

Red Sickening Lights, Manila



Book One of the Reconquista Saga



A Vampire: The Masquerade™ Fiction
Written by Tobie Abad

Red Sickening Lights, Manila

Written and Art by Tobie Abad



VÄSTGÖTAGATAN 5
SE-118 27 STOCKHOLM
SWEDEN

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All illustrations by Tobie Abad

Software used:

MS Office - Word

Adobe Illustrator

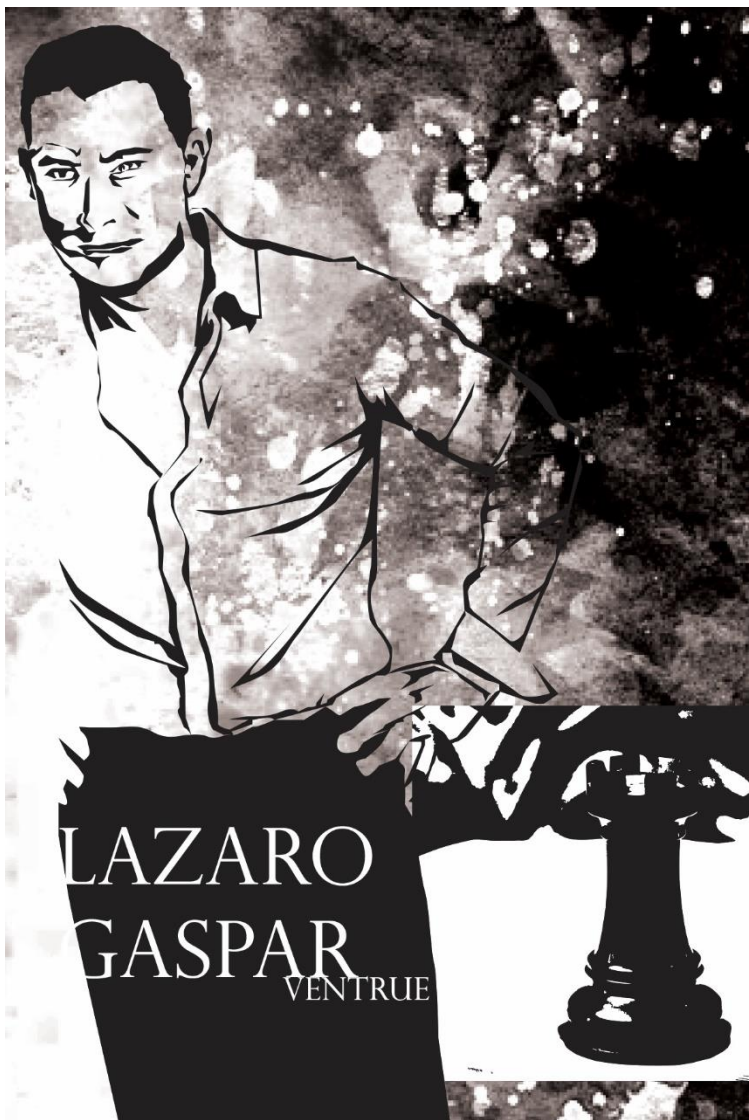
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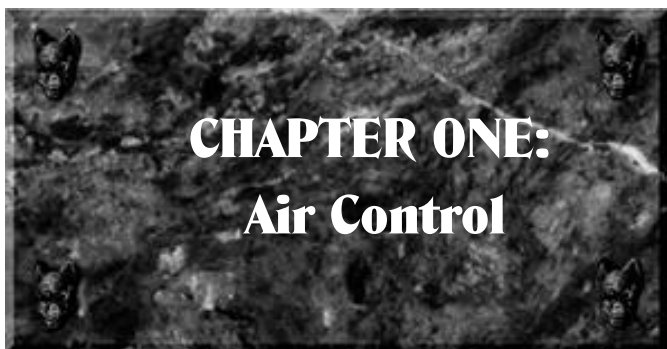
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“No Kindred in their right mind would ever fly commercial. That’s like asking the Inquisition for a sleepover.”

Binks, Malkavian deserter

No one else was willing to go here. No one else believed capturing one of the Red List was worth a trip to Manila. Worse, capturing someone who isn’t even on the list yet. The Philippines has had its share of getting a bad rap, having appeared in so many movies. If it wasn’t to show the country as an overpopulated poverty-stricken hellhole, it was to celebrate it as a fantastic beach setting with cheap booze and skillful prostitutes. With its rain slick streets and claustrophobic city planning, Manila no doubt had character.

It also had claws.

“Josephine Magcalas, Toreador,” Lazaro Gaspar repeated to himself as he fingered the pages of the report he had been given. Inside the slightly crumbled folder were pages of documented testimonies, witnessed reports, and sightings of the abovementioned Toreador. Lazaro could still distinctly remember the expression on the Praetor’s face as she told Lazaro where he will need to travel to follow Josephine’s trail. Today, he sat on a cushioned chair in a plane that was flying across the Pacific. It was a twenty-three hour flight; a bit longer than what Lazaro was comfy with, but given the Praetor’s concern of what Josephine could accomplish, Lazaro felt obligated to obey. He had been in Manila before. Only back then, he was not yet embraced. And unlike his contact, he was no Archon. Not even an Alastor. But he owed her.

Lazaro’s eyes scanned the page he drew out which tried to tally what was known of the Toreador. Josephine was believed to be of quality blood, likely of the ninth generation if not more potent. She was formerly based in Montreal and was one of the less notable vampires there that sought to challenge the Masquerade. She was barely worth anyone’s attention back then, being a young ambitious degenerate who hated the Camarilla for destroying her Sire some time back in the 80s. “Her sire...” Lazaro scanned the pages to try to find anything but to his surprise, most pages that had a portion for that to be mentioned were blank. He pressed his hand against his eyes, squeezing his temples to find some relief.

“Sir, would you like something to drink?”

The voice caught Lazaro off-guard. He looked up and smiled at the flight attendant who had spoken to him. She was short, a bit on the heavy side, which made her fill her uniform quite nicely. Her hair was parted on one side, and she actually looked genuinely hospitable. “Since you’re in First Class, you have an open bar at your beck and call, Sir. Soda, juices, wine, cocktails... just name it, sir.”

Lazaro pulled back a sleeve to check the time. It had only been ten hours since they left Toronto. There was still a stopover at Beijing, but since it was to the same airline, he did not have to leave the plane. Once he made the mistake of booking a connected flight to a different carrier. He found himself missing the connecting flight since he was trapped in a hotel room unable to step out. He promised himself never to be in such an amateurish complication ever again.

“Have you been to Manila before, sir?” the flight attendant asked.

“Some time back,” Lazlo smiled.

“Oh when?” she walked up to another passenger but seeing him asleep, she quietly stepped back towards Lazaro.

“Eigh...” Lazaro stopped himself. He almost slipped and stated it was eighty-nine years ago. He cleared his throat and said instead, “The eighties. Had a short business thing that I had to attend.”

The flight attendant smiled and brushed a wayward

strand of hair back behind her ear, “Eighties! I must admit, sir. You look quite young for someone who was in Manila during those years. I wasn’t even born yet!”

You should see the routine I have to do later in the restroom, Lazaro mused. As one of the Kindred, his body would always revert back to the way it looked on the night of his Embrace. And the look he sported back then was a more stylized cut that clearly wouldn’t fit in on this day and age. Lazaro was never without his razor. Had he known that accepting immortality meant having to trim away one’s moustache daily, he would have had second thoughts. Airport security typically didn’t allow such on a plane, but Lazaro had picked up a few tricks to make sure they ignored it on his trips. The ability to sway the weak-willed was quite a utilitarian power.

“Well, I would like to think youth is overrated,” Lazaro smirked. “Everyone grows old eventually. If not physically, in their interests, in their way of seeing the world.”

“That’s one way to look at things,” the attendant smiled, “So about that drink.”

“I guess we could arrange something,” Lazaro quipped. “Sir, I meant here on the flight!”

Lazaro watched as the flight attendant pulled back, blushing from surprise. He closed his eyes, allowed his vitae to course through his system and channel into the correct areas. His cheeks began to blush a bit as well. His body became a touch warmer. “I apologize,” Lazaro mumbled and reached a hand out

towards her, “I misunderstood the question. It has been a long flight.”

She hesitated, then took his hand. She shook it a few times, as if leading the handshake then disengaged. “Maybe I should get you some coffee instead. I’ll be right back.”

He did not answer. Even as she walked off and headed back to the attendant’s area, Lazaro had his hand outstretched and his eyes closed. He realized he could not shake away how warm her hand felt against his.

Lazaro Gaspar was a vampire of Clan Venture. The Bluebloods all suffered from a strange curse; they could only feed from specific types of victims. Some Venture could only feed on specific nationalities. Others on specific traits such as blondes. Or athletes. Or even gender. Lazaro could only feed on the dying.

He could not brush off the innate feeling that she was perfect for him.

*

Every window in First Class was shut closed, blocking the unforgiving sunlight from shining through. Golden haloes surrounded each windows shade. Lazaro anticipated the crossing over time zones would lead to confusion on when the sun was to be expected. Thankfully, he had enough skill to gently persuade everyone on First Class to keep their windows shut. That included the flight attendants. He felt tired though. While the living had to contend with their body clocks learning to adjust to

their destination's new local time, Kindred suffered a supernatural type of jetlag. The Beast sensed the sun was out and it sought to pull back into the darkness of sleep.

"Here," her voice cut through the silence. Lazaro looked up to see the flight attendant holding a plastic bag that contained a blanket. "This should help you get more comfortable. I can get you a few more pillows."

"That is very nice of you," Lazaro mumbled.

"Not a problem," she smiled, "Just doing my job."

His eyes traced the movement of her body as she tore the bag open and rolled out the dark green blanket. She wrapped it over him, tucking it just under his chin. Her skin touched his for a brief moment and once more, Lazaro felt himself react to the contact. The Beast growled from within him. He felt his fangs push against his tongue.

"Will there be anything else?" she asked.

He leapt at her. The blanket flew into the ceiling as she fell backwards onto the floor. His body pressed against hers as he planted his fangs deep into her throat. Warm blood pumped out from between his fingers as he clamped one hand around her face to keep her silent and the other cradled her back. She spasmed with each gulp until she stopped moving. She was empty. She was dead. He was —

"Sir?"

Lazaro looked up and realized he had slipped into a waking dream for a moment. He shook his head and buried

himself into the blanket. He couldn't say anything without revealing his fangs. But he knew better than to feed on someone while on a commercial flight. He watched as the flight attendant walked away and checked on the next passenger. He saw as she instinctively reached for the window shutter, then paused as if remembering a half-forgotten command. She then collected the empty soda can on the passenger's table and continued on her way. Lazaro smiled inwardly. The Conditioning would hold. For the next twenty-three hours, no one on this part of the plane will be opening their windows during the day.

Just before she reached the attendant's area, she stopped. Lazaro watched as she turned back to check on all the passengers one last time and he found himself smiling as her eyes met his. She smiled too. And before he could think of what to do next, the flimsy curtain that gave the attendants a semblance of privacy was down and she was gone from his sight.

It was going to be a very long flight for Lazaro Gaspar.



“This is your captain speaking. Looking at a smooth flight ahead of us. Feel free to roam around if you need to stretch your legs.”

Captain R.R.R. Sunico

The captain signaled that the flight was down to its final hour. Lazaro opened his eyes to the chime and panicked upon seeing an orange shine cast upon the far wall. His mind raced as he considered his actions and his options to deal with the sunlight that was in the room. Was there someone he failed to properly dominate? Did someone break from the mental conditioning he had set? Did someone from the other flight classes come up here and mess things up?

It took Lazaro a moment to realize the orange cast was not from an open window. But from an open laptop screen. He

realized he could not feel the Beast within him recoiling with the supernatural fear the academic among their Kindred referred to as the Röttschreck, or the Red Fear. He sat up and saw the passengers on the seats in front of his both watching the same movie. It was their screens that cast the reddish glow.

“Here,” he heard her voice again and turned to see the flight attendant offering him a plastic cup of coffee. “You were so asleep earlier that you didn’t wake up when we served dinner.”

“I’m fine,” Lazaro padded himself down, “I don’t... drink coffee.”

“You haven’t had anything,” she countered, “It has been nearly a whole day.”

“Night,” he grinned, “I’m more a night person than a day kind-of-guy. So Manila, we arrive at two a.m. right?”

“Closer to one. Caught a good tail wind so we’re arriving a bit earlier than expected.”

“Oh,” Lazaro frowned, “That might be a problem.”

“There should be taxis at the airport, if you mean someone who will pick you up won’t be there yet. Most Filipinos are used to this though. Their *sundos* show up an hour or two early and wait at the airport.”

“I’m sorry, their what?” Lazaro asked.

“Oh,” the attendant realized, “I slipped into Filipino. Sorry. The person picking you up at the airport?”

“A friend of mine will be picking me up.”

“Then it shouldn’t be a problem. I presume your friend

can check online to see if the flight is arriving sooner,” she replied then added, “Assuming he is still awake.. around midnight?”

Lazaro smiled, “He would be.”

*

Bonifacio Global City

Philippines

The couple stumbled out of the bar, clearly having had a bit more than they should have that night. They were young, probably fresh graduates who recently landed a job, and seemed a bit over-dressed for what seemed to be a simple night out. She wore a red strapless dress – clearly some Oscar de la Renta knockoff – while he wore high-water pants and a shrunk jacket that accentuated his chest. One of his hands held her red bottom heels while the other hand held a cellphone. On its screen, the ride sharing app that guided Binks to the curb where they wanted to be picked up.

Binks rolled his eyes as the two stumbled to the front of the door and exchange another heartfelt intoxicated laugh. She made some comment about how painful her heels were and he reminded her he had the Judas heels hanging on his fingers. He fumbled for the door. She pressed her face against the passenger window and mouthed a hello at the Malkavian driver.

And they say we're the mad ones, Binks thought.

Despite all that, however, Binks knew deep inside that he would have not had it any other way. Once, Binks was based Washington, D.C. and lived under the shadow of his sire,

Emerson Scott. Back then, they lived in a city with a thousand eyes watching every moment. In that city, every street seemed to have a camera staring, every corner seemed to have a security guarding. When the Sabbat took a bit to claim the city in 1999, Emerson Scott revealed the unthinkable to his childe; the two were actually Sabbat *antitribu* and have long been sleeper agents who were poised to help bring about the downfall of the Camarilla.

Binks could not accept this truth. He could not believe that his sire had lied to him all those years and that the fellow Kindred he had come to call his friends were now supposed to be his enemies. He refused to accept the truth and when Emerson engineered a way for them to escape the burning city to wait out the ongoing struggle, Binks struck his sire from behind and watched his paralyzed body sink into the bottom of the Potomac River. He fled Washington, D.C. and moved from city to city across North America, hoping to find a new place to call home. But with every Camarilla city he came upon, he found himself unable to escape the sins of his blood. The Tremere would single him out and sense the guilt in his soul. The Brujah would confirm from their connections that he was not among those who fought in the Capital against the invading sect. His unlife was not far from reaching an early end were it not for the friendship he forged with Lazaro Gaspar.

“The door please,” the man sighed as he struggled to open the car for his companion. The woman was making faces

now, blowing kisses and sticking her tongue out at Binks while her face was pressed against the glass. Binks glanced at the dashboard and saw the door locks were not even engaged. Rolling his eyes for perhaps the third time within the last five minutes, Binks stepped out of the car, walked around to the side the two were at, and opened the door for them.

The man struggled to help his date into the car and she promptly collapsed against the leather upholstery. The man accidentally dropped the heels and as he turned to try to pick them up, he smashed his face against the side of the open door. With a cuss, he promptly fell forward, with his other hand outstretched to stop the fall.

He forgot that hand held his cellphone.

As the drunk man cried out in pain from the pathetic fall, Binks reached down to pick him and the cellphone up. Binks guided the two into the car, keeping calm and showing no expression on his face. Onlookers probably imagined him to be holding back the urge to curse out or complain. They had no idea how far they were from the truth.

Binks was happy. In his mind's eye, he was already imagining the many different ways he could dispose of the two. In one version, he imagined driving them off towards the west, all the way until they reached Roxas Boulevard which was already a part of different city by Manila standards, and there, he would take them past the U.S. Embassy until they reached Del Pan Bridge. Not far from there were the darker streets where he

could then take his time to murder them with the powers he has inherited in his blood obfuscating every sound they make. In another, he would drive them around in circles while he meticulously and quietly allowed his own personal demons to seep out. He would infect them with his dementia and watch them struggle and squirm to contain such supernatural madness. By the end of the hour, he would then deposit the two broken kine at their destination, seemingly normal and simply tired, but in truth now ticking timebombs of violence that has yet to be unleashed.

Binks closed the door behind him and swiped on the cellphone that was anchored just below the air conditioning vent. “Starting the trip, sir” he smiled as the first hint of motion automatically locked the car doors.

In the end, that was why Binks loved the Philippines. It didn’t matter to him that the Philippines was filled with many cities, smaller than the average city of North America. The country as a whole was a contested place, and a majority of the cities were Sabbath controlled. It didn’t matter that this country celebrated having the extremes of the tremendously wealthy and the embarrassingly poor in one cultural melting pot. He loved the fact that the city, very much like himself, was broken deep inside. Was it Polynesian or Asian? Was it Third World or rapidly developing? Was it democratic or theocratic?

Did any of that matter?

It didn’t seem to matter who was in charge, so long as

they didn't fuck up how you chose to live your life. That seemed to be true for the mortal politics. And doubly so with Cainite affairs. The Philippines was, and simply, is.

And for Binks, that was enough.

*

Lazaro Gaspar wrapped a rubber band around the stacks of photos he had in his hand. The topmost photo showed a woman on stage with a microphone in hand. Lazaro angled the stack in his hand, to avoid the glare caused by the overhead light. Josephine Magcalas fled New York with the rest of the Sabbat after the Camarilla gained control of the city. She eventually resurfaced in Manila, which didn't really matter to anyone until an Archon that served under the Justicar Lucinde got a hold of what she was up to.

And that, was thanks to Dor.

DOR
TOREADOR





“In the end, we are children pretending to be men.”

Lucinde, Ventrue Justicar

Mark Roberts used to be his name. But after his embrace, the deep sleeping avant-garde artist took to the name Dor and reinvented himself into an eccentric modern artist. The artist used only various shades of a single color at a time. Dor was said to be manic, pioneering, ground-breaking, sublime, incomprehensible, and odd. The personality lived life as a mystery and refused to be part of any interviews and documentaries. His talent however remained unquestionable. A single Dor painting valued around four million, which seemed unthinkable for a work by an artist who a) was still alive, b) had

not been seen in interviews or most art-related events, and c) was ridiculed by more traditionalist art critics as someone who made pretentious work. But Dor's talent stemmed from a truth very few are aware of. Dor's age was far older than most realized. Mark Roberts an elder among Kindred. Only, one who had the benefits of an efficient digestion, the constant appearance of the blush of health, and a forgettable lineage. Few even realized Dor survived the Renaissance and had spent time learning from artists the modern day would call masters. With the absolute lack of political ambition, Dor was content to escape the more turbulent historical events through torpor and embraced the opportunities the modern day alone could offer. Dor immediately understood the vast potential of the internet in spreading word and creating an identity.

What Dor did not expect, however, was too see another upstart do the same.

Dor stared at the painting he was working on. Blue was this era's chosen color and Dor was mixing paints when his servant, Monday, slipped into the room. On a silver tray which had a sea glass center, a tablet was propped up. On the screen, an image of the fashionable blonde sorority queen turned lawyer, Elle Woods of Legally Blonde, could be seen. Underneath the image was the name of the caller. The initials, "M.R." were visible.

"Ink. Mermaid. Pool. Parrot. Iris," Dor muttered as continued to mix paints on the palette and ignore his retainer.

Monday raised a gloved hand to his face and faked a louder cough to get Dor's attention. Dor continued to talk to himself.

“Cornflower. Indigo. Powder. Turquoise. Woad.”

The tablet went blank. Monday quietly turned around and headed back towards the door. But then the tablet lit up once more and the image of Elle Woods returned into view. Monday stopped, about-faced, and waited once more for his liege to notice him.

“Vivianite. Ploss. Riebeckite. Topaz...”

Monday gave another cough.

“Fine. Answer it,” Dor grumbled. He placed the palette down and reached for the celeste towel that hung nearby. He wiped his hands clean and gave Monday the signal. Monday pressed the virtual button to answer the call and the image of Elle Woods was replaced with a video feed of a woman whose blonde hair brushed against her broad shoulders. The woman's voice breaks the idyllic atmosphere of Dor's studio.

“I take it, I called at a bad time,” the woman barked. Dor stared fascinated at how Rose was capable of expressing so much while moving so little. Only the Praetor's mouth and eyes moved as she spoke. The rest of her remained immobile. Dead.

Dor sighed audibly. “I was twenty-four shades of blue into my new piece when you called, Mary Rowana”

“Dor,” the blonde snarled, “While I know you would be the last one I can expect to respect my position as an Archon, you could at least address me with the name I've chosen to use for the

meantime.” She let the silence hang. Dor’s eyes circled her surroundings, like a child trying to look like he knew nothing of what had happened in the room with the broken cookie jar. “Or would you prefer we talk about the good old days, Michael?”

Dor hissed.

“Rose it is then,” the Praetor smiled. “And mind you, I am no longer just an Alastor. I’ve been promoted to the position of Praetor now. Shall we talk about business?”

Dor stood up and faced the monitor in a more formal manner. He planted both hands against his chest and bowed from the waist. Rose pulled away from the device on her end, making her visage appear smaller on the screen. She reached a hand up to face level, and from out of view, a dark hand passed a torn envelope to her. Rose opened the already torn envelope and fished out the letter within. Dor recognized them to be the one he had sent to the Alastor some months back. He did not anticipate she would rise to a full Praetor status so soon.

“Where do I start,” Rose curled her fore fingers underneath the first page, “This green-“

“Juniper,” Dor corrected her.

“What,” Rose’s eyes widened in disbelief.

“The letter is juniper. The envelope is moss. And the ink I used for the words are pine,” Dor explained. Rose was about to speak but Dor continued, “The different shades of green were part of my earlier artistic phase. They were specifically selected to ensure that if anyone else chanced upon the letter, they would

find a 'green envelope' that contained a 'green sheet of paper' that had nothing in it. You young ones are so intoxicated with the powers of blood you fail to remember there are many things most of the kine."

"Young ones-," Rose began but Dor cut her off.

"Yes, young ones," Dor shrugged, "Until there comes a time that another period of Enlightenment comes upon this wonderful world, you are all young vampires. I doubt any of you will ever realize how much the world can change so completely around you in a single night. You are young, little Alastor. And despite your pride in how many years you've extended your unlife despite the actions of the Sabbat and the conspiracies espoused by the Anarchs, your quiet and simple lives have sheltered you from the need to emotionally mature."

Rose held her tongue. She wanted to correct her and state that she was a Praetor now. She closed her eyes and fought every urge to retort back, even with the Beast hissing at her ear. Dor was many years older than she was, but unlike the Praetor, the Toreador had embraced a life of relative obscurity. She had no dreams of handling any positions of power. She was content to be a whisper of influence. As the years have shown Dor, being the figurehead of a greater organization simply places crosshairs upon your head.

"To return our focus on the letter," Rose sighed, "You mentioned the need to look into... her."

"Josie Magcalas," Dor gleefully named the topic of the

letter.

“Josie Magcalas,” Rose repeated.

“Yes,” Dor nodded, “Your *antitribu* sister.”

Rose scowled. The *antitribu* were the dark reflection of the Toreador. While the degenerates could not help but find themselves drawn to beauty and art, these perverts were drawn to the obscene and the vicious. “Perhaps she is *antitribu*. Why should she matter? She’s living in a country that pretty much epitomizes the Sabbat.”

“True,” Dor admitted, “But that does not mean she isn’t doing anything that can threaten the Masquerade and blow it wide open. She might not be one of the names on the Red List, but if she persists in these online activities, it is only a matter of time before her blog, Susmarjosie, becomes the center of controversy and trouble. This isn’t a new pattern of behavior, Rose. The last time some Toreador fuckwit got too excited with the fame he was receiving, that near breach led into a whole new vampire-inspired movement of tween literature, a host of stupid vampire tabletop roleplaying games, and the resurgence of a whole new fashion trend. Josie’s activities are not far from doing the same.”

“Why aren’t you just bringing this up to your Justicar?” Rose asked.

“After that embarrassing situation with Guil having disavowed the Camarilla, I frankly do not have any faith in a fellow Toreador handling this situation. Not even in her

replacement, Diana Iadanza. You, on the other hand, have recently gained your honorable title after successfully uncovered that Gehenna Cult that insisted the doomsday event actually came to pass – but some *deus ex machina* sort of event quieted away its repercussions. The opportunity to gain more prestige and perhaps even be promoted to a Red Alastor exists for you. Like the venerable Lucinde, who was one before she became a Justicar. You have the chance to benefit from his dire situation.”

“And you think handling this would be something Lucinde would approve of?” Rose asked.

“Of course,” Dor replied, “Among all the Justicars, Lucinde was the only one who handled things hands on before she gained her new title. If anything, she will see in you how she used to handle matters.”

Rose shook her head in frustration. Dor motioned for Monday to bring the tablet closer. With Dor’s face dominating the screen’s real estate, he looked straight into Rose’s eyes and threw his ace in the hole.

“You have to deal with her. Before the Justicars decide to do so. And use you to do it.”

*

Rose Magcalas, Archon Praetor of the Justicar Lucinde, considered Dor’s advice. While she agreed that dealing with her wayward sister was a matter best handled quickly, she still had her reservations at the thought of traveling to a Sabbat country. While most countries had both the Sabbat and Camarilla

contesting each other for territory and power, the Philippines was a different matter altogether. Composed of over seven thousand islands, a number which shifted depending on the tide, the country was pretty much controlled by the Sabbat, since the bloodless revolution of the 1980s, the sect had insinuated itself into the government, the military, and the Church. The Lasombra very quickly tapped key political families and powerful mortal clans and turned them into loyal lackeys and puppets that could not turn down the offers of immortality, wealth, and power. While most of the country united in the streets to show a powerful front, the shadows moved and made deals, claimed promises, and sealed them in blood. None could foresee the long lines of political dynasties that would follow; familiar chains that were extensions of the Keepers and ensured their control over the archipelago.

However, despite the dominance of the Sabbat in the region, the Camarilla soon discovered that the Sabbat had learned from their mistakes back in Montreal. The Sabbat kept a lower profile in the Philippines and maneuvered their political machinations behind the masks of crime, drugs, sex trafficking, and corruption. In a move that would have made the Camarilla smirk in amusement, the Sabbat learned the best way to maintain hold of the Philippines was to uphold the Masquerade.

And so they did.

The Praetor realized Dor was right. Eventually, the other Justicars might get a wind of her sister's activities in Manila

and realize her stupid online channel with its more than eight hundred thousand followers was a bomb waiting to explode. Or worse, go viral.

Rose searched her little black book for suitable contacts and allies to call upon and her hunt lead her to her list of Bellators – capable Kindred who can be called upon by Alastors to assist in matters regarding the Anathema. Rose knew her sister wasn't quite Anathema yet, but she realized this particular Bellator shared an advantage she had over the rest of the population: he too had once lived in Manila. And given the complicated political climate in that country, someone familiar with its unmarked streets, odd one-ways and sudden dead ends, and its cultural quirks would be necessary.

Rose called Lazaro Gaspar and informed him of his mission. She tasked Lazaro to investigate her sister's whereabouts and to gain her confidence. He was to report to her nightly and if Josie was deemed to be too dangerous, Rose was to give Lazaro the go-signal to end her unlife.



CHAPTER FOUR:

A bit about Magda

“The Catholic Church has never really come to terms with women. What I object to is being treated as Madonnas or Mary Magdalenes.”

Shirley Williams

“Binks?” Lazaro asked again, cupping one hand around his mouth close to the mouthpiece in hopes it muffled away the rest of the ambient noise. He glanced at his watch and saw it was fifteen minutes past midnight. Binks should have easily gotten the reports that the flight would be early. Lazaro wasn’t keen in spending a lot in long distance rates and was quite thankful when among those who awaited them outside the gate as they disembarked were promo girls from one of the nation’s biggest telcos. The girls offered free local cellular phone SIM cards in

exchange for a small fee of prepaid minutes. Lazaro could not explain what was taking Binks so long to answer, though.

“Missing your ride?”

Lazaro looked up to see the flight attendant from hours ago. She had her trolley on one side, with her heavy coat laid atop it. She was smiling.

“I would offer you a ride, although I’m not sure where you are going,” she admitted. Lazaro smiled back and dug out the answer from a small pad in his pocket. He read the name out aloud and threw a curious glance at her, wondering if she recognized the name.

“Yes, I’ve been to The Grand Luxurious before. That’s a pricey hotel in Bonifacio. I live in Pasay, so it is actually not too far away. I can drop you off if you want.”

Lazaro nodded and spotted his luggage on the baggage carousel. Grabbing it with the least amount of effort, he walked up to her side and offered his hand for a handshake. “My name is Lazaro. I’m here on business.”

She took his hand, shook it firmly, “Magda. I guess you know where I work.” They both laughed and made their way out.

The drive was horrible. Despite the lateness of the hour, the streets were still teeming with cars. Magda’s car was a sad orange sedan, clearly an inheritance from the looks of it. There were spent car air fresheners on the floor mingling beside old French fries that seemed impossibly impervious to rot. Lazaro

didn't plan on prying, but he spotted a cassette tape lodged between the chair and the side and slid his fingers in between to try and snag it.

"Best wear your seatbelt. They fine you around eight hundred if the cops see you."

"That's not so bad," Lazaro shrugged, his focus still more directed at the gap between the chairs.

"It isn't much for someone based abroad, but here, eight hundred is a lot of money. For some, that's even more than a day's worth of pay," Magda sighed. "What do you do for a living, Laz?"

The tape was slightly raised from the ground, but hearing his new nickname distracted him. The tape slipped from his fingertips and clattered back onto the floor. "Did you just give me a nickname?"

Magda laughed again. She had a very infectious laugh. "I'm sorry. I had to. I mean, I didn't have to, but I felt I needed to. Larazo just sounds too... Most Filipino names, which tend to be Spanish in origin, just sound so formal. At least for me, they do."

The sudden shrill sound of a modem connecting filled the car. Magda glanced away from the road briefly to stare at Lazaro. "Was that a modem connecting?"

Lazaro chuckled. "Indeed, it was." He slid out his cellular and brought it to his ear without checking it. Only one person was tied to that ring tone. "Binks, I got a ride."

Magda focused on the road, not wanting to eavesdrop. There was no denying she found Lazaro interesting. But she felt it was best she minded her own business. It didn't help though that the traffic clogged up the streets. The opposite lane was a painful red road of engaged break lights. She wasn't always a flight attendant. Back when she was in school, Magda had dreams of becoming an artist. She loved using watercolors and was a huge fan of artists such as Mike Dringenberg, Michael Zulli, and Dave McKean. She was also fascinated with art by classical painters such as Hieronymus Bosch and Francisco Goya, but since she couldn't afford oils back then, she found herself emulating more the artwork found in graphic novels and comics splash pages.

She had never really offered to drive a total stranger to his place before. Or struck up conversations with anyone on the plane beyond the usual pleasantries. Magda wasn't certain what made Lazaro different. She could not explain why she could not help but think of him. And want to make sure she was okay.

She didn't think it was love. But it felt quite close to it so much that she was curious to see where it would lead.

Slipping the phone back onto his breast pocket, Lazaro turned to Magda and smiled, "I really appreciate the ride. I've been told it can get quite tricky here in Manila. Cab drivers tend to overcharge foreigners, then claim their meters are broken and stuff. Doesn't this country have Uber?"

"It did," Magda admitted, "But I guess certain government people weren't getting a cut of those earnings, so

they maneuvered things around to force the serve to shut down. It isn't that they're against ride sharing though. One of the congressmen recently announced his own venture of an alternative ride-sharing service."

"Get rid of the competition," Lazaro snickered.

"Exactly."

The road before them branched out into a fork. Most of the cars continued down the right lane, crawling between intermittent stops. Magda turned her car into the left road, breaking away from the traffic and drove them towards the The Grand Luxurious.

It was an impressive sight. The hotel's façade was mostly metal and glass, and a golden light bathed the whole area. Coliseum-inspired pillars flank the front entrance and an abstract sculpture of what looks like melting gold stands at the center of the lobby. Lazaro scanned the building and noticed he could not find any sign or hint of the building's name.

The car turned into the driveway, slowing down just short of the front entrance. The hotel guard, who had a K-9 unit, approached the car to do the standard inspection they do to every visiting vehicle. Lazaro's eyes narrowed at the sight of the dog. It had perked up as it approached the car, perhaps sensing something that broke the monotony. Unlike the Nosferatu or the Gangrel, the Ventrue did not have the animal magnetism that allowed their Beast to resonate with other animals. While the subtlest uses of Presence easily nudged others in the necessary

direction, animals were beyond its empathetic reach.

“Keep driving,” Lazaro quickly commanded.

“But this is the building,” Magda protested. The dog began to growl. Lazaro could not risk any further delays. Locking his gaze with hers, Lazaro brought forth his Clan’s other affinity to the fore and uttered the words as a command which Magda could not resist.

“Drive.”

Magda had no idea what was happening to her. She knew she was driving them away from The Grand Luxurious, despite it being the hotel Lazaro was supposed to be staying in. She drove the car out of the driveway and turned at the first corner. She had no idea where she was going. She only knew she had to drive. “What is happening to me,” she gasped, “Why am I doing this?”

No answer came. Lazaro was focused on the rearview mirror, watching to see if the security guy had noticed their sudden departure. The last thing he needed right now was a chase. The less attention drawn the better. Especially in this country. The drove further down the road and once they were two blocks away, Lazaro released Magda from her hold. She gasped as she felt control return and did the first instinctive thing she thought of doing: stomping on the breaks. The car came to an abrupt stop with the red glow of the brake lights pulsing with the engine’s grumble. To her credit, Magda did not break out into a screaming fit. She took long deep breathes and focused her gaze

on the man beside her. *Was that some kind of hypnosis or some form of mind control*, Magda had no idea. But she was smart enough to stay calm and not try to fight her way out. If it was mind control, she figured he wouldn't have to do much to use it on her again.

"That was you," she said, her hands still both holding the steering wheel. Her heart was pounding in her chest, on the very verge of slipping into full blown panic. A rough calloused hand planted atop hers, his fingers slipped in between hers. She winced, but he kept her hand clamped on the wheel. His eyes had answered her impossible question. Another escaped her lips, "But how?"

Memories of the many years of maintaining the Masquerade raced through the Bellator's mind. He had been called upon by various Alastors through the years to help with different cases. Some required merely destroying evidence, or deleting footage, while others required something more direct. Lazaro had no qualms with silencing people. Although he avoided doing that whenever possible.

Something was different in this situation. There was an electricity in the air between him and the attendant. He could not find it within himself to treat tonight like any other night. It would not take much to gaze into her soul and use their clan's affinity for influencing the mind to force her to forget the last few minutes. But something stopped him from violating her mind and tampering with her memories.

"Please let me go," she begged.

“I’m sorry.”

“Oh god please let me go... What do you want with me? How are you doing this? Please.”

“Calm down,” Lazaro intoned and wished there was a way to hone his ability to help her relax. He heard rumors that the Malkavians have learned ways to amplify or neuter emotions. Now would have been a perfect time to see that Discipline in action. “I’m not...” he realized he couldn’t lie to her either. He could simply tell her she would be okay. He wasn’t sure if she would be. After rapidly choosing words to use, he ended up with, “I need you to calm down. I need you to trust me. I don’t want to hurt you.”

Magda shut her eyes. Lazaro could feel her trembling from the fear that suffocated her. He gently pried her hand off the steering wheel and placed it down on her lap. She did not fight back, but kept her eyes closed the whole time. Tears were sliding down her cheeks. Lazaro pulled his cellular phone out and quickly dialed or Binks. As the call connected, Lazaro relayed to him that they had to divert from the hotel entrance. *The fucking dog complicated things*, he said.

In the blue light of night, everything seemed surreal. The distant sounds of traffic and laughter could still be heard. The streets were slick from a recent rainfall. Barely half a block away, silhouettes of other people could be seen converging by the empty parking lot. Orange embers shone as they took puffs from their cigarettes and blew nicotine clouds into the street. The

occasional amorphous cloud of a vapor dominated the air and left some sweet minty taste in its wake. The two continued to talk and Magda thought she heard the word, “discipline” at some point. She spied her own cellphone on the small niche by the hand brake and weighed the chances of reaching it against simply trying to run out and make for the smokers. But the man had some kind of power that she could not understand. He told her to drive and something possessed her body. Forced her to comply.

He was more than just a man.

“Yes, I see you,” Lazaro muttered and closed the phone. Magda looked up and saw the headlights of a car come up behind theirs. She inhaled sharply, fearing this meant he was going to have to deal with her and ensure her silence. She didn’t have the courage to beg for her life. To her surprise, Lazaro turned to face her and held both her hands in his. He looked almost like a lost little child.

“I’m going to leave now. I want you to please try and act like you’ve forgotten everything that happened. You had a glimpse of something tonight that you shouldn’t have seen. And that was my fault. I lost a bit of control of myself there. I do not want to hurt you. I do not want to do it again to you. So please, forget this all happened.”

She nodded yes. But her mouth frowned as she muttered, “But how?”

“Just pretend. Don’t talk about this to anyone. Don’t

ever mention this detail. Please.”

The car behind them had stopped. The lights flickered twice. Magda nodded again. She kept her mouth shut this time. Lazaro squeezed her hands and let her go. He swung the door open, slipped outside, and after grabbing his luggage, headed for the parked car behind theirs. She could hear them talking, though their voices were slightly muffled. She caught Lazaro stating she has been made to forget everything. The other mumbles something called the Masquerade. They laughed. Soon enough, the car behind her drove away, and as it turned a corner and was beyond her sight, Magda felt her emotions burst out. She screamed. She clawed at her own hair. She punched the steering wheel, blaring the horn without thinking. The smokers stared at her from across the block, but none dared approach.

Thankful to be alive, but terrified on what had just transpired, Magdalena Faraon shifted her car back into gear and drove home. She knew her life would never be the same ever again.



“It is a pity, that most of the pieces had to be swept from the board.”

Ambrosio Luis Monçada

The drove down the circumferential road in the dark blue sedan like a dark shark searching for prey. The road was the Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, more commonly referred to by its acronym EDSA. The road is the main thoroughfare in Metro Manila, serving as a connecting vein between multiple cities including Quezon City, Taguig, Makati, Parañaque, Pasay, and more. The streets were still busy despite the lateness of the hour. There were, however, barely any buses. And most of the street lights were dead.

“Keep your head low,” Binks reminded Lazaro, “In as much as EDSA is deemed neutral ground between the cities, best we do not agitate the Archbishops.”

The Ventrue hated being in this position. With his chair reclined fully, Lazaro could not see where they were going, save for the occasional glare of lights that cross over the car. He knew Binks however from years back and trusted the guy. The Malkavian had his quirks but was one of the few Lazaro actually trusted.

Binks explained that they were earlier in Taguig City, a territory contested between Madrigal Rufino of Clan Ventrue and Laurel Aguinaldo of the Lasombra. Rufino was still of the Camarilla and despite the Philippines being declared Sabbat territory, Rufino and a small group of Camarilla elders still believed the territory can be won over. It was a losing battle, but one which the Princes were determined to keep fighting for. The city of Pasay, which borders Makati, are governed by the Nosferatu *Antitribu* Archbishop Basilio. The Archbishop has an incredible spy network composed of blood bound cockroaches and rats. Visitors of his city have learned to watch what they say the moment either pests are seen in the vicinity. Further north, the Archbishop of Quezon pushes to be recognized as the Cardinal of Metro Manila. Ysmael Prieto, a Tzimisce, has recently gained control of other cities, including the regions of Mandaluyong, Marikina, and Pasig. The Archbishops of those cities now pretty much act as mere bishops who advise and

support the beautiful Fiend. While there were many other Princes and Archbishops, Binks assured Lazaro that they were irrelevant so long as Lazaro minded where he went.

“I’m surprised to know the Camarilla still has a city here.”

“There used to be more. Taguig was originally part of Makati, and both used to be under the Ventrue. As the Lasombra slowly slipped his shadowy fingers into the city’s foundations, Rufino was forced to backpedal and figuratively barricade himself in what they now called the Bonifacio Global City. He has a lot of allies, admittedly, even from the other side,” Binks grinned, “No one likes Laurel Aguinaldo.”

“What did he do?”

“It was what he didn’t do. Aguinaldo was aware of the Fiend of Quezon’s plans of expansion. Rather than warn the other Archbishops, Aguinaldo actually distracted them and gave Prieto the opening she needed to destabilize their cities,” Binks snickered, “It was a very Camarilla move on his part, if you think about it.”

“So, is that where we are headed?”

“Nope. We just left Makati and Taguig a few minutes ago. We are headed down the South Super Highway, making our way to the City of Parañaque,” Binks replied. Lazaro risked a peek outside the car and saw they were driving down a three-lane road. A second road was above them, which for a moment made him think they were driving down a tunnel. There was another

car on the road. It was red, and it stayed on the middle lane. Lazaro peered against the window and thought he could see a woman driving the car. She didn't look particularly interested in them.

"Calm down," Binks signaled that they were about to take the coming exit, "The highway counts as neutral ground too. If there's anything you need to worry about, it is what happens once we get to Parañaque. Our Prince doesn't exactly welcome guests." The car in the middle lane didn't slow down and blared its horn even as Binks tried to shift lanes. Forced to withdraw, the woman accelerated just enough to match their car, and opened her window to give them the finger. Lazaro watched as Binks then opened the passenger window, gave the woman a stare and let her have it. Suddenly, her eyes widened in anger. She howled at them and screamed, spittle flying in all directions. Binks then cut the power and decelerated, allowing the woman's car to shoot past them. She suddenly lost all emotion and stared at the road ahead of her, uncertain why she just felt so numb. Binks maneuvered the car to cross to the right lane from behind the woman's, and then accelerated to match her speed. She glanced at them, emotionless and confused. Binks simply grinned and took the exit.

"Having fun on her expense," Lazaro asked, "Isn't that a bit unwise?"

"This is the Philippines," Binks snickered, "You'd be surprised what one can get away with in this country. The people

are a superstitious lot, believing in things such as shape-changing vampiric women, cigar-smoking giants that live in trees, and half-man half-horse creatures that use their powers to make you get lost at night. She would probably think she had some kind of emotional moment rather than a supernatural encounter.”

“Bullshit,” Lazaro laughed, “That’s insane. I guess I’ve been away too long.”

“But it is true,” he slowed the car down as they approached the toll gate. The metal barrier was still low. Lazaro noticed how the automated toll collection option was the alternative option here rather than the norm. The other gates had sleepy personnel waiting for any cars that might drive up to pay the toll. Binks had the electronic payment system in place, which meant using the automated gate. There was litter on the ground. Disposed plastic cups and dead cigarettes. And as they drove through the gate, Lazaro spied a family of three, one mother and three children, huddled behind a dumpster and sharing a meal of instant ramen noodles.

Past the gate, the surroundings quickly changed. From lots of concrete and walls and street lights, the surroundings took a residential feel. Trees were more frequent now, as were small pockets of commercial options and pedestrian walkways. Lazaro, however, spotted the familiar graffiti and street markings used by the Anarchs and many of the Sabbat. It was an amusing display of one-upmanship with each graffiti marking attempting to displace the other. They drove past what looked like a massive mall

structure and turned left into a street called President's Avenue. The road did not look anything grand or impressive though, despite its name. And the lanes squeezed down into two.

“Religion here holds a huge influence on the populace. Catholics, Christians, Muslims, and more in a melting pot of multiple cultures and economic levels. Where else in the world will you find a third world country where food drives and medical missions are done to battle poverty one moment, and concert tickets costing over \$1,200 get sold out the next.” Binks said. As the car continued down the street, Lazaro could see glimpses of other homes coming into view. The houses had a modern tropical look to them, with teak wood roof tops and elegant balconies. But just as quickly, while still on the same road, the surroundings would shift to dark and unlit areas where vulcanization stations and other *casas* stood. Like flies to freshly laid shit, sports cars and luxury cars clogged up the main thoroughfare, hoping to get their tune ups and detailing done.

Lazaro spotted a good number of pale faced figures standing around the vehicles, trading stories and drinking beer while passing around a joint. Had this been in the other side of the world, he could have simply observed their mouths to catch which ones did not have the telltale condensation of a warm body breathing. Not all vampires were trained in mimicking their now missing human tells. But being in Southeast Asia, such opportunities did not exist. He knew better than to rely on skin tone either. The Philippines had a rich history of colonization

under the Spain, America, and Japan. Having a mixed heritage was quite common here. Worse, there was a colonial mentality of seeing whiter and smoother skin as better. Skin whiteners are favored by the majority and abuse of such was common in the populace. If it wasn't either of those two, there was the third factor: computer usage. Many were active computer users, whether it was due to interest in esports, computer gaming, business process outsourcing, or social media, and having lifestyles that had one away from the sun in long stretches was more common than most expect.

“Guess the Philippines changes the game somewhat,” Lazaro admitted.

“Heh,” Binks snickered, “The game?”

“That’s what Rose calls identifying other kindred.”

“Ah, that word,” Binks made a face, “Not quite the word we use here. If anything, it too loudly marks one as an outsider. Worse, as Camarilla.”

“No. Don’t tell me-“

Binks grinned.

“*Aswang*?” Lazaro asked, remembering the popular term for supernatural creatures in Filipino folklore. The aswang, according to most popular media sources, was a monstrous thing which typically appeared in a variety of ways. Some described them as vampire-like blood suckers. Others described them more as shape-changers who favored dog like forms. Others describe them more like curse-throwing witches or vile predators of

pregnant women who could detach their upper halves at will. The term had reached some level of notoriety, having been mentioned in western horror television series and movies.

“*Tang’ina*, no way,” Binks laughed aloud.

“What then?”

“*Maginoos*,” Binks stated. It was a precolonial term which referred to the top of Tagalog society. In the current day, the term *Ginoo* and *Ginang* would still be used as formalities of respect among the rural population of certain regions.

“Amazing. I’m surprised the Camarilla would choose to use-”

“Oh, they didn’t popularize that term. The Sabbath did,” Binks clarified, “In fact, the Camarilla are called *Oripun* in this country.”

“Slaves,” Lazaro remarked, translating the Visayan word to its closest English equivalent. For locals, the closer equivalent was *Alipin*, a Tagalog term. “The Kindred are known as slaves here?”

“Well, as vampires who are slaving away to fulfill the obligations owed by their Sires.” Lazaro admitted quietly that there was some truth to that statement. The Camarilla always had a huge thing for the rules of prestation. Favors and debt was the coinage between most Kindred. Promises were pointless without the demands of an unpaid favor to be collected. “And the Sabbath? What do they call their people here?”

“Maharlika,” Binks replied. *Of course, they would call*

themselves that, Lazaro thought. The word was a term for the warrior class that served the chieftains of pre-colonial Philippines. The term in the modern day had come to mean “royal nobility” despite it originally translating in Spanish as *Hidalgos* or free men. Clearly, its use today to reference the Sabbat drew inspiration from the term reflecting its origins.

“And of independents,” Lazaro asked.

“There are no independents in the Philippines,” Binks replied in a matter-of-factly manner. “At least no one stays independent for long.”

The car drove towards a gated community. Spotlights were trained at the car as it approached. Lazaro turned to face Binks, worried if he should have stayed out of sight. The Malkavian, however, simply smiled, shut the headlights of the car, and stopped it just a foot from the lowered barrier. Two security guards approached the car, one on each side, and rapped at their windows. Binks gave Lazaro a nod and rolled down his window. Lazaro followed suit.

“*Saan po ang punta, ninyo?*” the guard asked.

“*Kina Ginang Shena*,” Binks replied. The two guards recognized the name and quickly withdrew from the car to raise the barrier. Lazaro caught the title, however, and stared at Binks.

“*Alam ninyo na po ang papunta doon?*” the guard called out, and Lazaro tried to look nonchalant. Binks gave a thumb’s up and drove the car away from the gate.

As the car continued its journey deeper into the private

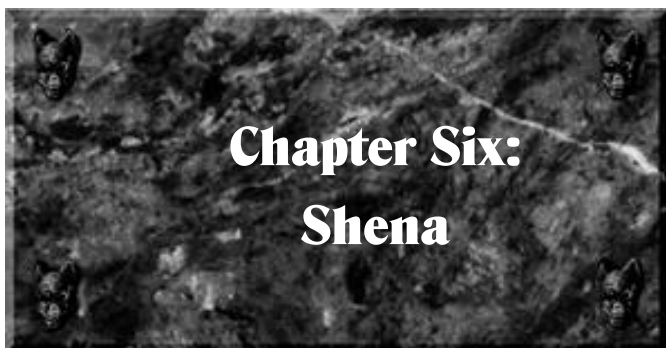
community, which now showed mostly trees and two-storey residences flanking the roads. LED powered streetlights illuminated the way by painting everything in an almost bluish light. “*Ginang*,” Lazaro muttered.

“Like I said,” Binks shrugged, “Ain’t that many oripun here.”

“I thought you said she was your Prince?” Lazaro asked.

“Exactly,” was only Binks’ reply.





“All television is children’s television.”

Richard P. Adler

In 1983, an open call was released as a children’s show searched for a woman to take one of its main roles. Within the first few weeks of the program, the show began to gain a huge following as children and adults found themselves drawn to the songs and stories of a gravelly voiced monkey, a gentle capped turtle, and the host of human characters who guided them through life and shared its lessons.

The show, called Batibot, was designed with segments that could be remixed with other episodes to make fresh episodes each week which allowed it to get cancelled and come back over and over until 2011 which marked the last time the show was

broadcast. By then, however, the characters in the show gained a somewhat timeless popularity, and one of the most popular was a teacher named *Ate* Shena. Her role in the show was that of an older female mentor for the puppet characters to relate with. In Filipino, the word *Ate* (which was pronounced as “at”+“eh”) meant older sister.

She is not the person standing before Lazaro and Binks. But no one has chosen to tell her that. Perhaps because the last few to attempt to do so were never seen again.

“We thank you for your kindness, *Ate* Shena, Archbishop of Parañaque,” Lazaro said, hoping he was choosing his words well. The woman standing in front of them was taller than most women, but still shorter than Lazaro. Her black hair was shoulder length, combed back and clipped in place. Her face was devoid of make-up, with her pale lips cracked and dry. Her eyebrows had been shaved off. She wore a simple printed tee and blue jeans. She wore no jewelry of any sort. In her hands, she held a black velvet sack that was held closed with twine. She reached into the back with one hand and retrieved from it the head of a stuffed toy. It was a monkey’s head, with the neck portion trailing clouds of dirty stuffing and thread. She raised the head to her eye level and held it to her ear as if to listen to it talk. A frown marked her face.

“Camarilla,” Shena groaned. Instantly, the room was in motion as three armed men drew their guns and trained it at the two. Binks raised his hands in surrender without saying a word.

Lazaro kept calling out to Shena, telling her to calm down and that he's not here to cause trouble. With Shena showing no response to his words, the men started yelling at them to drop to their knees and place their hands behind their heads.

Binks smiled, and with a smooth motion produced a knife from beneath the folds of his jacket. He held the knife against Lazaro's throat, forcing the Ventrue to immediately go silent. The armed men kept their guns trained at the two but stopped yelling. Shena raised one hand, motioning her men to step back. They complied.

"Why have you brought this man to me?" Shena asked.

"I was-" Lazaro began, but Shena would not have him speak. With a glance, she unleashed the powers of blood and peeked into Lazaro's soul. While most Malkavians, Toreador, and Tremere might have the ability to peer into the souls of others, Shena had learned to combine this power with the infectious madness that the Malkavian clan is infamous for.

Instantly, the world paused around Shena. Shena tapped into Lazaro's emotions and latched onto the instances he had felt fear. Her Dementation then lead her mind deeper into his, jumping from that fearful memory to every recent fearful memory she could find. She saw Lazaro's panicked moment in the plane. Then his worried instance at the airport as he showed the falsified passport at the gate. Then further back, at the meeting with Rose where she told him of his mission.

Lazaro relived the memory, aware of her intrusion into

his psyche. He was mentally back in that room, sitting across from the Alastor, Rose. The folders were on the table, still sealed with tape. The two Ventrue discussed the problem of the woman named Josephine and the need for Lazaro to travel to the Philippines. But unlike in how the memory truly unfolded, in this version, Shena was also in the room. She was a non-existent apparition that solely existed in Lazaro's recollection of the time. Shena walked to the table between Lazaro and Rose and knelt down beside the table, until only her chest upwards remained visible.

“While I understand you have not been in the Philippines for many years, our past life there will prove extremely useful in your search for the Toreador Magcalas.”

Lazaro quietly nodded. He had no dreams of returning to the Philippines, but he knew better than to question the Alastor. To his surprise, a high pitch voice did that for him. Lazaro turned to the offender and found a bright yellow bird-like puppet peering out from behind the table, same as where Shena knelt.

“Why not just send multiple Archons?” the puppet asked with its squeaky voice. Lazaro stared at Shena, who smiled back as if she was innocent to what was happening. Rose did not answer the puppet's question. She instead continued the dialogue Lazaro remembered her bringing up, “You are to fly out of Toronto with this ticket. Do not bring anything that is not vital for your survival. You shall be given adequate resources to buy

new clothes and set up a temporary haven. But keep in mind, you are expected to be discreet. Do not draw attention to yourself.”

“A spy!” a second voice announced the rise of a second puppet. This one looked like the puppet version of a monkey. It had huge plate eyes that seemed to swallow you in. “You are a Camarilla spy!”

“I’m not!” Lazaro gasped. He tried to stand up but realized he couldn’t even budge off the chair. He reached for the monkey puppet, but it slid to the bird puppet’s side. Shena looked at him, then at the puppets, and back again, her mouth agape in shock.

“If the Sabbat find you, they will destroy you. We will not try to pull you out. You understand this. You are going alone,” Rose reminded him. “You owe me.”

Lazaro nodded. The puppets laughed. And laughed. And laughed. Lazaro screamed.

A foot slammed into Lazaro’s face, breaking his nose. Blackened blood gushed out from his nostrils, painting his face dark. Binks stepped in front of Lazaro, holding his knife with two fingers, showing he wasn’t hoping to fight. “Let me explain, *Ate* Shena.” Lazaro felt confused if he should be thankful that Binks was trying to protect him or pissed off that he had literally been brought to a Sabbat Archbishop.

She raised her leg to stomp on Lazaro a second time, but Binks dropped his knife and knelt in front of the Archbishop. He counted on loyalty that he had demonstrated to her in the past.

With his outstretched hands, he tried to protect Lazaro as he yelled, “Remember your dreams! The dancer. The child. The scar. He was sent here to deal with the Toreador. Remember her? The one you also hate!”

“He is a spy!” she cried again.

“No,” Binks hissed. He knew Shena wouldn’t trust Lazaro. He also knew, however, hiding him from the Archbishop was near impossible. Her puppets, though they were just inanimate creations made from felt cloth and other materials, somehow were her most skilled advisors. Maybe she merely projected her usage of Auspex through them. Or maybe they really had a personality of their own. Binks had heard of rumors that the puppets were alive. That they were possessed by demons that had escaped the burning Library of Alexandria. The stories were probably rubbish, but he knew the puppets would have warned Shena of Lazaro within the day if not by the next of Lazaro’s presence in the area.

Still, Binks did owe Lazaro. The two were friends in many ways and Lazaro has – in more than one occasion – found ways to pull Binks out of the firing line. Lazaro has always found a way to help Binks regardless of where he was in the world. Binks had to at least stick his neck out for his buddy. “I promise you, Archbishop, he isn’t a spy.”

“Then what is he?” Shena growled.

“An opportunity,” Binks explained. “Josie. Camarilla. The dreams. The dancer. Yes?”

Shena paused. Lazaro had recouped enough strength to get back on his feet. His vitae was already consuming itself to repair the shattered bone and crumpled flesh. He glanced at Binks, holding back his Beast that growled in anger that his friend had literally led him to the lion's den. But somehow, Lazaro held it at bay, reminding it there was logic in his madness. Shena had stopped being violent. Thankfully, she had not asked for her men to gun Lazaro down into torpor. Lazaro had hoped this meant Binks anticipated the best way to resolve this first meeting. He did not want to think Binks merely got lucky. Lazaro wiped the blood on his face with his sleeve. He stayed low, however, thinking it might be best to assume a position that implied submission. Every Ventrue worth their social skills knew how to capitalize on body language to support their words. Or in this case, the lack thereof.

Binks had noticed that Shena has not moved. He realized she was thinking, which was a good sign. Binks nodded and repeated the last word he spoke, "Camarilla."

Shena started to smile.

"Yes," Binks smiled as well. He motioned Lazaro to stay silent. The Ventrue stayed silent.

"Josie," Binks continued.

Shena laughed. Lazaro was not sure what he had gotten into. But he did sense one thing to be true. Shena was no longer focused on him.

"Not a spy," Binks said.

“No, not a spy at all.” Shena laughed and she reached for the bag once more. She drew out her puppets and hugged them all in her arms. “*Mga kaibigan...*”

“My siblings,” Binks quietly whispered to Lazaro, forgetting the Ventrue understood Filipino.

“Vincente Baines was so kind to us today,” Shena smiled, “Do you know what he brought us?” Lazaro and Binks stared as all the puppets, despite being merely carried in Shena’s arms and not worn as puppets, all started cheering as puppets would, with wide open mouths and bobbing heads. Shena answered her own question, “He brought us an Opportunity.”

Lazaro growled at Binks, “I thought you said she was your Prince?”

Binks shrugged.



“Film spectators are quiet vampires.”

Jim Morrison

The ring light shone bright in the darkened room and its tiny circular glow reflected inside Josie’s eyes. She adjusted the web camera to capture her image at the angle which she knew showed off her best side. The room was small, barely enough to fit five people, and yet all seven of the young men did not seem to mind. Perhaps it helps that they were naked and on the bed. And high. Small bottles of isopropyl nitrites were scattered between the sheets. Pills were on the side table. Josie slipped out of the throng of groaning and grinding bodies and kept her gaze on the camera, staring straight back at the viewers.

The corner showed a growing tally of the number of online viewers who were watching her livestreamed show. Her blog, Susmarjosie, had an impressive following and tonight those numbers were a testament to the fact her fame was growing.

“Adam and Eve. Cadillacs. Clarity. XTC,” Josie grinned and stuck her tongue out. She pushed a tiny pill down its center, then swallowed it. Perhaps it was just the pixilation from the digital cameras struggling against the low light, but her skin looked like it rippled for a moment. It looked like it shifted in hue.

“California Sunrise. Lover’s speed. Elephants. Beans,” she laughed and ran her hands down her face, sliding across her neck, then crossing over her breasts. Her fingernails raked against her skin, leaving long painful red lines in their wake.

“Snowballs. Scooby Snacks. Hug Drug. E,” she continued, never breaking eye contact. The men on the bed had begun to sit up, rising to walk up to her and press their faces against her pale skin. Hands caressed her in all directions. Fingers groped her hair. Mouths opened.

“Ecstasy has got nothing compared to me,” Josie laughed. The men began suckling on her body, their mouths cupped over the red lines she had left on her skin. Their moans rose louder and louder, and the tally of viewers rose as if it were tracking their volume. At the bottom of the screen, text trailed, inviting any interested souls to visit a specific website. One can only wonder how many were visiting that page that very

moment.

Josie let the men drink her blood. She let them lap up the dark rivulets and watched with glee as their bodies slowly began to twist with the flowing ichor. Their bodies began to engorge with newfound strength. Veins erupted against straining muscles. Two of the men pulled away from Josie. They stared at their slick sweaty bodies and felt an unparalleled rush. One began flexing his muscles and staring at himself, amazed at how every muscle seemed to pop and every cut accentuated his form. The other began to touch himself, slapping his aroused member against his hands. He had tried various drugs in the past but none of them ever made him feel as potent and complete as Josie's blood had.

The red lights suddenly cut away, leaving nothing but pixelated darkness in the broadcast. A single spotlight flicked on, shining down from above. The men were all at the background wrapped in each other's arms, exchanging kisses and writing like a wall of flesh. Josie came back into view, dressed in strips of blackened leather. A stiff white wig adorned her head, with the locks braided into long strands that dangled all the way to the back of her buttocks. Small Swarovski diamonds dotted her face and body, creating an outline of stars against her form. Hues of colors blended around her eyes. Geometric lines marked her cheeks, heightening her cheekbones and jawline. She bared her fangs, pushing her tongue against each sharp ivory tooth, and began to lip-sync to the song playing in the background.

As she performed, Cardi B's "Bodak Yellow," Josie used the men as props as she gyrated in front of the camera. She hoisted herself atop one of the men and the others gathered around her, crouched low to offer their backs. Using her six-inch heels, Josie began to stomp to the beat, breaking skin and drawing blood. But none of them recoiled. Mercifully, the camera angle did not allow them to see how their wounds were already closing the moment Josie's heels pulled away from the stabbed area. They were Ghouls now. And with her vitae coursing through them, such wounds were just temporary distractions.

*

"So, you see the problem we need to deal with," Madrigal Rufino shut the video off before the sexual display became any more graphic. With the low lighting and the lack of any musical accompaniment, the visuals could still pass as just being some kind of art film. Gory and tasteless, but not that different from many of the movies shown by the local studios. The Ventrue Prince of Taguig was so disgusted by the display that he actually walked to the side room and cleared his throat at the sink. The black ichor he spat out splattered against the porcelain and fought against the hot water that Madrigal used to wash it away. "This country is held by The Sword of Caine, but it doesn't mean we can ignore the risk this poses to the Masquerade."

The Prince's guest didn't seem that fazed. She pursed her lips as she considered what to say. She glanced at the others in

the room, the small group of uneasy socialites. They were most likely the city's Primogen Council which wasn't saying much. She mentally took note of each of them and reminded herself that these are the kindred whom have survived the bloody streets of the Philippines. These were the ones who survived not only the Sabbat next door, but the Kuei-jin that used to rule over the archipelago.

Padre Domingo was the Malkavian Primogen. Dressed in a plain short sleeved polo-shirt, black slacks, leather shoes, and a clerical collar, the middle-aged man had a wart-rich complexion. His head was bald and his eyes were pale. He mostly kept to himself and barely spoke as if his mind was far away. The guest even suspected he was literally away, exploring some other place in his Astral form.

Swarthy and tattooed, the Brujah Primogen Guillermo was picking his nose for the last two minutes. At one point, he had stopped to check if he had dug out whatever was bothering him but it seemed to have not been what he had hoped to find for he wiped it against his torn jeans and began picking it again. The guest noticed his body had three specific tattoos that she did not expect to see on a Primogen. One was a marking that was associated with the Blood Brothers – a Sabbat Bloodline that the Tzimisce created to use as shock troops and flunkies. The second was a gang marking for the Commando Sputniks, an influential mortal organization that was said to be operating within the New Bilibib Prison itself. The third was of the crucified Christ,

complete with Joseph and Mary flanking him. The guest looked away to study the next Primogen.

Constantly rubbing his hands with a silken handkerchief was the bone-thin Tremere Primogen, Benedict Graham. Imposing in his long-sleeved shirt and slacks, the vampire looked malnourished as the dark tones of his clothing emphasized his pale skin. It was pale enough that one could see the spider-web blue veins under them. Graham was Caucasian and stood out against the other Primogen whose mixed heritages were more reminiscent of the general populace. He had a messy growth of beard on his chin, and terrible vision. A fragile pair of glasses balanced on his nose. The Usurper clearly did not appreciate touching the table or any of the other things on it. Whenever an opportunity arose, he would whip out the handkerchief once more and rub it against and between his fingers. Almost as if he was disgusted of having any physical contact with them.

Finally, there was the Nosferatu Primogen Crispin. He appeared as a young boy of barely twelve years of age. The guest found it hard to focus on him, despite her many years of learning the various vampiric Disciplines. She then realized there was a cockroach precariously balanced on his knee. Years of being an Alastor and a Ventrue have trained her in the art of subterfuge. She buried any reaction under a face of calm composure. She cupped her gloved hands together, resting them on her lap, as she returned her attentions back to the Prince.

“And so, we feel honored to have your presence here with us,

Justicar. We were uncertain if you would actually pay us any attention given the fact that most of the Philippines has been taken over by the Sabbath. But it is nice to know you've given us this much attention. We truly appreciate it." The Prince motioned to the ghouls nearby to serve the refreshments. The two beautiful women walked up to the gathered kindred and laid down the silver trays they carried. Each tray had tall glasses, frosted bottles of beer, a bucket of ice cubes, and a thin knife. "These are Mariella and Monica, both from the Pellago family. They have petitioned for the Embrace and are here to show why they believe they deserve it," the Prince Rufino looked amused. The women carefully opened each frosted bottle and poured a fifth into each tall glass. Mariella, the taller of the two, then picked up the knife and waited. Monica picked one of the ice cubes and casually ran it against her wrist. The Justicar glanced back at the Prince and saw him smiling eagerly as Monica's rich blood ran and was caught in the tall glasses, filling them with another fifth each. Mariella then stirred each glass carefully with her knife, making sure to minimize the build-up of foam in each one. "This is a local delicacy," Rufino boasted, "The best beer in the world, with some of the finest blood in the country. An offering fitting not only a Justicar, but a Ventrue as well. I call it, Sangre Miguel."

The Primogens cheered. Drinking was clearly a pastime they all shared. As Mariella served the Justicar her glass, all the Kindred watched intently, eager to see how she would find the

vintage. None of them expected her to stare intently into the glass and lose herself in the moment.

For Lucinde, the Ventrue Justicar, she was once more in the bed chamber of Michaelis, her former lover. She watched as he locked the door behind her and lead her deeper into the room. She watched as he raised the goblet to his lips and drank a deep heavy draught. She could smell the wine on his breath. She could taste the blood in the air. It was alluring. It was intoxicating. It was wrong.

Lucinde felt the danger in the air. Gifted with the powers of Auspex, she could sense a threat that she could not actually see. Having just risen from torpor, she was still struggling to grasp the world that has changed around her. She had served nearly every Justicar in the past, but even to one whose intuition was razor sharp, time would be needed for someone whose entire world had changed in what seemed like an eyeblink. Michaelis walked up to her and kissed her. She felt the familiar touch of his lips. And for that moment, it was enough. All she needed so desperately was the anchor of familiarity to regain her sense of being.

It was a lie she would embrace and soon learn to regret. In the many years she stayed under Michaelis' shadow, serving as both Archon and lover, she soon began to uncover the truth that she ignored. But it would take the interference of the Tremere to help her finally accept the truth. The Usurpers had witnessed far too many tell-tale signs that Michaelis was not who he claimed to

be. It would be at the Conclave in Munich when Lucinde would finally find the determination to declare the truth: Michaelis had been replaced by another vampire. The call for a worldwide Blood Hunt was then declared for the Setite Kemintiri.

“Justicar?” Rufino asked aloud. Lucinde, however, gave no reply. The Prince glanced at his council, wondering what to do next. None of them saw the moment Lucinde break from the fugue. As, Guillermo snorted in amusement, the Brujah reached for the glass in her hands. But just before he could touch it, he found himself staring down into the eyes of a vicious predator. Lucinde’s immaculate eyes stared coldly back at him. The Brujah pulled his hands back and raised them in mock surrender. “I believe now is not a good time for refreshments,” Lucinde said.

“Forgive us, dear Justicar,” Graham lowered his head in a bow, “The Brujah clearly does not know his place.”

“*Punyeta*,” Guillermo hissed, “*Di naman mabiro...*”

“Now is not a good time for jokes,” Graham reminded him. The Brujah growled in response. The Prince, eager to diffuse the situation, gave the Brujah the look. The Brujah sighed, downed his drink in one gulp, and looked away. “You must understand, dear Justicar, for most of us here the long night has mostly been a fight for survival. We made the deal with the devil in the past to free the country from the Kuei-jin. But we underestimated the devil and have paid for it in blood.

“The Sabbat and the Camarilla control a number of cities each, but for a larger majority of the country, the Kuei-jin retain

control. We continue to contest the Sabbat-" Rufino tried to explain but a young laugh interrupted his words. They turned to the source and found it to be the Nosferatu Primogen, Crispin.

With roaches crawling all over his body, the boy reminded them of the country's secret history. "The Philippines was and has always been part of the lands of the Kuei-jin. Even during the era when the archipelago was still known as Tawalisi, the Kuei-jin called these lands home. They feasted on the dragon lines and ruled through fear and silence. We only claim the country stands in our hands because we have gained control of the more urbanized ones."

"The point though," Rufino slammed a hand down against the table to stress his point, "This woman threatens the Masquerade."

"Does she?" Lucinde raised an eyebrow as she questioned his claim, "How?"

The Prince was flustered by the Justicar's response. It was admittedly the last thing he expected to hear from her. Her devotion to the capture of Anathema was legendary. Her loyalties to the Camarilla were never questioned.

"She is exposing Kindred existence to the internet," Rufino insisted. "Her unacceptable sexual escapades are broadcasting her growing army of thralls. She is literally feeding them her blood and allowing others to see her do it."

"She is showing them the secrets that only the Kindred know," Graham gasps, clearly distraught by it all. He pressed his

handkerchief against his face a few times, as if dabbing off sweat despite none being present. “She is showing her naked body.” Rufino agreed, and the two became a white noise of complaints that babbled on about the need to police the internet and protect the innocent. Padre Domingo stayed silent but nodded every now and then to their words. Guillermo tried to keep himself from laughing out loud.

“I loathe to say this, but it seems only the Brujah Primogen gets it,” Lucinde said. She placed her smart phone on the table and played a few video streams from a popular online streaming site. The Council watched videos of a man who was talking openly about the government being infiltrated by serpent aliens pretending to be human, of a couple proudly talking about enjoying sex with some latex appendage that acted like an alien tentacle that could lay eggs, and of a young woman who acted like a robot while singing songs. “The Internet is filled with noise,” Lucinde sighed, “The Toreador’s channel is just more of the same noise in an ocean of insignificance. She is barely a threat.”

“But what if someone believes,” Rufino gasped.

“Someone already does,” Lucinde said.

The Council exchanged glances. Crispin slowly nodded his head as he realized what Lucinde meant. Guillermo raised one arm up and scratched his exposed armpit, taking a brief moment to sniff his hand afterwards before asking, “And that’s why you are here?”

“She is here because the offender’s actions have caught the Justicar’s attentions,” Crispin grinned, “But not for the reasons we thought.”

“Yes. And I cannot have you all interfering with my plans,” she admitted. Lucinde has long suspected one of her Alastors was the reason Kemintiri has eluded her all these decades. She believed one of the Archons under her was playing both sides and so she carefully enacted a scheme of her own. Over the course of the last two years, Lucinde has been having one-on-one meetings with her Archons, a move which many understood to be her attempt to catch up with the times. In many businesses, the concept of having 360-degree feedback was a means to strengthen the relationship between the superior and the subordinate. Businesses would use this multi-rater feedback method as a means of an efficient way in appraising the performance of an employee. While other studies claim such practices were more likely to suffer from inaccurate data especially given the Paradox of Roles, many organizations boasted an increase in performance and morale. Some Ventrue have considered embracing such methods, seeing the Clan as no different from a larger commercial organization.

In truth, the Justicar was implanting the subtlest of commands upon her Archons. She was conditioning each one to perform a simple task at any time they opted to perform a task which they were intentionally hiding from her. They were conditioned to memorize a number, and to send to that number a

short message of their betrayal, then erase the letter and forget. Whenever the Justicar and the Archons would find a new opportunity to meet, Lucinde would strengthen the conditioning to make sure it never faded too soon. The last few months were filled with messages from one of her Alastors. The Alastor was concerned that this Toreador was causing a breach in the Masquerade. However, it was a telltale detail that instead drew Lucinde's attention. In one report, Rose, her Alastor reported that the possible breach in the Masquerade included this line:

"I do this for you, beloved. Your chair awaits."

It seemed innocuous a line. An off-hand remark that did not have any deeper meaning. But Lucinde knew better. And as she reviewed back all the previous reports and documents that related to this internet performer, she began to notice more prominent signs.

The Toreador *Antitribu* referenced the Amkhat in one episode, talking about a cult of cannibalistic sorcerers which also believed there was power in blood. She also mentioned, "*a chance encounter in London*" which forever changed her unlife. And lastly, she mentioned a greeting to Ophelia – and that was the detail that made Lucinde realize she needed to handle this herself.

However, the knowledge of a Justicar's presence in the country was not going to go well for the Camarilla. The presence of a Justicar in any city was always a huge deal. Some cities even

compared it to the visitation of the Pope or the harbinger of greater troubles to come. What more if the Kindred world were to learn that the Ventrue Justicar had deigned to visit a country deep within the Keui-jin territories?

Lucinde once mastered a Combination Discipline that allowed her to protect herself from the supernatural power of Presence, reflecting it away in a similar way the potency of one's vitae protects one from Domination. That was almost half a century ago. Today, she had a new trick up her sleeve. And it would prove to be extremely useful this very moment.

"I have personally decided to oversee this concern myself, despite the woman in question not being a threat to the Masquerade. The reasons behind this, however, are reasons I cannot risk allowing the Sabbat to know. The five of you stand at the forefront of a Camarilla stratagem that seeks to reclaim this country into its shadow. For its success, however, I must have your support. I must have your trust," Lucinde stretched her arm out towards them, with her hand facing down. "Do I have it?"

One by one, the Primogen reached forward and placed their own hand atop hers, if not atop whose hand already was atop the other. Guillermo hesitated, as expected of the Brujah, but it only took Rufino glaring at the Primogen to have him join the show of trust.

And then-

The Prince cleared his throat. Awkwardly, they pulled their hands back, glancing at each other sheepishly as they all

wondered the same thing: *what were they doing?* Rufino stood up and pulled his hands together behind him, wondering why he had just had his hand under Guillermo's. His pride, however, kept him from asking. Guillermo growled, thinking the Prince had just compelled him to participate. It wasn't uncommon for the Ventrue to do so. He had no desire to ask why he had to. Padre Domingo stared at his hand, smiling as if he knew something the others did not. Crispin snarled at Graham, who now was furiously wiping clean his hand with his handkerchief. Graham gasped when he realized there was a baby roach clinging to the edge of his sleeve! A burst of fire erupted from his fingertip as he instinctively called upon the Flames to burn the offending germ carrier. Guillermo moved faster, however, and crushed the roach with his bare hand. Crispin howled, almost as if the dying insect was an extension of his own limb. Then again, given the Nosferatu, it probably was.

"Enough," Rufino slammed a hand down at the table again. Graham dispersed the flame immediately, knowing better than to anger the Ventrue. It took a brutal Blue Blood, after all, to have the balls to paint a target on his own unbeating heart and proclaim himself proudly a Prince among Archbishops in an archipelago surrounded by the kindred of the east. "Finish your drinks and go. Tonight has stretched on long enough."

None of them could speak up on the matter, however, of not knowing what had just transpired in the last few minutes. And none of them could find the courage to do so.

*

Lucinde stepped out into the humid streets and pulled her hair back to tuck it under her hood. The streets smelled of piss and sour rot and the alleyways were neighbors for stacks of garbage and abandoned furniture. The effects of her vitae masterpiece combined the powers of Presence and Dominate with the subtle nuances of Auspex. Calling it The Judas Heart, it whispered a subconscious need to stay silent at any moment fear and confusion would rise in strength. It only worked, however, after its target displayed a show of trust. It was a gamble to use, but Lucinde had spent more than thrice what would have been her natural life learning the nuances of politics and prestation. She knew how to read a group and identify if they were easy puppets or strong-willed walls. Timing it with the use of Obfuscate allowed her to vanish from the memories of the weak-willed.

Lucinde stepped onto the street and considered where to go next. She was not certain if lingering among the Kindred would be the best resort.

*

Magda had to stop a third time while driving. Her heart was still pounding. Her hands continued to tremble. That man had a power she could not comprehend. It was as if his words could cut into her very soul and force her to act a certain way. Twice while driving she felt the panic attack rise once more, forcing her to park at the curb and try to calm down. When it

triggered this third time, however, it was as if the fates were having fun at her expense.

Walking with a meaningful stride, a woman with blonde hair and skin as white as the moon crossed the street and continued down the sidewalk. Magda found herself staring at her, wishing she had the woman's confidence. The woman's calm. She closed her eyes and imagined herself as the other. She imagined herself as confidently strong.

*

Lucinde saw a mortal woman sitting in an idling car. The woman's eyes were closed, as if she were pondering on a great emotional burden. Lucinde slid a hand to her own chest, pressing her fingers against her pounding heart. Like the mortal, Lucinde could feel her own emotions in a fantastic rush. It has been years since she felt her emotions this alive. Lucinde, however, was certain she saw the signs in that video clip they were viewing earlier. She was certain she read the hidden messages that the web celebrity, Josephine Magcalas, was quite indiscreetly broadcasting.

The cannibalistic sorcerers.

The Amkhat.

The mention of Ophelia.

The encounter in London.

Most failed to notice the connection. But not Lucinde. Not after decades of chasing after her. She saw the connection and realizes they were all referring to one other person in the

entire world. She approached the car, threw out a smile, and knocked on the window.

Magda gasped aloud, startled by the sudden noise. She looked up and saw the blonde woman by her window. Marga sheepishly smiled back.

“Are you alright?” Lucinde asked. She did not bother to use her powers. She could tell this woman would be easy enough to persuade. “I saw you with your eyes closed and I was worried you were having a worse night than I was.”

“Worse? What happened?” Magda was concerned.

“Oh, airport lost my luggage. And my boyfriend whom I was supposed to stay with turned out to be with someone else.”

Magda shook her head in disbelief, “No! That’s terrible! And I was just seeing you walking... smiling.. so happy.”

Lucinde gave an exasperated gasp. It was well-honed over the years of manipulating others to see her as a plain, harmless, non-threatening nobody. “I was pissed. Terribly so. But I realized given everything that’s happened, I might as well just move on, you know.” The two shared a laugh. Magda’s was uncertain. Lucinde, well-practiced. She knew the other woman was already feeling a small bond of connection. She only needed to push it a bit more...

“I’m sorry that happened to you. But I am afraid I have to go. I just...” Magda shook her head again and began closing the window. Lucinde’s eyes widened in shock. Was this mortal actually turning her away? She has swayed so many others in the

past. What made this woman more resilient?!? Magda waved through the window, clearly offering apologies despite her muffled voice. As she drove away, Lucinde considered using her Presence to compel the woman back to her side. But as the red tail lights faded in the distance, Lucinde realized it might be better to completely go incognito. To hunt the serpent, it would be best to make a nest of her own. To hide from any prying eyes.

“Kemintiri is here,” Lucinde slowly began to smile.

“And I swear, this time, she will not escape.”

*

A tiny roach watched as the Justicar walked on, in search for a Haven to use for the nights to come. Red sickening lights reflected against its glistening body as it spread its brown wings and erratically took to the air, eager to report its findings to its master.



End of Book One

Coming Soon

Blood Red Pearls

Book Two of the Reconquista Saga

Red Sickening Lights, Manila

LEXICON

Alipin: A Spanish term used to reflect people who inherited the debts owed by one's parents to another. Modern day corrupts its meaning to refer to slaves.

Casa: Independent car repair services

Ginoo/Ginang: Honorifics to refer to men or women deemed to be of higher stature or deserving of greater respect.

Hidalgo: Originally a term in Spanish that translates to “freed man” or referred to free men.

Maginoo: Vampire. Originally, a pre-colonial term to refer to the top-class people in society.

Maharlika: Sabbat vampire. Loosely translates to “Royal Noble” among the mortals.

Oripun: Camaraila vampire. Used derogatorily. Visayan word whose Spanish equivalent is *Alipin*, which means slave, or more accurately, someone who inherits their parent's debt of obligation

Punyeta: Filipino cuss word. Originally Spanish which was used to refer to a “wanker” but in the Philippines, it was used more as an insult or interjection, similar in usage to the term, “asshole.”

Sundo: Person who picks up someone who just arrived.

‘Tang Ina: Filipino cuss word. Shortened from “Putang Ina” which directly translates to “Your mother is a whore.”

About this Work

Red Sickening Lights, Manila is the first book of the Reconquista saga, a story that explores the Camarilla's attempt to regain control of the Philippines, a Ventrue Justicar's search for an old enemy, and the unexpected bonds that form between two people. It is an insidious tale of revenge, obsession, and love.

If the reception to this series of books goes well, a game supplement to use the story's setting and characters will be released as well.

Special Thanks

To Ryan Mendoza, Oliver and Quincy Buenaflor, Rommel delos Santos and Marco Santos. You were my original companions in exploring the World of Darkness.

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About the Author

Tobie Abad is a game designer and author based in Manila, Philippines. He is the brains behind TAG Sessions and has written for 7th Sea 2nd edition Pirate Nations, The Sound of Water, Girls Elsewhere, Itras By: Menagerie, Cold Shadows, Tiny Dungeon 2e and more.

He has also written for the Master Story Creators Anthology 1: Of Fans, Dragon and Blood, Queer Gaymers, and has dabbled on online comics.

He has committed himself to playing 12 new games each year and runs completely-free open-table one-shot sessions called, TAG Bites, that aim to help more gamers try unfamiliar games and expand their palate.



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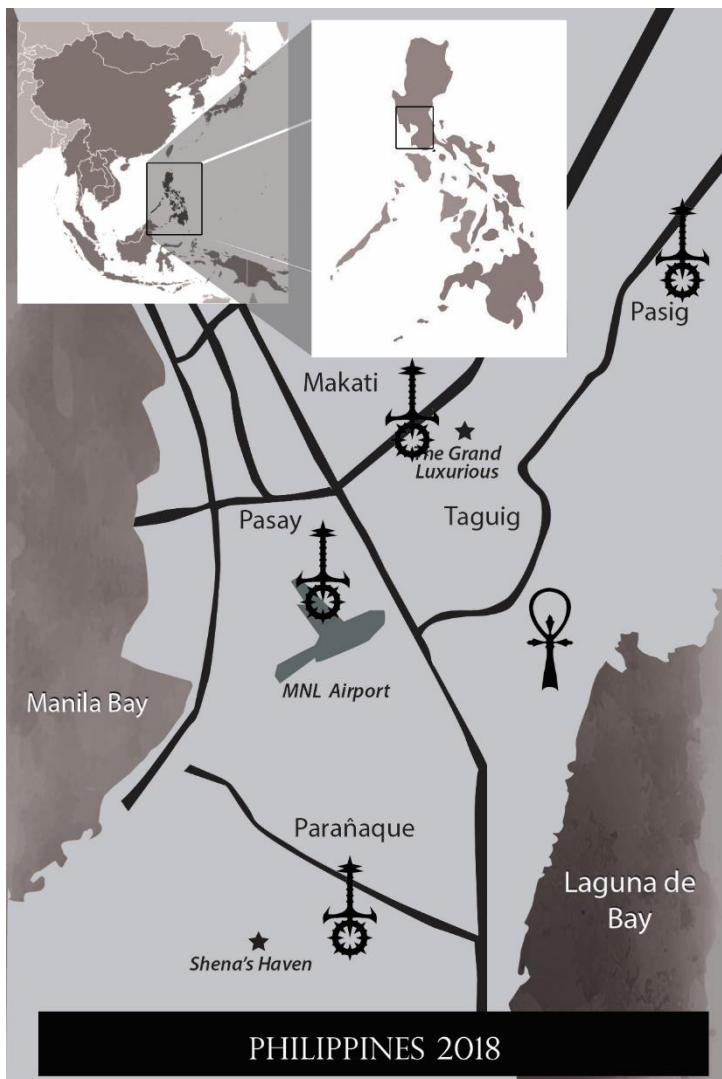
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TobieAbadGaming



@AllTobieNoShade



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For Mature readers only.

Book One of the Reconquista Saga

