

The Modern Nights



BLACK DOG
GAME FACTORY

A Novel for **VAMPIRE: The Masquerade™**

THE MODERN NIGHTS

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VÄSTGÖTAGATAN 5
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SWEDEN

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1	3
Chapter 2	21
Chapter 3	42
Chapter 4	62
Chapter 5	113
Chapter 6	137
Chapter 7	151



French Quarter, New Orleans

February 8th, 2015

The sun set slowly over the beautiful city of New Orleans. Bourbon Street was being closed by community workers so that cars couldn't run down random people. Daytime cafés closed shop and restaurants opened up their doors. Bars' neon signs started glowing on the buildings as the last rays of the sun kissed the streets and houses, bidding them a good night until it returned. The streets slowly started filling with people, natives and tourists alike, as jazz musicians set up on the sides of the roads, playing guitars and saxophones to bid the night welcome to the wonderful French Quarter.

In an apartment, in a red-brick house in the heart of the French Quarter, a man opened his icy blue eyes without flutter. They were human in appearance, but anyone looking into them would sense the darkness and bestial, animalistic instincts behind them. His senses were instantly alert for any sign of danger that might be revealed to him. He felt something— something. He couldn't put his finger on exactly what. He sat up slowly, without any of the springs in his mattress creaking. He stood and moved with slow,

careful and calculated steps through the small bedroom, decorated only with a bed and a closet, to the doorway leading to the rest of the apartment.

He came out into the living room, sparsely decorated with a sofa, sofa table, dining table with four chairs and a desk with an office chair. Upon the desk sat a laptop surrounded by papers and books. Within arms-reach was a bookshelf pressed against the wall, filled with books, both modern and tomes of ages past. On the other side of the desk was a paper-bin.

When he found nothing wrong, he checked the kitchen, a small room which noticeably never saw use. A sink and dishwasher on the left, refrigerator and freezer on the right. He sensed nothing wrong there and went to the bathroom.

It was modest, but had a tub and a shower, sink and toilet. There was a mirror and he took a quick look at his reflection. Short, Scandinavian blond hair and beard crowned a young, yet weathered, pale grey face with angular, Scandinavian features. His body was lean and muscular, and showed clear signs of a warrior's training to those with a sharp eye. His icy blue, inhuman eyes wandered the small room. Nothing hid in there, and he walked back out into his living room. He stood for a minute, just looking around, sniffing the air and listening for anything that might betray the presence of anything out of the ordinary. He found nothing but the scents present the morning he went to sleep. He looked around, trying to see or hear that something, but he found nothing.

He turned and walked back into his bedroom, sparsely decorated like the rest of the comfortably small apartment. A basic bed, a closet and a basket for dirty clothes. He

opened the closet and grabbed underwear, shirt and pants. He then went to the bathroom and took a short, warm shower before getting dressed. He exited the bathroom clean and kempt. He wore a pair of black jeans and a black v-neck t-shirt. He walked out to his front door and put on a pair of black Chelsea leather boots, as well as a black graft leather blazer. He grabbed a small bundle of keys and a wallet from a small table beside the front door, opened the door and left the apartment.

The young man walked down Royal Street at a leisurely pace. He wasn't in a rush, just enjoying the crisp night air in the early part of February, even if Louisiana was always hot and humid. He walked, turned left down Dumaine Street, then right down Chartres Street. He walked across Jackson Square and sat down on a bench, dead-smack in the center of the square. He sat patiently, waiting for something, or someone.

He waited for almost half an hour before a woman approached. She was exceptionally beautiful, her raven-black hair reaching her slender waist and framing her face, a darkly colored business suit the only thing which signified she was not without purpose tonight. She was even paler than the man who, despite being very pale, still had a slight tan to him. She sat down on the bench right next to him. In her hands was a black business case.

"I hope you didn't wait too long for me, Mr. Kane," she said with an indifferent expression on her face. She was clearly lying. He knew she didn't like him much. Which was exactly why she was twenty minutes late.

"Not too long, Marie. It is a lovely evening tonight," he stated, looking around and enjoying the sensation of the

evening breeze on his face and the many things he could smell on it. Coffee, tea, alcohol, perfume, many different scents, yet each appealing to him. Marie looked around with her indifferent expression, clearly not concerned with the sensations Kane was experiencing.

“The Prince has requested your presence at his plantation three nights from now. I expect you to be on your bes—“

“I know what you expect of me, but please recall, that I have this on my palm,” he showed her his right palm, upon which was a dark red tattoo-like mark of obscure origins, picturing a crescent moon. “The Prince may summon me or he may not, I can come and go as I please. I am outside of his jurisdiction.”

Marie’s face scrunched, as if greatly insulted.

“You reside in his domain, you are oblig—“ she was once again cut off by the man on the bench with her.

“My only obligation, Seneschal, is to inform him of my presence when I come back from my travels, as is instructed by the Traditions. I obey only the Inner Circle. Marcel has no power over me.”

Marie sat quietly and adopted a stoic expression, but Kane could feel her anger building up. She turned and looked him in the eye, unfazed at the predatory gleam in them.

“The Prince rules the city, David Kane, and you are still the scourge, don’t you forget that!” she said with emphasis on every syllable. David grinned at her.

“You may be the second-in-command in the city. I am an authority in the Camarilla proper. My duties are ones of hunt and destruction of the highest orders, do you honestly

believe you can hold a candle to me? Every candle you light is another mansion I set on fire,” he said with ease and calm, though the words had a certain finality to them. As if there would be grave consequences if she dared pipe another insulting word.

David smiled a lady-killer smile at her, which she brushed off.

“I’ll go see Marcel since he has requested me, but it is not because you told me to. It is because I respect Marcel and take what he has to say to heart. He is a wise and cunning leader, and he has the strength to assert his statements. He is a fine Prince. With that attitude of yours, you would never be able to take his place.”

Marie was clearly irritated by him, but nodded in approval nonetheless. She took her case, stood up and left without another word. David chuckled, and sensed her temper flare as she heard it, but he thought nothing more of it. He was certain, and knew for a fact that she heavily despised him, though she wasn’t the only one.

Alastors weren’t very popular in most Camarilla-held cities, but their supervisors, the Red Alastors, were even less so. Alastors operated under the jurisdiction of the Inner Circle, the seven Justicars and the Red Alastors only. Princes ultimately had no say over what an Alastor could or could not do, so long as they obeyed the Traditions. When an Alastor obeyed the rules and laws of a Prince’s domain, they were far more tolerated. But sometimes, Prince’s needed to be taught their place, and David was quick to remind any Prince that they never had authority over himself and his colleagues. David was just lucky that he had only a small team of Alastors to coordinate, allowing him a lot of time

to himself. He spent a great deal of it setting up havens and arsenals for his Alastors. He currently had six, only one of which was still in New Orleans, the base of operations for division NightBlade. SayMX was a Nosferatu valued for his computer skills, a skill David highly prized, considering his own complete inadequacy with such a device besides basic writing, emailing and internet browsing.

SayMX was born in the 1900's, but he was a man of technological development from his younger years, which served him well with his coding, programming and his 'hacking', something David was completely lost on. He always fell into speculation when SayMX shouted out "BOOM! YOU BEEN MEXED, BITCH!". David was aware that a bitch was a female canine and widely used as a derogatory term for women, but the rest of the phrase was beyond his comprehension of the modern English language.

David got back up from the bench and started walking back towards his apartment. On his way back, he turned up Toulouse and walked into One Eyed Jacks. It was next to empty. The only individuals inside were four people huddled around the bar, with a very human bartender wiping the disk. The huddled people were talking in low voices, but David's sensitive hearing easily picked it up.

"You need to stop, Charlie! If you don't, the Sheriff is going to send his Hounds after you! Hired killers is nothing new, but to hire a kill on a Kindred!? You're nuts!" It was a middle-aged man in a grey suit talking. His hair was turning grey at the edges, but David knew they wouldn't be greying any more.

"Just shut it, Fernando! You know as well as I that the

Scourge's lackeys are looking into me. If they find—"another Kindred was saying, a rather young-looking one, yet appearances can be deceiving when you're dead. His suit was of an old style, 1920's casual wear. He wore a fedora to boot, and his brown eyes gleamed with anger and his brown hair was glossy with product.

"Gentlemen, look who's arrived!" a dark-skinned man with oddly glowing, yellow eyes spoke loudly with a heavy Créole accent whilst looking at David. "The Scourge of New Orleans, come to pay little, old men like us a visit!" He smiled widely, but David saw right through the façade. Next to none of the Kindred permanently residing in the city liked him, except the few he did favors for. In return for boons of course.

David walked up to the group.

"Master West, Master Franklin, Master Nigels and of course the ravishing Miss McJenner." Each of the Kindred except for Charlie West nodded curtly when David said their names. "Such a fine time I ran into you. I wanted to talk to you, Master West."

The man with the greying hair flinched, but showed no other sign of his discomfort and anxiety, which David could almost taste in the air. He stood up and cautiously walked over to David. David turned around and beckoned him to follow, which he hesitantly did. He looked to the other three Kindred and made quiet sign for them to be alert of anything. He then followed David outside.

David led the man into an adjacent alley and stopped next to a dumpster. Charlie West was nervously on the lookout for anything that might indicate danger, besides the Scourge in front of him, but found none. He then looked

back at David with a serious frown.

“What did you want to speak to me about, Master Kane?” he asked.

David looked around a little, taking in the alley. He then looked West directly in the eye.

“I know about your little plot, Charlie. My informant tells me that you are going to try and have me ‘removed from office’.” David’s smile held no mirth.

“No, no, no, not at all, Master Kane! I would nev—“ West began, but David cut him off.

“Save me the sod excuse for another time, Charlie. My informant is a certain Assamite who owes me a few boons, something you might want to look into before you hire an assassin,” David stated with a deadly serious tone, betraying the fake smile still on his lips. His eyes started glowing red, and West visibly flinched, fearing for his unlife. As Scourge to the Prince, David was in reality a hitman in the Prince’s service, though the official job description is only really as a henchman. And since the Scourge of New Orleans had a fierce reputation as a dog-catcher and witch-hunter, who’s to say he wasn’t an experienced vampire-killer as well?

“Just be glad I didn’t catch wind of it the moment your would-be assassin would have struck. Else, some friends of mine wouldn’t have let you survived this long. Remember, destruction of a Kindred isn’t only punishable by death to the assassin, it is also punishable by death to the mastermind behind it, if there is one. Now, have a pleasant evening.”

Without another word, David walked past West and turned down the street. West was left standing in the alley. A few

drops of blood started forming on his forehead and rolled down, but he quickly grabbed a handkerchief and wiped it off. He let out a deep breath he didn't know he had been holding, an action he hadn't done in over a century.



David entered a large warehouse in the Warehouse District, right to the south-west of the French Quarter. He felt the magical wards he had placed on the building reach out and recognize him, after which they pulled back and allowed him access. The door slammed behind him and locked automatically. The first few days after the technological advancement of locks turning on their own, David was a little startled every time, but SayMX assured him that was all it did. And if it was good enough security for SayMX, it was good enough for David.

“Hey boss, check this out!” he heard his Nosferatu technology specialist call out. David briskly opened a door with the sign ‘Symon Maximillian, Auditor’, and entered a room filled with machinery and workstations and computers and ‘servers’, as SayMX called them. Some sort of storage device, like a ‘digital chest’, as SayMX put it. He then went on to ramble about some speed and ‘terabytes’, but David understood as much as “we can store large amounts of information rapidly and efficiently”.

David sat in a chair right next to his hacker companion. SayMX turned a monitor to face him and on it was a map of the world with five red, blinking dots. Three were slowly moving towards North America from Europe and South America, and two were close to Louisiana, moving in from states up north. David stared at it intently for a few seconds, then looked at his subordinate.

“What am I looking at, X?” David asked with clear confusion on his face. SayMX smiled with wicked sharp and uneven teeth. David could smell the fresh blood in his mouth.

“It’s our operatives, boss. Those red dots,” he pointed out the ones over oceans with a finger with a joint turning backwards,” are the signals from John, Daisy and Cat. They are all done with their assignments and are returning, should be here by nightfall tomorrow. Will and Aiden should be back in few hours.”

David clapped him on the shoulder.

“Thanks for the update, X. Do you have what I asked for?”

Before he had finished his sentence, SayMX had reached down and pulled a dossier out from a drawer. He handed it to David and explained further.

“Far as I can tell, she ain’t supernatural, but my knowledge of the occult isn’t as extensive as yours. Far from it.”

David opened the dossier and read it, looking through rental agreements, school diplomas, driver’s license, birth certificate and a few other documents. On the picture of the file was a woman. Brown–blond dyed hair, deep, light–blue eyes and a rather angular face, if with soft features. David flinched a little when he saw it, but steeled himself. SayMX’s smile lessened slightly. He looked at the picture of the girl and then looked back at his boss, who was entranced by the picture.

“I know it’s not my place to ask, sir, but...that woman...” he trailed off. David sighed and closed the file.

“Of course it’s your place to ask, X. But I’m not going to tell

you. Not yet, at least.”

SayMX nodded solemnly and turned back to his screens. David clapped SayMX on the shoulder with the file and left the room. He crossed the hallway and entered an office with the sign ‘David Kane, Red Alastor’ on it. There were a few bookshelves and a desk with a laptop on it. Behind the large desk was a comfortable-looking office chair and behind that was a small fridge. David walked over to the fridge and pulled out a transfusion bag with the text “O+” on it. He opened it and started slurping away. He sat down in the chair and opened the laptop. He put in the password and it opened to the New Orleans Police Department’s database.

“X, can you direct me to the criminal registry, please?” David shouted. Not a moment later, his screen started flashing through a few pages and ended up on the crime register. “Thank you!” he shouted again.

David then opened the dossier of the young woman and looked for the serial number of her criminal record. He found it and put it in the search engine. A few moments of loading later and a match popped up. David entered it and saw a few criminal acts on her file, but nothing major. The woman, Emma Jones, 21 years of age, had been arrested for participating in a riot against the police, which had been dispatched to calm a large gathering of residents in the Tremé district. Apparently, some ‘witches’ had been outraged by acts committed by ‘vampires’. Apparently, a murder was involved, but the police didn’t know the details.

David sighed, a very human action he had taken a liking to doing in times of distress. He took a few deep breaths and kept reading. She had also been arrested at 16 for underage drinking. There was a mention of campus police catching

her streaking with a few friends during college, but not anything else. David closed the laptop and leant back in his chair. He pulled a pack of cigarettes and a zippo lighter from one of the drawers, lit one and leant back whilst slowly puffing.

He smoked a few cigarettes and then opened a sunproofed window. David watched the smoke slowly drifting out the window while he contemplated his approach. Emma Jones was now enrolled in the University of New Orleans, a fifteen-minute drive from the French Quarter. He could approach as a newly enrolled student. He certainly had the means to make it happen. But it would seem very abnormal, given his ignorance to the technology used by most mortal teenagers in 2016. These were the modern nights, and like so many elders, David had been hard-pressed to even keep up with old technology. He had learned how to use a computer and smartphone from SayMX, but he was still extremely inadequate with most things young humans knew about these nights.

“Maybe an occult studies professor? Or ancient history?” he quietly murmured to himself. “I could alter my body to appear thirty-something, but that would be hard to reverse to my exact appearance. What would I do if people find out about my skill with flesh-craft? I’m already on a tight leash because they suspect me of being Lasombra, and if I display the Tzimisce’s expertise? Oh, well. I’ll probably think of something.”

He sat and pondered for a while more until he felt his phone vibrating. He fished it out of his pocket and looked at the screen. It said “A. Miles; Incoming Call.” David picked up and put the phone to his ear.

“Aiden, what can I do for you?” David said.

“Hey boss, I’m coming in from the north–west of the city in a few minutes.”

“Good, I will see you when you return.”

Aiden hung up and David put his phone on the table. He leant back once more. Aiden had been on a scouting mission in Alaska for the past two weeks. Wonder what he had found out? David’s thoughts ventured back to the young woman, Emma Jones. Suddenly, David’s vision faded to black and memories buried deep sprang to the forefront of his mind.

He saw a red-haired woman with bright, green eyes laughing. Her soft features were divine and he couldn’t help the smile that graced his lips. It soon turned to a frown, however. The next image was of the same woman in a white wedding gown. She was lovely, but before he could smile again, he saw her eyes widen and blood started pouring out from between her lips. David ran towards her and caught her as she fell forwards. When he turned her over, she coughed up more blood and looked him in the eyes with fear and pain. He saw his own horrified expression in her eyes. Who then dulled. He saw the life ebb out of her eyes, her bright, emerald orbs turning a dull green. Soon, her chest stopped heaving and she was still. He couldn’t hear her heartbeat. He fainted. When he awoke, the whole room was covered in blood and ash. He saw the woman lying dead. He panicked. He roughly bit his own wrist and put it to her lips. Nothing happened for minutes. After almost half an hour of just holding his bleeding wrist to her lips, he pulled it back and it rapidly healed, the skin knitting itself back together until there was nothing but blood to show for the injury.

The woman was no closer to life than she had been half an hour before. David felt his eyes tear up with blood and his vision went red. He then gingerly pulled the woman closer to himself and cradled her in his embrace, gently caressing her shoulder and quietly sobbing.

David's vision brightened again, and the first thing he saw was a man of British descent kneeling above him, waving his hand over David's face and snapping his fingers.

"Boss? Boss? It's okay boss, you're fine, it's just a memory. Nothing can happen, it's just a memory." He didn't seem concerned, but then again, David very often had these powerful flashbacks.

"Aiden," David groaned as he blinked his eyes, "nice to have you back."

Aiden grinned and extended a very furry and wickedly clawed hand for David to take. David took it, and Aiden pulled him up in one, smooth movement.

"It's nice to be back, boss." Aiden grinned. David looked him over properly.

An incredibly pale, youthful face with round facial features, crowned by dark brown hair and centered by bright, yellow eyes with pupils like those of felines. He was wearing a utility jacket, a t-shirt, dark cargo pants and combat boots.

When David was back on his legs and had regained his bearings, he gestured towards a chair in front of his desk, and Aiden took the seat. David walked back behind the desk and sat in his own chair.

"So, what do you have to report?" David asked his beastly subordinate.

“No sign that there is a methuselah, but there sure was one, one who masters beast-control. The animals were twisted and wicked. Hell, I was attacked by a pack of rabid wolves with two tails and two rows of teeth,” he said with clear disdain in his voice.

“Well, that is concerning. I trust you were in you wolf-form?”

“Yeah, and I am a master of beasts. I don’t know, usually when we Gangrel roam the wilderness, animals steer clear of us. They can sense our spirit and feral nature. And that was no normal behavior, even for rabid wolves.”

David sat back and listened to the report with concern. If the methuselah had moved, did he know of their intentions? No, it couldn’t be. He protected his subordinates from being spied upon, even by means of a master’s extra-planar senses. The power of David’s blood sorcery was not to be underestimated.

“I could follow a trail somewhat, though. I think he’s headed west over to Russia by the Bering Strait. If he has the means to twist the animals of his surroundings that strongly, I suspect he might even be able to bond with whales,” Aiden proposed.

“Yes, I think you may be right. It would certainly be possible for ancient Nosferatu or Gangrel, hell, even Ravnos or Tzimisce,” David murmured.

“Do you want me to pursue?”

“No,” David said calmly, “absolutely not. Russia is the domain of an ancient Nosferatu methuselah named Baba Yaga. Nasty old crone, that one,” David said.

“The Slavic boogeyman?” Aiden asked with mirth evident in his voice. He didn’t take it seriously.

“No, not exactly. Baba Yaga is supposedly a childe of the Nosferatu clan founder, but she is most certainly ancient. I don’t even know her name. The Little Grandmother, the Hag, the Cannibal Hag, Iron Hag. She is many different hags, and she predates the first written records, as far as most Kindred scholars can trace her past. She is not to be underestimated,” David said. The look in his eyes told Aiden that he was deadly serious. “The only way I would allow NightBlade to pursue were if we had the aid of all seven Justicars and all their archons.”

Aiden went silent and looked down at his hands, with which he fidgeted nervously. David’s eyes and frown softened.

“I didn’t mean to be harsh, but she is the most dangerous foe we could come across for the time being. Best not to give her any reason to destroy us.”

Aiden nodded and started scratching his hands.

“They’re itching again,” he said.

David smiled somberly and stood up. He walked around the desk and sat on it. He held out his hands and Aiden put his own in them. David gently rubbed the furry, paw-like hands. Aiden closed his eyes and an expression of peace and serenity came over his face.

“I can only alleviate the sensation. Caine’s curse runs too deeply in your Gangrel blood, even for one such as I. I can’t undo your animalistic traits.”

Aiden nodded slowly with his eyes closed. They sat like that

for minutes. Aiden was basking in the numbing sensation in his hands, and David was concentrating on the itching in his own. Soon, he let go and Aiden opened his eyes and looked at David with grateful eyes.

"Thanks, boss. It means a lot to me," he said.

"Anything for my loyal operatives," David replied with a smirk.

Aiden smiled and got up to walk out, but turned back towards David right before the door.

"Is there any chance you can teach me how to turn into mist? I have tried, but I can't get it to work," Aiden asked of David.

"When I have the time, yes. Once you do it a few times yourself, it becomes rather simple, but your senses become twisted and strange. Be careful what you wish for."

Aiden nodded and headed out the door. David sat back in his chair and stared into nothingness. The he lit another cigarette.

"Who are you, old one?" David murmured to himself. He puffed away at the cigarette until it was done. He then threw it into the room, where it suddenly burst into flames before it even got close to the ground. Only a little ash gently floated to the floor.

David again pulled out the file on the woman. Emma. He gently caressed the photograph of her. His eyes slightly teared up with blood, but he quickly wiped them away. He then reached into another drawer and pulled out a very old and small painting. It pictured a woman with fiery red hair and emerald green eyes. The same woman from his past.

“Seems your descendants passed on your fiery personality as well as your beauty. I wish you could see her. She appears to be almost as rebellious as you, if not more,” David quietly mused to himself. He held the small painting of his long-dead fiancé in his hands until he thought of something.

“When will William be back?” David shouted through the wall.

There came a ping from his phone. He pulled it out and looked at it.

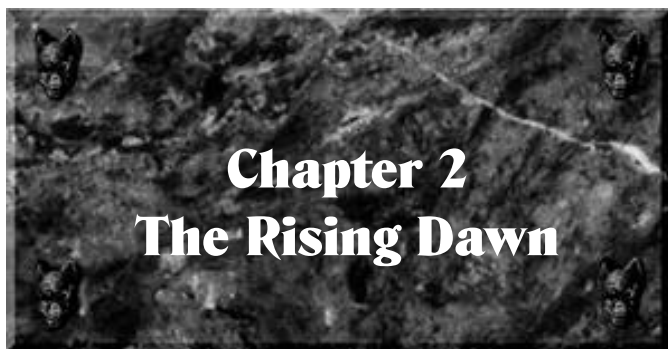
‘1-2 hours’

“Thank you!” David yelled back. He then walked over and sat in his chair. He sat, lost in thought.

If he approached Emma, he would be putting her at risk. Of course, he had the means to ensure his own obscurity, but if anyone found out about her... But something about her, the way her schools commented and the reasons for her arrests... he wanted to meet her. Desperately. In his centuries on this Earth, he had never wanted something so bad, except for Katherine.

David steeled himself mentally. If he were to engage, what would he do? Who would he be? A prospective student at the University of New Orleans? Or a recently educated teacher starting at his first job of teaching? It could be plausible, but he would have to make sure no one looked for him for the duration of his ‘undercover operation’.

“Haaahhhh, what a troublesome predicament I face.”



Gentilly, New Orleans

February 9th, 2015

The sun rose over the beautiful city of New Orleans and greeted the woman rousing from her sleep. The covers of her bed slipped from her body as she sat up and rubbed her eyes and face. She yawned loudly and stood up. She strode around her apartment in the nude, stretching lightly as she moved.

She was well proportioned. Petite, but with somewhat accentuated curves. She stood around 168 cm. Her hair was dyed light brown with dyed blond highlights all over, mixing the two colors seamlessly, and reached her shoulder blades. Her well-toned body stretched and revealed normally hidden strength, betraying her usually rather meek appearance. Her face was soft, if somewhat angular, betraying a Scandinavian heritage. Her eyes, however, were the most breath-taking part of her. Deep, light blue, which seemed almost grey or colorless in the right light. They were seas of wonder, pools of mystery and revealed nothing, yet

held a gleam of strong and unbridled life.

She moved around her apartment lazily, but even as she strode without effort, her movements were oddly fluid and graceful, even in her slightly drooping and hunched state of less-than-wakefulness. As if an inner strength carried her, even as she made no effort.

Her apartment was rather plain, which corresponded rather nicely with her somewhat modest income. A couch, a desk, a dining table, bed, shower, bookshelf and a few other bland and general items and furniture. One room, kitchen and shower. Rather modest.

She picked out clothes, showered, ate breakfast and spent a little while looking for the right books to bring for her day of learning. When she had her books, she took her keys and left the apartment.

She walked for a quarter hour and came up to the edge of the campus. Because of recent school shootings, security had been installed on the campus of the University of New Orleans. Her bag ran through x-ray and she was padded down. She sighed in frustration at the hold-up, but knew full well it would only last a few months, five at most.

She made her way to the building of her first class, occult studies. It was a very new subject, having been established a month earlier for diversity. Students who would like it could sign up, but would have other subjects if the subject didn't pass, as they needed a suitable teacher. Then, out of nowhere, every student who had signed up had gotten a notification that a teacher had been hired and the subject would happen. No one knew anything about this mysterious, new teacher. The young woman took the subject out of curiosity, but also partly for easy merit.

“Yo, Emma! Wait up!” someone called from behind her. The young woman identified as Emma turned around to look at who called and saw a boy around her own age. He had dark, somewhat long hair for a guy, but not distastefully so. His eyes were blue with green streaks. He wore a checkered, buttoned shirt and jeans, all bright colors like blue, green, beige, red, yellow and other such bright colors. Emma found it too bright for her liking, but it wasn’t bad.

“Hey, Seth. You know anything about the new professor?”, she asked him nonchalantly. Seth shook his head in denial and wrapped his arm tightly around Emma’s shoulders.

“Nope, but I know I’ll be sitting next to you!”

Emma smiled a fake smile briefly. She didn’t have anything against Seth, but his optimism and limitless energy reserves were tiring to her. She wasn’t pessimistic, but she enjoyed quiet and peace. Seth was gently shaking her as he dragged her along. She just let him. She didn’t want to bother wrestling herself loose.

They entered the classroom ten minutes early to find it empty. They took up positions in the back to have some privacy during the lesson, and to get away from some of the other people in their class. Both had been saddened when they discovered some of the jocks and jerks of the school decided to take occult studies for easy merit. Surprisingly, some people never grew up. Jerks in high school, college and university. Emma was ashamed to be of the same species as them, but there was nothing she could do about it.

The rather large classroom slowly filled over ten minutes, and soon, there were more students than she had anticipated. At least thirty by her count. Emma heard a few

girls nearby whispering about how they hoped the professor was hot and young. Emma wasn't so sure. After all, how many professors in occult studies could be younger than forty?

Around a minute after class would have started, a young man walked into the classroom accompanied by the principal. They were in quiet conversation and spoke for almost a minute. Then they shook hands and the principal left. The young man turned and Emma assumed it was a new student. He was actually rather pleasing to the eye, if in a way she couldn't pinpoint. The man did not, however, find a seat in the classroom. Instead, he walked up to the teacher's desk and placed his bag on it. Then he walked in front of it, crossed his arms, leant back on the desk and scanned the crowd of students.

He couldn't have been much older than Emma. He was clearly Scandinavian, with his blond hair, blond beard that turned somewhat dark and red under his chin, and a strong stature. He held his back straight and chest high. His light blue eyes slowly swept over the crowd. Everyone was silent for a little, but a few girls started quietly squealing and say "Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot!" rather quickly. And honestly, in Emma's opinion, they were right. He definitely was good-looking, in a powerful, strong kind of way.

When his eyes landed on Emma, she looked into his eyes and he looked into hers. Despite the distance, she felt something stir in her chest. A deep, fluttering sensation. Briefly, almost imperceptibly quick, he flashed her a small grin and wink, and then resumed his mask as quickly. Emma started leaning forward, intrigued by this new professor.

He looked out over the classroom for a little while longer and then spoke up.

“How many in here took this class to gain easy merits?” he asked. His voice wasn’t incredibly deep, but it held a sexy, dark tone to it. Like a devil disguised as a gentleman. The British accent didn’t exactly make it worse.

Almost half the class raised their hands. The man counted for a few seconds.

“Well, I can’t prevent you from doing it. All I ask is that you try your best to keep up in class, and actually learn something. Else, I will remove you from this class. Can we agree on that?” He didn’t say it with malice or irritation, but something in his voice held a finality to it, as if he expected them to agree. Everyone nodded, even those who didn’t raise their hands. The only ones who did nothing were some of the jocks, but that didn’t surprise Emma.

“Alright, let’s get started, shall we?” he said with a cheerful smile. It made the sensation from before flutter again in Emma’s chest.

The professor walked up to the chalk-board, grabbed a piece of chalk and wrote a name on the board. ‘Jason Kane’.

“My name is Jason Kane. You,” he gestured to the students, “may call me professor Kane. So, when I say ‘occult’ what do you think?”

No one said anything. Prof. Kane chuckled.

“Oh, come on! Someone must know something! Haven’t any of you watched Supernatural? Being Human? The Vampire Diaries?” He paused for a second and cleared his voice. “Twilight?”

A few raised their hands, and the jocks were audibly laughing.

Prof. Kane wasn't amused.

"Something funny?" he spoke out loudly to let his voice carry to the jocks, and Emma was silently glad he didn't put up with them.

The guys whispered amongst themselves and one of them spoke up.

"You watch Twilight, professor?" he asked and then started laughing, almost hysterically.

"For educational purposes, yeah," he said with a straight face. "It is my job to keep up with most things occult. Do you have a problem with that, Mr. ..." he implied, waiting for the young man to say his name.

"Jack Scythe, from the Scythe's down in the Garden district," he said with pride.

"Ah, the Scythe's. Well, Mr. Scythe, would you like to hear about your family's occult history?" David asked with a fake smile.

"What can you tell me that I don't already know?" he boasted.

David's smile grew amused, in stark contrast to the fake one before.

"What your family doesn't want you to know. For example, Mr. Scythe, did you know that one of your ancestors, Jackson Scythe, was infamously known in Tremé as a dastardly necromancer?"

Jack stood up. His face was an expression of rage.

“What’d ya say, punk!?” he yelled. David kept smiling.

“Yeah, he was. Graverobbing was one of the primary reasons for his hanging. He even killed people in an attempt to try and raise them. Most of his experiments failed, but he was still a disgrace to your family and ruined your family’s reputation for decades to come.”

Jack started towards Prof. Kane with clear intent of violence. When he reached him, Emma stood and was about to start running down there, but the punch didn’t connect. Prof. Kane dodged it expertly, with minimal effort. Jack started throwing slow, heavy, consecutive punches, but none connected. Punch after slow punch was dodged and Prof. Kane started smiling.

“What’s wrong, Mr. Scythe? Did I upset you?” This just served to anger Jack further, and he grabbed Prof. Kane by the shirt. Just when Emma was going to shout out, Prof. Kane grabbed Jack’s wrists and, in the blink of an eye, threw him over his shoulder and Jack landed on the teacher’s desk. Prof. Kane turned him over and pinned his wrists together behind his back. He then started pulling Jack’s arms up, slowly applying more pain to Jack’s shoulders.

“I want you to leave this class, Mr. Scythe. Do not come back, and if you try to hurt me again,” Prof. Kane’s voice became deeper and slightly hoarse, “I will report you to the police for assault. Understood?”

He then let go and Jack hopped off the table. He stood in front of Prof. Kane menacingly, but Prof. Kane wasn’t fazed in the slightest, even by being at least half a head shorter. Jack was huffing and his face was red with anger. Prof. Kane’s face was impassive, not impressed by the bully’s anger.

“Leave,” Prof. Kane repeated.

Jack quickly stormed up to his desk, grabbed his bag and left. His small posse swiftly followed. When the door slammed, Prof. Kane ran his hand through his hair and adjusted his dark shirt. Then he smiled to the rest of the class.

“Well, as we were. What do you think ‘occult’ means?” he asked politely again.

A handful of students raised their hands.

“Yes, Ms. ...” he pointed towards a girl in the front.

“Jane Dowers, sir,” she said quickly and blushed.

“I’m no sir, Ms. Dowers,” Prof. Kane said with a smile, which just made Jane blush even more. “I’m just a young professor in an old-man’s-class.”

“Well, ‘occult’ is a word that means something hidden. Something obscure,” Jane said hesitantly.

David clapped a single clap and smiled.

“Yes, that is indeed the dictionary definition of the word. But in this subject, it refers to so much more. The occult, the ‘hidden’, is all around us. Mr. Scythe’s necromantic ancestor is just one glimpse of something occult,” Prof. Kane said.

“Do you really believe that stuff? Magic, vampires, werewolves and all that?” a male student asked in the back.

Prof. Kane chuckled amusedly.

“Well, that is a precarious subject, Mr. ...”

“Andreas Bent.”

“Mr. Bent. I do know history and theory of the occult, but I know nothing for certain. That is what being ‘occulted’ entails. Knowing the truth would make it something that isn’t occult. Is that a good enough answer?”

Andreas nodded somewhat in agreement and sat back. Prof. Kane walked around his desk and sat in the chair.

“Let’s take a brief overview of occult things. Like magic. How many in here know something substantial about magic? Something traditional, cultural, not just Harry Potter.”

No one raised their hand. Prof. Kane smiled again.

“Alright. No one knows where in history magic comes from, what it really means or what it’s really supposed to do. I know more than most, and I have only ideas gleaned from studying various cultures. In Europe throughout the Dark Ages, Middle Ages and Renaissance, alchemy was a highly popular art. Anyone know the basics of alchemy?”

One student raised his hand. Prof. Kane smiled at him.

“Yes?”

“Ken Carter, Prof. Kane. And alchemy is changing lead into gold, isn’t it?” he asks nervously.

“Not precisely, but the idea is correct, Mr. Carter. It is transmutating one element into another. Say, lead into gold, as you said. It could just as well be gold into lead, or helium to neon, or beryllium into oxygen. The basis of alchemy is to change one object to resemble or become another. With alchemy, I could take a rock and turn it into a clump of gold or diamond. But this is mystical alchemy we are describing right now. When ‘magic’,” Prof. Kane said

with air quotations, “started dying because of the introduction of science, people started viewing alchemy differently. It became a branch of enlightenment, rather than a branch of mysticism. Suddenly, transmutating lead into gold meant achieving a state of enlightenment, like achieving Nirvana in Hindu lore, or becoming buddha in Buddhism. It might even have been merely philosophical BEFORE the advent of rationality and science.”

“But, what does this have to do with the occult?” Jane asked.

“Well, it is knowledge which has become buried, hidden, ‘occulted’. Alchemy, curses, charms and talismans are but a very few pieces of the occult. Divination, necromancy, pyromancy, thaumaturgy and a thousand other disciplines and schools of magic all fall under the category ‘occult’, because only few masters of these arts remain, and no one can actually ‘prove’ that it exists. These masters prefer to share their knowledge only with certain people, another reason as to believe it is fantasy.”

The class was interesting in Emma’s opinion, but her eyes were glued to Prof. Kane and listened to his voice drone on and on about the occult, of magic and supernatural creatures. He seemed to believe some of it, even if only small parts of it existed. Emma was almost certain he was slightly deranged, but somehow, the way he spoke about it made it seem like expert knowledge, not the rantings of a madman. Class came to an end and Emma packed her things. She kept sneaking glances at Prof. Kane who was saying goodbyes to the students as they left, having them tell him their names so he could remember them later.

She was the only one left in the room with Prof. Kane. He sat silently with a smile on his face and watched her failing

at hiding her glances at him.

“Are you taking your time or are you trying to spend as much time near me as possible?” Prof. Kane asked with a devilishly handsome smirk.

Emma blushed profusely.

“Sorry Prof. Kane. I didn’t mean—” she began, but she was cut off.

“It’s fine,” he said with an honest chuckle. “I didn’t mean to sound rude.”

His smile made her blush even more and she lowered her head and tried to walk past him.

“Ms., what’s your name?” he asked politely before she left the classroom.

“Emma. Emma Jones,” she meagerly replied and then stormed away, her face as red as a tomato. Had she been looking at him before she stormed away, she would have seen him smile somberly whilst mouthing ‘Emma’.



As dusk approached, David’s eyes slid open. No delay, just one smooth movement, the likes of which a human could never replicate. His chest heaved once, but was still thereafter. The scents swirled through his mind. Car leaking oil. Cat. Woman with obscene amounts of perfume.

Food. Delicious, delicious food. Twenty to twenty-six. Woman. Virgin. Healthy life-style. Plenty of exercise. Close. David swiftly sat up and threw a nearby rag in the air. He stood up, put on a black, v-neck t-shirt, black jeans, black leather shoes, black leather jacket and headed out the door. The lock turned and when he was out the building,

his sensitive hearing picked up the soft ‘swish’ as the rag landed on the floor. He smirked in satisfaction and started down an alley.

The alluring scent led him to a small gathering of people. The Hunger instantly pointed out the prey. A petite woman, no more than twenty-four. Blonde hair, blue eyes. Somewhat curvaceous, given her size, but no less attractive. David felt the Hunger rise to the surface. He allowed it. To watch. To observe. To feel. But not to feed. That was his own lot. His own task.

The Beast aided David in finding his prey, and the Beast would aid in the kill.

David walked up to the group, unseen, unheard. He walked up behind the woman and whispered in her ear “Follow me,” and led her away. No one commented. He led her into an empty alley and grabbed her hand. He extended his unnatural presence and charm over her. He held her close. She leant into him. She reached up to kiss him. He kissed her. Her neck. It was sweet. The life-giving blood rushed past his lips and down into his throat. David felt the blood spread throughout his body. It gave him strength and wakefulness, yet at the same time induced in him an exquisite euphoria. A sensation of calming and headiness. He felt his head spin from the pleasure. He heard fluttering of dove’s wings in her blood. He ignored them. Soon, the fluttering faded, and he felt her heart stop beating. He drank and drank, until there was nothing left.

He let go of her neck and held the body close.

“Thank you. I’m sorry for your blood-loss,” he whispered in the ear of the corpse he held in his arms with a very slight, maniacal chuckle. Then he just let her go. She fell to the

ground, dead, gone. David stumbled away, drunk on the sensation of life in his centuries old, dead veins. The feeling of being light-headed and lucid at the same time. Before he left the alley, he snapped his fingers and the cadaver instantly lit up. The flames licked at the corpse and hungrily devoured it. David stumbled on.



In the warehouse, David opened the door, still drunk on the healthy, high-grade blood he had consumed. A pair of footsteps resounded in his head, and before long, a man emerged from one of the offices. On the door it said 'William Barrow, Alastor'. He was tall and held a regal stature. His head was held high and his face was an impassible mask of stoicism. His hair was long and black, and his eyes green like jade. He wore a dark suit with a black shirt, unbuttoned at the top and the black tie hanging loose. When he saw David he quickly flashed him a smile.

"Good evening, sir," he said with a rich, English accent.

David smiled back, walked over and shook the man's hand.

"Evening, William. I trust your mission was a success?" he asked.

"It was. We have gained a sanctuary in Washington and stable allies. The contracts have also been drafted, approved and signed. I'll be going through possible applicants for new Auditors in an hour," William said with a light tone.

"Marvelous. Good work, William. Will you follow me to my office, please?"

William nodded and trailed behind David into the Red Alastor's office. David gestured towards the seat on the

other side of the table, which William accepted. David sat in his own chair and gathered his thoughts for a few moments.

"I would like for you to lead the new division of NightBlade in Washington. And become Red Alastor for the team there," David stated.

William's eyes widened and he opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out.

"Now, it's only if you want it, but I would feel safe leaving you at the head of the new department," David elaborated. "You will still report to me, and you will still get to go on assignments once in a while, but you will have to make strong allies and connections, establish havens for your subordinates and the like."

"Yes, I would be honored. But I still have things to do here," William stuttered.

"Of course, take your time, think about it. It will fall to someone else if you don't want it, but you are my first choice."

David smiled at the Alastor and chuckled lightly.

"That's all for now. You're dismissed," David said. William hastily made his way out of the chair and back to his office. David sat back and mulled over things far away, both distance- and time-wise. A ping from his phone drew his attention. He looked at the screen.

'C. is making his move. Constance, down from Protestant Orphan's Home. Now. -X'

David smiled sadly at the message.

"Thank you!" he yelled through the walls. He opened a

drawer in his desk and pulled out an old knife with a silver blade. Mysterious symbols ran along the length of the blade and at the right angle, a few of the symbols gleamed a crimson red. He closed the drawer and walked over to a chest tucked away in the corner. Upon opening, it revealed a heap of old blades, axes and spear-heads, as well as pistols, shotguns, sub-machine guns and flare guns. David pulled something out of it. He tucked it in a small duffel bag and put the mystical knife in a sheath under his jacket, hidden from view. He then closed the chest and walked out into the hallway.

On the handle of his door hung a small, transparent plastic bag with dark clothes. He grabbed the bag and stuffed it in his duffel bag. Then he knocked twice on the wall leading to SayMX's office and left the warehouse.



Charlie West sat in a black Sedan, blank from recent wash and waxing. The Louisiana license plate said 'HJD 834'. He was wearing dark clothes and black leather gloves. He sat in silence for a few minutes. He looked at the dash clock. 11:57 PM. He threw his head back into the head-rest of the seat. He took deep breaths. Then he went silent for a few minutes.

Charlie opened his eyes, now dead and dull. They were glowing ominously red. His face paled and his skin slightly tightened, making his cheekbones more pronounced. His fangs extended.

Eyes glowing, fangs out, Charlie stepped out of the car. In his right hand was a slightly rusted machete with dried blood stains on the blade. He walked silently towards a gate, which he effortlessly climbed over. He entered a door and

then closed it behind himself. Not long after, screams of children were audible within a block's radius. After almost a minute, the final scream was abruptly ended. Charlie walked out the door and a glimpse of blood and children laying still was visible behind him, until he closed it again. Blood was splattered all over his clothes and face, but he didn't pay it any attention. He threw the machete in a bush and walked back to the Sedan. He got in, turned on the engine and drove away.



David walked down Chartres Street. A ping resounded from his pocket and he pulled out his phone.

'Caught on traffic cam. He's done. -X'

David smiled sadly. He put the phone back in his pocket. He turned down Governor Nicholls' and then back down Royal Street. Now, David wandered aimlessly. Where should he go? What should he do? That was the problem with having a supervisory job you particularly excelled at. Most of the time, you had too much time on your hands. David made up his mind and headed back towards his apartment.

When he entered, everything was quiet, just like it always was. He pulled out his phone and keys and threw them on the table. Then he walked into the kitchen and got a blood bag. He opened it and leisurely sipped at it. He walked into his living room and sat on the couch. He took small sips of the chilled blood. Most vampires preferred it at 37.8 degrees. David did too, but the cold had always sat well with him. And it wasn't like it was dull, human blood he was drinking. David pulled the bag away from his mouth and held it in front of him.

“I do wonder if this classifies as self-cannibalization?” He looked at the bag for a few more moments before shrugging and bringing it back to his lips.

When he was done, he just sat in silence and contemplated his current situation.

On one hand, he was the strongest Kindred in New Orleans, considering his hobby/job of hunting dangerous vampires, as well as his age and status as elder. On the other, he was balancing on the razor’s edge when it came to Emma. If anyone got wind that he monitored her, undead people would ask questions, and some of them wouldn’t be easily removed.

If David was discovered as killing “upstanding” Kindred citizens, he would be judged and ostracized. The Prince couldn’t put him on trial or to death, but the status and well-standing he had worked for decades to earn would disappear in an instant. He didn’t want that to happen, his work almost required status in the city. Else, the Prince just might decide to remove David and his team from the city, which he justifiably could.

David sighed and laid down on the couch. The thoughts, plans, schemes and plots flittered through his brain, letting him have no rest. For a brief second, David wondered if it might just be easier to let himself fall into torpor. Stake himself and just sleep.

It knocked on the door. David sat up instantly, senses on high alert.

No Kindred in the city know where I keep my haven.

He cautiously stood up and moved towards the door. He could smell a human on the other side, a somewhat flowery

scent. Human woman. Rather young, perhaps twenty. He sniffed a few more times. Delicious. So very delicious. Healthy, though she drank and smoked once in a while. David made sure he was flush with color and body-heat before he opened the door.



Emma was walking up the stairs in the apartment building. She was holding a piece of paper with an address, a phone number and an email address. She came up to the apartment listed on the paper. She folded it up and hesitantly knocked on the door.

At first, she heard nothing, but she could swear she heard quiet sniffing. Suddenly, the door slowly opened. In the door stood Prof. Kane. He seemed very tired and had dark rings under his eyes. When he saw her, he smiled, tiredly.

“What can I do for you at this hour, Ms. Jones? It’s—“ he checked his watch, “three in the morning.”

Emma hesitated.

“Well, I was—,” she stammered, but she took a deep breath and started over. “I was wondering if you could help me understand something,” she said seriously.

Prof. Kane chuckled lightly.

“I’ve had one lesson with you, and I didn’t pass out assignments,” he told her.

“It’s not school related, professor,” she said. The look in her eyes told Prof. Kane that she was dead-set on hearing what he had to say on whatever she wanted to hear about. He sighed.

“Alright, come in,” he said.

He went back into the apartment and Emma quickly went in and closed the door behind herself. Prof. Kane sat in a rather luxurious armchair and gestured for Emma to take a seat on the couch, which she did. He folded his hands and leant forward.

“So, Ms. Jones. Please tell me what your predicament is,” he spoke, though weariness was evident in his voice.

Emma also leant forward and put on a serious face.

“About a year ago I was arrested for participation in a riot,” she started.

“Well, you’re certainly forthright with your criminal past,” Prof. Kane mused. Emma blushed lightly, but cleared her throat.

“That’s beside the point. I was rioting with some citizens down in Tremé and they claimed to be witches. They said a group of vampires had been on a feeding spree in their district, and the werewolves in the bayou refused to help them, despite some agreement or some such. At the time I was just angry about innocent people being murdered, but when I saw a report on the news claiming most of the bodies had less than half a gallon of blood in them and no blood was to be seen on or around them, I started wondering,” Emma said rather quickly. Prof. Kane raised his brows. “Do you know much about vampires, professor?”

Prof. Kane sat back in his chair. He looked intensely at Emma, and something about his eyes planted a seed in Emma. Something...not-human. Something...predatorial. As if an animal hid behind his eyes. Emma felt as if it would scare most people, but to her it was...intriguing. It excited something inside her. She felt a warmth in her gut, and a

little lower. It was, quite frankly, arousing her. Emma mentally berated herself. He was her teacher, this shouldn't be happening. Though he was also a rather handsome man.

"Well," Prof. Kane began hesitantly, "the word vampire has only been around since the seventeen-hundreds. It's from the Slavic 'vampir' or 'upir', which referred to an undead, blood-drinking person who rose from the grave every night in search of the living. But the myth extends far beyond that. There is the *vetāla* of India, the *lilitu* of Assyria. The *lamia* and *striges* of the Etruscans, the Caribbean *soucuyant* or *loogaroo*, African *asanbonsam*. I could go on, but in short, there are hundreds of vampire legends stretching back to the dawn of time," Prof. Kane finished.

Emma frowned and looked tantalizingly at him. He cleared his throat and leant back in his chair. She knew her look was putting him in an uncomfortable state. She wanted to hear more. And Prof. Kane knew what she wanted.

"Apparently, there are witches in the Tremé, but that is a rumor that has swirled for almost two centuries now, and accordingly, rumors about witches throughout the French Quarter, Garden district and Algiers as well. In short, people say there are witches all over the city. Some people also report seeing wolves standing on their hind legs and being three meters tall." Emma scrunched her face, as if in 'three meters?'.

"Ten feet. Supposedly, some superstitious folk in the city claim there are werewolves out in the bayou. They say they command dark magics and spirits," Prof. Kane explained.

"But what about vampires? Those are my immediate concern," Emma stated.

“Ms. Jones, please don’t pursue this any further. They are rumors, nothing more. You should know how some people like to exaggerate stories, and even invent them,” Prof. Kane asked of her.

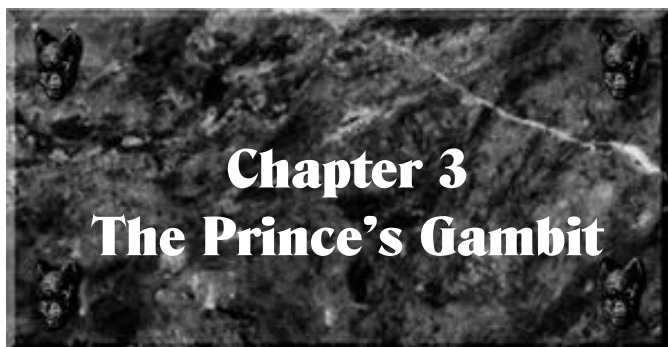
Emma stood up.

“I guess you’re right,” but she didn’t sound very convincing with her lie. “Good night, professor.”

“Good night, Ms. Jones,” Prof. Kane said.

Emma walked out of the apartment and down the stairs that led to the ground floor and the street. Up in his apartment, Prof. Kane sighed, sank back in his armchair, pulled an empty transfusion bag out from under a pillow in the chair.

“Too close,” he murmured to himself.



Chapter 3

The Prince's Gambit

French Quarter, New Orleans

February 11th, 2015

David was sitting on a bench in Jackson Square, enjoying the quiet, warm mid-February air of New Orleans. It was small pleasures like this that made existence bearable. Centuries of killing, scheming and manipulating slowly got to you. The warm breeze carried with it many fascinated scents, most of which were people. Being a resident of the City of the Damned certainly made things easier; everyone worked all day and partied all night. There were no downsides to being a New Orleans Kindred.

David's phone buzzed in his pocket.

Well, very few downsides.

He pulled it out and looked at the screen.

*'Marcel will see you in two hours. –Seneschal
Marie D'Richet'*

Well, better get going. Rubis d'le Nuit is several miles west of here.

David grudgingly stood up and trotted back to his apartment. In a small garage behind the building, he pulled the covers off an old Yamaha bike. 1980 Yamaha XS 1100, a beauty in David's eyes. Even if he had only very rudimentary mechanical skills, he took good care of it and loved it immensely. He had SayMX get two motorcycle experts enhance it. It could now perform almost twice as well as ordinary XS 1100's, and many miles-per-hour faster. The mechanics had been quite astonished at the request. Neither of them believed a human's reflexes could keep up with it. Of course, SayMX didn't mention the rider wasn't human. The bike was quite rich in color, strongly contrasting to David's preferred dark attire. It was pale, off-white pearl in color. Along one of the hind panels, there was the word 'Thanatos' written in silvered, italic script.

David took off his dark shirt and walked over to a hanger where he grabbed a black leather jacket and put it on. Then he grabbed the keys from a drawer in the small garage and sat down on the bike. He lovingly ran his hands all over the bike from where he sat, marveling at how humanity could keep surprising and inventing such beautiful wonders. He put the key in the ignition and turned. He revved it slightly and was delighted when he heard the engine purr like a tiger. Deep, dark and alluring. The scent of the exhaust lightly made his head spin and he slowly rode it out. Then he closed the garage door behind himself and started riding the bike through the city.

The wind in his hair was nice, and the rumbling and vibrating under him felt divine. The roar of the engine as he sped up made him chuckle and he briskly rode into the night.

He rode for almost an hour until the narrow and winding roads of outer New Orleans led him to a large plantation. He killed the engine of his bike and looked at the structure.

Early colonial era architecture, with touches of French modernism. Marcel may be old, but he is evolving with the times. And he has great taste in architecture.

David made his way inside. There were at least two paintings on every wall and the insides were very speakeasy and jazz bar. Forged iron railings, regional plants in pots, crests all over the place with a stylized 'M'. David admired the decor of the centuries old plantation's main house. However, David didn't recognize the paintings. They were very nice, but something about them was...off-putting. As if the images, landscapes and portraits were conjured from a depressive opium dream. David knew he was among the nicest, yet at the same time callous Kindred in Louisiana, but even he was disturbed by these dark and grotesque images.

They weren't images of gore or anything like that. They were more like...haunted. Horrors none could pinpoint.

"I see you have taken a liking to the paintings on my wall," a dark, if kindly voice spoke up from a small balcony behind David.

He turned around and saw Marcel Guilbeau, the Prince of New Orleans standing on a small balcony, gripping the slender iron railing with a plant hanging off it. He was wearing a casual suit. Navy blue pinstripe. Single breasted, two buttons, fake cuffs. A pair of nice, brown oxfords to boot. Nice. He smiled cockily at David, a smile that was

returned.

“Good evening, Marcel. It’s a beautiful home you have here,” David remarked as he looked around.

Marcel also took a glance around the large interior of the plantation.

“Yes, it is,” he said with a chuckle.

David looked back up at him.

“Who is the artist?” he said and gestured to the paintings on the wall beside him. “I don’t recognize them.”

“That is because they are originals. The painter lives here,” Marcel said. He walked down a small, winding stair leading up to the balcony. He soon joined David on the ground floor.

“Is it that Cambridge boy talk is swirling about? Joshua, was it?” David asked.

“The one and only. The kid has a natural talent, and an unnatural one,” he said with a crooked smile.

The two vampires silently stood and looked at the painting for a few minutes, appreciating it’s unique, slightly terror-inducing beauty.

“So, business?” David asked.

“Business,” Marcel confirmed. “But before that, I have heard some troubling gossip. Charlie West, the Ventrue primogen? Seems he went on a massacre in an orphanage last night.”

Marcel looked suspiciously at David.

“Now, why would he do that?” he inquired.

David's face saddened.

"Horrific. But Marcel I had nothing to do with it. You know how I feel about kids," he pleaded.

Marcel sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"I know, sorry. It just doesn't seem like him. If I didn't know better, I could swear he had been Dominated," he swore under his breath.

"I had no idea you read Trimeggian's work."

"I don't, but I have read some of Dr. Netchurch's recently. What an odd fellow."

"What an odd fellow indeed, but you should see Trimeggian, he's the loon to rule them all." David supplied. "Well, troubling news aside, what did you want from me?"

Marcel looked at David for a little before he turned around and walked. David followed wordlessly.

"I've had some trouble with the werewolves. Apparently," he walked through a door into a large board meeting room, "they think the land treaty is void since the humans expanded the city into the bayou. I keep telling the representatives that it isn't our fault the humans expand, but they won't listen. I need you to go out there and play dogcatcher for a little. I've heard it's within your collage of titles."

"How many?" David asked in a monotone voice. Before was pleasure talk between two Kindred. Now he was on business, Scourge for the Prince of New Orleans. In his world, being stoic and being professional went hand-in-hand. Marcel clearly noticed this shift and he himself changed. His demeanor and stature changed from those of

a person to those of a commander-in-chief, a general.

"As many as you deem appropriate, but I would like to keep it below five. We want to threaten them, not start a war."

"Understood."

In the room sat a few vampires and a few humans. There were two bodyguards at every door, powerful ghouls picked from military units. Their posture said as much.

"Everyone, may I introduce David Kane, my scourge," Marcel gestured to David, and every person in the room scrutinized him.

"He is a trusted ally and loyal soldier. Respect him like you respect me, he is my fist and my dagger. He is going into the bayou to rustle the Uktena a little. Mr. McKeen, I would like you to provide him with your new ammunition, what did you call it?"

A middle-aged man with an appetite rivalling the modern interpretation of St. Nicholas rasped up.

"HoloWolf ammunition, or HW. The bullets are lead with a silver coat and a hollow point where we melt silver nitrate into the indent. The bullet expands around itself, the silver scorches the wolf and the silver nitrate melts and flows into the bloodstream. It will kill any wolf in seconds, a minute at most," he boasted, his double-chin rustling while he did.

Marcel turned to David.

"Do you think it will work?" he asked him.

David thought for a few moments before answering.

"On the younger ones, probably. Any werewolf older than forty is very hard to kill, even with this...horrific bullet," he

said with disgust evident in his voice.

The fat man's face reddened.

"Are you saying we're stupid, boy!?" spit was flying from his mouth and his voice raised, clearly upset. "We've been in this business since before you were born! The oldest sucker in this city is barely two hundred!"

"I seriously doubt that," David flatly stated.

"We've been around since the British first settled in the colonies in the 1700's, boy!"

David slowly, but menacingly walked over to the table in the room and put his clenched fists on it whilst looking the fat man directly in the eye, the icy pools manifesting a threatening glow.

"I was already here when the colonists arrived."

He stood up and took a step closer.

"I was in Italy when the Inquisition started hunting supernatural creatures."

Another step. The man, McKeen, leant back in his seat, fear evident in his eyes.

"I was in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified."

He was dangerously close, just out of arm's reach.

"I served under Alexander the Great, king of Macedonia!"

His voice raised and darkened, the blue glow in his eyes turning red, fangs bared. He leant down and his face closed in on

"I was hunting demonic worshippers in BABYLON, AGES PAST!" he started yelling at the fat man who no longer

seemed very big. He had shrunk down in his chair, sweating profusely and his eyes wide in fear.

“DO NOT – TRY TO LECTURE ME – ON WHAT AGE – OR EXPERIENCE MEANS, BOY!” David was shouting right into the man’s face. He knew the pitiful excuse for a man was scared for life, and probably scarred for just as long. But he needed to be taught his place.

David slowly stood back up, straightened his jacket and walked back towards his place right next to Marcel. His face was once again completely passive.

“Ahem, as I was saying, no. It will only lead to angered Lupines. I can kill their children and the teenagers with that stuff, maybe, but that is out of the question. I don’t harm kids,” he said calmly, as if the display of rage hadn’t occurred.

Fear is a powerful tool when wielded properly. You just need to know just how to turn the volume and tone, and what gestures to make. Then, even the toughest foe will gladly fall on his own sword to escape you.

Then, a human woman spoke up. She was quite a beauty, but David had seen better. Her straight hair was shoulder short and bright, golden red. Her delicate face was framed by her bangs and crowned with professional-looking glasses and small, faint freckles. Her grey eyes were piercing and David briefly wondered if she actually was human, or maybe a human with some psychic or shapeshifting abilities. Both of those tended to have such intensity in their eyes, if only perceptible to those with extrasensory abilities.

“So, what are you going to use to kill them, then? You can’t really punch them to death.”

She sounded very pretentious, as if she knew she was the smartest person in the room. The English accent didn't exactly help that notion.

Would make a decent Ventrue.

"As a matter of fact," David replied, "I can. I have. Plenty of times."

The woman scoffed and crossed her arms underneath her rather generous bosom. Marcel started chuckling with a wide smile of amusement.

"Alright, calm down children, this isn't a competition." He turned to David. "David, are you ready?"

David leant close to Marcel, and Marcel quickly leant in as well.

"I'm going to sick my subordinates on the Lupines. They could do with some exercise," David said.

Marcel nodded and clapped David on the shoulder.

"Best of luck, friend."

David smiled and clapped Marcel back.

"Thank you, friend."

Before David could leave, though, Marcel whispered in his ear.

"Are you really that old?" he inquired quietly. David smiled.

"No, but he doesn't need to know that."

David then briskly left the room, and a chuckling Marcel, and walked through the plantation main building and walked out into the night, bright with the light of the crescent moon, just like David preferred it. He did very

much enjoy Marcel's company, even if he was a vampire. Vampires usually weren't friends. It was just in their nature to try to one-up each other. To stab each other in the back, or with a stake in the front if they were very distrustful.

Of course, Marcel isn't different. And neither am I. I suppose that is just part of the curse. To never trust one another. Hmm, I wonder what class will be like tomorrow.



Emma was sitting on a bench under a tree on campus. She was reading a book called "Dracula", written by Bram Stoker. After her sitting with Prof. Kane, she was certain he knew something. He didn't let on what he knew, but he definitely knew something of importance.

He was a rather handsome man, Prof. Kane. He wasn't divinely gorgeous, but he wasn't shabby at all. Something about him, though. Something.

He stood and acted like a man. But something about him told me he was something else. He couldn't be a...vampire, could he?

Emma stiffened and then went over everything she knew of him in her mind. Nothing as much as hinted at it.

But Dracula can walk in the day, just without his powers. What if... oh my god!

Now, Emma was resolved. If Prof. Kane wasn't a vampire, she was positive that he had relations with some. Dracula used to have a servant named Renfield. Well, in the movies, he did. He had no powers, but everyone knew he was off somehow. Emma stood up. She had occult studies in her next period. She would confront him.

She had visited the Tremé witches regularly since her release from the authorities, courtesy of her contribution to a riot. They told her about a great, ancient evil that resided in New Orleans in human shape. An Indian woman who had taken residence with the local witches told her stories about shilmulo and rakshasa. Demons possessing corpses and subsisted in the blood of the living. Apparently, these monsters had not their roots in Indian mythology, as most of the gypsies the woman hailed from believed. Instead, she had told her, they were around for almost as long as humanity itself.

She had heard legends of entire tribes, peoples and civilizations wiped out throughout history by the same method of killing; tearing out throats, biting and clawing the humans apart. She told Emma that she had once seen one of these creatures feed.

She had been walking home from an evening class in Bappiana in the Punjab region of India, and in an ally, she saw a couple, intimately kissing. However, in the dim light of the streets outside, on closer inspection she saw that the woman was dangling limply from the man's arms. She gasped, and the man turned to look at her. The dark silhouette of the man sported glowing, red eyes and a liquid was dripping from his mouth. The woman's neck was bleeding lightly, and she wasn't breathing. Suddenly, the man disappeared, as if he dispersed into nothingness, and the unmoving form of the girl fell to the ground. The witch ran to the girl and saw bite marks on her throat, and blood was trickling down into her clothes lazily. According to the Tremé witches, the same had happened to the poor, young man who was drained of blood, which was what incited the riot Emma had participated in.

Emma looked at her watch. Three minutes. She grabbed her bag and headed towards the occult studies classroom. When Emma entered the classroom, it was almost full, with the exception of the teacher, Prof. Kane. She found a seat close to the front. The class waited for a few minutes. After ten minutes, some people were taking their bags and made for the door, when it suddenly opened. Prof. Kane came walking in with a huge, old briefcase. He smiled at the students.

“Hello,” he said with strain clear in his voice, and he was hunched over like it was too heavy, but Emma noticed that he wasn’t sweating or panting, which would be what normally happens when a person lifts heavy burdens for extended periods of time. Emma was now more convinced of her theory; he was feigning the heavy weight. He wasn’t the slightest bit inconvenienced by the case, not really.

Prof. Kane threw the massive trunk on the table and a loud “BANG” resonated through the room. Everyone jumped. Prof. Kane chuckled and clasped open the locks on the case. Due to the lid being in the way, no one could see what was in it. However, Prof. Kane stuck his hand in and pulled out a wooden stake, like those in vampire movies.

“Anyone know what this could be used for?” he asked with a smirk to the class. A few stuck their hands up.

“Yes, Mr. Grant?”

“To kill vampires, professor,” the young man said hastily.

“But it could kill you just as easily, no?” Prof. Kane asked whilst pointing the stake at the student and smirking. “Why is it that, of all the things that could be used to kill a vampire, a wooden stake to the heart is one of the most

widely spread? Humans die from anything big enough piercing their heart. So why wood?" he asked the class.

Only Emma raised her hand.

"Yes, Ms. Jones?" Prof. Kane smiled at her.

"Because a vampire is dead and unnatural, and recently carved wood is living and natural." Emma had a certain look in her eyes that told Prof. Kane something was off. His face crunched into a curious expression, but it let go swiftly.

"Yes, that is correct."

They looked into each other's eyes and Emma knew her suspicions were right. It was clear in his eyes now. He knew that she knew. And suddenly, a revelation came to her.

He knows about vampires. So if they are real, what else is?

A rock dumped into her stomach. Vampires were real, and God knows what else. And Prof. Kane knew about them. So, was he a vampire? Or maybe a servant to them, or hunted them? Or maybe he was something else, or...

Her train of thought continued throughout the lesson. Prof. Kane had shown the class many things popularly associated with something occult. He had shown them a silver knife, a flask of supposedly 'holy water', mirrors and voodoo dolls and many other trinkets.

Class ended and people left the classroom. Emma was staying behind, deliberately being slow about gathering her stuff. Prof. Kane was quickly packing the briefcase and closing it. Emma saw her chance and took off her necklace. She hid it in the palm of her right hand and made a loose fist. She briskly walked down to her new, mysterious teacher.

“Prof. Kane, I have a question,” she asked politely and with a smile, but her eyes betrayed her courtesy. And Prof. Kane picked up on this.

“Argh, can’t it wait? I have somewhere I need to be,” he said and reached for his case. Quickly, Emma placed her right hand on his hand reaching for the trunk. As her hand touched, Prof. Kane gasped and pulled his hand back. When it came out from under hers, there was a cross-shaped scar, almost like an acid burn, etched into his hand. Emma’s eyes widened and shock overcame her.

HOLY SHIT, ITS REAL! HE’S A VAMPIRE!

Prof. Kane looked at her with pain and hurt in his eyes. Not the physical kind, though. She saw emotional pain, hurt feelings, betrayal, fear. Sadness. He quickly snatched his briefcase and was out the door before Emma could react, not bothering with acting like he felt it was heavy. He carried it off like it was a feather.

• • •

David ran. He carried his trunk swiftly across campus, towards his black Mustang.

Why!/? Damn it, Katherine, why is she so clever!/? Fuck, she wasn’t supposed to find out! Damn it!

David threw his luggage in the trunk and got in behind the wheel. He sat there for a few seconds and repeatedly hit his head back against the head-support of the seat.

“DAMN IT!” he yelled to no one.

He turned on the engine and left the school.

• • •

Night fell and David sat up from his bed. He felt the Hunger ravage his body. He hadn't fed on his way home before he went to sleep.

Big mistake.

David hurriedly walked out into his kitchen and opened the fridge. It was almost empty, save for a single bag of blood which had the label "A+" on it. He slammed it close hard enough to make the windows tremble.

"FUCK, WHY DIDN'T I RESTOCK!?" he yelled to himself. He grasped his head in frustration.

Fuck! Seems like someone is going to have to die tonight because of my carelessness. Damn it!

David put his hands on the kitchen counter and took some deep breaths, which didn't help when you considered that he was dead. He slowly stood up and clenched his fists. With a frustrated sigh, he walked out, grabbed a jacket, his keys and his phone, and then left the apartment.



David walked down Bourbon Street, carefully observing the tourists, and the citizens preparing for the upcoming Mardi Gras. February 13th was the day it would happen. David was sure he would be able to stock up on more blood when that time came, and the huge amount of people would be enough to completely fill him. He would just have to watch his expenditure for the long while after.

He saw a couple of young men, barely out of their teens, standing in an alley close by. They were all smoking.

I'll just have to be careful. I could take them without killing them.

David closed his eyes and focused for a moment, then

opened them and smiled brightly. He walked into the alley and up to the guys.

"Hey, any of you have a light? I seem to have lost mine," he said sheepishly, pulling out a pack of cigarettes from his jacket pocket.

"Sure," one of the men said and smiled kindly back.

David felt a little sorry, but continued with his plan. He pulled a cigarette out of the pack.

"Thanks, mate," he said and took the lighter held out to him. He put the cigarette in his mouth and lit it, and felt the Beast growl just a little at the flame so close to his face. He had grown used to it. When it was lit, he handed the lighter back.

"So," he asked, "are you guys ready for the parade?"

One of the other laughed.

"Hell yeah!" he said enthusiastically. "Best time of the year!"

"That, I can agree on," David bellowed with laughter.

The group talked merrily for almost half an hour. David came to feel even more bad about his plan, but he wouldn't back down. Soon, the guys were about to depart. David checked the surrounding streets with his extraordinary sense. No one would notice.

"Hey, could I ask you guys something?" David asked the group.

"Hmm? Sure," one of them said.

David looked at them and suddenly it was like his voice changed. It held an authoritative tone.

"Don't scream."

Then, quick as lightning, David jumped them and swiftly knocked them all unconscious. Within a moment of each other, they each fell without a sound. Then, he went over them, one by one. He drank to the point where they would barely be okay if he let them be. The Beast tried several times to force him to drink more, but he forced it down every time. He would try to keep his killing to a minimum, lest he not only incur Marcel's displeasure and a drop in his carefully built status, but give way to the Beast as well.

David felt very sated when he was done. Blood was dripping down his chin and he was panting heavily, centuries of mimicking human behavior having instilled certain instincts in him. He knew he didn't need to, but for some reason, he felt it kept him connected to his humanity. As if the adrenalin and rush which would have claimed a human body was coursing through him, through his own blood.

He stood up and looked around. No one was there, except... something was. He whipped his head around in every direction imaginable. He could see no one, nothing. He didn't hear anything that could have given a being away either. No breathing, no heartbeat, no movement. But he felt like something was watching him.

David put the nagging sensation in the back of his mind and quickly made sure all the humans were alive, then made sure there was no trace of bite marks on their necks, before he called 911 from one of their phones.

"Nine-one-one, what's your emergency?" a kindly, female voice asked from the other end.

"Yea, 'ello?" David said with a fake, yet very convincing urgent voice. "Yea, jus' found bunch 'a guys lyin' 'ere! 'N alley, raght' up Bourbon street! 'Dem ain't wakin' up!"

His dialect was very much that of an uneducated drunk from the South.

“Right, honey, got it, I’m sending some help! What’s your name?”

“Ah, ma name’s—“ then without flinching he squeezed the phone and it just popped and broke into pieces. He dropped the pieces left in his hand and left the alley without another glance.



David entered his apartment and threw his phone and keys on the small table. Then he plopped down on the couch and pulled his laptop out of his bag. He went to his emails and wrote a new one, then sent it a few minutes later. He then closed it and leant back in his couch and sighed.

“Rough night?” a voice spoke from the darkness. David froze, wide-eyed. If someone had been hidden from his extraordinary senses...then they were much powerful than himself. And being more powerful than himself... David dreaded to complete the thought.

David turned around, ever so slowly. Time almost slowed to a crawl in his mind, as his eyes caught sight of two red, glowing eyes piercing the dark shadows of the unlit apartment. They studied David with an intensity so fierce, David could do nothing but stare back.

“Who are you?” he asked, miraculously without his voice faltering.

The eyes closed as a deep, rumbling chuckle echoed throughout the deadly silent apartment. The shadows began to slowly pull away from the individual as he spoke.

“Why, Domenico...I had hoped you would recognized me. Then again, centuries aren’t very kind to the memory.”

The shadows had pulled away entirely, and a man stood smirking in the corner of the living room. He was rather short, only standing around 5’2”, but his presence filled the room with an immense pressure David had only rarely experienced. His black, unkempt, shaggy hair reached his shoulders, and his long, black, and equally messy beard reached his collarbone. He seemed Middle-Eastern, but David knew...humans hadn’t displayed such racial features for a long time.

“You seem...familiar,” David muttered.

The man’s face was suddenly scrunched in confusion.

“Do you not remember me, my friend?”

David’s eyes widened in shock. Was that...? Could he be...?

“You?”



David could already feel the daysleep creep up on him. Though he was by no means yet weakened by the oncoming day, he did feel the drowsiness which accompanied it, just like any other of his kind. He slid off his jacket and threw it on his office chair.

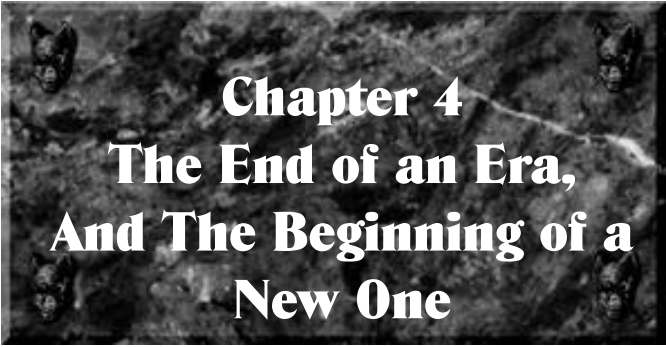
David sat in his chair and sighed out in weariness.

“Damn. I really thought I could get away with it,” he said to no one in particular. His eyes wandered to a small portrait sitting on his desk. A golden-red haired woman with bright, green eyes and faint freckles that enhanced the excited smile that rested on her face.

“I knew your descendants were clever, but did she really have to have that gene?” David chuckled lightly, amused. “Oh, Katherine. I wish you were here.”

His phone buzzed in the small glass bowl. He reached over and unlocked it. He had gotten a text message. When he saw it, his eyes widened and a single, bloody stray tear escaped his eye before he lightly threw the phone back in the bowl. He stood up and carried himself to his bed, the windows shut with the classic colonial era shutters, reinforced with heavy curtains to block out the deadly rays of the sun.

David fell asleep as the sun rose in the horizon, bringing a new day to the beautiful city of New Orleans.



Chapter 4

The End of an Era, And The Beginning of a New One

University Medical Center New Orleans, New Orleans

February 12th, 2015

David briskly walked down the long corridors of the hospital, checking the small plaques that showed room number and the patients admitted to the room.

He walked by door after door until he came up on a room with a single name on the plaque.

‘Anna Jensen’.

Looking around, David made sure no one saw him enter. When he closed the door behind himself, the old woman in the bed stirred awake, clearly having been asleep. The heart monitor beeped slowly, clearly showing her heart gradually failing to sustain her life. When her eyes fell on David, however, the monitor started beeping more rapidly.

“David,” she weakly called. She stretched out her hand. David slowly walked over and took it with a smile on his face.

“Hello, Anna. It’s been a while, hasn’t it?” David asked her with a charming tone of voice and a lady-killer smile. The

woman very lightly blushed.

"I think that run is over, dear boy. You look not a day older than when I first met you," Anna chuckled lightly, rasping a little while she did.

"It was in the thirties, wasn't it?"

Anna sighed.

"I couldn't believe my eyes when you just brushed off that gunshot. I was sure you would die."

David smiled at her kindly.

"It seems your granddaughter is as observant as you, even if she knows only a fraction of what you do."

"Emma's been causing trouble?" Anna asked worriedly. Her face creased into more wrinkles than the ones already marring her skin. David laughed lowly.

"Not exactly, but she might." David showed Anna the acid-burn-like mark in the shape of a cross on the back of his right hand. Anna laughed heartily, but started coughing.

"Just like her! She inherited her mother's calm and her father's temper, but her intellect came from me," she proudly boasted in a raspy voice. They both fell silent as David merely caressed Anna's hand. David decided to get down to business.

"The doctors wrote. Said you probably only have a few days left, if you survive the night."

Anna cast down her eyes.

"Had you turned me, I would still be young and beautiful. But, I feel like I'm ready. I had one hell of a ride with you, David. I earnestly hope Emma will get to have an adventure

of her own with you. You have a way with making an experience seem on the razor's edge, even if you have everything under control," she pondered.

"You are beautiful, Anna. Age is a beauty unto itself, and you've aged gracefully," David warmly told her.

"That's easy for you to say. You haven't aged a day in centuries," she says accusingly.

Before David could retort, the door to the room opened and Emma walked in with a bouquet of white roses. Anna's favorite. When she saw David, however, she threw the roses on a nearby table and pulled out the cross she wore on a thin chain around her neck.

"Get away from her, professor!" she shouted at David. Anna spoke up herself.

"Put that trinket away, dear girl. It's rude to my guest," Anna said beratingly, if sweetly.

Emma's eyes widened.

"What!?" her face paled considerably.

Anna laughed, only to be once again interrupted by coughing. David smoothly moved around the hospital bed and poured a glass of water, stuck in a straw and held it up to Anna's face. She muttered a quick 'thank you' before she started sucking on the straw, the strain of her throat making her cough again. David grabbed a napkin and quietly wiped away the small amount of spilled water and drool on Anna's chin. He smiled all the while he did so. Anna smiled back at him and winked with her right eye, a wink he returned.

Emma looked bewildered between her grandmother and the monster she had burned the day prior with the small

cross held tightly in her hand. Anna waved Emma closer, and David respectfully took a few steps away from them. Emma slowly inched closer to Anna, but her suspicious gaze only rarely left David. Emma sat in a chair next to the bed.

"Listen carefully, my dearest. David is not so bad as you may believe," Anna began. "He is a vampire, no doubt about that. But you have nothing to fear from him."

Emma stared at her last living relative.

"You're kidding, right!? He drinks blood, he kills people," Emma started, but was cut off by David.

"Only when I can't help it."

Anna chuckled.

"Children, hush. Listen carefully, Emma. David is protecting you, whether you are aware of it or not."

"Oh, cut the—"

"Listen!" Anna raised her voice.

Emma fell silent instantly, having never been shouted at by the old and dying woman in front of her. Anna looked ashamed, but continued nonetheless.

"David has been watching over our family and protected us from the unnatural for centuries, beginning with your great-great-great-great-great-great-grandmother, a Scottish woman named Katherine McDye," Anna explained. "She was a rather powerful sorceress who left Scotland because she hated being the Scottish court-mage. She arrived in the American Colonies in 1765, and at the Boston Massacre in 1770, she met David," Anna gestured to David standing over in the corner.

“They fell in love, and were to be married. But Katherine was assassinated by another vampire who hated David. Needless to say, that vampire didn’t live to awaken at the next dusk.”

Emma looked bewildered between Anna and David, but Anna continued speaking.

“A few months prior to meeting David, Katherine had birthed a boy from a tryst with the son of a local noble with whom she became infatuated. However, the young man’s parents claimed the baby when it was revealed that the young man was falling ill from a terminal disease. When he died, they threw Katherine out and kept the baby. Katherine met David while she was in mourning, and she fell truly in love.”

Emma sighed and put her head in her hands.

“While David was mourning the passing of Katherine, he learnt of her affair and swore to protect her son and his descendants until the line died out. You, Emma, are the last of that line, until you have a child of your own,” Anna finished her tale.

Emma quickly raised her head.

“But you’re still alive, grams..” she trailed off the question.

Anna shook her head.

“I won’t last the night. David will make sure of that,” she stated as a matter-of-fact. Emma jumped up and pulled the cross back out.

“Silly girl,” Anna sighed in frustration. “He’s not doing evil. He’ll be doing me a favor.”

“How is killing you doing you a favor!?” she spoke loudly.

“Because he can provide the fastest and least painful death there is; death by a vampire’s fang,” Anna said. “Being bitten by a vampire is a pleasure like no other. And when you lose blood, you start getting lightheaded.” Anna smiled somberly. “It’ll be faster, easier and more pleasurable than falling asleep.”

Emma’s eyes watered up.

“You want to die!?! You’re kidding!”

Anna held out her hand and Emma took it without hesitation. Anna lifted her other hand up and caressed Emma’s wet, tear-stained face.

“I have lived a long and happy life, darling. I have had adventure, pleasure, love and safety. I am fulfilled. The alternative is slowly and painfully withering away, and the doctors have already confirmed I will most likely die in the coming days. I would rather have it end at the fangs of David than from organ failure. Please understand, Emma; it is the most merciful death anyone could grant me.”

Anna’s own eyes were tearing up. Her voice started wavering.

“It’ll be over in seconds. And then, when you grow old and it’s your time, I want you to find me and tell me all about your adventures—“ her voice cracked as the tears started rolling.

Emma was almost sobbing, but wiped her eyes. She cleared her throat.

“If that’s the case, then goodbye. I will find you, and I will tell you all about the adventures I’ll have had.”

Then she leant in and kissed Anna’s forehead. When she

left the room, she cast a suspicious glare at David. David merely smiled back somberly. When the door closed behind her, David slowly approached the old, bedridden woman. He also leant down and kissed her forehead. She lightly leant into it and closed her eyes.

“Take care of her,” she barely managed to croak out before her quiet sobs swallowed her voice entirely. David slowly nodded and leant Anna’s head to her left. He bared his fangs and slowly bit down on the old neck in front of him. Anna gasped as the inhuman appendages pierced her skin, but relaxed and sank into the pillows, her almost-century-old body no longer strong enough to support itself. David slowly drained the blood from the old woman and she slowly lost consciousness, finally departing completely, her face carrying a final, peaceful smile into the comforting darkness that awaited.



David exited the hospital room to find Emma crying on a bench near the room. He momentarily considered what to do before he walked over and sat down next to her. Either she didn’t care at the moment, or she didn’t notice him. In any case, she didn’t react when he sat close to her.

“She had a complete life. Don’t mourn her. She wouldn’t want that.”

He spoke with a soft and gentle voice. Emma still didn’t react, tears continuously flowing and her entire body shaking. David continued.

“There are some things I want to show you. Something which has been kept from you your entire life,” he said slowly.

Emma looked up at David with red, puffy eyes, sniffing slightly.

“And what would that be, blood-sucker?” she asked with sarcasm and malice. David didn’t bat an eye, merely keeping up his impassive face.

“My name is David, and I know for a fact that Anna would want me to inform you.”

“And how could you possibly know that!?” Emma almost shouted in anger.

“Because I’ve known her for seventy years longer than you have, ever since she was twenty-one. That’s a long time to have known a ninety-one year-old,” David calmly replied.

With that, David stood up and started walking slowly down the corridor. Emma glared hatefully at his back. She then looked back at the door leading to Anna’s room. Hesitantly, she stood up and followed the old vampire, still glaring at him. David then pulled aside a nurse passing by him. Emma couldn’t hear what he said, but the nurse suddenly started acting slightly weird. She walked over to the room with mechanical movements, almost like a machine. When she looked inside, she paged someone with a pager and soon, a doctor came running.

Emma didn’t observe any more, as she turned down a hall, a few paces behind David.



David walked into a dusty attic and flicked on a switch that looked like a thing from the 19th century. The dim, yellow light flickered weakly to life, but illuminated enough to see almost everything clearly enough. Emma walked in behind

him, glancing about but keeping her attention on David, just in case.

"This is your legacy," David said. He gestured to all the shelves around them filled with books, boxes and odd trinkets. "Grimoires, magical objects, talismans and anything a witch could ever want. It's all yours, now that Anna is—"

Emma flinched hardly.

"Don't... don't say it," she somewhat pleaded, mostly demanded. David nodded slightly.

Emma walked about, taking in all the things. Dust covered almost everything, some more than others.

"So, I'm a witch, is that it?" she asked whilst looking through the many shelves, idly pacing the room and studying it.

"Not if you don't want to be," David said. "Magical abilities aren't passed from parent to child, though an affinity for it may. When Katherine died, I made sure to trace her lineage when I was watching over Hans," David said. Emma looked confused at him for a second. "Katherine's son," he elaborated, "he was named by Katherine's lover's parents. They were of Dutch descent. Katherine, and consequently you, hailed from a very long line of sorcerers and witches. I think it would be rather easy for you to learn magic. You might even have developed special abilities, even if you haven't noticed."

"Like?" Emma asked with a disinterested voice, though he had gotten her complete attention.

"I don't know," David shrugged. "Maybe you get

premonitions, maybe your presence attracts animals or people. Katherine was naturally gifted in foresight and divination. Maybe you get hunches about the future or past of a place, an object or a person?"

Emma shrugged.

"I have a pretty accurate intuition."

"Well, it may be supernatural in nature. Who knows. Magic is inherently impossible to accurately quantify and classify, even though most magicians like to try."

"Hmm, can vampires learn magic?" Emma asked sarcastically humorously, "or is it like The Vampire Diaries nature-abomination thing?"

"Something like that," David replied nonchalantly. "We can't practice the same kinds of magic you mortals can, but we can practice limited forms of magic through our blood, or pacts with demons."

"Demon's exist?"

"Yeah. Whole corrupted spirit from Hell thing. Though to be fair, most Christians consider any spirit a demon."

Emma raised a brow and looked at David.

"The souls of dead humans are the only spirits Christians and Jews consider 'natural'. Anything else is just...evil, I suppose."

"Damn, my life just keeps getting more complicated," Emma sighed with annoyance.

David chuckled lightly.

"You think you're the only one? Most vampires aren't exactly asked if they want to become one. They're just

turned without their consent, and then thrown head-first into this world of darkness. It's the most horrendous kind of violation one could imagine."

Emma's face softened slightly.

"They're not?" she asked.

"No, they're not," David shook his head. "We can't really ask someone if they want to be turned, since it would give away our existence, which in turn breaks one of vampires' greatest laws. If we did, and they refused, we'd have to kill them if we aren't capable of manipulating memories."

"But you're telling me?" Emma asked with a chuckle.

"Because you're special. Just like your mother, just like your grandmother, and just like Katherine. You may not believe it, but your family holds great importance to me," David stated.

Emma looked thoughtful, as this new information changed her rigorous view of vampires.

"Were you asked?" she questioned out of the blue. Her voice was soft.

David was quiet for almost an entire minute, clearly contemplating, even if his face didn't reveal anything.

"No. I was dying. A lion almost tore out my throat. I was bleeding out. But my sire was a dear friend of mine. He couldn't let me die so young. He fed me his blood and hoped it would heal me. Turns out he was too late," David said. His eyes told Emma he was far away, in a distant memory from ages past, most likely.

Emma hummed to let him know she was done talking for now, and kept browsing the inventory of the attic. It was

very large, and a great many of the things looked very old. Almost half an hour went by.

“Where’s all this from?” she inquired.

“Everywhere. Scotland, England, Wales. Africa and Arabia, Italy and Turkey, Chile and Russia. I roamed the world trying to learn about your family. It extends all the way back, as far as I can gather, to Babylon at least.”

“But if you roamed the world, how could you watch over my family?”

David smirked.

“Just because I wasn’t physically nearby, doesn’t mean I couldn’t know what went on. You pick up a few tricks over the centuries.”

Emma hummed once again, then picked a book off a shelf, dusted it off and opened it. She sat down on an old, ornately carved chair nearby and started reading. David walked over and placed the key to the attic on the book.

“It’s yours. The place is warded against vampires, ghouls, spirits and werewolves.” he explained.

Emma sighed and put the key in a pocket in her jacket.

“Then how are you in here?” she asked.

“Who do you think warded it?”

Then he turned and left without another word. Emma stared after him and pondered.

He and Katherine put Romeo and Juliet to shame. At least neither had to live without the other. Prof. Kane, or David, or whatever his name is, chose to protect all his love’s descendants for centuries, even if they were from another man. If that isn’t love, I can’t

imagine what is.

Emma's thoughts trailed off into many directions and she sat in the chair for hours, just wondering over her situation. She had no living relatives anymore, and the only one who could teach her about her family's legacy was a vampire who had deceived her from the moment they met.

Whoever said life was easy, clearly never tried living.



David sat on a bench in Jackson Square. He leant into the back of the bench, his arm draped across it and his right leg propped on the left by the ankle. With his other hand, he was slowly puffing away at a cigarette, lost in thought.

I wonder what she will do with her new life. Any normal person in their right mind would turn around, run in the other direction and never look back.

David threw away the burnt cigarette and lit another. Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted a young woman walking towards the Cabildo. David's powerful eyes instantly recognize her as Emma, even in the dark of night. A small smile graced his lips as he took another hit on the cigarette. The smile vanished as quickly as it appeared.

Emma looked around, her gaze ever watchful for the person she was seeking. Then something popped into her head. Instinctively, she turned her head to the left and scanned the Square. There on a bench, she saw a dark figure sitting by himself, casually smoking. Though she couldn't see his features because of the shadow cast over his face by the streetlamp beside the bench, she knew that it was him.

She walked over casually and sat down next to him, a foot

or two from him to give herself some space.

“Decided what you want?” he asked casually, knowing full well what she had decided.

“Yes,” she replied. “I want to know. I want to learn.”

David reached into his pocket, pulled out his pack of cigarettes and lighter and held them out for her to take. She pulled out a cigarette, lit it and started puffing away at it. They both sat in quiet and smoked.

Half an hour passed in comfortable silence. David could feel the sunrise coming on. He stood up and stuck his hands in his pockets.

“The sun will rise in an hour. Come on. You’re not going back to your apartment tonight.”

Emma looked at him funnily.

“Why?”

“Because my apartment is warded against unwanted intruders. Yours isn’t.”

“So, what, you’ll ‘sleep on the couch’?” she asked sarcastically.

“No, I’ll sleep in my coffin,” David said with a straight face.

Emma shook her head and blinked.

“What, that part is true!?” she asked in disbelief and shock.

“Don’t be ridiculous, of course I’m sleeping on the couch,” David leant his head back and laughed.

Emma put on a menacing face and glared at him. Then she threw away her cigarette butt and stood up to follow without another word.

“The world isn’t as cut and dry as most of humanity believes. You know how people say people aren’t afraid of the dark, they’re afraid of not knowing what hides in it?” David began his explanation, which would likely take an entire chapter of a book if it were written down.

Emma nodded yes.

“Well, in this world, humans are afraid of both. I’ve heard a great many sorcerers, mages and wizards of all kinds refer to most of humanity with the term ‘Sleeper’, or ‘UnAwakened’. As far as I know, they simply refer to people who don’t know of the supernatural truths behind the world, but I could be wrong.

Magic is real. So are vampires, and zombies, and many other creatures. There are plenty of shapeshifters. You’ve got werewolves, werecats, wercoyotes, wereravens, weresharks, werelions, weretigers, werepandas, werebears, werefoxes. It’s ridiculous how many different subspecies there are, but then again, there are legions of different vampires as well.

We vampires have a couple of secret societies, and most of them have secret societies within those secret societies. Honestly, it becomes really confusing when you go into detail with most of them. We have clans and bloodlines. They are different types of vampires with various characteristics, yet are fundamentally the same.

The Clans are the thirteen most common bloodlines, and can almost be considered the nobles among all the bloodlines, though every clan and every bloodline has beefs with others. Some, like the Nosferatu, are considered the lowest, simply because they are so nauseating to look at.

Others, like the Ventrue, are considered kings just because long ago, they embraced almost exclusively kings, nobles, bankers and the like.”

Emma raised a brow at the word ‘embraced’.

“We call turning someone else into a vampire an Embrace. It basically almost always happens through an actual embrace. How else would we get to bite necks?”

Emma shrugged and gestured for him to continue.

“Anyway, vampire society is heavily divided by sects. I belong to the Camarilla. I know that it’s Spanish, and as such the two ‘l’s are technically silent, but I prefer the English way of saying it.

The Camarilla is basically what you could call a pyramid scheme. We have a few people at the top, they have servants, their servants have servants, and so on. Then there is the Prince. The Prince rules a Camarilla-based city, and he has his servants, they have theirs, and so on. We vampires love pyramid schemes, it would seem.”

Emma raised her brows.

“So, vampires have a universal organization?” Emma asked.
“Seems farfetched.”

“Because it is.” David leant back in his chair. “There is no global ‘organization’. We have sects. An organization for all vampires is impossible, we’re too diverse for that. Rather, every city is, in the most basic terms, an independent state governed by the Prince. The Camarilla proper only intervenes when something major is going on. Say, extremely dangerous Kindred who are on the Red List or the Sabbat are moving in on strategically important

Camarilla–territory.”

Emma tapped the table twice, something David understood meant that he needed to explain a few terms. Anna used to do the same. He cleared his throat.

“We vampires call ourselves Kindred, or Cainite if you’re very old, or part of the Sabbat. The Red List is a sort of ‘Camarilla Most Wanted’ list of the Camarilla’s thirteen greatest threats, and the Sabbat is another Camarilla with completely opposite goals, if with a few of the same values. The Camarilla wants stability and order– control, basically. The Sabbat wants chaos and mindless killing. They see themselves as the rightful owners of humanity, as their masters. They want to act like the monsters they know they are, without being judged for it. In practice, it’s not all that different, though.”

Emma nodded silently.

“Anyway, I’m what’s called a Red Alastor. I only have a couple of superiors, and I’m almost completely autonomous from even them. I oversee a team of Alastors. Alastors are Kindred who hunt Anathema, the people on the Red List.”

Emma leant forward, placing her elbows on her knees and rubbed her hands together.

“So, to put it in simple terms, you’re vampire special forces?” she asked cautiously.

David looked out into nothingness for a few seconds while he contemplated his answer.

“Yes, I suppose you could say I am. I am the commander of a team of counter–terrorist soldiers, in your terms,” he said.

Emma chuckled lightly. Then she leant back and sighed.

“Three days ago, everything was normal. Now my grandmother is dead, I found out supernatural creatures exist and I’m sitting next to vampire special forces. Brilliant. Fan–fucking–tastic,” she said and threw her head back with closed eyes. She put her hands on her face and sat like that for minutes.

David smiled somberly. Then he looked out the window and saw the horizon brightening. He stood up and walked over, and closed the modified shutters. Emma looked up at the noise. David then walked into his bedroom and closed the shutters there. They were left with only the light of the living room lamp.

“You should get some sleep. My bed is right in there. Don’t worry, it isn’t dirty or anything. I’m dead, so I don’t sweat or anything. Besides having been on the bed for a month, the sheets are practically as clean as the night I put them on,” David explained to her.

Emma nodded and walked inside the bedroom and was about to close the door, but she thought of something she wanted to ask David before he went to sleep.

“David?” she gently called.

“Hmm?” David turned to her with an expression that said he was genuinely going to answer the question, no matter what it was. Emma hesitated.

“Is everything going to be fine?” she asked with a little worry. She hadn’t given it much thought, but now that this was the way of her world, she wanted to know if it could end prematurely. “Am I going to die?”

David looked sadly at her for a few minutes. With a weak and tired smile he shook his head slightly.

“You will get to know pain. You will lose things, people, you will get hurt. That’s just the way it is in this world of ours,” he said regretfully. “But it is the mission of my existence to make sure that you won’t know an unnatural death. I will do everything in my power to make sure you die like Anna, or your mother, or your father. Anna grew old and died. Your parents died in a car accident. Those were natural deaths. Sure, I took Anna’s life, but only to spare her those last few days of pain and indignity. I will make sure you die naturally, too.”

Emma nodded slowly. David turned away.

“David?” she asked again. David stood with his back to her for a few seconds and sighed. Then he turned around to face her.

“Yes?”

“Will you turn me into a vampire if I’m about to die soon? If something unnatural almost kills me, and becoming a vampire is my only way out?” She didn’t ask because she wanted to be a vampire. She asked because she was afraid of dying. Her parents died when she was young, and now both her grandparents were gone. She wanted a full life to tell them about when she saw them again in Heaven.

David once again looked sad. He was silent for minutes. He felt the daysleep crawl up on him.

“No.”

With that, he walked over to the couch and laid down. Emma saw he was tense, but almost instantly, his body just

went limp, as if he were dead. Emma was sure he was just sleeping. After all, if he were dead when he was awake, why shouldn't he be when he wasn't?



Emma woke up around five. She turned and looked at the clock next to David's bed, and saw he had a small iPod in a dock with an app showing the times for sunrise and sundown. Almost two hours until David would wake up, according to himself.

"Neat," she murmured to herself.

She stood up from the bed and scratched the back of her head while she yawned. She was wearing only her olive green v-neck t-shirt and her black underpants. She put on her socks, her jeans and her shirt. Then she walked out into the living room. David was lying exactly as he had when he fell asleep in the morning, with his arm dangling down from the couch at an uncomfortable angle.

Hate to be him when he wakes up.

Then she deadpanned.

Since he's dead, he's not going to have a sore shoulder when he wakes up. Lucky bastard.

She put her palm to her forehead and sighed. Then she walked out into the kitchen. She walked over to the fridge and opened it, but was shocked when she saw what it contained;

Just a half-empty transfusion bag. With blood in it. Nothing else.

She sighed and closed the fridge. As she did, she jumped when she saw David standing right behind the door of the

cooling cabinet.

“SHIT!” she yelled and put her hand on her chest, right above her heart. “Don’t...do that.”

“Sorry,” David smiled at her. “Come on, we’ll go get dinner.”

Emma looked at him suspiciously, and he chuckled.

“Not my kind of dinner. Yours.”

He turned and went into the living room, grabbed his phone, keys and wallet. Then he walked out into the small foyer and put on a jacket. Emma was still standing in the kitchen, looking lost. David laughed.

“Come on, I won’t bite,” he paused for moment. “Not you, at least.”

Emma made a face and walked out into the foyer. She put on her jacket and shoes. Then she turned to David.

“After you,” she said without mirth.

David smirked and left the apartment. Emma followed closely behind.



David led Emma to a small restaurant with few visitors. The night was still young, though, and he would find something to eat before it was up. They walked inside, and the hostess immediately recognized David.

“Mr. Kane, so good to have you with us again!” she spoke out with delight. “Table for two?” she asked and looked Emma up and down.

“Yes,” David replied with his infamous lady-killer smile. “And kine for the lady, please.”

The hostess looked at Emma again.

“Yes, I could tell. She doesn’t look very Kindred to me.”

Emma frowned.

“If you have something to say, speak! I don’t have to put up with this,” she said angrily.

“No, no,” David put a reassuring hand on Emma’s shoulder, “it’s nothing like that. This restaurant is operated by Marcel’s ghouls. It serves food for both humans and vampires.”

Emma looked at him annoyed.

“Then what about that ‘kine’ thing?” she asked harshly.

“That’s an old term a lot of vampires use to designate humans,” he explained.

The hostess looked bewilderedly at David.

“Wait, you’re telling a human!? David, you—“ she began, but David calmly interrupted her.

“I know, I know. I am making her a ghoul soon, don’t worry.”

The hostess eyed him and Emma suspiciously.

“Fine. But if I find out you don’t, Marcel will know about this.”

“I know.”

The hostess glared at him for a few seconds, but relented with a sigh.

“Fine. Whatever. You know where your table is,” she said with annoyance.

David thanked her and dragged Emma by the hand into a corner of the restaurant. He sat, and Emma followed his lead.

“Ghouls?” she whispered into his ear. It was a question, not a statement.

David leant over the table, close to her face.

“Humans who drink a little vampire blood here and there. They become stronger, faster, and a lot tougher than normal humans, and they can heal injuries much faster as well. They can learn some of our powers, but that depends on the power of the vampire whose blood they drink.”

Emma nodded silently and leant back, and David did the same. Soon, a waiter approached their table. He was young, and looked nervous.

“We— welcome to The Crimson Bite. I’m Daniel, and I’ll be serving you tonight,” he lightly stammered.

David smiled at him.

“Good evening, Daniel. Please, don’t worry. I won’t bite.”

He flashed his fangs at the boy.

“Yet.”

The young man started shaking a little, and he gulped audibly. David started laughing.

“Oh, God, lad. I’m joking! No, I’ll have a pint. O—positive, if you have any more of it,” David said whilst laughing. “And the course of the evening for my companion.”

The boy nodded and quickly stormed away. David’s laughter quieted to chuckling. He looked at Emma, who was not at all amused.

“What are you laughing at? You scared the shit out of that boy.”

David stopped chuckling.

“I can’t help it, sorry. Old habits die hard, especially for Kindred.”

Emma raised her brows.

“Old habits?”

“Yes, old habits.”

“Why is it a habit?” she asked with slight revulsion.

David rubbed his beard for a few seconds.

“Because, Emma, to live as a vampire, you can’t afford to be nice to everyone. It’s just like Machiavelli described in his work ‘The Prince’: the nice guy will get himself overthrown by more ruthless individuals before he can rule a kingdom.”

Emma frowned.

“But you don’t rule a kingdom,” she said accusingly.

“I did, once upon a time. I’ve been the Prince of a city. My rule was always harsh and ruthless, but fair and efficient. Thanks to that, no one caused problems, and without problems, it just became boring.”

Emma’s jaw dropped.

“You think problems are fun!?” she asked with disbelief.

David nodded.

“Yes, I do. When your existence is— well, meaningless — you start craving conflict and trouble, if only for the satisfaction of having something to do.”

David looked Emma in the eyes with seriousness all over his face.

“In Kindred society, Emma, viciousness and ruthlessness are very nearly the only things people respond to, whether physical or social. They’re par for the course. Make people love you, great; they will adore you. Make them fear you, however, and people will respect you. They will respect your rule and your laws, and when you show reward for progress, and punishment for failure, efficiency goes through the roof,” David said as a matter-of-fact.

Emma sat in her chair with slight horror and disbelief on her face. She didn’t respond, even when the waiter came back with their order. The boy placed the meal in front of Emma and put a large glass of crimson, lifegiving blood in front of David. David smiled at the young man.

“Thank you, Daniel. Now tell me; how long have you been ghouled?” David inquired kindly.

The boy swallowed.

“Uh, a few months now, sir,” Daniel nervously replied.

“A few months? Why, that’s not a very long time at all. Who is your domitor, Daniel?”

“Uh, Mr. Guilbeau.”

David leant back and smiled.

“Ah, Marcel. So how did he recruit you, Daniel?” David asked, almost sweetly.

Daniel seemed on edge. A little sweat was starting to form on his forehead.

“Uh, I– I needed money to pay for tuition. Mr. Guilbeau

was here when I came to give the boss my résumé, and he started asking me a lot of weird questions. He asked if I would like a chance to live forever, and I said ‘yeah’. Then he told me about vampires and stuff, and I thought ‘why not? He’s a nut-case either way’. So I said yes, and now I’m just sort of working here. Mr. Guilbeau feeds me a little of his blood every month, and then I work here so I can pay for my tuition.”

“Mhmm, I see,” David said with well-faked mock-curiosity. “And what do you think of it? Do you like being stronger and better than all your schoolmates?”

“Yeah, I do. Mr. Guilbeau is a nice man, and a good boss. He says I can work here for as long as I want. He pays well, and the strength and speed are amazing!” Daniel ranted excitedly.

David smiled and waved him away. Daniel bowed and left them. Then David addressed Emma.

“See, it’s not just awful things Kindred do. Marcel is one of the nicest vampires I know. He is fair, just and strong, and he won’t hesitate to punish those who deserve it. But he isn’t adverse to underhanded methods. That is why he is Prince of New Orleans. He rules as a ruler should.”

Emma still looked disgusted at the notion of terror, brutality and blackmail being perfectly normal for vampires.

“You have no morals, whatsoever,” Emma merely stated in revulsion.

David looked intensely at her, then took a sip of his glass. He put it down and looked at her.

“I do have morals. Katherine instilled them in me,” he

stated. "Without her, I would still be a monster causing death, destruction, pain and terror wherever I went."

Emma's face fell, and David saw sadness and regret in her eyes. She sighed and started eating. David looked away and slowly sipped away at his drink. They sat in silence for almost twenty minutes.

She shouldn't be part of this world. She isn't cut out for it.

David was lost in thought and stared at Emma, who was eating. Once in a while she looked up, but quickly looked down in her food when she saw him staring at her.

Or, she may prove me wrong. Who knows?

You know.

A deep, dark, growling voice quietly said. It sounded almost like a demon in the back of his head. Grunting, growling. David rolled his eyes.

Stop talking to me, I fed you that poor girl.

Not enough. Give. Me. More.

Maybe tomorrow. The Mardi Gras begins in a few days. I'll definitely feed you then.

The deep, dark voice growled again, but nevertheless slowly receded back into the depths of David's mind. He suppressed the urge to sigh, and just stared at Emma as she finished her meal. She sat so still and acted so small, she might as well have been a child who had just been scolded.

"Why are you acting like that?" David asked her.

Emma jerked her head up to look at him, but wore an expression like her posture. David sighed at himself and started pinching the bridge of his nose.

“I’m not mad at you.”

Emma only looked a little relieved when she heard it.

“I know you don’t understand my rationale. But you chose to become part of my world. This world of darkness. It isn’t a place for the faint of heart. How many people do you think Katherine had seen die before she turned fifteen?”

Emma shrugged and looked down at her empty plate.

“At least thirty,” David stated calmly. “I’ll admit, humanity was very different back then. But some countries still have cultures where killing under certain circumstances is acceptable. Look at what the Israeli State of Iraq and the Levant are videotaping. They decapitate people they call spies, when many of them simply did something that just upset them a little.”

Emma looked up at him with her head still down.

“It’s ISIS now.”

David blinked a couple of times.

“Excuse me?” he asked confusedly.

Emma blushed lightly.

“They’re called Israeli State of Iraq and Syria now.”

David looked dumbfounded at her for a few seconds.

“Oh,” was all he said.

Emma looked around. David checked his watch. Quarter past nine.

“Well, time to go. There is something I want to show you,” David said. He stood up and started slowly walking over to the exist. Emma deftly stood up and followed.

“Until next time, Mr. Kane,” the hostess said, but cast a suspicious glance at Emma. Emma looked away and just followed David.



David led Emma down to the Warehouse District. They stopped right outside of a large building, presumably used for storage. Emma looked at David, her former spirit now returned.

“A warehouse? That’s what you wanted to show me?” she asked.

“My office,” David said. He took her hand. She flinched at the touch of his cool skin. It wasn’t cold. But it was definitely colder than the weather. He gently pulled her toward the door, and suddenly she felt a warm sensation run through her body. It started at her fingertips, and then spread throughout her body, as if she walked through a waterfall. David smiled.

“I’ve warded the place against outsiders. You feel the wards, I see it in your eyes,” David told her. “I think you may just have the aptitude for magic.”

Emma felt the warmth of the ‘wards’, and then as suddenly as it appeared, it was gone. She looked at her hands and down her body. David chuckled.

“Don’t worry, nothing’s happened to you. You shouldn’t have a problem entering anytime now.”

She looked up at him, right in the eyes. They looked intently in each other’s eyes. It was David who broke the eye contact, out of nowhere.

“We should get inside. I want to show you something.”

He walked up to the door, an unassuming, old door with a rather fancy-looking lock on it. He pulled out his keys and stuck one of them in it. He turned it and opened the door. Emma quickly followed him inside. There was a long, dimly lit corridor with eight doors, and it opened up into a large room at the end. David took her hand and pulled her into the large room at the end of the corridor. When they came inside, Emma noticed dummies with holes in them, bullet holes.

Suddenly, a door in the corridor opened.

“GUYS, THERE’S A HUMAN IN HERE!” someone yelled out. A man with yellow, glowing eyes and furry hands with long, wicked claws jumped out, fangs bared. He looked in Emma and David’s direction, and instantly put his hands behind his back and closed his mouth.

“Oh, boss, didn’t see you there!” he said and laughed. “Eh, human, yea, of course there’s a human here. You’re here, right?”

David laughed, and all the other doors opened and revealed several people coming out of them. There were two women and two other men.

One of the women was dressed in brand new, untouched designer’s clothing and was flush with color. She had long hair in a golden-red color. She wore just the perfect amount of makeup and looked like a modern-day Aphrodite. The other wore extremely short denim shorts, a black tank top with a few holes in it and a black leather jacket over that. She was pale as snow, and had shoulder-length brown hair tied in a ponytail, with bangs framing her face.

The men were both dressed in suits, only one of them wore all-black with the first few buttons of his shirt opened and a loose tie. His hair was black and slicked back, and his deep, brown eyes held a certain allure to them.

The other was dressed in a brown, classic, old-school college professor outfit, except with a red skinny tie instead of a butterfly. He even wore glasses and kept his greying, light brown hair slicked back.

Emma shrieked when she saw the thing that came out the door on the left, closest to the door. It had pale, grey skin, a wicked, deformed maw filled with uneven, sharp teeth and looked like something out of a horror film. The thing jumped slightly, and then started laughing. Emma quickly jumped behind David and used him as cover, even though she was only a few centimeters shorter than he.

The woman in designer clothes squeaked and ran up to David and Emma.

“Aww, she’s so cuuute!” she squealed. “Can I keep her, boss!?”

The woman jumped up and down whilst clapping her hands excitedly. Her voice was light and like the sound of a glass bell. The other woman in the back grunted at the other woman’s antics.

“Leave the kine be, Daisy. She’s obviously David’s,” she said. Her voice was deeper, but not very deep compared to men. She looked like an action movie badass, ready to deal out ass-kicking at a moment’s notice.

The man in the dark suit spoke up.

“Please tell me you’ve got a plan with this... whatever

scheme it is," he said. His voice was thick with a strong French accent.

Then the other suit-clad man spoke up.

"It wouldn't be inconceivable that the boss could correct her memory after feeding off her. He is, after all, better at memory manipulation than any of us, William," he stated while he pushed up his glasses. He sounded Italian.

Then, the thing in the back rasped up.

"Heh, that's Emma Jones. The boss isn't going to feed off her. He brought her here for safety," he explained to the others. They looked at him, then back at David and Emma.

David laughed at their antics.

"Yes, X, that is exactly the case," he told them. "This is Emma Jones. She's the last living descendant of Katherine. You will protect her with your lives, and you will teach her about the Camarilla, the Sabbat, all of it. Tell her your personal histories at your own discretion," David said, suddenly with authority in his voice. Not like an employer. Like a commander.

Instantly, every one of them ran up and kneeled before David.

"Understood, boss!" they shouted simultaneously.

They then all stood back up, with the exception of the grey-skinned thing, which seemed to have some trouble getting up. The man with furry hands grabbed its arm and pulled it gently to its legs. It clapped his shoulder and muttered 'thanks'.

David then took a step back and gently pulled Emma beside him. He gestured to each of them one by one.

“That woman,” he pointed to the diva-like woman in designer, “is Daisy Blake. She’s a Toreador. They are sort of like artists, though some Kindred like to call them degenerates.”

The childish woman waved at Emma with a bright smile and a high-pitched ‘hii!’-. Emma waved back embarrassedly.

“That,” he pointed at the man who looked like a professor, “is John Miller. He’s Tremere, and they are blood sorcerers. You just might learn something from him.”

David then pointed to the other woman.

“That is Catherine Jensen. She’s a Brujah, and a damn fine one,” he added. “The Brujah are mostly referred to as rabble-rousers or thugs, but they were once great philosopher kings, and are still amazing fighters and warriors.”

“Next is William Barrow,” he pointed at the man who looked like he had just been at a club. “He is a member of clan Ventrue, the rulers or kings of Kindred society,” he paused. “Or so they like to think.”

The man identified as William gave David the middle finger, but smiled nonetheless. David chuckled, and then pointed at the horrific thing next to him.

“Symond Maximillian, or SayMX, as he prefers, is a Nosferatu. You can see why they would be called sewer rats,” David explained in her ear. “They can’t be seen, or else they breach the Masquerade, but they are the finest damn spies a commander could wish for.”

SayMX smiled and flashed his wicked, crooked and

horrendous teeth.

“Don’t worry my dear, my fangs will never touch your skin,” he rasped with his coarse, rough voice. “I would rather pull each of them out with my bare hands.”

Emma flinched at that, but David put his arm around her shoulders protectively.

“Don’t worry, he’s just telling you how devoted to me he is.”

Emma looked up at him with confusion.

“Besides William and John, I have played integral parts in their lives. But I’ll let them tell you their stories if they want to. Respect goes both ways; I respect them and their pasts, they respect me and mine.”

Emma looked at him, and then nodded.

“Anyway, my last subordinate here,” David pointed to the man with yellow, feline eyes and furred hands, who smiled and waved, “is Aiden Miles. He belongs to clan Gangrel, and they are master of beasts and shifting their shapes.”

Emma was slightly waving at them. Then the black-clad man and the professor-type both turned around and headed into their respective rooms. Emma suspected they were offices, as David had said the building was his office. The badass woman, Catherine, also turned and went back to her own office.

“So, this is the last relative of Katherine, eh?” Aiden mused. His eyes ran her up and down. “I see the resemblance. If only barely.”

“What did you expect?” David asked. “She’s ten generations from Katherine.”

Aiden nodded and continued looking at her. Emma looked him in the eyes, and he smiled.

“But I see the fire in her eyes. Katherine’s fire.”

Emma’s interest was piqued.

“You knew Katherine?” she asked Aiden.

David withdrew his arm from around her shoulder.

“I hate to have to leave you, but I have work I need to do. I’ve put it off for far too long.”

David rested his hand on Emma’s shoulder for a moment.

“Don’t worry, you’re safe here. Every single one of my subordinates is willing to lay down their unives to protect you. You’re under my protection.”

With that, and a smile, David headed back down the corridor and walked into the last office on the right. Aiden gestured for Emma to follow him and walked into a nearby room. She followed him, as did the remaining two of David’s friends, Daisy and Symond. As she walked into the room, she saw the plaque on the door reading ‘Aiden Miles, Alastor’. They all walked in, and Aiden gestured for them all to have a seat.

There was a desk with a chair behind it, a couch which could comfortably fit three people, and an armchair. Emma took a seat on the couch. Daisy sat down next to her, her eyes glued to Emma’s face and roaming her entire figure, the unnervingly wide smile never leaving her face. Symond took place in the armchair and leant back. Aiden sat down in the chair behind his desk.

“To answer your question, yes. I knew Katherine,” he began. “I was embraced on my family’s farm a few miles

outside Boston, in 1722. My sire took refuge in our barn and frightened all the horses and cattle. I went out to look, but he ambushed me and drank all my blood. When I came to, I knew I had to get away. I knew I was different, and probably dangerous.”

Aiden paused and looked up into the ceiling for a few seconds. Then he looked back at Emma.

“Dawn approached, but I had no idea the sun would burn me to ash in moments. It was almost too late, but then David swooped in and dragged me to a nearby mine. We fed on the workers that slept in there, and when we woke up the next night, he started explaining what had happened to me. He told me my sire was a Gangrel who was a wanted criminal. David was chasing him, and he only embraced me to slow David down. He then went on to tell me about the Camarilla, and how they had issued my sire’s death-sentence.”

Emma’s eyes widened and her mouth opened, as if to ask a question, but she remained silent. Daisy threw herself back into the couch.

“AAWWW, SHE’S SO CUTE!” she squealed. She rolled around on the couch and giggled like a schoolgirl. Emma looked at her with an expression that practically screamed ‘the fuck is wrong with you?’. Aiden noticed this.

“Don’t mind her, practically everything about humans excites her these days. She’ll calm down soon.” He smiled, amused by the female vampire’s fit.

“Anyway, I asked David to take me with him. He told me to stay in the cave for three days. If he wasn’t back by then, I would be on my own. If he was, he would bring me with

him after, and teach me more. He came back the second night, and told me to come with him to Boston. We stayed there for a couple of decades. He taught me everything. How to speak with animals, how to control them. How to heighten my senses, how to change my body. Hell, he even taught me how to resist ungodly amounts of damage.”

Symond sat in his chair and nodded.

“Yes, David is a very compassionate man. He has taken care of Aiden, Catherine and myself since we were embraced. All our sires abandoned us, and he took all of us in without hesitation. Taught us all we needed to know about Kindred, the Camarilla and the Sabbat. He taught us how to survive.”

Symond spoke with something that almost sounded like reverence when he mentioned David. Emma looked down at her hands, which were folded in her lap.

“He really is the kindest Kindred I have met,” Daisy spoke up. Her fit was over and she looked into oblivion in remembrance. “He takes better care of us than any other Kindred takes care of their childer.”

Emma looked at Daisy for a moment.

They all think so highly of him. There is so much I don’t know. I need to learn.

Aiden continued his story.

“Anyways. Come March 5th, 1770. The Incident on King Street. It was in the wee hours of the morning, and the sun wouldn’t rise for another couple of hours. David and I were out listening to the town criers on King Street when Regulars stormed the square in front of the State House. They formed ranks in front of it and aimed at the populace,

warning them to stay away. I still don't know what happened.

Something provoked them, and they just opened fire. I got hit in the shoulder, but it didn't do much. David's training was harsh, but I asked for it, so it wasn't a big deal. I saw David getting hit by three or four balls, and he didn't even flinch. Then he turned around, and before I could see anything, he just stormed off, pulling a woman with him.

I knew something was up, but I didn't want to disturb him. A few months later he introduced me to the same girl he had pulled away from the square. She had a fire in her eyes, she did. Like a survivor. A warrior."

Emma raised her brows at the last statement. Aiden waved his hands in front of himself.

"No, she didn't look physically like a warrior," he quickly explained with a nervous chuckle. "But her eyes radiated strength. Resilience. The will to take on any task, no matter how daunting." He paused for a few moments. "Now that I look closer, you do actually resemble her quite a bit. Not in looks, but in your eyes."

"I don't follow..." Emma trailed off, as if in a question.

"You've a warrior's eyes. I think you are more willful than you know. It takes eyes like that to survive in this world. I have no doubt you'll flourish."

Emma nodded and took it all in. Aiden had known David for almost three hundred years. That was a long time in Emma's mind, but what was three hundred years to someone who wouldn't grow old and die?

"Quite a lot, actually," Daisy said out of nowhere.

Emma looked at her with confusion.

“What do you mean?” she asked the woman, who was now just smiling kindly, instead of wearing a nigh maniac grin.

“Well, the first hundred years or so of being Kindred are by far the hardest,” Daisy explained, “survival-wise. After that, it just becomes sort of a big blur to many of us, but to some, every moment is as vivid as the next. Eternity just stretches on forever, it seems.” She giggled when she realized her wording. “It’s like that for Aiden and myself, among the NightBlades. When that is the case, three hundred years are a long, long time.”

Emma shook her head in confusion.

“Wait, you can read minds?” she asked curiously.

“Yes, I can!” Daisy quipped excitedly. “Pretty cool, isn’t it?”

Emma looked at the redhead with awe.

“Yeah, it’s awesome!” she exclaimed.

“Yeah, I’ve been practicing it for my entire life!”

“So, how old are you?” Emma inquired.

Daisy looked up in the ceiling.

“Oh, about two-hundred-and-fifty or so. It’s no big deal,” she claimed. “John and Will are over three times my age.”

“Really?” Emma asked with wide eyes.

“Yeah. I think Will is about twelve hundred, and John is about eight hundred, if I recall correctly.”

Emma grabbed her head and took a few deep breaths. She was learning so much so quickly. After a few seconds, she put her hands back into her lap and paid attention again.

“So, how about David?” she asked Daisy. “How old is he?”

Everyone in the room was quiet. Neither Daisy, Aiden nor Symond said a word. Emma looked between them, bewildered.

“What?”

Aiden just tapped his desk with a finger repeatedly, leant back and looked into the ceiling. Symond rolled his crooked thumbs and whistled lowly. Daisy cringed.

“Well,” the Toreador began hesitantly, “we don’t know.”

Emma blinked.

“You don’t know?”

“We don’t know,” Aiden confirmed.

“None of us know,” Symond chimed in.

“Not a single one of you?” Emma asked curiously.

“Well, David has revealed some things that give us a very rough estimate,” Daisy told Emma hesitantly.

Emma blinked.

“So, how old is that estimate?”

Daisy paused.

“At least two–and–a–half thousand years.”

Emma’s jaw dropped in shock. She started blabbering.

“TWO THOUSAND!?” Emma almost yelled.

“Shhh,” Aiden shushed her, with a slight twinge in his face.

“Everyone in this building except you has supernatural hearing. We can hear you just fine.”

Emma blushed and leant into the seat.

“David has a tattoo on his back that he said is a curse placed on him by Babylonian sorcerers. He says that the curse slowly changes his personality over time. I don’t think he’s lying, he has changed quite a lot, even since when I met him,” Daisy explained to Emma.

Emma nodded slowly, digesting the information. Then, there was a few knocks on the door to Aiden’s office.

“Come in, David” he calmly said.

Sure enough, when the door opened, it revealed David holding the doorknob. He looked them all over.

“Carfax sent me a list of potential Anathema. One of them was last spotted in Baton–Rouge, and was heading this way. There’s a good reward in it for us,” he said. He then looked at Emma. “Are they treating you nicely?” he asked with a smile.

“Uh, yeah, they are,” she said uncertainly.

“Good,” David said. “You’re going to stay here for a while. I’m going to have a spare room prepared for you. I’m going out to see if I can find this cretin.”

“He means the potential Anathema,” Daisy said before Emma could even ask. “Hunting them, and Anathema themselves, is what we do.”

“You could say we’re governmentally employed assassins,” Aiden said. “The Camarilla pays us for killing those that can be appointed to the Red List when an Anathema dies.”

“The Red List is the Camarilla’s thirteen most wanted enemies,” Symond continued. “The Anathema are basically to us what the Al–Qaeda, ISIS and Baka Haram are to the FBI. If someone kills one of them, they are immediately

appointed as Alastors and receive a rather sizeable reward.”

“But since all of us except John and Sy are already Alastors, we just get the reward, and a monetary one for the potentials,” Daisy finished.

“Then how much do you earn for an Anathema?” Emma asked her.

“Oh, we don’t get money for Anathema,” Aiden chuckled. “For those, we get big boons.”

“They’re basically favors,” Daisy once again said before Emma could ask. “An Anathema usually gives us a tutor for certain Kindred powers or allies, though it can be anything from allowing us to kill someone we hate, to something like a domain in a city or immunity to blood hunts.”

“Blood hunts, by the way,” David interjected, “are events called by the Prince of a domain. Every Camarilla vampire in the city is required to participate.”

“So, what is it really?” Emma asked, having not understood the underlying meaning.

Everyone was silent.

“Essentially, a public execution where anyone is allowed to kill the criminal.”

The tone of David’s voice held a certain finality to them. A sense of bone-chilling dread washed over Emma, and she noticed that Daisy, Aiden and Symond all shook slightly as well.

“Boss,” Aiden slightly growled through his teeth, his eyes directed at the floor and his face portraying the terror Emma felt in herself. “You’re doing it again.”

David looked at him, then the others.

"Ah, sorry," he meekly said, and just as swiftly the sensation had appeared, it was gone. Everyone sighed a breath of relief except Daisy.

"Anyway, Aiden," David continued. "I need you to scout the city from the sky. I'll go out and try to sniff him out."

"Got it, boss."

"Daisy, I need you to ask around a little."

"On it, boss."

"X, see if you can pick anything up on your...whatever you use to track people with computers."

"Understood, boss," Symond chuckled, amused by David's complete ineptitude with technology.

Emma looked up at David.

"What about me?" she asked. She had no idea what was going to happen.

"I'm going to write an email to UNO saying that you will be absent from classes for a few weeks. You're going to Washington to take care of a cousin's children while their parents are in the hospital. They were in a car accident, but they are slowly recovering, and completely safe."

Emma nodded.

"You can ask John to try to teach you magic while we fou."

Emma's eyes brightened and she smiled.

"Really?"

"Yes, but I tell you this right from the beginning; it will take dedication, practice, more dedication and more practice. It

will take time and patience, and you will become frustrated. But don't give up. I know you'll accomplish things."

David smiled, knocked the doorframe once, and left the room. The three vampires she sat with got up and left as well. Emma then followed them out into the large space where the training dolls stood. Aiden walked over to four large, black boxes, like those with equipment at a concert. He pulled a panel on the front away to reveal several drawers. He pulled out the first and revealed several swords in various styles. He picked up a clean, shiny machete and strapped it to his side in a holster. He closed the drawer and opened the third from the top. In it lay a wide variety of pistols, and he picked up a rather large pistol. He then closed it and replaced the panel before going over to another. He opened it normally and Emma saw ammunition boxes of all kinds. He picked a box with '.45 ACP' ammunition and grabbed a few magazines from another box labeled '1911'. He then walked over to a small table with a couple of simple wooden stools around it. He sat down and started loading the bullets in the magazines.

Daisy walked back into her office, and Symond did the same. David walked out of his own office and towards Emma, holding three files like the ones they use on CSI. He walked past her with a smile and handed Aiden one of them. Aiden opened it and skimmed it over. He then put it on the table and kept loading. David walked back to the corridor and threw the remaining two inside Daisy's and Symond's offices as he passed them. He then walked back into his own office.

Emma stood in the middle of the common room, at a loss of what to do now. She had only just been introduced to

this world last night, and now she was dead—center in what was basically an assassin's den.

This is straight out of a novel. Vampires are real, and God knows what else. And a friend of my grandmother's is a two-thousand-year-old hitman working for a vampire government. Absolutely brilliant.

She was lost in thought when a voice spoke up behind her.

"So you're Katherine's descendant, eh?" came the voice of Catherine Jensen, the badass Lara Croft-esque woman. "Well, I hope you know what you've gotten yourself into."

Emma almost jumped out of her skin of fright and turned around. The woman frowned.

"Maybe not."

Emma looked at her whilst holding her hand on her chest, trying to calm her rapidly beating heart.

"I—I didn't see you there," Emma stammered, panting at the sudden exertion of her heart.

Catherine scanned Emma with her eyes, looking up and down her figure.

"You're aware you can die at any moment, right?" she asked nonchalantly. "This world is a mean place. It's not a girl's world."

Emma felt offended at that.

"I'm a grown woman," she said indignantly. "I'm not a girl."

"You might as well be. Everyone in this building except you is at least a hundred years old. I'm almost two, myself." Catherine crossed her arms and put her weight on one leg. "We are all vampires, and we're all prepared to die at any

moment. Are you?"

Emma was taken aback.

"What?"

"I asked," Catherine repeated, this time pronouncing every syllable more clearly and slowly, "are you prepared to die?"

Emma just stared at her.

"Every NightBlade, including David, is prepared to die at a moment's notice. We have to be if we want to exist. In many ways, vampires are at a much higher risk of death than humans, simply because we're all violent creatures who are living dangerous unlives."

Catherine clapped Emma on the shoulder and walked away, back into her own office. Emma gently rubbed her shoulder where Catherine had hit her. It actually hurt a little. Emma then walked over to Aiden and sat down next to him. Without looking up from now sharpening his machete, he slid the file across the table to Emma. She looked curiously at him for a second before picking it up and reading it.

"Zodiac, real name unknown. Rogue Giovanni who's been spreading a little uproar in Louisiana lately," Aiden said without looking up. "Known to have broken the first, third and sixth Traditions, the last several times over. Clan Giovanni has given the Camarilla permission to eliminate him without discretion. He is a serial Kindred-killer, powerful necromancer and a big threat to Camarilla Kindred. His sire has been executed, as has all of his childer, but he remains at large."

Emma read the file while she listened to Aiden's rundown

of it.

“So, he’s a bad guy.”

Aiden snickered.

“Really bad. He wasn’t born in the Giovanni family, so his very existence is actually a crime.”

“How?”

“Well,” Aiden began his explanation, “back in the 12th century, there was this clan called Cappadocian. They were necromancers, and most of them were very religious folk. But one of the founder’s childer, Augustus Giovanni, wanted more power. His family had become a bloodline centuries before, but he wanted clan–status for them. The thing about the Giovanni is that they are all biologically related.”

Emma blinked.

“Come again?”

“Augustus was the first of them to become a vampire, he was head of the family. He then began embracing his children, and when their children had children they were turned, and so on and so forth. They still continue that practice today, and it’s punishable by death to embrace any that aren’t from their family. That’s why Zodiac’s very existence is a crime to them; though we don’t know his real name, he’s no real Giovanni. That’s why the Giovanni gave us permission to end him.”

“Right.” Emma sat in thought for a few moments. “So, the Giovanni aren’t part of the Camarilla?”

“No, they’re not. Brujah, Gangrel, Malkavian, Nosferatu, Toreador, Tremere and Ventrue are all Camarilla–aligned

clans. The Lasombra and Tzimisce are the majority of the Sabbat, and the Assamites, Setites, Giovanni and Ravnos are all independent from both the Camarilla and the Sabbat. They just don't want to deal with our crap."

"And what's the deal with the traditions?" she inquired.

"They're the six basic laws of the Camarilla. The Traditions are in place to keep us in line. The elders say they're to protect us, but anyone with half a brain realizes that that's bullshit."

"But, what are they, specifically?"

"There's six of them. Thou shall not reveal thy true nature to those not of the Blood. Doing such shall renounce thy claims of Blood. That's the first of 'em. It's called 'The Masquerade', and it basically means that we have to hide ourselves from humans. We can't tell them we exist, unless of course we want us to make them ghouls to serve us."

Emma was curious now.

"So, they can tell those who're going to serve them, but not those they're turning?"

Now, it looked like, Aiden was confused.

"Where'd you hear that?" he asked her.

"Well, David told me. Is it wrong?"

"Well, no, not exactly. I mean, incredibly few are actually asked if they want to become vampires. Most of us are just sort of forced into this life, and then forced to adapt. The Ventrue, as I understand it, are particularly adept at that."

"What do you mean?"

"They have entire protocols, lists of what to do at which

time, what to respond when asked a specific question, that stuff.”

“What, really?”

Aiden chuckled.

“I think David exaggerated a bit. Though, from the Ventrue I’ve met, it wouldn’t be too much of a stretch. At any rate, only a few are groomed these days.”

“Groomed?”

“Yeah. David tells me it’s a practice of ancient times. Apparently, vampires used to tell their prospective childer that they were going to become vampires months or years in advance. They taught them about vampire society, powers, history, et cetera. Some still do it, and that’s called ‘grooming’, though even these aren’t really given a choice in the matter, either. They just get a ‘head’s up’.”

There was silence for a few minutes, where only the clicking of Aiden loading bullets into the magazines could be heard. Emma just sat and went over all the new knowledge in her head.

God, it’s like a game. All these established rules and all that... I don’t know. I’m tired.

Emma stood up and waved Aiden goodbye. He returned the gesture with a nod. She started towards the corridor with the offices, and was surprised when she saw David standing in his door, waiting for her. He was smiling slightly at her, and leant against the doorframe with his arms crossed. Emma slowly walked up to him.

“I can guess from your posture, your eyes and your overall appearance that you’re tired,” he began. “Come on, I’ll

show you where you can sleep until your things get here.”

Emma just nodded, her eyes now drooping a little. It hadn't been long since they got here, but it was dark out and Emma was a '6 a.m.' person. David strode down the corridor, into the large training area, and walked up a flight of stairs she hadn't noticed before. She followed him up there, and it revealed an entire second floor, which was almost identical to the one downstairs. There were eight rooms, just like the offices downstairs. David led her to one in the back, the one right above his office. He opened the door to reveal what essentially looked like a study out of a movie about a wizard.

Old books, parchment and paper, and things Emma didn't recognize littered the room. With the exception of the large, comfortable-looking bed. King size, silk sheets and plush. It looked so inviting to her!

“Go on,” David chuckled with a smile at her. “You must be beat, going from diurnal to nocturnal so quickly.”

Emma barely registered what he said after 'go on', as her face hit the pillows almost instantly. She sighed audibly into them and just laid there. David laughed, and she embarrassedly rolled over in a fetal position. David, faster than she could follow, pulled the comforter from under her and laid it on top of her.

“Good morning,” he said with a chuckle as he turned off the lights and closed the door with a final smile.

Emma sank into the bed.

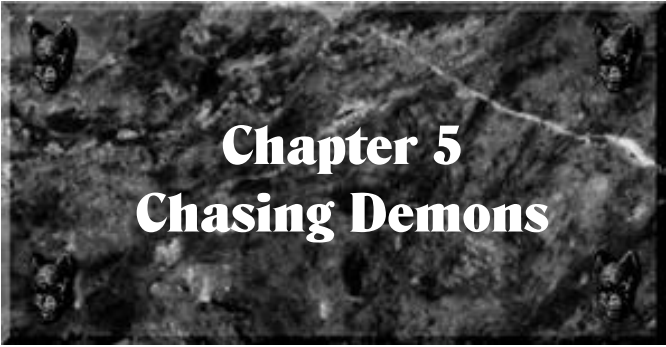
He sure smiles a lot for someone who's lost the love of their life.

Emma's head started swirling with thoughts, of what had happened, what she had learnt, and what would happen

yet. A few tears rolled from her eyes when she thought of her gramps dying in the hospital.

Ah, guess I haven't processed that properly.

Emma soon entered the realm of dreams. It wasn't a good night's sleep, however.



Chapter 5

Chasing Demons

French Quarter, New Orleans

February 13th, 2015

Blood was everywhere. David looked down at his colonial era suit, and it was soaked in cold, crimson blood. His hands were drenched in it, and he still bore the claws of a vampire's changed shape. He looked around. The inside of the town house's main hall was bloody and gory, but he saw no bodies. No rent corpses.

"Da...vid..." a pained gasp sounded from behind him.

He whipped around and saw a woman in a dress, once white, now dyed red with blood. Her green eyes were blaming, her once rosy skin now porcelain white and pulled taut over her bones. Her cheekbones were protruding under the skin, and her eyes were sunken, with dark rings under them.

"Dav... id..." she gasped again.

David saw her throat was cut, but not bleeding. He could see her windpipe struggling to get air down into her lungs. David rushed over towards her, but just as he was about to pull her into his arms, she disappeared.

"W-why...?" he heard in his head.

His eyes started welling with blood.

"Katherine, I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!" he started sobbing.

He fell to his knees and started pulling at his hair, his teeth clenched and tears of blood streaming down his face. His fangs extended, and when he opened his eyes again, they glowed bright red. Leaning back, he screamed, roared into the ceiling. It was a sound unlike that of any human. Like some sort of mix between a wolf's howl and a lion's roar, but sounding truly like neither. It was wholly inhuman, and totally monstrous. It went on forever, a dark scream of an unnatural creature.

Suddenly, the double doors in front of him opened, and revealed the sun. The bright rays, full of life, scorched his skin and burnt his flesh. His scream increased in volume as his flesh slowly rotted, fell off and burned. His face was slowly falling off, revealing his bleached skull. David fought to stand, and then charged head first into the open.

He was in the middle of a large tribe of people, most of them fully naked. Most were clearly African, but some looked like they were from other places as well, like Europe and the Middle East. His skin no longer burned under the sun, and he looked down to see his naked, very living body.

"What is this?" he spoke to himself. "What is going on?"

Two boys came running up to him, rather dark in skin, but both had bright, blue eyes. They said something he didn't understand, a tongue he didn't recognize. A woman, very dark-skinned, came up to him with a smile and pushed herself against his body. She leant up and kissed him on the cheek, then spoke in the same, unknown language.

"What?" he asked her bewildered.

She frowned and said something again. David slowly backed away with his hands raised in a non-threatening manner.

"I can't understand you," he said slowly and clearly. "Who are you?"

Then, just as suddenly as he had appeared in the African tribe, he was somewhere else. It was night, but he still felt his heart racing, his lungs heaving and sweat all over his body. He looked around, confused.

"Good evening, &F&\$," he heard a deep, masculine and smooth voice behind him. The last word he said was muffled, as if underwater. Distorted. Indiscernible.

David whipped around, and stumbled a little, his head spinning slightly from the sudden movement. He saw a man, around his own height, standing next to a large rock. He was wearing a loincloth made of animal fur, and wore a string with fangs and teeth of predators around his neck. His hair was black, wild and long, as was his scraggly beard. His skin was dark, like that of a very tan Middle Easterner, and his eyes were glowing bright red. He smiled.

Then everything started fading away. David's sight blackened from the peripheral inwards, and soon, he saw no more. Then, the unseeable ground below him slipped away, and David plummeted into nothingness.

"FATHER!" he screamed. His voice echoed in the darkness, ringing throughout his head and the empty void. He fell, and fell, and fell. His screams went on for what seemed like forever. Then, out of nowhere, David hit the 'ground', and he felt his head whip backwards, his face cave in and his neck snap.



David woke up and stared silently into the ceiling of his

office. His head was leant back over the chair, and his hands firmly gripping the armrests, so firmly that the wood had splintered.

"Damn," he muttered and pinched the bridge of his nose.

He got up and started slowly pacing his office. He felt the weight of the day slowly fading, as he awoke much earlier than most other Kindred. About half an hour until Aiden woke up, then followed by SayMX, Daisy, William and John. David had learnt quickly of their sleeping habits, and found that he woke earlier than all of them. He walked over to the chest in the corner of the room and opened it. He pulled out a twelve-inch knife made of silver. He felt the uneasiness and nausea that came with it. He pulled up his shirt and, without flinching, plunged the knife into his gut. He grunted slightly and fell to his knee. He breathed slowly, feeling the pain of the special weapon spread from his stomach to his entire torso. He twisted the blade with another grunt and roughly pulled it out.

Blood coated the knife, and he saw the liquid starting to boil and evaporate. Soon, there was no more vitae on it, and it was as clean as when he took it from the chest. David put it back and closed the chest. He stood up and clutched the wound, still feeling the searing pain of the silver stabbing his gut. He then closed his eyes and the wound slowly, but surely, closed and left not even a scar, in stark contrast to the many scars already marring his abdomen. Claw marks and bite marks from a vicious beast, the likes of which no natural animal could be. David gently traced the scars on his stomach, remembering only very faintly how he got them.

"Get up, boy!" the tall, dark-haired man yelled. "You're stronger

than that!"

David lay on the ground and clutched his torn and bleeding shoulder. The man was hairy, very hairy, and rather tall. His hands wore claws and his feet were almost like paws. His mouth was clenched shut, and covered in blood. David's blood. The rest of the man's face was blank, completely feature-less.

"I SAID GET UP!" the man screamed and kicked David in the stomach. David had the wind blown out of him and the claws on the man's foot dug into David's flesh and cut him. David felt his almost seven-year-old body quiver and shake, and he was losing consciousness rapidly.

"ENOUGH!" a feminine voice shouted. A woman came, and just like the man, the only part of her face David could make out was her mouth. Her hair was golden and reached her hips. David notice that the both of them were naked, and he realized that he was as well.

"DO NOT INTERFERE, WOMAN!" he yelled back at her. "HE NEEDS TO AWAKEN TO HIS HERITAGE!"

"AND KILLING HIM WILL DO THAT, HOW?"

They shouted back and forth at each other, and David's hearing muffled, his sight darkened and soon he felt no more.

David stopped caressing his scars and let his shirt drop. He walked out of the office and headed through the corridor, upstairs and to the last room on the right. He gently knocked on the door. A few seconds later, he heard a quiet "come in", and he entered.

Emma sat in the bed, her lower body covered by the duvet and she wore only her v-necked t-shirt on her torso. David sat down in an armchair close to the bed and looked

intently at her. Emma returned the look. David knew they were just getting used to one another's presence, and he was well aware that she was experiencing the same. They just looked at each other silently for a few minutes.

"I'll take you out for dinner when you're ready to eat."

Emma nodded and laid back into the headboard.

"So, I guess I'm going to have to get adjusted to being active at night?"

"Yes, you will."

Emma sighed and ran a hand through her hair.

"Sleep well?" she asked him casually.

"No," he replied just as casually. "I rarely do."

Emma looked back at him with wide eyes.

"Rarely'?"

"Few vampires actually experience anything when they sleep. To most, it's just like blacking out. I have nightmares almost daily."

Emma's eyes softened.

"What are they about?"

David's face remained an impassive mask, betraying none of his emotions.

"My past. I've had nightmares about Katherine's death since she died, but more recently they have... shifted – to something else."

"What is that?"

"My life. My mortal life."

Emma's face became more curious. She leant forward and rested her arms on her covered knees.

"When I was a boy," David continued, "my father used to beat me. He hurt me a lot."

David pulled off his shirt to reveal the ocean of scars covering his body, and Emma gasped and put a hand to her mouth, eyes wide.

"My father was a werewolf," he said without waiting for her to say anything. "Contrary to common beliefs, werewolves are born, not turned. And not all descendants of a werewolf are werewolves themselves. Those that do not awaken to their wolf heritage are called kinfolk, and my father was desperate for his only son to be a werewolf like himself."

"So he scratched you up like a cat's toy!?" she almost shouted in anger.

"Basically," David said offhandedly. "My mother healed me a lot over the years. She was a pretty powerful sorceress, and she taught me magic so that even if I never became a wolf, I would still be of use to the tribe we lived in. Our shaman helped with that. He saw potential in me, and I even surpassed my mother, may she rest in peace, before my untimely death."

David didn't flinch as he spoke.

"But when I became a vampire, they all ousted me from my home. I had to go with my sire. Not that I don't like him, but I was very much attached to my tribe. They were my family."

Emma leant back into the headboard and put her hands on her face.

“Some people are just...” she trailed off, not knowing what was appropriate to say near David.

“I am a little behind on the youngsters’ slang of the time, but I do believe the term you are looking for is ‘fucked up’.”

David put his shirt back on, and Emma cast a last, sad glance at the scars before they were covered up. David stood up.

“I’m heading out to locate the Giovanni Carfax notified us about. Why don’t you try and talk to Daisy or John? I’m sure they’re eager to teach you a few things.”

Emma nodded and looked into David’s eyes.

“Be careful,” she said.

“I will,” David replied with a grin. Then he left the room. Seconds later she heard the front door of the warehouse open and close.

Emma slowly got out of the bed and got dressed. All the thoughts swirling in her head distracted her. All these new things to learn, things to study. She went downstairs and looked around. Daisy was humming away in a couch in the corner of the large, open room. She was sitting with a pad of paper, drawing or writing something as she started buzzing to herself. Emma was instantly reminded of a bee lazily flying around. She walked over and sat down next to the vampire and looked at what she was doing. On the sheet of paper, Emma saw a beautiful drawing of David.

“He’s so handsome, I can’t help it,” Daisy said calmly, if with some kind of suppressed glee or excitement. “But he’ll never be mine. I’m fine with that, but he would be a nice trophy to have.”

Emma's eyes widened slightly.

"Trophy?"

Daisy smiled at her.

"We Toreador are known as artists for a reason," she began. "We gain status in our clan by creating artistic masterpieces, seducing the loveliest or most handsome people, things like that. Having David on my trophy wall, now that..." she trailed off and stared into thin air.

"But, what makes David so special?" Emma asked the Toreador. "I mean, I understand that he's really old and probably really strong, but why would he be good to have on your 'wall'?"

Daisy laughed heartily.

"For those exact reasons, sweetie! Elders are so much more rewarding than fledglings or humans, and David's a really powerful elder."

Emma looked back on the sketch. She noticed a symbol on his forehead that she hadn't seen on David himself.

"What's that?" she asked and pointed it out to Daisy.

"That's a mark that takes supernatural senses beyond those of any neonate to see. It's linked to a curse that David says he was subjected to in Babylon."

"What curse?"

"He says that the curse terrifies people if they hold eye-contact with him for too long. I believe him. I've felt it. But other than that, I've only ever admired him, ever since I met him."

"When did you meet him?"

Daisy laid the pad in her lap and leant back into the couch.

“I think it was the late 19th century. Eighteen–seventy–or–eighty–something. I was growing bored in London, painting and sculpting all the time. I wanted to try something new. So my sire, Elias, called in a boon from David to bring me along in his hunt for an Anathema in Germany. It was so exciting, and so much fun! And when we tracked it down and cornered it in Hungary, I went for the kill! It was amazing!”

Daisy seemed to get riled up, just from talking about it and remembering the events.

“I’ve been an Alastor ever since. It hurt my sire a little that I was leaving him to hunt the most dangerous Kindred on Earth, but he still lights up like a funeral pyre when he sees me.”

Emma nodded slowly, a little disturbed by the ‘funeral pyre’ part. Daisy looked analyzingly at Emma with a smile, and then leant in and whispered in her ear.

“Hey, wanna go shopping?”

Emma looked at her for a second, before smiling brightly.



David walked down the street, his gaze wandering about. His nose was working in overtime to pick up the scent of unknown Kindred.

Chances are he came to the French Quarter. It’s the district with the most places to get supplies for magic, except for Tremé. Since he’s a necromancer, he might want to stock up.

David mused to himself in his head all the time. It was one of his many small ways to keep himself from going insane

with boredom. David's nose twitched as he caught an unfamiliar scent not belonging to a human. He turned his head to the side and looked behind him. The scent became a little stronger. He started walking towards an alley a good distance behind him. When he came to the opening, he got close to the wall and peered inside.

A man stood next to a couple, who were obviously dominated if the dazed look in their eyes was anything to go by. He was whispering to them, a whisper no human could have heard. But David was no human.

"Be quiet, lovelies. Don't scream. Don't thrash. Don't fight it. Just let me drink."

The vampire leant in to the woman's neck and bit down on it. Though she didn't scream, David could see that the bite was excruciatingly painful as her face contorted in fear and agony. If the bite hurt, then that was a good sign that he was a Giovanni. Thinking quickly, and moving even quicker, David rushed down the alley, pulled a wooden stake from inside his jacket and drove it into the back of the man, placing it right through his heart. He sank to the ground instantly and stopped moving. Before dealing with him, David bit his hand and placed it on the woman's heavily bleeding throat. The wound swiftly closed and new skin quickly grew over the puncture wounds.

"You both walked through this alley, met a drunken guy who needed a little cash for a cab home, and then you left," David said quickly, the couple's gazes glazing over again before refocusing. They then turned and walked away without another look back.

David turned back to the vampire and rolled him over.

“Damn, just another caitiff,” David cursed under his breath.

The vampire was not the Giovanni David was looking for. David could see the rage and hate in the vampire’s eyes as he glared up at David. The black mohawk crowning his otherwise bald head was shabby, and the piercings decorating his face were awful to look at. He had a tattoo under his left eye resembling a teardrop, and his brown eyes glared hatefully at David.

The kid couldn’t have been older than sixteen when he was embraced, probably not that long ago.

“You were hunting on private property,” David said with annoyance. “The French Quarter is my domain, so get lost. If I find you here again, I won’t hesitate to kill you.”

David reached down and pulled the stake back out the way it came, and the youngster groaned in pain and clutched his chest where there still resided a hole previously occupied by a piece of wood.

“Fuck you, man!” the kid shouted. “America’s a free country, dickface!”

David hesitated when he heard that statement.

“What do you know about vampires?” he asked the youngster. The boy stood up, still clutching his chest and gasping in pain. Then David realized what was going on.

“No one told you anything about being a vampire, did they?”

The kid looked at David angrily.

“No, so what!? I can find out on my own!”

David chuckled bemusedly.

“Not if you can’t even heal that wound, you can’t.”

The boy sat down and put his hands on his head. David sensed his confusion and distress.

“I thought it would heal on its own,” he said quietly.

David pulled out his phone and sent a text. He then pocketed it again. He scrutinized the youngster for a few moments whilst deciding what to do.

“There is a warehouse not far from here. 1560 Tchoupitoulas St. It might seem abandoned, but someone will be waiting for you outside.” The boy looked up with confusion, and a small glimmer of hope, at David. “There will be more people inside. They will teach you about the basics until I have time,” David said with nonchalance, though it turned to a stern glare, “but do not go anywhere near the human inside. If you do, your life is forfeit.”

The boy nodded hurriedly and stood up.

“I’m Johnny,” he extended his hand to shake David’s. “Johnny Franklin.”

David shook Johnny’s hand.

“David Kane.”

Johnny nodded and quickly walked away, down the street. He was soon out of sight, and David contemplated whether he should have offered tutelage or not, what with Zodiac on the run and Emma wanting teaching in magic and the occult. David shook his head, at this moment silently chastising himself for his poor skill in choosing what assignments to take on, and which to pass up on.

Well, I said I would do it. And breaking promises really isn't my style.

David resolved himself and started down the alley, out into the street. He took a few moments to really imprint the scents of the humans deeply into his mind, so as to better sniff out a vampire. Then he started roaming the Quarter at a leisurely pace, constantly vigilant of his surroundings.



David found his way back to the warehouse almost two hours before sunrise, as he felt the faintest glimmer of the day's sleep's drowsiness crawl its way into his body and mind. He walked inside and stopped in the training room. Aiden was sitting on a chair opposed to Johnny, carefully explaining the finer details of basic vampiric existence. Johnny was sitting with a small notebook and a pen, both of which David recognized from his own office, scribbling down notes for himself. Daisy and Emma were nowhere to be seen, heard or smelled.

"Where are the girls?" David asked Aiden as he walked over to him and Johnny, taking a folding chair with him and sat down next to them.

"Out shopping," Aiden said, nodding a greeting at David. "So, as I said," he continued and turned back to Johnny, "the Sabbat are not to be messed with. If you see anyone fitting their description, come to David or myself immediately. DO NOT try to deal with them."

Johnny nodded. He looked a little scared, but David knew it wasn't because of himself or Aiden, it was because of what Aiden explained about the Sabbat. Aiden then turned to David.

“Boss, can you try and figure out his clan? He told me he was a little stronger and faster, but that’s pretty much universal. And his fangs are blunt, so that’s why he seemed like a Giovanni.”

David looked at Johnny a little.

“And he looks like ninety percent of all Kindred, I get it,” David said. He then extended his hand, palm up. “Can I have a little of your blood?”

Johnny’s gaze shifted back and forth between David and Aiden, and then nodded and extended his arm. David gently took his wrist and bit, rousing his blood whilst he did so. As Johnny’s blood slowly dribbled into David’s mouth, David saw flashes of memories. Faces, murders, a church, a group of people David recognized as Babylonian warriors and a charismatic woman he recognized as Jeanne d’Arc who shouted in French to an impressive fighting force.

David retracted his fangs and licked the wound. It closed rapidly, and David released the wrist.

“You are of clan Brujah,” David stated with finality.

Johnny looked between them with a little confusion, then down at the notepad.

“The ‘rabble rousers’?” he asked cautiously as he looked back up at the older vampires again. They both nodded in response.

Just after Johnny asked, an office door was opened, and Catherine came out.

“That means you’re a clanmate of mine, cock-head. Welcome to the party in Violence City, population: a lot,” she said with a wicked smirk on her pretty face. “I’m gonna

make a real Zealot out ‘a ya.”

David looked behind him, at Catherine.

“Go easy on him. He’s green as grass.” David looked at Johnny. “Catherine is a Brujah as well. She’ll be teaching you, considering she knows what you feel the best.”

Johnny nodded and looked at the fierce woman that now stood next to David. David saw in the fledgling’s eyes that he would have been shitting himself if he were alive.

“Now, be silent! Class is in session! Follow me newbie,” Catherine said and walked back to her own office. Johnny jumped up and quickly followed.

David and Aiden both followed the new Kindred with their eyes, until the door to Catherine’s office closed behind him. Then they just sat and stared into nothing for a little.

“So,” David began, “find anything?”

“No. Didn’t get much air–time since you wrote, but I couldn’t find any trace of him whilst flying. He probably isn’t in New Orleans yet, or at least not in the Quarter.”

David nodded and patted Aiden on the shoulder before he stood and made his way back to his office. Just as he was about to enter, the outer door opened, and revealed Daisy and Emma, both carrying an obscene number of bags from various shops throughout the city. David didn’t know that many shops were open at this hour. Daisy instantly smiled when she saw David.

“Hiiii,” she said in a high–pitched voice, and firmly hugged David. David chuckled and returned the intimate gesture. “Don’t hope you mind that I took the girl out for some shopping. I needed something to do while I wait for my

contacts to return my texts!"

"Not at all," David replied. They let go and Daisy practically waltzed down the corridor and into her office. Emma was blushing brightly, and David couldn't help but laugh.

"Did she treat you alright?"

Emma nodded hesitantly. That made David pause.

"What is it?"

Emma remained silent for a little, until Daisy shouted cheerfully from her office.

"I dragged her with me to The Den. Hope you don't mind!"

David instantly realized why Emma was brushing so brightly. He also understood why Emma didn't look at him. She probably felt a little ashamed.

"I didn't know there were sex clubs specifically for vampires," she murmured quietly as she made her way inside. David closed the door after her, and they made their way to Daisy's office.

"It's not a sex club, dear," Daisy spoke beratingly, as if correcting a child. "It's an erotic club. Besides, what's the matter? I thought you could use a nice stallion to pump you. You seem so uptight."

David cast a glance at Daisy. Then, just like before, in Aiden's office, Emma felt the bone-chilling sensation of being dipped in a sub-zero pool.

"Just because she doesn't talk a lot, it does not give you the permission to get her a prostitute," he said with an equally cold voice. "If she doesn't ask for it, don't mention it."

Just when he stopped speaking, the cold slowly faded away,

and Emma breathed a sigh of relief. Daisy didn't.

"Come on, David! If you're not gonna please her, someone else has to!"

David stared down the Toreador.

"That was an order."

With that, he left Daisy's office and walked back to his own. Emma quickly set down the bags and left the office as well, following quickly behind David. When she entered, she saw David sitting in his chair, looking out into nothing whilst smoking a cigarette. Emma slowly walked over and sat in the chair right in front of his desk.

"Penny for your thoughts?"

David's gaze shifted to her, and his hardened eyes softened.

"Sorry about that. She had no right—" he was about to apologize, but she cut him off.

"Don't be. I managed to fight him off." She paused. "And then the second one," ... "And the third."

David smiled. He reached down into a drawer and pulled out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. He put both on the table, and Emma accepted them. She swiftly lit one up and leant back into the chair.

"So...vampire sex clubs?"

"Like she said, more an erotic club. Sex is just one service they provide."

Emma was puzzled.

"What else?"

"Feeding. Sex shows. Strip teases. Just lounging in the nude.

Eroticism becomes...different, when sex isn't an instinctual urge or truly pleasurable act anymore."

"You don't have s— of course. You're dead. You don't get aroused," Emma facepalmed.

"Not physically, no," David chuckled at her antics. "But we can fake it."

"Really?" she looked up at him.

"Yes. Kindred can manipulate the blood in their bodies to any part of it. We can place it just under our skin so we become rosy and feel warm. We can direct it to our wounds to heal them, or we can pump it into our limbs to increase our strength or speed, prepare for combat. Once you understand how the blood works, you can do whatever you want with it. Say, transform your nails into claws, or use it to harden your skin, or to move faster than the human eye can follow."

"Or pump it into...parts, to arouse them. To simulate a natural response."

"You're a quick study, and eloquent of speech. Yes, indeed. We can. But sex is...weak," David said with deep thought. "Don't get me wrong, it can still give us pleasure. But between that or feeding... there's just no Kindred who would ever choose sex. It's indescribable. Tasting it in your mouth, feeling it run down your throat, feeling the power course throughout your body... There's no comparable sensation a human could possibly feel. Even the Kiss pales in comparison."

"The Kiss?"

"The bite. To humans, it's Heaven. To us, it's...well, Hell."

“What do you mean?”

“It is the greatest sensation possible, but it’s also our addiction, our single need for existence,” David began his monologue. “The Blood is everything to a vampire. It’s every meal, every breath, every thought, every feeling, every action we have ever or will ever take. It’s our first, last, and only requirement. It’s our best friend, and at times our worst enemy. Without it, we simply cease to exist. The Blood is our power, our drug. Our means to live and our reason for living. The Blood brings with it the Hunger, and lurking behind the Hunger is the Beast that all vampires fear to some extent.

The Blood infuses our entire body. It takes the place of our nervous system, but it doesn't flow the way human blood does. It's simply there, to be used as needed. It allows us to move, to feel, to think, and to do things no mortal could dream of. It’s the most precious thing in existence to us. We never waste it, and we use it carefully, because getting more isn't exactly easy,” he said with a small smirk. “If we run low through exertion or stupidity, we begin to battle the Hunger, that driving need to have more before it's too late.

Now, the Hunger isn’t a sensation like human hunger or thirst. It’s more akin to the drive for self-preservation in an animal. You know, that instinct that’ll cause a wolf to gnaw off its own foot to escape a trap. The same kind of drive that will cause even the tiniest creature to turn and bite viciously when trapped. The unthinking, unreasoning, uncaring need to survive. The vampire that lets the Hunger get too strong is in for a terrible time, I tell you, because then the Beast takes over, and that Hunger is personified, quite literally.”

David paused for a little. He stared into the empty air of his office, contemplating the next bit.

“A frenzied vampire will gladly rip the head off their own lover to drink from the fountain of their gushing neck, they would rend their own children in half to get at the blood hidden in their small bodies. Nothing is more important to the Beast than survival. Nothing.”

Emma sat quietly.

That was... so... deep. I never gave it a thought. I've seen some vampire movies, but the vampires were always the villains.

Emma and David locked eyes, and suddenly, she was overcome with a weird feeling. As if something was trying to snake its way into her mind. Something that... frightened her, but only for a moment. After that, David's eyes seemed to glow. Not much, just a little...ethereal, blue light emanating from his irises.

Those eyes... they were so... beautiful. Enrapturing. Gorgeous.

They sat like that for what seemed like hours, even if it were only minutes. They just couldn't look away. It wasn't until David suddenly felt a burn in the back of his head that he looked behind him. Through the window, which was opened to allow the smoke from their cigarettes to escape, he saw the clouds right above the horizon parting, and within an instant, unmoving, he sat still as the sun peeked through between them. David instantly felt the light burn his face, the searing pain running through his head and scorching his eyes, blinding him and causing him agony.

“DAVID!”

He threw himself out of the way of the window and yelled

out in pain. Emma swiftly jumped up, ran to the window and slammed it closed. Then she ran over to where David was now clutching his face, shaking from the pain. She knelt down and put a hand on his shoulder. He was shaking so bad, and Emma didn't know what to do. Slowly, she closed her fingers around his hands, and gently removed his hands from his face.

She gasped in horror at what she saw.

His eyes had been burnt out, leaving black, sooty holes of nothing. His forehead and upper face was almost burnt clean off, revealing the black, sooty skull underneath the charred flesh. Blood was starting to form on his neck and hands, just like sweat normally would. He was shaking, and his jaw clenched shut as he felt the pain in his almost non-existent face. Emma could see his fangs, as his upper lip was gone as well. Without thinking, she leant close and wrapped David in her embrace. Without hesitation, he leant into it, and his shaking slowly lessened. After a few minutes, he had completely calmed down.

"It's so strange," David said out of nowhere. "Having no eyes."

Emma couldn't help the chuckle that escaped her, and David chimed in.

"You almost got your head burnt off by sunlight, and you think having no eyes feels funny?"

David hummed in confirmation. They sat in silence for another few minutes, until Emma released her embrace and stood up. She reached down, and pulled David to his feet. He followed her ministrations, and she led him up to the room she slept in. When they entered, she guided him to

the bed and laid him down. David almost stumbled down on the bed and fell backwards. Emma, not reacting quickly enough, was pulled down with him. She landed on top of him, and she felt her face heat up. She was grateful, strange as it may be, that he didn't have eyes.

"I, uhh- ", Emma started to stammer, but she stopped. "David?"

No response.

"David?"

David just laid there. He didn't say a word. Didn't move a muscle. His face was completely lax. Emma sighed in relief.

"Daytime. Of course."

Emma then crawled over besides him and laid herself on the bed. The fact that David almost lost his head, literally, didn't weigh nearly as much on her mind, considering he seemed fine...well, relatively fine. It was then that Emma really started thinking.

But, the last time, he fell asleep half an hour before sunrise... it doesn't add up.

Emma couldn't really wrap her head around it. So, she decided sleep would do her good. She fell asleep quickly.

David's ears heard her breathing and heartbeat slow down. He smiled slightly, and his upper lip lost its char, his skull bleached, and his flesh started growing back where it had been burnt off. His face healed completely, and the last thing was his empty eye sockets beneath his eyelids slowly filling out. His eyes opened, and they were glowing a bright red.

"Lovely," he quietly said to himself, and then let the

daysleep claim his mind and body.



Chapter 6

The Hunt Begins

Rubis d'le Nuit, a few miles west of New Orleans

February 13th, 2015

Marie D'Richet, seneschal of New Orleans was sitting on the balcony, surrounded by wrought iron rail. She looked out over the expanse of land that surrounded the plantation. She was conflicted. On one hand, she desperately wanted to be respected, maybe even feared in Marcel's domain. On the other, she just wanted to spend every moment of her existence with Marcel. Her lover.

She had been pining for him ever since she met him that night in New Orleans, in 1989. She felt so enamored with him, and she knew he felt the same for her, but he wouldn't embrace her, saying he would only be able to see her as a childe. She had gone to New England to find a vampire willing to embrace her, preferably a Ventrue. It was that damned Tremere, Antonio Calbullarshi, who had claimed her instead. He Embraced her without permission, just because she was the daughter of Martin D'Richet, a powerful Son of Ether mage. Thought it would make himself look good. Instead, the fucking idiot had

condemned them both to death!

Her only choice had been to return to New Orleans, to Marcel. She arrived in 1991. He'd been hesitant about it, and less than pleased with what she'd done, but he just couldn't turn her away. Then, one night, a coterie of Setites had decided to kill her and Anthony, Marcel's favorite child, because they hated Marcel. Anthony healed, but she'd been beaten into torpor.

When she woke up, the year was already 1999, and Marcel was so happy. He said that she'd been torpid for almost ten years, but also that with her humanity shining so brightly in this world of darkness, she should have slept for one at the most.

Marie narrowed her eyes. How had she woken up, anyway? Marcel had avoided the question the few times she asked. And the one time David had been there while she asked, he smiled smugly at Marcel, who just said 'oh, shut it' when he saw the expression. In her opinion, the pair seemed like they were old, best friends. Marcel spoke very highly of him, and Jereaux, despite not particularly liking the man, admitted that he highly respected the elder vampire.

Neither of them could tell her of David's past, however. He had just appeared in New Orleans in 1905 and situated himself. Since he was a Red Alastor, they just steered clear of him. It soon became apparent, however, that he was a nice guy, especially for a vampire. Sure, he didn't have any problems with murder, theft, arson or pretty much any other crime, but when you spoke with him, he was usually polite. Marie had tried to make him respect her, but Marcel had explained last night that David had started complaining about her 'attitude issues'. Her attempts at gaining his

respect had only earned his disdain.

Last night, Marcel had sat Marie down and explained the situation to her: David was an elder, no doubt there. He was also incredibly powerful, though Marcel couldn't say how, since he had never actually seen the scourge of his city at work. The fact that Marie was Marcel's lover AND seneschal made David think that she used Marcel's position to flaunt political power, when she had built none for herself. Marcel had also said that, if she wanted to earn David's respect, she should just be herself and use her title less when addressing him. If she did that, he just might begin respecting, maybe even like her.

So that was what she was going to do. Right now, she was just waiting for David to arrive, in accordance with her invitation. Marcel had given her space and shut himself in one part of the plantation with his older brother, Jereaux, to make plans and strategies. It was just an hour after sunset, and the balcony she was sitting on was facing New Orleans, visible in the distance with all the lights. Then, however, she spotted a headlight making its way down some of the small roads leading to the plantation.

He's coming.

Marie watched as the headlight came closer, and eventually entered the plantation grounds. The motorcycle's roaring engine died down and the rider got off. He started towards the plantation, and quickly spotted the balcony she was sitting on. It wasn't even a minute from the time he entered the main foyer until he stepped out on the balcony, a route she very well knew would take almost three minutes at the pace he walked to the front door in.

"You wanted to see me?" came the smooth, off-British

accent behind her.

“Yes. Take a seat.”

David slowly sat down in the other chair which also occupied the balcony. They sat in silence for a few moments, just admiring the view of the beautiful city that never slept, and where the party never ends.

“You know that I haven’t been a Kindred for long. Not actively, at least,” Marie began. She was grateful that David only nodded in confirmation, not breaking the monologue that was about to happen. “I am very new to this life. I still don’t truly know how things work, what to do. I also know that Marcel doesn’t need a seneschal, and only appointed me so to protect me from those who would use my death to their advantage.”

Once again, David merely nodded, never taking his eyes off the city in the distance.

“I would like to apologize for my behavior. I only wanted you to respect me as seneschal. As a real vampire. Marcel has explained to me the error of my ways.”

It was only then that David opened his mouth and spoke.

“And what conclusion have you come to?”

Marie was silent for almost a full minute to contemplate her answer.

“I should just have been open about it. I shouldn’t have flaunted my position the way I did, or tried to command you by using Marcel’s position. I was going about earning your respect the wrong way. So I ask you to give me another chance by wiping the slate clean. And then we’ll see how it goes from there.”

David sat in silence for almost a minute as well.

“Alright. Clean slate.”

Neither of them smiled, but Marie felt relieved.

“Now you just owe me another boon.”

Marie’s stolen blood ran ice-cold. She turned to face David, who was still looking at the city, but his face held a small, wicked smirk.

“Another?” She barely managed to form the word.

He turned to look at her, and there was a mischievous gleam in his eyes.

“Those Setites put a spell on you to keep you in torpor until the turn of the twenty-second century.”

Marie’s eyes widened.

“Then how am I awake?”

“Well,” his smirk widened, “someone broke the spell.”

His smirk was now a full-blown smile. He stood up, patted her on the shoulder, and said: “Good evening, Seneschal.”

David left the balcony, and was soon riding away on his pale motorcycle. Marie was in shock. She owed him two boons, and the elder vampire could call them in at any time he desired, for any purpose he wanted.



David was trudging on the outskirts of the bayou to the direct south-east of New Orleans. He decided he would give the lupines one last warning before he fulfilled Marcel’s order to euthanize some of them. He had told his Alastors to keep searching for the rogue Giovanni, but so far none

of them had any luck. He had also seen Johnny and Emma getting along as well as their cultural differences allowed. They were both new to this side of reality, and they both found comfort in not being the only one. That had put a smile on David's lips.

Even as he just entered the bayou, David was fully aware that the werewolves already knew he was there. He would have been disappointed if they weren't. His powerful senses worked in harmony to paint a very detailed picture of the situation for him: two on each side of him, and several more up ahead.

David slowly trudged through the bayou, his company never revealing themselves, but never eased up. He walked for almost two hours until he reached a settlement of cabins and tents. People in human form were scattered all over, many of them carrying machetes and bows. One in particular, an elderly man with a certain pattern of paint on his face, stood in the front. He slowly moved over towards David, his expression never faltering from the grim visage he put up.

"You are not welcome here, blood-drinker," he rasped in the language of his people, one David recognized as Choctaw.

"I am aware of the treaty of lands, venerable one," he replied in the same language. "But your people have been attacking blood-drinkers in the city."

"You forget, that land belongs to us," the elder shapeshifter countered.

David's face remained ever stoic.

"The treaty says that the city belongs to us. We have no

hand in what the mortals decide to build, or where to build it.”

“You know your statement to be untrue. Does not your own creed tell you to bear no false testament?” the old wolf accused the older vampire with eyes narrow in contempt.

David looked the man in the eyes for a few moments, but turned around and started towards the edge of the small village. When he reached it, a large man-wolf creature stood beside him. David heard the old man make a ‘humpf’-like sound, clearly mistaking David’s retreat as cowardice. David turned his head to the side to look at the old man over his shoulder. Then, faster than anyone, much less the humongous wolf standing over three meters tall on his legs, David drove his fist into the werewolf’s gut. The wolf knelt down in pain, and David drove his knee into the creature’s muzzle with enough force that the entire head was smashed, sending blood and brain-matter out all over David, but he wasn’t fazed in the slightest.

He turned back to every other person, and saw shock and horror painted in their faces. Then, an arrow whished past him and struck a tree. Then one flew and struck him right in the throat. David did take a small step back, but he stood up straight almost instantly. He glared at the young man who had fired the arrow, and kept his eyes fixated on the boy as he yanked the arrow from his throat and the wound immediately started healing, vanishing without a trace only a second later.

“I tried to settle this like peers,” he shouted at all of them, “but it seems you crave death instead.”

He heard a few of them swallow.

“I shall give it to you.”



David entered the warehouse just before dawn. He was drenched in water, mud, blood and gore. When the door closed behind him, Catherine stuck her head out of her office. She smiled, but when she saw the state he was in, it fell and she came out running towards him.

“What happened!?! You alright!?”

David smiled weakly at her.

“Just went to try and settle the issues of the land treaty with the Uktena in the bayou. They didn’t take it too kindly.”

Catherine took his hand and led him to a bathroom with a shower on the second floor.

“Go and wash up,” she ordered him. “I’ll get you fresh clothes.”

David smiled in gratitude and stripped. Then he walked in the rather large shower and turned it on. The water was hot from the start, eliciting a groan of pleasure from his throat. He didn’t feel it physically, but it was things like this that made his mind relaxed and clear. The door to the bath opened again, and Catherine walked in with a set of new clothes. She had also brought a plastic bag, and started dumping the bloody, muddy and torn clothes in it.

“You seriously need to find better hobbies,” Catherine commented. “You’ll go through clothes faster than Blake can buy them.”

Catherine never used the other team—members’ first names, except for David and Aiden. She called Symond ‘X’ just like everyone else, but she otherwise only used the

others' last names.

"I doubt it," David chuckled heartily whilst washing all the grime from his body. He then started lathing himself in soap.

Catherine chuckled as well.

"Okay, maybe that was an exaggeration."

Without warning, she pulled off her jacket and hung it from the hooks for clothes, and kicked off her loosened combat boots. Then she pulled her tank-top over her head, followed by her sports bra. She then undid her daisy dukes and pulled them down her lithe, yet muscular legs, along with her underwear. David stepped to the side and allowed her to step into the shower with him.

"How'd it go with the search?" David asked her as she was rinsing herself before picking up the soap as well.

"Fine. Well, we didn't find anything, but I took the greenie with me and taught some things along the way. I had him try and track down a specific snack. Kid's a natural hunter."

David hummed in approval as he rubbed her back and shoulders in soap. Catherine pulled her hair over one of her shoulders to give him better access.

"How many lupines are left?" she asked nonchalantly.

"A few kids. Thankfully there were only about four or five of them below eighteen," David said, and his relief was obvious in his voice.

When David let go of her shoulders, she turned to him and leant against him. She brought her face close to his, and then their equally warm, equally dead lips met in a passionate kiss. David put his hands on her hips and pulled

her close. She draped her arms around his neck and pulled him closer, deepening the kiss.



Emma was sitting in the room that had been assigned to her and was reading a small journal. According to John, it held some of the basics to magic. He'd explained that theoretical knowledge, when it came to magic, was far more important than the practice itself. If you had no clue what was happening, nothing would happen. The things detailed in it were very interesting, if she were completely honest with herself. It was written in English, so that helped a lot, but he had given her a Greek, a Hebrew and a Latin dictionary, telling her to become familiar with the languages, if not try to learn them outright. Said that almost no book of actual magic was written in a common language, but usually in older, more obscure languages. When she had asked why, he had gone into detail, saying that no sensible sorcerer had ever written a grimoire in a common language, and it was usually in several languages or encrypted, so that only those with great knowledge could access the power they held.

Then someone knocked on the door.

"Come in," she called.

David entered, freshly bathed and in a fresh set of clothes. He was smiling warmly at her.

"How are you?" he asked her. His concern for her touched her every time.

"I'm fine, thanks," she replied with a small smile.

David walked over and sat beside her on the bed. He looked over her shoulder.

“Just make sure to take in every detail,” he said quietly. “You can’t actually use any of the magic in here, but you might develop your own by utilizing the same principles.”

“Yeah, John told me,” she said. “He said it was written for neonate Tremere, not ‘mortal sorcerers’. He told me that all vampire blood magic relies on the basics in this book, but that not all of them could be used in other magic. Such as the ‘Principle of Blood’.”

“That’s right,” David said in praise. “You’re a fast learner.”

Emma hummed in gratitude and kept reading. She then rolled over slightly so she was leaning up against David. David repositioned himself so that they were in a rather comfortable position.

“Where’s ‘Etruria’?” she asked after a little while.

“It used to be the northern—most part of Italy, but it hasn’t existed since around the first century.”

“BC or AD?”

“BC.”

“Hm.”

She kept inquiring into other such references, and David patiently answered every one of them. ‘Who’s Enki?’, ‘where’s Assyria?’, ‘what’s Du’at?’, things like that. Emma greatly enjoyed having David with her, and David had grown fond of the young woman. He was in the middle of explaining her the finer details of Hermeticism when Aiden peeked his head in.

“I think I’ve located him.”

David sprung up and followed, but not before throwing

Emma an apologetic expression and mouthing 'sorry'. The pair made their way downstairs, where Catherine, Daisy and William were all waiting.

Catherine wore a pair of black yoga pants, her usual black combat boots (tightened this time), a black sports bra and a black utility jacket. Under the jacket she carried a black leather harness where she had both her Glocks, spare magazines and a combat knife.

Daisy was wearing black running pants, black trainers, a tight sports tank-top and a short, black leather jacket. An arm-mounted sheath carrying a combat knife was barely visible in her left sleeve, and she was playing with a rather fine wooden stake.

William wore black cargo pants, black combat boots, a black Under Armour shirt and a sleek, black running jacket. David knew he carried a 1911 in a holster on the back-side of his belt, and he was carrying a black, tactical backpack, most likely containing a few blood bags, stakes and a machete. Maybe even a collapsible crossbow and some arrows for it.

Aiden wore the same as William, and held out a plastic bag for David. David took it and started undressing. When he reached his tight boxers, he started putting on the clothes from the bag, identical to Aiden and William. He then took his discarded shoulder harness carrying an FN Five-seven, a silver knife and a wooden stake marked with runes and seemingly occult symbols. When he was done, the vampiric 'special forces operatives' were all geared up and ready for combat.

"I spotted someone tightly befitting the description of Zodiac in Gentilly, close to UNO," Aiden said with a

serious look in his eyes. He turned his attention back to David.

“You know the drill,” David began his speech. “Spread out and look for the target,” he said as SayMX had come out to them, handing each of them earpieces so they could communicate. “If you see him, report your location to the rest of us and stand by.”

They all nodded seriously.

“Scatter.”

They all nodded and turned around. They left the warehouse, and David hear a car’s engine purr to life. David then turned and walked upstairs. He reached Emma’s room, where she was still reading. She looked up when he knocked on the doorframe.

“We’re going to take down Zodiac. We’ll likely be back late, or tomorrow night.”

Emma stared at him a little, then nodded solemnly. David knew she would need time to adjust to the idea of killing being a regular occurrence. David smiled comfortingly and was about to leave, but Emma got up from the bed. He looked at her expectantly, but she just walked over and threw her arms around his neck.

“Be careful,” she whispered, but David’s sensitive hearing had no problem understanding it. He gently hugged her back.

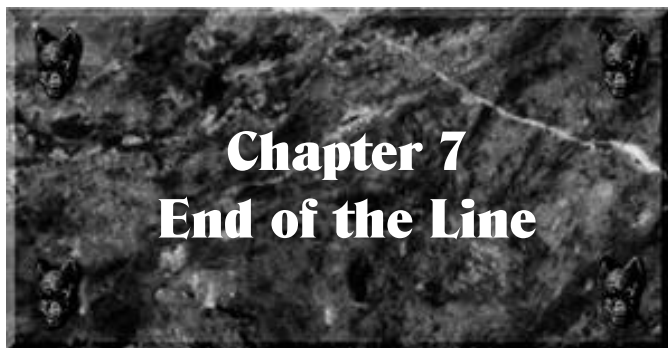
“I will,” he said quietly.

She let go and looked him in the eyes. For just a moment, it was like he was looking at Katherine again, and he had to fight the urge to lean down and kiss her.

Katherine's gone.

He smiled and walked away, eventually walking out of the warehouse and out onto the streets.

A lot of blood is shed this night, it would seem.



Gentilly, New Orleans

February 13th, 2015

David was sitting on the roof of Pontchartrain Halls. He was scouting out the area around the University of New Orleans, trying to detect a vampire. So far, he could smell a little, but the scent was incredibly faint, and he couldn't entirely pinpoint it. It was just past 1 a.m., and they still hadn't found the sucker. Until...

"W. calling in, I have the target in sight." David looked to his left to see William, but when he wasn't there, he remembered he had an earpiece in his left ear. Sometimes, mortal technology confused him.

"What's your position?" David spoke aloud.

"Wesley Barrow Stadium. It looks like he's preparing a ritual of some sort."

David turned to the east and sprinted across the rooftop and jumped. He dropped five stories and hit the ground running. Not even a cheetah could have kept up with him. He raced across lawns and roads, his image no more than a

blur speeding by. He reached the edge of the stadium within two minutes of leaving UNO. His eyes had no trouble finding the Giovanni in the pitcher's circle. And he was indeed in the middle of a ritual. David saw the movements he made, the circle he trailed. He focused his hearing, trying to catch at least glimpses of what he was chanting.

It was Greek. And not just that, Koine Greek. It hadn't been a spoken language since the third century.

"Rise, O' Hallowed One. For thine is the ancient power eternal, the ancient hunger eternal, the ancient suffering, eternal. Awaken. Feed. Rise."

David realized what he was trying to do.

"I'm taking him out," he spoke into the earpiece. "If he finishes this ritual, things could go very bad, very quickly."

He then proceeded to climb over the fence and start running towards the necromancer.

"WHAT!? NO! DAVID, YOU SAID—" he heard Catherine's protests.

"We don't have time," David whisper-shouted into the earpiece. "If he finishes this ritual, New Orleans is fucked!"

He took the earpiece out of his ear and turned it off before stuffing it into his pocket. He kept running, raised his obfuscation, and hoped to God the rogue vampire didn't have strong, supernatural senses. He ran, and when he got close, he drew out the silver knife from under his jacket. He came closer, and closer. Then, the necromancer turned around to face him.

"YOU CAN'T STOP ME!" he shouted. His eyes were wide and erratic, and his face was the opposite of expressionless;

there were too many emotions depicted to be able to figure out which he truly felt.

David lunged forward with his knife and aimed for the vampire's chest. The strike connected, but it seemed to do little to him. The necromancer took that small lapse in David's focus to clench his fist and launch it straight into David's face. Feeling the weight of the mighty fist, David was forced backwards, but the attack had done little in the way of actually harming him.

He sprang forward once again, and this time ducked the punch, landing one of his own in the opponent's gut. He doubled over in pain, and David took the opportunity to grab the knife, tear it from Zodiac's chest and stab it down into his neck. He then twisted the blade, and with one sweeping motion cut the head clean off. The head fell to the ground and rolled away from the elder, and the body slumped over, dead. This time for good.

David turned to the ritual circle he had all but ignored before. It was a circle made of black sand, with five hands of glory spaced evenly apart. Inside the circle was the corpse of a man, likely German. David turned to look at the deceased vampire once more. The formerly undead, now properly dead body hadn't moved an inch and was slowly but surely fading away into dust, for which David was grateful.

All of a sudden, an icy hand touched David's shoulder, and he felt a searing pain run from the hand throughout his whole body. Like the coldness was so powerful, it felt hot. His knees buckled, and he turned his head. The German man was standing with his hand on David's shoulder, his skin white as a sheet and eyes no more than pools of

darkness. Then the corpse whispered something to him with a voice as cold and dark as the vast nothingness of the abyss. Something in a language he hadn't heard in ages.

Then, the body seemed to be covered with shadows, until it disappeared entirely. David felt his energy seeping from his mind and body, and soon, he saw or felt no more.



Syracuse, Sicily

1405

Domenico Vitae awoke to the sounds of screams. He had been resting in the earth outside Castel d'Ombro, the dark, foreboding castle said to house the torpid founder of clan Lasombra – Domenico's target. He rose from the ground and walked to the edge of the small forest. Looking up at the castle, he realized something was wrong, as if the screams hadn't been enough. There were fires lit around the place.

They abhor light, he thought to himself. Something is very wrong.

He gathered his wits about him, and stormed off towards the castle. He quickly noticed that the shadows, who always moved fluidly across the surface of the outer walls, were erratic, disturbed. He put it out of his mind and raced on. Calling up his powerful blood to remain unseen, he ran past anarchs and Assamites fighting Lasombra, vampires against vampires. The speed of the combatants was unnatural, their strength as they flung each other around like ragdolls, inhuman. Their roars and howls, bestial. He kept moving, sensing the powerful presence far beneath his feet. The Antediluvian itself.

Domenico pumped some blood into his legs and rushed past unsuspecting monsters. He needed to get down there, now! He made his way into the castle and down into the underground. Below the surface of the Earth, where dungeons lay. He made his way down even further, not caring too much when he bumped into a pair of fighters or six. When vampires moved into his way, he easily used his longsword to slash clean through them. He felt his reserves of power dwindling very slowly, and he made it to the entrance to the crypts.

His powerful hearing detected no fighting down there, so he quickly got ahold of a few vampires and drunk their potent blood to refill his own. Sated once more, he ventured down into the extensive labyrinth he had spent weeks trying to figure out, knowing roughly where to go. He made quick work of the few groups of vampires he met down there on his way to the vault where the ancient slept. As he got further down by the minute, he felt the dark, looming presence grow ever stronger, until he came upon the entrance... which was open. Dreading what could happen, he dashed inside.

Gratiano de Veronese, a young Lasombra barely three centuries old, was standing over a large rock carved to look like the base for a sarcophagus. Only there was no sarcophagus. Instead, to Domenico's disappointment and defeat, there lay the emancipated husk of a now diablerized Cainite... Lasombra himself. One of the vampires Domenico had sworn to himself to destroy. When Gratiano and his posy turned, Domenico was swift in pulling up his cloak of shadows to disappear from sight. He waited until the vampires had left, talking about what they would do next.

He then dropped the obfuscation and slowly approached the half-dissolved remains of his enemy.

"I swore to myself," he began, his dark, alluring voice almost shaking from his seething rage. "I swore to myself, that I would make you suffer for eternity. For everything you did. But now...now you're out of my reach."

He looked at the husk of an undead predator, but then noticed something; the dark presence permeating the vault hadn't subsided. Indeed, he felt it... move? Domenico focused on his otherworldly senses, trying to determine what was happening.

Indeed, the presence was moving, as if it had been-released. Domenico's eyes widened. And then he started roaring.

"You fool! You released the shadow from its coil!" Domenico fell to his knees, his Beast rattling its cage fiercely, trying desperately to get out, to vent his wrath and deal carnage. He almost let it.

"I will find you."

He said this to no one in particular. Maybe the corpse beside him?

"I will make you suffer."



David slowly opened his eyes, but he couldn't work them more open than half-closed. His vision was blurry, and his ears were ringing. It was painful. Excruciating. He was disoriented, nauseated, weak. He felt...cold. Empty. Lost in a vast abyss. He felt his body shaking and trembling, like only a human would. He tried to sit up, but his body

wouldn't respond to him. He tried to speak, but his throat couldn't muster a word. The only thing that escaped his mouth was a raspy breath. He heard muffled voices and muffled steps. Shadows loomed over him, but he could not see what they were. People? Friends? Enemies. Enemies? Humans. Vampires? David couldn't concentrate, his mind couldn't focus or sharpen. Once again, his eyes closed and he felt darkness reclaim him once more.



Taurus Mountains, south-west of Kayseri, Turkey

1401

Domenico sat on a rock near the giant cave-mouth. Kapaneus was standing a few meters away from him, admiring the view.

"Let no childe of Caine ever leave through this passage," Kapaneus read the ancient Greek inscription above the entrance to the city. "Let no son of Seth enter."

"Awfully convenient, don't you think?" Domenico asked his friend in ancient Greek as well, with some disinterest. "That Cappadocius could somehow create a barrier like that?"

Kapaneus chuckled.

"Do not forget, he is a grandchilde of Caine, Domenico. A Cainite of the Third Generation. Who knows what powers they possess?"

Domenico caught the smallest gleam of humor in the elder vampire's eyes.

"Who, indeed?"

They were both silent for almost half an hour, merely taking in the feeling of the place. Domenico found it disturbing.

“So much death, even for a clan that espouses it,” he commented.

“I agree,” Kapaneus concurred. “It unsettles me, but I have grown weary of the outside world, my friend. It is the only place I know of, where my sleep would remain undisturbed.”

Domenico continued to stare at the cave, a troubled look on his face. Kapaneus took notice of it.

“What troubles you?”

Domenico didn’t answer right away. He thought about the series of events that lead to this point. Time, he had found, was a nebulous thing. Always in flux, never standing still, never relenting. Even to the ageless descendants of Caine. And humanity...what a fascinating concept. They could be the best, kindest and softest of all God’s creations, but they could just as well become terrifying monsters.

“Everything, Kapaneus. I’m tired of it all. All the fighting and destruction Cainites cause, all the mindless bloodshed. They should all just disappear.”

Kapaneus looked sorrowfully at his oldest, and only, friend. He turned his attention back to the cavern before them. Less than an hour until the sun would sear them to ash, but he would be inside the cave, and Domenico could sink into the earth to escape their greatest enemy, the giver of all life.

“What will you do when I enter?” Kapaneus asked Domenico and looked at him. “I should hope you would survive the coming ages to greet me at my reemergence.”

“I don’t know. A few elders have been gathering, talking about plans to erect a sect. An organization. One to protect all the Cainites from the innumerable eyes and torches of the kine. I just might see how they intend on bringing that idea to life.”

Kapaneus nodded solemnly. They were silent for almost the rest of the night, just relishing their last moments together. The dawn was approaching and coloring the horizon sky a lighter blue. They both stared at the sight, even as they felt the weight of the sun creep up on them, though both of them had experienced it many times enough that they could easily shrug the day sleep off, without effort. Then, the sky turned a deep, crimson red. The sun was very close.

The friends looked at each other, and nodded solemnly. Kapaneus stalked into the cave, and was soon seen no more. Domenico rose from the large stone and turned to face the bane of all Cainites. And then he felt the sun caress his face gently, like a lover from an idyllic dream. It had been only nights since he had discovered this strength, this power. He knew he could take far more punishment than most vampires, given his many, many centuries of study, training and experience. The sun, dangerous as it had been to him in his first nights, now seemed like a lover from a distant memory, coming back to provide a moment of solace and serenity.

Then, turning his back on the cave, he walked in the direction of the sunrise, stopping and climbing into the sands for sleep and shelter only when the sun became rose too high and became too intense for even his supernatural resilience to reject.



I will kill you.

• • •

Emma had spent the past few hours sitting with John and going through more Thaumaturgy basics.

“You can’t use these principles exactly the way vampire or ghoul could,” John had carefully explained to her, “but you could potentially use the principles as foundation for practicing magic of your own.”

Emma had grasped the core concepts behind the principles rather quickly. She took notes and listened intently as he used his chalkboard to make visualization much easier. It occurred to her that John was a brilliant teacher, and he seemed even more knowledgeable than David. John, though, claimed that such a notion was preposterous.

“David is much older and wiser than any of us. I seriously doubt any of us could ever hope to match him.”

Emma was about to inquire further, but they heard the front doors to the warehouse slam open.

“JOHN!” they heard William scream with desperation. They both looked shocked at each other, then rushed out of John’s office. Down in the large communal area, Catherine, William, Aiden and Daisy were gathered around a couch.

“Where’s David?” Emma asked with a little worry. They turned to her and John, and got out of their way. Emma smacked her hand to her mouth to keep from screaming.

David was lying on the couch. His skin was grey as ash, the skin around his eyes almost as dark as charcoal, and he was shaking furiously, even though it seemed more like he was

vibrating. The clothes covering his torso had been removed. His right arm was completely black, as if killed with frostbite, and a mark similar to a handprint was glowing very slightly a blueish white, as if ice was vaporizing off his shoulder. The frostbite-looking blackness was very slowly spreading over his chest and his neck.

John's eyes were wide as a deer caught in a pair of headlights.

"Che diavolo?" he muttered under his breath.

He moved closer and sat beside his boss, closely examining what was going on.

"At least the wards he placed around the warehouse is slowing down the infection," he muttered. He put his hand on David's black arm, but immediately pulled it back. "Merda, he feels colder than liquid nitrogen!"

"Can you do something!?" Aiden asked, panicked for the well-being of his oldest friend.

"I have no clue what's going on," John replied and looked up at the Gangrel, "but if it's cold that's doing this to him, maybe fire can reverse it."

"MACHST DU WITZE!? FEUER WÜRDET IHN UMBRINGEN!" Catherine screamed at the sorcerer.

"It's the only option I have!" he screamed back. "I have no clue what this is!"

"Do it," they heard a calm voice from behind them. They all turned to Emma. They could all see her anxiety, but her eyes were hard as steel. "If it's the only thing that can be done, do it."

Catherine's eyes lit up like the subject of their discussion.

“LISTEN HERE, YOU LITTLE SHIT! I’LL BE DAMNED IF—” the Brujah began, but William spoke up.

“Just do it.”

His eyes held the same strong look Emma’s did.

“It would seem like the only other way is his death. I’d rather he died from our attempt to save him than leave him be to die slowly, without anyone putting in an effort to do anything about it.”

Everyone looked at him.

“Besides,” he added, “he appointed me in charge in case he had to leave.” He looked at John. “Do it.”

John nodded. “Everyone, get clear!” he shouted and took a little distance himself.

Once everyone was a safe distance away, Emma felt harsh tugs at her heart, and felt vice wrap around her chest, squeezing tight. John, with a look of regret painted on his face, threw his left arm at David, and snapped his fingers. Instantly, David’s left arm lit on fire, and they all heard loud screech, as if a small creature was burning. It continued for minutes, but it felt like an hour to everyone present. Symond had rushed out of his office to join them as soon as John sent another blast of fire at David’s arm. And for all their sharp senses, Emma seemed to be the only one noticing David’s arm starting to crumble into ash.

“STOP IT!” she shouted. “HE’S BURNING!”

But no one seemed to listen. John seemed to scurry away from the fire, hissing a little along the way. William had taken a few steps back, but never took his gaze off the inferno. Symond had long since rushed back into his office

and bolted the door. Aiden and Daisy had gone a few good paces back, holding each other by the arm, and Catherine stared into the fire from where she stood, never yielding to whatever scared everyone else away.

“JOHN, STOP IT!” Emma screamed back at the Tremere, but he was crouched by his own office, baring his fangs at the fire.

She turned back, and saw some of David’s shoulder starting to crumble, his entire arm now a pile of ash next to the couch. She was desperate for someone, anyone, to do something! And then, without thinking, she ran forward and grabbed David by the shoulder.

“NO!” Aiden screamed, but he was too late.

Emma screamed in pain as the fire started charring the skin and flesh on her hands.

“DAVID, COME ON!” she screamed, and tears of pain rushed down her face as the fire caught her sleeves and ran up her arms. “WAKE UP, COME ON!”

Without warning, she was flung away from David and landed on the floor a few meters away. Her sleeves were no longer on fire, but the skin on her hands and a little up her arms was still charred black and blistering from the immense heat. She felt light-headed, and her vision was slowly fading, the pain in her hands numbing her mind. Before consciousness left her entirely, she managed to see David stand up from the couch and pat out the fire on his shoulder. She heard yelling and shouting, but it was all blurred and muffled, as if her head was underwater. Slowly, he made his stumbling way over to her, falling to his knees and using his intact left arm to support himself. His face

was so close, she could almost bump his head with her own. “Emma!” she heard, muffled as it was. “Go to sle–” was all she heard, before her vision went black.



Emma slowly raised her head from the soft pillow. She felt the comforter weigh her down like sand. Her mind, as unfocused as it was, did recall some of what had happened before she lost consciousness.

“David,” she quietly slurred under her breath. She couldn’t force her eyes open, and laid her head back down as it became too heavy.

“I’m here,” she heard that stupidly charming voice softly speak.

She tried to speak, to ask how he was, if he were okay, but once she got her mouth fully open to speak, she couldn’t control her jaw anymore.

“Save your strength, Emma. I’ll be here when you wake up again.”

She felt a gentle hand help close her jaw, but she was far too tired to be embarrassed about it. She could hum a gratuitous sound...sort of. It came out as something of a grunt, and she heard David’s annoying chuckle.

“I’ll always be here.”

Emma reached out her hand, and was soothed when it was gently grabbed by the vampire. Emma felt that something was wrong with it, but soon fell asleep again.



Emma awoke once again, and this time she felt fresh. Like

just having had a good night's sleep. She used her hands to sit up straight, and then yawned when she started stretching. She laced her fingers together and opened her eyes, and then she pulled her hands close and thoroughly examined them. They were a little dark red, like she had stuck them in boiling water, but other than that, they looked and felt normal.

She looked to the chair beside her bed, and found David slumped in it. He was sagging a little toward the edge of the seat, and his head was leaned over the backrest's edge, his mouth wide open and his arms hanging limply over the armrests. She looked to the alarm clock on the other side of the bed.

Still three hours until sunset. Well, that explains it.

She took in the sight of David in the chair. His neck and shoulder were healed, but a little more than half his arm was still missing.

Vampires' healing abilities are so broken.

She laid back down, determined to get some rest.

But how are my hands fine as well? I'm not a vampire, I don't have supernatural healing powers.

She closed her eyes and emptied her mind, and even though she had felt fresh, it soon became clear to her that that had only been a small rush of dopamine. She soon fell into sleep again.



When Emma awoke, she was tired, but not overly so. Like she had an intense workout the night prior. She moaned as her muscles ached, and rolled over. She wasn't the least bit

surprised when she saw David sitting in the chair, idly flipping through the small notebook where she took notes of her lectures with John.

“You’re rather neat with your notes,” he said casually, his eyes roaming the pages. “And you pick up the things quickly. I’m impressed,” he said with a small smile thrown her way.

His eyes were once again kind and warm, and she looked to his right arm. It was wholly healed, though she did see that his little and ring fingers were still missing and scorched.

“How long was I out?” she asked wearily and sat up in bed, before she realized she was wearing only a bra. She was about to fret, but then she just let it go. David wasn’t some hormonal teenager who’d ogle her chest with wide eyes.

“A little over a week,” David said, his eyes never leaving her face. “I put you in a magically induced sleep so you wouldn’t wake up and feel your arms.”

Emma raised her brows and held up her hands. They looked perfectly normal.

“Did you heal them?”

David turned his eyes back to the notebook.

“In a way, yes. When you first passed out, I was really scared,” he admitted with a slightly forlorn glint in his eyes. “I cut my wrist and bled into your mouth.”

Emma looked back at him with suspicion.

“So I’m your ghoul, now?”

David smiled her.

“For the next month or so. I activated and manipulated my

blood in your system to forcibly heal your body. It took effort, and I had the others run off and feed so I could feed on them when they returned.”

“You feed on vampires?”

“Only in times of extreme emergency,” he said whilst flipping through her notes once again. “Human blood satisfies my hunger, and allows me to use some of my weaker abilities. But if I need to unleash more power, I need stronger blood.”

“Then what about animals?”

“A lot of younger vampires can sustain themselves with it for years if they must. It can sustain me for a week or so, in times where human or vampiric blood is unavailable.”

“Hmm,” Emma hummed, letting David know she understood.

“Most of the time, I only drink enough to barely sustain myself. A liter or two every night.”

Emma raised her brow, which David somehow picked up.

“About a pint and a half.”

Emma got out of the bed and sauntered off to the dresser she and Daisy had filled up with clothes for her on their shopping trip. She grabbed a robe and put it on, and then grabbed some clean underwear, t-shirt and jeans.

“Where’s the nearest shower?”

“Just down the hall, to the right.”

“Thanks.”



Emma emerged from the shower fresh and clean, and a lot happier than she had been in two weeks. She walked back to her room to find Daisy, Aiden, John and William sitting on various pieces of furniture, since the only chair was occupied by David.

John stood up and walked over to her. He took her hands and held them up to his bowed forehead.

"I am SO sorry, that you got hurt from my flames," he said, and she could hear the regret dripping from every word. "I lost control, I couldn't control the flames."

Emma smiled slightly.

"It's okay, John. David told me that fire is something that terrifies all vampires to some degree. You couldn't help it."

John kissed the back of her hands, and left the room, his head bowed in shame.

"The same goes for the rest of us," William said, though there was no semblance of remorse in his voice, or his face. "None of us tried to help you. Even though we should have." He looked a little at the other vampires in the room. "David's the only one who can remain calm so close to fire. Then again, he's older than any of us." David smirked a little, but didn't look up from Emma's notes.

"What he's trying, and failing to say," Daisy intervened, "is that we're all sorry. Truly, DEEPLY sorry." Daisy's face was twisted in sorrow and hurt, feelings Emma had never seen on her before. Aiden nodded his agreement with a serious frown, and William lightly shrugged his shoulders.

"Fantastic," David said and closed Emma's notes. "Now, let's get you out on the street."

Aiden sighed as if he was happy she had been picked for a tough exercise over him, and Daisy was incredibly close to shuddering.

“Oh come on,” David said with a chuckle. “It isn’t that bad.”

“No,” Aiden confirmed, “but it is extremely tedious.”

Daisy nodded and got up to walk out alongside William.

“Better you than me,” Aiden said on his way out of the room as well.

Emma looked astonished at the trio of vampires leaving. And then directed her gaze back to David.

“What do you mean ‘out on the streets’?”

“Some exercises in intelligence-gathering,” he said nonchalantly. “You need to be able to gather information that you might be able to use to your advantage.”

“Why?”

“It will help you survive. If you can pick up a few nasty things about someone who wants you gone, you come to me with the information, and I’ll make sure measures are taken against them.”

“And why would people want me gone?”

David’s smile lessened.

“If someone finds out that I’m protecting a human, they might come after you. There are people who would like to see me suffer.”

Emma snorted.

“There can’t be that many.”

“Hm, if you only knew a fraction of the messes I’ve gotten myself into over the centuries, you’d be long gone, ‘running for the hills’, so to speak.”

“You’re not getting rid of me that easy.”

David chuckled.

“No, I suppose not.”



It was a couple of hours before dawn when David decided they’d had enough exercise. They had gone to Jackson Square to just sit in silence and listen to the people around them. Once in a while, Emma would tell David what she’d heard, and David would give her some small bits of advice. Emma had quite frankly enjoyed it. And then, David had told that they were done for the night. They then leant back and had a smoke, which had also given Emma time to form some questions in her head.

“What happened with that Zodiac that messed you up so bad?” she asked her mentor.

David pondered for a little while.

“I think he was trying to resurrect a Cainite who’s been dead for centuries. Six centuries, to be a little precise.”

“You can do that? Isn’t death permanent?”

David sat back and sighed.

“Death is a strange concept indeed. I’m dead, but I’m sitting here, conversing with you. And the souls of the dead can indeed interact with this world. But not everyone who dies becomes a wraith, or ghost. And not all dead things stay dead. Necromancers toy with death, fiddle around with

necrotic magics that would probably be better left undisturbed. I honestly can't tell you much about death, Emma. I barely understand it myself. But I know that some have succeeded in bringing back particularly strong spirits to living, or undead bodies."

"Alright, then. What about that vampire who's been dead for six hundred years? Do you know him?"

"I thought I did, to an extent," David said, but his smile and good mood were gone. Now, he seemed like he was remembering a time he would rather forget. "He was a Lasombra, a powerful one. He once covered a city in shadows for a week. Cainites had free reign, both night AND day. We had the same grandsire, but I never really got to know him personally. And now, it would seem that he's returned. In what capacity, I can't tell you. He was definitely not at full strength."

"How would you know?"

"Because if he were, I would be dead," he said grimly. "That coldness would have ended me in minutes. But it didn't. I'm glad that John thought of using fire to combat it. More so than Kindred themselves, the Lasombra's shadows are incredibly vulnerable to fire. After the infection was gone, I would have woken up in seconds, anyway. You really didn't have to get hurt," he said, his expression remorseful.

"Come off it. I'm fine now," she said with a small smile and playfully pushed him with her shoulder. He chuckled and gently returned the gesture. She then leant into his side, and he raised his arm to make room for her, then draped it across her shoulders.

"Do you know any mortals that can teach me mortal

magic?" Emma asked whilst they sat like that.

"I do," David replied, "but they live in a temple in Tibet."

"You're kidding!?"

"I'm afraid not."

Emma was silent for a while.

"I can get you there, if you'd like," David offered. "The temple is protected by wards and ancient magics. They can teach you a lot, considering they're practically shaolin monks with magical capabilities."

Emma was quiet. She didn't know what to think.

"They call themselves 'Akashics', but I'm not sure what that actually means. I was wandering the Orient for some centuries when I met them. They were being attacked by Mongols, and though they were brilliant martial artists, there were just too many enemies. So I sent the horseback soldiers riding. The Akashics knew what I was, but they offered me shelters for a few months if I so wanted."

Still nothing.

"I can introduce you. They'll be happy to help you grow. To train you and teach you."

"How long would I have to be there?" Emma almost whispered. David leant his head down to let his cheek rest on her head.

"A few years, at least. And it would be difficult. But you would be strong when you left. I've seen them do things no human could, and that few vampires can boast to be able to do."

Emma scooted a little closer, and leant heavier into him. He

then firmed his grip on her. And for some reason, he began to laugh.

“What is it?” she asked somewhat indignantly.

“Two weeks ago you tried to use a cross to repel me, and look at us now.”

Emma couldn’t help the smile.

“You’re a likeable person.”

“I suppose I am.”

The Modern Nights

New Orleans, Louisiana. 2015.

A young woman attending university in Gentilly in New Orleans finds herself taking a new occult studies class for easy merit, but something about the teacher feels off. It's not his young appearance or demeanor. It's his very presence. The predatorial glint in his eyes, which almost seem to glow. She determines to find out exactly what is wrong with him. When she thinks a little harder about it, she does remember hearing about 'rakshasa' from an Indian woman she knows...

Meanwhile, in the French Quarter, her new teacher walks into a seemingly abandoned warehouse. Inside awaits several monsters. And not ones of the metaphorical kind. Six vampires, all awaiting orders from their boss to find, hunt down and destroy any vampire who has been deemed disposable by the Camarilla. Red Alastor David Kane, vampire-hunter for the Camarilla, rejoins his team of Alastors and continues his existence-long quest to fulfill a promise to a lover from centuries past: protect her mortal lineage from death by the supernatural. The last remaining member of which is a certain young woman who recently took occult studies.

Welcome to The Modern Nights