

~~Jack~~

He hated waiting.

People handled waiting differently, and with different degrees of stress. Some people shut down, to save mental energy. Some people shut down because they couldn't handle the stress in general. Some people became antsy, anxious, and volatile. Some people panicked, and started spiraling down ridiculous trains of thought that were nothing but self destructive.

Jack became a planner. When he had no choice but to wait for the event, the action, the conclusion, the whatever, to happen, he planned. He was a good planner, and he enjoyed it. Spreadsheets of his old diet, before he was embraced, calorie counting and such, were a joy to craft. Writing out flowcharts of his various career choices, and where they could lead him, were too. It helped relieve and manage stress when he had to think about something coming his way that he had to deal with, but wasn't here yet.

These hunters were coming, and no matter how much he looked, no matter how much Mulder and Scully looked, no matter how much the Right Hands looked, or anyone else looked, no more details availed themselves. So, he did the only thing he could do. He went to Bloodlust.

"Hello Eric," he said. "Long time no see."

The man looked him up and down, before shrugging, and leaning against the wall. On the first floor, it was noisier than upstairs, more people around. Jack didn't like it, and from the way Eric was looking at the people around him, he didn't like it either. Strange job choice then. Jack was almost tempted to ask him how he became a bouncer, but the look on his face suggested he shouldn't.

"Jack. Good to see your guts on your inside."

Heh, yeah. Jack looked down, pat his stomach, and slid into the booth beside Eric. Empty, now that the couple that'd been in there were leaving. The werewolf probably scared them off.

And he was a werewolf. Jack hadn't been in a position to analyze him, the first time he saw him, and apparently the man had never transformed until recently. Whatever it was his first transformation had done, it'd changed him. He looked different, smelled different, and moved different. There was something animalistic to his stance, aggression, defensiveness, territorial maybe. Or Jack was letting his knowledge taint his view.

“How’s it going?” Jack said. Yeah, small talk, with a guy Jessie warned was not interested in small talk. This was going to go well.

“What do you want, vamp?”

Damn. Spot on. Jack could relate to the antisocial tendency, but not the aggression. The fuck had Jack done to earn the glares Eric was giving him now?

“Checking in, to see if you’ve seen anything unusual.”

“Like those four hunters? No, nothing like that.”

“Would you know?”

“I’d smell them.”

Jack raised a brow up at the man beside him, and took a sniff of his own. Lots of smells, lots of sweat and alcohol and sex and drugs, but he had no way of separating it from the more subtle smells. Man must have been a blood hound werewolf.

“You sure?”

“If not, I’d see something. I’d notice if something was off about someone, and if they weren’t something with fangs or claws, I’d know that that person was dangerous, and probably a hunter. I’d report it. So you can fuck off and—”

“Whoa dude, whoa. Not here performing any kind of check to see if you’re doing your job, Eric. Just here because... need a place to wait for the shitstorm.” Not entirely true, but good enough to progress the conversation.

Eric grunted, a noise closer to a growl than Jack supposed the man meant to make, because his eyes opened wide after, and he shook his head out. “Fine. Shitstorm?”

“The hunters are going to do something. We need to find them, beat them to the punch.” Sighing, he shifted in the seat so he was facing out of the booth. It set his feet near Eric’s, so Jack didn’t have to yell; not like he wanted the nearby kine to hear. The pulsing music and background noise of sex and chatter was only effective cover to a point. “Probably something involving me.”

“You? Because you’re dating that tall, white-haired chick?”

Jack smirked up at the man. Tall, white-haired chick. He couldn’t tell if Antoinette would be upset or amused at the description. Probably both.

“Maybe. And because I know Azamel. It’s her the hunters are after.”

“Right, granny in the rocking chair.”

“Well, I’m sure after that daring rescue you made, they’ll be coming for me, other vamps, and maybe you too.”

Eric shivered, and ran his fingers along his shaved head. Jack knew the reflex well; buzzed head versus bald head though. Could be fun to try that haircut, and since he was Kindred, he’d only have to keep the change for a night. Eric raised a brow at him. “Why are you staring at me?”

“Oh, uh, no reason.” Chuckling, Jack looked to the door of Bloodlust. There was Damien, and Jessy, coming in to join him as planned.

He watched Eric in the corner of his eyes, and waited to see if his hunch was correct. Once the man looked toward the door, and saw the two vampires, a small crack showed through the wolf’s hard exterior. Chin raised, arms relaxed, Eric watched Jessy, and as she came in closer, the crack of a smile on his face grew. Eventually, the man realized he was smiling, and wiped it off with his hand, but Jack saw it all, through the pulsing lights of Bloodlust.

Jessy liked him. He liked Jessy. No issue there, as long as Avery didn’t create a problem, and get Eric dragged into it. Worst case scenario. Well, he was paid to think of the worst case scenario now, especially as a Right Hand.

“We’re heading up, team meeting,” he said, standing. “Wanna come, keep people from getting too close?”

“The fuck you having a team meeting in a club for?”

“Let’s us keep an eye on things,” Damien said, stepping in close enough for the conversation. Man had good ears.

“Yeah.” Once she was in close, Jessy walked up to Eric, tapped him on the shoulder, and winked at him with all the subtlety of a firecracker. “Plus, think of it like a work meeting, right? We’ll grab a snack while we’re here.”

“Never worked in an office environment, or anything with team meetings.” He shrugged, and smiled for a moment when Jessy winked at him.

“Come with us,” she said. “Be a lookout.”

He managed a snort laugh, a quiet noise Jack had heard many dogs make. Sort of like a canine’s way of putting an exclamation point at the end of a sentence. Jack wasn’t exactly well versed in the man’s normal body language, but he assumed it used to be more human; it wasn’t anymore. Every

glance, every breath, every tap of his finger on his own bicep, and every motion he made, had the calculated, prowling depth of a wolf's movements. He might as well have been Clara or that Carter fellow.

And as the three Kindred went upstairs, he followed, up the stairs and to one of the booths in the back. Dark, secluded, where the music wasn't as noisy, and where the kine weren't. Back in the day, Jack would have found it a tad scary, maybe even spooky, to hang out in the shadowed corner of a night club. Now, he gravitated toward it naturally. Give him some mascara, an earring, a trench coat, and he'd wear them without irony.

Well, maybe a little irony.

The three Kindred sat down, and Eric stood by the booth. Took his job seriously, or knew to go with the flow to prevent issues. Jack made sure to sit down on the outside of the booth, beside the werewolf. Time for the part he wasn't looking forward to.

"Jessy tell you about me?" he said.

Eric raised a brow as he looked down at him. "Not sure what you mean."

"He means," Jessy said, leaning over Jack's shoulder and grinning at Eric once she was in the booth, "that Jack here is your new goto, sort of."

"Did you three come here to have a meeting, or talk to me?"

Jack sighed, and shrugged. "Both, in a way. I need to know what Avery told you, what the Begotten told you, and... well, what your plans are."

Every muscle on Eric's body tensed. Whatever Jack said, it was nails on chalkboard to this guy.

"My plans?"

"Your plans." Ok, at least he was talking. Jessy warned him the man was a 'bitter fucker', her words. She also said he seemed to appreciate honesty. A fine rope to walk, as the truth was usually a tough pill to swallow, and in a bitter jackass, was liable to get spit back out. "If you're going to join Avery's pack, that's fine, I talk to her regularly anyway. If you're not, and you're going to hang with the Begotten, you—"

"Why does everyone think I'm going to do anything with them?"

"You're friends with Fiona, aren't you?" he said. "And Jessy found you in the sewer with them."

"That was... that was an accident."

Accident or not, the mention of Fiona turned his eyes downward. A glance Jessy's way showed a knowing smirk from her though; which, from Jessy, likely meant some sexual manipulation. Ugh.

"Well, alright, if you don't have any plans to side with—"

"What's with this 'side' crap? You guys at war? Not what Avery told me."

This guy liked to interrupt him. Jack didn't like that. A quick glance to his companions showed some different opinions. Damien was annoyed, but not over the interrupting; probably just hated having to waste time talking to this extra thorn in their side. Jessy was smiling, and likely thought the man's antics cute. Blatant bias. If he was anyone else, she'd have the man's head pinned to the table while she drilled orders into his ear.

"No, we're not at war, but..."

"But we could be," Damien said. Stone cold face on, the man put his elbows and fists on the table, and glared at the werewolf standing beside the booth. "When we all thought you were kine, you'd be nothing but a worthless bystander in any potential conflicts. But now you're not."

"Jessy gave me the run down." The man snorted again, and leaned against the wall before folding his arms across his chest. Defensiveness. He thought he was being attacked, but not from Jessy. It was Jack and Damien putting the man at odds. What did that woman say to him, before now?

"I'm sure she did." Damien looked at her with the same cold face, and Jessy rolled her eyes in return.

"Whatever." The werewolf shrugged. "My plan is to keep working here, and help out if those hunters show up."

Jack shook his head. "What does helping include? You understand if those hunters show up, or anyone else does with a similar agenda, helping could mean listening to our orders, when we tell you what to do?" The man didn't seem to get it. Another poor sap sucked into a world they didn't want to be a part of, and their desire to stand on the sidelines was not acceptable. He was too valuable as an ally, and too dangerous as an enemy, to ignore. "That could mean doing whatever Avery tells you. If things turn weird on us, it could mean doing whatever Azamel tells you. It will likely mean us telling you what to do. And that isn't simple either. The Carthians might ask for your help. They might want you to help with the hunters, or they might pull you into some shit that will force you to make enemies of the Invictus; or at least piss them off. It's a complicated world of darkness, Eric, and we're just trying to stay afloat."

Ok, rant over. It was enough to pierce this asshole's shell though, and get through to him a little, based on the man's expression. Pensive, contemplating, his eyes fell to the booth, and his head tilted slightly as thoughts undoubtedly rolled around in his head.

And Jessy winked at the man.

That wasn't good. Jessy was talking to this man, and talking to him about more than just sex, if she was winking at him about this topic. What game was she playing? Much as he wanted to believe she was too stupid for the Danse Macabre, too stupid to be playing a sneaky game of her own, he doubted that was true anymore, not since he'd become a Right Hand and started seeing her intelligence shine through.

"I can't just... tell everyone who comes to bother me to fuck off?" he said.

Jack laughed, and shrugged. "You could try. It might even work. But we're talking about strong entities, people with the individual power to pursue staggering agendas. They rarely suffer a neutral party. They're with us or against us types." He put his hands up in surrender before Eric could interrupt him again. "If you want to try and remain neutral, fine. My sire told you to talk with Avery, and we'll defer to her about this. If she's ok with you being neutral, then I hope you can remain neutral."

Chuckling, Jessy leaned in, and pushed Jack in the shoulder, always buddy buddy. "Except, of course, if you try and play the neutral card, you'll default to working for us Invictus, since we write your cheques. I assume you want to keep the job and the nice apartment and shit." And, again, a wink.

She might have been smarter than she seemed, but the lack of subtlety was a nasty weakness. Her brute strength might have worked on weaker Kindred, and she was damn powerful, but Jack was starting to grow worried the woman was going to get them all in trouble. Azamel wouldn't swallow her bull shit, and neither would Avery.

"The Prince told me a neutral party Uratha used to live in the city," Jack said. "Said she was a ghost wolf, or something."

"Ghost wolf?" Eric raised a brow, before a small smile came in. "I like that."

The four of them looked to the stairs across the second floor of the Bloodlust, as a couple of women walked up to join them. Fiona, with her pale skin, freckles, and frizzy red hair, could not have looked more different than Athalia, with her dark skin and long black hair. Short versus tall, and curvy versus skinny, too. What they were wearing was just as contrasting, Fiona fully embracing the club label Bloodlust carried, despite its lounge nature. Athalia wore some torn-up, tight jeans, and a tight

white t-shirt, while Fiona wore a dress, a green dress, straps tied around her neck, and plunging cleavage showing off her impressive breasts.

Jessy whistled, and motioned for her to come sit beside her. Giggling, Fiona jumped in place a little — boing boing — before hopping over to sit beside her. Damien was trapped between Jessy and Jack, but based on the look on his face, he preferred that to being closer to the other people joining them. Fiona getting into the booth put him on edge, and it put Eric on edge, though he seemed a little more interested in looking at her, than looking away from her.

Fucking high school romance drama crap. At least they kept it to their body language, and didn't put any of it to words.

“You, you fucking little devil, looking fucking gorgeous in this.” Jessy leaned in, put a kiss on Fiona's neck, and earned more squealing giggles from her. Ok, maybe not so high school.

“Keep it in your pants,” Athalia said. “Not here to fuck.”

“Could do you some good.” Jessy, laughing, put another kiss on Fiona's neck, more deliberately this time, and she earned giggles weren't as girly anymore. There was a moan in there.

Talk about awkward. Either Jessy was a brain dead moron, or she was trying to pull some reactions out of Eric and Damien. Why, he didn't know. Could be trying to push Damien into fighting for Fiona, so she could have Eric to herself? Or vice versa... or she could be trying to engage a foursome.

Jack choked on a laugh. A foursome as Damien's first foray into sex. The ramifications on the poor man's mind would be worthy of poetry.

Athalia wasn't amused. She sat down in the booth as well, and offered Eric a small nod. “Hey dumbass. Still alive I see.”

“Yeah.” The man shrugged, and forced his eyes away from the sight Jessy was creating. “You all here to talk about me?”

Damien shook his head. “No. We're here to talk about the hunters.”

Fiona, finally free of Jessy's lips, nudged Athalia with her arm. “Tell them!”

Rolling her eyes, Athalia leaned in, and motioned for them all to, as well. “Saw an old woman fitting Azamel's description of the shaman. We think she's somewhere in Devil's Corner.”

“You sure?” Jack said. “They brought me to North Side, when they caught me. Figured they'd have a base or underground hideout or something in that half of Dolareido.”

“Or they’re smart, and wouldn’t bring you close to their HQ.” Athalia shook her head, and took a moment to look around. “Sure it’s safe to talk here?”

Jessy nodded. “Yeap. Built by vamps, for vamps. The only people who could be eavesdropping would be other paranormals.”

Athalia frowned, and continued looking around. When she caught Jack’s eye, he shrugged at her, and offered her a small smile; like Jessy’s, but gentler. Bloodlust was a great place for what it was meant for: a place for Kindred to get an easy meal. It turning into a good meeting spot was a strange turn of events, not the intent. They could trust Eric’s nose though, to spot the hunters. And it wasn’t like the hunters would come waltzing into the center of Invictus territory anymore anyway.

Several of Jessy’s ghouls were around, too. And once the vampires, werewolf, and monsters were all together, the ghouls happened to start getting busy with some of their girlfriends. Their moans were background noise, joining other moans, groans, and thudding crap music from the rest of the club. No one would be able to eavesdrop through the noise, anyway.

Athalia’s gaze lasted on the sexual display longer than Jack thought it would. Maybe his talk in the Black Hall sank into her a bit more than his impression gave him. Something told him the woman could use a good lay; Jessy, specifically, told him that, on several occasions.

“Devil’s Corner,” Damien said, “is problematic to deal with. Lot of places to hide. A lot of people to make deals with, too. I wouldn’t be surprised if they’ve recruited, without explaining to who they’ve recruited exactly what they’re up against.”

Yeah, it was a messy place to handle. “I’d prefer to keep casualties to a minimum,” Jack said.

Athalia scoffed at him, but said nothing. Good. It was starting to get irritating, how she absolutely refused to give him or any Kindred an inch. How much of a paradise did Dolareido have to be before she realized Kindred weren’t all just looking for blood and slaughter.

Paradise by a vampire’s standards, maybe. Begotten weren’t having as easy a time of it, thanks to Julias and the others.

“We can try,” Jessy said, “but when push comes to shove, getting rid of these hunters takes priority. Besides, we don’t know if they’re hiring. That’d be dangerous to do, don’t you think? Hire random strangers. Might give away what they’re up to.”

“They’re good at hiding what they’re up to.” Nodding, Damien pulled out his phone, and brought up a map of the city. “Killed Barry here, kidnapped Jack here, brought him here, and then disappeared when the Invictus showed up. We found the weird ritual here, and—”



“Weird ritual?”

Everyone looked up over their shoulders, to see Eric looking at what they were doing. If the man wanted to remain neutral, his reflexes didn't agree. Curiosity killed as many dogs as cats.

“Sure you want to know?” Jessy said, smiling at him.

“I... you know what? Sure. If these hunters are doing something, I should know too. They know my face, know I helped Fiona. I wouldn't be surprised if they decided to shoot me on sight.”

Yeah, Jack could agree with that. Nodding, he leaned back a bit, so the man could see past him to Damien's phone easier.

“Here,” Damien said, “in a storage locker in Devil's Corner, we found a ritual. An occult ritual. Your imagination will probably end up closer than you think. Blood symbols, a fresh skeleton, the works. The peculiar thing was, we found drawn pictures of a body being dissected, rigorously, every detail. And, attached to the skeleton, we found a face.”

“My face.” Kind of Damien to leave out that detail, but Eric was right. The hunters considered him a threat, so there was no reason to not fill him in on the pertinent details. Hopefully.

“That... is some seriously disturbing shit,” Eric said. Jack could almost see the man's brain collapse with the new knowledge that occult rituals existed, and likely worked. And from there, his brain would spiral Fibonacci style, adding more and more possibilities to the ever expanding pattern. The world of darkness was filled with so many new possibilities, each darker and crueler than the last.

“You're telling me.” Laughing again, Jessy leaned in close and motioned for Eric to lean in as well. “But what's truly disturbing is this was something done by hunters. Freaky shit like this? Vampires do this sort of stuff, the witch ones. Begotten are... well, you know them.” With an eye roll and a flick of her wrist toward the two monsters, she continued. “And I'm sure you Uratha do some weird stuff. Dance in the moonlight naked, and devour the raw flesh of your prey, or some weird insanity, right? But humans doing that, is weird. And...”

And horrifying. Vampires, werewolves, monsters, they lived and breathed such absurdities, because it was in their nature. Even vampires, relatively normal and nearly human, compared to the other two, got their hands dirty with some pretty disturbing shit. Humans had no business getting into that stuff, and if they could, what the fuck was wrong with them? Like cannibals in the woods, disturbing on a level monsters like Jack and his companions in the booth could never hope to reach.

Be afraid of vampires, of werewolves, of monsters, sure. But being afraid of humans was like being afraid of your neighbor. It was sickening, and he didn't wish that fate on anyone. No wonder that episode 'Home' from X-Files was so fucking scary.

"So, what's the plan?" Fiona said, leaning in. "I... I dinnae ken if... I dinnae ken if ye should go there, nae alone. B-But if ye go as a crew, they might catch ye, and it'll be dangerous for other reasons."

Damien nodded. "If only it was as easy as simply walking through the city and removing them. Unfortunately, they know our weakness, and they seem to have tools to deal with us."

"Your elders could—"

Jack raised a hand, cutting Athalia off. "If shit hits the fan, or we get solid evidence, they'll step in. But elders don't risk their lives on a whim. Much as I hate that we have back up we can't use, I can't ask for Garry or Maria or Michael, or the Prince or Jacob, or even Julias, to throw in their weight until we have something better to go on." And besides, elders weren't gods, they weren't invincible. He saw that first hand, too many times. Much as he hated that he knew they'd refuse to help until they had better evidence, he hated that he agreed with them all the more.

The covenants needed their rulers, or they'd collapse in a vacuum, or to each other. What a bitter truth.

"I'll talk to Isabella," he said. "Or Hella, rather. I know Hella likes to dig into Devil's Corner occasionally. So does Vicky and Parker. I'll talk to them." They ran some sex holes in Devil's Corner, so maybe they knew something.

The rest of the meeting went about as well as planned. With a new target, Devil's Corner, as the focus of their search, they had something to work toward. Athalia and Fiona would provide some support, and Jack was to come to the Azamel if he found Jeremiah. He could report back what he found to Julias, and see what they decided. It'd be what Jack figured, though.

Like Antoinette told him, learn to predict his superiors. Just, he knew they'd also try and take advantage of the situation in ways he couldn't predict; the Danse Macabre was a bitch.

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~~Eric~~

“You look different,” his dad said.

Eric shrugged, and turned to look at the TV. Baseball again.

“You don’t.”

His dad shrugged. Probably where he got the habit from, when combined with the look-away. Delightful way to say ‘don’t fucking care’. “How’s your new job treating you?”

“Good, and bad, I guess.” Eric leaned back in the visitor’s chair, and took a moment to look around at the hospital room. Not much had changed since the last time he was here. Nothing had changed since the last time he was here. His dad had made no effort to get up off his fat ass, and Eric’s money was giving him an avenue to continue eating crap.

He should tell the nurses to only give him shitty hospital food; which, he supposed, they were probably supposed to be. Maybe he was bribing them, to get more crap shit sneaked in. Eric should follow up, and see if he could make his dad’s life more miserable. At least it’d save his stupid life and get him off the shitty food.

“What’s bad?”

“The company that’s hired me wants to do a song and dance.”

“Like back in the day? You gettin’ on camera again?”

Eric shuddered. “No. I may be in a bit of a spotlight with these money types, though.” Money types described the vampires well enough. What type were the werewolves and monsters? Pains in the ass, for sure, but the vampires were easier for him to understand. Dealing with news crews, lawyers and accountants, the media, and celebrities, fit right into dealing with the undead fuckers.

He sighed, and looked up at the tile ceiling. Jessy put a small hole into that approach. She was the sort of woman he could trust, more than others. Came at him straight, put things into a realistic perspective, and gave him some options too. Play the field, she said. You have the power to defend yourself and pursue your own agenda now, she said.

His dad changed the channel. The news, volume low, captions on. Old habit again, or he was looking to continue the conversation.

“Make any friends?” the old man said. Guess he wanted to continue the conversation. Talkative today.

“In a way.”

“Woman?”

“A couple.”

“Don’t fuck it up like you did with Sheryl.”

Sheryl. Just the mention of her name made his knee tense, which made his whole body tense in preparation for the pain... that never came. Healed. Silver lining to all this hell.

“My knee is feeling great lately, thanks for asking,” he said. He was starting to wonder if maybe he should fake a limp, before someone started asking questions about the knee.

“She’s not to blame for the knee, boy. And I meant, you and Sheryl were a horrible pair. Do better this time.”

“I’ll get right on that.”

“Seen a few cute doctors around here. Go ask one out.”

“Think I’ll pass, dad.”

The old man rolled his eyes, groaned, and erupted into coughs. He winced once the grotesque noises passed, and scratched at the IV needle in his arm.

“When’ll I be getting out of here?”

“When your health starts to bounce back. Think you can stop eating cheeseburgers and potato chips for a few fucking days?”

“Son, let me do what I want, would you? I’ve lived this long—”

“You’d be dead if I didn’t interfere.”

“Says you. Remember O’Malley? Man lived to be eighty-nine years old, smoking every day of his life. Came out of his momma’s cooch with a cigarette between his lips.”

The idiot said it without irony. No point in trying to explain survivor bias to his stupid father. No point in trying to explain how pathetic it was, to trust the things you see with your eyes, as a representation of general truths. So, Eric sighed, shrugged, and looked back to the TV. Some other place in the world was burning to the ground. Wonderful.

If Eric pushed him, said something like ‘fine, let’s go, I’ll take you home’, his dad would probably die. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but he’d deteriorate into a fat tub of lard until his heart gave up or his blood-sugar levels destroyed him from the inside out. And his dad didn’t want that.

Stubborn and stupid as he was, he didn't want that. But he was stubborn enough that, if Eric pushed him on it, the dumbass would agree to go home, and be done with the hospital.

Every time Eric was in the hospital, he juggled that fucking option in his mind. Keep his dad alive, because he knew his dad wanted to live, despite his stupidity and resistance. Or, let his dad die due to his own incompetence and laziness. Let him die, so he'd be out of your life. Just an anchor holding you down.

Anchor that kept you from going adrift in a storm.

“Question for you, pops.”

“Yeah? Thought you got the world figured out by now, don't need no advice from anyone.”

“Yeah, well, lot of weird shit happening to me lately, making me question my omniscience.”

“Fine, ask away.”

“What would you do, if you were being asked to pick sides in a cold war? Got a few groups of people... pushing for money, business acquisition type stuff. Some of them are your typical money snakes. Some others are honest, but I don't trust them to not get rough, maybe even break some knees. And the others are—”

Steps at the door cut him off. “Oh, this has got to be good. What are we in your hilariously inaccurate breakdown?”

Eric froze, and looked to the door. Athalia.

“This fine lady looking for your help, Eric?” His old man sat up in bed, and winked at her.

She laughed.

Eric raised a brow at her. He didn't know her well, but from that meeting last night, it seemed like everyone expected her to be a cold bitch. Nothing wrong with some ice, and Eric could do with some ice in his life about now anyway. Refreshing, when everyone else was trying to get him on their side.

But the look on her face, as she looked between him, and his father in the hospital bed, wasn't ice. She smiled at his father, and tossed her hair over her shoulder a little. Flirting with the old man; not something an icy woman would do. Most definitely not the same woman who punched some sense into him when he was transformed. Not the same woman who had some sort of undead god horror inside her. And yet, he knew she was, he could feel it, could almost smell the disgusting waves of unadulterated terror made manifest dripping from her pores.

“I was going to say,” Eric said, “you’re something of the underdog, I guess. An underdog with nothing to lose.” He got up, walked over to the monster, and frowned at her. “Makes you dangerous.”

“Son, stupid boy, gonna introduce us or not.”

Fucking hell. If only the old man knew who or what this woman was. Not like Eric could share that information with him. And what the hell was she doing here anyway? The only people who should know about this part of his life were people either tracking his finances, like the Invictus, or people following him. He expected Avery to be following him, to have someone tail him, though he hadn’t seen or smelled anyone yet. The last thing he expected was a Begotten to show up.

“Don’t mind Eric,” she said. “I’m Athalia. And I got plenty to lose.”

“What’re you doing here?”

“Came to see you.”

Why? He almost asked it, but a look in her eye made the answer obvious. To talk about dangerous shit. Sighing, he motioned to the door with his head.

“I’ll be back before I leave, dad. I—”

“Boy, get out and go hang with the beautiful lady. Get me some fucking grandkids already, for Christ’s sake.”

A lovely way to be dismissed by his dad. Better than usual, he supposed, with the two of them usually growing increasingly irate until he simply had to leave. And Athalia’s laughter was a delightful sound; not much of that going on in the hospital.

Rolling his eyes, Eric stepped into the hallway with Athalia, and the two of them made their way to the cafeteria. Big hospital with a lot of money meant a nice cafeteria for visitors and patients. The staff had their own he figured, since no nurses or doctors were around. Plenty of seating, too.

“You know,” he said, sitting down at one of the tables by a window, “I was in a hospital when I was younger.”

“Oh?” Ice expression returned, Athalia leaned back in her seat, and looked out the window. The hospital had a small garden view, a grassy area in the center, between its halls and walls.

“Terrence Hospital. Run down, horrible, barely functioning.” It was easy to argue for premium health care if you had money to spend on it. He’d seen the other side of the fence. “It’s almost sickening, how much better this is.” South Center Hospital might as well have been hospital care for royalty, as far as Eric’s upbringing could tell.

“I was there, once, when I was younger. Terrence Hospital, I mean. Pretty sure, if it wasn’t for my horror, I would have walked away from that hospital with an infection and disease on top of the wound.”

He smiled. Yeah, he got that. “What kind of wound?”

“Dislocated my shoulder.”

“Sports?”

“Fighting.”

“I—”

“Not fighting for a sport, like you. I got into it with some bully when I was younger. This was before Angela.”

He kept a straight face when she said her daughter’s name, but it wasn’t easy. “South Center is... the people here are spoiled.”

“Very.”

“How did you find me?”

“Not telling.”

“Why?”

“Because, it’s my prerogative as a monster. You’ll never understand, anyway.”

“I get the impression you don’t like me very much, Athalia.”

“I don’t. You’re a dog, and all of your kind are aggressive brutes, incapable of controlling your impulses.”

If he didn’t know any better, he’d think that was a sexist statement, more than a racist one. But he noticed a lot of frustrated, annoyed looks at Jessy too, during the meeting. And Jack. And Damien. Only person she seemed ok with was Fiona; maybe because everyone liked Fiona, or because she had issues with werewolves and vampires. She apparently disliked werewolves, so the extrapolation was reasonable.

Fuck, stop running the thoughts through your head. What did Avery say, that Cahaliths like to narrate their thoughts, like spinning a story? Fucking stop it.

“Alright, so, why are you here?”

“Came here to re-offer Azamel’s offer.”

Ugh, this shit again. “I’m not taking any sides in anything, Athalia.”

“That’s just it. The vamps think this is about sides, and the fucking dogs think this is about sides. It’s not like that for us.”

“You telling me you’re all free agents? Seems like you all work for Azamel.”

“She guards us, but we don’t work for her. And we’re not a family, not a pack, not really.”  
Shrugging, she got up, and walked over to the selection of food. A few minutes later, she came back with some fruit, and a sandwich with beef.

The look of it turned Eric’s stomach. The beef was alright, but the rest of it? He didn’t want it. In the past, he’d have wanted it. The fruit would have looked delicious, and the bread, an enticing base for other flavors to compliment. Now it looked like the shit prey ate. Athalia enjoyed it well enough, though.

“Surprised you’re eating that.”

“It tastes good.”

“Do you need to eat?”

“I eat.” She smirked at him, and took a bite of the sandwich. “I feast on destruction.”

“... destruction?”

She leaned in closer, and glared into his eyes, piercing him. Sheryl used to give him that look, when she was ready to literally pierce his eyes with her stiletto heels. A mix of condescension and anger, wrapped in a layer of ice. Unnerving.

“That’s the problem. That’s why I don’t trust you, or the vamps, as you’ve no doubt noticed. You’re just animals, looking for food. Begotten are more than that.”

His turn to lean back, and sneer. “Wanna fill me in?”

“No, but, Azamel thinks you can be of value to us, so... Jesus, explaining this is like explaining science to an infant.”

This woman was begging to be hated. It was an act he knew well, too, actively making people hate you, so you could avoid ever having to connect with someone. No one can hurt you as much as a friend, so, better to not make friends. He didn’t want to agree, but, sometimes he did.

“I am basically an infant, in this new, fucked up world, Athalia.”



“... true.” She took another bite, and looked out the window. Felt like the sandwich was just a precursor to conversation for this woman, as if she didn’t need it. “Werewolves want to hunt, patrol, do their duty. Vampires have their squabbles and political agendas. You know what Begotten want?” She didn’t look his way. Rhetorical question. He almost answered it anyway, just to piss her off. But that was the old him, and the least he could do was shut up and listen. “We want to exist.”

“Sounds simple enough.”

“So you’d think. It’s not.” She turned to him again, and leaned in. “I get the impression that’s all you want, too. You don’t want to serve in any vampire wars, and you don’t want to be doing some ancient duty for some ancestor you had nothing to do with.” Another bite. “No rules, no organizations, none of that shit. We want to exist, to eat, and be left alone. You want similar, and fuck me, if I didn’t see that, I wouldn’t be here. It’s what you want, and it’s what we Begotten want. So consider Azamel’s offer, and all we’ll ask of you is to be there for us if people try and kill us. Otherwise, you do whatever the fuck you want.”

He frowned, and looked out the window too. Yeah, she had him pegged. He didn’t want any of the bullshit the Uratha or Kindred brought. He just wanted to fucking exist, do his own thing, and eat and fuck and sleep and be left the fuck alone.

“... I’ll consider it.”

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~~Beatrice~~

Ok, that was enough fucking for a while.

Beatrice sat up, and looked around. Jen was between her and Julias, and they were all naked. The room smelled of sex and blood and flesh. Not theirs of course; that all faded away once it was off the vamp’s body, fake stuff created by the blush of life. Julias had brought some of his servants into the guest bedroom, where they’d decided to fuck like rabbits. Yummy yum.

Two guys, two girls, passed out on the floor. Each had been drunk to exhaustion, and each thoroughly satisfied by fingers and tongues. Julias had watched, for the most part, while Triss and Jen had indulged in the four kine. Making the kine cum on each other, while drinking them, was such a

power trip, and Triss delighted in it. So much easier to be a Ventrue than a Nosferatu, when all you had to do for a good time was look a kine in the eye, and tell them what to do.

Triss smiled at Jen, and snuggled into her side. Julias did the same, but he reached over, and pushed her onto her side, facing Triss, before he scooted into her back. Classic spoon position.

She was never going to get over how weird this relationship was. Jen got it; she slept with a pair of ghouls on a regular basis, before Triss came along. Julias got it; he was sleeping with kine all the time before Triss came along, sometimes two at a time. Antoinette got it, with her two little pet girly ghouls. Heh, what a kink, dominatrix with her harem. Jack must have been loving it, if he liked being a sub anyway. Clearly, Antoinette enjoyed being in charge, in and out of the bedroom.

Triss put a claw to her necklace, and flicked it. It was silent. Good. As long as the necklace was silent, she wasn't worried.

Jen smiled at her, reached out, and pulled her in. Bed hugs were weird to do, with the mattress blocking one arm, so Jen used the one arm to pull her in. Triss still had her nipple chain on — Jen's usual request — and it rubbed against Jen's larger breasts. Hard nipples. Sighing, relaxed, happy, Triss let the Ventrue pull her in snug, until their chests were tight to each other.

“How do you know if the ritual's working, if no one triggers it?” Jen said.

“I can feel it. In the blood, in the bones.” Gave her a damn thrill, feeling blood magic working through her, through the necklace on her neck, through everything connected to her.

“I wonder what that's like. I—oh!” With a squeak, Jen looked over her shoulder, to Julias.

The bastard grinned at her, then at Triss, and began moving his hips back and forth. Jen was reduced to moans in seconds. Surprise sex! Well, leave it to Julias to be bold when the mood struck him.

“How the fuck are you not satisfied?” Triss said.

He shrugged, set his head to rest on one hand, elbow to the pillow, while his other hugged across Jen's body. Fingers found her breasts, and he began to fondle the large tit. With Triss so close, it caused Jen's nipple to rub into her own. A pleasant feeling, but Triss was thoroughly spent. No more sex for her.

But watching her boyfriend and best friend have sex, while she felt her up, was a fun time nonetheless. Laughing, Triss leaned up and in, and Julias leaned in to match her, so the two could begin kissing. Oh yes, Julias was a good kisser. Being a royal slut for a century had bestowed the man with

some amazing skills, and Triss's lips were still human enough for kissing action. Doing it over Jen's face, and earning some longing sighs from the observing Ventrue, made it all the better.

Better still, when Julias started thrusting again, and Jen let out a quiet moan. Triss pulled back, set her free arm on Jen's hip, and watched as the beautiful woman enjoyed a spooning from her man.

"Julias fucked me this way, the first time."

"Thanks," she said, "for letting me try it, then. It's... relaxing."

"I know, right?" Triss's hand slid down her hip, down to the woman's smooth belly, down her beautiful mons pubis, and then between her legs. Swollen clitoris, wet, and then a little past that, where Julias's cock was spreading her tight little cunt open. "You can just lie there, let him do all the work, and take it easy. Read a book."

"I sincerely hope you're a little more focused on enjoying the sex," Julias said, "than reading a book."

Triss laughed again. She hadn't actually tried reading a book during spooning sex, but she was definitely going to, now.

Sighing the same sort of relaxed, pleasant sigh as Jen, Triss put her other elbow to the pillow, and propped her head up, same as Julias. Her other hand continued to explore between Jen's thighs, and offered some gentle strokes of her clitoris. Nothing rough, not the point of the position, or Julias's aim. If he wanted to spoon, it was to relax, too.

Triss lay there, and watched. Jen's expression was melting away, each thrust from Julias bringing her closer and closer to orgasm, but never over. It'd take forever to cum this way; just the way Julias liked it. And, it was a good opportunity to take a moment, and admire just how god damn fucking hot Jen was.

No wonder her sire did what he did. Christ, what an asshole.

Eventually, the two Ventrue started to cum. Triss leaned over Jen again, found her love's lips, and made sure to give him a proper, long, mushy romantic kiss. Catching him mid-orgasm was fun, and bombarding Jen with the disgustingly tender display of her catching his quiet moans with her lips, was even more fun.

More fun than that, was lowering herself down to Jen's neck, and kissing the exposed skin. Poor woman's mewls turned into outright moans, and she gasped all the more as Triss pressed their bodies tight, and suckled on her jugular. Hickey time.

Except, not. Failure. Triss didn't have cheeks, but enormous crocodile teeth instead. Without cheeks, she couldn't create any suction. She could, however, use her long tongue, and lick the girl up like prey.

"Eeek!" Squealing, Jen pushed against her, but she had no strength. Not like a Ventrue could beat her in a competition of might anyway, but the busty lady was too busy cumming to fight much.

Laughing, Triss continued to hug her, hug Julias, and press against them as they came.

"Ya done now, finally?" she said.

Julias sat up, stretched his arms up over his head, and returned her smile. "Yeap."

Jen rolled onto her back, and closed her eyes as she sank into Julias's fancy bed. Everything the man owned was fancy, and the juxtaposition of all the sex and sin against the antique beauty of the mansion was a huge fucking turn on. Jen knew it too, as she spread her thighs, and reached between them to coat her fingers in the white cum leaking out of her, the master of the house's cum.

She trailed his cum up her stomach, and onto her breast closer to Triss, before looking up at her with expecting, hopeful eyes. Yeah, ok, there was sinful, and then there was this. But damn, Triss did like to get naughty. She leaned down, set her lips and long tongue against Jen's breast, and slowly licked up Julias's cum. The weight and pressure of her tongue was enough for the softness of Jen's breast to mold to the wet appendage, and Triss took advantage, causing the big tit to bounce against Jen's chest a few times, up and down, up and down.

"Sunrise is in fifteen minutes," Julias said, "much as I'd like to go again."

Forever the voice of reason. Triss rolled her eyes, but nodded, and jumped out of bed. Underwear underwear, where was—ah, underneath one of the kine. She pushed over one of the men, and slid her thong out from where it was sandwiched between him and one of the girls. Still clean, thankfully.

Everyone threw their clothes on in a hurry. In the past, they might risk sleeping in the bed. The mansion was secure, and the thralls in Julias's employ would keep them safe. But, half the thralls were out of commission, sleeping on the floor, naked and covered in sex. The other half wouldn't be a match for hunters; hell, all of them wouldn't be a match for hunters. That meant the three vampires were going to sleep in Julias's secure bunker.

They might fuck there too, when they woke up.

“When’s the next primogen meeting?” Jen said as she slipped on a robe. Julias preferred to put on his suit, and Triss only had her typical shit, jeans and a tank top and army boots, but Jen liked the mansion and the mansion-y lifestyle. Expensive, soft robes called Jen’s name, like moth to a flame.

“Couple nights from now. I do not look forward to it.” Julias finished getting his suit on, but kept the tie off. Better in his pocket, or at least more comfortable.

With the three of them wearing clothes, or at least two of them, Jen in a robe, they left the room, and headed downstairs. Stairs down and down led to the much creepier, much more secure bunker room deep underground that no one was getting into without a nuke.

“Why not?” Jen said, once they got underground, and started down the long halls of stone.

“Garry has been a pain in the ass lately. He’s not happy about the Mirrden situation. This hunters problem has everyone looking for hunters, but the council, Garry, and I assume the Prince and Jacob, are trying to play two games at once. They want the hunters dealt with, and they’re working to plan out the futures of the covenants at the same time. Garry and Michael, in particular, are...”

“Barking at each other like a couple Gangrels.” Triss shrugged, and stepped in beside him. “I can’t blame them. They’re elders, and they’re good at playing the long game.”

“True.” Jen ran one of her fingers along the old stones around them, and let her eyes drift about randomly. Such an old tunnel had an almost romantic feel to it, like something out of a story or play. “But if they don’t focus on what’s in front of them, it’ll kill them.”

“I’m with Jen on this.” Nodding, Julias opened the gates and doors, digital locks and all, to his underground room. “And I’m trying to make them see that. But to the Primogen, I’m just a young punk that doesn’t understand how long life can be. They want to weather the tide. Fuck, even Garry does, and I was hoping he’d be in my corner for a little more aggressive action.”

Yeah, Garry defied some expectations. He was the leader of the Carthians for a reason.

Once they were through the last gate, Triss waited for Jen to pass her, before she turned around, and slit her wrist.

“Um, Beatrice?” Superman said.

“Getting better at this.” With a deep sigh, she let the pain fade away, and forced out some of her thick blood onto her fingers. She reached up, and painted the frames of the door with her blood, her vitae, and her will. A moment later, the blood began to fade, but it didn’t turn to ash like usual. It left behind traces of black, almost invisible against the metal.

“What’s that about?” he said.

Grinning all the more, she climbed onto the bed, and lay beside the man. “Witchy stuff.”

“Witchy stuff...”

“Mmhhh.” She kissed him, opened her mouth wide, and pretended to bite his neck with all her extra teeth. He shuddered, and she giggled. Such a lovely feeling, knowing she could still get a thrill out of him when wanted to. “Can’t share the details though.”

Blood of the crow. Crows were very observant birds, knowledgeable, wise, and with a know-how other birds didn’t have. According to Jacob, that translated into something real, something in the animal, something that the beast could identify. Something that the Crone could bestow. Triss didn’t know if she believed in the Crone or whatever, but she believed the beast in a vampire’s gut was real, and more real than most Kindred believed; crúac saw to that.

If anything came near the archway she painted, the crow skull would warn her. How exactly it’d warn her, she didn’t know. Would it speak? Burn her? Start glowing? It’d have to do something impressive, because unless it could wake her during the day, it wasn’t terribly useful. Jacob insisted it could, and that she’d be more than capable of dealing with the intruder, despite the overwhelming exhaustion daytime brought with it.

Hopefully, she’d never have to find out.

“Sure you don’t want your suit?” Julias said, sitting up on his elbows and looking to Jen.

“I only wear the suit because I know you like it.” Laughing, Jen snuggled into Triss’s side, still in her robe.

The Nos nodded. “She’d be naked twenty-four-seven if she could get away with it.”

“Bah, you kids. You’ll change your minds when you grow up. A suit is a man’s — and woman’s — second skin. Clothes make the man, you know.”

Triss rolled her eyes. No denying that there was something damn sexy about a suit, though.

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~~Jack~~

Waking up next to the Prince was always a thrill. No matter how many times, no matter how often, no matter what, waking up next to the deadly woman sent the beast in his gut into a panic. It only lasted a moment, as his guts came to the realization that he knew this other beast in bed with him. It knew the colossal, ancient, grand creature, and its immeasurable strength. Immeasurable patience too, considering all the shit that came at her, especially lately.

He scooted in closer to her, and watched her eyes open. He woke up with a jolt, normally, but Antoinette woke up slowly and gently. Those red eyes, god damn. And the way she smiled, sent a jolt stronger than the kick that wakes a Kindred for the night.

He got in closer, pressed himself to her, and kissed her.

“Ah, feeling bold this evening, are we?” She returned his kiss, and pulled him in close with her free arm, other trapped between her and the mattress. It was just the two of them, Ashley and Julee nowhere to be seen. So Jack was in the clear to slide in close to Antoinette, hug her, and simply let the world come to a stop.

“Can we... stay here?” he said. “Jessy’s dragging me around the city to do some crap, Invictus crap. You’d think with hunters at our doorstep, we’d focus on that and only that.”

“Unfortunately, my love, the world does not stop because hunters attempt to spoil it.”

“It should! If we don’t deal with this problem, we’ll all be dead.”

“Perhaps a metaphor will serve, in this instance. How familiar are you with chess, little Terry?” Her hand raised up to his head, and stroked the back of his skull. Mmm, fingers on buzzed head.

“I used to play it a lot, in high school. Decent player, I guess.”

“I suppose you would consider this war we fight against the hunters to be similar to a game of chess, oui?” She leaned down, and kissed his forehead. The position forced his head into the crevice of her breasts and sternum, and he melted into it as she continued to stroke his head. This is what it must have been like, to be a puppy and melt into pets.

“Yeah, I guess I do. They’re moving pieces, trying to control the board, and we’re doing the same, trying to catch each other and poke holes in defenses.” Sounded like a simple enough comparison.

“And while that is true, the game we play against these hunters is not of the grand scale I speak of. These hunters are a single piece on the board, and there are many others in their color. If we focus all our eyes upon that single piece, then we will surely be able to capture it, but we will leave holes in our defenses against the other pieces.”

“I... I guess I am focusing a little much. Tunnel vision.” It was hard not to, after what happened to him. “Who are the other pieces?”

“There is the Uratha, and the Begotten, each a single piece. There are the covenants, each a piece. And then there are forces beyond our knowledge or understanding. Spirits flirt with my borders, and test their strengths. And, as you know, there is something amiss in my city, something that threatens us all. A cliché for the ages, and yet, something very real that must be contended with.”

“Nothing’s a cliché when it’s happening to you.” Where did he hear that before?

“Too true. As for all these pieces, they are controlled by life itself, the opponent. We forever battle its whim, and if we do not control the field, defend against all the tools it may attack us with, we will be destroyed.”

“Sounds stressful, trying to manage so much all the time.”

She laughed. The feel of her voice, with his ear against her chest, was delightful, and he hugged her tighter as she continued to pet his head.

“It is. One of the many reasons Kindred often seek delights to alleviate their woes.”

“Delights, you say?”

“Oh yes, delights.” Chuckling again, she pushed against his shoulder, and slid onto him. The blanket slipped down her body, and Jack groaned as he watched her beautiful figure expose itself. She sat on him, his waist, his stomach, and smiled down at him as she reached her arms up to stretch them out. The tug of the motion on her breasts raised them, and caused them to jiggle with the subtle sway of her body.

No way she was doing that just because. She was doing that to arouse the ever living fuck out of him.

She blushed life. Yeah, definitely had a motive. He blushed life as well, and a moment later, his cock was pressing up against the crack of her bountiful ass.

“You got time?” he said. “Thought you had a Primogen meeting to prepare for.”

“I have time, and the meeting is not until tomorrow night. If the worst comes, I shall tell those idiot children to wait. But it is not for some time yet, and I have done plenty to deserve time with my love.”

She always called him ‘her love’. Title of endearment, but also, how she felt about him. He didn’t say it nearly enough.



“... I love you.” It almost sounded forced and unnatural to say it like that. She didn’t care. She blushed a touch red to her cheeks, and leaned down, pressing her hands to his shoulders until her lips found his.

“Merci.” She gazed into his eyes, and he let himself relax into the bed as she shifted her hands onto the blankets above and around his head. As she began to gently grind her pelvis down, and rub her clitoris against his body, her heavy, enormous breasts swayed over his head.

He reached up for one, only for her to take his hands, and pin them down to the blankets, a foot over his head. Fine by him. He opened his mouth, and let her guide one of her nipples down onto his awaiting lips.

The feel of her tensing for a moment, and then relaxing against him, as he began to suckle on her, was amazing. How could such an ancient creature enjoy sex this much? Blew his mind, every time. He pushed his head up into her breast, and let the softness completely bury his face, as he sucked and licked. Her areola swelled in his mouth, half with her arousal, half because he sucked on it, drawing blood to it. And when he could tell he was getting a little too rough, he eased up on any suction, licking gently instead.

Antoinette let out several, long, heavy sighs, as she ground her body against him. She was getting wet. A small trail of damp warmth ran along his skin, above his cock where she ground herself. It used to have trim hair, but now it was perfectly smooth skin, at Antoinette’s request. No rough hair to bother her, as she rubbed her clit against him.

“I hope you are keeping your Right Hands friends close,” she said, smiling down at him. “After the incident, I must insist you remain safe at all times.”

He nodded, let go of her breast, and moved his head over to the other. She helped, leaning her other breast into his face, so he could pamper and bathe it with his lips and tongue, same as the other.

“How does your position in the Invictus fair, my love?”

He shrugged, and managed a smile with his eyes, before resuming sucking on the most amazing thing in all of existence: breasts.

“I suppose it is a mostly stable position now, is it not? You work with your fellow Right Hands, and are one of the primary drivers of prosperity for your entire covenant.” Her eyes looked up, and her shoulders came down lower, smooshing his face in the whole softness of her tit, so he couldn’t see her anymore. “In one so young, it must be quite the thrill. Have you any plans on how to spend your new found wealth, or perhaps enjoy your new power?”

At last, she let go of his hands, and sat up. And to his surprise, she pulled him up to sitting as well.

“Not sure. With the money, I figured I’d get a penthouse suite, or something? But I really like it here. And... and honestly, I haven’t thought about it too much, since the incident with Angela.”

“And I enjoy having you here, little devil.” With an exaggerated sway of her head, showing off her long, flowing white hair, she hooked her legs behind his lower back, while lifting her ass so she could sink her pussy down onto his length. Hot, squeezing, and god damn heaven. Antoinette didn’t so much as moan, as she buried him to the hilt inside her clenching muscles, and got comfortable between his legs, hers now crossed behind him over his hips.

She was so much taller than him. Sitting on him, on his thighs and pelvis, it put her breasts at head height, and he melted into her chest as she guided his head back to her body.

“Do not fret, my love. As much as these hunters, and the other troubles on our doorstep, are a thorn in my side, our side, it is also true that such things will pass, if we are diligent. As long as you do not let fantasies of how to spend your wealth blind you to present circumstances, I see no fault from indulging.” She started to grind herself back and forth, eyes closing, head drifting back and letting her hair dangle behind her.

Jack was just along for the ride. Course, they’d been having sex for many months now, and he was starting to get more comfortable being proactive with her. She didn’t like having control taken from her, and it wasn’t like he could actually take it, even if he tried. But, she did like it when he followed her lead, and slipped into the groove of her rhythm.

He started shifting his hips with hers, back and forth a couple inches. Nothing crazy, nothing to push either of them to orgasm, but euphoric nonetheless. Each motion she made, she squeezed on his cock, and forced the vise-grip of her soaked insides to massage the hard girth of his length, and its swollen tip. The pleasure sparks came in a consistent, gentle rhythm, and Jack made sure to go slow, to hold off orgasm as long as possible.

It was damn hard, as Antoinette squeezed her curvy, toned, and fucking amazing thighs around him, nice and tight. As she did, she leaned back even further, and let her head dangle behind her completely, so her hair rubbed against the blankets and his knees. Leaning back so far, her breasts were no longer reached by his lips, and instead, were put on display, jiggling and flattening against her chest for the few minutes she hung back, her hands on his shoulders. Up and down, up and down against her chest in slow waves, like a tide.

Holy shit.

But eventually, she sat back up, and slid a hand up the back of his neck to hold his head again, and guide his lips back to her breasts.

“Natasha enjoyed seeing us make love.”

“Uh... what?”

“In the third wing living room.”

The room with the pretty lighting. Right, he was lying on the couch, and—“She watched us?”

“Of course. We were in the open, and you know she sleeps here in my Elysium Tower, as well as joins me in affairs of the Ordo Dracul.” Laughing, she started to work herself faster, pulling some quiet moans from him, while she barely made a noise other than her words. Total control of her body, despite how he could feel her juices coating him, more, and more. “But do not worry. She enjoyed what she saw.”

“Oh.” Heh, that was good. Stroked his ego, knowing Natasha thought he was attractive. “... or, did she like seeing you naked?”

Antoinette shivered, and guided his head down to find her breast again. “I am a terribly splendid example of the human body, am I not?” Her confidence was practically Ventrue level. So hot.

As he suckled on her nipple again, her insides clenched on him like a vise, almost enough to hurt. And with her constant rocking, the friction of her dripping insides massaging his girth and rubbing against his sensitive glans sent him over the edge. He closed his eyes, and sucked her nipple into his mouth, as if he was hungry for milk. He wasn't going to get that, but the more he bathed her breast in kisses, the more he circled her swollen areola with his tongue, the more she clenched on his girth.

She may not have made much noise when she came, but he did. Too much, too blissful, feeling her insides squeeze and milk him as he came, for a few groans to not escape him as the warm fluid gushed up his length. Soon, it was dripping out of her depths, onto him, along with her own juices. She pulled his head from her breast, and kissed him. Eyes half open, she gazed into him as she milked him, and as she came. He was hopeless to resist, and did nothing but stare back into her red gaze as he shivered, struggling to manage the stimulus of her gripping and squeezing.

He couldn't come forever though, and eventually he went slack in her arms. A signal for her to let go of him, slide her legs out from behind him, and let him fall to the blankets.

“You, my boy, my little Ventrue, are to be careful with your adventures. Trips to the Shadow Realm are dangerous at best, and as much as it is your duty to communicate with the Begotten and Uratha, you are not to throw your life to suicidal whims. Understand?”

Before he could respond, she stood up. With one foot beside each side of his waist, thighs spread slightly, she put her hands on her hips, and gave him a very ‘angry mother’ glare. Frowning at him, a one-eighty on the sex they’d had literally twenty seconds ago, she raised a foot, and pressed it down against his chest.

He could see a mix of their cum dripping down her thighs, until it reached the ankle of the foot pressing to his sternum.

“I’ll try, but—”

“But?”

Oh shit. She glared down at him, and pressed down on the foot. It wasn’t like she was very heavy, by vampire standards; even Jack could lift something a couple hundred pounds without much issue, these nights. So even if she put enough strength into the foot to crush metal, it didn’t matter if she only weighed as much as a tall-but-fit woman normally does. Thank god, because there was a bite to her eyes he hadn’t expected.

“I... I mean, I’ll really try. I can’t guarantee it though, you know?” If there was one way he was going to die, it’d be by pissing off his lover. Probably the most dangerous of all his options, but he had to be honest with her.

“I understand the ritual showed your face, Jack, but that was likely due to your closeness to either Azamel or myself. For all the trials that may come your way, understand that you need not be the one that throws themselves into the fray to see them solved. Your partner Herrington, or even that fool Damien, are older than you, and more than capable of dealing with threats.”

He blinked up at the woman, and gulped. From sex to orders in a single minute. But after staring up at her for a while, he nodded. “I’ll be careful, and make sure someone else is there to deal with things if they get hot.”

“Good.” Stepping down from the bed, she sighed, and looked over her shoulder as she reached out to scoop up her clothes from the chair by the mirror.

“Something bring this on?” He jumped out of the bed, and walked after her, standing behind her once she sat down in the chair.

“Nothing specific, non. But, after the incident with that man Eric, and his random change, it is hard to not imagine what it would have been like if he had suffered such a change in your presence.”

“That’s... a random thing, to be worried about. After all the things I’ve deal with, that—”

She picked up her brush with a snap. Mood swing? He wasn’t about to say it, or he was liable to get torn apart.

“Those were not things that should have been thrust upon you. The incident with Viktor and Tony was of my doing, and your presence was a regrettable accident. Lucas’s insanity and kamikaze assault were not for you to contend with, it was my problem to solve, and Daniel’s. That monster that plagued our sewers, the arrival of the Avery and her Uratha, the arrival of Azamel and the resurgence of other Begotten, and now the arrival of hunters? Please stop throwing yourself headlong into these situations, or you will find yourself in a crisis you cannot escape, if this continues.”

“That... is a lot of things, now that you say it like that.” He came in from behind her, and as she started brushing her hair, he took the brush. With a sigh, she set her hands down, and worked on getting dressed. She slipped her underwear on, and did up her bra; did it so smoothly, she could probably do it all one handed.

“I apologize, but it bothers me terribly, to look into your eyes, little Ventrue, only to imagine them in such fraught situations.”

He chuckled, and brushed through the waves of white. “I seem to be pretty good at surviving those situations, don’t I?”

“Yes, and you forever impress me. But, no doubt this situation with Angela has led to a horrible outcome, has it not?”

Shit. Did she know? Know about his hang-ups and baggage about her? Shit. Shit shit.

“Um, what do you mean?”

“With Athalia. I remember her talking with you, at the ball. And you have met her on several occasions since then. I thought, perhaps, she might become a friend to you.”

Oh, right, Athalia. “She is, sort of. She was at the last Right Hands meeting, sharing with us some information about the hunters.”

“Oh? She has news?” She turned her head slightly. Either a queue to start brushing that side of her hair, or a way to look at him in the corner of her eye. The tone of her voice changed too, to something more analytical. Prince mode, he supposed.

“She does. The council will fill you in at the Primogen meeting.”

“You do not wish to tell me?”

“Oh! Um, I can, sure. Just figured you wouldn’t want a double dose? And, we usually avoided topics like this.”

Sighing, but nodding, she looked back to the mirror, and leaned forward to peer into it. With a quick but precise hand, she started applying her makeup. Again, something she could have done with her eyes closed, he was sure.

“It is good to hear it from you.”

He wasn’t sure it was. But, it was a part of being in a serious relationship, according to her. So, even if it wasn’t good, it was required, if they were going to be equal partners in their relationship. He never felt like an equal partner in the past, and she was making efforts to change that. With other couples, it’d be talk of student loans, or car repairs, or the uncle’s cancer, or mom’s drinking problem. With them, it was about the hunters at their door coming to kill them.

“Since Azamel thinks the weird ritual was performed by an extremely old woman, Invictus and the Begotten have been keeping an eye out for an old woman.”

“Not exactly a difficult thing to find in Dolareido. There are many.”

“Yeah but this woman is supposed to be very old. Scully and Mulder told me they saw a woman on a respirator and in a wheelchair, so I’m thinking it could be her? And Fiona and Athalia say they saw a similar woman in Devil’s Corner.”

“That is a lead worth exploring. Well done. And your skill with animalism grows too.” She grinned at him, before returning to her mascara.

“Oh! Speaking of Devil’s Corner. I wanted to ask you about a... a thing, a symbol, artifact, object, something or other, dangling in one of the sex holes. Vicky and Parker run that sex hole; doing a side business thing, I guess. You know anything about the object? Avery seemed to know something.”

“Ah, yes, I know of the object. I suppose if Avery shows interest in it, then that confirms my suspicions. It summons, or creates, an essence of sexual delight. And spirits come to feast, and spread, such influence.”

Antoinette sounded like Clara, or Avery. She knew a lot about spirits then. Maybe he should ask her more about them, in the future.

“You know where they got it?”

“Jacob and I, long ago, imported many objects of such a strange nature.” She moved onto her lipstick, and blew him a kiss in the mirror after applying the blood red. “And I continue to do so. I am sure Jacob does as well, though we no longer share with each other what objects we acquire. I am sure the man has had dealings with all the Kindred of the city, in ways you do not know.”

“But you know.”

“Ben oui, mon amour. But I cannot tell you how I know.”

He nodded, and laughed. Yeah, secrets. Much as they were in a serious relationship, quote unquote, they’d never be able to share with each other all their secrets, as long as they were in different covenants. Even if they were both dragons, he doubted the great Voivode of Dolareido could tell him everything she knew.

So, Jacob probably gave them the object. Or they somehow acquired it, and Jacob was the one who brought it to Dolareido. An innocent exchange, or was the old bastard manipulating Vicky and Parker? The rabbit hole was so deep in Dolareido, it might as well have been endless.

He watched Antoinette’s reflection for a while. She’d returned to looking at herself as she worked her face with tools and stuff he’d never truly appreciate. She looked smoking hot wearing make up, but damn, what a hassle; she looked smoking hot without it too, so it wasn’t like she had to wear it, or so much of it. A Daeva would never go without their mask, she’d say. Smiling at the memory, he kept watching her reflection as he brushed her hair. The mood swing earlier was a little strange. It was true his second life kept throwing shit at him, but he’d made it through so far. No reason to suddenly get angry about it.

Unless something was bothering her.

“... Antoinette.”

“Oui, mon amour?”

“... how much do you know about Black Blood?”

She froze. He froze. Yeah, that was a sensitive spot. He didn’t know why it was a sensitive spot, or what Black Blood had done to make her so anxious, but something about it was connected to things. From her reaction, she definitely knew about the spirit; she’d reacted to his name, last time he mentioned it. He didn’t pursue it at the time, though. Better to let that tidbit rest while they talked about other things. Not this time.

“It is an old entity, Jack. Ancient. It was here before Jacob and I came to Dolareido. It was here before we turned a tiny village into our haven.”

“You’ve spoken to it?”

“... I have.” Sighing, she got up, took the brush back, and started getting dressed in her suit. “I cannot tell you how I have spoken to the creature, but I have.”

Scary. He shivered a bit, and sat in the chair as Antoinette put on her shirt and skirt. “I’m only asking because the name comes up in strange places. It might have something to do with... well... everything.”

“I sincerely hope it does not. The beast inserts its tentacles in every facet of my city, in ways I struggle to understand.”

Hearing Antoinette admit to not knowing something was almost strange to the ear. She was usually confident, almost to the point of warranting a Viktor comparison.

“It does?”

“Yes. Dark currents forever sweep through my tunnels, through my streets, through the homes and business locales that pepper my city and fortress. It... it has motives that I do not understand, and that Jacob has only scratched the surface of.” Fully dressed, she set her hands on his shoulders, leaned down, and set a kiss to his forehead. “It plays games in my city, and it is not above murder in its pursuits. Its name is Black Blood for a reason, little Ventrue. Please, be careful with it.”

Maybe it was his visit to the Shadow World that had her more anxious than usual. He’d said Black Blood was one of the powers there, and then other names, Red Tide and Street-Tail King. Big names, names that had her startled. He was poking at a world she didn’t understand, and dealing with names beyond her comprehension. Beyond anyone’s comprehension, except for maybe Avery. Maybe she felt helpless, that no matter what she did, he’d get himself hurt or killed, dealing with things outside of purview. And if there was anyone who couldn’t handle not being in control, it’d be her.

“... you really think it’s my proximity to you, or Azamel, that led to the ritual showing my face?”

Sighing heavy, she pulled him up onto his feet, and hugged his naked body tight to her. Tall as she was, she set her chin on top of his head, and squeezed him.

“Yes. Do you think it could be something else?”

City Sky knew his name. Jacob mentioned him. People and spirits were talking about him, for reasons he didn’t know.



Jacob. What the fuck was that man doing? He had to be involved in the damaged portal door thing, and the other mysterious shit happening. Either he knew who was doing it, or he was responsible. But, to imagine the vampire tearing open holes across the worlds, was a bit much. Even Fiona, a monster and ancient horror apparently, didn't tear open holes to the spirit world. She found doors and opened them.

God damn, he missed the old days.

"... Antoinette?"

"Oui?"

"I haven't seen you at the Bloodlust lately." Maybe he could ask her to rekindle those old days.

"That... is true. I have been buried in concerns and worries. I spend many of my nights standing at my window, looking at the city, and considering my options." She let go of him, and started toward the vault door of her grand bedroom. "Perhaps tomorrow night, after the Primogen meeting?"

"Tomorrow night? I'm supposed to be meeting with Beatrice and Jen. Fiona too."

"Oh? Where?"

"My apartment. We're going to talk about the hunters, but I think Triss is planning to just chill. But, I can ask if they'd prefer to another time."

Antoinette smiled at him over her shoulder. "Perhaps, instead of asking them to reschedule, ask them to come to Bloodlust?"

"Um, sure." He returned her smile, and finger waved as she disappeared through the door.

Beatrice and Jen, and Fiona, and Antoinette. That was way too many women. Hopefully she wouldn't mind if he invited Damien. Julias was busy, but Damien might have a few hours to spare.

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"What. The fuck. Is this?" Jessy swept her arm through the air, pointing to the vampires of the room.

The only vampires that should have been in the room were the Right Hands of the Invictus, but there were two more. Garry Tones sat on the edge of Jeremy Long's desk, arms folded across his chest, and a wolfish grin on his lips. He was completely at odds with the aesthetic of the building, slick and

modern, with a few warmer colors than the Xnomina HQ, but otherwise still similar to its motif of money money money.

Garry didn't reek of money. Garry reeked of brutishness. He reeked of zero elegance. He reeked of being a bully. His shaved head, the jeans, the jean jacket from the eighties, and the scars, were perfectly at home on the elder Gangrel. It fit his aesthetic, but Terra Den's HQ did not.

Jack looked around the room some more, and glared at the man in corner. Montoya Montel. A ghoul, apparently, based on the way he kept glancing Long's way. Not the usual glances of an employee, but of a devoted slave. Of course, it was Long being a Kindred, that had everyone shocked.

"Jack, Jessy... Damien, little fucker." Garry rubbed his fingers on his jacket, as if removing dust. A classic display of nonchalance, to show that they weren't a threat.

He was wrong. They were a threat, at least a small one, even if the man didn't realize it. That knowledge was the only reason Jack wasn't urging the three of them to split before shit hit the fan.

"Mister Tones," Jack said. "I, uh... am I to take it that Jeremy Long is your new childe?"

"Yeap." The elder smirked, and turned slightly to give them a more clear view of the CEO of Terra Den.

Jeremy Long was of average height, and though he was wearing a suit, Jack guessed he had a decent build underneath. If he was Garry's child, it was probably more than decent, and actually tough as metal. Chinese heritage, though born in the US near Washington. Came to Dolareido for its prosperous industries of sin and vice, and created Terra Den.

Jessy was not happy. "When the fuck did this happen?"

"Jeremy's been my ghoul for some time, and now that the Prince has opened the door on siring, I embraced him." Shrugging, Garry hopped off the desk, and took a seat by a fern. At least Xnomina embraced its dead-and-professional look. Terra Den felt like your typical, slimy, evil, pretty-on-the-surface corporation. Very not-Garry, now that he thought about it.

"You fuckin' this brat?" Jessy said.

Christ. So much for trying to be Garry's friend.

"... not that it matters, but no, I'm not fucking Jeremy." Garry rolled his eyes, and gestured to Montoya. "Or his ghoul. Get your head out of your ass, Jessy. Idiot child."

If it was any other Carthian, Jessy would have torn into the man, verbally or physically. Not Garry. Much as he was the youngest elder in Dolareido, he was still an elder, and the power that

radiated from him shut down the three beasts of the Right Hands, like whiny, scared dogs. Jessy's loud words were just barking.

"How may I help the representatives of Xnomina today?" Jeremy said. He had the jackass grin that you'd expect from an expert poker player, CEO, and all around evil asshole.

"... Christ I hate you." Jessy motioned to Jack. "This is Jack Terry. You already know Damien Burksen."

"Ah yes, Jack Terry. Your name has a habit of circulating conversations." The man leaned back in his chair, and tapped one hand's fingers against the table, while the other swished around a glass of red. Blood, instead of wine.

"Does it?" Jack said.

"Indeed. Your recent encounter with the hunters is a topic worthy of discussion."

Montoya snorted on a chuckle, and wiped his thumb across his lip. "Hear you nearly died. Shame you didn't. Could use some holes in the Invictus."

What the fuck. Jack looked Montoya's way, and stared daggers into the man. Long and Tones were happy to dance around insults without ever saying them directly, while Montoya didn't feel the same, apparently.

Montoya Montel was a fat fucker, pale skin, and tall. Every step was liable to break the floor. His brown hair was long, wavy, and his beard was a bit scraggy. What was a lazy, unkempt man like him doing with Long? Long's hair was very short, and he had a tiny chin beard fitting his Asian heritage; he looked damn professional, while Montel looked like he belonged in a fast food joint, eating burgers. All the burgers.

Damien and Jessy sneered, Jessy louder. Jack winced, and analyzed. This was a strange move on Garry's part, and untimely.

"Mister Tones," Jack said. Let's see if he can salvage what was turning into a train wreck. "Are you aware Montel's man Mister Pitt tried to kill Eric Tanverson? According to Eric, it was to send a message to Xnomina."

Garry shrugged. "Kine lives. Nothing Jeremy can't do what he wants with, as long as he doesn't damage the Masquerade."

"Except Eric isn't kine," Jessy said. "He's Uratha."

"He didn't know that at the time," Garry said.

Not good enough for Jessy. She marched up to the big wooden desk, glared at Long, before turning and marching over to Garry.

She reached out, picked him up by the collar of his jacket, and punched him.

Shit.