

~~Natasha~~

“Sire,” she said.

“Natasha.” Daniel looked down at her, then to Athalia. “Athalia, do you—”

“Speak with your childe.”

The sheriff adjusted his glasses, a single finger against the bridge, same as always. “I’d prefer you stayed for a while.”

Athalia rolled her eyes. “I... will, ok? Jesus, I’m not going to explode or anything.”

Natasha tried to meet Athalia’s eyes, but the moment the tall, dark-skinned woman looked at her, Natasha looked down. Those weren’t eyes she wanted to look into, not now, not yet. Just the thought of what Athalia must have been feeling was enough to have Natasha on the verge of tears; not that she could cry while not Blushing, but still. The poor woman.

Athalia didn’t go far, just a few steps back. Other than Daniel, Fiona was the only person at the ball Athalia would want to be near, and Fiona was with Damien. It’d been an adorable sight, Fiona trying to walk while drunk, in high heels, dragging Damien around the ball. The twinkle in the drunk girl’s eyes said everything: she wanted to have sex with her dark, mysterious, well-dressed vampire. That meant she couldn’t be a social anchor for Athalia, while Daniel could be.

Natasha peeked past her sire at the woman again, before nodding to him, and then nodding toward Jacob in the distance. “Um... is that ok?”

“You tell me. You took her over there.”

Samantha had asked Tash to introduce her to Jacob. She had, stuttering up a mess, but she had. Then she’d backed off, and did her best to casually join Daniel, to get his take, or at least get his eyes on Jacob.

“I d-don’t know. I... have a hard time trusting Jacob. I can’t t-t-tell what he wants.”

“Wants from what?”

“From... life? Or unlife?”

Daniel sighed, nodded, and watched Jacob with cold eyes. “He’s up to something, Natasha. Keep an eye on him.”

Keep an eye on Jacob, right, like she wasn't already doing that with extreme prejudice. The man was terrifying, and it blew her mind that Samantha didn't seem to care. Despite her warnings, and Antoinette's warnings, Samantha was content to talk to the man, like she had with Athalia. Even more surprising, was how Jacob looked happy to talk to her. Samantha's body language grew calmer, as did Jacob's, and the two laughed as Jacob told some sort of joke.

Samantha adjusted her hair and shifted her weight from foot to foot a little, in a subtle but not too subtle flirt. Natasha frowned. Jack was not going to like this.

Natasha looked across the ball to her boyfriends, who were hanging with Avery and Clara. Sex surrounded them. Not actual sex, since no one had penetrated anyone yet, but the room was filling with soft moans, as arousal began to soar. The poor werewolves, surrounded by hormones, and unable to control their own.

The music changed to something a little less classical, and a little more... jazz? Slow, but pleasing, and almost naughty sounding. Something Antoinette had picked out probably, and told the musicians to play when things began to heat up.

She looked to her right, and sighed as she watched a male kine, now completely naked and lying on a table, begin to cum onto his stomach and onto a woman's breasts. Two women were around him, Kissing him, and a third one strolled up like everything was perfectly normal, and sank her fangs into his wrist. A female kine was in a similar boat, lying on a table as well, and being devoured from all directions, including between her legs.

Several of the waiters and waitresses had been robbed of their clothing, left to walk around in their underwear and bras. Those would be gone soon, once a hungry Kindred decided to partake of them, instead of the unfulfilling glasses of old blood. And from the looks on the waiters' and waitresses' eyes, and from their erections and hard nipples, they were eagerly anticipating that moment.

Natasha squirmed as she spotted Mason through the crowd. It was hard to see him past all the shoulders, but between moving bodies, she managed to spot him with his girlfriend Tilly pressed to a wall. He wasn't just kissing and fondling her. He was fucking her.

Things quickly devolved from there, as people noticed the hungry werewolf had actually penetrated his girlfriend. While these balls had a habit of being very sexual, with thralls and ghouls being caressed and massaged first, then kissed and fondled, then Kissed and treated to fellatio, cunnilingus, and everything up to, just not including, actual sex. The Kindred didn't indulge themselves to orgasm at these parties, usually. That came when they took the kine home after the party, or they rushed out to find unsuspecting kine to hunt, Kiss, and fuck into comas.

That wasn't what was happening tonight. Maybe it was because of the Uratha, and Mason's actual willingness to fuck. Maybe it was larger than that, tensions having finally given way since the hunters were no longer a threat. Or maybe it was the spice of having some of those very hunters in the ball, who Tash could see were slowly getting more drunk, and more aroused. Something had snapped in the crowd, and Kindred began to indulge more than Natasha had ever seen.

Brianna suddenly had her two vampire friends pressing their bodies against hers, from front and behind, and the one in front of her pulled his pants down, took out his cock, and sank it into her. Not exactly the best position for her to enjoy, except, from the expression on her face, she looked like she came instantly the moment the man entered her. He pressed his body tight to hers, as did the man behind her, hiding the fact they were having sex, though her skirt was still pulled up over her hips, and her panties were gone. She hugged the man in front of her, ground her pelvis against his, and shuddered as the two men continued to slowly drown her in pleasure with the Kiss.

Natasha gulped and looked around some more. According to her boss, balls used to be like this, before Lucas, and before Garry rose to be a covenant leader. When Dolareido was still young and a lot smaller, and light bulbs hadn't become a thing yet, Kindred would gather in a big room in a mansion, filled with thralls and ghouls, and everything would descend into a feast orgy. In the darkness, lit only by gentle candlelight, kine would be Kissed and fucked until utterly exhausted. And when they were, Kindred would fuck each other.

No candles this night, and a lot more people. She doubted it'd turn into a full orgy, with everyone fucking everyone, but that didn't mean it wouldn't get very, very close.

She licked her fangs, and looked around a little more. The hunters were defeated, unable to resist the approaching vampires, or the tingle of alcohol in their veins. Isabella's troupe had likely used some Majesty on them, but it'd be temporary, and as much as Natasha didn't necessarily like being that forceful with kine, she could see the three hunters were enjoying themselves immensely.

Both Dennis and Harcourt each had two women on them, kissing and Kissing. One of them pulled up her skirt, lifted a leg, and leaned into Harcourt, encouraging the man to hook her leg with his arm, while she looked him in the eyes, and talked to him, a casual conversation Natasha couldn't hear. Poor guy was way too nice, and drunk, to say no, and the moment he gave in, Dennis found himself in the same situation.

Marge had three men on her. Natasha was tempted to interfere, since Marge looked like such a small and innocent thing, but after looking at her for a few seconds, Natasha quivered. It was like looking into a mirror. Much as Marge was clearly being forced into a super embarrassing and

overwhelming situation she didn't seem to want to be in, Natasha recognized the sweet hunger in her eyes, those 'oh please don't ravage me, I'm too sweet and innocent' eyes. She wanted to be ravaged. It may not have been what she expected to happen tonight, but that didn't mean Natasha couldn't see the obvious desire on her face.

One of the vampires leaned in and sank his teeth into her neck, and she melted instantly, mouth opening and eyes rolling upward. She struggled, tried to get away, but it was a weak attempt, and not because of the Kiss, but because she didn't really want to escape. Natasha squirmed as she watched the small woman disappear between the three men, but between two of their bodies, she could see a sliver of the woman, and the trembling of her body, as one of the men slid his hand under her skirt. Her tiny squeaks were audible, and as she started to quiver in bliss, a few more of Isabella's troupe turned to watch the hunter orgasm.

Humans were slaves to their hormones, and it wouldn't take much from any Daeva to break them. Well, maybe it would, since the hunters had tattoos and stuff that supposedly fought off vampire Disciplines. If those tattoos were working, then either they weren't working very well, or the hunters found themselves giving into the erotic atmosphere naturally, same as the thralls and ghouls.

It took a moment for Tash to realize she'd lost track of time, and had spent the past ten minutes watching people have sex. She snapped her head back to Samantha, except, there was no Samantha. She blinked several times, leaned forward, and tried to see past as many shoulders as she could.

"Um, sire, where is—"

"Samantha's outside, with Jacob."

"What?"

"He hid them both in his Cloak, and now they're outside."

"What!?" She stepped in close to her sire, and elbowed him in the side. Not the smartest move on her part, irritating her sire, but this was an emergency. "G-Go after them!"

Daniel let out a quiet sigh, set a finger to his ear, and touched the earpiece there. "Report on the warlock?... alright." He looked at Natasha, adjusted his glasses, and smiled slightly. "They're sitting on a bench and talking, not far from the ball. Samantha probably felt uncomfortable with..." He gestured to the growing eroticism.

"I... can't b-believe she's talking to him."

"She doesn't know Jacob, like we do. To her, the man is an intriguing figure."

Well, Jacob was intriguing, Tash had to agree with that. But he was also terrifying. She'd dealt with elders for a couple decades, when her skills had launched her career in the Invictus, and soon earned her a position as a Right Hand. Of the three elders she'd dealt with dozens of times, Viktor had been the most intimidating, sometimes outright horrifying to speak to, but even he didn't scare her like Jacob did.

Which, now that she thought about it, wasn't really fair. Jacob was terrifying because she knew he was powerful, possibly the most powerful vampire in the city, and he was very unpredictable, but his actions weren't all that horrible. As far as she knew, he'd never actually done anything to directly harm the Prince, the city, or even actively fought to acquire territory. Jacob was content to do his own thing, and barely involve himself in the Danse Macabre. And, even more strangely, the Prince considered him to be something of a friend.

Natasha was more concerned with Samantha talking with Jacob, than the Prince would be, or than Daniel apparently was. If Jacob wanted to get his hands on Samantha, it wasn't like the elder couldn't just sneak-sneak and kidnap her. He might even protect her, if a circumstance arose that meant Samantha was in danger.

Or, he could slip her some of his blood, addict her to vitae, addict her to him, and turn her into a bound thrall, a vampire trapped in the Vinculum. Well, true as that might be, it wasn't like Samantha had the acting skills to hide such a condition.

The more Natasha thought about it, the more she couldn't find a circumstance where letting Samantha talk to Jacob was a real problem. If Jacob was doing nasty things, things that the Prince would want to stop, Samantha talking to him would hardly change that. And she wouldn't be able to stop Jacob from kidnapping, enslaving, or killing her anyway, if that was his goal. Better yet, if Jacob wasn't actually an enemy, the two becoming friends would be good for relations. Minerva had been friends with both Antoinette and Jacob, after all.

So, the best course of action, was to trust Jacob... a little. And that was a very hard thing to do.

"So you're going t-to let her go?"

"She has a phone, my childe. I am sure she will contact the Prince to let her know what's happening."

Tash frowned. "Do you... w-want to let her go?"

“No. I trust Jacob less than the Prince does. But you know as well as I, that if Jacob wished to strike us through Samantha, we could hardly stop him... only retaliate.” And, retaliation would mean Jacob’s death, judging from the stone cold glare her sire gave her.

Tash doubted her sire trusted anyone except for the Prince. The two had worked together for centuries, and were huge figures in the Ordo Dracul. An unbreakable pair. A shame Jacob had no one like that for support.

Sighing, she nodded. “I’m going to t-talk to Beatrice. Maybe... maybe.”

Daniel nodded. “Maybe.”

Maybe Triss could give her a hint about Jacob’s intentions. A long shot, especially since Jacob told his witches less than Antoinette told Tash, and Tash only knew a little about the Ordo Dracul.

She found the witches, and walked over to them. The quiet one, Aaron, was gone, or maybe hanging out where she couldn’t see him. Maybe he went outside, like she wanted to, cause parties were overwhelming. Moving through the crowd was horrible, and she shuddered as she brushed shoulders with people. Way, way too many people for her to be comfortable. Once she talked with Triss, she’d go get her boyfriends, and they’d leave.

All around her, the sex continued. This was crazy! Never ever had these parties gotten so out of hand before. It wasn’t just the kine getting treated to Kisses and orgasms, it was Kindred as well. While plenty of Kindred were now actually having sex with kine, some Kindred were having sex with each other. More than a few of the Carthians had taken advantage of each other, when one was busy Kissing a meal. A feeding vampire was a momentarily helpless, very horny creature, and a horny friend could easily turn that into a sexual situation. And they were.

Beatrice, Jennifer, and Sándor were near the stairway, where they could stand beside it so they had at least one flank not surrounded by sex.

“Hi Triss. J-Jen. Sándor,” she said once she got close.

“Tash,” Triss said at her, smiling. It was always a little disturbing, Triss’s smile. Such a beautiful face, but the crocodile teeth where cheeks should have been always threw her off, until she adjusted. But, it was great to see the young Nos smile again. “Surprised you’re still here. Your boys are, uh, yeah.” She gestured toward Matthew and Arturo.

A few women had approached the two werewolves, and were blatantly flirting with them. The three vampires had fed, judging from the smiles on their faces and warm tints in their skin, and all three were likely looking for someone to satisfy their Blush-awakened urges. Jealousy crept up Tash’s spine,

but she dismissed it with a shrug. She trusted her boyfriends, and it was only natural that the werewolves would be feeling the impact of the bubbling sexuality in the room, more than the other races.

Once she left the party with them, she knew what was going to happen. They were going to take her, pin her down, and do naughty things to her, even if she said ‘no, please, stop’, just like Marge. Which sounded horrible! Horrible, bad, mean, and... tantalizing.

“They’ll b-be fine. I wanted to... um, I d-don’t know. Check up on you? I missed the fight, and I feel guilty.”

Triss laughed and shrugged. “It wouldn’t have mattered. Everything was finished by Jack, in the end. And Sándor, I suppose.” She gestured to the man beside her, his arm still locked with Jen’s.

Sándor’s expression wasn’t too different than Tash’s. He didn’t want to be at the party either. But, unlike Tash, it looked like he was uncomfortable with all the sex. Not that Tash was comfortable with it, but considering the twists and turns her life had taken lately, being in a ball that was evolving into an orgy, was not all that overwhelming. Being almost shoulder-to-shoulder with them was overwhelming, but the fact many were half naked, and fucking either thralls, ghouls, or each other, only hit a six or seven on her embarrassment scale; it would have hit a nine, just a few years ago.

Sándor was a gorgeous man. A little tall, and thinner than her boyfriends, but since his shirt was open, she could see he was nothing but muscle. His buzzed dark hair, dreamy blue eyes, and hard chin, combined with the dark gruff on his face, were very attractive, and she smiled at him as they made eye contact. He looked away a second later, eyes yanked by the sounds of moans and groans. The Kindred did a good job of being quiet as they Kissed and fucked. The humans and the werewolves, not so much.

Tash watched the Begotten for a few seconds, analyzing. He seemed very closed off, stoic even, and it only added to his attraction. No wonder Jennifer seemed so intent on cracking his shell. And there was the gargoyle monster too, Natasha remembered that well. It’d been enormous, imposing, terrifying, and strangely majestic, even handsome, in a ‘oh god it’s going to eat me’ kinda way.

“Look at this, look at this,” Jennifer said, looking to the hunters. Isabella’s troupe had surrounded them, to the point it looked like a bunch of lions circling prey. Dennis and Harcourt each had hands down their pants, the hands of female Kindred, and several of them at that. Marge still had three men with their hands inside her dress, fondling, massaging, fingering.

“Think we should... d-d-do something?” Tash said

Jennifer shook her head. “Oh come now. They’re perfectly safe, and the least they can do to repay Antoinette and Jack for sparing their lives, is share their blood. Though, I suspect by the time the ball is over, the three of them will be catatonic.”

Tash rolled her eyes, but watched a little longer. The way the three men pushed themselves onto Marge despite her weak struggles, and the obvious pleasure in her eyes, was just too damn erotic, and familiar. It was giving her ideas for her next movie.

“How are you, Sándor?” Tash said. “Uncomfortable? Me t-too.”

“This is...” The man looked around at the evolving sexual display, and carried a tiny frown for a second, before he turned into stone again. “I’m not used to so much open sex.”

“You said you were a lot older than you look,” Beatrice said. “I’m sure you’ve been around vampires before.”

“Yes, but... never this close.” Sándor nodded his head slowly, but his eyes flicked around to some more sexual displays. Brianna was still being fucked, and she wasn’t too far from them, around the corner of the staircase where it met the wall. She had her hands on the Ventrue’s shoulders, still standing, still penetrated from the front, still with her breasts pressed to his chest. The Gangrel ground against her ass, not penetrating, but Tash could see his pants were open, and his cock was wedged along the crack of her ass.

“No wonder Samantha left,” Triss said, laughing. “Holy shit, this place just exploded, didn’t it?”

“She left... to speak with J-Jacob.”

“Ah, right.” The Nosferatu nodded, and stepped in a little closer to Natasha. “I suppose you wanted to ask what that’s about?”

“Y-Yes. I worry about her.” Samantha was far too nice and naive to be in the Ordo. Considering who her sire was, Samantha would have plenty of time to grow up into tougher, smarter Kindred under Antoinette’s protection. But she did have to grow up. In the mean time, Natasha had to worry about her fellow, young dragon. “Has Jacob spoken t-to you about her?”

“He mentioned her once. Said he thought she was cute, and interesting, cause of her eyes.”

“Her eyes?”

Triss nodded. “She has Jack’s eyes.”

Tash smiled at that. It was true. Samantha had Jack’s eyes, and their capacity to say a million words with a single look. Intense eyes.



“Jacob’s outside, t-talking with her right now. Should... should I be worried?”

Laughing, Triss shrugged. “Uh, I’m not sure how to answer that. Jacob won’t do anything to hurt her, if that’s what you mean.”

A tricky situation. Tash couldn’t outright say she didn’t trust Jacob to not do something to Samantha, but then again, it wasn’t like Beatrice wouldn’t already suspect Tash of suspecting that. How to play this, then? Antoinette could dance the Danse as easily as kine breathed. What would she do? She’d say something that committed to nothing, but held powerful subtext.

“Jacob... is a d-dangerous man,” she said. “He makes p-p-people nervous.”

Jennifer and Beatrice looked at her, and their eyes widened slightly. Her words were a hint, just a tiny hint, that maybe some people didn’t like that Jacob was talking to Samantha. Antoinette didn’t. Daniel very much didn’t. And Jack most certainly wouldn’t. The Prince and the sheriff were scary foes to have, but it was Jack that the witches had seen in action. It was Jack, that the whole city was now a little scared of. It was Jack, that Natasha was warning them about.

“He is dangerous, I’ll give you that,” Triss said, nodding. “But I’m keeping an eye on him. I can’t imagine he’s talking with Samantha for any other reason than because he thinks she’s interesting. Cross my heart.”

Natasha smiled, nodded, and looked around some more. Othello was nearby, and was sharing his ghoul with a woman, a vampire of the Carthians. The poor ghoul was completely naked, dark skin visible for all to see. But, instead of being fucked from the front for a very intimate Kiss, it seemed like she’d already been Kissed, at least a little. He was fucking her from behind, hands wrapped around her hips, her breasts bouncing and her large ass rippling as it collided with his pelvis. The Carthian stood in front of Madison, pressing her chest into the woman’s bare breasts, and Kissing her neck, as Othello fucked her into what must have been a fifth or sixth orgasm.

“I don’t understand,” Sándor said, eyes squinting slightly as he glared around at the ever growing eroticism. “How can everyone be so comfortable with sex?”

Jennifer laughed and pat the man on the arm. “It’s what happens when Kindred are at peace, and we have no need to fight for food. When we can enjoy the hunt and the pleasure the Kiss brings and gives, things get sexual very quickly. Combined with the Prince’s natural Daeva tendencies, and her view that sexuality should be embraced as an art form, displays such as these are inevitable.” After a moment, she tapped her chin with a finger. “Though, they don’t usually get so... blatantly sexual. Kindred would normally indulge the kine, but not have sex with them. At least not here.”

“I think it’s the wolves’ fault,” Triss said, gesturing to them. “Just the smell of their horniness is bound to draw people in, flies to honey.” The pack had spread out quite a bit, and at least half of the pack were sharing their blood with horny vampires. Well, the Uratha had spent many months in Dolareido now, and had made friends with various Kindred. It was only a matter of time before more vampires than Tash or Tilly got to sink their teeth into them.

“You can smell them specifically?” Sándor said.

The three women raised brows as they looked at him.

“You can’t?” Jen said.

“No. I hunt by sight.”

Ah, like an eagle or something. Well, he was a gargoyle. If it was his Horror’s nature to stand on top of super tall buildings, and look down below for tasty targets, quality eyesight over smell made sense.

“We c-can smell it,” Tash said. “And, if we can, the Uratha are p-p-probably—”

“Boiling in their clothes,” Jennifer said, her evil grin now pointed at Natasha. She knew what Matthew and Arturo were going to do to her, the moment they were out of the party. Or possibly before they were out of the party. If Tash wasn’t careful, they might grab her here and now, and fuck her where everyone could see.

Would that be so bad? It wasn’t like she was as uncomfortable with sex and her body as she used to be. She’d had sex in front of Jessy and with her ghouls, before she even met Matt and Art! And now she was making sex films, because it was fun and satisfying. It was a project she could nerd-out on, obsess over, master, while also being super enjoyable, sexually speaking. And showing it to Jessy, and Eric, had been nerve racking, but also exciting. The result, knowing that it had been a very arousing watch for them, had been exhilarating, and validating. It felt good, knowing that people found her attractive, and it felt good to show off a little. Antoinette would have loved to hear her say those words.

Of course, there was a difference between the very controlled environment of a film shoot, and knowing only select people would get to see said film, than having sex in the middle of a Kindred ball, where the majority of Kindred would get to see her naked, and penetrated. Too much, way way way too much. Maybe in a hundred years, but for now, too much.

Tash spotted many of the Uratha, but Avery and Clara were gone. Avery probably left to find and have sex with her kine boyfriend, some random man she’d apparently become close with. Clara, she didn’t know. Maybe she was still having sex with Jessy’s ghouls? If Jessy was attempting to convert

Clara into being as sexually open minded as her, it didn't seem to be working. Clara probably felt guilty, for giving into her hormones and having sex with four attractive men, rather than satisfied.

Maybe Tash should talk to Jessy about that.

Shaking out her shoulders a little, Tash adjusted her hair, and looked for her friend. "I'm going to talk to Jessy again. I'll speak to you guys later?" Sándor didn't say anything, and continued to look around him, bewildered by the growing orgy. Jen and Triss nodded, though. "And, uh... Sándor, um. I know it's... w-weird, in D-D-Dolareido. But, this is the happiest Kindred have been in... d-decades. This is how a lot of Kindred express that. Sex, and similar things. D-Dolareido is like that." She almost said 'you can enjoy it too', but didn't. It wouldn't be fair to push him too hard, considering what he'd lost. Hopefully Jen realized that.

It took a little while to find Jessy, but she found her at last. She expected to find her having sex with Eric, or at least groping him, but she stood with a glass of blood in her hand, still completely clothed, and not Blushing Life. The wicked grin on her face said a million words. While she was capable of ignoring her arousal, poor Eric looked around with flicking glances, not unlike an animal scanning for prey. The smell of sex, of lust, hunger, sweat, and blood, was driving him closer and closer to an animal frenzy.

"Tash," Jessy said, "those witches looking to fuck Sándor?"

"Um, I... don't think so. Jen's d-definitely trying to make him an ally, but I don't know if she's actively trying to have s-sex with him." Jen was young, and Natasha still didn't understand her very well, except that she carried the same confidence and directness most Ventrue did. At the last ball, she'd gotten her hands and breasts quite messy, pleasuring multiple kine for the feast. To see her take her time with Sándor was confusing. Then again, Sándor seemed to have more than enough self control to dismiss her if she pushed him too hard.

Beatrice was the reason. Jennifer liked Beatrice, a lot. Her behavior had changed because of her, and if Jennifer was trying to seduce Sándor, she was doing it because she thought it was a way to help Triss. The thought made Tash smile. Well, good luck to her, because Sándor looked like as hard a nut to crack as Daniel.

"Well, I hope they succeed," Jessy said. "Dude's fucking crazy strong."

Eric nodded. "Yeah, he is."

"And hot," Jessy amended.

Eric rolled his eyes. "Yeah, I guess he is."

Jessy laughed and thumped her boyfriend in the shoulder with her free hand. “Ha, gay.” Politically correct, Jessy was not.

Tash smiled at Eric. “Um, how are you d-doing? Things are getting... p-pretty crazy.”

The man shook his head, a hard shake meant to dislodge rising thoughts. “Even at the craziest parties I went to at the height of my fighting career, with people getting wasted and high in every corner of the room, snorting lines off tits and silver trays, people didn’t start fucking like this.” He frowned, scratched his neck, and looked beside him at how one of the waitresses, now completely naked, was still taking her tray of blood-filled glasses around. From the look on her face, and hardness of her nipples, she was just waiting for someone to pounce her and Kiss her. “Granted, they were a lot louder, and sometimes rowdier.”

The beautiful waitress came close to Jessy, Eric, and Tash, obviously hoping for something to happen, but Jessy shooed her along, and the poor girl walked away. Natasha had no doubt someone would satisfy her before the night was done, though; Kindred only grew hornier the more they fed, not the other way around.

“I can see it,” Jessy said, “a bunch of rich fucks, hanging out at a celebrity party, cutting loose after a fight? I wonder how many of them were just kids, barely eighteen, living the highlife on their parents’ money.”

“A lot of them. Way too damn young and stupid.” No wonder Eric had a thing about wanting to clean up some of the drug abuse in Dolareido, if it’d been a part of his environment as a poor child, and then again as a rich adult. The werewolf shrugged, and took a sip of his wine. Probably not a good idea, considering that being intoxicated was why so many Uratha were giving themselves over to their arousal.

“I’m surprised you’re... not... I d-don’t know, groping Eric, or that waitress,” Tash said, gesturing at the naked woman walking away with the tray.

Jessy laughed. “Eric thinks I’m a hornball with no control. I’m proving him wrong.”

Poor, poor Eric. As long as Jessy didn’t Blush Life, or feast on someone, her body would remain a lifeless husk, incapable of being physically aroused. Mentally was a different matter, and Tash could see Jessy’s eyes jumping to the various sexual displays. She watched the naked waitress walk away, and then looked down at Eric’s crotch. He wasn’t erect, but he was getting there.

As if cursed by some sort of sex god, determined to make her life awkward, Matthew and Arturo joined Natasha. The two men stood behind her, leaned down, and each planted a kiss on her cheeks at the same time. So close, she could smell the hunger on them.

“This party,” Matthew said, “uh... took off, didn’t it?”

“Yes, it did!” Jessy said, raising a glass. “Finally. I’d heard stories about how sexy these parties used to get, back before my time. Glad to see people getting Kissed and fucked in the open like this.”

“Because you want to corrupt everyone,” Eric said.

“Yes, corrupt them with the awesomeness that is sex. The Prince knows what she’s talking about. Everyone should get over their shit, and fuck in the streets.”

Arturo laughed, smiling. “I don’t think even the Prince and Invictus could suppress the news bomb of people fucking in the streets.”

Fantasy ruined, Jessy sighed and lowered her drink. “Yeah. That sucks.” Before anyone else could say anything, she smiled an evil smile and looked at Tash and her two boyfriends. “I look forward to more movies, by the way.”

Natasha frowned, squirmed, and glanced up at the two men. They blushed, but barely. They weren’t embarrassed, or at least not very much. They probably just didn’t know how to take a compliment.

Eric coughed, and did his best to not look the two men in the eyes. “It won’t be long before the Prince, or Jessy, has us all—”

“No no!” Tash said, waving her hands. “No no, no. T-Too much.”

Everyone laughed, and then stopped, as Fiona dragged Damien past them.

“Up ‘ere!”

“There’s a way up to the roof from here, yeah.”

“Then let’s go! Ah want to see the roof!”

Tash coughed, and stared at Fiona as she guided the vampire up the stairs the way the Prince had gone. She was a very horny drunk, and apparently, very intent on fucking Damien. Poor Damien. If there was anyone in Dolareido who understood Tash’s pain in balls like this, it was Damien, and now his girlfriend was dragging him off somewhere to likely have sex.

That said, Damien had a dark side. He was calm, collected, cool and quiet on the outside, like Daniel, but Tash knew better. There was an aggressive aspect to him, hidden underneath that cold exterior. If Damien could be coaxed out of his shell, he would probably be quite the sexual animal, same as Tash knew she was.

What kind of man was Damien, when he gave into arousal?

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~~Jack~~

Mulder and Scully flew down, and perched on a nearby power line. They didn't know who Elaine was, and until they did, they were probably happier staying out of immediate reach of potential attackers. He smiled up at them, but snapped his head back to Elaine a moment later.

"All this time, and you never told me Viktor was your childe?" Antoinette said. "And... and... contaminated by the Strix curse?"

"I did not want that stain to be a... a wedge between us."

"And yet you let him come with me to Dolareido, to help forge this city."

Elaine frowned at her, stepped up to her, and touched her arm. "I knew you could protect yourself. Daniel was with you, as was Jacob. And I did not expect Viktor to become an enemy."

The Prince sighed, but didn't step away from her friend. "And the curse?"

"I asked Sándor," Jack said, "if he could see the things I know give the curse away. He said she looks perfectly normal. She's not cursed."

Antoinette raised a brow at that, but Elaine cut in before she could say anything.

"I rarely ever deal with Begotten. I had no idea they could see the curse."

Jack nodded. "They can see the monster in everyone. They say it's difficult to pin down exactly what a Kindred's Beast looks like, except that they saw chains on mine and Julias's, and... and that mine has ditched the chains, and is now grown, and twisted. Infected."

The two women looked at him then, and the difference in their expressions was startling. Antoinette was stuck somewhere between pity and surprise, concerned about him, and shocked about

the whole situation. Elaine's was stuck somewhere between intrigue and dismay, probably unhappy that he knew her secret and that she was forced to share it. Her intrigue, on the other hand, sent a little chill through him. It wasn't sexual, but her eyes were pointed at him. Intrigue in the curse?

"You should have told me, Elaine."

"Yes, well, surely you can understand why I wanted to avoid speaking of Viktor. The man quickly became a... cruel creature."

"Yes, I remember you introducing me to him, when he was still a neonate. A... hazy memory, but I remember his cold, subtle rancor." Sighing, Antoinette pushed her friend's hand away. Gently, softly, but still away. "Yes, I can understand. Tony became a menace, as I have told you."

"After embracing Viktor, and enjoying the pleasures that path in life took me, I realized how... problematic he was quickly becoming." Sighing, she shrugged, and started to slowly pace in a circle. But before she could continue, Jack jumped in.

"You got rid of the curse. I assume that's why? Because you saw the sort of person Viktor was becoming?"

"There were many reasons. And many were greatly personal, reasons I do not wish to divulge. Some of them are lost to time, and the haze that curses all elders."

He frowned. He needed details. Her avoiding giving them was a big red flag waving in the night sky. She should have been bombarding him with details, offering help, doing something to solve his dilemma, if she really was Antoinette's friend. Why wasn't she?

"I want this curse gone, Elaine," he said.

She raised a brow at that. "Do you?"

"Yes."

A small frown flickered across her face, before she strutted up to him. He did him damnedest to not stare at her breasts through the see-through dress.

"Why?"

"Why?" His frown only grew, even as hers disappeared. "Because—" He stopped, and looked to Antoinette. This was a conversation they should have been having in private, just him and his lover. He didn't like exposing this part of himself, especially to a stranger. But Elaine was his great grandsire. He had to say something to her, if only to try and get on her good side. She wasn't infected anymore, and

maybe she could help him accomplish the same. “Because the curse is a sick and twisted thing. It crawls into my thoughts and... christ, it’s fucked up, Elaine.”

The flicker of pain on Antoinette’s face cut into his insides. Elaine didn’t show pain, just more of that intrigue.

“I can only assume,” Antoinette said, “that the reason you have come to Dolareido this time, is a desire to interact with Jack, now that his curse has been unleashed.”

Elaine slid behind him, and he struggled to keep looking ahead to Antoinette. If Antoinette was comfortable with Elaine stepping behind him, then she didn’t think her old friend would suddenly attack him. Still, it made him nervous, and he glanced to the side to see how Mulder and Scully were reacting. They watched, like hawks.

It made him especially nervous, when Elaine set her hands on his shoulders, still behind him.

“Yes, I admit it. I have come to... bear witness, to this moment. I have come to document, study, and learn. I have come to understand this thing that my sire had sealed away from her, that I abandoned, and—”

“Susanna,” Jack winced with the name. “Your sire Susanna.”

“Susanna. I have... forgotten nearly everything about her, memories worn by the sands of time.”

“Know what happened to her?”

“No. I imagine she is dead.” Elaine stepped out from behind him, and leaned her ass against the railing beside him. “With her lust for carnage, I imagine someone has killed her. There is no way she could have survived all these centuries with no one knowing about her.”

Antoinette watched, silent, analyzing. This whole thing had come as quite a shock to her, too, and Jack could see the frustration and pain hidden in her stone gaze. She felt betrayed by Elaine’s secrets.

“How did you get rid of the curse?” he said.

“I do not know.”

He turned to face her directly. “Um, what?” Well, that would explain why she wasn’t bombarding him with details on what to do to fix his problem.

“It was centuries ago. I have... blurry memories to offer you, but I fear they will not aid you.”



Sighing, he shrugged, and leaned his ass against the railing a few feet from her, eyes pointed down at the roof underneath them. “I guess it was pretty dumb of me to expect a... convenient solution to my problem.”

“Indeed,” Elaine said. “I am not here to solve your problems. I am here because I am a dragon, an Architect of Terror, with a need to know and learn of the Beast. That does not mean I will not aid you if I can. And...” With a quiet chuckle, she gestured to Antoinette, hand outstretched, and waited with open palm. “I wanted to visit my old friend, and this new lover she speaks of, this young man who has filled a hole left by that loathsome Tony. Knowing that it was my great grandchilde that has helped her, was a secret I was dying to share with her. But I did not know how, until you forced my hand.”

With a heavy sigh, Antoinette walked over, took Elaine’s hand, and pulled her into a hug. Seeing Antoinette hug someone almost as tall, and almost as busty as her, was a strange mix of emotional, and comical. Antoinette didn’t normally let her guard down like that, but with Elaine, she did. The only people Jack had ever seen Antoinette be even half this open with, was himself and her ghouls. And it was funny how the two of them were too busty to actually get in a proper hug without things getting in the way. Funny, and erotic.

Apparently he was staring, because Antoinette, looking at him over Elaine’s shoulder, smiled. Slowly, she turned her friend around, and resumed looking at him over Elaine’s shoulder, though now with Elaine facing him, her back to Antoinette’s stomach.

“Jack has become a grand force in my life,” she said, and her hands set on Elaine’s hips. “And I in his.”

He nodded, the wariness and distrust he felt for his ancient sire slowly fading. If Antoinette still trusted her, even after all that, he could trust her too. A little.

“Yeap. She’s the love of my life.”

“Aww,” Elaine crooned.

“And,” Antoinette continued, “as I have told you, old friend, nothing delights me, or arouses me, quite like seeing his eyes go wide as I bathe him in new, delicious wonders.”

Uh oh. He froze, eyes going wide, just like Antoinette said they would, as she started to trace one hand up Elaine’s bare stomach and sternum.

Elaine didn’t flinch. Hell, she looked perfectly comfortable with what Antoinette was doing, like it was a dance they’d done a million times. “I see what you mean. Those eyes of his are... enticing. I

am filled with a desire to... I do not know, draw something from them?" Her hands found Antoinette's, rested on her wrists, and her gaze stayed on him as her smile grew.

"I know how you feel, my dear. His gaze stirs hungers in me, and I feel a need to extract his eyes and feast upon them." His eyes opened wider, and she laughed. "Metaphorically, of course." Her second hand joined the first, teasing fingers running up and down the bare chest between the straps of Elaine's dress.

Until she pulled them apart, so the straps sat outside her breasts. Jack froze, eyes locked onto the blonde woman's enormous bosom, and he gulped. Elaine still didn't flinch, but even with his eyes locked onto her chest, he could see her mischievous smile grow, along with Antoinette's.

Oh god, they really were similar. Two powerful women who liked making people squirm, were looking at him like he was a tasty dessert they were preparing to devour. Every moment he stood there, he was a statue with jaw dropped and hands stuck on the railing. Two of them. Two of them! He couldn't handle one!

Antoinette's hands cupped Elaine's bust, and her fingers and palms sank into the overflowing softness of her friend's breasts. And, because she knew damn well it'd hypnotize him until he'd be drooling if he'd been Blushing, she gently bounced Elaine's breasts in her palms. The rippling waves of softness stirred a groan from him he didn't even realize he'd made until the two women were chuckling.

"Oh yes," Elaine said, "I can definitely see why you are so enraptured with him now. The way he gazes upon us, it is... intense."

"My love wears his emotions openly with me."

"Indeed. I have not had a man lust after me so... honestly, and wholly, in decades."

Finally, Jack managed to find some measure of control, and gulped. Still had his eyes locked onto Elaine's huge breasts, especially because Antoinette refused to stop playing with them, but his mouth did start working again.

"It's, uh, a bad habit for a Kindred. I need a better poker face." He should have been hiding all his emotions behind a mask, but it just wasn't a skill he'd ever master, at least not when it came to sex.

It was surprising, how quickly Antoinette had gotten over the secrets Elaine had shared. Was it because they'd been friends for centuries? Was this just how elders behaved, dismissing monumental issues as minor hiccups compared to multiple lifetimes of friendship? It was strangely endearing, but he was still suspicious as all hell of Elaine, suspicious and utterly hypnotized by what the Prince was doing to her tits. Jiggle. Jiggle.

“Perhaps,” Elaine said, “but it is... deliriously... beguiling.” Her hands entwined with Antoinette’s, but didn’t stop her. The white-haired, taller vampire continued to play with Elaine’s breasts, bouncing, massaging, gently squeezing and softly kneading, and Elaine did nothing but watch him.

“Just wait my dear, until you see his eyes gazing upon you, when his length sits between your breasts, gushing white onto your skin.” Antoinette, devil smile unwavering, set a kiss on Elaine’s earlobe, and then lower, lips trailing kisses down Elaine’s neck until her friend moaned. And all the while, she never broke eye contact with him, drinking in his shock and arousal like it was some kind of drug.

Oh fuck. Seeing Antoinette kiss Elaine’s neck was like a fireworks explosion in Jack’s mind, and all the images Antoinette had planted in his head of the orgies she’d shared with Elaine, were suddenly replaying with a thousand times the resolution.

“I think I would very much love to see those eyes, in exactly that situation.” She reached out for him, and before he knew what he was doing, he took the single step needed to be within touching distance. He didn’t fully trust Elaine, and was pretty sure she was still hiding something, but for some dumb reason, he went to her anyway. Her right hand touched his sternum, and her index danced down his skin to find his abs, where she traced the shapes she found.

These two were a dangerous pair. This wasn’t like with Ashley and Julee, where Antoinette directed them in everything. He could see the same confidence, and reservoir of experience in Elaine’s eyes as Antoinette’s, and the same brutal intelligence. Scarier, was how Antoinette didn’t seem to mind Elaine making physical contact with him at her own choosing, something she’d never let anyone else do. Even now, Antoinette was watching him, drinking in his gaze, and very purposefully making a show of her friend’s body while kissing her neck, all for the sake of making him hornier, and hornier, and hornier. Judging from the soft sighs of Elaine, it was a kiss she was both familiar with, and one being done in just the way she liked it.

“You...” He forced down the rising panic. It was an old sensation, the sudden shock and uncertainty of being in front of a beautiful woman who’d shown interest in him. Most women, in romantic situations, could be scary as fuck for any man to deal with. These two, tall, busty, half-naked women with mountains of power and money, were utterly horrifying in their sheer confidence.

“Yesssss?” Elaine said as her hand slid down and down, until her fingers started to slide into his pants. If he’d been Blushing Life, he’d have been hard as a rock, eyes still unable to peel away from what Antoinette was doing with her friend’s breasts.

“You, uh... you’re—”

The roof door swung open with a bang, and Jack jumped up with a half spin. Mulder and Scully cawed and flapped their wings in surprise. Elaine and Antoinette barely moved, though when they saw Fiona and Damien come up, Antoinette gracefully slid her friend’s dress back on over her bust.

“Ah’ve never been up ‘ere!” Fiona’s voice, cheerful and fun. And drunk. “Bet ah could piss on someone below!”

Damien, pulled by a bouncing Fiona, stepped up onto the roof. He looked at Jack, Jack looked at him, and then the Mekhet looked at the two women standing around.

“Per... haps we should go back downstairs, Fiona?”

“No!” Jack said. Everyone blinked at him. “Um, no, uh... we’re done up here. Right, Antoinette?” He knew his expression must have said something like ‘please save me from this extremely squirmy situation’. Part of him screamed at him, telling him to bathe in the divine land of unending, enormous boobs. Another part wanted him to back off, until he could get a better sense of who Elaine was; much as he trusted Antoinette, she hadn’t known Elaine as well as she thought she had. Another part of him found the idea of two elders, two obscenely strong vampires with centuries of sexual expertise, turning him into a boy toy for an evening, terrifying and thrilling. It was making him hesitate, like everyone does the first time they go skydiving.

He knew that look in Elaine’s eyes, though. Sure, she probably had all sorts of secrets, but the look in her eyes was one he saw on Antoinette all the time: desire. He’d expected the desire to be pointed at Antoinette, but Elaine looked at him like she wanted to do... well, the things Antoinette liked to do. And it wasn’t like he didn’t want to, it was just a bit scary, looking at the two five-hundred-year-old women who’d seen more sex than anyone, ever.

Plus, he needed to stay on Elaine’s good side, if he wanted to learn how she got rid of her curse. She said she didn’t know, but he doubted that was true. Even if it happened three hundred years ago, or longer, he could not believe a memory like that wouldn’t be chiseled into her brain.

Ok, so, plan, stay on Elaine’s good side. Recover!

“I would like to get together later though,” he said, looking at Elaine and Antoinette.

That was enough to make the two women smile. Antoinette’s mischievous, devil smile was always enough to send a thrill through his body. Elaine’s smile was almost identical, and that made it terrifying.

“Yes, I would enjoy that,” Elaine said. “Ann?”

“Oui. I do believe I would.” She gave Elaine another small kiss on the neck, let her go, and the two women walked toward the door Fiona had just opened. Fiona stepped aside, eyes wide at what she’d just witnessed. The two vampires left the roof, leaving Jack alone with Fiona and Damien.

“That... is a dangerous woman,” Damien said to him, once a few seconds had past.

“Aye. Ye know ‘er, Jack?”

“I don’t, not really. But... eh, I’ll tell you later.” He took a slow, useless breath, and stood at the top of the doorway.

Elaine, was gorgeous. Utterly fucking gorgeous. And from remembering how casually Antoinette had pulled the girl’s dress apart, exposing her breasts, and then played with them, it was clear what Antoinette, and Elaine, had in mind. It really was like that first night with Antoinette, the nervousness and shyness all coming back to him. Maybe it was because Elaine was his great grandsire, and he’d been given a glimpse of her past. He knew what Elaine looked like three hundred years or more ago, what she did, what the city looked like, what the kine around her looked like, and how she fed on them. It made it so much more real, how crazy old those two vampires were, how much experience they had, and how little he had.

Like Garry said, he’d been given a nuke, but he was still just a child, a young boy compared to the elders. And two ancient, beautiful, ridiculously sexy women, were eying him like he’d look good tied to a bed, naked, with hot candle wax being dripped onto his stomach.

Gulp.

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~~Antoinette~~

She looked back to her love, and smiled. To her utmost delight, Jack had been completely enraptured by her teasing using Elaine’s body. She had been concerned the man might be uncomfortable with her touching another vampire, but the sheer wonder in his eyes when she had touched her friend’s breasts, had said everything. As long as she drew a clear boundary for Elaine that

she was not to cross, as she had with Ashley and Julee, Antoinette was free to use her friend to test the limits of her love's sex drive.

She laughed quietly to herself. Faded memories reminded her she had indulged in sexual fantasies with Elaine, long ago when the two only recently entered their elder years. For centuries thereafter, they expressed their sexuality whenever they met, and Antoinette had invited the woman to join her in many erotic forays. At that time, such dances were exciting, with her still new to the power of an elder vampire capable of enthralling entire groups of kine. To explore such extreme eroticism, often with Elaine at her side, had been some of the most enjoyable nights of her life, ages past.

Jack made her feel as if she were experiencing those nights once more. Jack made her feel young again.

But, Elaine had kept a secret from her. Viktor, a capable Ventrue that had quickly risen in power in the Invictus in Europe, was her childe. The man had decided to join Antoinette, when she left Europe for greener pastures, and only now did she realize it was likely a decision influenced by their secret. Viktor, ancilla at the time, had promised to help her build a new city, where Kindred could live in a utopia, and he likely only agreed because he knew of her relationship with his sire.

Elaine had been ashamed of Viktor, in much the same way Antoinette had grown ashamed of Tony. Perhaps Elaine thought the curse responsible for Viktor's cruelty, and had performed whatever ritual she had to be rid of it in response to that. Perhaps something else had triggered her seeking of the ritual. Or, perhaps the ritual had been performed upon her against her will, by a third party.

The curse of torpor, and being an elder. How many memories had she lost to time, and the erosion torpor and its chaotic dreams buried the mind in? It had been ages since her last deep torpor, to let the rising blood lust all Kindred suffer settle. How many memories had it stripped from her? Even now, as she thought back to the wonderful times she had shared with her good friend, there were gaps. Had Elaine already sired Viktor when she met her, or did that come later? Had Antoinette sensed anything strange with Elaine when she first met her, perhaps indications of the curse? Entire decades, lost to a frustrating mist, and twisted images that lied to her, memories altered by the vivid dreams of torpor.

She stopped at the top of the stairs that led to the second floor, and looked down at the paranormals of her city.

"Well then," Elaine said beside her. "It seems things have... escalated, while we spoke."

Antoinette laughed. "Indeed." Sex was everywhere. It did not hold a crown to the younger years, when Dolareido was small, and before electricity, but that did not change that the ball had succumbed to

the sexual frenzy she had partly hoped it would. The Kiss was wonderful, and Kindred could spread neither disease nor pregnancy. Why not encourage her city to indulge, and share in that pleasure?

“Holy shit,” Jack said, looking around from the top of the stairs. “Uh, ok, things kinda exploded. Um...” The look in his eyes was obvious. His mind already wandered with thoughts of Antoinette and Elaine, thoughts planted and nurtured by her, and now he was treated to the sight of dozens of Kindred Kissing, kissing, and sexually engaging with dozens of thralls, ghouls, and surprisingly, Uratha.

“How delicious.” Antoinette licked her lips, held out her hand for her lover, and started down the stairs. He fell in beside her, holding her hand and looking left and right in bewilderment.

People were beginning to leave, either satisfied, or eager to pursue sexual endeavors in privacy. Jessy and Eric left, with Natasha, Matthew, and Arturo immediately behind them. Maria was gone, but she did not feast during the balls, and always left early. Michael and Garry shared a few final words with Kindred of their covenant, and were soon to be off. The witches remained, poor Sándor trapped by circumstance, and Jennifer’s arm. Jacob—

“Uh, where’s Mom?” Jack said.

Frowning, Antoinette looked across to the room to Daniel. A quick glance and nod toward the door from him, was all that was needed for a conclusion to be drawn. Samantha was outside, with Jacob. Oh dear.

Surprisingly, Athalia remained, standing with her sheriff, and looking out at the crowd with a strange mix of annoyance, moroseness, and arousal. Samantha had done more to crack Athalia’s shell, than anything Antoinette had ever seen. Perhaps now the woman could let herself feel joy for once in her life. Perhaps Daniel could be the one to show her some.

“I believe my childe is outside,” Antoinette said. “And, I believe I would like to depart for the evening. Perhaps we should say goodbye to her, as we leave?” With a small wave of her hand, Ashley and Julee emerged from the crowd, untouched and fully clothed, though perhaps a bit drunk, and quite aroused from how their nipples pressed through their thin dresses.

“We’re going to leave her here?” Jack said.

“Do you believe her in danger?”

“I...” He frowned as he looked around again. Sex, sex, and more sex, but the room and those within were all allies, or at least, neutral parties. “I guess I don’t. Just... it’s been so damn long since we could walk around without worrying about a hunter sniping us or something. I can’t picture Mom out there, just... being a vampire, doing her own thing, living her own life.”

Antoinette ran a finger over her lover's head, kissed him on his forehead, and guided him through the crowd. Ashley and Julee fell in step beside her, though the two aroused little creatures kept their hungry eyes on Elaine.

"Look," Antoinette said, gesturing to the hunters as she walked past. The three of them were lost to the bliss of the Kiss, enraptured in pleasure, and from the looks on their faces, orgasm. They were kine, after all, drunk and helpless to fend off the many Kindred that wished a taste. Whatever hesitance they might have had was but a paltry defense, against the seductive powers of Kindred, especially Isabella and her Majesty. But, the hunters were safe from physical harm, and would be sent back to Antoinette's tower before the night was done.

"I hope they don't mind, come the morning," Jack said.

She shrugged. "They were our enemies. Every moment they are alive, is a moment I have given them. I am sure they would happily share their blood, and their bodies, with Kindred, rather than die." Not that she planned to kill them, but it was within her power to do so, and the hunters knew it. And, despite the frightening situation the hunters found themselves in, she could see relief in their eyes, that they were not to be killed, only Kissed. Relief turned to surprise, when the kine found themselves succumbing to pleasures they had never experienced before.

They walked past Daniel and Athalia on the way out. It surprised Antoinette to no end that Athalia remained, both for the growing sexual display, but also the obvious disdain Athalia must have felt for Jack and the others. She held polite, quiet, somber conversation with the sheriff, and as Antoinette walked past with her lover, Athalia grew silent, and looked at them.

Elaine, Ashley, and Julee all gave the woman space, and waited at the doors of the Black Hall, as Jack made eye contact with Athalia. Antoinette remained beside her lover, though she did not stare at Athalia, keeping her gaze on Daniel instead. So long had she known her sheriff, that it took little more than subtle twitches of their mouths and eyes to convey simple messages. Yes, Athalia was dangerous and unstable. No, she would not attack Jack. Yes, there was hope for her.

"Athalia," Jack said at last, "I—"

"Don't," she said in return. "Just don't. It's over, and... I was wrong... to do what I did."

The words hurt her. Pain dripped from Athalia so thick, Antoinette could almost see the black ooze of it splash on the floor. The mother's eyes fell, and she shuddered as she struggled to contain her misery. Mother no longer.



“I’m... sorry,” Jack said, wincing. Before the situation could turn worse, he walked out of the Black Hall.

“For all the solace useless words can provide,” Antoinette said to the Begotten, “understand that I am glad you came, Athalia. Paranormal creatures should not war with each other.” And there were other reasons she was content. Athalia’s presence pleased Daniel, for one. And it had brought new strength to Samantha, for another.

“No, I suppose they shouldn’t.”

“Indeed. Good night, Athalia.” Antoinette offered the grieving woman a small nod, before she followed the little Ventrue out of the Black Hall.

The night could not have gone better.

Outside, with Elaine, Jack, and her pets in tow, Antoinette walked toward the wide driveway where a driver waited for her. Tiny squeaks of pleasure filled the air, and she looked up. Fiona dangled over the ornate, marble railing of the roof of the Black Hall. Her dress had been pulled down to expose her large, freckled breasts, and they rippled underneath her as someone thrust into her from out of sight. Not out of sight for long, as Damien pulled Fiona up to stand, came in close to her to press his chest to her back, and held her to him, hands clutching at her body, one hand sinking into her breast while another wrapped her stomach. The Begotten looked drained, and from the look in Damien’s eyes, he had Kissed her, taken of her deeply, and was now unleashing his arousal upon the defenseless woman. He sank his teeth into her for what must have been a second, or perhaps third Kiss, and began to drain the helpless creature as she squirmed, trapped on her man’s length, unable to escape, as the Kiss forced a climax upon her.

Such a beautiful sight, Antoinette found herself watching. Jack coughed, and the ghouls giggled as they looked up to watch for a little while too. If Damien was aware, he did not show it. The man was lost to his hunger, his desire, hands groping and squeezing Fiona’s naked chest roughly, with hard thrusts that had her whole body quivering, each earning a little squeak from her.

Antoinette had not imagined Damien could let himself go so completely. In her experience, creatures like him were wrapped in complexes so deep, no joy could be found within their fortress of solitude, bitterness, delusion, and hypocrisy. Claude Frollo, Damien was not. Upon her Black Hall, the man devoured his girlfriend, fucked her with reckless abandon, and gave into his desires.

The more she learned of the man, the less she disliked him.

“Mom?” Jack’s voice.

On a concrete bench, near some of the sculpted bushes that decorated the grass around the Black Hall, sat Samantha and Jacob. They had been chatting, and laughing, until Jack spoke up.

Before Antoinette could say anything, Jack marched over to them, the impact of his feet a touch harsher than necessary. While it brought Antoinette much joy whenever Jack exercised some of his more masculine traits, there was a time and place for it. Now was not such a time or place, and she almost stopped him from interfering.

But she did follow him, as did Elaine.

“Jacob,” Jack said. “Talking to my mom?”

“I was talking to him,” Samantha said, frowning at her son. “Can’t I do that?”

Jack frowned at the grinning elder, though he spoke to his mother. “You can. I just don’t think it’s a good idea.”

For all Jack’s obvious annoyance with the situation, Antoinette could not help but continue to smile. It was pointless to tell Jacob to stay away from her childe, strong and talented as the man was. Unless Antoinette locked her childe up in her tower, never to leave, it was impossible to keep Jacob from interacting with her, or whomever he wished, for that matter. The young Ventrue had to know that.

“I’m starting to feel judged!” Jacob said brightly, and he placed the tips of his right hand’s fingers against his chest. “Can’t I have a nice, evening chat with a beautiful woman?”

Antoinette’s smile hardened. What game was Jacob playing?

“Oh, stop!” Samantha dismissed his compliment with a tiny flick of her hand, and she radiated joy from every pore. Jacob had thoroughly demolished whatever defensive measures Samantha had, with a simple word of admiration. Teaching her childe to defend herself against the words of others would take time, but Jacob was a master at manipulating people. Samantha would never be able to defend herself against him.

But, Jacob had no reason to come after her, unless he genuinely found her attractive or interesting, or both. Surely Antoinette’s old friend would not attempt to use her childe to manipulate her? He was smarter than that. If push came to shove, Antoinette would destroy him in retaliation, and he knew that. For all the man’s grand plans and hidden motives, he knew that she could kill him, if the situation was forced. But he had no reason to force her hand, and she had no desire to kill him.

In the end, she trusted him with her child, to an extent. And if her request of Beatrice, to help the man out of his pit of depression over Minerva's death proved fruitful, who knew how he would evolve?

But regardless, she was not stupid enough to not keep a close eye on the old Nosferatu.

"I was talking to your lovely mother about history," Jacob said, head pointed at Jack. "Imagine my surprise when I learned she's never left Dolareido."

Jack folded his arms across his chest, frown unending. "You haven't left Dolareido in hundreds of years."

"Says you!" Chuckling, Jacob gestured to the streets beyond. "I've taken a few trips to various places, over the past few centuries. I was in France during World War II, for a few months. I was in South America a century ago."

"Oh, what was South America like?" Samantha asked.

"Hot. Very hot."

"You were close to the equator then?"

"Yeap. I was looking for some ancient, lost text about different rituals the indigenous people used to perform, many hundreds of years ago." Jacob gave Jack one last, quick smile, before turning his head to Samantha. "I was borderline naked, crawling on my stomach through the pitch black of the jungle. The foliage was so thick, I had to ditch the clothes. Centipedes crawled over my skin. Monkeys howled. An encounter with a jaguar taught the jungle I wasn't to be bothered, but I didn't expect the lesson to last. And worse, sunrise was in a couple hours."

Jacob proceeded to regale Samantha with a tale of adventure, with the discovery of ancient ruins, and the horrors that awaited within. And she was enraptured. Jacob was a masterful storyteller, and edges of his rather obtuse personality shone through as delightful accents to the pacing. Samantha only grew more enamored, and she watched the man with hypnotized eyes, drinking in every gesture the old Nosferatu made as he told his story.

"Mom," Jack said. "I... I'll... see you later, ok?" The hesitation in his voice painted a clear picture for Antoinette, and likely for Jacob and Elaine as well. He wanted to get angry, and act the protective father for his daughter. But for all his greater wisdom and intelligence in matters of their second lives, he was the son, Samantha the mother. "Jacob, don't do anything—"

"I'm half a millennium old, Jack. I know how to be responsible. I'll make sure your mom's home before sunrise."

“I’ll be fine, Jack, really. Jacob’s not so bad.” And as she said ‘bad’, she smiled.

Antoinette could barely contain her own, resurfaced smile. Not due to her childe’s strange interest in Jacob; she also wished the woman would leave the old man be. No, it was the inflection she used in the phrase ‘Jacob’s not so bad’. It was flirtatious, obvious without being too obvious, a compliment handled with a social mastery Antoinette expected of older Daeva. Delightful.

“Come, my love. Your mother will be fine.” She set her hand on Jack’s shoulder, drew him toward her, and offered Jacob a final glance. A flicker of knowing bounced between them.

Jacob was difficult to read. He always was. Even if he had eyes, and did not wear a bandage to hide them, he would have been as predictable as a chaotic wind. But she could see the hint of understanding in the muscles of his face, when he looked her way.

*I know you are up to something, Jacob. Harm my childe, and I will kill you.*

And of course, the man returned a wordless reply.

*You’ll never know what I’m up to. I’m too good at this. But relax, your childe’s safe.*

She frowned, but wiped it away before her childe could notice. “Samantha, I expect you to return to the tower before the night is over.”

“Yes, sire.”

A final glance for Jacob, before she left with Elaine, Jack, and her precious ghouls.

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“Jack,” she said, once they stepped onto the stairs, leading down into the maze beneath her Elysium Tower, “do you mind if I speak to Elaine alone?”

“Um, sure.” He seemed hesitant. No doubt, he wished to speak to his great grandsire in private as well. “I’ll wait for you in the rec room, B4?”

“Very well. Ashley, Julee, go with him.”

The two ghouls nodded, and joined Jack down the stairs to disappear around a corner. Leaving Elaine and Antoinette alone.

Elaine knew her way around the tower. As much as Antoinette updated it routinely with technological advancements, the purpose of individual rooms remained largely unchanged, and Elaine

headed toward one of her smaller rooms, one meant for updating journals and recording personal developments. Sound proof, perfect for speaking, and in the modern era, for recording data privately.

They stepped into the small room, and Antoinette turned on the light, before sitting down at the large, beautiful, wooden table in the center of the black marble floor.

“You have been keeping secrets,” she said.

Elaine laughed, sat down opposite from her, and snuggled into the luxurious leather chair. “As have you, and Jacob, and Daniel, and the others.”

“Yes, but this is not a secret of the Danse. This is personal, Elaine. I...” Sighing, Antoinette pulled her hair over a shoulder, and combed it as she looked down at the table while she folded her legs. “Why did you not tell me?”

“About Viktor?”

“About Jack, and the curse.”

Elaine matched her sigh, and managed a weak shrug. “I am free of its reins, Ann.”

“But I am not.” A frown sneaked its way onto Antoinette’s face, and it took concentration to dismiss it. “The curse now infects my love, and my city. If it only affected him internally, that would be a different matter, but it does not. It expresses its power and desires outwardly, and has summoned the media to my city, ravenous for answers for the unusual.”

“That, is part of the reason I am here, as I am sure you have deduced.” Elaine traced a finger along the wood, eyes on Antoinette. “I wish to learn what I can of the curse, and if possible, to help your little Ventrue be free of it.”

“Did you expect to do this without me learning of the connection?”

“Maybe?”

Laughing, Antoinette shook her head. “What I cannot understand, is why you did not tell me about Viktor, and the curse? Surely you must have realized the curse was dangerous.”

“It was centuries ago, Ann. I cannot remember Susanna, and I can barely remember embracing Viktor.”

“But you did remember. And you remembered the curse.”

Elaine shook her head. “A lingering shadow in endless mist, at best.”

“Do not hide behind your age, Elaine. When you embraced Viktor, your memory would have been intact. When you let Viktor join me in my plans to create a new city, riding the colonial wave, you must have known, then.”

“I... hoped, perhaps, the curse would fade away. I can remember, and I know I have it written, that I was forever unable to free the curse from its binds, and use its true power.”

Antoinette squinted her eyes at her friend. “You attempted to?”

“I... did. I can barely remember, and I did not catalog my efforts well. I have written some remarks about Susanna, small things, hinting at her great power.” The poor woman shuddered as she dug through her memories. A painful process for any elder, to dig through memories destroyed by the centuries and torpor. “I scratched the surface, I believe, but in the end I failed.”

“All that, and you never thought to warn your friend that Viktor carried this infection?”

“I should have, but it was a shadow of my past I wanted to forget. And, after my failed attempts to unleash the curse’s power, I did all I could to be rid of the nightmarish presence.” Again, more shudders from her old friend. “I found some way to remove it, and I broke all contact with Viktor.”

“You did not offer Viktor a way to remove the curse?”

“I... never told him of the curse.”

Antoinette sighed heavily, and buried her forehead in one hand, while the other continued to comb her hair. “Why?”

“I was unable to summon it. I assumed Viktor would not be able to either. And the idea that maybe he would manage to accomplish what I could not, and unleash its power, was terrifying. After my own failed attempts to summon it...” The poor woman. It hurt, to watch her suffer as she dug through her faded memories. Antoinette almost asked her to stop, but this conversation was too important. Their friendship depended on it.

“Why go on a quest to remove the curse?”

“I am not sure. My journals mention that the curse... clawed at me.” She laughed as she looked down. “I wiped it from my past, and cast Viktor aside.”

“Is that why the two of you avoided each other, during your visits?”

“I imagine yes. And, he had come into his own, without my help. I suspect he resented me, ignorant of my reasoning. Or... that, perhaps, the curse wore away at him, and devolved him.” Elaine leaned in closer, and a hint of vulnerability passed her face. “It had crossed my mind, to perhaps speak

to the man, after your stories of how much he had become... twisted, and cruel, crueler than I could have imagined. But then you told me of Julias, and how great a man he was.”

“Julias was a great man, and... and gone.”

“And gone. I cannot imagine the pain your little Ventrue is going through.”

The two shared a sigh, and Antoinette reached out to pat her friend on the hand. “You thought, if Julias could be such a good man, surely the curse was something that faded between sires?”

“Yes. And now, to learn that my great grandchilde is not only plagued by it, but has unleashed it? And that he is your beloved? I had to come.” She withdrew her hand from Antoinette’s, and looked up. Misery draped her shoulders. “Why must our past haunt us so?”

Elaine was not telling her the whole truth. Something else was on her mind, and if Antoinette had to guess, it was something to do with the curse, and the Coils Elaine pursued. She was a master of Coils that dealt with the Beast, and Jack was likely of great interest to her, professionally. And perhaps personally, since the boy had managed to do something Elaine admitted to not being able to do: free the curse from its chains.

Antoinette trusted her friend with much, but she was no fool. She would have to keep an eye on her friend, as one dragon competing with another. But, in matters personal, she felt far more comfortable sharing her secrets and feelings with Elaine.

“Such is our curse. And... I must apologize, for plotting Viktor’s demise.”

Elaine chuckled and shrugged. “I bear you no ill will for that. Tony died as well, did he not? You plotted to kill both of them.”

“Yes, and...” Sighing again, Antoinette leaned back in her chair, and looked down at the table. “Jack killed them.”

“Jack?” Elaine’s eyes went wide. “Your little Ventrue?”

“Oui, my little Ventrue. He killed my childe, and your childe,” she said. Elaine’s stare was powerful. Rare, for an elder to let their shock show on their face. “Self defense. He was caught between them as they fought over the fabrication I had sent them after. He set the building on fire, a cotton mill, in order to prevent Viktor from killing him.”

“Oh... god. I had no idea.”

“Of course you did not. I did not speak of it. I have no desire to involve you in the Danse here in Dolareido, Elaine. Surely you must struggle with your own games in England.”

“Yes, but... but if I had known—”

“Nonsense. Viktor has been his own man for over two hundred years, Elaine. His actions are not of your make. If Julias could suppress the urges of the curse, then Viktor had no excuse.”

A smile slowly returned to Elaine’s lips. “You are correct, of course. And... I must say, I am surprised. Jack did this?”

“Oui. Forever the boy is thrust into circumstances no neonate should face.”

“And yet he thrives.”

“Thrive is not the word. He has nearly died several times, and the death of his sire, and sister, hit him hard. Considering the stress that befalls my love, I fear for his sanity.”

Elaine laughed. “Knowing you, you have likely pampered and spoiled the boy rotten, in order to soothe him of his pains.”

“Ben oui. That is why I have let you get so close to him, after all.”

“Oh, is that how it is, old friend? I am nothing but a tool for you to use, to overindulge and mollycoddle your lover?” Lightheartedness had returned to her friend’s voice, and Antoinette laughed with the joy of it.

“Naturally.”

A twinkle shone in the woman’s eye. “Naturally. And I admit, I look forward to it. He is a scrumptious morsel, is he not? But, I am worried that this... unveiling of my past has damaged that possibility.”

Laughing again, Antoinette shook her head. “Jack trusts me. And I trust you.”

“Trust is dangerous.”

“Quite, but I do nonetheless.”

Elaine’s smile brightened. “Thank you.”

“And despite the surprises this evening, we both saw the look in my love’s eyes.”

The old Ventrue licked her lips with a hunger Antoinette recognized. “Yes, indeed. I am surprised a man who has seen so much violence, and has grown into such a powerful individual in many ways, can be rendered so paralyzed by the sight of breasts.”

“As strong as Jack is, in will and mind, something about him cannot seem to fathom the existence of women, of breasts and legs, and sex.”



They both laughed. Surely there was a time in her life when such stubborn innocence in a man would have been thoroughly unappealing. Now, with endless years of experience to draw upon and sculpt her outlook and tastes, Antoinette found it extremely enticing. And so would Elaine, before the night was done.

“But, he has been your lover for two years now? Surely he is comfortable with sex, considering you... are you.” A sly grin announced her true meaning.

Antoinette rolled her eyes. “As if you are any different to me.”

“I did not arrange orgies of over fifty kine, Ann.”

“No, but you did join them. Excitedly, if my blurry memories do not lie to me.”

With a playful sigh, Elaine shook her head. “They do not.”

Nodding, Antoinette stood up, and motioned for Elaine to do as well. “Jack defies my attempts to acclimatize him to the sexual possibilities of sharing his bed with an elder Daeva. Every night, his eyes fill with wonder as I take him into my arms. And every time I treat him to a new experience, he paralyzes, as if struck dumb by the sheer idea that multiple women find him attractive.” Nodding, she pulled out her phone, and prepared a message. “No matter how many times I have bathed him in not only my sexuality, but also that of my ghouls, he is still shocked by such pleasures.”

“He lacks confidence?”

“I considered that, at first. Now, I believe the boy simply cannot ever be bored with erotica.”

“Lucky you.”

Antoinette grinned her playful, devil grin. “Indeed.”

For all the insanity the evening had wrought, secrets upon secrets shattered and innards exposed, everything turned out well. Her invitation for Elaine to visit her in Dolareido had not backfired with the new knowledge, and if anything, she understood her old friend better now. Telling her who killed her childe, and Elaine’s childe, had been a strange moment, balancing on a knife’s edge. But Elaine did not care for Viktor anymore than Antoinette did Tony. The threat of ill will passed, and Antoinette found her tension fading away. Tonight, was a wonderful night.

“Who are you texting?”

“Ashley and Julee. My pets will join us. We will feed, and then I will show you how wonderful my little Ventrué can be.”