

~~Jack~~

“Dead? Did... Michael kill him?”

Maria shook her head, and to his surprise, took a few seconds to comb her hair with her fingers. It was long and flat, and their fight had messed it up a bit. He forced down his smile. For a moment there, she reminded him of Antoinette.

“Garry was embraced here in Dolareido, not long before Michael and I came here, barely elders in our own right. We joined the Invictus, and Viktor established the council.”

“Surprising, considering he was a power-hungry asshole.”

“He was also wise, and his... tendencies did not blind him, at least not at the time.” She shook her head. “I digress. Michael sired a childe not long after establishing himself in Dolareido. Back then the Carthians and Invictus fought with each other more openly; no kine technology to make it difficult. Deaths were rare, however. No open war, but the usual machinations of Kindred. Michael’s childe had a... rough time, after his embrace. It was the turn of the century, after all.”

“Turn of the century? Oh, right, the 1900s.” Not a nice time to be gay.

“Kine often died in horrible circumstances, that long ago. Roland, Michael’s childe, lost his family. He was unstable before Michael embraced him. It only grew worse thereafter.”

“Rough.”

“Indeed. And considering the time period, homosexuality was difficult as well. Garry and Roland found solidarity in each other. And Michael was content to keep his hands out of it.”

“Until?”

“Until the Carthians grew more aggressive, starting brawls in the streets. Brawls that were... perhaps warranted. The Invictus and Carthians have butted heads over territory since before he or I came to Dolareido, and it is now impossible to know what land originally belonged to who. Regardless, the violence grew, and Michael ordered his childe to never see Garry again.”

Jack slapped his forehead hard enough it echoed through the cathedral. “Has Michael seen a single movie in his whole life? Or read a fucking book?”

“Fiction? Rarely.”

“Figures.”

“Michael’s ignorance for storytelling aside, he knew Roland would defy him. Steps were taken to keep Roland from seeing Garry, and sometimes they were... less than peaceful. And you know how Gangrels can be.”

“Yeap.” The idea of locking Jessie up in a box to stop her from seeing Eric was hilarious. Plus, being a Gangrel, she had ways to get through things other vampires couldn’t. Only powerful Gangrels could turn into clouds of smoke, but the younger ones still had ways.

“We don’t know what happened or how, but we do know Garry came to us, begging for us to find Roland. Apparently he’d threatened suicide. He was a fledgling, and fledglings are often unstable. And as I said, Roland’s first life had been unstable enough.”

Fledglings were unstable for a good reason. They’d literally just died, so that sucked. They woke up looking all pale and thin. They suddenly had a new set of instincts with a mind of their own fighting to get out. And the only way they could eat now, was drinking other people’s blood. The ethical dilemma alone was enough to tip some new Kindred into suicide territory. Far as Jack knew, most managed to find some solace in that they didn’t have to murder anyone, and hell, the Kiss was pleasurable. But it was still taking blood from unwitting, and sometimes unwilling victims.

Then there was the whole problem with being yanked out of their previous lives. Sure, lots of Kindred held up a facade so they could still interact with people from their first lives, but not family. Not close friends. You couldn’t trick those two, not forever, and any kine that figured out what was going on either ended up bound by the Vinculum, embraced if the Prince allowed it, or dead.

And from what Maria said, Roland had issues in the family and friends department.

“You didn’t find him?”

“Michael looked. He... hesitated to trust Garry, but looked eventually. Perhaps it was that hesitation that led to Roland’s demise, we don’t know. But he was not found until the next night, a pile of ashes in his apartment, drapes pulled open.”

“Damn that’s... that’s really rough. Suicide note?”

“Yes, though it provided little resolution, only that Roland was miserable with all circumstances, and the promise of immortality seemed more a curse. He said goodbye to Michael, to Garry, and that was all.”

“Fake?”

“Garry insisted Roland was extremely depressed beforehand, and Michael checked the handwriting. Either a rather cunning Carthian plotted against Michael and went after his childe to torture him, and faked the suicide, or the reality was as it appeared.”

Sighing — lot of sighing tonight — Jack leaned back against the pew, and motioned with a finger to his birds. They came down to join him again, and Scully dropped his necklace on his head for him. A small adjustment later and it was around his neck again, and immediately the Beast in his guts quieted. His two familiars got comfortable on his shoulders again, and he made sure to give each of them proper scratches on the back of their heads. The conversation with Maria was making him feel affectionate, and sad.

“So Garry blames Michael.”

“Yes. And Michael blames Garry, for creating the unusual situation for Roland at all, to pick between Carthian and Invictus.”

“And this was over a century ago?”

“Yes.”

“Long time to hold a grudge.”

“Is it?” She raised a brow as she looked at him. “I do not fault you for looking for the good in everyone, young vampire, but do not be so foolish to think that vampires — or any sentient — wouldn’t hold a grudge for hundreds of years. Scars last for a long, long time.”

He winced at that. “Yeah, I guess. Just... damn, that is some serious drama shit. Personal shit.”

“I kept it secret for a reason. ”

“I’m glad you told me, I am. But now I gotta figure out a way to use it to stop this war.”

She shook her head. “Do not be so stupid as to think this war is purely over the personal issues between those two. The Carthians and Invictus fight each other in every city with a vampire presence.”

“Yeah, I get that, and I get why. But I still think I can at least bring us back to a shitty truce if I can get those two to come to some kind of understand.”

“Unlikely, but not impossible.”

Mulder and Scully cawed a few times, and rubbed their heads into the sides of his head. He took a few seconds to assure each of them he was fine, scratched them behind the neck, and stood up.

“Damien said you think Michael didn’t kill her.”

“Yes.”

“Damien’s also pretty sure Amanda’s good enough to not get caught in some shitty distraction maneuver from the Carthians, and accidentally go up in flames.”

“Damien is perhaps correct in that, I do not know. I know little of the fledgling, but her sire Gloria isn’t exactly a... methodical sort.”

He laughed, earning a small smile from the woman that never smiled. Gloria Jennings was a bit of an airhead, which was all sorts of weird for a Mekhet. Then again, gossip was information, and Mekhet absolutely loved information.

“Three options then. Amanda screwed up and Garry’s distraction accidental killed her. Which is what Michael says happened, and is using as his reason to go on the aggressive against the Carthians. Option two, Michael killed her, is lying about how she died, and is using the lie so he can go on the aggressive. Or... option three, Amanda’s still alive. Michael says she’s dead, so if she’s alive, he might have her stashed somewhere? But, why would he do that and not just kill her?”

“Because my once fellow councilman is not Viktor or Tony or... or Lucas, young Ventrue. He is both smart enough to want to avoid creating unnecessary enemies, and not so bloodthirsty that murdering a child would not faze him.” She managed another small smile as she looked up at him from the pew. “In this regard, I suppose I am thinking as you, and not assuming everyone is a heartless bastard.”

“Let’s hope being an optimist doesn’t backfire and get me killed. I—” His phone buzzed, and he took a quick peek. “It’s Damien.”

“Go. We are done here.” Nodding, the corpse lady stood up, dusted off her beautiful white gown, and started up the stage, headed toward her den below. “Be careful, Jack. And please do not spread this information about Garry and Michael lightly.”

“I won’t. You got my word on that.”

She nodded again, took a deep, heavy sigh, and disappeared around the curved wall behind the gigantic organ.

~Dangerous,~ Mulder said.

~She’s sad,~ Scully said.

~She’s definitely dangerous, and sad. But not as sad as she used to be. Hopefully that tussle gave her a little... closure, I guess.~

He checked the message from Damien.

~Fiona thinks Athalia might know something about Garry's attack on Xnomina,~ the message read.

~Shit. I really want to keep them out of this. If we start getting them involved, Garry might ask Avery for help, and she might even do it, too. We don't exactly get along.~

~Maybe. How did your heart-to-heart go with Maria?~

~Well. Got what I needed.~

~Great. How?~

~Brute force psychology.~ Jack laughed as he texted the message. Brute force psychology that nearly got him killed.

~Interesting. Perhaps the same can be used on Avery?~

Ugh. It had been borderline kamikaze to use against Maria, and very well could be again with Avery. But Avery's bitch attitude wasn't exactly unwarranted, considering the shit she'd put up with in the past, and her goals as an Uratha. Sure, she made everything a thousand times harder than she needed to, but she also wasn't hoping to kill Jack either. Hopefully.

~Natasha is handling things on that front. If Avery gives her trouble, I trust her to deal with it.~

~And any other trouble that comes her way? This Carthian Invictus turf war seems oddly timed, doesn't it?~

Jack groaned and rubbed his face. ~Because it's happening just as we started to figure out more about what the fuck Black Blood is up to? Yeah, I noticed that. But Tash and the Prince are a pretty deadly combo. I trust Tash with this, and we got our hands full anyway.~

They had to get this war dealt with as soon as possible, before something else bit them in the ass while they were too busy dealing with bullshit.

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~~Natasha~~

The Prince sighed as she leaned back in her chair. On the top floor of the Elysium Tower, Natasha stood in front of her boss's large desk, squirming. Not because she was scared; she'd gotten used to the Prince, mostly. Scared because how this conversation went could have an enormous effect on the city at large, and she didn't really like having that responsibility. She was a Mekhet, and would always prefer to be on the sidelines.

Case in point, Daniel stood next to the Prince, and Tash knew her sire might say three words in the whole meeting.

"Please, spare no details, Miss Vola."

"R-Right." And she didn't. She told the Prince about the trip into the Hisil with the boys, Eric, and Sándor. She told her about their encounter with Street-Tail King; mentioning its name earned a scowl from her. And she told her about what Sándor said about the tear.

"Minerva's legacy..." Antoinette looked up as she sighed, and combed her hair over her shoulder with her fingers, down over her suit jacket's chest. "My old friend's experiments with ephemera had progressed further than I thought."

"Indeed," Daniel said, and he adjusted his glasses with a single finger. One.

Natasha nodded. "And Jack is convinced B-B... Black Blood is responsible for the tears. Or at least, is connected to them."

"That creature is insidious," Antoinette said. "I believe Jack is correct. Black Blood is a spirit of grand intent, and if bringing down the Gauntlet is within its power, it will do so. Spirits would love nothing more than the freedom to visit the physical world ad nauseam."

"B-But Street-Tail King doesn't want it gone."

"Yes, that is peculiar, is it not? Perhaps it has something to do with what Sándor noticed, that the tear was not cutting to a realm he recognized. And then there is the incident of Jack and the Begotten becoming trapped in that strange realm of ghosts."

"I'm n-not following."

"Spirits do not like the Gauntlet. If Street-Tail King has given information that will usurp Black Blood's plan to destroy the Gauntlet, we can only surmise that something else is at risk."

"M-Maybe Street-Tail King is happy ruining Black Blood's plans? They are rivals."

"Oui, but even I would side with an enemy if we shared a goal of such colossal value."

“Then...” She tapped her temple as she looked down, frowning, juggling thoughts. “The tears and M-Minerva’s legacy might overlap, but maybe something else would happen too?”

The Prince leaned forward, elbows on the table, fingers netted together in front of her. Classic thinking pose of a mob boss.

“Minerva threatened much, if Avery is correct. But I have no recollection of her experiments ever touching on realms other than the Shadow Realm. If these tears are opening ways to other realms, then I fear there is a connection.”

The way she said ‘other realms’ sent ice down Natasha’s spine.

“Maybe Minerva’s legacy, d-destroying the Gauntlet, could do the same to other barriers between us and other realms? Or maybe...” Natasha held up her hands and mashed them together, as if squashing different colors of clay. “And instead of only the physical and sp-irit realms connecting directly, it’d be... more of them? M... Maybe all of them?”

Her sire smiled at her for a tenth of a second before nodding at her. “Smart.” Two.

“And that does indeed sound like something a scheming spirit like Street-Tail King may be hesitant to allow. Though in truth, I am surprised it gave the information without enforcing a deal.”

“It almost did! My... the b-boys stopped it. They were convinced it wasn’t helping earlier without a deal because it hates Avery, no other reason. They were right.”

Antoinette laughed softly, shaking her head. “Perhaps. I doubt it was that simple. In all likelihood, it was waiting for an excuse to give the information without losing face.”

“I guess that m-makes sense.”

“This information is... problematic. Dealing with Black Blood is never easy.”

“And Jacob,” Natasha said.

Antoinette shook her head. “I will not blindly assume that Jacob is also responsible or linked to Black Blood’s actions. But, I have to accept that it is a strong possibility. Minerva knew Black Blood, but she knew Jacob best of all, and to my chagrin, it would not surprise me if my old friend knew enough about his lover to be able to recreate her experiment.”

“B-But... why?” Natasha raised her hands with a shrug. “Why would he want to do something like that? I mean, it sounds...”

“Apocalyptic,” Daniel said. And that was three.

“Indeed. The sort of thing Azamel would warn us about.”

Natasha gasped. “You think she knew all along?”

“No. But Begotten know realms better than anyone, and I am sure she noticed something brewing.”

“I see. I... um... I p-planned to work with Avery, so we can get a closer look at this newest tear.”

“Prudent, and dangerous. Avery does not like what we dragons here in Dolareido do. And she especially does not like us after I forced her hand, indenturing those boys to you.”

“Yeah, b-but Arturo and Matthew are convinced she’ll help.”

“I see. Then, carry on, Natasha. Inform me of future progress. And well done.”

Natasha smiled, bowed slightly, and half turned to leave. But before she got any further, she looked back, knowing full well she shouldn’t ask this question.

“Ab-b-bout... Samantha...”

“Nothing has changed, Miss Vola. Do not tell my childe what you are up to. All business of Black Blood is never to grace her ears.”

“B-But... Jacob—”

“Is not proven to be our enemy, yet. And even if he is, Samantha is as safe with him as she would be elsewhere.”

Natasha stared at her boss before making a quick glance to Daniel. Safe, with Jacob, really? But all her sire had for her was a slow, sad nod. He agreed with Antoinette. He wasn’t happy about it, but he agreed with her.

“And if he is, um, an enemy,” Natasha said, “then... Samantha’s in a position to... d-do something?”

The Prince’s cold eyes confirmed. This was another ploy of the Prince’s, another way for her to control the outcomes of situations. If she had to use her childe, her lover’s mother, as a tool in her games, then she would.

Natasha gulped, nodded, and left. Jack wasn’t going to be happy about this, and if he didn’t hear it from Tash, he’d hear it from Jessy.

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She sat down at her counter with the boys in her apartment. They each sat beside her, and all of them looked down at the counter in thought. A business meeting.

“I t-told the Prince. She... wasn't happy.”

“Understandable,” Art said. “If Jacob's an enemy, that's a big enemy to have.” He rubbed his nose, frowning. Right, Jacob had smashed his face in in a fight, effortlessly defeating him and Matt at the same time.

“Yeah. B-But she's not going to stop Samantha from dating him.”

“Makes sense.”

“It does?” She blinked up at the big guy.

“She'd be tipping her hand if she did, you know?”

Natasha groaned, but nodded. The idea of sweet Samantha getting caught in the middle of all this was horrible. Horrible! She shrank on her stool and leaned forward enough to press her arms and shoulders against the countertop side.

Matt pat her on the shoulder, and rubbed her back, earning a small sigh from her.

“Tomorrow,” Matt said, “we can talk to Avery, and organize something, figure out a way to get to that tear.”

Art nodded. “And hopefully not piss Black Blood off too much doing it. Maybe Red Tide? He was looking for that tear we couldn't find around the Cathedral.”

“Tear we couldn't find.” She sat up, tapping her chin. “If Black Blood is making these tears, then m-maybe it created a tear there, in the den b-below the Cathedral, to make Maria look guilty?”

“Black Blood framing Maria?” Art looked ahead, entering thinking mode. They'd all thought these thoughts already, might as well voice them. “I guess that'd explain why we caught the blood wraiths saying her name. Black Blood wanted us on the wrong trail, and it had them spreading misinformation.”

“Exactly!” she said, grinning up at Art again. The grin quickly morphed into a frown before she could stop herself. “If...” Sighing, she looked back down, and shook her head. “N-Never mind.”

“What? Never mind?”

“Y-Yeah. I don’t... w-want to fight about it anymore.” No more fighting about what happened with Avery and Maria.

“Oh.” Art sighed and looked down, like she’d hung an anchor around his neck.

Matt coughed, and they both looked at him, making him squirm a bit and scratch the back of his head.

“This relationship,” the gentle giant said. “It’s... it’s important that we treat it like a relationship, right? And I’m no relationship expert, but we should be able to have arguments, right? Not throw fists or anything, but if we have a disagreement, and we start yelling or something, it should be okay, right? We shouldn’t worry about leaving each other because... I don’t know.”

The gentle giant was smarter than he realized. Or were those Jack’s words?

She smiled at Matt, leaned up and over, and gave him a kiss, a good one. “You’re right. You’re v-very much right. I... I guess I was worried before, b-because it’s an unusual relationship, so I didn’t want to disagree over anything. D-Didn’t want to stir the water cause it was so perfect. Perfect, and... and not real.” Both men were looking at her now, eyes heavy. She squirmed. It was a heavy topic, one she’d been afraid to have, but if Matt was willing to talk about, she should be too. And no offense to Matt, but she was the better thinker. “But real relationships aren’t p-perfect, right? They’re messy, and problematic, and... and there should b-be room for us to get into arguments about stuff, and not w-worry the relationship will die.”

Art sighed, nodding. “Yeah, same here. First time Matt and I have ever done the long term relationship thing; you can guess why. Been really careful to not do or say anything that might make anyone upset.”

She slid off the stool, and both boys turned to face her.

“Well, it’s a real relationship! I love you two. I d... don’t care that there’s t-two of you. I d-don’t want to think of this relationship like a fairytale. It’s r-real, and we should be realistic about it.” Before she could say more, Arturo’s smile widened until he was laughing. “It’s not funny!”

“I know, I know. I’m not laughing about that. I’m laughing cause this dumbass is smarter than me.” He gestured to Matt, who nodded confidently, apparently already knowing this.

“Not that we should look for things to argue about,” Matt said. “But, uh, Jack said it best I guess. We didn’t have any confidence in the relationship. We should, right?” It was Jack’s words then. That kid was too smart for his own good. No wonder the Prince loved him.

She smiled, nodding. “Right. And it’s n-not like we’ll argue all the time. Romance should be fun! I like t-talking to you guys about stuff, and hanging out, and learning new things. I like the sexy times too, and...”

Uh oh. She said the S word. Arturo and Matthew both grinned at her, and she stepped back immediately. She knew that grin!

“Hey, w-wait a minute...”

Both of the huge men prowled toward her, and she squeaked as she jumped back and over the couch. But they were fast! Way faster than big guys like them should have been. Matt chased after her directly, rolling over the couch on his side. She squeaked again and dashed for the wall of the hallway that led to the front door. But Art was even faster than Matt, and the man got between her and her only escape.

The hungry grin on his face struck her still, and sent a tingling thrill down through her spine into her toes. And before she could recover, Matt swooped in from behind. She jumped to the side back toward the living room and the couch, but Matt plucked her out the air. Literally. And before she could say anything, he set her over his shoulders, and walked toward the bedroom.

She giggled. She very much tried to not giggle, but she did, a lot. She squirmed and wriggled, trying to get out of Matt’s grip, but trapped between her squeaky giggles and desire to punish her boyfriends for being so forceful was a tough place to be. And she giggled louder when Matt tossed her on the bed.

Both men climbed onto the bed with her before she could escape, and each took one of her hands, pinning it to the bed over her head, while they leaned in and kissed her neck.

“Blush for us,” Art whispered, voice half growling.

“Blush,” Matt said, the same hunger in his voice too.

“N-No!” Despite her best efforts, she couldn’t wipe the grin off her face.

Art nibbled on her earlobe softly, pulling it between his lips and placing kisses on it. “Blush. It’s been killing me not having you like we used to.”

“We’re dying,” Matt said, nodding, a deep purring rumble in his throat. More kisses. “I’m gonna explode.” Out with the sweet romantic talk, in with the carnal sexy talk, apparently. It was silly, and exciting.

“Dreamed about you a lot,” Art said, and he kissed her neck again, opening his mouth wide enough she could feel his teeth.

“R-Romantic dreams?”

“At first. I missed you. But after a while, the dreams got very sexual.” He peeked up over her chin long enough to kiss her, before going back down to her neck. His free hand found her blouse, and undid a button. “I need to get inside you.” A grunt. A growl. Barely words.

She squirmed in their grip, trying to slip free. She knew she couldn’t. She knew she didn’t want to. But she also knew trying to get away from them drove them crazy with lust. And, for some reason, she just found herself doing whatever made them hornier, even if she didn’t tell herself to. It was like a game she couldn’t help but play, even though she knew the boys often got pretty crazy when she teased them.

“Blush,” they said, together this time. Her shirt was fully open now, and both men teased and massaged her small breasts with exploring fingers. Such huge hands.

“I dreamed I had you tied up,” Art said. “Hands up, dangling. I did everything to you.”

“I chased you down,” Matt said. “Caught you inside a big building. Grabbed you, fucked you on the floor.”

She gulped and managed quick peeks at both men. Those were some very aggressive fantasies. What sort of men did she get herself involved with?

Art slipped over her chin, and kissed her again. Then Matt did as well, before the both of them lifted their heads up so they could look down at her. Animal hunger in those eyes, and a lot of it, all aimed directly at her.

If she Blushed Life, she knew they’d be all over her, and she’d never seen so much hunger in their eyes. Exciting. Scary! Having business meetings with Uratha sometimes made her forget, but the moment sex was involved, it quickly became apparent that the boys were wolves, and they had massive appetites. Talking and negotiating with Matt and Art was easy. Talking and negotiating with two hungry enormous wolves intent on devouring her, was not.

Sighing, and trying to hide her smile again, she Blushed Life.

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Both men groaned, practically growled, and got to work. She squealed as they fell on her, their hands reaching under her clothes and pulling them off. The shirt came off with almost desperate speed,

their movements growing faster, almost frantic. The pants next, both men yanking them down and up hard enough she almost slid right off the bed.

In sync like practiced group hunters, they both jumped off the bed, and grabbed her underwear. She squealed again as they yanked them off. They pulled the bra off the same way, up and over her head like they were in a race against time.

They yanked her off the bed, and she squeaked as she landed on her feet between the two men. She thought they got her out of her clothes fast, but both men stripped naked in three seconds. Matt, hilariously massive, with his shoulder-length dirty blonde hair. Arturo, messy black hair down to his jaw, and tan skin. And both of them were so hilariously fit, she gulped as her eyes lowered and looked at their abs. Both of them of them were already aroused and hard.

Matt got on his knees in front of her, grabbed her hips, pulled her forward, and growled.

“W-Wait! I didn’t say you could—” She sucked in a breath hard as Matthew wrapped his lips around her slit, and devoured her. He’d done this to her dozens of times, and he knew her body better than she did at this point. Warm lips and a wet tongue buried her swelling skin in playful pressure, encapsulating all of her slit, making sure every inch of her was wet with his saliva.

She glared down at him and bopped him on the head, several times, but the huge man just grinned up at her, his nose pressed to her mons as he ran his tongue up and down against her clitoris in broad, slow strokes. The sudden electric jolts were almost painful. He made sure to keep every inch of her between his lips, refusing to let any of her sex free of his wide open mouth. It was almost like watching an animal devour a meal, a very handsome animal with long dirty blonde hair, and gentle green eyes.

Her body lit up like kindling in seconds, and her tiny grunts of failed escape attempts turned into little whimpers, as she felt her body begin to boil.

Art grabbed her butt cheeks, spread them, and before she could so much as squeak in surprise, he pressed his tongue into her other hole.

“Hey! Art, you d-d-dumbass!” She tried to whack Art in the head, considerably harder than she did Matt, but Matt grabbed both of her wrists. Chuckling, Matt continued to bury her pussy in big, wet kisses, pushing his nose into her as he devoured her, tongue getting rougher as she tried to pull her hands free.

It wasn’t like she was dirty back there, where Art was mirroring Matt. She was a vampire, and every inch of her was always clean. But that didn’t mean it wasn’t a shock, to have a tongue pushing

into her from behind! She wriggled and squirmed, and tried to move her ass out of the way, but Art locked his hands around her thighs and held her in place.

All she could do was stand there, and try to stay standing, as the two men slid their tongues along her sensitive skin.

“I’ll... g-get you for this!” She tried to hit Matt again, but his grip on her wrists was strong. And she didn’t try very hard, cause as much as she squirmed and wriggled, she missed this. She missed feeling tiny and trapped between the two hornballs. She missed the way they jumped her and did things to her once she was stupid enough to Blush for them. She missed getting taken by them.

Matthew buried her whole pussy in ravenous licks and kisses, covering it and drenching it, even as it grew wetter on its own. Painful jolts morphed into euphoric waves of bliss as her clitoris swelled. He grinned up at her as he licked faster, and she broke into trembling whimpers as the pleasure sparks began to build between her legs. The only thing keeping her from falling over, was Art’s grip on her thighs.

She bit her bottom lip as she looked down at the big idiot eating her out. She squirmed some more, desperate to hold onto something, but Matt didn’t let go of her hands. Trapped. Matthew slowed down and let her enjoy some sharp sparks of pleasure that jolted outward from her clit into her core and thighs, before he devoured her again. Arturo did no such thing, refusing to slow down. If anything, he experimented, sticking his tongue deeper into her tiny butt as she mewled.

She got wet so fast, faster than usual, and usual had gotten pretty fast with how often the boys and her used to have sex. And with long it’d been since they had.

Then they stopped. She blinked down at Matt, then looked behind her at Art as he reached into the nightstand cupboard, and pulled out a bottle of lubricant. Of course. She frowned at him, but she couldn’t muster her serious, angry frown. All she managed was her chipmunk frown despite her best efforts to do otherwise, and she knew very well the chipmunk frown only made the boys hornier.

Arturo dribbled some lube on his fingers, pressed two of them against her already wet and stretched asshole, and massaged them against her skin. The lubricant worked quickly, and she squeaked as the man eased two fingers in deeper, and deeper, and deeper. With his palm pointed toward Matt, the man curled the two fingers toward her pussy, and she squeaked again as her swelling insides sent more jolts through her. Wider, heavier waves of pleasure, the sort you could only get from feeling something deep inside.

Matthew did the same. He didn't need lubricant though, dripping as she was, and she gasped as the man forced two thick fingers into her tiny body. With her wrists free again, she reached down and grabbed Matt's wrist, but he ignored her, overpowering her as he sank middle and ring finger into her slit. Palm up, the evil giant winked at her, and pumped his hand toward himself.

"Matt! Slow d-d-d-d—" She clutched his shoulders with both hands, and spread her legs to try and keep from falling, as the two men fingered her insides. Arturo pumped faster, hard enough to make her butt ripple against his hand, but Matthew pumped harder, enough to earn some splashing sounds as his fingers slapped against her g-spot.

She tried to hold it back, but it'd been so long. And both of them were coming at her with such hunger in her eyes, her knees grew weaker by the second. She punched Matt's shoulders a few times, but they were weak little strikes, and soon her punches turned into a desperate grip to keep from falling, as her insides began to squeeze. The building heat in her insides exploded outward, rushing up into her chest and down through her legs to her toes, forcing them to curl and for her thighs to tremble.

They didn't let her fall. Each held a hip in their huge hands, while their other hand filled one of her holes. They slowed down a little as she came, giving her muscles enough freedom to spasm and milk pleasure through her, but they didn't slow down for long. The moment she stopped shaking like a leaf, they fingered her again, and harder.

"Please, slow... d... d..." She stared down at her tiny slit, spread by the brute's two massive fingers. Such a little thing opened wide by his digits, now drenched in her juices. Her smooth mons almost rippled with the impact of his fingers inside her, and for the second life of her, she couldn't stop staring at how hard the man's fingers worked back and forth.

Staring got ten thousand times harder when another orgasm ripped through her, but she managed, and she blushed from head to toe as she caught a peek of the copious amount of juices leaking from her. Matt's palm was soaked.

As last Matthew stopped, and he smiled up at her again as he slid his fingers out of her. Arturo got the cue and stopped as well, but instead of letting her collapse on the floor, Art took her by the hips, and threw her on the bed. Literally threw, again. She bounced a few times, squeaking, body trembling and refusing to listen. But she managed to glare at Art as he climbed onto the bed beside her. It creaked under his weight.

Arturo grabbed her, turned her, hugged her from behind, kissed her neck, breathed in the smell of her hair, and whispered, "You're not getting away tonight."

“I... you’re... horny dog!” Predictably, her weak insult rolled off his back. If anything, it turned him on more, earning another hungry, rumbling growl from him that vibrated through her, and sent another tingling thrill down her spine.

She glared at him, but it melted away as the man raised her, and lowered her down onto his cock. So hard, he was bursting, and she mewled as his thickness spread her ass. Both men were huge, and she was tiny. Every time they penetrated her, it was an overwhelming sensation of being stretched taut; this time was no different, even with how hard they’d fingered her. Her ass squeezed on him in spurts, and Art took his time, shifting back and forth to work with her clenching and un-clenching rhythm, slowly sinking her deeper and deeper, until she felt him stretching her wide, and deep.

In no time, her ass found his hips, and she pushed at his hugging arms as the sensation of her ass being filled until his cock pressed against her deepspot had her whimpering. She didn’t actually want to escape, but some part of her told her to try anyway, to make them hold her down and take her. She pressed a little harder, and Arturo tightened his grip around her chest as he growled down at her. Every time she tried to get away, the man’s arms held her tighter, her breathing increased, and his heart rate did too.

Matthew crawled onto the bed, and Arturo sat back and rolled onto his back. The two of them were in perfect sync as usual, and Matt grinned down at her as he took his massive cock in hand, and aimed it down at her tiny entrance.

“W-Wait,” she said, voice wavering along with her legs. “Slow down!” She managed doe eyes for Matthew, knowing full well it’d drive him crazy with need, but she did it anyway. It’d make him get rough with her, pin her down and pound her. She never liked those things in the past! But now, she couldn’t stop herself from teasing the boys, and pulling out that aggressive, hungry side of them.

Totally Jessy’s fault.

Matthew went slow, at first. He liked to do that, and she knew it’d only be for the first penetration. Gently, he spread her little slit with his thick, hard shaft, and she squeezed down on him and Arturo both, as the giant pushed his length deeper into her. With Arturo already inside her and little room left, each inch Matthew forced into her was full of blissful, wet friction, and her legs quaked as the hard thing rubbed against every inch of her insides.

Eventually his huge glans pressed against her depths, and she sucked in a breath as the small sparks of pain were immediately buried in waves of bliss. Matthew sank deeper, and her insides stretched. He pushed deeper, stretching her more and more. She sucked in a breath as that sensation,



‘that’ sensation of being fucked so deeply she could feel it had her insides quivering, and her juices leaking out all over him.

She managed a quick peek down at her belly, and groaned. Tiny as she was, with a thin little waist and stomach, it meant the two boys filled her completely, and made a small distension along her flat belly. God, she felt like she was going to burst.

Matthew growled down at her as he leaned down over her, an animal sound that rumbled in his chest and filled her with vibrations, and tingling chills. The look in his eyes was almost inhuman. She gulped as he came closer and closer, until he eventually got down onto his elbows, weight pressing against her blankets outside Arturo’s chest. So close! So close his giant chest pressed against her, and she disappeared between the two huge men.

Both men growled this time, and thrust.

“W-Wait! Not so—”

They thrust faster, and her breath fled as the werewolves plunged into her body, hard. Not gentle, not gentle at all. She squeaked with each thrust as they buried her in their hard, hot, sweating bodies. Her muscles clamped down in a desperate attempt to slow them, but it only made things worse. The pleasure jolts, almost painful with their intensity, spread out from between her thighs, up into her chest and down to her curling toes.

She was cumming. They were cumming. Maybe two minutes into it and both men were growling around her as the pumped cum into her. Her insides clamped down with muscle spasms, milking them as she drenched Matt’s cock. But they didn’t slow down! They usually slowed down when they came, and sometimes when she came, so they could enjoy the pleasure more. But both men only growled, and continued to pound into her, hard enough she felt the bed and her tiny butt shake.

They rolled onto their sides. She squeaked with the sudden position change, but the men didn’t stop. They thrust in rhythm, first Art, then Matt, both filling her and stretching her until she nearly burst, and until she felt their cum leaking out of her. Art pulled out, then Matt, leaving her empty, before they did it again. Fast, constant thrusting that left her gasping, Blush of Life making her think she needed oxygen, even though she didn’t.

The two men pressed their bodies into her, squashing her between them. Art slipped his hand up to her neck, and squeezed his fingers around her throat as he filled her ass with his cum. Matthew grabbed one of her outside thighs and pressed her leg tight around his hip. Both didn’t stop.

She tried to say something, but Arturo's grip was absolute, squeezing with desperate need. A small part of her mind knew she could communicate if she had to, summon *vitalis* and kick or something. A much bigger part of her mind melted against Art's chest as he squeezed her throat, and she looked up at them both with wide eyes as they thrust almost frantically into her.

They rolled over again, and she thought maybe Art would sit up and pull her back against his chest. He liked to that, especially when he had a hand around her neck. But he stayed down on her, pinning her whole torso between both men's chests. She was completely sandwiched between them, and tiny as she was, she disappeared between them. If anyone could see, she knew the only thing they'd be able to see of her, was her tiny legs spread around Matt's, limp on the blankets. Limp, until another orgasm ripped through her, and she found the strength to kick at the bed in desperation as the boys continued to pump into her.

She lost track of what was where after a while. Never had the boys been this rough with her, desperate and grunting like animals as they squashed her between them. Art let go of her neck at some point, so he could get better leverage on the bed and grind into her all the harder. Attempts to say words failed. All that came out were tiny squeaks.

Finally, they slowed down, and she sucked in a breath deep enough so she could moan instead of just squeak. Moan turned into groan as Arturo slipped out of her and sat back, huffing and puffing, and he wiped a drop of sweat from his brow.

But before she could comment — he looked amazing all sweaty like that — Matthew sat up, and turned her around, so she was on her knees and hands on the bed.

“Matt, w-wait! I need... a break...”

He didn't listen. He spread his knees so his pelvis was aligned with her straight on, grabbed her hips, and yanked. The giant sank every inch of his massive length into her hard enough his testicles slapped against her clitoris, and she collapsed, arms giving her. The blankets caught her, and she turned her head enough to look at Arturo as Matthew pounded her from behind. He was grinning.

Each slap of Matthew's balls against her made a soaking wet splash, sound and all, and she knew it was mostly her. And it only got worse as the man pulled her into him, thrust into her hard, and stayed there, burying himself balls deep inside her as he came again.

Before Natasha could recover, Art grabbed her, pulling her away from Matthew. He threw her onto her back, spread her legs, got between them, grabbed her hips, and lifted her pelvis up. With Art

on his knees and sitting up, he had to lift her hips high, and she stared up at him, exhausted, her shoulders and head on the blankets, as the man sank his hard cock into her ass again.

Bent like she was, a yoga bridge, she couldn't see much. But she could feel how his hard cock drove straight up toward her belly with each thrust, the angle and her position guiding it toward her navel. Each thrust into her cum-filled ass was hard, hard enough to make the bed creak again, and have her mouth wide and eyes locked onto the huge man pounding her.

She wanted to reach up and grab his wrists, hold on, but her arms wouldn't listen. She wanted to make some noises, at least squeak, but her body didn't want to breathe anymore. A kine would have started seeing stars. She could only lie there and tremble from head to toe as her lover fucked her ass.

More wetness flowed down her butt, making a splashing mess as the man didn't slow down. She managed to lift her head long enough to get a peek at Arturo's abs, and see a tiny squirt of her juices shoot up and hit them below his navel. And another, and another, before she collapsed back onto the sheets, and let the orgasm rip through her again. No use trying to keep her eyes open anymore.

Hands found her, moved her, turned her. Weight pressed on her, buried her between bodies. Matthew had come back, and now both were inside her again, grunting and sometimes even growling as they wrestled on the bed, rolling and thrusting and pinning her between them. She went limp, arms and legs dangling around them, and bouncing with each impact of their bodies. They were wild animals.

She came so hard, it hurt.

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"Bad dogs! B-Bad, bad dogs!" Marching in the front of the two kneeling men, she gave each of them a good smack on the head with a rolled up magazine.

"Sorry," Art said, wincing after the smack she knew didn't hurt him at all.

"Sorry," Matt said, mirroring Art.

"You're supposed t-to do what I tell you, remember? That was the deal." She thwaped them again.

"Sorry," they said together.

She rolled her eyes, and did her best to keep the smile off her face. Success, but barely.

The two men knelt in front of her by the bed, while she stomped around, towel wrapped around her. No towel for them! This was a punishment. But it wasn't like the boys cared they were naked anyway. And unlike her, their legs weren't shaking.

Cum was still all over the three of them, and the moment punishment was given, shower time.

"You were both like... wild dogs! Like, as if you had t-to... take catch me and eat me or I might get away." She wasn't Blushing Life anymore, but if she were, that line alone would have had her hot again. The memory combined with the words was powerful. It wasn't like the boys hadn't ever ravaged her before, but tonight they went a little far. And while that idea was a bit scary for her, her body disagreed. She'd never cum that many times, or that hard before.

"It did kinda feel like that," Art said. "And we... we don't want to lose you again, you know? I guess that kinda... made us feel a bit desperate, when things got physical. Plus, you know, we hadn't cum in weeks." He grinned at that, and she rolled her eyes.

Matt nodded. The big lug was no doubt thinking the same thoughts as his best friend, but Art was better at articulating them.

"W-Well I'm not going anywhere."

They smiled at that.

"Yeah?" Art said.

"Yes! Yes you b-big dumb..." Groaning, she set the magazine aside, and kissed Art's forehead. "We can argue, b-but as long as we respect each other like Matt said, it's ok. Arguments are fine, as long as w-we... understand that we n-n... n-need to try and understand each other, too. I'm not some young girl with st-tupid fantasies that love is supposed to be all roses! Love is hard work."

Matt smiled up at her, and she leaned over to kiss him, a proper kiss on the lips.

"This whole love relationship, the long term deal, is pretty new to us," Art said.

"Well, we are in love. So from now on, we d-don't do things like... like what happened, with Maria and Avery. We don't betray each other. From now on, w-we talk to each other. Ok?"

They winced again, but she leaned in, kissed them both again, and motioned for them to follow. They did, frowns fading and growing into giant smiles as they realized she was taking them into the shower.

Soon all three of them were under the blast of hot water, and lathering each other, taking turns with the loofah. She smiled up at them, they smiled down at her, and tension melted away as she could

see her words sink into her boys' heads. They didn't have to worry and be desperate with her, like she was gonna run away like prey. Like, a weak little doe, all ready to be gobbled up.

What would it be like if they'd transformed? She'd had sex with them once, when they went into their bigger, wolfier human bodies, Dalu. It'd definitely been an experience, being filled like that. But Dalu was nothing compared to Gauru, to the giant werewolf forms, and the aggression that came with it. What would it be like, if she had her hands around two, monstrous girths right now, with two giant beasts looking down at her with animal hunger and giant teeth?

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She shivered as the image danced through her mind, and before she knew it, she slid down onto her knees, Blushed, reached up, and guided the shafts of both boys to her mouth. They both blinked down at her in surprise, but it wasn't long before they were both hard again. Long, hard, thick girths, pumping full of blood, teasing her with its rich taste and extreme power.

She smiled at them, opened her mouth as wide as it could go, and eased Matt's cock into her mouth, bathing his glans with her lips and tongue while her left hand stroked him. She did the same for Art, right hand stroking him as she kissed and teased his glans, until she could taste his growing juices. Sometimes she tried to suckle both at the same time, guiding both cocks to fight for space against her lips; they didn't mind.

She made sure to blink her doe eyes up at them, knowing each time it'd have them growling with desire. It did. She watched them as she leaned forward and slowly slid Art's length into her mouth, and then down into her throat, her lips spread by his thickness. Kindred had no need to breathe, and no gag reflex, after all. Her lover groaned, and she smiled up at him, and Matt next. She eased off Art, and did the same for Matthew, taking the man's ridiculous length and thickness into her until her lips found the base of him. And she stayed there for a while, one hand stroking Art while the other held Matt's side as she smiled up at him from around his girth.

She slid back off his length, and let its heavy weight sit on her face a bit, enjoying the heat of it, and how she could feel his heartbeat through it. She did the same for Art, nudging her face along his cock's underside, and planting kisses along its length, tip to base. Satisfied, she set them both against her lips again, and stroked both their lengths as she suckled on the two cocks while they both watched her like she was a meal they'd been hunting with ravenous bellies all night long.

It didn't take long for them to cum again, and she let the white fluid pour down over her lips and chin before it flowed down her thin neck and body. Both of them stared down at her, surprised, and

groaning softly in bliss as she milked them. They'd cum several times already, but weeks without an orgasm — and crazy regenerative werewolf bodies — meant they had plenty to spare, and it overflowed her mouth in moments, creating a huge mess that eased down her chin and tiny, slender body.

They both rumbled, and she shivered with the buzz of their voices.

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She stood up, washed their cum off her skin again, and motioned for them to kneel. They did. First, she took a drink of Matt, and the man sighed happily as his body relaxed with the power of the Kiss. He struggled to not fall over when she was done. She did the same with Art, kissing him, then Kissing him, drinking deep until the man fell on his ass and sat back against the wall of the shower. Werewolf blood was so damn good. Exquisite! As Antoinette would say. It had her body rippling with energy the moment it hit her stomach, and more besides once she'd taken deep of both of them.

“You t-two may be all big and bad and strong, but I'm the vampire.” Nodding and smiling as if she'd announced victory to a game, she stepped out of the shower, leaving her two thoroughly drained and exhausted boys struggling to get back up.

Tonight had been fun. Too much fun. What would it have been like if they'd transformed, and did to her what Eric did to Jessy? She'd probably burst at the seams.

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~~Antoinette~~

“Jack survived.” She sighed as she leaned back in her chair, seated in the top floor of her tower, and sighed relief.

Daniel stood beside her, and he nodded as he turned to look out the great window overlooking her Elysium. “He's very good at his job.”

“Ah yes, the peacekeeper job? That was never supposed to apply to the covenants.”

“Either way, he's making progress.”

“Yes, he is. Bullheaded and brazen, but he is. And perhaps that is what is needed to wipe the dust from the minds of those like Maria.” After a quiet chuckle, she stood up and joined him. “How goes your hunt?”

“Black Blood eludes me.”

“But not Jacob?”

“Not when he is here, in our realm, no. I have witnessed his traversing to other realms through the old gates, and my projection cannot follow him there.”

“Then it is good your childe is as effective as she is. She will find out more, about whether Jacob is to blame for this, or whether Black Blood is pursuing this strange agenda on its own.”

“I’d prefer you summon the creature. Interrogate it yourself.”

“I do not sacrifice kine at a whim.”

“But you will sacrifice my childe? And yours, for that matter?”

She turned to look at her old friend, but he did no such thing. Solemn, he stared out the window, arms folded across his chest.

“If necessary.”

“What constitutes necessary?”

“If there is an enemy that wishes to destroy us all, then defeating it qualifies as necessary. And I know you understand that, Daniel.”

Her old friend sighed, a slow and heavy sound, but nodded eventually. “Sorry. Just, nearly lost her once already, to Lucas.”

“You have nearly lost her more times than that. Natasha has been in danger many times, and has survived many times. Trust her.”

“And Samantha?”

“I have seen and heard enough to believe Jacob genuinely cares for her.”

“To the point he won’t use her against us if such a situation arises?”

She matched his sigh, and set a hand on his shoulder. “I do not know. I will have to... reevaluate when more information is available.”

He nodded slowly, not pleased with her answer. And that was why her good friend could not be Prince. Powerful and intelligent as her sheriff was, he did not have the stomach for difficult decisions. She did.

She continued. "If Black Blood truly is pursuing Minerva's legacy, then if it has any indication we are aware of its pursuits, it might change tactics. If we want to catch it unawares and put a stop to this foolishness, we must pretend we do not know. I will not summon it."

"You really think it doesn't know what we're up to?"

"I think prudence is required. Continue your searching, my sheriff, and I will continue mine."

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"Mister Pavel. How unexpected."

"Prince."

Both she and her sheriff watched the Begotten as he stepped into the throne room of her kingdom. She leaned back in her chair, wearing her business smile, subtle, and dominant.

Sándor was an attractive individual, slightly tall, a lean but muscular man with a defined chin and some gruff on his face. His dark hair was buzzed short, not unlike Jack's, and the shape of his blue eyes betrayed his Eastern European origins. If only he wore something better. Dark jeans and a black button shirt? For shame.

"For what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"Wanted to catch up on a couple things."

"Normally my love would handle contact between the races, but..."

"He's pretty busy trying to keep everyone from killing each other."

She grinned at that. "Officially, he is Invictus and will aid the Invictus in this war."

The Begotten walked up to her desk, looked around at the luxurious but professional grand office of her Elysium Tower, and managed the smallest shrug.

"We both know that's not what he's doing."

"All too true."



“I wanted to talk about Jacob.”

Ah yes, of course he did. He had joined Natasha for her discovery, after all.

“I admit, your readiness to help Natasha has confused me, Mister Pavel.”

“Please call me Sándor. It’s...” He looked to the side for a moment, at the enormous wall of black marble with white veins, and the several carvings of dragons that circled various columns of the same material, before looking back to her. He was analyzing her, based on her environment. Intelligent. “It’s strange, hearing that old name.”

“Very well, Sándor.”

“I helped her cause it helps Dolareido, right? And I’ll help her again with this problem, as many times as needed.”

“It is that generosity that confuses me so.”

He managed another quaint little shrug. “Azamel—”

“Would not aid me or mine to such a degree, or so directly.”

He raised a brow at that. “Wouldn’t she? She told you about this weird threat, right?”

Antoinette considered that, and tapped her chin a few times as she watched the man. “Oui, that is true. But your generosity overshadows hers greatly.”

“I guess so. But I... I’m not just replacing her, when she’s gone.” For all the man’s efforts to keep his stoic expression, a hint of a somber frown took control of his lips. “There’s Julias, too.”

And for all Antoinette’s efforts to maintain her subtle, dominating smile, the man’s words struck a chord, and she let the smile go.

“Surely you do not blame yourself for his death. You were under the control of a dangerous witch.” A flesh witch she knew both Beatrice and Samantha were becoming increasingly involved with.

“Of course I... My family...” He sighed, shaking his head. “The details are my business, Prince.” And there was that stoic expression once again.

Ah, of course, he blamed himself indirectly, due to the past. It was true that the man had been found and captured by hunters, but that did not necessarily mean he made a mistake in how he hid his paranormal nature. Forever a lesson that avoided even the wisest minds, that one could make no mistakes, and still lose. In this case, a lesson blocked by guilt, and Sándor reeked of it. It would be

decades, perhaps centuries, before he no longer reviled himself for the death of his wife and child. It would be an eternity before he ever truly forgave himself at all.

Unfortunately, that also meant those that died while he was controlled by Jeremiah and his tool, were partly under the umbrella of his guilt. An absurd conclusion, intellectually. Emotionally, the reasoning was flawless, and she doubted anything she could say would help him. Perhaps Jack and his disarming ways could, but her? No, nothing she could say would help this poor soul.

“What do you wish to know of Jacob?”

“Whatever you’re willing to share.”

Nodding, she pulled her hair over her shoulder onto her chest, and ran her fingers through it as she looked up with memory.

“Jacob and I came to Dolareido over two centuries ago, with my childe Tony, and a rather bold, powerful up-and-coming Ventrue named Viktor Honors.” The names earned the faintest twitches from the listening man’s eyebrows. Azamel and the others had likely shared much of this story already. “A small town, buildings of wood, where every kine knew each other by name. Over the decades, I molded that small town into the Dolareido you see today. And, as much as I would like to say the credit is entirely mine, the others played roles as well. Viktor and Tony did little but take advantage of opportunities, but Jacob planted hints of the call of darkness within the city.”

“Call of darkness?”

“To sire Kindred who do not reek havoc, or violate the Masquerade without concern, or throw themselves into the sunlight at first opportunity, requires a somewhat unique mentality. And Dolareido was meant, from night one, to be our utopia. Jacob planted the seeds of interest in what occurs after sunset in those silly, ignorant, superstitious villagers. Potential Kindred. And it was not long before vampires from other villages came to our village as well, lured by the dark whispers within.”

“Dangerous, to have a city with rumors of vampires.”

“And that is where I came in, Begotten. I controlled who did what, and I made sure everyone obeyed the rules. With my guiding hand, the Masquerade was maintained and maintained well. Kine did not die to Kindred, or if they did, they were people no one would notice or care about disappearing. And over the decades, I molded this city into my utopia. But... to my chagrin, Jacob pursued his own agendas, and he hid them well. Only as my experiments with ephemera grew did I come to realize my old friend had become close with a spirit named Black Blood.”

“He didn’t want you to know about it?”

“Jacob knew both his and my goals for a utopia overlapped, but also clashed. If Jacob ruled Dolareido, this city’s nightlife would host a far greater accumulation of dangerous affairs. Flirting with spirits with dark rituals. Deadly games where winners survived and losers did not. Freedom, and chaos. A utopia for vampires of a sort, but not the utopia of cooperation I seek.”

Sándor nodded as he looked down, pondering. “Sounds like a witch.”

“Indeed.”

“And Black Blood?”

She eyed Sándor for a few seconds, and he met her gaze, steady and unmoving. He realized she was analyzing him, and he let her. The Begotten did not lack for confidence, after a fashion.

“Unfortunately I know little of the creature. As far as I can tell, it had been growing in Dolareido since before our arrival.” He did not need to know the creature could be summoned with ritual and murder. The fewer that knew, the better. “I have discovered similar spirits, much younger than Black Blood, and with none of the older creature’s colossal strength. What bothers me most though, about the intolerable spirit, is that its nature is not natural to Dolareido.”

“It’s not? Far as I can tell, it’s a spirit of death and the dead.”

“Yes, but death is no more common in Dolareido than other cities. Less than, I must say.”

“And the blood wraiths?”

Sighing, Antoinette shook her head. “Blood is a frequent point of intrigue in Dolareido. But for those blood-and-flesh-obsessed wraiths to emerge from that intrigue is also unnatural. Or so I assume. The Uratha would know more.”

“Black Blood’s connected to them. It might have had a hand in creating them. Might explain their weird natures, if Black Blood itself is also an oddity. I’ll ask Avery.”

“They are not willing to share their information with me.”

He nodded again. “I’ll ask nicely.”

She blinked at the man, at his steady, solid expression, and she laughed. If he was joking, he was a master comedian for his perfectly unmoving face. Perhaps there was more to Sándor than a simple man scarred by guilt.

“Natasha has deemed you trustworthy, and while I do not share her views, I must admit circumstances suggest I should trust you.”

He frowned slightly at that, deliberating, before he looked past her to the enormous window that exposed her city's beautiful skyline.

"If Black Blood is a problem, then why did it help me, when Jeremiah cast that ritual on Azamel? We were all blinded and bound by the spell, but Black Blood... helped me get through it."

"I do not know, Sándor. Perhaps so Jacob would not potentially lose Othello and Beatrice in the fray? There are far too many unknowns, which is why we need more information. It pleases me that you are helping Natasha, and I hope you will continue to do so." She leaned forward and set her elbows on the table, adopting her usual business deal stance. "I doubt money has much value to you, Begotten, but I believe you align with my plans for this city. Continue to aid Natasha, and I will see to it that your stay in this city, however long that may be, is a rich indulgence."

That earned a small smile from him, the sort a knowing soul would make when offered a contract for his soul from Satan herself. He was suspicious of luxury.

"Thanks."

"There is something else you wish to ask?"

"Yes. I wanted to ask about Beatrice, and Julias."

Of course he did, to seal in his scars with acid. She was tempted to give him the simple explanation, as Sándor himself acted the simpleton. But the man was centuries old, and far wiser and more intelligent than he wanted others to know.

"A stalker sired Triss against her will. Jerem Montallia. I imagine you have known vampires with similar pasts," she said. He nodded. "I executed the fool, of course, but the damage was done. Beatrice changed quickly, donning the tattoos and piercings, and embracing the Carthian lifestyle. A rebel. But that changed when she met two men."

"Two? Oh, Julias, and Jacob."

"It is easy for most to think Julias has had the most effect on her. He taught her to love others and herself, if you subscribe to clichés. But it is Jacob that showed her she could pursue her own desires and agendas outside of romance."

He nodded again, eyes stern as he stared at the window. Building the Dolareido puzzle in his mind, no doubt, each drop of information she gave a new puzzle piece to be placed.

"Her relationship with Julias," she continued, "was painfully poetic. Julias, much like Jack and I, wanted the best for everyone, and for everyone to cooperate. An idealistic, albeit a realists as well, with

the will to make difficult decisions when necessary. He was also quite depressed, and it was not until he met the rather harsh Beatrice that her spark kindled his love for his second life.”

“Not Jack?”

“Jack was to Julias what a child is to a parent. Julias found purpose in preparing Jack for his second life, but not happiness. Not for himself, at least. Beatrice and Julias created happiness for each other.”

“And now he’s gone...”

“Oui. And Beatrice, as you can imagine, has thrown herself headlong into the affairs of witches.”

Sándor nodded, frown betraying him. He knew, or perhaps had even seen what the Nosferatu was doing in the shadows.

“I see.”

“Sándor... it would be a waste to tell you you should not feel responsible for the damage the hunters have caused. But if you truly wish to help those it has, do not go to them seeking to replace that which they lost. There is little you could do to offend them more.”

Another wince. After a few moments of silence, Sándor lifted his head, met her eyes with his steady gaze again, and nodded. “Thanks for the information. I’ll... see what I can do, about... everything.”

This man. This silly man. A stranger to their city, brought as a slave and tool by psychopaths, and yet he now felt bound by guilt to help them. The only reason he agreed to replace Azamel as protector for the younger Begotten, no doubt. How often did nightmares of his dead family haunt this poor man’s dreams, driving him to sacrifice himself for those he hurt? Proof, perhaps, that creatures of the nightmare had nightmares of their own.

“Be careful, Sándor. I tell you much of this information in good faith. Perhaps too much. But, as I said, Natasha trusts you.” And she had avoided saying anything too damning during the conversation, of course. “I advise you to leave Black Blood and Jacob be.”

“I will.”

“As for Beatrice, I can see that you feel a need to reach out to her. And to that I say, be especially careful.”

The tiniest smile graced the man’s face. “She’s stronger than you think.”

Antoinette leaned back in her chair, a touch of relief running through her. “Oh? I—no, I will not pry. If you think you can be of help to her, then by all means, do as you see fit. Jennifer certainly sees value in you.”

Sándor hid his smile, but she could see hints of it fighting to show through. “Thank you.” He nodded deep, almost a bow, and left.

She watched after him, and combed her hair idly as she pondered. What effect would this man have on her city? Surely better than Azamel, and the destruction she caused decades ago.

Eric and Sándor, Uratha and Begotten, both helping her Kindred student. A powerful turn of events.

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~~Beatrice~~

Romance was in the air, she could smell it. That had something to do with Jen relentlessly groping her, getting her hands under Triss’s tank top while Triss was busy looking through the binoculars. But more so because Clara looked happy.

Triss, Jen, and Samantha stood on a rooftop in South Side, closer to the entertainment district, spending a little time updating their impression of the ongoings in the city and its war, and also for some girl time. Girl time did not imply sex, just the opposite usually, but for some reason Jen felt handsy today. Triss didn’t mind. Sam, on the other hand, kept peeking and then feeling guilty about it and looking away. Which probably had something to do with why Jen couldn’t keep her hands off Triss.

“How’s she doing?” Jen asked, chin on Triss’s shoulder.

“Better than I figured.”

Clara was doing the outdoor restaurant thing, the fancy shit. She wasn’t dressed for it. Then again neither was Harcourt, but at least he was wearing some dark pants and a white button shirt, a few undone; everyone undid their buttons in Dolareido’s heat.

Brace was a pretty damn hot guy, a tall black dude with quite a bit of muscle on him. Short curly hair, and random tattoos, most hidden by the shirt but some peeked out, and some were weird ritual magic shit. And of course he had a few scars on his hands, and a pretty awesome one on his face. Dude looked perfect for the tall, dark, handsome, brooding and scary hunter role.

But a single conversation with Brace Harcourt was enough to let anyone know the dude was a goofball.

And then there was Clara, average height, and damn fit, athlete's body; still looked small compared to Harcourt though. She had tan skin and long dark hair done in box braids, and the face made Triss think she came from close to the equator. Really hot.

Clara looked down and poked at her meal — blue rare steak — as she talked. Introspective? Sadness? Probably a serious conversation then, maybe about the vampires, or even Jack.

Far as Triss knew, Clara still had a thing for Jack, too. She hadn't talked to the girl in a while, but maybe now was a good time to change that? The Circle and the wolves weren't exactly on the best terms, but Clara had put in the work when Jack needed her, leaving her pack behind to do it. Maybe talk to her later tonight, get an update? Maybe—

Triss groaned and looked over her shoulder at Jen. The damn woman was happy to be a nuisance, hugging from behind and playing with Triss's nipple piercings without a single hint of remorse. The damn slut.

“Jen, you are insatiable!” Sam reached over and poked the horny slut in the shoulder, for good measure.

Jen shrugged, but didn't stop, cupping and massaging while kissing Triss's neck. Triss wasn't Blushing Life, so it wouldn't lead to anything, but honestly she really didn't mind. Jen was a Daeva trapped in a Ventrue's body, and that was fine.

“It's probably a good thing Clara's moving on,” Triss said. “Or at least trying.”

“I can't believe she had a thing for my son.” Sam, dressed in a gray suit not unlike Jen's, cupped her cheeks as she looked down from the building rooftop. “How'd my boy get so popular with the girls?”

“Jack has proved his mettle,” Jen said, finally done with the neck kissing, “time and time again. And Julias groomed him well. He looks quite spectacular naked.”

Sam gasped, a classic mom gasp. “You've seen Jack naked?”

Triss laughed and shook her head. “No but none of our clothes survive very long in the fights we get into. I’ve seen enough of the kid to know Julias must have put him through the fucking ringer to get him into the shape he is.”

Jen gave Triss’s abs a gentle slap. “Like Triss here.”

“No one groomed me. I was just a vain bitch who liked it when people looked my way.” Which backfired of course. Fuck that Jerem asshole.

“In any case,” Sam said, “I’m happy Clara’s moving on. I don’t want my boy in a love triangle.”

“Triangle?” Jen laughed and returned Sam’s shoulder poke. “Kindred interests can get a lot more intricate than that. Or are you suggesting Othello and Madison aren’t both interested in you?”

“W-What? No no, that’s just... sex...” Poor Samantha. She squirmed in spot and looked back down at the street below, obviously recalling all the things Jacob, the Daeva bimbo, and Madison had been doing to her lately.

Triss nodded. “Yeah, it’s just sex. And honestly, I say you’re in the clear to go nuts and keep doing whatever you want in the Circle, no drama to worry about with us. We’re all pretty buddy buddy with each other. But there’s been more than a few ghouls or thralls who’ve been jealous of someone falling in love with their master. Leads to some crazy weird love triangles and stuff.” Jacob had some fucking horror stories about that sorta shit, the sorta stories you told around a campfire at night. Supposedly. Triss’s experience with campfires so far was one, in a dream-not-dream.

“You mean, like with J-Jack!? He—”

“Will be fine,” Jen said, finally letting go of Triss’s tits, and instead taking the binoculars. “The man is careful, and with the Prince as his love, circumstances will surely be... interesting, but safe. I doubt the Prince’s ghouls hold Jack in ill regard. And Veronica doesn’t seem the sort to stab Jack in the heart and kill him while he’s vulnerable.”

Oh god, why’d Jen word it like that? Sam groaned as she looked down, and clutched her face with both hands.

“Seriously Sam,” Triss said, “it’s fine. Jack’s fine. Other Kindred are fine. The stories Jacob’s told me weren’t from Dolareido. Your sire’s got a good thing going in this city.”

“I guess...” The poor Daeva sighed as she leaned forward and looked down, holding onto a nearby metal bar that stuck up from the rooftop for balance.



After a while, she clutched her necklace and frowned. She wasn't thinking about thralls and ghouls anymore, she was thinking about her daughter again.

Triss and Jen shared a look. Tell her? Yeah, tell her.

"I found a new ritual," Triss said. "Should let me finish the vessel."

Sam's eyes shot open. "Really? You told me you had to keep working on the vessel, and it could take months."

"I... had a surprise visit."

"Visit?"

"From, uh, the Crone, I guess."

Samantha gasped. The girl was just too damn cute, gasping and putting a hand to her mouth with wide eyes. Somehow, she embodied cliches. Jack was right, the woman may have been strong as hell, but it'd be a lie to say she wasn't the perfect example of the dumb mom who gets addicted to shitty phone games while watching and reading too many god awful romance stories that were nothing more than thinly veiled non-con fantasies. It was too cute.

"But I thought... I thought that was just, mythology and stuff."

Triss nodded as she stepped back. Jen kept watching the city with the binoculars, sweeping her vision and probably looking for more Invictus and Carthian activity. Tempting, very tempting to grab her tits from behind and see how she liked trying to focus with someone groping her. But, nah, Jen would like it.

"Mythology stuff," Triss said, shrugging once she and Sam were in the center of the roof. "Jacob tell you much?"

"A little, but a lot of it was vague."

"Yeah, understandable. He's vague cause he has to be. Far as we can tell, if there are any mythic entities out there, shit like gods, we don't understand them, and they probably evolve over time. But, there is crazy shit out there, we know that much. All those old tales from thousands of years ago probably got grains of truth in them."

"Oh god. So... gods..."

"Ask your boss. The Prince pokes at that world, right?"

“Kinda, but it’s more... science, more about writing things down and doing experiments and stuff. So, I mean, I know there’s ephemera, ghost ghost spirit stuff. I know there’s Twilight, where ghosts like... like Mary hide, and spirits too. I know there’s that spirit place where all the crazy spirit stuff live, like, uh, spirits of buildings or animals or emotions.”

“Yeap, that’s a pretty good summary of the shit we know. But there’s so, so, sooo much shit we don’t know, you know? The nightmare monsters know more but they don’t tell us shit. And crúac rituals seem to poke at that unknown stuff. Like... ever watch those documentaries where scientists take those tiny submarines down deep in the ocean?”

“Oh yeah! And it gets all super dark and they can only see maybe twenty feet with their lights and... and... it’s so spooky, and dangerous.” Fear visibly ran across Sam’s face. Just like Jack, she wore her emotions on her sleeve. Unlike Jack, she hadn’t made much progress in learning to control that reflex. “Oh god, that’s scary!”

“It is fucking terrifying, no doubt about that. And one time, when Jacob and I were going... diving,” no need to describe the tortures that entailed, “something spoke to me. An old woman, but a lot freakier and, uh... god-like. She helped me track down Elen so Jack and the gang could take down the hunters.”

“Oh, wow. So... so it’d be like, you were drifting along in the endless, crushing darkness, and something... something freaky and huge and deadly found you?” Her eyes went wider and wider with each word. No need to get heavy with the description when Sam would do it on her own. Wild imagination on this woman.

“Yeah. That’s a big part of being a witch, I guess. Probing at the dark side, going deep ocean diving and finding out Cthulhu’s down there, sleeping.”

“Cthulhu?”

“I—what, seriously? You don’t know about Cthulhu?”

“Um, I think Jack’s mentioned the name once or twice.”

Oh god, a perfect opportunity to scare Sam. But, no, Dolareido life was scary enough, especially with the shit Triss and Sam were getting into.

“Anyway, so apparently this Crone creature has noticed me. Paid me a little visit in my dreams.” Actually, yanked her out of her dreams, but again, that’d probably scare Sam more than needed. “She... gave me a tip, on how to make a vessel.”

“Oh wow. That’s... horrifying.”

Triss laughed. “I know, right? Believe you me, I am scared shitless. But I picked this road, and I’m gonna walk it. I’m gonna use this ritual and finish Julias’s new body. His... vessel, according to the Crone. And then we’ll see about part two.”

Samantha squirmed and clutched her necklace. “You think it’ll work?”

“I think the Crone didn’t steer me wrong before. But... but even the Crone thinks we won’t be able to resurrect Julias.” She wanted to be optimistic, but two fucking deities — three if she included Black Blood — already warned her it was basically impossible. Better to not get Samantha’s hopes up. “I’m gonna do the ritual in a few days. Then we’ll see.”

Nodding, Samantha paced in place, clutching that necklace again like her life depended on it. Head pointed down, the poor woman hyperventilated as if it’d help her, and didn’t stop. Triss let her. Sooner or later Samantha would come down from her anxiety, and Triss would be there to catch her.

Sure enough, a minute later, Samantha calmed down, and looked Triss in the eye.

“I... want to see the ritual when you do it, if you don’t mind.”

“You sure? It’s not pretty, Sam. It’s going to suck, a lot.”

“I’m sure. If this is something we might do for Mary, then... then I should see.”

Wincing, Triss nodded, rubbing her arm. “If you’re sure.”

“I’m sure. I want to see.”

Poor woman was gonna be traumatized.