavior we have seen over centuries, and sometimes expressed ourselves.” She sat down beside her, and set the silly pink thigh high socks on her lap. “Learn from my mistakes, and embrace that which you hide behind closet doors.”

“You... weren’t always s-s-so... confident?”

“My dear! Of course not.” She got back up, leaving the socks behind, and started rooting through more of her ghouls’ clothes. “I came from a time where women were to be subservient, not dominant. I have always been taller than most men. And, from a time before I can recall, I have had white hair. Much of my life, according to the few journal entries I still retain from that time, I was quite self conscious about those aspects of myself. To be meek, small, to be cared for by a man, that was what I wanted.”

Imagining tall, curvy Antoinette being self conscious about anything was a tough thing to imagine, especially with how tonight’s conversation had gone, with the Prince shamelessly describing sex and sexual acts and approaching her about them. Woman barely ever blinked, let alone stutter and fidget with embarrassment and awkwardness like Natasha did.

“It was decades,” she continued, “before I learned to embrace what I kept private. In today’s age, it is preached that women should strive to be assertive; and yet, that has perhaps damaged what many enjoy in the bedroom: being submissive. Jack is submissive with me, and I expect you will enjoy being submissive with your two lovers. Submissive, and perhaps, a little... girlish.” She returned from the wardrobe with some colorful tops, some various colors in underwear — bubblegum colors everywhere — and some more types of socks, different colors, different patterns, different heights.

“Your ghouls m-must have a lot of fun.”

“Oui. If only we Kindred could enjoy life as they do. But, we may try. Jack has awoken in me many pleasures I let lie dormant. Corsets, I must admit, are a guilty pleasure of mine. To create such unrealistic

portrayals of a woman's waist? I should feel more guilty for the act, and yet I cannot help but indulge my vanity.”

Natasha giggled, and looked the Prince up and down a few times. Yeah, she definitely seemed like a corset woman. And, as Natasha looked at all the colorful, fun clothes the Prince was showing her, the little Mekhet couldn't help but picture herself in them. Cause they were fun, and silly, and all the things she never considered herself to be. That Jessy kept saying she could be. That Art and Matt seemed to think she was.

She scooped up the clothes. Not that they'd fit her, but it gave her some idea as to the brands she should buy. If a Daeva knew anything, they knew fashion.

“Feel like... I'm b-betraying my bookworm self.”

“Nonsense. Embrace that as well.” Antoinette dismissed her puerile concerns with a small hand wave, and stood up again to go digging through more clothes. “And I do suggest some nighties to compliment your clothing rotation. Colorful ones. Unless I am mistaken — and that is rare — those two wolves would lose themselves in total, animal lust, if they caught you wearing a babydoll nightie, see-through, and nothing else.”

“Nothing else? N-No bottoms?”

“Non. It spoils the collective illusion of innocence such attire can bring. But of course, that is a small distinction, and if you would prefer to wear them, wear something that matches. In either case, the results will be explosive.”

And again, Natasha giggled at Antoinette's perfect word choice: explosive. She felt like she should be at a salon, getting her nails done, her hair done, and gossiping about boys with the hair stylist. Course, Antoinette approached sexual details with a little more openness than a hair stylist might. But, at the same time, with total sincerity and maturity. It was refreshing, a total one-eighty from Jessy's approach.

“Thank you.”

“For what, dear?”

“For... I d-don't know, talking about this sorta stuff with me, even though I'm... p-pretty shy about this kind of stuff.”

“Ah, my dear, it is I that must thank you. Your sire does not share my passion for sexuality, and not since... Tony’s youth, when he went by a different name, have I engaged in such delightful conversation. To gossip, and talk of men and sex? A guilty pleasure if there ever as one.” She removed another piece of clothing from the wardrobe, a nightie, a tiny thing that was very see-through, and very lime. And now that Natasha was staring at it and Antoinette in this whole new, mind-shattering light, she realized the Prince was handling the clothes of not just her ghouls, but two women she’d spent many years having sex with on a regular basis.

Little bit of bias then, maybe, from Antoinette about the clothes Natasha should wear. Well, maybe bias, but still true. Maybe not so true that she’d start wearing pink all the time, or sundresses, but maybe, on occasion, for fun? It could be fun. It would be fun!

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~~Beatrice~~

She shuddered, and rubbed her arms. Not like she felt terribly cold, being Kindred and all, but it seemed like the thing to do while in a tank top, in the Three Kings Cemetery.

The Dolareido Cathedral, Lucas’s masterpiece, wasn’t too far away. Beatrice wouldn’t be surprised if Maria was in there right now, playing some music like she knew the old Nosferatu could. Maybe Damien was in there too? Maybe. But, not why she was here.

Jacob was wearing his robes, long black things that reached down to his ankles, and worn with what must have been decades of use. Maybe even centuries, if it was treated to last. Whatever it was made of, it wasn’t the sort of thing you’d wear in public, cause it screamed witchcraft and occult and other crazy shit; not good for blending into a crowd. The elder kept them both hidden in his cloak of night discipline, and considering his power, his age, it was more than strong enough for them to basically disappear from existence.

“We gonna dig up a corpse?” she said.

“Did you want to?”

“What? No. The fuck? I was joking.”

“Just as well, there’s no one in this cemetery worth digging up.” The old man shrugged and wandered through and between the tombstones, occasionally chuckling when his gaze landed on a tombstone he recognized. “The three kings were greatly overrated.”

Three Kings Cemetery, named as such for being the burial site of three kings. Not real kings, but three people who’d been quite famous early on in Dolareido’s life. Mob bosses maybe? Nah, earlier than that. Three criminals from when the city was damn young, and who’d managed to make themselves some tiny empires. But all things come to an end and their corpses were found here, in what had become the biggest and creepiest cemetery in Dolareido.

Withered trees. Dozens of mausoleums of varying sizes. Tombstones with statues on them, people on horses, of women in robes holding someone’s body, or baby angel things—cherubs. Bits of leaves blew by, along with some twigs that fell from the trees. The moonlight was casting powerful shadows, as the cemetery was far enough from brighter sections of the city to allow some of the sky to be visible. And without the tall buildings around it, the wind picked up enough speed to get the trees moving, their branches dancing, and the shadows coming to life.

Rows upon rows upon rows of graves. Sometimes it was easy to forget Dolareido was a pretty damn old city, even for Beatrice, who hung out in a fucking catacomb. And with so much age and history to the city, elders with some seriously old tastes got to indulge in their macabre delights. Which was cool and all, Beatrice did love that shit.

“I have to wonder,” she said as they walked past some of the larger tombstones, “what sort of shit you elders did when this city was growing up.”

“Oh, such a tale! That boy Tony — Jacques at the time — was always stirring up trouble in the quaint little village, while we created our thralls, dug our tunnels, took over the whole town. They had a city council of nothing but our thralls. Such glorious days, when we only had to herd a few thousand, instead of millions. When there were no cameras or internet, and we were free to turn the town into our playground come nightfall.” He chuckled a few times, and came to a stop in front of one of the smaller tombstones. A carving of a cross was on it, and a stone rose. “I had three Kindred at the time in my circle, and we loved to catch bandits and sacrifice them; Antoinette preferred we spared those who deserved life even then. The

blood poured, and we howled at the moon as we danced naked and summoned spirits you would not believe exist.”

“Jesus. What happened to them? Your circle.”

“Dead.” Jacob paused by another grave, this one with a tombstone that carried no statue, but held some words: Death Comes For Us All. Fucking delightful. “Hunters.”

“I’ve heard that word a few times now, but no one ever goes into detail. Hunters? We’ve had no hunters in Dolareido since I’ve been Kindred, far as I know.”

“And you are likely correct.”

“What happened to them?”

“Oh, they’re still out there.” He shrugged as he came to another tombstone, where another quote was found: Fuck You Carl. He laughed and continued on, glancing around at everything they passed like someone revisiting their old high school. “But like the Kindred, they had to adapt. Instead of marching into town wearing necklaces of silver, bones, charms, with pistols and swords and torches, now they hide in back alleys and with walls of meat and technology between us and them. Gangs, or organizations that seem innocent, but are very much not.”

“You mean... in Dolareido?”

“Perhaps. I know much, as does Antoinette, and even the worthless triumvirate of the Invictus know plenty about the ongoings in the city. It would seem the city is free of that pest. But we cannot safely say that hunters do not hide in our midst.”

She shivered and looked around. “They uh... must be doing a good job of hiding, if we haven’t heard of them in decades.”

“Far more likely they aren’t hunting in Dolareido. There are a lot of other cities with a Kindred presence who aren’t nearly as kind as we are. Lucas and Viktor and their cruelty are the norm for the elders, after all. Antoinette and I and our compassion are the exception.” He laughed again, knowing full well Beatrice didn’t think of either of them as compassionate. Maybe not insane with bloodlust and violent tendencies, but certainly not compassionate.

She shivered a few more times, and stopped to stare at a tall statue. An angel, with robes hanging over her whole body so the face was hidden in shadow. She was pouring a jar of water, the fluid carved of

stone, onto the tombstone beneath her. Beautiful. And totally at odds with the overall creepy vibe the cemetery gave off.

“So, why are we here?”

“You wanted to explore crúac rituals, didn’t you?”

“Yeah but, I figured we’d want to do that somewhere private? This is a cemetery, a public one at that, and Maria’s not even a mile away.” Assuming she was in her Cathedral. Hers, since Lucas was gone.

The man chuckled, and motioned with his head for her to follow. He stepped into one of the mausoleums, and she stopped outside it to look up at the arch of the small, stone building. Pillars lined the sides of the entrance, and a cross decorated the arch’s face. Old, worn stone, and a gate made of two wooden doors, lined with metal. A single step lead up to the small gate, and beside it, statues of the virgin Mary stood with arms outstretched. They too were worn with time, features washed away, and the stained stone looked almost like it was bleeding discoloration.

She stepped into the mausoleum, and shuddered. Mountains of nameless bones she could handle, but a mausoleum like this gave everything a name. It was just a big room, really, with most of the space taken up by shelves of marble, dark and dead. Coffins, each with a name, and each beside a drawer of some sort. Personal belongings probably. And some of the drawers were cracked, with bits of the rock on the floor so the cracks exposed the contents. One of them held what looked like a shaving kit from two hundred years ago. Another held a very creepy doll.

At this point Jacob withdrew an LED lantern. Not a real lantern, cause no Kindred liked using fire if they could avoid it, and not a typical flashlight, because that wouldn’t appeal to an elder’s nostalgia. No, the man had a lantern with an LED source of light, but also fashioned to look oldschool. She smirked at him, and he returned it with his own, before he pressed on a very specific part of a specific crack of one of the shelves.

The floor slid aside. Beatrice squeaked and jumped back as the sound of sliding stone filled the mausoleum. Straight out of a fucking eighties action flick, the stone moved aside to reveal a stairway, the only source of light being a glimmer of moonlight through the cracks in the roof, and Jacob’s lantern as he approached the descending tunnel.

“Come on. Pussy.” He smirked at her again, even chuckled a little, and disappeared into the blackness.

Gonna kill him, gonna fucking kill him. She hopped over to the opening side of the stairway, and descended after him. A very tiny tunnel, so tiny she had to crouch to keep moving with the stairs; nothing she wasn't used to dealing with, considering the entrance to their usual home. And once she had her head under the stones, Jacob pulled down on some sort of metal crank handle on the wall. The floor above her shifted, and slid back into place, giving her a little more headroom. Standing up, she glanced around at the darkness, at the long shadows cast by the one source of light, and how the stone under the earth was so very worn, and wet.

She could smell the dead. And more than just the very old dead, but also the recently dead. The fuck was Jacob up to?

“Guess this is one of your secret places then?”

“Yeap. Only Daniel and Antoinette know about this, and they respect my privacy.”

What a weird relationship between them, that Jacob could be building secret rooms, and they'd just let him.

“They don't spy on you?”

“Sometimes they try, but it's rare. Daniel has to go through quite the song and dance to try and spy on me, and what little he learns, most often, I let him learn it.” He raised the lantern up the spreading walls, and showed where strange symbols or runes were drawn in what must have been blood. Not like blood lasted forever, so, he must have been renewing them. “And with a few specific rituals, I can defend my ritual areas from his prying auspex.”

“Really? Damn.” Cause she knew how deadly that shit was in the hands of a master. Might as well have been trying to stop a ghost from spying on you. “And what sort of nasty shit do you practice down here?” That apparently he trusted her with knowing. Made her kind of proud and happy, but she wasn't about to let him know that.

The tunnel was very oldschool, and she half expected it to collapse on her at any moment. But there were wooden beams within, holding up the thousands of pounds of dirt and rock, and they themselves seemed pretty sturdy. Still, hard to ignore the fact she was underground, something that she was normally used to dealing with, but these wet, dripping rocks, and the complete and total lack of stonework or architecture, made it seem like she was walking through an abandoned mining tunnel.



At least until she came upon one of the support beams along the ceiling with an old wooden plank hanging from it. Something was burned into the wood: Continue Forth, and Death Awaits Thee. And hanging from the sign were several skulls dangling from chains, with hooks driven through their temples.

“Your doing I assume?”

“Actually that was Jean’s doing.”

“Jean?”

“One of my circle, when the city was still young. Three Kings Cemetery has existed for quite some time — for an American city anyway — and this tunnel was one of the first places I taught my pupils the dark rituals.” He brushed the skulls aside and continued on. Beatrice ducked.

“What happened to him?”

“Hunter killed him. Got him with a stake in the heart, then cut off his head when he was paralyzed.”

“Fuck, man. When was this?”

“The 1820s, I believe. Hard to remember the details. Except for, you know, the head removal part.”

Right, right, that memory. God she was following someone with a volatile memory, and that added a whole new level of fear to her adventures. For all she knew, he was going to forget something important and get them both killed. It was like trusting herself to someone who was randomly senile.

Eventually the tiny tunnel opened into a large cavern, a very familiar one at that. She’d never seen it before, but the bone decorations were similar to the ones in their home cave, hundreds of them from every part of the human body arranged to create a tapestry of patterns and designs. In this cave, the pattern looked almost like the waves of an ocean, the sort of ocean where you could hear the howling of wind.

And she could hear howling. Quiet, distant, but there was some sort of howling sound in the darkness of the cave. No candles lit, so the only light source was Jacob’s one lantern, and despite how it was a solid light unlike a candle flame, the shadows she found around her flickered.

In the center of the obsidian that surrounded them, sat a bowl. Unlike the blood bowl in their usual cave, this one sat closer to the ground, and was held above the ground by skeletons. Someone managed to get skeletons lying on their stomachs, some on their back, with arms up to press against the massive bowl’s undersides. The bowl itself looked like it was carved of stone, and someone had chiseled some intricate lines along its edges, lines that looked like dripping liquid.

Above the enormous bowl, was a corpse. Some woman was hanging, naked, with arms up high and a chain around her wrists. In her stomach were several knives, still in there in places where it'd take a long time to die. The woman's face was aimed down, her jaw open, eyes wide; the pain and fear were still visible in her expression.

"I thought... you used vitae to perform these rituals, vampire blood," she said.

Jacob set the lantern aside, and stood by the edge of the bowl on the other side. "Yes, but if you're going to be bleeding yourself to fuel your rituals, it's nice to have a snack."

"That's not a snack!" She pointed up at the naked corpse. Woman looked to be in her twenties, but her skin was sunken into her body with how drained she was. "That's—"

"Please, your misplaced ethical dilemmas are unneeded. She came from another city and started peddling heroine to some youngsters. Dolareido embraces drug use, but not like that." He chuckled a few more times, each chuckle a little louder than the last, before he reached out to push the feet of the hanging body. "This is a nice neighborhood, after all." The corpse eased back and forth, just hard enough for Beatrice to hear the creak of the chain around her wrists against the wooden beam from above. The quiet howling was still there, but Beatrice couldn't place its origin, as if the stone walls were echoing the dead woman's cries.

The shadow of her swinging feet flickered on the walls.

"So you tortured her to death?"

"A few knives to the gut hardly counts as torture."

"Most people would disagree."

"We aren't most people." The man stepped around the bowl again to come beside her, and he leaned in closer until his bandage-covered eyes were only inches from her. So close, even in this darkness, the lantern provided enough light she could see the gray lines in his hair. "You want to explore the power to be found in witchcraft, in blood rituals, then grow up. There are witches out there who will bleed another Kindred dry, to fuel rituals so insane you could not fathom." He came a step closer, and she had to take a step back from him to make room. "There are Kindred out there who have drunk other Kindred down to the fucking soul, absorbed their entire essence, absorbed what made them who they are, just so their own blood would have the power to perform the most heinous of rituals."

Diablerie. He was fucking talking about diablerie.

“... we wouldn't do that.”

“Oh yes we would. Perhaps not you, and, perhaps, not I, but diablerie exists, and it is a tempting proposition. The sweet taste of a soul.” He touched his lips, licked them, before he smirked and shrugged. “Not that I would know.”

Fuck. Now she had a new thing to suspect her boss of. Elders often did some pretty nasty shit over the course of their long lives, but diablerie was a whole different level of asshole, and she had a hard time imagining even Jacob doing that. But him just saying he'd never done it was no way a guarantee he hadn't. Fucker loved to lie, to see if she could figure him out. And right now she could not.

“So what now?” she said, stepping back and moving around the bowl to stand opposite of him again. The bowl was easier to look at than the hanging body.

Jacob frowned at her, and motioned for her to return. Sighing, she walked back over to stand beside him, until he sat down by the huge bowl, and she did as well. She did not like where this was going.

“You need to understand something, Beatrice Damor. If you want to learn crúac rituals, if you want a peek at what it's like to call upon things beyond your understanding, you're going to have to suffer.”

“Suffer?”

He gestured to the empty bowl. In the dark and hard to see, there were some objects lying in its base, and now that she was sitting by the bowl, she took a moment to squint and peer at them. More knives.

“Why do you think I brought you here, to this underground cavern in an old cemetery? Here, we may pursue these dark arts, and the screams will remain within these walls.”

“... screams?”

The robed man leaned into the bowl, and withdrew one of the blades. Blade was a strong word for it, more like rock that'd been chipped into something sharp, and then tied to a wooden grip of sorts with string.

“The Circle of the Crone is many things. Some of us worship the gods of the earth. Some of us chant and dance naked in the moonlight to celebrate the blood of the cosmos. Some of us speak to spirits, or the dead, and offer our blood in communication or worship. But there's one thing you need to know, one similarity between all witches: the beast in your guts is going to come out.”

“I don’t—”

“You may not know why you’re interested in this stuff, but I do. It’s because the beast inside you is a little closer to the surface than most Kindred. In this pussy town, everyone here is whipped. Fucking. Whipped. By that Prince, and the Invictus council, and even Garry.”

“... you mean we’re all pussy whipped because we like peace? Christ Jacob, I’m not the violence lover you think I am.”

“Didn’t say violence. That night I showed up in your precious catacombs to talk, you didn’t shy away or anything. Like a fucking badger, you snarled and barked.” He put an arm around her shoulder, and gave her one of those buddy hugs humans give when they’re drunk. “If I asked you to rip someone in half with your bare hands, an enemy, you wouldn’t have an issue.”

She flinched, and looked down. Rebecca. Beatrice never thought back to the woman’s death, not really, not for anything more than to smile at how satisfying it’d been.

“So I’m a little more in touch with my beast than the pussy-whipped Kindred of Dolareido. So what?” she said.

“So, that makes you a prime candidate for deeper levels of the Circle. It’s why I invited you. It’s why I knew you’d eventually wonder about these blood rituals. You remember the thrill of the night I put my blood on you, and bestowed upon you my power.”

“You think I’m interested in dancing naked in moonlight?”

More laughter, and he reached out to grab a second blade from the bowl. Holding it between fingers along with the first in the same hand, he kept his other hand around her far shoulder. She felt trapped.

“I’m sure Jennifer and Othello would love that, and there are rituals often done in such a manner.” Still with the two knives between his fingers, their blades pointed backward and toward his wrist, he pressed their handles together like cigars turning between his knuckles. “There’s a bit of animal in you, Beatrice, that I like, that you like. Hell, that even Julias likes. That spice to you that makes you dangerous and interesting.”

“You sound like you’re trying to convince me to join a cult.”

“That’s exactly what I’m doing.” He put the daggers in her hands, and smirked. “See a lot of myself in you.”

Fucking god. “This some Nosferatu bonding shit?”

“Nope. Not at all. I could describe the things you’ve done, the things that make you who you are, and make the comparisons. But I think we’ve chatted enough. Spill my blood into the bowl, and I’ll show you.”

Hard to read. Why was he so god damn hard to read? A bandage instead of eyes was definitely part of it, but the man’s voice, his tone, he kept flirting with playful, and then serious, and then psychotic, and then compassionate. Couldn’t place him, couldn’t figure out his motives, couldn’t ever get a handle on it. But he wanted to show her, and that was a far cry from his typical manipulative ways. The dark secrets of the Circle of the Crone, blood magic, the thing Kindred whispered about in shadowy alleys, the thing that made witches so damn fucking scary. He was going to show her a crúac ritual.

With a gulp, she dragged one of the knives across his wrist. Jacob smiled at her the whole time, no flinch or anything, and reached out a bit further to make sure the large droplet of thick Kindred blood fell closer the center of the empty bowl, near the corpse’s feet. It landed with a quiet splash, but the echo of its impact resonated in Beatrice’s ears.

The howling in the walls grew louder.

“W... What is that sound?”

“Not afraid of ghosts, are you?”

“... after the shit I’ve seen? Yeah, I’m afraid of ghosts.”

“Good.” He held out his other hand. And again, wincing the whole time, she cut his other wrist. The tiny splash of his heavy blood pulled her guts to her feet, laden with stone. The room grew darker, the lantern now fighting to pierce some invisible black that fought against the light.

And the howling in the walls grew louder still.

Whatever light the lantern was giving, she couldn’t see it anymore. The floor, the bowl, the walls and bones, it was all solid black. She could see Jacob, and she could see the corpse hanging before her, but all else faded away in a black cloud she could neither feel nor smell. Not like there’d be a breeze in a cave underground, but she expected to be able to feel something on her skin; not anymore. Whatever texture the air once held was gone, until the feel of Jacob beside her was almost jarring against the backdrop of numbness.

“What’s going on?”

“Shhh.” Chuckling in his quiet, sinister little way, Jacob motioned with his head toward the bowl.

The blood was moving. It trickled down the shallow edge, and pulled its own mass behind it so no trail was left. More like watching a slug of liquid move. It dragged itself down to the center of the bowl, and once beneath the corpse with maybe four feet vertical distance between them, it began to spread. The pool of blood clawed outward, gripped at the bowl and crept up its sides in all directions, until it became veins for the bowl, black veins.

The black veins didn't stay in the bowl. Beatrice looked around into the oblivion swallowing her, and shrank into Jacob's side as her eyes opened wide. It may have been pure black around them, but something was moving. Tendrils, blacker than black in the endless shadow, crept along the walls, along the ceiling, over and around the lantern, until they reached up and touched Beatrice.

She felt these. Cold. So cold. Like ice but without the sting, only the weight and lifelessness of cold death pulling at her and her skin. The fuck did an undead creature like her have to fear from death? A lot apparently, as the shadows around her clawed at her skin, sank their fingers into her, through the skin without damaging it, but filling her legs with more of the same cold weight. She looked to Jacob's legs, and found the veiny tendrils doing the same thing. Didn't bother her boss.

The bowl began to fill. Blood, black and thick, began to pour up from the bowl, managed to spout a few inches into the air before spreading out over the insides of the bowl. More, and more, until the large bowl was filled, and droplets of the heavy liquid fell over the sides onto the stone and dirt beneath it, until the black liquid dripped down the skulls of the skeletons holding up the bowl, and down their jaws like tears. She started to back up, but Jacob stopped her, hand to her leg to keep her from getting up until she calmed down.

Calming down wasn't happening. She looked around again, at the drops of black that started to drip out of the bones on the walls, and from the cracks in the stone. There were screams, still distant and hidden from her, but with the total silence falling on them with every moment, the quiet noise was free to grow louder, and louder, until her skull shook with the sounds of death wails. She looked around again, past the blood bowl and to the other side of the room, where a wave of the blackness that shouldn't be there came forward. Onyx mist, that crept along anything and everything until Beatrice, Jacob, and the corpse disappeared into black.

She could still see him though, could still the corpse, hell she could see the lantern now, when she couldn't before. But nothing seemed to be visible with light anymore. She could see it, but not because it was lit. As if someone had removed the need for eyes, she could see everything around her in the black, despite the total lack of light. Despite that it felt like she was drowning, when Kindred no longer needed to breathe. Despite how it felt like something was pinning her to the ground, something that wasn't Jacob, something cold and dense and smothering.

Something that grabbed the corpse, and yanked it off the chain.

Beatrice gasped hard and fell back, but Jacob's arm kept her from falling onto her ass. And, he kept her from not seeing what just happened in front of her, the black hand that gripped the body, big enough to cover the whole corpse in six fingers, before ripping the dead woman free of the chain. The corpse's wrists tore, and the sound of wrenching flesh forced Beatrice to look up, to see how the dead body's hands fell away from the chains to splash against the black blood in the bowl, while the body disappeared into the curtain beyond.

The howling in the walls settled, and instead, a deep rumbling came from the black before them. It shook the walls, shook them both, shook her teeth until she felt them rattling in her head. It couldn't have been real, couldn't have actually been doing that, more of the fake stimulus like that weird voodoo bag Jacob had back in his room. But the corpse, the dead woman, all that remained of her was her ruined hands floating in the thick Kindred blood.

"Malachi," the darkness said.

"Hello old friend," Jacob said back. "This is Beatrice."

"... Beatrice." The darkness moved. Something large, invisible but silhouetted against the obsidian that buried them. Its voice was a rumble, bass overpowering the room and the two Kindred in it, while harsh rasps scratched to the surface of its voice. "Hello."

She blinked a few dozen times, and looked into the shifting back. "Um... hello?"

"Beatrice, this is The Black Blood of Dolareido." Jacob nodded a few times, but remained seated. Just a few friends sitting around the dinner table chatting. "Will the body do, old friend?"

"It will."

From the blackness, some scraping sounds ripped through Beatrice's head until she closed her eyes. It passed, only for another to happen, and then another. And then movement to go with it, familiar movement, the movement of a humanoid walking.

The corpse came forward. Each step she took, her feet scraped against the stones beneath them, ripped up the dirt as if weighed down by several tons of rock. But the corpse stood there, favoring one side, with one shoulder drooping too low, and her eyes wide to stare at the two Kindred. Her eyes were black, solid black, and more of the black liquid dripped down her cheeks, like she was crying black tears. The liquid dripped down her naked body, down to her gut where the knives remained and wounds leaked more of the same liquid, down to her wrists where the black blood continued to drip. The corpse had no hands, and the shredded, ruined wrists, with bones jutting from them, were dripping with the same liquid.

She—it sat down with them, legs apart and folding at the knee. The weird liquid dripped from its nostrils and mouth, and down between its legs as it leaned forward.

“Why have you summoned me, Malachi?”

Malachi. Another name Jacob had? Elders occasionally changed names as the centuries went by, but Jacob was an old name as is, no need to change it.

“Two reasons. First, to tell you that one of the Uratha died in their confrontation with the Azlu.”

The corpse laughed, and a splatter of the black liquid fell from its lips onto the bowl before it. “Delightful. My fellow spirits noticed the death. Still, we are unhappy about the presence of the Uratha.”

“No one is happy with their presence,” Jacob said.

Beatrice frowned. She didn't mind their presence, now that they weren't trying to kill Fiona.

“And?” the incarnation of everything Beatrice feared as a little girl said.

“And, I'm going to teach Beatrice here some of the basics in crúac rituals. Thought you'd like to help.”

Oh fuck.