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When In Rome

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A Novel for VAMPIRE: The Masquerade™

WHEN IN ROME

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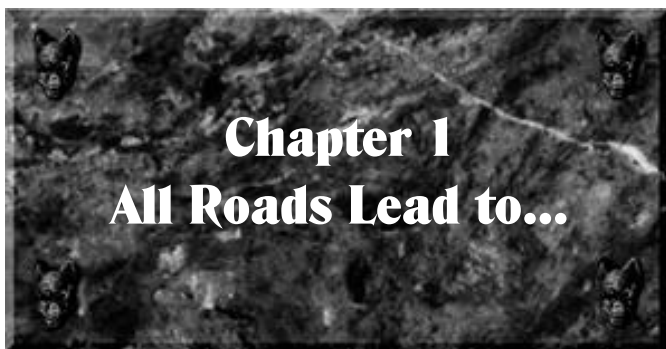
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Rome, Italy

August 13th, 2015

Luchenzo Mirachelli, an aging, Hispanic man with short, greying hair and a few wrinkles, walked down the street to the small house designated as his safehouse for the time being. Though he looked old, at least fifty, his walk betrayed no weakness. Rather, he walked as a lion among sheep. He was the epitome of an alpha male, strong and with a hardened look on his lightly scarred face. His dark brown eyes seemed almost black, even in the light of the noon sun, and his facial expression was sternly set in stone. He seemed like what every man would want to be when they reached old age; strong, impressive and tough. A real warrior. His jeans were dark blue, his t-shirt white and his button-down a deep red. He wore his sleeves rolled up, which revealed a long, thin chain of silver wrapped around his right arm, at the end of which hung a silver cross from his wrist. Under his left forearm was a tattoo of Christ on the cross, and a banner reading 'IN LUX, VITAE' stretched beneath it.

Walking down the street, he turned and entered a two-story building. Inside sat another elderly man, though this one was definitely not the same as Luchenzo. He was heavily

overweight, had a handlebar mustache, wore a cardinal uniform and was clearly out of shape, if his huffing and sweating was any indicator. As opposed to Luchenzo, with a fit, muscular body, a stubbled beard and breathing slowly and steadily.

“What is it, Callisto?” Luchenzo asked with boredom. “I did as asked, the elder is dead.”

“As are twelve civilians, Luchenzo,” Cardinal Callisto Radosta replied with short breath. “Your skills are appreciated, and we can accept the odd collateral casualty from time to time, but twelve people! That is unacceptable, *messere* Mirachelli!”

“Extreme targets require extreme measures,” Luchenzo brushed off and went over to his coffee machine. “Be glad I didn’t take out an entire block.”

Luchenzo poured himself some coffee and started sipping at it. He walked over to the day’s newspaper lying on his kitchen counter and started reading it.

“Are you entirely certain that you took out the blood-sucker, Luchenzo?”

Luchenzo glared at the cardinal for even considering that the Order’s best assassin had failed his task.

“No vampire could have survived that explosion. End of story.”

He returned to his newspaper and coffee. Cardinal Radosta looked at Luchenzo for a while, his labored breathing the only sound in the kitchen.

“Very well, then,” he relented. “I shall take your word for

it. Until we meet again.”

The fat cardinal rose from the chair, with some trouble, and left the house. Luchenzo stood against the counter and read the paper. He took a sip of his coffee a few times.



The English–Italian Nosferatu known as Henry sat in the cistern leading from Tiber Island to the river and read the newspaper. His crooked fingers with grey, scaly, flaking dead skin turned the pages lazily as his one good eye skimmed them.

‘New arrival in Rome killed in gas leak explosion!’

“Heh,” the rusty and scratchy voice of the sewer rat muttered in Italian. “The kine sure are interesting with their choice of assassination.”

The sound of a swimmer reached the Nosferatu’s one ear, and his horribly twisted mouth with only five teeth, two of which were his fangs, turned up into a very crude and repulsive smile.

“Took you long enough.”

The swimmer appeared from the exit which led to the river. His blond hair and blue eyes were small markers that he wasn’t local, but he could easily pass for half–Italian.

“I had to make sure the hunters didn’t follow me,” the man said. “Do you have what I asked for?”

He swam over to the edge and climbed out. He was stark naked. The Nosferatu picked up a bag by his side and threw it at the man.

“Towel, deodorant, clothes and a pistol, just as you wanted,” Henry affirmed. “I still can’t figure out why you wanted a pistol, though.”

“It’s not for Kindred,” the man explained. “It’s for kine.”

The man dried off with the towel before he sprayed himself with the deodorant. Thankfully, the cisterns under Rome weren’t as foul as they had once been, thanks to modern water-purification technology. The water wasn’t as contaminated or stinking as it had been just two centuries earlier. He dressed quickly and put the pistol in the holster attached to his belt behind his back. The black leather jacket was the last thing he put on.

“How much do I owe you?” the man asked.

“Consider it a favor,” Henry answered with a wave of his hand, as if to say ‘don’t worry ‘bout it’. “After all, being owed a favor by **the** Domenico Valerius is quite the juicy, little morsel.”

“Can’t argue with that sentiment,” Domenico replied with a smile. “Goodnight, Henry.”

“Night, Mr Valerius.”

Domenico walked down the corridor of the cistern and disappeared into the darkness. He emerged from the sewers on Isola Tiberina, a small island in the middle of the Tiber River an hour or two from the Vatican by foot. He emerged from an obscure passage under the bridge, created by the city’s Nosferatu centuries ago. He made sure no one was looking, and then jumped into the air. He didn’t land, but a small, black bat flew away, its wings beating quickly. He soon reached the *Colosseo*, where he landed on one of the

highest platforms of the old seats. An obscure place, hidden from view. He flew down close to the ground, and suddenly expanded back into his original form and landed softly on the ancient stone. His eyes were gleaming red and scanned the surrounding area for any intruders. When he found none, he sat down and let his eyes resume their normal color. And then, he just waited.



Luchenzo walked through the streets of Rome at night. It was then that vampire activity was, naturally, higher. Their unholy servants wandered the day, and were indistinguishable from regular humans, with incredibly rare exceptions. He had once found a so-called ‘ghoul’, which shared some of it’s master’s hideousness, but Luchenzo had come to realize that the vampires were distinguishable. Some were capable of some powers, while others had powers completely different. As such, keeping an open mind and assuming the worst usually led to victory when paired with skill and experience. Many of the filthy creatures had decades or centuries worth of experience that he did not, but his own experience was very focused. Stake to the heart paralyzes them. Sunlight and fire kills them. So does extreme trauma or decapitation, but some vampires could survive being hit by trucks, so Luchenzo kept a small flask of gasoline and a lighter on and at all times. Another thing he had come to realize, at the cost of his best friend, was that crosses and holy water did nothing to the average vampire. Only one blood-sucker he had encountered displayed such features, leading Luchenzo to believe that the exact powers and vulnerabilities of vampires were incredibly individual as well, with only few common nominators. Sunlight, fire, stakes. Those three traits were

all the only weaknesses they had in common, though an Egyptian vampire he'd met in Cairo once was unaffected by the stake. It foolishly went on to tell him that it had removed its heart. Like a cliché movie villain revealing his plans after it had come to fruition.

Luchenzo passed a nightclub he knew where the demons prowled at times, but he just wanted to scout and gather information tonight.

Know your enemy, and know yourself, and you need not fear the results of a hundred battles.

Sun Tzu was a brilliant general, and his teachings could be applied in almost any situation. Especially in hunting blasphemous creatures stalking The Lord's greatest creation. The elderly vampire-hunter stalked the streets, much like his prey did. His pistol was securely tucked in its holster beneath his jacket, as was the wooden stake. As he reached the Colosseum, he thought he felt an eerie presence, a dark, malignant sensation. He usually got that when a vampire was close. Instantly on alert, he made sure to keep his hand ready to draw his pistol as he kept moving. The night crawled with filthy creatures, and he would be damned if he was taken down by one.



Soon, Domenico was joined by someone. A bat turning into a woman, looking no older than twenty, but Domenico knew she was well beyond a human expiration date. Sofia Montesano, an inhumanly beautiful woman, and a Cainite easily five centuries old. Her golden-red locks billowed in the quiet breeze and her usually emerald green eyes shone a bright red. Her wine-red velvet blouse went well with her

tight, black skirt, her black stockings and black stilettos. Her pale skin was in stark contrast to her smiling lips overlaid with black lipstick.

“Domenico!” she exclaimed as she saw him. “It has been too long!”

Domenico stood up with a smile of his own, and just as he was standing, she crashed into him and feverously pressed her lips to his. He returned it almost just as eagerly. Soon, they pulled apart.

“It most certainly has, my childe,” Domenico said as he looked his progeny lovingly in her impossibly green eyes. “I have missed you dearly.”

Sofia looked back into his blue ones with the same expression.

“And I have longed to see you.”

Domenico leant in and placed a small kiss on her forehead.

“I need your help in locating a man. A human. His name was recently added to the list of humans to stay far away from. I’ve been tasked with verifying the validity of his rumor.”

Sofia nodded eagerly.

“He is a vampire killer, by the name of Luchenzo Mirachelli. Have you heard of him?”

“I have,” Sofia confirmed with a nod. “The Kindred of the city call him the ‘Witch-hammer’.”

“From the old manual by the Inquisition?”

“Yes. He is a fanatic warrior amongst equally fanatic priests. I understand why the Inner Circle have finally decided to place his name on the list.”

“The proposition came from Molly Macdonald, said her Roman clanmates had been pressing the issue for years.”

“Given that the Nosferatu is the most numerous clan in the city, I understand the Nosferatu Justicar’s decision.”

“How much can you tell me of him?”

“Not much,” Sofia admitted. “He was likely born in the forties or fifties, and he’s one of the most dangerous humans there are to Kindred, but other than that, nothing.”

“I see,” Domenico mumbled and started stroking his beard. “Do you know of someone who can tell me more of him?”

“There is this Brujah,” Sofia admitted hesitantly. “He claims to be an elder, but I don’t know much about him. He runs an underground fighting ring, literally.”

“The catacombs?” Sofia nodded. “I thought that was Nosferatu territory.”

“It mostly is, but in return for being allowed to host his fights down there, he provides them with muscle if they need to do things topside.”

“Seems reasonable. How do I reach the fighting ring?”

“It’s in a tight nook down in the Domus Aurea. I trust you know how to get down there.”

Domenico faintly smirked.

“Sure. Can you prepare a haven for me? I could take the time to do so myself, but I want to finish this assignment so I can enjoy some time with you.”

Sofia would definitely have blushed if she were still alive.

“I will make sure a suite is prepared for you in my hotel by daybreak.”

Domenico frowned lightly.

“I only need a room.”

“I know,” Sofia said cheerily. “But while you are my guest, you will want for nothing.”

Domenico shook his head with a small smile.

“I’ll be off, then,” Domenico said and rose to his feet. “I need to get reacquainted with the city before I go tomb raiding. Take care, Sofia.”

“You too, Domenico.”

With that, Domenico leapt off the ledge they were sitting by, and soon, a small bat was fluttering away into the night. Sofia just sat quietly and watched as her sire flew away, using the coolest trick he ever taught her.



Domenico walked through the winding streets of Rome. Small flashes of his past there slipped through his mind, and he felt the nostalgia hit him. The new buildings on archaic stone. A young city resting atop and amidst an ancient one. He sniffed the air, and kept his attention looking for prime sustenance. High-quality juicebags to feed from. A scent entered his nose, and led him down

alleys. He came upon a group of young adults, likely university students, sitting in a small, private garden, smoking what he could only assume was this 'pot' Emma had mentioned once. The thought of Emma brought an icy stab to his heart, but he ignored it. He entered the garden and closed the door behind himself.

"The Hell, man!" one of the boys said loudly.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen," Domenico smiled as he said that. "Welcome to tonight's episode, where we reveal just how quickly a bunch of potheads go down when bashed in the back of the head with the lid of a garbage can."

He grabbed said lid from the can right beside him, and rushed the teens. One by one, they were knocked out cold by the strength of the strikes.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Domenico chuckled darkly to himself, "it would seem that such a feat takes four and a half seconds! Give a round of applause for the unwilling participants!"

He clapped his hands unenthusiastically a few times before he went around and started feeding on the teens, one after another. When he was done, he felt somewhat lightheaded, but was otherwise alright. None of the eleven teens would wake up again, so Domenico did the sensible thing; he stacked the carcasses in a neat pile, made sure it was on stone tiling, and then snapped his fingers. The pile instantly lit up with flames hotter than any bonfire, and Domenico stood, watching the corpses burn. He tried to, deep down, find just the slightest hint of remorse, the slightest amount of respect for the departed. He found

none. But, just to be certain, he stood watch and made sure there was nothing but ash left when it was done burning. The energy from all the blood shook his system. It had been a long time since he fed so much. He felt more energized than he had in years.

But Rome was another story. So much depravity and hedonism from the past permeated the city, Domenico felt his old self starting to bubble up to the surface once more. The vampire who never felt bad for exploiting people whose trust he had gained. The vampire who would throw spontaneous childer to the Inquisition to throw them off his own trail. Who would feed on children for the simple pleasure of the youngest possible blood. The necromancer who had committed unspeakable atrocities simply to quench his morbid and twisted curiosity. Sofia's presence made it bearable, but he only had bad memories of the city. The bastard Nero, the emperor himself, had burnt down part of the city, just to make a new palace. No Roman emperor had ever wanted to rule the city to help its people. Sure, the Roman empire had been a master at war, comparable even to Alexander the Great. But Alexander had been one king, who had achieved virtually as much as the Roman Empire as a whole. The emperors had all wanted the power and prestige, instead of the privilege of helping people from a position which allowed them to do just that. Then, Domenico turned and left.

Only a neat pile of ash remained on the scorched stone, which, with a flick of Domenico's hand, was scattered to the winds.



Luchenzo sat in a chair outside a neat café frequented by

the wealthier classes. And as such, was a popular spot for the servants of the wealthier vampires. The decadent, degenerate, corrupted, depraved, once-human drones who believed their lives changed for the better. Pathetic creatures who weren't satisfied being God's greatest and most perfect creation. The thought made him sick to his core. Eternal glory and peace awaited those faithful to their Lord and stayed on the right path. How could people not believe that? Luchenzo sighed to himself and sipped his coffee once more. He didn't understand how people couldn't take the Lord seriously. His worship had been practiced for thousands of years. His own family had done it for hundreds of generations, all the way back to Mesopotamia. Back then, several deities were worshipped by everyone else. Only a minority knew of the one true God. Then again, his family had been sternly protecting sacred history since before the invention of writing.

Luchenzo finished his cup of coffee, and left a few euros on the table. He then walked back towards the Vatican. He had been unsuccessful in locating any vampires or their servants tonight, but he would try again the next night. And the one after that, and after that, until the day he died. However, he felt like someone or something was watching him. He kept discreetly looking around, on the lookout for an extra shadow. The creeping, cold sensation of the unholy snuck its way onto his skin, making him shudder slightly. There was a blood-drinking critter nearby, of that, he was certain. His right hand kept close to his hip, so as to quickly draw his pistol. Taking slow, carefully measured steps, he let his senses reach out. Though he was less skilled in tracking than some of his cousins, he was far from a slouch. He couldn't smell anything out of the ordinary, but being in

the middle of a city with exhausts everywhere, a strong sense of smell did little good. His ears sharpened, and all sounds became much louder and much crisper. Chats, engines, clattering glasses. He heard them all. And most importantly, he heard footsteps on rooftiles. He glanced back and up, and saw a shadow leap from one roof to another, the black clothes contrasting the dark-blue sky and creating a silhouette.

Amateur.

Luchenzo turned into an alley to his right, hoping to lure the vampire down to face him. And as you wish, so shall you receive. The figure dumped down from the roof and sprinted up behind him. As it put a rough hand on his shoulder, Luchenzo grabbed the extremity and pulled the vampire forwards. He ducked, stepped back under the arm, and twisted it behind the vampire's back at an odd angle. He pulled the stake out from his jacket and rammed it through the vampire's back with little effort, and much strength. The cretin slumped over and lay still. Luchenzo couldn't help the amused chuckle that escaped him. From time to time, a vampire came after him in the hopes of killing him. Likely to be seen as a fearsome warrior by his equally delusional and pathetic kindred. He turned the monster over, and the face of a young woman who looked no older than fifteen. A stinging sensation reached his heart.

"Oh, poor thing," he said and crouched down. "So young, and still defiled by the blood-drinkers."

He pitifully caressed her cheek and hair, ignoring the girl's wild eyes full of fear.

“Shhh, it’ll be alright,” he whispered reassuringly to the child. “Soon, your soul will be purified and you will go to Heaven in eternal peace.”

He stood back up and pulled out his can of lighter fluid. He poured some out over her, and then pulled a lighter from the same pocket. He carefully lit the vampire, so as to not get burnt himself, and stepped back. With a sorrowful smile on his face, he signed the cross in the air in front of him, and bowed his head and clasped his hands in prayer for the purified soul to find peace in God’s eternally loving grace.



Domenico finally settled on the roof of a rather tall building, having been making his way across the rooftops. He crouched down and looked at the Vatican. He was still more than five hundred meters away from the borders, and yet the pure faith of the inhabitants still irritated his skin, like hundreds of red-hot needles prickling him all over his body, but especially across his face and neck. He noticed that when he looked at it, his entire peripheral vision blurred.

Now that’s interesting.

Looking down at the street below, he saw a man sitting on a bench by himself, staring at the Vatican as well. A bottle of wine was sitting next to him. Domenico stared at the back of the man’s head intensely, and focused. He reached out with his mind and felt the man’s inner thoughts and wants. Pushing further, Domenico felt the ground slip from under him, and he felt like he was falling, until he opened his eyes.

Or rather, the eyes of the very human Areto Kilantri. A drunk and alcoholic who had apparently been disowned by his rather wealthy family. His girlfriend had left him for another, and none from his family would associate with him. Finally, his German Shepherd pup had died from eating something it shouldn't have.

That's sad. Wonder why he hasn't killed himself yet. Seems to have become a trend over the past years.

He shook his head to get the sensation of the possession out of his mind, and his head cleared. He looked at the Vatican once again, and despite being closer, he didn't feel the slight burn of faith he had earlier. However, his vision, despite being better, still blurred at the edges when he looked at the Vatican.

Seems I will have to deal with bad eyesight once I go in there. Good to know.

Domenico felt like he was being sucked through a vacuum cleaner, like he was being dragged through a narrow pipe, and suddenly, he opened his eyes. He was lying on the roof, face down on the tiling, and was slowly sliding towards the edge. When he reached it, he grabbed hold of the edge and used it as an axis, from where he flipped his body around like a gymnast. He fell towards the ground, feet landing first. Domenico turned back to look at the Vatican one more time, feeling the burn of the divinity centered in the small city within Rome, and smirked.

"I'm coming for you, Luchenzo."

With that, he turned away and left.



Chapter 2

No Rest For The Wicked

Rome, Italy

August 14th, 2015

Domenico woke up in the large bed, easily able to fit four adults. He noticed that Sofia was lying naked next to him. With a smile, he placed a kiss on the top of her head, and pulled off the thick duvet. He walked over to his carelessly discarded clothes, and put them back on. He then looked around the large room for some paper and a pen. He spotted it on the desk, and walked over. Leaning over the desk, he grabbed the pen and started writing.

Sofia. I have gone out already, and may not return for a few days, four at most. While I am away, could you be sure to stock up the closet with apparel for many occasions? And not just suits, I need practical, everyday wear to blend in. Thank you.

He folded the piece of paper, scribbled 'Sofia' on it, and placed it on the pillow next to his child. He gently caressed the face of the very dead corpse, which would reanimate within an hour or two. Domenico turned and looked at the

window. The sun would set in a few minutes. He left the suite and made his way down to the hotel lobby.



Domenico walked down the streets of Rome, mere minutes after sunset. Even the small amount of sunlight would be enough to severely burn most Kindred, but Domenico's resistance to injury, mundane or supernatural, was greater than most. He walked around one of the older districts, recognizing some structures from every century, all the way back to the fourteenth century.

Some of these structures are centuries old. And yet, all of them are younger than me. Such a bizarre phenomenon, we Cainites are.

He made his way through the winding streets, once nothing but dirt and sand, which were now asphalted and paved. Everywhere he looked, Domenico saw reminders of his cursed immortality. He had existed centuries longer than even the oldest structure in Rome. He had been there to witness Caesarion's assassination. He had watched Rome burn as Nero had discovered the existence of Domenico's kind, and foolishly tried to exterminate them all by setting fire to buildings in the city. It had been an ocean of flames in the dark night, and countless human lives had been claimed. Only a minority of the Kindred had been killed by the incident.

Domenico shook his head at the memory of Rome's fiery doom. But it had rebuilt. Just like the Kindred community had. That one fact was the only humor Domenico had from that time. Quite an egg on Nero's face it had been when Domenico had come for him. Domenico had made sure that he was as pale and gaunt as he could be, and to display

his glowing eyes and pearly-white fangs. Nero would have died from fright, if it weren't for the fact that Domenico had killed him first.

Domenico finally reached a small, abandoned building in one of the poorer districts. He looked around to see if anyone was there, and was pleasantly surprised when he actually sensed something. He crouched down, focused the stolen blood in his body to boil in his legs, and the flew backwards through the air, landing silently on the roof of a building some distance away. His sharp eyes honed in on the small building, and saw a shadowy figure run out to where he had been an instant earlier. He recognized the woman instantly, from a time a few centuries earlier. He smiled and jumped forward once again, landing completely silently a few meters from her.

"I didn't expect to see you here," he said mirthfully in off-British English, knowing full well that the woman understood it.

She whipped around and lunged at him, fist barreling towards him. He expertly dodged and gripped her tight, an arm wrapped around the one holding the weapon, the other snugly tightened around her waist, pressing her into himself.

"And we even ended up in roughly the same position," he added. "Fate really is a kind mistress, isn't she?"

The woman, hair midnight black, skin olive and her features regal, was truly a Spanish beauty without the slightest trace of Moorish ancestry, a common trait in Iberian people around the time of her birth. Her dark brown eyes were hard and held a certain intent to harm

him. Her attire consisted of black, high-heeled boots, tight black jeans enhancing the shape of her posterior, a black sports bra and a black leather jacket, revealing her toned, somewhat muscled stomach and displaying her breasts' cleavage. In total, she was the perfect image of almost any mortal man's dream woman. But Domenico was no mortal man. Even with her complexion, her unusual pallor didn't escape him, and he knew full well that her attire wasn't entirely of her complete choice; it was a tool for seduction, a powerful skill in the right hands. One in which Domenico knew the woman was quite thoroughly practiced and proficient.

"Dominic Valor," she said in what was supposed to be a courteous manner. "What are you doing here?"

"The same, I suspect, as you."

"And what would that be?"

"Don't peg me for a fool, Lucita," the woman's eyes widened at his mention of her real name. "I know people who can get me the information I want."

"How do you know my name?" Lucita asked with a dark tone.

"I've heard a few things about you here and there," Domenico said with some measure of humor. "And I prefer Domenico Valerius. Dominic Valor is for the Brits and Yanks who can't pronounce my name right."

The wisecrack didn't make Lucita waver in the slightest. They just looked into each other eyes intensely for what seemed like hours, gauging each other. Domenico pressed Lucita a little closer, making their contact more intimate,

which made her slam her left elbow into his face. He stumbled back and clutched his face.

“Merda!” he shouted and held his face. “What was that for!?”

“For getting too handsy,” Lucita replied casually.

“I don’t seem to remember that being an issue last we met,” he smirked victoriously.

“I was paid to get information out of you. No one told me you were Kindred, and you’re good at pretending to be kine,” Lucita brushed off the comment.

“Quite a night, it was,” Domenico continued. “With the way your hips were rocking around, your bouncing brea—” his comment was cut off by a heel to the face, sending him flying backwards. “Shit!”

His face struck the wall of a building hard enough to crack the brick a little, but his face remained intact, even if it stung a little. Lucita glared at the Camarilla agent.

“One more word, and I’ll end you,” she said dangerously, her eyes relaying that she wasn’t kidding.

“If you can,” Domenico countered with a smirk and got back up. As he did, he pulled a little object from his pocket, and quickly threw it at Lucita. “Hot potato.”

Lucita caught the object, then quickly realized that it was a grenade, and the pin was hanging from one of Domenico’s fingers. She whipped around and chugged it far into the air. She then ducked into the abandoned building with Domenico following swiftly behind. A loud ‘crack’ was audible, and Lucita punched Domenico on the

shoulder.

“What the Hell is wrong with you!?” she shouted angrily.

“Just testing your reflexes,” Domenico shrugged and walked over to a large stone slab in the small cottage-like structure. “Good to see you’re at the top of your game.”

He dug his fingers into the crevices surrounding the loose tile and grabbed hold of the stone slab, easily weighing over 500 kilograms, and picked it up like it were made of plywood. He pushed it to the side and revealed a hidden entrance to the city’s older catacombs, which couldn’t be visited by mortals without intimate knowledge of the city’s Nosferatu. It was, after all, built by them in the fourth century.

“How do you know about this entrance?” Lucita asked casually, having regained her composure.

“I was here when it was built,” Domenico said calmly. “A friend of mine was as well. He was supposed to come down here with me tonight.”

“What happened to him?” Lucita asked without concern.

“He got caught up in an explosion a few nights ago,” Domenico shrugged.

“Oh,” Lucita said, completely void of remorse.

“Yeah,” Domenico said. “Ladies first,” he gestured to the entrance, the tunnel underneath drowned in complete darkness.

Lucita shot him a glare, and jumped down the hole. Domenico took the ladder, and slid the stone slab back into place above him as his eyes started glowing bright red in the

darkness, allowing him to see perfectly in the dark.



Lucita and Domenico didn't exchange a word for a good portion of their dungeon-delving. Domenico walked, and Lucita quietly followed. It wasn't until Domenico felt the first pangs of the daysleep creep up on him. Lucita seemed concerned, if only marginally so.

"It's almost daytime. Do you know where we're going?"

"Not entirely," Domenico admitted. "Most of these tunnels are from after I was here last, which was a good few centuries ago. I know the general direction, but it would seem some of the original tunnels have collapsed. Most likely to keep intruders out."

"What do you mean?" Lucita inquired.

"The Nosferatu, from what I gather, like to change the layout of the catacombs every few decades or centuries. I don't know exactly how they do it, but they block tunnels and create new ones. I doubt it will take us more than a few days to find our destination, though."

"Days?" Lucita said skeptically. "We don't have days, I won't last a few nights if we get into a fight. I need blood soon."

"Summon a rat or ten," Domenico shrugged. "Maybe you'll find one the size of a dog."

"I will not feed off rats," she said indignantly.

"Save that pride for someone who cares," Domenico said over his shoulder as they walked. "I know you're from Clan Lasombra and all, but I would hope you can put it aside for

survival.”

“You wouldn’t know anything about us,” Lucita mocked haughtily. “We’re very particular.”

Domenico turned back towards her, which made her stop. His eyes looked deeply into Lucita’s glowing eyes.

“You mean to say that I don’t know my own clan?” he asked with a face clearly saying ‘you’ve got to be kidding’.

Lucita was taken aback.

“You are Lasombra?”

In response, a dark tendril of utter darkness unlatched itself from the wall of the tunnel and wrapped itself around Lucita’s leg. She looked down at the shadow, and back at Domenico. While there was just a little glint of relief, it was outweighed by the suspicion.

“Then why would you even suggest feeding off rats?” she asked.

“Because I used to be like the rest of us, once. It didn’t get me very far. I’m an Alastor. Keeping those outdated norms would endanger me on my missions. I adapted to my changed circumstances. Maybe you should too.”

Domenico then turned around and kept walking, and Lucita quickly followed.

“Besides, the only alternative to rats is me,” Domenico said calmly. “I’m willing to let you, but I doubt you will want that. What with the pesky blood oath and all.”

Lucita fell quiet and just kept following Domenico. They walked for almost an hour until Lucita was forced to lie

down for the day sleep. Domenico sat down next to her, keeping watch until, two hours later, he felt his own consciousness slip, and he himself fell into the deep, dark slumber of the day.



Domenico woke up a good two or three hours before dusk. He sat back up and looked at Lucita's unmoving and seemingly dead form. Well, truly dead, as she was dead even when she moved and talked. He gently poked and prodded her face.

"Luciiiiitaaaa?" he cooed annoyingly. "Luuuuciiiiitaaaaaa?"

No response.

Domenico sighed and leant against the wall to wait. He was starting to regret that he hadn't brought permanent markers so he could draw on her face, and he was getting bored very quickly. He started fondling her firm and generous posterior, hoping it would rouse her. It didn't, so he stopped. He then slapped it quite hard, but she remained still and silent. He then sat and admired it for a few minutes.

Why are young people these days so obsessed with women's hindquarters, anyway? I don't understand. Do they find them enjoyable to play with? Do they arouse some sort of excitement, or desire? He gently caressed the sleeping vampire's behind again. What on Earth is so fascinating about it? They've always been part of the human anatomy. Breasts, I understand. Everyone develops an attraction to them from suckling when they are neonatal. Playing with them and sucking on them is an instinct from infancy. But the, what do they call it, 'booty'? I really don't understand.

“Damn it,” he sighed to himself and slammed his head back into the earthen wall of the tunnel. “Wake uuuuup.”

Generally, Domenico considered himself lucky that he woke up long before most other Cainites, but when one of them was an impromptu partner, he got restless and easily bored. Minutes went by like hours until, an hour later, Lucita finally opened her eyes and sat up. She looked around before it occurred to her to entice the Beast into letting her see perfectly in the dark, and then her eyes fell on Domenico.

“You didn’t do anything inappropriate to me while I slept, right?”

It wasn’t a question, so much as a barely-veiled threat.

“If I had, you probably would have noticed,” Domenico shot back.

Lucita studied him suspiciously, until she stood up. Domenico stood as well.

“Come on,” Domenico said and started walking. “Shouldn’t be too far now.”

Lucita followed quietly, and they walked in silence for some hours, making their way through twisting tunnels, hitting dead ends and fall pits. Except for the fact that Lucita had almost fallen into one such pit filled with sharpened wood pikes. Domenico had taken hold of her arm and roughly pulled her back, earning a little ‘thanks’ from her. Finally, an hour or so before dusk, they entered a large room in the underground tunnel system. It was incredibly tall, at least twenty meters from floor to ceiling, and its walls were of stone, likely granite. All around were

tall pillars, some broken, some still supporting the ceiling. There were stone benches, and the room looked like it was made to be an amphitheater. All around, there were blood stains and broken weapons like baseball bats, bottles, golf clubs and other items. A number of recently extinguished braziers were also dotting the room, giving ample light to see when lit, but Domenico figured it was also an attempt at passively trying to build a resistance to The Red Fear.

Domenico and Lucita walked through the giant room, looking around.

“This must be the site of the fighting ring,” Domenico commented, his quiet voice ringing out in the emptiness of the vast, cavernous hall from ages past. “But there weren’t just Kindred here. There were kine as well.”

“I smell it,” Lucita confirmed. “My senses might be mundane compared to yours, but I will never miss the scent of human blood.”

David walked over to some of the benches and studied them.

“They get quite rough,” he muttered. “Someone was thrown onto this bench. I suppose he was Kindred, else there would have been blood.”

Lucita crouched over some of the weapons.

“I think weapons are only allowed for ghouls and kine,” she called. “There are traces of Kindred vitae on them, and greasy fingerprints. Kindred don’t leave prints.”

“Right,” Domenico agreed. “We should find a little crevice somewhere to sleep. We’ll wait for them to return tomorrow night.”

Lucita nodded and walked over to Domenico, her eyes flittering about the room.

“Where do you reckon we can sleep?”

Domenico looked around as well, looking for a place where they could sleep undisturbed. His sharp sight found no place where they could without anyone noticing them, but an idea sprang into his head.

“Do you know how to meld with the earth?” he asked his companion.

Lucita shook her head.

“Come with me,” he said and walked back towards the door they entered from.

When they came out, Lucita started swaying a little, signaling the end of her night. Domenico extended his fangs and pricked his thumb on one of them. He then smeared a minute amount of his blood on her forehead, and all of a sudden, she started sinking into the dirt of the tunnels, as if she were being pulled under dense water. Soon, she was gone, into the soil of the ancient city. Domenico then turned back and reentered the large room. He sat down and surveyed the area, committing every detail to memory. His eyes flittered about, recording everything he saw. Then, he began planning.

They will likely enter an hour or two after dusk. We need to be careful, because they might come through this tunnel, though I suspect there is an easier, alternate entrance. The Brujah elder will likely stand out like a sore thumb. Any who calls themselves elders are egomaniacs, and won't share the spotlight with anyone. Especially not a Brujah, considering their propensity for violence

and bloody glory. I would suspect the majority of them are caitiff, thin-bloods and other Brujah. As such, the more seasoned members are likely to put up a good fight. They might have speed, strength and resilience at high calibers. Emotional influence is also likely.

Domenico nodded to himself after making assumptions about his current situation. If he and Lucita were attacked, they would be pressed to make it out alive. If he were alone, Domenico was certain that he would survive. But Lucita was another case.

If I have to protect her as well, I might be distracted. She still uses anonymity to her own advantage. She hasn't told anyone that she has defected the Camarilla, and joined the Sabbat. I wonder what made her change her mind? Was it killing her sire, Monçada, that was the catalyst for her change? Or was it something else? From what I gathered, she is rebellious and independent, and would like nothing less than to become like Monçada. But that is exactly what she is doing. She must be blind or delusional not to see it herself. She even took his place as Archbishop of Madrid. Should I kill her?

Domenico's face turned dark and brooding.

No. For now, I'll see what she wants. She wouldn't be this far from her domain if it wasn't important, she would have sent some lower-rank goon to handle anything simple. But why follow me? She can't be after Mirachelli, that is Inner Circle affairs. The Sabbat wouldn't be interested in that in the slightest. This supposed elder Brujah? No, he is too insignificant, and I don't suspect he hides much power. Is she after me? If that is the case, why hasn't she tried to kill me yet? That punch earlier was from surprise, that was genuine. Is she after David? If that's the case, she likely hasn't watched the news.

Domenico sat and pondered about the situation for

another hour or two, until he felt the daytime slumber creep up on him. He got up and walked back to where he put Lucita to sleep, and slowly sunk down into the earth close to where she slept, unknowing of the fact that Domenico had been well aware of her allegiance the whole time.



Domenico was aware of several presences passing overhead from his dark, comforting safe haven in the dirt of Rome. He felt the footsteps, felt the energies and presences passing him like small balls of cold flying over him. Their running steps rang out through the earth, but Domenico remained still, his essence being spread throughout the ancient earth. He also vividly sensed Lucita's lightly agitated and nervous presence close to himself. It was cold, unlike the vampires who passed overhead. It was like the northernmost part of Greenland compared to Germany. So cold, it would give a mortal frostbite if they could physically touch it. He knew that she had forsaken her Humanity. Her grasp on humankind, on human emotions. He'd suspected it earlier as well, feeling like something was off about her. Now, he knew for certain.

It wasn't like he thought it was a bad thing. He himself hadn't followed the Road of Humanity for many centuries. His own mentor had inducted and taught him in the ways of the Path of Pleasure. But Domenico had met Lucita earlier. At a ball in London, in the mid-19th century. Back then, she still retained her Humanity. Now, it was replaced by something wholly inhuman. Not that it really bothered Domenico. He'd grown accustomed to inhuman monsters soon after his Embrace.

But that doesn't change the fact that she is Sabbat, and I am

Camarilla. I should probably kill her before my assignment is finished. Shouldn't be too much trouble. She is younger than me, after all.

When Domenico felt the last of the presences pass overhead, and disappear into the large fighting hall, he slowly ascended from the earth like a flower, and crawled out. His clothes were no dirtier than when he sank into it. He then made his way over to where Lucita lay, and used his fang to puncture his thumb. He dragged the bleeding digit across the surface of the soil, and Lucita slowly but surely rose as well.

"That was far more comfortable than I'd imagined," she quietly mused, humorlessly.

"I was pleasantly surprised my first time, as well," Domenico agreed just as quietly.

They crept up to the door leading to the large atrium, and Domenico inched it open and peeked inside. The now lit braziers revealed Kindred and kine, both mundane and ghouléd, were roaring and cheering at a fight between two vampires happening in the lowest part of the room. Domenico made a few hand signs to Lucita, ordering her to keep quiet and follow. Lucita tapped his shoulder, indicating she complied. They snuck through the door and crept along the wall to reach around the gathering of nightwalkers and mortals. Domenico roused his blood, and the shadows darkened and thickened around them, obscuring their forms and movement from even supernatural senses. Lucita seemed impressed by the subtle, yet undeniably powerful and versatile ability. They came to a point where they had the cover of some broken pillars, and then they watched in silence. Domenico's eyes swept

over the group, counting twenty-nine, and trying to pinpoint the supposed elder. It wasn't long, as one of them soon stepped away from the others and addressed them all in a very grandiose manner. His hair was long and black, his skin dark olive, and eyes brown. He was clearly Hispanic, and looked like he had been no older than twenty when he was Embraced.

"Friends!" his deep voice called out in Italian, with clear influence of a Spanish accent. "I rejoice every night you return to join me for fun and competition! Our bashes are things to behold, and you are all exceptional fighters!"

Domenico had to fight to hold in a snort. Lucita didn't even resist.

"But I bear warnings," he continued loudly. "Intruders have made their way here, last night! They must be close! Find them, and bring them to me!"

Domenico sighed in frustration, and stood up. Lucita kept to the shadows as her companion walked around from the cover.

"Don't bother," he called out, drawing the attention of every member of the group. "I'm right here."

He casually walked down the steps, hands in his pockets. Most of the neonates seemed ready to pounce and tear him to shreds. He would appreciate the effort, wasted as it might be. His eyes swept over the gathered crowd, taking notice of the small details. One of the neonates had been cancerous in life, his body emancipated and shriveled from the terminal disease. Another had been associated with the Albanian mafia in Naples, if one went by the tattoo on his neck, just barely visible under his leather jacket. Never the

less, Domenico walked down towards the crowd. He clenched his right hand into a fist, and clenched it tight. He let his Beast slowly rise to the surface of his mind, and all of the young Kindred, ghouls and mortals recoiled, some more than others. Even to those without knowledge and awareness of the unnatural, he felt dangerous and predatory, his presence intimidating and dominating.

The Brujah he'd been looking for seemed like he was just barely controlling his own Beast.

"What's your name?" Domenico asked the vampire.

Everyone looked confused and frightened, as the crowd parted to make way for the powerful Cainite in their midst, this king amongst men.

"Erinco Kalita," he replied, unable to keep himself from talking. It was as if he was compelled to speak quickly and honestly, else there would be grave consequences.

"What clan spawned you?"

"Lasombra," Enrico said without hesitation, though he seemed shocked at his own answer.

Domenico stopped dead in his tracks.

Lasombra?

"Who is your sire?"

"Sofia Montesano."

Domenico's eyes narrowed, and the air around him fell several degrees in temperature, as the shadows cast by the braziers dotting the room started flickering and twitching out of rhythm with the flames.

“When and where did she embrace you?”

“1711, in Madrid.”

Domenico scrutinized the Kindred, his own unknown grandchilde. Which meant that he was nothing compared to Domenico.

“Can you tell me about a mortal called Luchenzo Mirachelli?”

Enrico shook his head quickly. Domenico was disappointed, and wanted to know more.

“What is your relationship to your sire?”

The other members of the undead society stood rooted in place, held at bay by this elder’s sheer proximity.

“She believes me dead,” Enrico explained. “We were caught in a fire by inquisitors, in Madrid, and had to flee. I pushed her out of a window, right before the floor we were standing on fell apart. I fell down into an underground tunnel, and it took me nights to find my way out. By the time I made my way back to our haven, she had packed and left to escape the inquisitors who had tracked us down.”

Domenico nodded absently.

“So she has no idea that you are alive?”

“No,” Enrico confirmed.

Domenico looked at his grandchilde with disdain.

“Then she will never find out.”

Domenico lunged at Enrico, which in turn broke his spell on the others present. He jabbed his right arm straight at Enrico, but it seemed Enrico indeed was an accomplished

fighter. He managed to duck under the elder's lightning swift punch, and delivered a quick kidney shot. Domenico was sent a few meters away from the force of the impact, but he didn't feel injured. It would seem he underestimated this mongrel running an underground fighting ring.

He landed on the floor, rolled once, and used his arm to send himself back to his feet, from where he skidded a meter back. A powerful strike indeed, but not enough to hurt him. The followers of Enrico quickly ran around and gathered weapons discarded the previous evening. Baseball bats of wood and metal, golf clubs, one even brought a sword, even if it were only a replica. Domenico scanned the crowd, taking notice of their fighting stances. Most seemed like all the fighting they knew was dirty street fighting. One was in a karate stance, and another was definitely a kick-boxer. But the rest looked like amateurs.

This will be easier than I imagined.

"Make sure no one leaves!" Domenico called out to his hidden partner in crime.

Domenico heard the shadows whisper to him, Lucita's sign that she had understood. He smirked wickedly.

"Now, who is ready to dance?"

A neonate hurled himself wildly at Domenico with a battle cry, ready to pummel the elder with his baseball bat. He swung the weapon with fierce intent to kill. Domenico easily stepped sideways and grabbed the young one by his throat. With a powerful, sharp jerk, he tore the child's head clean off. The body tumbled to the ground, and the head was frozen with a wild expression on its face, before it went slack, and Domenico dropped it. The smiling Cainite

stepped over the body as a small group of four charged in as well. The first to reach him, empowered by the vampire's supernatural speed, swung his club. Domenico, being much faster, ducked and cocked his left fist back. He then shot it forward, and brought it to the neonate's face, which exploded in a shower of blood, brain matter and torn flesh. On and on they came, every new vampire or mortal exclaiming a cry of battle before being brutally put down. Domenico tore through the group; one by one they fell. Some turned to ash, others shriveled like they were being dehydrated, and some just went limp. Living and undead alike fell to the flurry of death-strokes that was Domenico, until only four remained.

Domenico stared them down, his own grandchilde among them. When Domenico's eyes snapped to one of them in particular, a skinhead wearing hotpants and a leather jacket without a shirt underneath, the younger of them gasped and turned to run away.

"COWARD!" Enrico shouted at the childe, but soon, the childe's head fell from its shoulders, cleft clean off by an unseen blade. The skinhead fell to a pile of ash, indicating he wasn't as young as Domenico had suspected.

Oh well.

Domenico turned his focus back to the three remaining. His smile lessened at what he saw. Enrico had grasped one of the two Kindred by his side, and sunk his teeth into his throat. The younger screamed and thrashed in the Lasombra's grip, but to no avail. Soon, the youngling crumpled to a pile of dust, and Domenico knew what his failure of grandchilde had done. Domenico's face grew sullen and dark.

“You would turn to the Amaranth to try and defeat me?” he asked dangerously. “You sicken me.”

Before anything could be done, the now duo of opposing vampires spontaneously burst into flames. Their screams and howls of pain and fear cut through the chamber, rebounding on the stone walls. Domenico watched with disgust as the two burnt until there was only a pile of ash and a heavily charred corpse left. The elder slowly trotted over to where Enrico had stood.

“You filthy mutt,” Domenico sneered at the ash. “Turning on your own followers like that, consuming their souls in the hope of gaining some small advantage over me. Disgusting.”

Lucita emerged from a shadow close to him. Her face was without emotion, except for some measure of disgust as well. She came up beside Domenico.

“Why did you react like that when he said his sire was this ‘Sofia’ woman?”

“Sofia Montesano is my only childe,” Domenico replied, though he didn’t exactly know why he told her. “She was the one who told me of a Brujah elder running this fighting ring.”

Lucita nodded slightly in understanding.

“I won’t tell anyone that you belong to the Sabbat if you don’t tell anyone that I killed this pathetic rabble,” Domenico said calmly.

He felt Lucita flinch, even as she had cast off her Humanity.

“How did you know?”

“It was a rumor I heard in Barcelona a few years back. No one takes it seriously. They think you care less about the Sabbat than you do the Camarilla. And, I know some shovelheads in Madrid who owe me.”

Lucita remained quiet for some time, clearly thinking about what she should do. Domenico morbidly entertained the thought of not resisting if she tried to kill him.

“Very well,” she finally accepted. “I won’t say anything.”

“Great,” Domenico said, and then turned back around to the door they came from, and Lucita followed him.

“Who is this ‘Luchenzo’ fellow?” she asked. “I don’t suspect you would come all the way down here to deal with trash if it wasn’t important.”

They left the room and reentered the tunnels as they made their way back towards the surface of Rome.

“He’s a notorious and skilled vampire killer,” Domenico explained as they walked. “The Camarilla is considering adding him to the list of Anathema if there is an open spot some time. Even the Sheriff of Rome fell to his crusade.”

“I see,” she muttered quietly.

“Why are you here, yourself?” Domenico retorted. “I told you my piece. Tell me yours.”

Domenico wondered if he would have to force answers out of her, but it seemed she had a sense of honor, after all.

“I heard a high-ranking Camarilla official might come to Rome. Decided to see for myself, but I haven’t been able to

find him.”

Domenico snorted.

“What?”

“He was blown up a few nights ago,” Domenico said with a small smirk.

Lucita raised a brow.

“So, your friend was the Camarilla official?”

“Red Alastor,” Domenico corrected. “Well, ex-Red Alastor.”

“Looks like I wasted a trip to Rome, then,” Lucita said coldly.

Domenico pondered for a little.

“Doesn’t have to be,” Domenico said. “You could help me.”

“Me? Help you?” Lucita chuckled darkly. “Why on Earth would I do that? You’re Camarilla, and I’m Sabbat.”

“I’m only Camarilla by title,” Domenico admitted. “I honestly couldn’t care less about what sect anyone belongs to, but I’m stuck being an Alastor. If I try to say ‘I quit’, the Justicars will have me executed for treason. Besides, I have friends a few places in the Sabbat. And, it’ll be more fun than having wasted a trip.”

“Fun?”

“Yeah, fun. You think I hunt Anathema because it’s my duty? So long as I say that I’m doing it, the Justicars don’t care what I do.”

Lucita smiled just a little.

“You do it because it’s fun? Have you no sense of self-preservation?”

“What good is immortality if you sit around doing nothing?”

“We’re not immortal.”

“I said ‘immortal’. Not ‘unkillable’.”

“What’s the difference?”

Lucita studied the Lasombra *antitribu* curiously for some moments.

“We don’t get sick, we don’t age, we don’t change. We are as we were when we died, and we will be until the day or night we’re slain. This constitutes immortality, as much as an immortal being can exist. Absolute immortality, the absolute immunity to death under any circumstance, is impossible, for any being. There is unaging, reversal of aging at some point, resurrection, incorporeality or ephemerality, or undeath or undying, but none of these is truly absolute immortality. All living or otherwise existing beings must at some point be destroyed, whether naturally or unnaturally. So, we are, for all intents and purposes, immortal.”

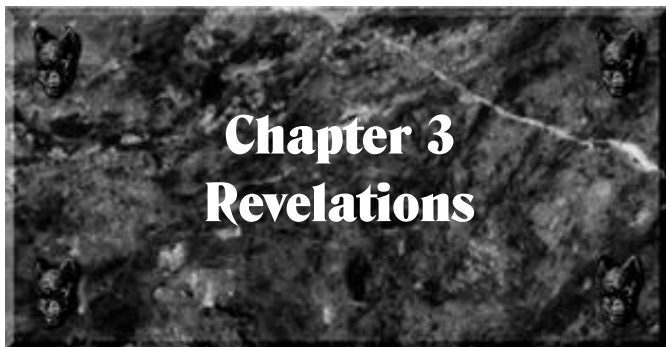
He must be insane to hunt the most dangerous Cainites in the world for mere fun. But then again, this might be interesting.

“Alright. For the time being, I will help you.”

Domenico smiled.

“But don’t think that makes us friends.”

“Why would it?” asked Domenico, and continued on.



Rome, Italy

August 18th, 2015

Luchenzo woke up in cold sweat when his alarm clock started blaring with an annoyingly high tone. His hand lifted up over the device and slammed down on it, making it quiet for just a while longer. The elderly man sighed deeply, and then sat up in bed. He grew more and more weary with each passing year. His long life of constant danger had taken a great toll on his mind and body. He knew he would soon want to retire and let someone else do his work, but he still had the desire to cleanse and save the souls of the damned, even if they didn't want it themselves. It was the Devil whispering to them to live, he told himself. But over the course of the past many years, his mind had wandered.

Luchenzo had been set in his ways from a young age, having been told the same tale as everyone else from his family. The tale of Ashur, the Spawn Moste Evile of The Adversary, had been passed down from generation to generation. A powerful monster whose only goal was to defile and corrupt precious humanity. When he was young, he had believed this Ashur character to be a mere myth.

Until one night, he had woken up from nightmarish dreams, bathed in cold sweat as he had tonight. The image of a demon, a wicked thing from Hell, had been shown to slaughter Luchenzo's uncle, and Luchenzo had cried throughout the night. When his parents came back from an assignment they had been on in Germany, they told him that Ashur had slain his uncle. That the vision he had been granted was a gift from the oldest Crimson-Blades. Whenever Ashur slew a Crimson-Blade, the rest of the clan would know. Luchenzo, being only nine years old, had asked why. They explained that, according to the clan's history, the Crimson-Blades were mortal descendants of Ashur. That Ashur had once been a man, just like Luchenzo. Ashur had two sons before he was corrupted. The son the Crimson-Blades descended from was Halesh, and he dedicated his life to hunting his father and cleansing him of what he was, out of his undying love for him. Being corrupted, Ashur ran with his other son, whose name would remain unknown for his treachery to God. Before that night, where he had seen the incarnation of The Beast, he would never have believed the tale. But the visage shown to Luchenzo was so vivid, so horrifically twisted and wicked, that he could do nothing but believe.

Luchenzo slightly shuddered at the dreadful memory. Only twice had he seen a vision of Ashur slaying a Crimson-Blade, but those two visions were enough to thoroughly ingrain Luchenzo's pity for Ashur. His soul could go to the Lord in eternal bliss, if only he would let himself be purified. But Ashur had not been seen for hundreds of years, and when they knew of his presence, it was only when he killed one of their own. He was as elusive as water gliding down a stream; unhindered and fluid,

maneuvering around every obstacle perfectly. Truly, Ashur was a monster to be feared. There were records in the clan's archives beneath the Vatican City, which described Ashur's aliases over the millennia. There was even a cave painting in north America dating back to before the last ice-age, showing symbol of the Theurge. A werewolf who first changed under the crescent moon, and known as a spiritual guide and mystic. To the Crimson-Blades, they were the earliest known practitioners of magic in any form, as they beseeched their goddess, Gaia, who granted them their power. Ashur had been a werewolf when he was alive, and a powerful Theurge, or so the stories went.

The Crimson-Blades turned their back on 'Gaia', so as to worship the Lord God, and have a place in Eden when they died. Though the Crimson-Blades were fundamentally werewolves themselves, they rejected some of the pagan magics the werewolves practiced, and turned to their Lord's miracles instead. In the millennia since, they had slightly come around to their gifts, seeing as they only used their animal shapes and powers when confronting unholy filth of the Devil, like vampires.

But, what if the Devil actually had nothing to do with them? What if they were just changed, by no will of an infernal entity? Questions had sprung up in his head, questions he hadn't bothered thinking more about when he was younger. The way these creatures acted, the way he had heard them talk...some of them actually sounded like regular people. He had even met a vampire once who, begging for its wicked life, had told him that it only fed on animals, that it struggled to retain its sense of self in the face of a beast, whatever that meant. Back then, he had assumed that this 'beast' referred to Satan. But now, he wasn't so sure

anymore.

“What are you thinking, Luchenzo?” he asked himself as he rubbed his weary eyes. “But then again...”

He knew exactly what to do if he wanted answers, but did he truly want them? Or was he getting soft in his old age? He ran a hand through his greying, dark hair. He then got up and went to the kitchen. He turned on the lights and started the coffee machine. He then grabbed the old newspaper from a few days prior. It was the one detailing the explosion he had caused to take out the elder blood sucker. His eyes wandered over it, and he was about to put it down when his eyes caught something. He held the newspaper closer and more thoroughly examined the picture, taken a few minutes after the explosion. There was a crowd of people looking about wildly, but one face stood out to him, like a tiny piece of gravel in his shoe.

The elder vampire, who was supposed to have been killed, was walking away from the building, through the crowd, unharmed and smiling a humored smile.

Luchenzo felt a rock drop in his gut.



A young man, clearly local, sat on the edge of a roof and looked through a window on the second floor of a small house with a smile. The old man inside the window was staring at a newspaper with a shocked look on his face. As entertained as the young man was, he picked up a small rock, just a tiny pebble, and threw it at the window. The man inside jumped and turned around. He looked out the window and quickly caught sight of the young man who was smiling mirthfully. The young man pointed downwards and

to his left, pointing to a small alley. The man looked in the direction of the finger and saw it. He then looked back at the young man, who threw his head in the direction of the alley and, with some effort, climbed down the side of the building. The old man stormed throughout the house, and soon reached the designated alley. He looked around, eyes alert and a pistol in his hands.

“You won’t need that,” came a light, yet masculine voice from the darkness. “I merely want to talk.”

“It’s you, isn’t it!?” asked Luchenzo loudly. “The old one who rented that apartment!?”

“Sure is,” the voice replied.

“Then how do you look so different!?”

“Merely sharing this body with its original inhabitant for a while. If you shoot it, I will return to my own body, and you will have murdered an innocent college student.”

Luchenzo sneered. He begrudgingly slipped the pistol back into its holster. As it was securely replaced, the young man came out from behind a large dumpster with a small smile.

“You are conflicted, are you not? Conflicted as to how well you know your quarry.”

Luchenzo eyed him suspiciously, then nodded stiffly.

“I can reveal to you the secrets of our kind,” the elder in the guise of a child said, his voice holding a certain quality of temptation in it. “All you need to do is meet me on Isola Tiberina in one hour.”

Luchenzo was quiet as he contemplated his answer. On

one hand, he should come prepared to slay the monster. On the other, he now had a prime opportunity to learn the answers to his questions. It was a difficult choice to make. His curiosity instead of his duty, or the other way around?

“One hour,” the elderly hunter accepted.

The young man smiled, then his face went blank, and he fell to the ground, as if he was a marionette whose strings were suddenly severed. Luchenzo rushed forward and caught the boy. He was still breathing, and he was moving weakly. Luchenzo checked his pulse, which beat strongly. As he did, the boy’s eyes fluttered open.

“Wha—?” he could barely form words, as his head toppled backwards. He rolled over and threw up, and Luchenzo quickly got out of the way. “Uuuughh...should’ve stayed from that vodka,” he mumbled as he got up and stumbled away. Luchenzo was a little dumbfounded, but shook his head and made his way throughout the Vatican to go to where his former victim had specified for him to meet.



When Luchenzo arrived on the small island, he wandered around until he saw the selfsame pale blood sucker with blond hair and blue eyes he had been tasked with killing, sitting leisurely on a bench, completely relaxed. He was wearing completely black clothes; dress shoes, chinos and dress shirt, completed with a blazer whose collar was turned up. He was smoking a cigarette, and his glowing red eyes were planted firmly on Luchenzo. The elderly man cautiously walked over and sat on the opposite end of the bench, his eyes roaming his surroundings, but his focus never leaving the elder beside him.

“So,” the vampire began, “you want to understand your prey beyond their eating and sleeping habits?”

“I do,” Luchenzo said sternly.

“Very well,” David Kane said and threw the cigarette behind him. It fell into the water of the Tiber river. “To start off, we are not the spawn of Satan, as I heard the Inquisition spout centuries ago. The first of our kind, our progenitor, was created by your precious God.”

“That’s preposterous!” Luchenzo snapped and turned to face David. “The Lord would never create such evil beings!”

“So you think,” David said as he lit another cigarette. “We used to call ourselves ‘Cainites’, in reverence to our progenitor. He was Caine, son of Adam and Eve.”

Luchenzo’s eyes went wide.

“He was cursed and rejected by God for his killing of his younger brother, Abel,” David continued. “He wandered the lands of Nod for aeons, until he came upon Lilith, the first wife of Adam. She had been cast out of Eden for her desire to, rather than be subservient to her husband, be equal to him. She became the Mother of ‘Demons and Monsters’, and when Caine came to her, she taught him how to utilize the magic inherent within his divine curse. From that was born our powers, our unholy manifestations of will to defy the Lord.”

Luchenzo, despite himself, was encaptivated by the story.

“He then left her and went to a human city. There, he became king and sired childer, vampiric progeny. They then sired in turn, and so on. Within a hundred years, there were almost as many vampires, and Caine bade an end to it. But

his grandchilder wanted his power for themselves, so after almost a thousand years, they rebelled against him. The ensuing war between himself and his wayward progeny lasted for decades, until God decided to flood the Earth. During the days of the Deluge, the weaker Cainites fell to the stronger. Vampires need not breath, so they can subsist eternally beneath water, so long as they have prey to feed upon. The older fed on the younger, and the vampires still left from that time are traumatized, even to this day.”

Luchenzo was quiet. He didn’t dare disturb this narrative, given how unlikely it would be that he could find another elder willing to inform him.

“Ask your questions, old man, and I will answer.”

Luchenzo thought long and hard about questions.

“Do vampires possess free will?”

David smirked.

“To an extent. While we are not actively under anyone’s control, we do carry with us a malevolent entity, deep in our very souls. We call it ‘the Beast’. It is our deepest, darkest fears, our animal instincts made manifest. It whispers to us. Begs us to feed just a little more, to kill just once more. And when we are in life-threatening danger, it takes possession of our bodies to keep us alive. It compels us to commit heinous acts, and every single one of us struggles to tame the Beast. Some control it by remaining virtuous, staying close to their former Humanity. Others seek to subjugate it by adopting entirely alien paths of morality. Ones that espouse cruelty and sadistic tendencies. But those are few, and far between.”

Luchenzo nodded quietly.

“What about evil? Surely, parasites like your kind cannot be good.”

David snorted.

“‘Good’ and ‘evil’ are merely concepts invented to provide some semblance of stasis and control. Mortal tools to determine the best outcome for all parties involved.”

“You speak heresy, monster,” said Luchenzo with anger.

“I do, don’t I?” David commented with a smirk. “I have long since embraced my state of being, but does that make me ‘evil’? I do as the wolf when it hunts, and the lion when it defends its pride. I follow my instincts. If that makes me evil, would it not make the wolf and the lion evil, as well?”

“The wolf and the lion don’t possess intel—”

“They are far more intelligent than you give them credit for, mortal,” David quickly cut him off. “The wolf is an extremely cunning creature, and the lion is incredibly clever. They do not possess ‘human’ intelligence. The way humans see the world is very different from how a predatory animal sees it, but they are no less intelligent.”

Luchenzo begrudgingly shut his mouth. He could not refute that the vampire definitely had much more wisdom and experience than himself. To say otherwise would be a fool’s errand. Still, Luchenzo did not like what he heard, even if it made sense, logically speaking.

“Why would you tell me this?”

“Because I am bored,” David said casually. “I feel like telling you, though doing so is breaking the very laws I have

sworn to uphold.”

Luchenzo’s ears perked.

“That only makes me more curious as to why.”

“A whim,” David said. “Nothing more. We ancients bore easily, and I feel like telling you. That is all.”

Luchenzo sat back and let his mind peruse this new information.

“Vampires are very human when they are first turned. That is what you are actually telling me, is it not? That the monsters we hear of are those like you, embracing their nature and giving in to their instincts.”

“Indeed,” David said with a small smile. “Many have great issues with feeding for the first many months, or even years. After all, what if they accidentally take just a little too much, and their victim dies? They would have to carry that guilt with them, just like any human. The desensitization to murder and violence over the course of decades transforms a human into a monster, not a vampire. Some vampires are compelled by their own sense of honor to only feed upon those who willingly offer themselves. One can be a monster without being a vampire, and being a vampire does not make you a monster. The two are not inherently linked. At least, not to my belief. Incredibly few are asked if they want to become vampires. It is usually forced upon them. Would you say that makes them evil? To me, that makes them victims. Whether they give in and start relishing in their new state is what determines if they can be called a monster, or a tragically cursed human.”

With that, David stood up.

“I grow weary of this conversation. Would you like to hear more?”

Luchenzo nodded.

“Then meet me at midnight tomorrow, at the Roman Forum.”

With that, David walked off. He reached into his pocket to pull out a cigarette, only to realize that he had emptied the pack.

“Shit,” he mumbled, and stalked off to buy more. “Fuckin’ hell...”

Luchenzo stared after the vampire. While he had acted like an old, wise and powerful monster sage throughout the conversation, at that moment, he had seemed so...human. What Luchenzo had been told was swimming around in his head. Luchenzo stood up himself, and walked in the other direction. He needed to clear his head.

• • •

Domenico awoke in his hotel suite once more, this time lying next to a dressed Lucita. She had only arrived in Rome the night they met, and hadn’t had time to procure a temporary haven. She had said ‘thank you’ rather stiffly, clearly having a problem with gratitude since her induction in her new moral code. Domenico didn’t really care all that much, either way. Lucita was still asleep, and he knew that the sun was still up, though it wouldn’t be around another hour before she likely woke up as well. Domenico started pacing the suite, thinking about his next step.

Enrico was of no help. I still need to confirm whether or not Luchenzo Mirachelli is a viable threat. If he is half as dangerous

as he is made out to be, this should be interesting. But what to do? Sofia said he was a warrior priest. If he lives in the Vatican, I need to take a body and make my way in there. If not, I need to start looking manually. That could take weeks.

Domenico sighed and held a hand to his face.

I don't have the patience to spend weeks looking for him.

He then walked over to an armchair and sat down. He then went through his thoughts and memories, looking for something interesting. He barely noticed Lucita waking up, but he did notice.

"Goodnight," he casually greeted her as she slowly got up from the bed.

"What's the plan now?", Lucita asked, ignoring the niceties. "The catacombs were waste of time, and I don't know what else there is to look into."

Domenico sat silently for a while. He couldn't come up with an idea.

"I don't know," he admitted.

They were quiet for a few moments, until it knocked on the door to the suite. They looked at each other briefly, and Domenico got up and walked over to the door. He listened intently, and heard breathing and a heartbeat. He opened the door with a smile, and saw a maid. Young, Italian, beautiful and wearing a black uniform, though it resembled more the uniform of a waiter or butler.

"This was delivered to the front desk with the instruction of being delivered at sunset, signore," the young, attractive woman said with a courteous smile, revealing marble white

teeth.

Domenico smiled seductively at the young woman, and took the recorder she held out, marked “play me”.

“Thank you very much, sweetheart,” he said bashfully, and the young woman bowed very slightly, and walked away, which made Domenico’s smile fall just a little.

Domenico heard Lucita’s alluring voice laugh mirthfully at his expense as he came back inside.

“What’s wrong, couldn’t get her number?” she asked chuckling.

“Quiet,” he said coolly and pressed the play-button on the recorder.

“Midnight tomorrow, at the Roman Forum.”

Domenico looked at the label again and saw, written in small numbers ‘08/ 18/ 2015’. He then looked at his watch.

“That’s in two hours,” he said. “We can still get there in time.”

Lucita stared at him with a perplexed expression.

“You listen to a tape, and suddenly you want to go there?” she asked the other vampire, as if he were an idiot. “Without knowing who made it or why they want to meet?”

“I know exactly who made the tape,” Domenico said calmly. “You can stay here or leave, if you want, but I’m going.”

He then briskly left the suite. Lucita stood still, rooted in place. Had she been alive, she would have sighed in annoyance, but she just followed without another word.

David stood in the middle of the ancient Forum, a monument in this day and age signifying the past. He remembered how it had looked when it was first erected. Pearly marble walls, forming a center for discourse and exchanging ideas, trying to be as the philosophical Greeks, and somewhat succeeding at it. The thoughts and philosophies swarming the halls were thought-provoking and deep, and David did, to some extent, miss them. One of them, Lykomedes, had come to Rome from Athens to study those who had oppressed them. He had been there in secret, going by the name Septimius. He acted a deranged philosopher, but David has pierced the act; he was, in truth, a hunter of the supernatural, and the Forum had been where he had vented his frustrations in veiled statements and allegories and metaphors. And he had come to Rome to establish a network of hunters. David's lips curled into a grin. He did have fun toying with the elderly witch-hunter. He followed him at night, kept just out of sight, but always in the peripheral of his vision. He always let his eyes glow red, and sometimes, he would stick his head out from cover and simply stare at the man. Septimius had slowly gotten more and more paranoid, until he started killing civilians, shouting and spouting nonsense. He played his part of deranged thinker too well, and he was imprisoned and ignored, even as he rambled about blood-drinking creatures roaming the night of Rome. The hunters already established in Rome had kept him at arm's length, and even sought to discredit him, making the unlives of the Kindred easier.

David, suckling away on a cigarette, was brought back to the present by the appearance of Luchenzo, but he knew

something was off. He expected the man to realize that any effort to kill him would be futile, so David hadn't checked the immediate area for an ambush. After all, Luchenzo and his compatriots could walk in the day, whilst he himself only rarely could. And yet, he saw the bulge around Luchenzo's torso, indicating a strong protection vest, and he saw the rather large cross hanging from his side.

"What is the meaning of this, mortal?" David asked, but he stretched out his hearing.

Dozens of footsteps moving around them. He stretched his sense of smell out, and he felt practically covered in the scent of humans. Suddenly, at least fifteen men and women, covered in uniforms, steel vests and with crosses sown all over them, jumped out from cover all around him. They were carrying assault rifles, shotguns, pistols and high-caliber rifles. David, feeling a sudden pang of danger, looked up; a group of four people were parachuting down quietly, and they held something between them, something covering a large area, but still too thin to see. They came closer and closer, and only then, enhancing his sight, did he realize what they were doing. A large net was strung between them, and it was too wide to escape now, considering how little blood he had left. Not only that, his sharpened sight caught glimpses of flashing silver threads and crosses and spikes interwoven with the net. David's stomach dropped. Some of the inquisitors around him threw small bags of something at him, and only when they struck and opened did he see, and **smell** what it was; garlic. David jumped back, hissing with bared fangs, and the net lowered around him. The inquisitors opened fire, and **silver bullets**, with **silver nitrate capsules** were being flung roughly into his body. He roared in pain and disgust, the garlic forcing him

to try and get away, only to get wrapped even tighter in the net. The crosses seared his skin, and the silver thread burned him. Whole chunks of his flesh were being ripped from his bones, leaving him with large chunks missing on his arms, legs, torso, and even a part of his head. His screams and roars rose in volume, and the blazing guns spread the silver throughout his body. David felt his Beast smash against the cages of his psyche, but he would not let it out. He didn't have enough blood to fight back, and doubted he would last much longer.

"CEASE FIRE!" Luchenzo called over the blaze of silver. "CEASE FIRE!"

Orders were followed, and the deafening gunfire was ended. David fell to his mangled knees, groaning in agonizing burns throughout his ravaged corpse of a body. He slumped, lying down on his side. The silver and crosses woven into the net still sizzled his skin and charred some of his flesh. But David, defiant as ever, shot a hateful glare at the aging man moving towards the downed elder. He knelt down next to him, and pulled a flask out from under his jacket. He then poured the contents over David, and a whole new pain and acid-like burn spread over his face.

Holy water! Damn you!

David glared at the old man, but Luchenzo merely smirked.

"You can't honestly have believed that this would end with you victorious," he chuckled, staring down the eldritch abomination, the ancient horror.

But David didn't respond. Merely glared with a hellish fury. Luchenzo stood back up, and as he did, he just missed

the small smirk that appeared on David's lips for a mere instant.

"Bag him," Luchenzo calmly ordered the soldiers.

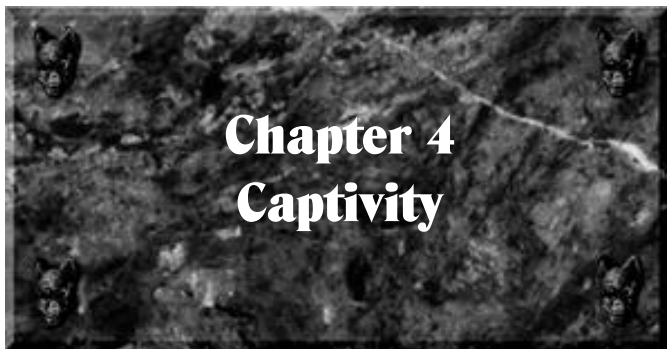
Two were very quickly covering David's body with a burlap sack. To David's dismay, eliciting a feral growl, which quickly turned into a raspy scream, from his throat, the sack was soaked in holy water and filled with garlic and silver crosses. He felt himself be lifted, and violently thrown into a car of some sort. No one heard the very faint chuckle between the excruciated roars.



Domenico and Lucita sat on a tall building nearby, watching the special force retreat, having taken the vampire into custody, quite violently. Domenico felt like a vice grip around his heart and lungs squeezed the life out of him, again.

"Who was that Kindred?" Lucita asked in a whisper.

"David Kane," Domenico said quietly. "My broodmate... and my brother."



Chapter 4

Captivity

Rome, Italy

August 18th, 2015

“What the hell!?” Lucita, seated on the large bed of Domenico’s suite, shouted at Domenico, who was pacing impatiently. “You said he was dead!”

“I thought he was!” Domenico countered. “I had no idea he had survived the explosion!”

Lucita shook her head in a disapproving manner.

“So, what now? Do we rescue him?”

Domenico shook his head.

“He’s a master at interrogation. If he wants us to help, he’ll send me a signal.”

“What do you mean ‘master at interrogation’?”

Domenico stopped and looked ahead, contemplating what he wanted to do. Then he pulled the desk chair away from the desk, positioned it next to the bed, and sat down.

“David and I have always been together,” he began, calming down rapidly. “We were embraced around the same time, but he’s still the older of us. We’re seven boys,

all born about a year from the last. We all share the same father, but we were born to different mothers. When dad became a vampire, he turned each and every one of us, but we were scattered. I was born in Egypt. David was born in Iran. Our brother, Darius, in Persia, Damon in Greece, you get my drift.”

Lucita nodded slowly.

“David was the natural among us,” Domenico continued. “He understood our powers the best, he... was the most vampiric Kindred of us. He took to cruelty and brutality like putting on a perfectly-fitted glove. He started torturing kine, tried to find out what made them talk, what made them hurt. He did the same with Cainites. How to keep us on the brink of sanity, even as they torture us continually for months. If he wants to get information out of someone, he does. If he wants someone to stab their family, friends, honor and integrity in the back, they will. Without hesitation.”

Even the cold and hardened Lucita didn’t know if she could condone David Kane’s existence.

“Likewise, he spent a century telling mortal servants exactly what to do to cause him pain. Even as they kept him in agony for decades, he kept instructing them in what to do. David can’t break under torture, and he’s certainly strong enough to survive anything but sunlight. David is...” Domenico trailed off, and quieted for a little. “...a monster. In every sense of the word.”

Lucita was shocked by the story. A Cainite willingly subjecting himself to a century of unending torture, just to toughen up? She found the idea laughable, but the

seriousness Domenico displayed, given his usually very playful demeanor...it was disconcerting to her.

“Not only that,” Domenico continued further, making Lucita wonder if he trusted her, “but he is an incredibly capable fighter, and the smartest creature I know.”

“But he just got dragged away by a bunch of humans,” Lucita countered.

“But he didn’t fight back. David **meant** to be captured. Which most likely means that I’m his failsafe plan, in case he underestimated his enemy, Luchenzo Mirachelli.”

“The man you were both sent to investigate?”

“I was supposed to investigate him. David has been ordered to assassinate him. Despite his expertise in torture, he’s much better at assassination.”

“Why did the silver hurt him?”

A long pause followed as Domenico closely studied the woman. When she got no response, she closed her eyes to hide her frustration. But she calmed herself.

“What now?”

Domenico wore a somber expression on his face.

“We wait.”

• • •

David sat naked in the dark cell. He conserved his energy by not lighting up his eyes to see, and acid-burn marks and crosses etched into his skin were still present, and several of his limbs were still no more than half their original mass, like his chest and gut, and the right top of his head was still

blown away. His mind wandered back through time, glimpsing at the few moments of true happiness he had ever had. Now, even his eight years with Katherine seemed like a mere, fleeting moment of light in his dark, damp cell, without bed, without bucket, and without anything at all, really. But David knew the tactics, he *invented* them!

Deprive your captive of all things. Give him no clothes, no bed, no waste bucket and no light. Feed him only once every day, and never enough to satiate him. Let him drive himself into a corner. His mind will slowly wither away. Let his own imagination drive him insane.

David smirked.

And then use daily torture sessions as his only relief from solitude. Talk to him, tell him things. Give him updates on his family and friends. Let the pain give him sanity, and the relief, insanity. Turn his world upside-down, turn his mind in on itself, let him do the real torture himself. Amateurs. They don't know who they're dealing with.

David knew that he was slipping into his old self. The self he had been before Katherine. And it terrified him, far more than anything he had faced in a thousand years. He knew that, if he let go of his fragile, reassembled humanity, he wouldn't care anymore. But that monster wasn't what Katherine had fallen in love with. Katherine had fallen in love with the man he had pretended to be. And the more he had pretended, the more he had become the man. David felt his heart twist painfully, but not from actual, physical pain. It was a pain several times stronger than any physical pain the Inquisition could inflict on him with techniques he had created. He couldn't help the small, arrogant grin.

Being undead, the cold didn't bother him, the grime wouldn't give him an infection, and he wouldn't fall ill. The only things they could do would be to torture him, and leave him alone. And judging by the footsteps he heard coming ever closer, they were going for the former. Soon, someone banged on the solid steel door to his cell, making the cell boom with rebounding soundwaves. David felt like his ears were going to fall off, and he got a ringing in his ears, muffling all sound. The door was opened, and three men walked inside. They quickly threw silver shackles around his wrists and ankles, and wrapped him in chains with adorned crosses and dipped in holy water. David didn't know how these mortals had come to know about his particular weaknesses, but he was determined to find out. Indeed, few vampires were affected in the slightest by crosses and holy water. But David was, along with silver and garlic. Even as a childe, he hadn't been able to stand the stench of it, and that was only heightened along with his senses.

The men dragged him by his arms along the rough floor of the dungeon. The silver, crosses, and holy water had weakened him to the extent that the skin on his legs scraping along the floor was torn. His focus was on keeping the silver nitrate from coursing around his shredded body. Having holes all throughout your body made that a significantly difficult task. David let the humans drag him along, and even here the fire of the fanatic faith of the Inquisition's members scorched him like being in the presence of the sun. But, with effort, he endured it, like he had for millennia.

I'm getting out of shape. This would have been a stroll in the park just half a millennium ago. I need to find a way to get to the Sistine

Chapel unnoticed. The faith in this house of God will subdue my powers. What I wouldn't give for a miracle right now.

As his head hung low, he grinned wickedly.

Well, I am just waiting for my old 'miracle' to come to me, after all.

Soon, the vampire was placed in a solid, wooden chair. Additional chains, shackles and wrist cuffs were tightened around his limbs and the chair's appendages. After that, for good measure he supposed, one of the men dragging him there dumped a bucket of holy water over his head.

"I'll tear out your girlfriend's jaw and stuff your amputated cock down her throat!" he screamed at the man pouring the acid-like substance over his head. "Tell Francisca I said 'Hi'!"

The man went pale, and rushed out of the room. Taking a good look, David realized it was time for a good, old-fashioned torture session. The 1300 AD edition. Tools of the trade *he* had designed were lined along a table in one side of the room, and in a far corner sat four men in the shadows. Well, three men and one woman. They all seemed battle-hardened, and had a certain seniority to them, even as they could pass for young adults. One of them rose to his feet and neared him. David soon noticed Luchenzo's features. But there was something different about him. His eyes almost seemed to glow blue in the dim light, even as his natural eye-color was dark brown. Looking down at the man's right hand, his suspicions were confirmed. There, on the palm of his right hand, was a black tattoo of a crescent moon. It wasn't smooth like the dark-red mark of the Alastors. It seemed more like it was designed by claws. A

very distinct mark to a certain group of supernatural creatures.

“So...” David said weakly, but his eyes were as strong as ever. “You’re one of **them**.”

“And you are **him**.”

David smirked sadistically.

“I have no clue what you’re talking about.”

Luchenzo’s face was set in stone as he placed his marked palm on David’s cheek. David felt like his brain was frozen to subzero temperatures, and the pain exploded through his head. The feral cry of agony echoed in the room, and the other people present covered their ears, which David had just confirmed to be more sensitive than any human’s. Luchenzo removed his hand.

“Your reaction tells a different story,” Luchenzo calmly rebutted.

Though the smile lessened, it was no less filled with menacing glee.

“I have no clue what you’re talking about.”

Luchenzo frowned, and roughly placed his hand back on David’s cheek. The ensuing torturous, agonizingly painful interrogation went on for hours.

• • •

Domenico and Lucita sat in silence.

“If you relay what I’ve told you to anyone, I’ll hunt you down, just so we’re clear,” Domenico said casually.

Lucita nodded absentmindedly, her face an impassive

mask of indifference. She now had absolutely no doubt that Domenico could easily make good on his threat. And while she would rather walk into the sun on her own, than admit it, she was indeed slightly scared of this David Kane, after Domenico's story.

Without warning, the alarm clock on the nightstand started beeping loudly, making both of the vampires jump, something Lucita desperately tried playing off as adjusting her seating. Domenico walked over to the clock, but right before he hit the snooze button, he noticed something. A minor detail most would have overlooked. The clock wasn't set to wake someone up. He looked at the time. 02:24.

He wants me to be ready in twenty-four days?

He snoozed the blaring clock, and laid down on the large bed with a tired sigh.

Being fully awake and clear of body, whilst all your mind wants to do is sleep is... incredibly taxing. Just make sure you make it out alive, David.



Several Miles South of Babylon, Babylonia May 9th, 323 BCE

The fire all around him warmed the battlefield, a nigh-barren landscape whose most memorable features were the blood-covered corpses strewn about, soldiers fallen in battle, swinging with their swords and stabbing with their spears to their final breaths. The mortal servants of ancient beings being pitted against one another to suit their masters' whims. The undead children of Caine who were blinded by their magically enforced devotion and love to their elders. Among the corpses and piles of ash sat a lone man-turned—

monster. He sat on his knees, and his eyes swept the scenery, taking it all in. Little did he know, at that moment, that the very sight before his eyes would change him at his very core in the millennia to come. In his lap, he cradled the head of one of his compatriots, a young man by the name of Lykomedes. His own ghoulish servant, who was very dear to the undead creature. The body was hacked into larger pieces a few meters away. Tears of potent blood dripped down on the severed head of the beloved friend.

“We shouldn’t have been here,” the man croaked, his face distorted by remorse. “If only you hadn’t been so infatuated with his ideas, Lyko!”

He held the head close, trying not to remember that the dead piece of a former human would soon start to decompose. He let out sobs and cries of sadness and sorrow. The only human he had cared for in centuries had been taken from him, at the tender age of seventeen. Lykomedes had been so enthralled at the words of Alexander of Macedon. He had always wanted to be in the great king’s forces. Even when the vampire met him, as a young boy. So the elder monster had made it happen. When Lykomedes smiled, there was nothing the blood drinker wouldn’t give him. Even after a long day of training, and the boy came home beaten to a pulp and broken down by the harshness of the exercises, he wore a proud smile.

Now, he would smile no more.

Through clenched jaws, the vampire managed to rasp out a dreadful sentence, spoken in a language forgotten by mortal and immortal tongues alike, and with such coldness and lethal intent that the darkness itself steered clear of him.

“I will kill you... Alexander.”



Subterranean Vatican, Rome
September 8th, 2015

David quickly sat up in the dark, cold and wet cell. He heard the individual drops of dirty water drip rhythmically from the ceiling.

Drip, drip, drip.

His vision was black from the lack of light, and he refused to spend unnecessary energy in this dire hour. Well, his plan hinged on him conserving energy, anyway. And if he had been too well-fed when they took him, they would have known something was wrong.

Drip, drip, drip.

No, David needed them to think they had gained the upper hand so they would be demoralized when they couldn't break him. The *half-bred mongrels* calling themselves Clan Crimson-Blade. Only one group of hunters had been as effective vampire hunters as they. They had been around almost as long as vampires themselves, always looking for their quarry. They branched out into all corners of the world. They had people almost everywhere, to one extent or another.

Drip, drip, drip.

But the most impressive thing about Clan Crimson-Blade, the real reason they were the most wide-spread and best organization hunting vampires, was that they mainly consisted of werewolves and sorcerers of various degrees. Only a single family of werewolves extended down throughout the entirety of Crimson-Blade's history, but they were numerous indeed, and treated like royalty in the

halls of the Inquisition. Which of course meant, that only the highest-ranked inquisitors even knew they existed. What made them wide-spread was all the minor branch-families derived from them over the millennia. To the rest of the Inquisition, Clan Crimson-Blade was known as “Judas Witches”, supernatural inquisitors who had turned their backs on their own kind because of parallel views with the Inquisition. No one particularly liked or trusted them, but they were the most effective inquisitors, so they were tolerated. And to make bad things worse, they had spent millennia honing the skills and abilities of their werewolves. They were enhanced to the point that a humanoid Crimson-Blade could face a natural werewolf in their strongest form face-to-face, and come out of it without too many scratches. They were, collectively, the most dangerous foe David had ever come across. Practically no one knew about them, and it was only his intimate connection to their founder that he knew of their existence, and had kept an eye on them for millennia.

Drip, drip, drip.

David heard the faint footsteps of a man, and he perked up. His remaining arm and leg were still bound by heavy, silver chains with crosses welded on, and he would be splashed with holy water at regular intervals every other hour, day and night. Had he been human, the amount of screaming and roaring in pain would have torn his vocal chords to shreds after a few days, and he might even have been rendered permanently mute by now. He hadn't grown back the parts of his body still missing. The apprentice torturers being instructed with him as a guinea pig had been less than pleased when he started insulting them, throwing slanders and curses at them, and read their minds. ‘Your

mother should stop knitting you socks and start knitting you a body bag!', or 'Your boyfriend sure is handsome! Be a waste if he were to wake up without his face!'. Still, they had taken his right leg and left arm, even some of his shoulder. A fourth of his head was still missing, and his left eye had been gauged out. Not to mention the organs they had cut him open to remove.

Drip, drip, drip.

If I hadn't done all that training centuries ago, I would have died for certain. With my resilience, they can't possibly hope to kill me. Well, I think that... but they've actually come really close. Haaahh... I haven't felt this close to death in centuries... I can't give up now. I have to push on. I need to do this. I need to remember where he sleeps. And to do that, I need the vial.

David listened for the footsteps getting closer and closer, until someone banged on his door. This time, he was prepared, and took an instant to concentrate on shutting off his hearing for a few seconds. A neat trick he had come to discover quickly after he had learnt to enhance his senses. It was a means of protecting against overstimulation, and efficient when you knew something was coming. The door opened and revealed a man. But he hadn't worn the shades they usually did.

Big mistake.

David's eyes locked with those of the soldier, all covered in gear except for his brown eyes.

Come close.

David let his mind probe that of the inquisitor, and the inquisitor's gaze instantly became blurred, unfocused. He

stumbled over to David.

Kneel.

The soldier sat on his knees.

Remove the scarf.

The scarf was taken off and thrown to the side.

Stab yourself in the throat, and lean in over me.

Another prize the inquisitors had claimed from him were his fangs, brutally torn out with a pair of rusty pliers. They had developed cleaner, more efficient methods of removing them, but David got special treatment.

It almost warms my cold, dead, unbeating heart.

The man drew his knife, and his hand wavered.

Stab. Yourself. In. The throat.

Self-harming commands always required more ‘*umpf*’, and they would fail more often than not in regular, younger vampires.

But David was no regular vampire, and he certainly wasn’t young.

The blade plunged into the inquisitor’s throat, and was roughly pulled out again. David leant up and closed his mouth around the wound, and started sucking the human dry. As he did, he instantly felt new power surge through his entire (remaining) body. He felt his new fangs dig their way out of his gum, and he felt the top right of his head slowly reform, and eventually sight in his right eye returned as they eye manifested itself again. David’s healing ability had always been far more powerful than that of his Kindred

brethren. He assumed it was because of his nature as an abomination, a werewolf who was turned into a vampire. He had healed incredibly well in life, as well, and had even had some slight resistance to silver, when compared to his fellow wolves.

Drip, drip, drip.

The human fell to the ground, deader than David himself. Despite the rather sizeable quantity of blood, and the potency of it compared to regular humans, it wasn't enough to heal that much damage, and David was left with a fully intact head, a restored shoulder, but his remaining limbs were still utterly shagged. He leant back against the cell wall. He had honestly expected his mind compulsion to fail. It had been so long since he had been that weak.

"Well, you look utterly miserable," came a distinctly familiar voice in an American dialect from the door to his cell, and David looked towards the source. A smirk spread on his face. "Miss me?"

"Absolutely, Damon."

The man stepped into the cell and cracked a glowstick. As the light landed on his face, it was so similar to David, it was almost as if they were the same person. Though, Damon had a few age-lines marring his face, and a few gray hairs marring his slightly darker hair. His eyes were the same bright blue, his sharp, regal facial features were almost identical, and his beard was longer and darker than David's by very little. He wore black cargo pants, black military boots, black long-sleeved undershirt, knee and elbow pads, and black, fingerless gloves. He looked just about David's own age, but his skin was warm and colored, and his

breathing was rhythmic and even. And even as weak as he was at that moment, David could hear Damon's heartbeat going strong and steady.

"You're pretty good for a human," David commented with a cheeky smirk.

"I'm still harder to kill than you," Damon retorted as he walked over and knelt beside the vampire. "It certainly has been a while, brother." He swiftly undid the locks with the keys he fished out of his pocket, before grabbing David and pulling him to his foot.

"I need to feed before we leave," David said, the throbbing pain throughout his body making him cringe at the lateral movement. "And I need a vial, stored in a tomb beneath the Sistine Chapel."

"What's in it?" Damon asked casually as he helped his mutilated brother to the door of the cell.

"Some of my blood," David explained. "He came to me in a vision. He wants me to gather you all, and return to Him. I stored my memory of His location in that blood, so that no one could get to it, in the unlikely event that someone could force their way into my mind."

"Sensible enough," Damon commented indifferently. "Wait here, I'll find you some dinner."

David nodded and leant against the wall his brother had carried him to. Damon quickly went off in search of some people for David to eat. David couldn't help the only truly happy smile he'd worn in what seemed like centuries.

"It's good to see you, brother."

Domenico sat in the suite, a young human woman strewn across the bed. The body was rapidly cooling, and he was on the phone.

“Yes, hi. Domenico Valerius. I would like someone to come and clean up some leftovers. No, just the dumpster will do fine. Thank you.”

He smirked and got up. Lucita was sitting in a chair a little away from him, slowly sipping on the moaning teenage girl that had been brought to them. Whilst the vampire’s mouth was suckling the tiny wound in the human’s throat, her hands were roaming the girl sensually, eliciting mewls of pleasure from her vessel. Domenico looked on, and he felt a familiar spark inside him, urging him to go for the kill. Scenery like this put him on edge, gave him cravings. Urges. Desires. Domenico would admit, he was occasionally a slave to his lust, and Toreador would constantly confuse him for one of their own when he was in their company. Truly, Domenico was a Sinner. But he pushed it down. There was a time and place for everything, and now was not the time for *that*.

“Don’t think I haven’t noticed the way you stare at me,” Lucita’s voice broke through his inner musings. He looked up at her again. “Am I really that appealing to you?”

She didn’t sound like she cared. Indeed, to Domenico’s somewhat limited knowledge, her Path dictated that she didn’t. But he saw through the indifference. She didn’t particularly care, true, but she was at least curious.

“You are,” Domenico confirmed. “I have rarely met a person, Kindred or otherwise, who was as beautiful to me

as you are.”

Lucita studied him intensely.

“You’re awfully honest for a Cainite,” she commented.

“I don’t see the point in lying,” Domenico shrugged. “At least, not right now. Time and place for everything, right?”

Lucita’s eyes took him in, and then she nodded slightly.

“Right.”

There came a knock from the door. Domenico went to answer it, and in came two burly ghouls, from Domenico’s educated guess.

“Clean-up service for Mr. Valerius?” one of them asked politely.

“Right this way, gentlemen,” he said with a smile and led one over to the bed, whilst he gestured to the girl in Lucita’s arms. “Hers is still breathing, by the way.”

Soon, the humans were removed from the room, and Domenico and Lucita were left alone once more. Domenico laid down on the bed and looked at the alarm clock. Almost dawn. It was surprisingly tiring to do absolutely nothing. It had been a while since the old vampire had so much time on his hands. He had been busy verifying reports of Anathema sightings, none of which had been authentic. He did come across some Setites who claimed that the traitor Kemintiri had sought west, over the pond to America. He had quickly discarded it as mere rumors, until David had contacted him and expressed his concerns over Setites saying the same thing in Louisiana. After their assignment to deal with Mirachelli, Domenico

was to accompany David back to New Orleans to be back-up.

Surprisingly, Lucita came over and laid next to him on the bed. Her face showed no particular emotions, and Domenico was convinced that those she did feel were very dim. But she just laid there and stared up into the ceiling, like he did. Truthfully, Domenico had come to relish moments such as these. Whether in human or undead company, just lying next to a person had become a comforting thing to him. He did not have the slightest idea as to why.

“What about your other brothers?” Lucita asked casually. “Are you close with them as well?”

“I see them occasionally,” Domenico answered with a small smile and closed eyes. “Our brother Darius never leaves his lair in Egypt, though.”

“What does he do there? I can’t imagine he holes up there for the solitude. That would drive anyone mad.”

“He reads,” Domenico chuckled. “He’s a sort of information broker, if you will. If you can provide him an authentic, obscure text about the occult, which he doesn’t already possess, he’ll tell you pretty much anything.”

Lucita turned her head to look at him.

“So he’s a bookworm?”

“Understatement of the millennium. He can recite every single one of the ten-thousand-plus books in his library by heart. He can read pretty much every language created by mankind, and he’s even written a few texts himself.”

Lucita's eyes furrowed.

"What kind of texts?"

"History, math, science, magic, take your pick. We have this weird birthday-like tradition once every century or three. He gave me a book about the history of agricultural development from the Neolithic era to today, he'd written himself."

"Really?" Lucita's eyes widened. "He wrote down the entire history of agriculture?"

"Twelve-thousand-ish pages, complete with charts, maps, tables and drawings of different plants, their best months for growth in every major climate, where they grow natively, the works."

"Dear me," she muttered and looked back up at the ceiling. She was then still for a little while. "Do you often do this?"

"Do what?"

"Just lie on a bed, thinking? Talking? Share your story?"

Domenico fell silent.

"When I can," he finally muttered. "I grow very sentimental at times. It's not bad."

"Hmm."



David was sitting in the opening of his cell, chewing down on the throat of an inquisitor, next to four others. Damon, who was sitting close by, constantly alert for any sign of the enemy, had been generous in bringing several whole

humans for David to consume. Damon expressed only mild discomfort at sitting so close to his vampiric brother gnashing on human throats.

“I’m glad I wasn’t embraced,” Damon muttered under his breath. “At least I don’t have to eat people. I prefer running down to the supermarket.”

David let go of the fourth throat he’d sunk his teeth into that night, eliciting a gurgling noise from it.

“That would definitely be much easier, yeah,” he commented, his lips and chin covered in blood, which spread down his throat and unto his almost fully healed chest. His arm had grown back, and most of his thigh. There were still holes in his anatomy, and he still needed the lower leg and foot, but his primary concern was regaining unrestricted movement. The stump that was his knee slowly reformed, inching itself back into the original shape of his leg. He threw the corpse a little away, reached over to grab another, and sank his teeth into the throat, before tearing the front of it out, making it easier to get at more blood quicker.

“So, is that vial the only thing bringing you my way?” Damon asked casually.

“No, it’s not,” David replied between slurps. “I’ve been sent to assassinate Luchenzo Mirachelli.”

Damon perked up.

“Really?” David nodded. “Why?”

“He’s too dangerous of a vampire killer to let live,” David shrugged. “The Camarilla’s ordered his execution.”

“He’s the one who brought you in?”

“Yeah. Got a few of his friends to pump me full of silver and silver nitrate.”

Damon cringed.

“Ooohhh, that’s got to sting.”

“It did!” David started laughing slightly. “Fuck me, I haven’t been that close to dying in centuries!”

“Well, he’s really good at what he does,” Damon acknowledged, “and he knows some pretty powerful gifts.”

Done with the fifth person, David reached for the last. His leg was now fully restored, and the major chunks of flesh missing from his body in various places grew back somewhat quickly. Soon, he was sitting naked, but looking no worse than he had before he was grabbed. He knew the pain wouldn’t subside for another week or so, though.

“I thought the Inquisition wouldn’t allow the Judas Witches to practice their innate powers,” David commented thoughtfully as he drank the last man in the vicinity.

“There’s been a change of policy,” Damon said with a small shake of his head. “Ingrid Bauer, better known as ‘The Iron Maiden’, became Inquisitor-General some years ago. When she came to power, everything changed. Torture became a viable option again. Then the Judas Witches were allowed to practice magic, even pagan styles. It wasn’t until five or six years ago that the Judas Priest was allowed to hone his powers.”

David released the neck in his mouth, and looked at

Damon with raised brows.

“The ‘Judas Priest’?”

“That’s what they call Mirachelli,” Damon said with a serious look on his face. “He’s the most dangerous inquisitor to be active in the past forty years. And he’s a member of the Crimson–Blades, adding to that.”

“I noticed,” David said and absentmindedly rubbed his cheek, where Mirachelli had placed his palm. “Haven’t come across one of them in sixty years, and him I killed.”

“That was Mirachelli’s uncle,” Damon stated. I saw the look on the Crimson–Blades’ faces when he died. It seems they can all sense the death of one of their own by our hands.”

David’s eyes widened.

“You’re kidding!?”

“Unfortunately, no. Luchenzo’s parents sent him to see me after, seeing as I’m the only one around here with a degree in psychology. He told me he’d had a nightmare.”

“What kind?”

“He saw a monstrous demon made of darkness and blood killing his uncle brutally. Tore open the man’s torso and tore his organs and innards out with its bare claws.”

David was silent for a little while, his face portraying horror.

“I used the man’s own knife to cut him, shoulder to waist,” David said quietly. “Some of his guts came out on their own.”

“Seems like a semi-metaphorical vision, then,” Damon contemplated. “He saw in rough detail what happened, but a twisted perception of you and your actions, and the clan can feel the direction you are in from them. According to some rumors, the Crimson-lades call you ‘Ashur’.”

David placed his head in his hands.

“But that’s Father,” he lamented. “Halesh isn’t **my** son, he’s **our** older brother! We weren’t created until hundreds of years **after** he was born, **and** had died!”

“I’m fully aware of that,” Damon said. “Maybe it’s because Father embraced you. I’ve killed a few Crimson-Blades on assignment, but no one experiences the visions when I do it. Maybe it’s his vampiric lineage that does it.”

“Shit!” David exclaimed angrily and smashed his head back into the steel frame of the door, making him groan and clutch the back of his head.

“The faith’s still powerful down here,” Damon said with a chuckle. “Your powers aren’t as strong.”

“I noticed.”

With that, David stood up, and Damon followed his lead.

“I hid the vial in a vault beneath this place before it became the headquarters of the Inquisition,” David informed his human brother.

Damon nodded and walked out of the door.

“Follow me, I know a quiet way,” he said and started running, but his footsteps were nonexistent, made no noise. David smirked at his brother’s skill, and followed in the human’s tempo.

David managed to grab a few more inquisitors on the way to the famous chapel, slowly restoring his full strength, which would be at its peak when he left this dreaded place of faith. Even now, he felt like his skin was sunburnt all over, and moving ached in every muscle and joint, but he'd had far worse. He also noticed that his sight was much worse than it usually was. It was still better than any human's, but it was blurred and white around the edges, which did make his eyes sting quite a bit. Adding insult to injury, he had a persistent coppery taste of hot spices on his tongue, and his ears were ringing with perpetual tinnitus, making his hearing much worse than it usually was. All in all, he was in miserable pain, but at least the thought of soon getting out of there was enough to force himself from thinking too much about it.

David had also rarely ever seen Damon in action, but now he was highly impressed with his brother's skill. He knew Damon was good at magic, but he'd never figured him for the martial type, until now. When an inquisitor unexpectedly came around the corner, Damon grabbed him before he could react, threw him to the ground, and forcefully broke the soldier's neck. He didn't even blink. Damon, as it turned out, had spent decades training martial arts and with elite military forces around the globe since David last met him, until he eventually joined the Inquisition to keep an eye on their activities.

"We're getting close," Damon said casually, as if he hadn't just killed almost ten inquisitors in cold blood.

"Why are you killing them?" David asked curiously, not even the least bit ashamed that he was still stark naked. "I

mean, good riddance, but won't it hurt your cover?"

"Please don't tell me you haven't thought about that," Damon sighed in exasperation. "We're practically twins. Even if my cover would remain the least bit intact, anyone who's seen you, which isn't all that many, would instantly peg me as extremely suspicious."

"Right," David commented. "I could change your face."

"Please do," Damon nodded. "Later."

The brothers soon reached the desired chapel, abandoned this late at night. David and Damon ran up to the podium, and David started looking around.

"Damn, the faith of this place is distracting," he muttered as his eyes flittered about. "I can't even recognize anything." He turned to Damon. "Look around, see if you can find an ankh somewhere."

Damon nodded and went to it. The brothers searched the entire half of the chapel where the speaker's podium stood, until Damon called out.

"Found it."

David quickly came over, as Damon pressed the stone slab which had the image of an ankh carved in it. Before them, a tile of the floor opened, pulling inside the wall, and revealing a hidden tunnel which was pitch dark. David was about to jump down, before Damon stopped him.

"By the way," he said and handed the naked vampire a bag, small enough to remain unnoticed, but large enough to carry some significant things. "I brought you some clothes."

David looked at his little brother with a deadpan face.

“You couldn’t tell me that earlier, why?”

“Wanted to see how long it took until you had enough of the nude, dear, nudist brother of mine,” he said with a smirk and jumped down the tunnel.

David frowned indignantly, opened the bag, and got dressed in clothes identical to his brother’s, before he jumped down himself.



“Sir!” came the shout of a young man, an inquisitor in training.

Luchenzo Mirachelli, who was sitting in a room with some apprentice Crimson–Blades looked up with annoyance.

“What?”

“Sir, David Kane has escaped!”

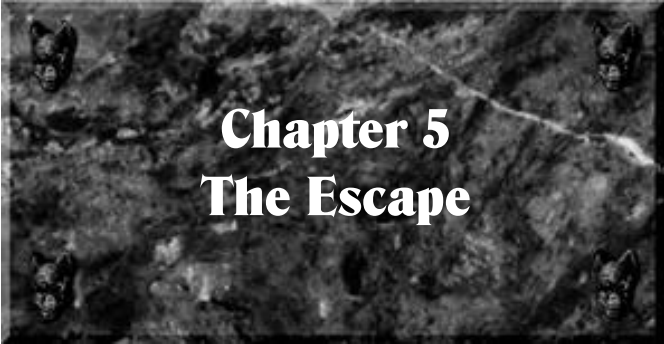
Luchenzo’s eyes widened in surprise. He looked at his apprentices, who looked back at him, all with the same look on their faces, saying ‘Oh shit!’. Luchenzo looked back at the young man.

“Get everyone ready to track him down!” the elder Crimson–Blade roared. “Find him!”

The boy scurried out of the room, and Luchenzo walked over to a safe and opened it. Inside were wooden stakes, grenades with silver shells, Dragon’s Breath shotgun shells, and a few other specialty items. He shoveled things into his pockets and vest. He then grabbed a shotgun and looked at his apprentices, who had all geared up faster than he had,

which did impress him, despite their dire circumstances.

“Let’s go!”



Chapter 5

The Escape

Subterranean Vatican, Rome
September 8th, 2015

The darkness was cold, clammy, and generally uncomfortable for a human. But David noticed that Damon didn't seem fazed in the slightest.

My younger brother is a secret badass. Who would have known?

The brothers walked slowly through the long, narrow, winding corridors lined with stone. Two pairs of glowing eyes shone through the darkness, one pair red, the other bright blue. The brothers saw perfectly in the darkness, though.

"How long has this been here?" Damon asked curiously.

"I had it built around the birth of Christ," David explained as they walked along the pathway. "I originally meant for it to be my tomb, when I would go to sleep for centuries. The Catholics cocked that up for me quite thoroughly."

Damon snorted at the remark.

"Now, it's just the safest hiding spot in the world against Kindred."

Just after he said that, the corridor turned into stairs going down, and the walls changed from being completely clean and smooth, to having thousands of symbols engraved in them. Egyptian hieroglyphics, Greek letters, Goetia sigils and a vast variety of other occult symbols lining everywhere. Like a pharaoh's tomb with several cultures' writings and spells guarding it.

"This is some serious warding," Damon commented. "Did you do this yourself?"

"Some of it, yes. Mostly the Egyptian stuff, but I did some of the Norse and Babylonian as well."

Damon marveled at all the magical signs on the walls.

"I can feel it now," he muttered. "This is... pretty dark magic. But I see how no one noticed."

"It's obscured from the rest of the world by location—obscuring spells. I knew that if I brought artefacts down here without them, someone dangerous might sense them. It took me and a few others, mortal mages as well, almost two decades to make it all. If it had been anyone down here who didn't have the same blood in their veins as me, these sigils would roast them until they were ash."

"Impressive," Damon breathed in amazement. "I've never seen such a heavily warded place before. And some of these symbols, I don't even recognize."

"That was the point. Almost every magical culture and tradition is depicted here to one extent or another."

They wandered deeper and deeper, and Damon knew that they were far below the surface of the Earth. The air was getting thinner and thinner, and Damon started feeling

light-headed.

“Another safeguard against anyone who shouldn’t be down here,” Damon guessed. “Only those who can hold their breath for extreme periods of time, or who don’t need to breathe at all can go down there, right?”

“Exactly,” David said. “You can wait here if—”

“I can manage,” Damon cut his brother off. “Besides, I need to see this.”

“Fine.”

They walked for minute after minute, until almost half an hour later, they reached the bottom of the stairs. In front of them was a gigantic door made of a dark, black metal. Engravings in purely Egyptian from an era long past were written in the door, top to bottom. There was an indentation in the shape of a hand-print in the middle, where the two-part door split open. David put his right hand to his teeth and bit down, causing blood to emerge. He then placed the bleeding hand in the indentation. A deep rumbling was heard until a dark, ominous voice came from nowhere, penetrated the darkness and resounded through the large room surrounded by stones. But the voice was unearthly, and it didn’t speak in a language used in modern nights. Rather, it was an ancient Egyptian dialect, one Damon hadn’t heard in thousands of years. But both he and David perfectly understood what the voice said.

**On a hill, there stood a house. The boy entered
it blind. There, he remained for years upon
years. When he left it, he could see.**

What is it?

Damon and David stood silent for a little while after the voice had quieted down.

“A house...blind...see...” Damon muttered to himself. “I haven’t heard that riddle before.”

“Neither have I,” David admitted. “I had mortals bring riddles to be given by the door, and then I killed them before I could hear the answers. Thought that would be safest.”

“So even you couldn’t get in without the proper knowledge. Clever.”

They quieted down for a little once more.

“Could it be...” David muttered, then loudly exclaimed at the door “a school.”

The chamber shook, and a light erupted from the writing on the door and the handprint. The door then slowly opened inwards, revealing a large tomb with large, round dais upon which was a circle of twelve sarcophagi. In the center was a lone sarcophagus. There was writing on all of them, and carved stone figurines on the lids of demonic-looking creatures, human bodies with claws for fingers, and their faces looking like Japanese oni with open mouths, revealing vampiric fangs. A bright light shone from the ceiling, illuminating the dais. As the brothers entered the chamber, their eyes dimmed and stopped glowing, relying on the light inside instead. They slowly made their way to the dais, walked up the few stairsteps, and looked around.

“Something’s not right,” David said dangerously. “I only had one sarcophagus made in here, the one in the center.”

“So someone’s been down here since?”

“It seems like it.”

A powerful, dark energy was radiating throughout the chamber, and enormous amounts of it was practically rolling off the twelve sarcophagi in waves of maddening despair. Damon shivered from a nonexistent cold in the rather warm chamber, and David had to suppress a shudder himself.

“There are methuselahs sleeping in these sarcophagi,” Damon mumbled with wide eyes. “No other creature could create this kind of energy, much less in such large quantities.”

“I can think of a few,” David said quietly. “There were legends about ancient beings sleeping beneath the Vatican, giving off energy the Inquisition tapped off of. No one ever checked,” David said.

“That’s impossible. The Inquisition can’t tap into vampire power,” Damon said. “I would know, I’ve spent the past twenty years among them. Besides, you’ve placed w—” and then he stopped.

“I placed wards which would hide this energy, as we didn’t feel anything going down here. Which means that these sleepers *knew* I had built a tomb down here.”

“How many people knew about you then?”

“Practically none,” David stated. “I make a point of disappearing every few centuries until I come up with a believable new alias.”

“What did you go by then?”

“Caius Domenicus Valerius. Domenico took it later,

made it Domenico Valerius.”

“I’ve never heard of that name,” Damon muttered to himself. He was quiet for some time, before he looked at David. “Should we open one?”

David looked around at the sarcophagi.

“I don’t think so. They might end up killing us. This kind of energy takes a lot of power, and a lot of experience. They must be thousands of years old. Older than us, almost definitely.”

“Do you think one of them could be an antediluvian?”

David sighed, distressed at this unexpected turn of events.

“Maybe. I hope not. If we don’t disturb them, they might not know we’re here. Come on.”

David and Damon made their way to the sarcophagus in the middle, radiating only a minute amount of the same kind of power of the other sarcophagi. When he reached it, he laid his hands on the edge of the lid, and leaned into it. The lid of stone was heavy, at least a metric ton, and he only slowly pushed the stone slab aside, slowly revealing an empty tomb, except for a long, brass amulet covered in blood. David stared blankly at the amulet.

“You have **got** to be kidding me,” he whispered, aghast.

“What is it?” Damon asked with some amount of concern, and looked into the sarcophagus.

“It’s an Amulet of Mnemosyne.”

“And?”

“There should have been a little glass flask of my blood in

here, containing my memories,” David said and punched the lid of the sarcophagus angrily. “If I created an Amulet, it means that I hid the vial somewhere else, and this is just another failsafe to protect His whereabouts.”

“Fucking...” Damon was about to say, but he stopped and just punched the lid of the sarcophagus.

David slowly reached his hand down and picked up the magical trinket. He held it up before his face, and then tentatively placed his lips on the object. Suddenly, thoughts and memories popped up in his head. Before him, he saw a desert, sprawling in the distance. More specifically, he saw the entrance to a cave, but the entrance was so huge, twelve full-grown men could easily walk in shoulder-by-shoulder, and still not touch the edges. It resembled the maw of an ancient, petrified beast in some ways, and an inscription in an ancient, long-dead language was scrawled above the entrance. But a cold darkness swept through the shadows of the entrance, like wisps of dark shawls floating around. David blinked several times, clearing his vision of the recently reacquired memories.

“What’d you see?” Damon asked and placed a hand on David’s shoulder.

“I have to go to Turkey,” David breathed. “That’s where I’ll find the vial.”

Damon nodded, and let his hand fall from his brother’s shoulder.

“Do you feel the sun?”

“Yeah, it’s just broken past the horizon.”

“We’ll sleep in here, then,” Damon said and sat down

next to the sarcophagus. “Hopefully, the inquisitors will think you escaped, and calm down their alertness. It would be easier to get out of the Vatican that way.”

“Sound strategy,” David agreed. “Let’s just hope none of these ancients feel like a midday snack.”



Domenico stood by the side of the road as Lucita was in the midst of dominating a wealthy, pudgy man with a handlebar mustache out of his car.

Well, I guess she’s only partly using her mind control... she doesn’t need the Blood to control her victim’s minds. She’s plenty charming as is.

The man walked away with a dazed look on his face, and a stupid grin. Domenico internally sighed at the human’s weakness of character. Lucita, a seductive glint in her deep, brown eyes, was juggling the keys to the Porsche with a small smirk on her deliciously inviting lips.

I need to go out to a party soon, I’m losing myself in her. Not that I would entirely regret that. I let her live, after all.

“I’ll be honest for once,” she said with a somewhat uplifted or relieved tone. “I haven’t enjoyed myself that much, doing practically nothing, in centuries. If you ever do decide to leave the Camarilla behind...you’ll be welcome in Zaragoza. If you work for it, that is.”

Domenico smiled at the last jab.

“If it comes to that, I’ll be happy to work. There’s nothing worse to the mind than stagnancy. Besides, being with you has been a refreshing experience. The neonates and childer

are always ready to suck up to me, and a few elders as well. You never did. I like that.”

“I’m not much for ass-kissing.”

“Metaphorically, me neither. But I **could** be tempted to do it literally, if you’d let me,” Domenico suggestively winked at the ancient, undead woman with a smirk.

Having learned of his behavior, Lucita merely shook her head, but the smirk never left her face. Her eyes returned to Domenico, and for the first time, they made full eye-contact.

“I didn’t think you would have the nerve to look into my eyes,” Domenico commented.

“You wouldn’t do anything to me.”

“You’re right about that.”

They both stood in silence, looking each other in the eyes. Domenico had rarely felt a connection as he felt with the deadly vampire, and he was well aware that, despite her inhuman path, she was still learning it, and was still a little tied to human emotions, if only barely.

“Safe travels,” Domenico said with a smile.

“Thank you,” Lucita nodded, and got into the sleek, black sports car.

Soon, the engine was running, and the car quickly accelerated and sped down the road. Domenico stood where he had, smiling, even a while after the car was out of sight. He knew that he himself wasn’t very good at his own path. He still felt human emotions regularly, still felt *alive*, if only barely.

What a terrible methuselah I make.

With that little internal comment to himself, and an amused smirk on his face, he turned around and walked back the way they had come.



Luchenzo was slowly and quietly walking down the large hall of the ground level of the Apostolic Palace, alert for any sign of David. It had been almost twenty-four hours since his breakout had been reported, but his gut was telling him that David was still in the building, or at the very least on the premises. His pump-action SPAS 12 was shouldered and loaded with incendiary Dragon's Breath shells. If he wasn't going to be locked up, David wasn't going to live at all. There was a wooden stake in a custom holster on his belt, and on his right thigh was a Desert Eagle pistol, loaded with silver hollow-points. Luchenzo stalked the halls. He was sniffing the air, looking for that scent of fresh blood. David had torn out the throats of six guards, despite being so crippled. Truly, Luchenzo had underestimated the monster Ashur.

But even with all that blood, vampires can't heal from that kind of injuries that quickly. He is still around somewhere.

Two soldiers Luchenzo had dispatched came running up to him from in front of him.

"There's no sign of him in the Sistine Chapel, sir!" one of them said, and they both saluted, standing straight.

"Good work, men," Luchenzo said. "Report to the team in the *Quirinale*."

"Sir!" they both exclaimed with another salute, and took

off running.

Luchenzo turned down another hall and kept his alertness. He walked down the hall, and when he reached the end, he realized something.

One of them wore a uniform too tight. And neither were carrying their firearms.

Luchenzo turned around and took off running after the two 'officers'. He reached for his radio on his chest and pressed the talk button.

"Everyone, come in! Two inquisitors down, two inquisitors down, David and an accomplice have taken their uniforms! If you see inquisitors not carrying firearms, fire at will!"

He released the button, and soon voices screeched over the radio, confirming their understanding of the order. Luchenzo sped down the halls of the Palace, and soon came outside. The moon was high in the sky, and the two unarmed inquisitors were running across St. Peter's Square. Only a few civilians were present, all staring wildly after the uniformed men running quickly across the square. Luchenzo sped after them as he put the safety on his SPAS and slung it over his shoulder, so that it rested on his back. He was impressed with how quickly the two were running, despite knowing that David could very likely move several times faster with ease.

A human friend, eh? Well, in that case...

Luchenzo pulled out his pistol and took aim. Despite still sprinting, his aim was true when he pulled the trigger, his decades of practice in combat making such a feat easy for

him, not to mention the supernatural enhancements he had. The silver bullet shot out of his pistol, and flew across the square, easily over fifty meters. The bullet struck one of the targets in the shoulder, but he kept running as if it were nothing. Luchenzo was shocked.

Was that the human!?

He aimed at the other, the man with a uniform a size or two too small, and fired again, also striking the shoulder. The target flinched, but still kept running, unhindered, shocking Luchenzo even further.

Another vampire!? We would have known!

But at that thought, he saw the navy-blue uniform slowly gain a deep, dark stain from the shoulder of his second target.

He keeps running! What an impressive human!

Luchenzo holstered his pistol again, but kept up his pursuit. Only few civilians were around, so Luchenzo focused for merely an instant, and he felt his anger boil up in him. Suddenly, he felt his legs pump faster, his breathing become panting, and he sped up even further, suddenly gaining significantly on the fleeing pair. The pair turned left, easily scaled the wall isolating the Vatican, down a narrow street, and Luchenzo, moving too fast to stop, leapt onto the building he was running against, and used it as a sharp turn, leaping off it and into the alley. He saw the pair turn another corner, and he did the same. He was gaining on the pair, until he realized what was going on.

The pair were intentionally running through the narrow passageways of the quarter north-east of the *piazza*, slowing

down not only themselves, but **him** as well. His turns were becoming slower and slower, and his unnatural speed couldn't entirely keep up with their more flexible, slower run, as they jumped over obstacles, turned around corners quickly. His speed was going against his advantage in these tight quarters.

Begrudgingly, Luchenzo rescinded the powerful fury, reducing his speed, but also allowing him to better keep up with David and his accomplice. All of a sudden, the two escapees jumped, and started easily making their way to the rooftops. Luchenzo followed as quickly as he could, but the sudden change caused him to stagger for a moment, allowing them some leeway once more. Once on the rooves, he noticed that they were away from the Basilica and church, and were headed towards Castel Sant'Angelo. Luchenzo was starting to feel the effects of the sudden take-off, and using his innate power for forcing his human form to such speeds.

*I'm getting too old for this **merda**.*

The men Luchenzo chased turned right, and passed right under the wall they had jumped over before, through the entrances for cars. Some of the drivers honked their horns, annoyed at the people running on the road in costumes. The pair kept running on the road straight ahead. They were about to reach the edge of the *Tevere*, and Luchenzo almost thought the chase was over, until he saw David reach his hands over and forcibly twist the neck of the human, much to Luchenzo's shock. The human went limp instantly, but David grabbed the now life-less body and jumped into the river coursing through Rome. Luchenzo raced up to the edge and looked over, but there was no sign

of the vampire and the recently deceased man. His eyes were wide in shock, unable to comprehend what had happened.

He killed him! If he was going to kill him, why bother running slow enough to stay close to him!?

Luchenzo stared at the body of water, unable to grasp the vampire's intentions.

• • •

David climbed out of the water, and pulled his brother's body after him.

"Sorry about that, Damon," he mumbled as he reached his left arm behind his head, trying to reach the small hole where the silver bullet was lodged in his shoulder. "Faster than drowning you."

He fumbled with it for a few minutes, but eventually managed to stick his fingers into the wound. He let out a low growl of pain as he dug around in the wounds for the bullet. After another while, he managed to grab the damned thing and pull it out. He then leant over Damon's corpse, rolled him over, and dug into his wound, and easily fished out the other bullet. He then rolled the corpse back over and started pressing down on his little brother's chest, trying to squeeze out the water that had come into the lungs. He then carefully placed his brother's head so that the spine was reconnected again. He then started undressing both his brother and himself, until they were in their underwear, and then threw the uniforms into the river. Then, he waited.

He waited for almost an hour until he heard the small 'crack', followed by Damon quickly sitting back up and

heaved, purging the water from his lungs. There wasn't much left, but Damon heaved and panted, and stuck his fingers down his throat, making him vomit up more water. David calmly clapped his brother on the back.

"I hope it wasn't painful."

"Perk of immortality. Getting your neck broken never hurts," Damon commented between small volleys of water from his system. "I just instantly wake up on the other side. Why'd you swim so far away? I had trouble finding you."

"Safety," David said as he looked around. "We're on Tiber Island. We can get into the underground quickly from here."

"Right."

Damon spent several minutes dry-heaving and hackling water from his lungs. David merely kept clapping his brother's back to help. Soon, Damon stood up, still wobbly and disoriented. David was instantly on his feet and took hold of Damon. The older brother slowly led the younger towards the northern bridge connecting the island to the mainland.

"We'll make our way towards The Crimson Bed."

"The high-class hotel?" Damon asked with confusion.

"The one. The owner is Sofia Montesano, a woman Domenico embraced in Istanbul, in the sixteenth century. We'll have safe haven there."

David walked them across the bridge, and hailed a taxi driving by. It stopped, and David stuffed his brother and himself into the back seat.

“If you take us to The Crimson Bed hotel, you’ll be paid very well,” David said to the driver, who was looking at them strangely, and indignantly for the water all over his car. “I’m talking ten thousand euros.”

The driver quickly turned his head away and drove the car, clearly eager for the abnormally large payment. The drive didn’t take long, and the driver pulled up in front of the hotel.

“Forget you ever saw us,” David said whilst pushing his will onto the weak human mind, forcibly erasing any trace of Damon and himself, and got out of the car.

He opened the back door, threw the money at the driver, and got the shivering and shaking Damon out of it. He then carried his brother back to the entrance as the taxi sped off. David quickly cloaked himself and his brother with the unnatural obfuscation of the vampire, and ran back into the hotel. At the reception desk, he looked at the who looked at them strangely, clearly wondering exactly what was going on.

“Call the manager of the establishment, tell her that Domenico has a visitor.”



The Crimson Bed, Rome
September 10th, 2015

Sofia Montesano stormed through the halls of the luxury hotel, worried at what was going on.

How does he know about Domenico!? I have to find out, now!

She reached the office behind the reception, where the receptionist had told her that the guest was waiting. She burst through the door and saw... two practically naked Domenicos?

“What the...”

One of them was red and quivering like a mortal, whilst the other was still and pale like Kindred. The Kindred looked at Sofia, and smiled.

“Sofia, I need help. Show me to Domenico’s suite.”

She was confused as all hell.

“What?”

“Sofia, I don’t have time to argue, show me to the suite,” he exclaimed, his smile wavering.

Sofia shook her head, and looked at them.

“Who are you!?”

“David Kane, Red Alastor,” David introduced himself, “and Domenico’s broodmate. Now, show me to his suite!”

Sofia didn’t know what to do, so she turned and walked quickly. David picked up the human and carried him at the pace Sofia set.

“Can we go faster?” David asked. “Damon’s getting worse.”

Sofia was already confused and scared, so she swiftly kicked off her heels and started running, with David easily keeping up with her. They soon reached a door on the seventh floor, and Sofia opened it quickly. They burst through the door, and Domenico stood inside, looking out of a window. He turned at the loud noise, and his smile instantly fell.

“The bath, now!”

He pointed at a door, and David ran through it. He gently placed the human on the floor and ran the hot water in the bath. It filled up rather quickly, and David gently picked up and placed the human in the bath to warm up. The quivering soon stopped.

“Domenico, what’s happening!?” Sofia asked loudly of her sire. “This man shows up unannounced and says h—”

“He’s Red Alastor David Kane, my broodmate,” Domenico replied as he made his way to the bathroom. “The human is his ghoul, Damon Knight. He likes to look at himself. Don’t worry too much. Will you give us privacy,

Sofia?"

Sofia nodded and stalked out of the suite. Domenico walked into the bathroom and looked at his two brothers.

"What happened?"

David sat on the toilet beside the bath.

"We were being chased, so we jumped into the Tiber. He helped me escape from the Vatican."

"I was just about to get ready to go there myself," Domenico said. "The faith would be a problem, but I was intending on using another body to go there."

"No need, anymore," David said as he felt Damon's forehead. "Luchenzo is on high alert. I don't think he'll leave the Vatican for a while. And I need to locate a certain Gangrel."

"Who?"

"Beckett."

"The noddist?"

"The very same," David nodded.

"Why?"

"Father contacted me, told me it was time to gather and return. I left my memory of his location in a vial of my blood, which I thought I placed in the vault below the Vatican."

"It wasn't there?"

"No, an amulet was. It told me I had left the vial in a cave in Turkey."

“Kaymakli?”

“Yeah, but I don’t know how to get there. I can’t place it on a map, and I’m not going to waste my time combing through all of Turkey’s deserts to find it.”

“But Beckett can?” Domenico asked seriously.

“According to rumors,” David nodded. “They might be wrong, but it’s the best chance I have.”

“How are you going to find him? He could be anywhere in the world. He’s a Gangrel archeologist, after all.”

“Anthropologist,” David corrected his brother, “and I have a few Kindred artifacts that might interest him. Can you use your Toreador connections and reach out to Victoria Ash for me? Let her know I have something both she and Becket might find interesting, and to bring him? I hear they have a close work-relationship.”

“Not a problem,” Domenico nodded. “I’ll get it done. Where will you be?”

“The French Quarter, in New Orleans. Tell her I’ll make sure to welcome her warmly.”

Domenico nodded and turned his attention to Damon.

“When are you leaving?”

“Tomorrow evening.”

“Then take a shower and get dressed. I’ll take care of Damon.”

“Thank you, brother.”



David stood and adjusted his all-black suit, making sure everything was on point. Black two-piece with black shirt and black tie. Black shoes, black belt and black handkerchief. He smelled nice and fresh, and looked dapper in the outfit. Sofia had come in with the suit for him, and had asked a lot of questions about his relationship with Domenico.

“So, he’s your brother?”

“In more ways than one,” David replied with a courteous smile. David then pulled out a new phone from his pocket and sent a mail.

Could you check when there will be lethal-strength storms in the sky, commercial airline-height? –DK

He got a reply not an instant later.

September 16th to 19th

David smirked.

Check flight tickets ordered from within the Vatican for the next two weeks.

A few seconds later:

September 17th. Change Rome airport forecast?

Please do.

David locked the phone with a smirk.

“Why so smug?” Sofia asked curiously.

“Just watching the pieces fall into place,” David replied. “Do you play chess?”

“No. Why?”

“Good, don’t. Play poker instead. Just don’t play to win.”

Sofia was confused.

“Winning is the entire goal with playing games.”

“You’ve been alive for centuries, Sofia,” David said mirthfully. “I shouldn’t have to tell you why that is wrong.”

“Well, you play poker to play the other players so you can win, right?”

David merely looked Sofia in the eyes with an amused smile.

“Start playing. I’ll come by another time and see if you’ve figured it out.”

“Won’t you teach me?” she asked and fluttered her eyes seductively.

“Loss and experience are far better teachers than I. And I’m an excellent teacher, as much as I hate to brag.”

Sofia giggled lightly at the last part.

“Don’t be a stranger,” she winked and walked out of the suite, her hips swaying quite generously.

David chuckled and shook his head. Human women, and even Kindred women had tried to seduce him for millennia. Only a few had ever succeeded. Most notably, Katherine. That thought quieted his chuckle. Much to his dismay, he had quickly found out after meeting her that Katherine, too, had been a member of Clan Crimson-Blade. Such a glaring mark of her heritage as that of a symbol of the werewolves had only been overlooked by a blind man. Still, whenever her mark had touched his skin, he had felt

nothing. Just the soothing caress of her gentle touch. She had accepted him, despite knowing full well the stories about him. Any Crimson-Blade would know who he was if their mark touched him, misinformed as it might occasionally be. As if by prompt, he felt that same touch on his cheek that very instant, and he knew that it was merely a memory. A phantom to haunt him until he died, as far off as that might be. Without realizing what he was doing, he placed his hand on the very spot the phantom touch had been. He cast his eyes back to the mirror.

Sofia had mentioned nothing when he adjusted his suit by looking in the mirror. She knew that he shouldn't have been able to see it, as Lasombra didn't possess reflections. And she hadn't seen a reflection. She likely thought it was a habit. But looking in the mirror, David saw himself perfectly fine. At least, to some extent. Looking back from the mirror wasn't himself, but a rotting corpse wearing a rotting and ruined suit. Maggots crawled around in the flesh of the *thing* in the mirror, whose face was half-eaten, and who looked like it had been buried for years. David's eyes swept over the monstrosity that was a curse on him. He had endured that curse for five thousand years. Part of it, at least. Powerful, Babylonian magicians had cursed him to have no reflection, but he had managed to break free. The result had been that he could still see his faded reflection, but no one else could. Almost two thousand years later, Setites had cursed him to see horrible and twisted monstrosities, parts of himself he rather wouldn't see. He had broken free then, too, and he did see his reflection true at times, but those were becoming rarer by the week. His eyes fell for a moment.

David looked back up into the mirror, and almost

flinched. His reflection had turned into that of a wolf-man, the war form of the Lupines. It had black, matted fur, where it still remained, and it was as rotted as the other image he had seen. He could see the tendons and muscles of its snout, and it was missing an eye, but the other eye was glowing furiously red. He stared into the eye intently. This monstrosity...it was a reflection of who he was. *It was him.* And that made David sick to his very core. He felt a minute urge to throw the mirror out of the open window close to him, but he resisted. It wasn't his mirror. And someone on the street might get hurt.

David turned away from the mirror and walked over to the bed. There was a black plastic case resting on it, a late birthday-ish-esque present from Domenico. David opened it, and a gleam brightened his dull eyes. He picked up the gorgeous, *beautiful* custom-made 1911. It was sleek and black, matte. Ultralight match trigger, fluted chamber, skeletonized hammer, high-quality rubber grips, no beaver tail safety, ambidextrous thumb safety and magazine release, ported vent slide, extended barrel with precision rifling, muzzle brake, improved ejector, double-stack magazines, and a custom suppressor. Truly a weapon of dealing death. Turning it over, David saw an inscription on the slide's right side. It was written in Old Sanskrit.

“Divide and Conquer’? I can’t argue with that,” David muttered as he placed the pistol in the holster under his left shoulder. He then gathered the three extra magazines and placed them in the pouches on the back of his belt, under his suit jacket.

He closed the case and walked over to the door to the suite, but cast a last glance at the mirror behind him. It

showed nothing but his true self, as others saw him. Without a word or another glance, he left the suite.



Vatican City, Rome
September 10th, 2015

Luchenzo sat in the living room of his house, looking intently at the screen of his laptop. He was reviewing footage of David's cell during his imprisonment. David mostly sat in the same spot he was dropped in, didn't say a thing. When they threw transfusion bags into his cell, he weakly claimed that with such poor nourishment, he would slip into a deep sleep, and wouldn't wake up for decades, nor would he feel any pain they might try to inflict upon him. Luchenzo studied the screen closely, when he saw David's lips move. His eyes widened, and he turned the volume up to max. He then rewound and listened intently.

"Wonder what the others are doing? I hope New Orleans is fine."

Luchenzo's eyes widened, and he grabbed his phone. He quickly dialed in a number, and waited for the other end to pick up.

"I need a flight to New Orleans, Louisiana. Commercial, private would raise questions."

He hung up on the call, and watched the former captive intently. Then he noticed another detail. David has seemed weak and hurt every time they tortured him. But, he had always withstood enough not to die. Luchenzo had thought it was fishy, but didn't think anything of it. But that little pixel on the screen, one of the wounds inflicted on him, slowly closed. The farther he watched, the more injuries he

noticed David healing. During the first few nights, very specific wounds were inflicted. But by the end, most of the original wounds had been healed, and replaced with newer ones.

“You clever bastard,” Luchenzo growled. “None of us would have noticed that your wounds changed places. And you would have been just fine on the original amount of blood. *Stronzo*.”

Luchenzo internally berated himself. David Kane had been severely underestimated. Not just by the others, but by Luchenzo himself. He would not make that mistake twice. When he arrived in New Orleans, he would make sure that nothing there could surprise him. He would learn of the vampire community there, stalk his prey, become David’s shadow.

Speaking of which, Luchenzo noticed another thing. One of the times David was given blood, he was sitting in the middle of the cell. When the door opened, and the light flooded in...David’s form didn’t cast a shadow on the wall behind him. Luchenzo’s eyes narrowed, and he pressed a key on the keyboard, rewinding it. He came upon the previous time, and there, on the wall behind him, was a shadow, but it seemed inconsistent. As if it was...*alive*. It moved and danced on the wall. He rewound back to the time before that, and saw that his shadow was full of holes. As if the light shone, not upon David, but upon a skeleton. Luchenzo sighed and leant back in his chair. He rubbed his weary eyes. His phone ‘pinged’, and he picked it up.

September 17th, 12.40 out of Rome Urbe Airport.

Luchenzo laid the phone back down. He had a whole

week to prepare. He'd best get to work, then.



New Orleans, Louisiana

September 13th, 2015

David stepped out of the private jet, his suit looking pristine as ever. The first thing he saw was his Tesla, parked just twenty meters away. Leaning on the hood, hands in his pockets, was Aiden, lips curled into a smirk and his glowing eyes covered by aviator shades. He was suited up as well, black suit and black shirt, first top buttons undone and without a tie. David strode over to his adopted child, smirking himself. He walked past Aiden, who moved to sit in the passenger seat, as David sat in the driver's seat.

"It's good to see you again, Aiden," David said as he started the engine.

"You too, boss," Aiden replied.

David pushed down on the speeder, and the car instantly moved, rapidly picking up speed. Within a minute, they were off the runway, and away from the airport.

"How have things been going?" David asked, his eyes never leaving the road.

"Fine," Aiden replied. "We've killed a few potentials coming our way. Daisy went to London to scope out reported Anathema activity a week ago. John's gone to Vienna to gather with the Tremere, won't be back until early October. Catherine went on a survival exercise in Alaska, should be coming back in a few nights. And William has been busy. He's been running around New Orleans, making deals and alliances, things like that."

“What kind of deals?” David asked, growing just a little concerned.

“Just investing in mortals, making donations, establishing contacts and creating some influence.”

“Ah,” David uttered, at peace with the explanation. “Good.”

The electric car drove almost silently through the streets of New Orleans, headed for the French Quarter, and David’s home.

“How was Rome?”

“It was nice. Relaxing, really.”

Aiden snorted.

“I somehow doubt that.”

David snorted as well.

“It was far from dull. Let’s leave it at that.”

“Right.”

“How much work is there on my desk?”

“Not much. William’s been doing a good job of keeping things quiet.”

“Good to hear,” David smiled somberly. “I’ve missed this city.”

“It’s missed you as well, boss.”

“It’ll have to wait a few days, though. I need to take a quick trip to Boston.”

Aiden’s eyes fell slightly.

“Her?”

“Yes,” David said quietly. “And there’s something I need to do there.”

“Not long you been home before you ship off again, good little Camarilla soldier,” Aiden muttered in a mocking tone.

David didn’t comment on it. His small, fake smile never faltered. Centuries of lying to those you loved were hard to shake. Less than a minute later, David stopped the car in front of the warehouse, the headquarters of NightBlade. Aiden got out with another word. And David simply drove off.

His thoughts wandered as he drove from the city, and came onto the highway. Katherine had been a Crimson–Blade, he had known that from the beginning. But his mind wandered to Emma, a direct descendant of his long–dead fiancé. She didn’t have the same mark on her palm, like other Crimson–Blades did, or even like Katherine did.

So they awaken it? But how?

David leant his head on his left arm, supported by the door, as he sped down the long road. He knew it would be two or three nights of driving to get to Boston. But he was filled up on blood, so all he needed was a small patch of dirt to slink into.

I wonder how you’re doing, Emma?

He was well aware that it had only been a month. But sitting down in the subterranean cell, being tortured twice a day, while he was at his most tired, did take its toll on him. He was a master at ‘enhanced interrogation’, as the American government called it. And his mind was clad in

the strongest steel. But the pain the Crimson–Blades could inflict...that was something else. David had never felt that pain before. Katherine had certainly never exposed him to it. He lifted his head and used his now unoccupied arm to caress his cheek, where Luchenzo had placed his hand. The pain briefly returned, and David flinched. His right arm, the one holding the steering wheel, jerked, and made his car swerve wildly as it drove at high speeds. He quickly regained his composure, and straightened the car.

“Shit,” David muttered to himself.

He looked at the clock in the car. 23:52. He still had some good hours of driving until sunrise. He changed hands on the steering wheel and looked at his right palm. On it sat the dark, crimson mark of the crescent moon, the ‘Mark of the Trophy’. The thaumaturgical mark Alastors received when they entered unending service to the Camarilla. David remembered vividly how he had proposed the design of the crescent moon. A hearken to his mortal days, when he had awoken to the service for Gaia. And how he had been a Theurge. Loremaster and mystic of Gaia’s warriors. Having grown up as a shaman, thanks to his mother, he was a natural with mystical lore and powers when he did awaken his father’s heritage. His father had wanted to make peace with him, had been proud. David remembered, more strongly than anything else, how his rage, his anger had been all-consuming. Make peace with him? After more than a decade of being torn, shredded, bitten, flayed and beaten by that monster of a father? David snorted darkly.

Never.



Freemason tunnel network, subterranean Boston

September 15th, 2015

David had made good time on getting to Boston. He had also been quick to find the remaining entrances to the tunnel network established by the Founding Fathers and Freemasons in the 1700's. David walked down the damp, cold corridors stretching out beneath the city. A heavy backpack hung off his shoulders. The original entrances had been sealed off and forgotten, but some Nosferatu still made use of them, so they had built new entrances. David had easily snuck past a few neonate Sewer Rats, seeing as there was only one or two elder Nosferatu in the city. And even then, one of them was an ancilla. Boston wasn't particularly strong when it came to Kindred inhabitants. They could hold off the Sabbat, but Sabbat interest in the area was, to David's somewhat limited knowledge of the current state of affairs in the region, meager.

David took a right down another corridor, his glowing eyes preventing him from stumbling over loose planks and pipes. But in front of him, he saw it. In the wall at the end of the hallway was a large gap, revealing a thick steel door behind it. The door was ajar. David felt his anger flare, and he drew his new pistol, loaded with hollow point rounds. He stormed forwards and pushed through the gap. He aimed down his pistol and saw the figure looming over the single sarcophagus in the middle of the room.

"Turn around," David said darkly, his pistol aimed at the unwanted visitor to the tomb.

The man did so, and David lowered and holstered his pistol when he saw who it was.

“What are you doing here, Jack?” he asked.

The Kindred standing next to the intricately carved stone sarcophagus smiled at David. He looked to be in his mid-thirties, but he was by no means unattractive. He was actually a rather handsome man, Embraced only a decade earlier. A Tzimisce, meant to be a shovelhead. It was only thanks to David’s interruption which kept Jack Snow from becoming an average Sabbat rookie.

“I’ve been in town for a few weeks, heard rumors of a tomb in the old tunnels. Apparently,” Jack smirked humorously, “there’s an ancient vampire sleeping down here. Figured I’d take a look.”

David shook his head and walked over to the other side of the sarcophagus. There was a caricature of Katherine chiseled on the lid. David gently ran his fingers over the figure’s cheek.

“No vampire. Just a human.”

“Relative of yours?”

“Of sorts.”

David then leant down and pushed the lid off the stone casket. Inside was an urn, made of brilliant white porcelain, which had long since matted. David pulled off the backpack and opened it. He pulled out a thick, leather-bound book, with curvaceous gold lettering on the front and spine reading “Rites of the Blood”. He placed it in the sarcophagus, and then gripped the heavy stone lid, before pulling it back, once more covering the contents of the tomb.

“Didn’t have a shelf at home, hiding a secret laboratory?”

Jack joked.

“No, I didn’t. And you won’t tell anyone of this.”

“Course not. You might not be my sire, but you taught me everything I needed to know. If you hadn’t, I’d have been hunted down, and not known anything about myself. I owe ya.”

“Remember that when I come knocking,” David poked back at the neonate.

David turned to leave the underground chamber, and Jack followed behind him.

“How’s the gang these days?” the Tzimisce asked as they made their way back through the tunnels.

“Same as always,” David replied casually as his eyes started glowing bright red again, as did Jack’s. “Are you considering joining?”

“I just might,” Jack admitted. “Besides, New Orleans is home. And I lost most of my jars of dirt a few weeks ago.”

“Ah,” David smirked. “Of course. The curse of the homeland.”

“One thing I don’t like about being a Fiend,” Jack nodded.

“How are you doing? Is the unlife hard?”

“My coke habit was much harder,” Jack commented. “I’m doing well, all things considered. Of course, most Camarilla cities are hesitant to let me stay. How do you do it? Y’now, being Lasombra?”

“I claim to be antitribu.”

“Right, anti-tribe. I say that too, not many believe me.”

“You’re a neonate. You haven’t built your reputation as an opposer to the Sabbat. Besides, you could call yourself autarkis.”

“Autarkis?”

“Basically,” David began, and was reminded of the year he spent tutoring the Tzimisce childe, “you distance yourself from the sects.”

“Isn’t that anarch territory?”

“No, because the Movement is a distinct sect of its own, no matter how much they claim to distance themselves from the Camarilla and Sabbat. Besides, they’re practically a Camarilla Light. Diet Camarilla. Like, ‘I can’t believe it’s not Camarilla’.”

“You still need to work on your pop-culture references.”

“I know,” David sighed.

They spent the rest of the way out in silence. They soon reached the surface, and remerged onto the streets of Boston. David looked at his watch, and it was almost four in the morning.

“Will you offer me shelter tonight?” the elder asked of his formerly adopted childe.

“Of course,” Jack nodded. “It might be a week or three before I head south, but I’ll likely visit in the next month or so. You’ll offer me haven there until I find something, right?”

“Certainly. I own an apartment building with a few sun-

proofed units. You can stay in one of them.”

“Thanks.”

The pair silently walked the few alleys towards David’s car. David got in the driver’s seat, and Jack in the passenger’s seat. David started the car, and soon, they were driving down the roads of the city once considered one of the largest centers of English population in the Colonies.

“A lot of memories in this city,” David quietly mused as they leisurely cruised the roads. “This is where I met the person in the tomb down in the tunnels.”

They turned left off Congress Street, and David pulled over next to hotel. David turned off the engine and got out. Jack followed, not sure what David was doing. There were no pedestrians, and only a few cars in the street. David, followed by Jack, crossed the street to the tall office building. David stopped and turned to look up at the Old State House.

“This used to be called King Street,” David said with a small smile. “It used to run down where that building is right now,” he said and pointed at the large structure behind them, looking around at the various buildings as he did. “This is where the ‘Boston Massacre’ happened. We called it the ‘Incident on King Street’ back then. I vividly remember Paul and Sam ran articles on it for months after it happened.”

“Hold on,” Jack said and turned to look at David. “Are you name-dropping Paul Revere and Samuel Adams right now?”

His only response was a confused expression.

“You knew the Founding Fathers?”

“Not well,” David elaborated. “I did fund some of their campaigns and publications. I was also a little involved with the Masons, and the Sons of Liberty. Then again, almost everyone who supported autonomy from the British Empire did in some form. Farms provided shelter and hiding spots, frontiersmen helped the bluecoats survive in the wild when they got lost, things like that. Loyalists and redcoats were quite unpopular among the poorer classes, and only a very little number of the wealthier people contributed to the cause of the revolutionaries.”

“You were here in Boston during the revolution?”

“Not for the most part, no. I was an Alastor, even back then. Most of my time was spent hunting Anathema. It just so happened that one had created a place for himself in Boston. He was a loyalist, so to force him to reveal himself, I played directly against him by supporting the colonials.”

“So you didn’t care about the Colonies?” Jack asked. “You didn’t care about freedom?”

“I didn’t care about humans at all, back then,” David admitted. “All I wanted to do was hunt my prey. I was no better than the Sabbat, save for the fact that I agreed with the Camarilla. I felt that the Traditions were fairly good laws to have in place. Not that I particularly cared about Kindred, either. That was the second worst period of my unlife, when one talks about losing yourself to the Beast. My humanity was almost extinguished. The only thing separating me from the Beast was my intelligence, my sentience.”

Jack fell silent.

“What happened?”

“Katherine McDye happened.”

“You’re kidding?” Jack asked, his brows raised and eyes big. “You fell in love with a woman?”

“It wouldn’t really have mattered whether she was a man or a woman,” David shrugged. “I’ve lain with b—”

“That’s— not what I meant,” Jack shook his head, trying to get out the involuntary images popping into it. “You fell in love? That’s what changed you?”

David was a little perplexed at the sudden reaction to his statement, but brushed it off.

“Not at first. I was standing in the crowd on March 5th, 1770. The redcoats were being agitated by the protesters, and someone opened fire. No human has ever found out who it was.”

“But you have?”

“I haven’t. Anyway,” David rubbed his eyes and continued his story, “I was standing in the crowd when the redcoats fired, and my body shielded a young woman. I turned and looked at her, and I have to admit, she was an honest beauty. Her hair was long and red, her eyes like emeralds. She was pretty dirty, and she hadn’t bathed in a while, but she was still one of the most beautiful humans I had ever seen. Even with how far I had fallen, she still stirred something human in me. I grabbed her and ran away before anyone could take notice. When I put her down and was about to erase her memory, she curtsied and thanked me for saving her life.”

“The fact that you took a musket ball without injury didn’t ring a bell?” Jack asked with a small frown.

“She was perfectly aware of my state of undeath. She said that, if I was ever in dire need of blood, I could come to her.”

“What?”

“I was shocked as well, believe me. She then took my hand and kissed a signet ring I used to wear, before she walked off. It wasn’t long before I chased down the Anathema. My plan had worked almost perfectly, and I managed to kill him. But my mind never left that girl. So I stalked the streets, looking for her. I found her working as a barmaid in one of the most frequented taverns in the town. I went in there and sat down. I was surprised that she came by after a few minutes with a glass full of blood. I noticed that she had bandaged her left wrist, as well, and that the bleeding hadn’t stopped.”

“She cut herself for you?” Jack inquired as he moved to a nearby bench and sat down.

“She did,” David confirmed and sat next to him. “She just smiled and tried to walk away. I grabbed her injured wrist, and she flinched. She looked at me with some measure of uneasiness. I can’t blame her. I removed the bandage and licked the wound. She was surprised when the wound healed in front of her eyes.”

“I bet.”

“After that, I started frequenting the bar. We started making small-talk, got to know each other. Of course, the first while I simply acted. I knew how to seem normal, and

I knew how to behave. But we kept meeting for months, then years. And over those years...I stopped acting. She helped me. She helped me regain my sense of self, my humanity. When we had known each other for almost five years, she kissed me. And I had, well and truly, come to love her. More than I have loved any other man or woman over the centuries of my life. Today, she rests as a pile of ashes in an urn, resting in a sarcophagus, located in a tomb beneath the city. And if you were to locate the tomb down in the tunnel system, and equal it to a location on the surface...it would point to where we're sitting right now."

Jack nodded quietly. The mentor and protégé sat in silence for some minutes, before David stood back up.

"We should head to your haven before sunrise."

"Right. It's not far."



Chapter 7

The Pieces Fall Into Place

**Airplane, c. 25,000 ft above the Atlantic Ocean
September 17th, 2015**

Sitting in the economy class of the commercial plane, Luchenzo was going over documents describing New Orleans, as well as maps detailing the city and its various districts. There wasn't much information on the vampire population of the city, but Luchenzo was certain it was dense if David Kane lived there. The only thing he knew for certain was that the leader of the city seemed to be a vampire called Marcel Guilbeau, and that there seemed to be a werewolf population in the swamps surrounding the city.

Other than that, there were unconfirmed rumors of vampire hunters in the city's police, as well as a number of sorcerers throughout the city. After all, it was considered the home of voodoo, and had a long history in heathen, pagan traditions. Luchenzo only reluctantly practiced his own heathen powers rarely, but he realized that to defeat the enemies of the Lord, he would have to resort to unholy ways. That was why he chose to call himself the 'Judas Priest'. Not because he turned his back on his filthy kind, but because he worked with unholy methods to promote

the sanctity of his cause. Truly, he was a betrayer of Christ.

Luchenzo felt some turbulence, and he looked out of the window. The clouds were dark. Too dark. He heard the ‘pling’ indicating that passengers should buckle their seatbelts.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the voice of an airhostess sounded throughout the plane in Italian, “we are experiencing some turbulence due to unforeseen weather changes, but please don’t worry. They should pass soon.”

Luchenzo buckled up, as was instructed, and just in time for a violent shake. Some child started screaming somewhere behind him. He neatly put away his papers back into the folder they had previously occupied. After several minutes, the shaking didn’t stop. In fact, they only grew worse.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please remain calm and seated!” the airhostess said over the speakers after people had begun shouting and screaming as the shaking worsened.

This isn’t happening.

The realization was slow to dawn on him, but it did. That mutter about New Orleans... David hadn’t muttered a single other thing. Just ‘New Orleans’.

A trans-Atlantic flight will have nowhere to land, and the weather institutes inform airlines of all weather forecasts with more than ninety percent certainty. Missing a storm this violent couldn’t happen.

Luchenzo felt his entire body relax, and a small smile even made its way onto his lips.

*This is it, isn't it? I underestimated my prey, and now I'm going to pay for it. David Kane... you were truly a worthy opponent, an opponent to fear. You dictated my every action, didn't you? **You** erased the forecast, **you** made sure my flight was booked today. Didn't you?*

The shaking grew in intensity, and Luchenzo's ears picked up on the panicking pilots, telling the airhostesses that the flight was going down. Luchenzo began chuckling faintly. He was vaguely aware of the woman staring wildly at him to his left, but he didn't care. After all, there was no point to it now. David Kane had shown his true nature as a monster who would sacrifice innocent humans, and even children just to kill Luchenzo.

In a way, I suppose, I should be honored. To take such drastic measures to get rid of only me. I can't say it's been fun, but... it has certainly been interesting, David Kane.

Luchenzo felt the violent rattle as an engine on the right wing of the aircraft malfunctioned, and the plane started spiraling downwards, slowly twisting, quickly descending. Luchenzo closed his eyes and leant back into his seat, relaxing completely. He wouldn't survive this crash, so where was the point in fretting? Strangely enough, he found his mind wandering back to his uncle, his parents. His family. How nice it would have been if he could join them in Heaven. But alas, Luchenzo knew that, with the state of his soul, he would forever be condemned to Hell.

Still, Luchenzo felt it poetic; he had hunted the unnatural his entire life, and he was an unnatural creature himself. Yet, here he was. About to die a completely natural and rather common death.

If I could see them again... what would I tell them? I wonder...

Luchenzo barely registered his body snapping into the seatbelt incredibly tightly, and his head slamming into the plastic covering of the seat in front of him, before everything went dark, and Judas had finally hanged himself.



French Quarter, New Orleans

September 19th, 2015

David casually walked down Royal Street, as he had so many times in the past. He was once again wearing his signature jeans, Henley, and utility jacket, all black. His hands were stuffed in his pockets, and he just loitered down the pavement. The gentle breeze was warm, and the city radiated with life he had missed. Feeling the pulsating rhythm of the life ebbing throughout the home of jazz.

Jack was making arrangements to have the entrance to Katherine's tomb resealed, and to make sure the workers' memories were erased, wiped, *deleted*. David had also instructed Jack to find a particular Tremere he knew, and who owed him a favor. The Tremere was to seal off the tomb magically, and to make sure that no one, even David himself, couldn't get back in. Granted, that last bit was impossible, but it was merely a figure of speech, at any rate. The Tremere was an elder, and very skilled in Thaumaturgy, and David had faith in his ability to ward it against practically anything, save a Methuselah.

David's plan to assassinate Luchenzo had gone perfectly, as well. The Inquisition had quickly found the digital breadcrumbs SayMX had laid out for them in determining his haven.

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"It's done," SayMX said to David who was looking over his shoulder. "Anonymous, but not anonymous enough to be impossible to find. With feelers out, they should find it in a week or two."

"That's good enough for me. Thank you, X," David smiled and clapped the Nosferatu on the shoulder.

• • •

The information provided by a Nosferatu he knew in Rome about the rigging of his haven had been helpful.

• • •

Emma stormed out of the room, pissed that David was leaving for what could be months. David heard her stomp upstairs, before slamming her door shut. David turned his eyes back down to his laptop. He was reading an email from a Nosferatu, Henry, situated in Rome. According to his network, the Inquisition was rigging an apartment with explosives, under the guise of pest-extermination. David frowned lightly.

That will take out the entire building, if not the buildings surrounding it. You're a terrifying human, Luchenzo.

• • •

Of course, making a body-double of himself enter the apartment in his stead was quite ingenious of an idea on John's behalf. It had merely been a mindless homunculus with a pre-programmed routine David had installed into its empty mind, and granting it some of his unearthly strength was simple, if leaving him slightly more vulnerable for a while.

• • •

David was sitting in the private jet with a mortal homunculus perfectly resembling himself. Though he was no expert in the fleshcrafting art of the Tzimisce, he was accomplished enough to replicate his own features in the mindless body. He then pulled the double's head closer towards his own and stared it deep in the eyes. Using an ancient, nearly extinct technique of manipulating the minds of others, developed by the Ventrue millennia before, he enclosed a portion of his memories and experiences in the head of the homunculus, granting it the ability to mimic himself, to think, and make decisions for itself, though only for a few hours. He then bit his thumb and smeared a small measure of his vitae on its forehead. He then closed his eyes and focused. The living homunculus paled considerably, and its skin became somewhat taut. When he reopened his eyes, he and the homunculus smiled at one another.

"I never get tired of our games," the construct mused.

"Nor I," David replied with the same smirk. "Now, let's spring the trap."



Granted, he needed to discover where Luchenzo would be, where he lived, those things. With the world thinking him dead, it would be a simple matter.



David sat in the darkness of the living-room, his eyes glowing ominously red. Dark thoughts swirled through his head. Sitting in this house, he would have to steel himself, and be ready to realize every threat he would make. *Ispettore Capo Alfredo Ferinni*, Chief Inspector of one of Rome's precincts near the Vatican, would soon be home after a long night at the office. His wife, thirty-seven-year-old Maria, and his sixteen-year-old daughter Alcina, had

both gone to bed, and were sleeping soundly. Maria, at least. Alcina had been a naughty girl and had her boyfriend sneak in through the window in her room. Even as he sat in the darkness, his superhuman senses picked up on the steady breathing of Maria, and the dull thumping of Alcina's bed.

Well, now I have another potential hostage.

The elder vampire heard the front door silently open and close, and footsteps, along with a steady heartbeat and steady breathing. Soon, David's perfect vision picked out the silhouette of chief Inspector Ferinni. Ferinni stopped when he noticed the pair of glowing eyes pierce the darkness.

"So good of you to join me, Alfredo," David said in Italian with a dark voice. "I have a small favor to ask of you."

Ferinni quickly pulled out the pistol from his holster and trained it on David, the forty-three-year-old-looking policeman's hands shaking.

"Who are you!?"

"Someone who needs information. Information obtainable by a man of your position within the hierarchy of Italy's law enforcement agencies."

"Yeah!? Well, you're under arrest, bambino!"

David snorted humorlessly.

"As I understand it, you're a man who can be bought for the right price. Not to mention that you have been bought by my kind before. Tell me, were you given vampire blood before or after you met your first wife?"

Ferinni's eyes widened.

“What’re you talking about!?”

“You heard me, signore Ferinni. I know that you were born in nineteen–twenty–nine to Alfonzo and Nana Ferinni, down in Naples. Yet, you look quite spunky for being eighty–six. Not to mention that your current wife is your fourth, and your great–great–granddaughter. You can’t have a festino without incesto, am I right?”

Ferinni began visibly sweating, and swallowed audibly.

“And for the sake of Christo, put the gun away. You’ll only put a hole in my shirt and wake up your wife.”

“What have you done to Alcina!?”

“Oh, banish the thought from your mind. She is merely having fun fornicating with her boyfriend in her bedroom. She isn’t dead... though that **could** change.”

David’s voice became cold, and a freezing breeze swept through the room.

“All I want is all the information your government has on a man named Luchenzo Mirachelli. If you refuse to comply, I will knock you unconscious, tie you and your family, your daughter’s boyfriend included, to chairs. Then, I will make you and your family watch as I slowly eviscerate the poor boy.”

Tears were welling up in Ferinni’s eyes, and his lips quivered.

“Then, I will explain the circumstances of your wife’s heritage to her as I first rape, and then slowly dice your daughter into pieces, which I will proceed to deliver to her friends. After that, I will do the same to your wife, and finally, I will take a few hours in showing you some of my favorite interrogation techniques, before I kill you. And then, I will seek out someone who might be a little

more helpful.”

Ferinni dropped to his knees, and his pistol fell to the floor.

“I’ll give you anything,” he pleaded, snot and tears running down his face as his voice quivered hoarsely. “Just don’t hurt my family.”

Despite knowing that it was for the sake of his fellow Camarilla Kindred, and despite having found such interactions delightful in the past, David was sickened by his own words.



Of course, going into the Vatican under the guise of a drunken youth, and having to make an image of vomit appear from his mouth did hurt to some extent. But David needed to test out his powers in such close vicinity to the place he intended to infiltrate. Continually regenerating and overplaying his weakness had gone better than he could have hoped, and his intimidation of the younger inquisitors had spooked off idiots who may accidentally hurt him more than an experienced torturer would. That would have been terribly inconvenient.

He had known Damon was undercover in the Inquisition, but that he was in the Vatican chapter was ridiculously lucky. And now that the recently departed Luchenzo had reported that David had killed his human associate in the escape, no one would be looking for Damon, either.

A smile crept up on David’s lips. It had been a long time since he had such a great evening, back in the Big Easy. His home. And it had been a long time since he had devised such a devious scheme. David felt the slight tug of his Beast, urging him to do another.

“In time,” David muttered cheerily, with a sadistic smile

plastered on his face. "In time."

David soon reached the old warehouse which was his office. How he longed to walk through those doors and issue a command to gear up and get ready for an exercise. But he had already massacred the werewolves inhabiting Bayou St. John. He needed a new target. He ever so briefly wondered about Marcel, but he banished the thought as soon as it came into his head.

I don't want to throw this whole city into supernatural mayhem... however fun it may be.

David knew that the month in captivity, continually beaten, cut and branded by novice inquisitors had reawakened a small part of his former self. And, being honest with himself, he felt intoxicated by the old feelings welling up in him once more. Like a savory elder under his fangs, just waiting to relinquish their unwilling souls unto him. The amaranth was outlawed, but how he **craved** for it at that moment!

I should take a trip to New Mexico. No Justicar will care what I do to a few Sabbat packs.

David swept those thoughts out of his mind as he entered the familiar building. The clacking of SayMX's keyboard stopped, and a chair was pushed out. Soon, the Nosferatu emerged from the door to his office, and a wicked, crooked grin spread on his already deformed face.

"Red Alastor David Kane, in all his glory!" he exclaimed in mock worship. "Long may he remain dead!"

David walked over and affectionately wrapped his arms around the Nosferatu, who returned the gesture. After all,

they were family.

“It’s good to see you, X.”

“Likewise, boss.”

They let go and David clapped his hacking subordinate on the shoulder.

“All is well?”

“All is well,” SayMX repeated with a nod.

“Good.”

David walked down the hallway to William’s office. He knocked thrice before entering. When he opened the door, he found William sitting at his desk, scanning several pieces of paper. David’s keen eyes recognized them instantly as property deeds.

“Expanded to real estate?” David asked with a smirk.

William looked up, and once he saw David, he smiled wearily.

“Purchased a small cabin in the bayou,” he explained. “I’ll have builders out there to create a bunker beneath, and I’m having firearms and ammunition brought in. I thought a safehouse there would be useful.”

The Ventrue leant back in his chair and started tapping his index finger on the tabletop, quietly hammering out a melody David was all too familiar with.

“Requiem?” David mused. “Are you considering getting a real funeral?”

“Mozart was a master in the craft. It’s my favorite piece of his.”

“I prefer *Lacrimosa* myself,” David smirked. “You okay?”

“I am,” William confirmed. “My sire reached out to me. She wants me back in France. I don’t know why.”

David nodded slowly.

“You’re an elder, William. You’re your own man. Do as you wish. Just remember that that mark on your hand will never go away, no matter what your sire does.”

“I knew what I signed up for,” he nodded.

With that, David knocked the door with his knuckles and turned away. He walked through the common area and greeted Aiden with a nod as he turned to the stairs. He felt his chest tighten as though squeezed with a vice as he walked down the hallway of the upper floor. He stopped in front of the far-right door and placed his hand around the doorknob hesitantly. Taking a deep breath, he opened it and walked inside. The room looked exactly as Emma had left it, though with some dust covering the surfaces in there.

Vampires were undead, and as such, they didn’t shed dead skin, meaning that places inhabited by vampires rarely became dusty. After Emma had moved in, they’d had to make a cleaning policy to accommodate her mortal needs. The shadow of a smile appeared briefly on David’s face, before it turned stoic once more. Having Emma with them had been a good time. A couple of months where he could truly relax. Spend time with an innocent human, rekindle his own dying flame of humanity, if only a little. A flame which had come dangerously close to being extinguished over the past month. He would not fall to the Beast again, if he had a say in the matter. And his was the only intelligent voice in his head.

David closed his eyes and leant his head against the side of the door frame. A single drop of blood emerged from his left eye, and lazily rolled down his cold, dry, and dead cheek. He pushed his blood throughout his body and felt his skin gain warmth. His heart, though, remained as silent as ever. While he wouldn't give up his vampirism for anything, he did sometimes long for a truly mortal body. Breathing was a hollow, pointless thing to do, and even felt wrong at times. Food tasted like garbage. Water couldn't slake his thirst. And his heart didn't beat strongly, like it once had. There was a certain beauty to mortality. The fear of one day dying driving you to make your life as memorable as possible before your time was up. Having to work hard for every day of life, and being overjoyed when you survived. And, more than anything else, carrying the fear of dying in battle, making you strive your hardest to survive, to push past all your boundaries, and grow. A fear that David, much to his chagrin, had long since lost.

David had once told Emma that he couldn't trust himself, that he suspected that he subconsciously wished to die. And the fact that he was disappointed in Luchenzo for not managing to kill him confirmed it, to himself. David had long gone past his expiration date, and every day was a struggle, but not one for hard-earned life. It was a struggle to just remain sane, to keep the Beast at bay. And David had thought of surrendering to it, imagined it so many times, and had constantly been tempted to do it. To release his reigns of his body, and hoping the Beast would be too primal to let him survive. But David knew that it wasn't like that. His own Beast, and the Beasts of elders were generally very cunning creatures. A neonate, or even old ancillae would go berserk, and have no regard for their own safety.

But the Beasts of elders and Methuselahs were different. They were clever, deceptive. They could mimic their host almost perfectly. They were perfectly aware of their weaknesses. Another curse of the truly ancient Kindred.

David turned around and closed the door to the room behind him. He was certain that he would see Emma again. After all, she would want to reenter society, and New Orleans was her home, just as it was his. It might not be for years, or maybe even decades, but it would happen. And at that time, David wouldn't be sure what she would do. But he would protect her, like he always had. A few vampires had tried feeding on her before he revealed himself to her. They had all been reduced to ash before they could move in on her. While she was at college, he had Jason and two other members of the Kane family watch over her.

The Kane family. David had achieved many things, social, political, and magical. But they were his finest creation. Tzimisce sorcerers had employed revenants for almost two thousand years, utilizing their Koldunic rites and rituals to warp a ghoul-fetus as it was growing in its ghould mother's womb, feeding her a concoction of enriched vitae throughout the pregnancy. They had certainly created many families of revenants several centuries old.

But the Kane revenants had been around for longer. He found them in Greece long before the time of Christ, and they were willing to follow him, seeing him as a kind of god, most likely. Their attitude towards him had changed radically until the modern nights, where they saw him as more of a patron and commander than a higher power. Seeing as they were created from his powerful blood, using ancient and powerful magics, they were stronger than

average ghouls by far, and most could contend with a relatively young ancilla on practically even ground.

Even then, they were usually far smarter, more cunning, and far more deceptive than most Kindred. They were raised from a young age to be assassins and fighters, though they were free to go out into the world and see it for themselves. Many had become managers for David's firms and companies, as well as overseeing his funding and accounts with one central bank they had established around the twelfth century, and which had become one of the leading banks in the world. Granted, such a title was only applicable to the part of it which harbored the accounts of mafias, criminal syndicates and money launderers, who paid them to keep their records straight. The Kane clan at large was global and steeped in crime, being yakuza, triads, mafiosos and any other criminal organization you could imagine. But the main family still stayed in a large plantation, some hours' drive north-west of New Orleans, and they were completely legit, some being lawyers, doctors, policemen or soldiers in the army.

Other Kanes became career criminals, or mercenaries with the skills they had picked up during their childhood, and helped bolster the already ridiculous funding the family had, which was shared with David. The one revenant family on the planet no other Kindred knew of, but David and his brothers. David still didn't know what the deal about the Kane family's idealization of him was, but he had given them restrictions, like every other revenant bloodline, to keep them in check. All of them were blood bonded to him, and shared his vulnerability to crosses and silver.

Jason lived underneath David because he was David's

most trusted lieutenant of the family, David's right-hand man. Jason would rather brutally eviscerate himself with a rusty spoon than divulge David's personal information to an enemy, and David valued such loyalty more than anything else. Jason was also the oldest of the Kane family, as of a few years prior, when the eldest had decided to stop taking David's blood, and rest peacefully. David had held a speech for his funeral, in the plantation's private graveyard. The old ghoul had been a trusted friend and was sorely missed. Now, at almost six hundred years, Jason was the oldest, and he wasn't showing signs of wanting to stop.

David contemplated his reason for creating the Kane clan in the first place. He couldn't remember why he had done it. Had he been lonely? Had he been sad, hurt? David shook his head wearily. Old age was nothing new, but the weariness of the centuries turning into millennia weighed down on him from time to time, giving him a temporary depression, if he had to make an educated guess. It would last for days, months or even years, but it would go away, and make him more enthusiastic about his unlife once again. His unlife was an unending cycle of depression and elation, and that in and of itself was incredibly taxing on his mental health, or whatever passed for it when your brain's neurochemistry didn't work.

Yet, in the face of all these issues, all these things that made him want to give up, he carried on, never stopping, rarely resting. When he did find respite, it was brief and sweet, and never ended well. Lykomedes and Katherine had only been two of dozens of people, human and otherwise, which David had found spiritual and emotional comfort with, only for them to be brutally murdered, and very rarely, die of old age. He had learnt over dozens of cruel lessons

that loving someone, fully opening yourself to them, made you uniquely vulnerable, in both wondrous and terrifying ways.

David slowly made his way to the stairs up to the roof, and quietly ascended them. He came out of the door and was hit with a cool breeze of the night residing over New Orleans. No, David didn't particularly miss the sun, but it was refreshing to shed your undead body for a semi-mortal one and walking in the daylight with little fear of burning to death. He took deep breaths, letting the scents of the city course through his head and relishing it. He briefly felt the presence of Emma standing beside him, but he was well aware that it was a phantom impression set on by his subconscious. Emma was in Tibet, and likely hated his guts. But he was a monster, as he had always been and would always be. He had accepted that fact, and didn't correct others when they said it. But would a monster truly fall in love? **Could** it? Would it cling to a dwindling humanity, hold on for dear life, and try to treat kind people kindly, return the good graced granted unto it? Would it be loyal to those loyal to it?

So many questions, each as difficult as the last. But such questions had been the sole questions David couldn't even begin to guess at, and he was starting to lose faith that he ever would. Indeed, were they even in need of answers? Were they open to interpretation, as practically every other question was?

The horizon in the distance was starting to brighten, heralding the coming of the deadly sun. David contemplated staying out there and letting the sun consume him. But his father had told him to come find him, to

reassemble him. David took little comfort in the fact that his father would likely consume him, as he would roam the world to consume his other sons as well, if David didn't bring them to him. David took less comfort in the fact that the creature they called their father wasn't the mortal man who gave birth to them. Indeed, the origins of each and every single one of David and his brothers were unknown to any of them. As far as they were concerned, they didn't have an origin. They just *were*, and they had each come up with their own origin story. The only thing they knew for certain was that they were related *somehow* through their so-called father, and that they were almost identical to each other. Going with the story of being half-brothers born by him, who shared their appearance, was the easiest.

David's earliest memory had been in Iraq. Domenico said his first memory was of Turkey. And Darius' first had been in Egypt. Damon's had been Greece, Darui's had been China, Desmond's in Germany, and Danyal's was in Russia. Seven boys, all having their first experiences of the world as grown men. Seven immortal children, even if not all of them were vampires. Darius and David had their theories as to how and why. After all, their father was himself a powerful sorcerer. But their father had entrusted the knowledge of his location to David only, and David had sealed that knowledge away to keep it safe. And now, David was supposed to round up the children and bring them to their father, almost certainly as a 'welcome back from torpor' feast.



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?"

"Well, not exactly", the man said. "I am having some... difficulties, in revealing myself to you, it would seem."

The man closed his eyes in concentration for a moment, and then his body shimmered and blurred. Soon, in front of David stood what was practically a mirror image of himself.

"Father!?"

"Yes, Domenico. It is I."

"You'll have to forgive me, father, but Domenico Valerius now belongs to Lagesh. I am David Kane, now."

"Oh," the vampire frowned lightly. "Well, it is not as if I myself have not gone by several names."

"I'm surprised to hear you speak English, though."

"Yes, I must admit, my soul has observed mortals for the past few months, to see what goes on in the world at large. Some very interesting things, most definitely."

"And this is your soul, here?"

"In a manner of speaking," David's 'father' admitted. "More importantly, I have deemed it time for you and your brothers to return to my resting place. I have waited long enough for my time of judgement."

"As you wish, Dayo," David nodded in defeat.

The vampire now identified as Dayo looked strangely at his oldest

son.

"Does this bother you, my child?"

"I admit, it does," David looked Dayo in the eyes. "I have settled into a good place, with Kindred and kine I respect."

Dayo's eyes seemed curious.

"If I survive what I intend to do, David, I will let you resume your life afterwards. But I need your aid in achieving my goal, our goal."

"But what is this goal?" David asked. "Who wronged you, incurred your wrath?"

"That will be made clear in time, son. For now, beware the descendants of your older brother, Halesh. They are conspiring against you and your precious Carmilla."

"Camarilla," David corrected his father.

"If you insist," Dayo waved his hand dismissively. "I cannot wait much longer. I have sensed the movements of my prey, and I must act. You and your brothers are no match for a single one of them."

"We are strong, father," David countered, "Stronger than any other. Together, there is nothing we can't ac—"

"Do not speak as if you know the enemy, boy!" Dayo yelled. "I did once, and it cost me all I loved, all I held dear! These things are vile, filthy, and terrible beyond anything you can imagine, and I will not rest peacefully until they are no more!"

With that final statement, Dayo vanished into thin air, as a cloud of smoke dispersed by a strong wind, leaving behind a shaken David. A state which was particularly unusual for him. He hadn't been in contact with his father since before the birth of Christ, and

this time, his father was angry. He was restless, and that meant that something far more terrible than a Methuselah was coming.

"Has Gehenna come?" David whispered, but there was no reply.



If he was going to be consumed by his father...then there wasn't really much else to do, was there?

David pulled out a cigarette and lit it as he stood outside, watching the horizon grow just a little brighter every minute. He puffed away at it, and enjoyed the tranquil he would have before Domenico somehow managed to get Beckett to New Orleans. Or get David to wherever Beckett was. He would have to make a serious offer, and he had several valuable items of Kindred origin and relating to Kindred history in deposit boxes around the world. He just had to figure out what price Beckett would likely want the most. Seeing as Beckett was the most famous Kindred anthropologist, that would be tough. David might even have to go raid his stash in Namibia, or Afghanistan.

But for now, David would just sit back, and enjoy a last cigarette before he once again died for the day, as every Kindred invariably did.

When In Rome

David flew to Rome to investigate trouble stirring up with the Roman Kindred, and to, if necessary and possible, assassinate the cause of the problem.

However, his plans are quite thoroughly foiled. As soon as he reaches his safehouse, it is blown up, and several people die in the suspected gas leak. David has been neutralized. But he wasn't the only Alastor in the city, sent to investigate the trouble.

Domenico Valerius, an old friend and fellow Alastor for the Camarilla, takes up the task by himself. However, it would seem that Lady Luck is smiling upon him... or is she? A woman he has met only rarely before, but of whom he knows a great deal, joins him in this task. What her motives are, and why she follows him, he doesn't know, but he will take company where he can get it.

Join Domenico on this journey, where plots are uncovered, secrets are revealed, immortals are murdered and death is ever-present. For such things, and much more, happen...

When In Rome