

~~Damien~~

A night off, finally. Maria had demanded he take it, after learning of his rather brash encounter with Parker and Vicky. Matt had said his pack were going on a trip and wanted their enforcer along, as well. He didn't like being put off the hunt for a night, when hunters were out there, hiding, sneaking, and planning to kill them all. But he couldn't deny that working nearly every hour of the night, every night, for several weeks, had been taxing.

Best of all, he could spend some time with Fiona.

"Mah apartment!" She swung the door open, and bounced several times as she hopped in, before turning around and grinning at him.

He followed her in, looking around and taking in the sights. It was, to his surprise, utterly normal. Fiona was anything but a normal girl, from her bouncy, cheerful attitude that could not be smothered, no matter how dire things got, to the fact she was also a literal monster. The apartment reflected none of that. No, that wasn't true. As his brain analyzed, it became clear the apartment was, in fact, very cheerful.

It was a studio apartment, so it didn't take long to take in everything. It was a cheap apartment, cheap building, on the edge of South Side near the Carthian district, and Damien found himself smiling as he looked at it. He was so used to the extravagances of the Invictus, and the eccentricities of old vampires like Maria, that he'd almost forgotten most people lived in simple, small apartments, in buildings that barely remained standing. He could almost hear the cockroaches he assumed hid in the walls.

She was messy. Well, maybe messy wasn't the right word; a splattering of random objects on the floor, slippers, a plush toy, a pair of jeans and some socks, wasn't exactly a mess. But her tastes were quirky and eclectic, that was for sure. On the windowsill, she had a couple potted cacti. On the walls, she had several posters of what he could only imagine were K-pop bands; supposedly considered music by the uneducated, to Maria's chagrin. She had a desk in the corner, a small thing of wood, slightly warped with age, and a laptop sat upon it, with pink and blue stickers decorating its white casing. Her bed was a double, with pink sheets and bright blue pillows that reminded him of cotton candy. Several stuffed animals sat on the bed, most of them rabbits with big, child-like black eyes, and long floppy ears.

Maybe that's why she liked bouncing around everywhere? Rabbit envy.

He took off his shoes, set them aside, and couldn't help but laugh when he met her eyes. Sometime, during his analysis, her smile had become a frown, but it was too adorable to not chuckle at.

“Hey! I'm just a young woman trying to survive in a town, living off the wee bits of money I get from my meals. Dinnae make fun of my apartment! Ye wanker!”

He held up his hands in surrender. “I lived in literal holes for fifty years, Fiona. This place looks great to me. Looks like a home.”

“It does!” She threw herself onto the bed, and tossed her leather jacket onto the floor. Naturally, he picked it up and hung in the closet by the front door. There was a winter coat inside, along with a rain coat, and different shoes. A lot of different shoes, maybe nine. He was very tempted to tease her about that.

She was in jeans and a white t-shirt, one that hugged her large breasts in a way he couldn't help but notice. Maybe she was wearing one a little smaller than she should have, so he'd notice she was wearing a white bra, one that made everything look so... bouncy. She was also wearing white socks with little rabbits drawn on them.

“If you wanted, I could set you up with a more expensive place.”

“Ye can?”

“Yeah. Invictus pay well.” He was making six figures, and it was money he didn't need. Maria considered it a standard pay for someone who put their lives on the line for the Invictus, while also being at the forefront of assaults as a Right Hand, and attempting to revive the Lancea et Sanctum. Perhaps he could put the money toward reviving the Second Estate, but how to do that was the bigger question in that regard.

“Maybe when I'm older. But, living in a nook like this is part of growing up, ye ken?”

Laughing again, he walked over to her and sat on the edge of her bed. “I suppose that's true.”

“Besides, I like it.”

“I do too.”

She giggled, reached out, and started pulling his trench coat off his shoulders. “Are ye nae hot?”

He helped her, doing his best to ignore the butterflies in his withered stomach at the feel of a woman removing his jacket. Such a simple touch that elicited such a strong response.

“Vampire. Body heat not really a thing.”

“Like a lizard?”

“Sort of. More like, being cold or hot doesn’t really mean anything to me.” Sweltering heat, freezing cold, as long as it wasn’t literally hot or cold enough to damage tissue, it didn’t affect vampires.

“Oh. Azamel says ye Kindred are a distant cousin to us Begotten. The same, but different. The Horrors inside ye, ye call them Beasts, affect ye in a different way than us. Ye ken?”

That was an interesting theory. “A better question for the Ordo Dracul, I suppose.”

“But, I thought ye were religious? Like, religious for vampires? Do ye nae have an idea of where ya came from?”

“We do, but for vampires and humans. The Testament of Longinus says little about other paranormals.”

“Are ye nae curious?”

He nodded, took his coat from her, and hung it up in her closet. A sideways glance showed her bathroom door was open, and he could see the curtain of her shower; it was clear, with bright yellow flowers on it.

“I guess. Maybe a little. I try and let faith guide me, when I can, when it comes to questions larger than life.”

“Oh?”

“Mhmm. There are questions out there we can’t answer, and while I’ll try and keep an open mind to potential explanations”—against Lucas’s judgment—“I cannot deny there exists something beyond science.” He gestured to her, and him. Paranormals, magic, spirits and other dimensions, much of it existed outside the purview of science as far as he could tell. “God, or something equivalent, seems a possibility, and a decent one, does he not?”

She thought about that for a moment, tapping a finger on her chin. “As long as God isnae an old man sitting in a chair, judging people for wankin’ all the time.”

He choked on a laugh. Oh dear Lord.

“I suppose many Christians believe God is male, with a penis and a white beard, casting judgment for ultimately inconsequential actions and intentions. Lucas was such a vampire.” He came to the bed and sat down, undoing the buttons of his suit jacket as he did. Fiona was quick to shift over to him, take

the jacket, and set it on the back of her desk chair. “I’m trying to be a little more open minded than he was.”

“Probably a smart idea.” Giggling, she crawled up behind him, hugged him snug and tight, and set her chin on his shoulder. “Mah parents dragged me to church every now and again, but I dinnae think they really believed it. Think they just wanted to teach me some morals.”

“They failed.”

The beautiful monster erupted into more giggles, and hugged him harder. “I’m a bad lass.”

“No denying that.”

“I should be punished.” She kissed his neck, hugging him tighter, and giggled yet again. She was excited.

“I... I have trouble believing this is real.”

“Wha?”

“All the Kindred I know, get into relationships in bizarre ways, dramatic ways. They don’t start dating because they just happen to like each other, get along and are attracted to each other.”

“Oh! Drama! I see what ye need, now.” She got up and stomped around a few times, feet hitting her carpet with enough weight to go thud thud. “The world is going to end tomorrow, Damien! We... we only have tonight. And I cannae die knowing that—”

He reached out, took her hand, and yanked her back onto the bed. With a squeal, she threw her arms around him, and the two of them landed on their sides, facing each other.

“Point made. Drama is dumb.”

“Oh I dinnae know about that. It’s fun, especially for a young lass like me.” Lying there, opposite from him and facing him, she leaned in closer and set a kiss on his chin. “And besides, I think there’s some drama.”

He raised a brow. “Is there?”

“Mhmm. I am just a wee lass, drawn in by the emo vampire.”

Ok, that made him laugh. “Two weeks ago, you tied me up in a giant spider’s web.”

“That was nae me! That was Vrall.”

“You are Vrall.”

Her smile broke for a moment, and she nodded. “Aye.” Sighing, she sat up, and he did along with her, only for her to sneak in behind him again, and start hugging him from behind once more.

“You... don’t like being Vrall?”

“It’s nae about liking. She and I are the same, but... like with yer Beast, do ye not sometimes wish yer own feelings were nae so... fucked with?”

Oh. That. The call of the Beast and its hungers were instinct, a part of him, and after having dealt with them for so long, he barely noticed them anymore. “I suppose it’s a little easier for me to ignore it. It can’t talk to me. Assuming Vrall talks to you?”

“Well, Vrall cannae really talk to me. She is me. I have her memories, and her personality emerges when I’m in mah nightmare.” She hugged him tighter, pressing her body to his back as she squeezed. “I think that’s drama enough. Anymore and it’d be like one of my shows.”

Ah yes, the eternal sin of women everywhere: bad television. He looked over at her laptop, and smiled at the cute animals that danced across it as her screensaver. Undoubtedly, she watched Netflix and whatnot on it, and indulged other wastes of time on the internet. He envied her.

That wasn’t true. Her hungers were far worse than this own, and the dark side of her was a far greater presence than his Beast. And that, put her silly, terribly cute but juvenile home into perspective. He looked around, tilting his head at the pictures on the walls, at the obvious obsession with cute animals and cute musicians she had, and contrasted it against the nightmare horror that lurked inside her. She’d said that, when she was younger, she was haunted by nightmares every night, and that they were always about her being pursued by a creature in the dark, a creature with eight legs.

He turned his head and studied her bubbly smile. For so long, she must have been a fun, simple young girl, who did everything in her power to not let her strange nightmares ruin her. Tragic, he supposed. It must have been horrifying, to be stalked by a creature in her dreams, especially when her life gave no reason for it.

He slid out of her hug, and stepped up to one of the posters.

“Damien?”

“Sorry, just...” It was another cute creature, a ferret, pouncing on a cat, who was delighted to be play fighting. Not a photograph, but something drawn in a cutesy, silly cartoon style.

They’d both had rough lives, and she’d embraced everything fun, silly, bright, and cute she could get her hands on, to keep it from tainting who she was. Considering how powerful a force her horror

was, it was a wonder she managed to do that. Most people, him included, would have let it destroy who they were, until they devolved into self-loathing. Moping, brooding, the things he'd done for so many decades.

“Do ye like that one?” she said, eyebrow raised.

He laughed as he smiled at her. “Not for me, no. I like that you like it.” He liked that, unlike him, she had a tenacity to her, a desire to hold onto who she was and what she liked. He'd been a malleable fool when he was her age. She'd stood against something horrible, something she likely hadn't been able to understand, and didn't let it break her. She was, by night, a scary as all Hell monster who devoured people and their fears. By day, she was a bouncy, silly girl, that liked rabbits, cats, ferrets, dogs, and likely anything she could hug, pet, feed, and take care of.

He supposed a more cynical view would be that she refused to accept reality. And that was a view he probably would have defaulted to, once upon a time. But, after having spent a couple weeks hunting for hunters with her, he couldn't deny her optimism and joviality were affecting him. It was contagious.

She blinked at him, obviously confused. That was fine. If she didn't understand why she did the things she did, all the better. They didn't need two over-analytical people in the relationship.

“Aye, I do like it!”

“I don't smell any animals.” With his new insight, it was a surprise he didn't see at least a cat running around. Any minute now, he expected a small dog to hop out of the bathroom, or maybe for a chinchilla or something equally fluffy to land on the windowsill. Nothing.

“Oh? Oh! A pet, ye mean. I... I've always wanted one, but... I dinnae know. It might not like me, because of Vrall, ye ken?”

He shook his head as he came back to the bed, and crawled across it to join her. “That is a real possibility, but I think any pet you get and raise from a young age will be fine. That Eric fellow has a cat, and he's a werewolf.”

She blushed a little at the mention of him. “Right.”

“I... suppose you saw the cat I'm talking about.” Eric's cat, a creature Jessy insisted was the most amazing pet in the world.

“I did.”

“Still surprised you're dating me, not him.”

“Well, like I said, yer both stupid, but a different kind of stupid. I thought I liked him, but I know better now. I like ye a lot more.” She reached down, grabbed the hem of her t-shirt, and pulled it up over her head. Her hair bounced a little, but like her, the frizzy thing was surprisingly resilient.

Damien tried to keep his eyes on her, but when a woman is only a foot away from you, wearing only jeans and a bra, it’s hard to not stare at the chest area. It wasn’t a sexy bra, with special lace or anything. It was a perfectly normal white bra, and she looked amazing in it.

“I, um—”

“Strip!” Giggling, she undid the buckle of her jeans, and wiggled out of them. That warranted some staring as well. “We’re gonna do a lot of firsts today.”

He kept his eyes on her—more like, unable to look away, as he started undoing the buttons of his shirt. “We are?”

“Aye! After all this, I’m still a virgin I’ll have ye know!”

He raised a brow at that. Well, it was true he’d had sex with her horror’s body, not her human body. And apparently, despite her sexual adventures with Eric, they hadn’t ever had sex. It didn’t really matter to him whether they did or not, but it was surprising that someone as assured of herself, and extroverted and outgoing as herself, hadn’t had sex before. Funny that she was the virgin, while the scary monster inside her, had a history of orgies with cultures that worshiped her, centuries ago.

Wearing nothing but her plain white bra and underwear, and her cute socks, she reached out and slid his shirt off his shoulders. He almost didn’t realize she was touching him, as his eyes locked onto the sight of her body. Curvy legs, wide hips, massive breasts, and her thin-but-not-too-thin physique gave her such a soft looking body. Every part of him wanted to pin it beneath him.

He licked a fang, and Blushed Life. He thought about asking first, but stopped himself. It had become clear from their interactions that she wanted him to take charge, to be aggressive with her, to be the beast that hunts the doe. She liked being treated as a cute, innocent little creature, helpless to stop a beast from having its way with her. And, to his surprise, he enjoyed giving into the aggressive desires he normally kept locked deep in his chest.

Once he was out of the shirt, he took her hand, and set it against the fly of his suit pants. He also took her other, and set them against his abdomen, and the many abs carved there. Instant delight in her eyes, and she squealed between giggles as she traced them, while struggling to undo the zipper of his fly. He was being far more playful than he usually was, he knew it, she knew it, and it was fun.

She made him fun.

He helped her get the pants off him, and he made sure the boxers came off with, and his socks, leaving him naked. She licked her lips as she looked him up and down, staying close on her knees, and now using both hands to touch his arms, chest, and abdomen.

“It’s such a shame,” she said.

“Mmm?”

“Ye permanently have such a nice body, all lean and defined and... mmm.” She almost purred as she came in closer, and set a kiss on his shoulder. “Ye cannae get fat! That’d make any lass die with envy, but, ye cannae eat food. Nae cake or pizza, nothing.”

“Lucas demanded I get into the best shape possible, before... you know.” He struggled to keep his growl quiet as he looked down at the woman’s body. He was naked, but she still had her underwear and bra on. Not fair. He was blatantly aroused too, cock standing out from the smooth skin of his pelvis, announcing his obvious hunger.

“Oh, ye shaved it,” she said, sliding in closer so his right knee was between both of hers. So close, she set one hand on the small of his back, while the other traced down his abs, then down further to the smooth skin, and to the base of his member.

He shivered as she slowly encased it in her hand. The feel of a hand, fingers, palm, circling his girth in experimental squeezes, drew a quiet growl from him, and Fiona looked up at him with her big doe eyes all the more. She put on that please-don’t-hurt-me-I’m-so-innocent-and-pure face, bit her bottom lip, and continued to idly stroke the base inch of his length in slow pulses.

“I... thought maybe, since it’s the ‘in thing’ to do in Dolareido, I should?” he said.

She giggled, but her eyes slid down his body with anything but silly laughter. They were hungry. “It looks... really good... here.” She let go of his shaft, and slid a finger down from his navel, down the abs beneath, and to where the muscles sat just above his pubic bone.

Listening to his own building hunger, he leaned down over her, reached behind her, and worked the clasp of her bra. It took several seconds longer than he’d have liked, and she giggled into his neck as he struggled. But she let him work, and soon the large piece of white fabric fell off her breasts, and with a little wiggling from her, down her arms.

She blushed a little, and it made her pale skin glow red. “Did ye like the pictures I sent ye?” As she said it, she sat up straight, and hugged her bust, forearms underneath while her biceps pressed them together. They were very bottom heavy, and they weighed down on her forearms as they spilled over them, while her pink nipples poked outward from her swelling areolas.

He stared at them, and gulped. He hadn't been able to touch Vrall, being trapped in a web and all. But Fiona was right there, topless, inviting his touch. The last time he'd touched her like this, he'd pounced her, drained her, fingered her, and almost took it a lot further. This time, he could take it much further, all the way, if Vrall was to be believed; and she was.

He reached out with a hand, and she lowered her arms as he set his palm underneath one of her breasts. Instant tingles coursed through him, and he felt growing heat between his legs, as he marveled at the sensation of her pale breast sitting on his palm. It overflowed his grip completely, and he stared in awe as a small wiggle of his fingers caused it to ripple. He pushed up a little harder, just enough to make it bounce, and Fiona burst into a fit of giggles as she watched him experiment.

“Aye, I think ye did.”

He crawled toward her, but being already so close left her with no choice but to fall back. Her squeak of surprise was intoxicating. She blinked at him, but her surprise faded as he brought his head down over her chest, and set his lips to her breast.

Her squeaks and giggles turned into mewls, and he smiled into her breast as he slowly brought her nipple into his mouth. It was swollen, and instinct told him there was only thing you can do with a swollen nipple: suckle on it. So he did, and he groaned into her body, intoxicated by the sensation of her massive breast's softness and how it molded to his face.

They could talk later. For now, he was going to do what she kept asking him for, what he wanted to do, and listen to his body's hungers. Just give in, take her, have her, and drink her.

With him lying on top of her, half his weight on her and half on the bed next to her hip, his arm closer to her was free to find her legs. Smooth, curvy, delicious legs. As he slid his fingers up their contours, he could feel her start to shiver, quivering, but her legs spread without prompting.

He set his hand against her stomach, slid his fingers underneath her underwear, down smooth shaved skin, and down to her sex. Last time he did this, he'd had his fangs in her neck. This time, he wanted to try tenderly licking and suckling on her nipple first, before fangs came into the picture. It sent fire through his body, when he felt some subtle wetness on his fingers as they traced along her sex's lips. She liked this, a lot. And knowing that she liked it, liked having his body on her, his lips on her breast, and his fingers tickling along her lower lips, was a loud siren in his head demanding for more.

“Damien! Mah tits are sensitive, ye ken? Be... gentle...”

He lifted his head, but in that moment, found a split second's disappointment on her face. Right, she liked being sweet, docile, but she didn't want him to be like that. She wanted him to ignore her

pleas, and have his way with her. He immediately set his lips back onto her breasts, and suckled harder, lifting his head so her breast lifted from her chest with him. She squealed again, and both her hands found his head.

They fell to the blankets, and squeezed her sheets into bundles around her fingers, as his wet fingers began to massage her clitoris.

“Nnn... mmm.” She wriggled and squirmed a little, pushing her hips toward his hand, even as he devoured her breast. Her nipple swelled more, filling his mouth as he licked it, while his lips suckled, drawing it to his face again as he lifted his head, before his lips let it go. The way it jiggled as it settled against her ribs pulled another growl from him, and he licked his lips as he felt his hunger grow.

He backed up along her bed, slid his hand out from her underwear, and crawled between her legs. With her wanting him to be more and more aggressive, he let his natural desires out a little more; and they wanted to rip her underwear off. He took the fabric apart like it was tissue, leaving her completely naked save for her socks, and earning a squeak from her. He’d shocked her. Good.

He got down onto his stomach, hooked his arms under her thighs, and gazed upon her wet, tiny, glistening slit, before burying it in his mouth. Immediate gasps from her, filling the quiet room, and sending pulsing need through his body. Vral had made interesting sounds, lovely and hypnotizing sounds, but the way tiny Fiona mewled and whimpered as he buried her clitoris with his tongue, was intoxicating in a way he hadn’t expected.

“D-Damien! Please, slow down!” She reached out with both hands and pressed them to his forehead, gently pushing him away. With his arms hooked under her delicious thighs, he had the leeway to reach over her waist, grab her wrists, and pin them to the blankets around her. More squeaks, increasing in volume as she realized she was trapped, unable to stop him, as he devoured her pussy.

Not being able to stop him set her off. Her squirming and wriggling intensified for a second or two, but as it became obvious she couldn’t get her hands off the blankets to stop him, it was like gasoline thrown on a fire. Her breathing quickened, her mewls turned into moans, and her legs quivered on his arms and shoulders, as more juices flowed out of her.

When he tightened his grip on her wrists, the reaction was almost visceral. She squealed and arched her back, and he had to fight a little harder to keep her down as she came. He hadn’t expected her to cum so quickly; she’d been on the edge of need for days then, like he was.

While he didn't have any sexual history to draw on, he knew how to read, and had done his research. Instead of licking and suckling on her clitoris as she came, he eased up, letting her enjoy the bliss without spoiling it with too much stimulus.

It was his first time, and more importantly, his first time with her. Analysis skills kicked in, and he made mental notes of each and every reaction she made to his touch. First thing he noticed, was how easily she came; sort of made everything feel like cheating. Fiona was hyper into her sexuality, and he got the impression anything he did to her would make her feel good, as long as he held her down when he did it. Second thing, was how she gasped. A lick of his tongue drew a sharp inhale from her, that turned into a long groan as he rested his tongue against her clit, no longer moving it as she continued to climax. She liked being pushed a little further than his reading suggested.

It was like solving a puzzle, a beautiful, writhing puzzle.

He lifted his head and smiled down at her, her panting body, her closed eyes, her smile of pleasure, and her trembling legs. She was coming down from her pleasure high, and she giggled as she stopped trembling.

"Mmmm," she said, voice a whisper. Once he released her wrists, her hands drifted up and down her body, fingertips teasing along her skin, before they reached out for his waist.

He slid in closer while sitting on his ass. And before Fiona could realize what he was doing, he took her legs, pulled them toward him so they hooked around his hips, and then he took her waist. He pulled her up toward him, and she giggled as she set her hands on his shoulders, sitting between his thighs.

"So romantic!" she said, smile only growing.

He gulped as he looked her body up and down. With her hands on his shoulders, and her sitting between his legs, her legs hooked over his and around behind him, he could feel her body heat. His cock pointed up, aimed at her stomach, only several inches from her and her shivering body. Her heavy breasts, jutting out from her ribs with their bottom-heavy, teardrop shapes, made each breath she took blatant and hypnotic. And the feel of her quivering legs resting on his and his hips, filled him with hunger for more.

He slid his hands under her ass, squeezed the soft meat of her body, and lifted her.

"Oh!" With more squeaking giggles, she helped him align everything, one hand reaching down and grabbing his length. "Be... be slow, ok? Yer, um, pretty large, ye ken? And I'm... nae."

Nodding, he slowly lowered her down, and licked a canine as he felt the wet lips of her slit graze along his glans. He wanted to slam her small body down, feel her tiny walls spread taut around him, and watch her beautiful breasts bounce as he thrust into her. And, considering Fiona's personality, that sort of rough sex was inevitable. But it was a good idea to start slow, like she asked. It gave him time to analyze her more, figure out what she liked from how she responded, and the longer he got to enjoy this, the better.

He lowered her more, and a quiet growl rolled through him as he felt her clenching, wet muscles spread over the sensitive skin of his cock's head. Immediate sparks of pleasure danced down his length, and Fiona giggled and mewled simultaneously as she caught his eyes. He lowered her a little further, and she closed her eyes as she let go of his member, set her hand back on his shoulder, and groaned.

The slow journey of penetrating the feisty redhead, was exquisite torture. She was dripping wet, and boiling hot; combined with how tight and small her insides were, it made each inch he managed to slip into her euphoric. She squeezed in spurts as he went deeper, and gasped every so often, eyes staring down at him as her mouth parted. He tried to look up and meet her gaze, but his eyes couldn't stay away from her body, her breasts rippling with her shudders, and her small pussy spread wide around his girth.

She winced when he started to press against her depths, but wince turned into another groan as she sank another inch onto him, stretching her insides inward as she snuggled her thighs around his waist. As her lips found the base of his cock, and her lovely ass grew snug with his thighs, sitting on them, her hands slid under his arms to hug him. She set her forehead to his, and smiled as she squirmed, getting comfortable.

"No... longer... a virgin!" She kissed him, winked, and hugged tighter, pressing her breasts to his chest and setting her chin on his shoulder. "Well, I mean, I used a lot of toys and stuff, but they dinnae count."

He chuckled, but it came out constrained, mixing with a growl as his hunger continued to rise. "Con... congratulations."

"I can tell yer hungry," she said, whispering into his ear, and nudging her body against him. "Ye can drink me, ye ken. Any time ye want." He shivered as he felt her fingers trace up and down the muscles of his back and spine. "Maybe right now? Cause, yer... inside me, and we're all... snuggly, and... and I'm all tingly and... I'd probably cum right easy, aye."

Drinking her was still a scary thought. He hadn't done it since the first time, and the strange taste of her blood had been intoxicating, in a bizarre, overpowering way. The heat of it had been powerful, delicious with a kick, and he wanted more.

“Are you sure? I—”

“I trust ye. And... it... it was really good.” She squirmed, wriggling her hips left and right. He didn’t know if she knew how good that felt, but good Lord, the way her gripping, dripping insides milked his length as she adjusted her weight, was heaven.

He growled into her ear, breath flowing over her neck, and she whimpered all the more. He couldn’t help it. The Beast wanted to growl, and every time he gave into it, the results it earned were amazing. Muscles squeezed around his girth, hot juices soaked him, and she hugged him tighter, making sure her hard nipples were buried against his chest.

He opened his mouth, kissed her neck until she started whimpering again, and slowly sank his fangs into her.

“Nnn! Nn.... Oh... dinnae hurt me, ye evil... horrible... brute...” She squirmed again, and to his surprise, actually tried to escape. He couldn’t have that.

He put a stop to her escape attempts quickly. His hands reached behind her, grabbed hers by the wrists, and pinned them to her own back instead. With her hands pressed to the small of her back, by his own, she was trapped in his embrace, unable to squirm away, as he was basically free to press on her body, and keep her snug to his. Trapped. Helpless. Defenseless.

“Noo! Please... please dinnae...” Her legs kicked at the bed, heels digging into the blankets as she tried to find leverage to escape him. Every wriggling motion, every writhing twist of her body, made her insides clench like a vise, squeezing in milking spurts around his length. They were also making her pant and mewl, the friction of her tight depths on his cock pulling intoxicating noises from her.

But all of that became background noise, as he Kissed her. Blood, warm, thick, flowed over his tongue and into his body, filling him with tingling heat that spread throughout his limbs. Electricity coursed through him, and he groaned around her skin as the strange kick of her blood hit him. The Beast in his guts roared pleasure, demanding more, and he gave it, keeping his teeth deep in his prey’s neck as he swallowed down her life essence.

Her struggles continued, legs kicking at the bed, and body wriggling in useless attempts to escape his embrace. Futile. His hands were pressed to the small of her back, pinning her hands there, and keeping her body balls deep on his length. Each of her squirms and wriggles bathed his cock in bliss, and he started to press down on her lower back in a rhythm, a heartbeat pace, forcing her back and forth an inch on his length, as he continued to drain her. He needed more.

She came again. Part of him, a small part buried by everything else at the moment, told him he should be proud of that, delighted that he'd made his sexual partner enjoy herself so much. But right now, a much louder part told him to hold her down, keep her pinned on his cock, and Kiss her more. Hold her, embrace and trap her, drain her, and continue absorbing her exquisite, delicious, precious life blood. And it was delicious, with a flavor far more overwhelming, and an effect far more powerful, than any kine's blood. It had his whole body buzzing in seconds, and soon after, cumming.

"Please! Let... let me go... ye... monster..." Her trembles came and went in waves, and renewed more wet warmth as they returned, until he rolled his eyes up in bliss as he felt her insides spasm in quivering need.

He growled around her neck, and pressed on her hands harder, pushing her body snug to his own as he flooded her insides. His prey squealed, but it was a tired sound, weak, and her kicking legs and wriggling body began to slow. Her insides continued to squeeze, random spurts of muscle clenches working through her pussy, and milking him sporadically. Every moment inside her was bliss, the heat of his cum filling her and demanding he flex his inner muscles, only for her milking grip to coax more of his seed from him.

Soon, Fiona went limp. No longer struggling, the quivering woman leaned against his body, exhausted and spent. It was a signal that he should stop Kissing her; a signal that he desperately wanted to ignore. Despite the annoyed protests of the hungry creature in his soul, Damien forced his lips away from her neck, and licked the puncture marks closed. He let her wrists go, and kissed her jaw as he felt her hands dangle at her sides, fingers grazing the blankets.

He slid her off of him, set her butt against the blankets, and smiled down at her as she fell onto the bed like a bag of sand. Breathing hard, sweating, and quivering, she managed to keep her eyes half open as she looked up at him, but any attempt to move was defeated by her drained state. The blissful release of a post-Kiss coma. And with her legs spread wide around him, Damien was treated to the delicious site of her smooth, pink lips leaking white cum down her lovely thighs and buttocks.

And that was enough to trigger a need for more.

He reached down, and flipped her over. A vampire didn't need to be a Daeva or Nos to summon strength; Daeva and Nos would forever be naturals at summoning insane strength, but a Mekhet was quite capable of tapping into inhuman strength as well. Lifting and turning a small girl like Fiona onto her stomach was easy, and better yet, was the way she lay on the bed on her stomach, breasts squashed and visible along the outside of her ribs.

He reached over for her biggest pillow, and slid it under her hips, so her beautiful, bountiful ass was in the air, and legs together, so he could kneel around them. And, without being nearly as gentle as before, he guided his wet cock to her lips, and sank his length into her.

“Nnn!” The poor creature managed a squeal, but not much else. She was exhausted, trembling, and he could feel her legs struggle to move, but unable. The Kiss coma had rendered her helpless, defenseless, and sensitive.

He shivered as he enjoyed the bliss her quivering depths sent along his length, and he lowered himself onto her. He sank his weight onto his elbows around her torso, and most of his weight onto his hips and pelvis so they pressed snug to her ass. With her ass up on the pillow and legs together, trapped between his own, nothing stopped him from sinking himself down on her with all his weight, and the beautiful monster whimpered into the pillow as he started to thrust.

She managed to turn her head enough so she could rest her cheek to the blankets. Her eyes gleamed, despite still being half closed and struggling to stay that way. Even when he started to thrust harder, hard enough he knew he was hitting her to the base, and hitting places inside her that he probably should have treated more gently, she continued to whimper. Either getting that deep inside her didn't hurt her, or it did, and she loved it anyway. The message was clear: fuck her hard.

He grabbed her wrists again, and pinned them to the blankets around her head. Immediately, as if he'd pressed a magic button, her whimpers turned into moans again, and her clenching depths squeezed until it was hard to keep thrusting. He did though, because, no way could he stop now, with the gorgeous woman trembling underneath him, and leaking more juices onto his length.

And then, he tried something he never thought he'd try, in a million years, ever. He pushed his weight back up onto his knees so he was kneeling straight, looked down, and gave her a slap on the ass.

“Nnnnn!” She clenched on him hard enough to make him wince, before she went limp again, body trembling but unable to move. Her eyes closed, and her panting mewls grew a little louder, as he felt more of her juices trickle down his testicles.

Wow.

He spanked her twice more, each deliberate, each hard enough to make a bit of a sound, and spark a small sting on his palm. Each caused her ass to ripple with the impact, and for her pussy to grip down like her life depended on it, practically crushing his length. He thrust through her vise grip, and shivered at the bliss of her soaked, hot insides milking his glans, sending sparks of pleasure through him. His

fingers sank into the curved softness of her ass, and he thrust again, and again, until he felt the pleasure building into heat between his legs.

He pressed his chest down on her back again, lay on her body, pinned her wrists to the blankets again, and started to fuck her hard, driving his hips down upon her. Her bed shook, creaking with each impact, and her mewls mixed with her panting as she struggled to get breath. He didn't let her. He pounded down into her, robbing her of any air she tried to get, as he worked himself up to another orgasm.

He growled into her ear, and came inside her once again. His thrusts slowed, but each was a hard slam into her, causing the bed to bounce a little more violently than was strictly necessary. Neighbors would probably hear, and he didn't care. He smashed her down into the bed with each thrust, until he felt her hot cum renewing. He felt her try and lift her legs, maybe to kick at the bed, but she managed only a small bend of her knee before she collapsed again, closing her eyes as she soaked his cock.

He knelt up straight again, slowing down his thrusts as he focused on the pleasure. Her insides were insanely tight, and he made sure to stay balls deep inside her, as he adjusted his weight on his knees. His hands found her ass again, and he smiled down at her quivering body as he kneaded the large mounds. He slapped one again, and groaned as her insides responded with a hard squeeze, milking him with enough force that it was almost painful. But, to feel her boiling insides massaging every inch of his length with a death grip, was too pleasurable to not do again. Another spank made her shudder, and he groaned as he watched the heavenly mound ripple, and felt her muscles spasm around his cock until she'd managed to milk another few drops of his cum.

He blinked down at himself, and her, as the hunger for blood faded, and the hunger for sex along with it. He inched his legs back, and his cock slid out of her, letting cum spill from her slit and down onto her blankets and pillow. He stared, licking his lips as he took in the sight of her shivering pussy, and how her legs trembled. Good Lord.

Good Lord! He'd... he'd pinned her down, had rough sex, and spanked her! Spanking. Him?

"Fiona? You, uh... you alright?"

The redhead managed to a few, quiet whimpering noises, but didn't manage much movement. He touched her leg, shook it a few times, but still only managed a few murrms and meows from her. Even a shake hard enough to make her ass jiggle — damn that was hypnotizing — wasn't enough to stir her from the bed.

So, he pulled the pillow out from under her, let her flatten on the bed, and climbed over to lie beside her. “Fiiiiiona.” No response, eyes still closed, but breathing. “Fiiiiiona.” He reached out for her, pushed her closer shoulder up, and rolled her onto her side, facing him.

Which, of course, put her breasts on display, one half flattening to the bed sheets with its size and weight, the other pressing down on its sister. For a split moment, it made him want cover her up, hide her nudity so that he couldn’t see. And then he remembered that, not only did they just have sex, they’d been dating for a little while now, and had had sex a couple weeks ago, sort of. Plus, she’d sent him plenty of pictures of her topless, with full intent on showing off her bust. That meant, he could be more forward, especially since that seemed to be the thing she liked.

And, his stomach was full, flooding his body with energy. The womans’ strange blood was empowering, intoxicating, and he could feel it clouding is thoughts. Not drunk, not high, but the waves of tingling energy blood sent through a Kindred’s body, didn’t normally hit like this. The Kiss was extremely pleasurable, and satisfying hunger was always enjoyable, but Fiona’s blood made him want to explode with energy and desire. It made him want to grab her, hold her down, slide his cock into her wet, tight, dripping insides, and keep going.

Fiona was still awake, and sensitive, still trembling with orgasm aftershocks. If he fucked her again, now, she’d cum easier than paper took fire. And his growing erection loved that idea. So, he scooted down a little, got closer, and as he hugged her waist with one arm, he set his lips to one of her breasts. Some more mewls followed, and he smiled into the softness as—

As his phone rang.

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~~Jack~~

Damien had a bounce in his step, and that was weird. Damien didn’t bounce. Damien stalked, sneaked, walked with quiet steps, and basically never bounced. Apparently Fiona was rubbing off on him. Or maybe...

“You slept with Fiona, didn’t you? I can smell blood on you.”

Damien froze, reached up with a gloved hand for his mouth, and ran a finger along his lips for a moment. Well, that reaction was telling.

“I did. Was it obvious?”

“You’re radiating joy.” And it was kind of irritating. Course, Jack didn’t say that, but seeing his friend being so damn happy, when everyone else in Jack’s world, including Jack, was miserable, was grating. He was happy for his friend, but circumstance made it difficult to not also be annoyed, and envious.

The two of them were underground, walking the tunnels to Azamel’s path. Jack would have gone alone, now that he had the power of the curse at his disposal, but it would have annoyed his bosses to break the rules. And, much as he could feel the power coursing through him, the strange and wicked curse ready to unleash its visceral desires on whoever it felt deserved it, he wasn’t a god. He almost felt like one, knowing what he could do if the situation demanded, but the elders of Dolareido never stuck their heads out for a good reason: even elders died quick, if you caught them off guard. He was no exception.

It annoyed him, that the elders refused to do things themselves. All that power, and they did nothing but hide in their towers or whatever, telling other Kindred what to do. It also annoyed him that, whenever he broke it down tactically, he couldn’t disagree with them. Elders wanted to stay alive, and he couldn’t blame them for that. Elders wanted to control their environment, and he couldn’t blame them for that. The role of general was the best way to accomplish both those tasks, out of the fight while also controlling it.

One mistake was all it took for any vampire to die, no matter how old. Tony and Viktor were perfect examples of that, dying to something as innocent as a dry fire in an old factory.

That meant that, while he may have gained access to strength that rivaled an elder Kindred, he still had to be careful. And it wasn’t like he didn’t want to bring Damien, it was just that, a part of him wanted to brood, be angry, and mope. It was hard to do that with his friend vibrating on the happy frequency.

“I... I’ve been... dating her, for a while, I suppose you could say. We just didn’t have time to get physical, except for that time with Vrall.”

Ah yes, the oddly beautiful spider monster, Fiona’s horror. Damien hadn’t given him many details, but had given him enough hints for Jack to piece together what happened. Fucking a gorgeous-but-terrifying spider monster in her web, would have been not unlike the times Antoinette had sex with

him, when she tied him up so he couldn't move. Except, Jack got to do those things in a nice, quiet, luxurious basement, with lots of soft things to lie on, usually. Sex in a spider web, in a sweltering jungle, in the black of the canopy, with corpses hanging from nearby trees? Eesh.

“Judging by what I'm seeing, I'm guessing your first night with normal redhead Fiona went well.”

“Very.” Damien nodded, smile beaming; at least, beaming by Damien standards.

Jack laughed, reached up, and stroked the breast feathers of Mulder. A caw from Scully drew his hand, and he scratched the back of her head a few times, as he continued walking.

“Jacob visited my apartment.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, and he met my mother. Hell, part of me thinks that was half the reason he went there.”

“And the other half?”

Jack groaned and looked down at the old tracks beneath his feet. “He wants me there, when Triss and him do... do something, I guess.”

Damien mirrored his groan, shaking his head as he slipped his hands into his trench coat pockets. “That sounds like it could be messy. There's already been an unusual amount of disappearances in Devil's Corner. The police are likely going to get involved soon.”

“Not like they'll catch Jacob in the act.” And, now that Jack and Damien knew the weird sex statues in Devil's Corner were there because of Jacob, it was easy to put two and two together. “I wonder what other sort of hooks that man has in the city.”

“Plenty, I'm sure, of all sorts,” Damien said. “He's been here since the beginning. Getting leverage on Vicky and Parker is probably an afterthought to him.”

That was the problem with dealing with elders. They played the long game. Jack, and even Damien, could unfortunately only appreciate actions that had consequences within the year, or decade at most. Jacob had undoubtedly made decisions like sewing seeds, or better, planting trees. Trees took forever to grow, and took centuries to truly grow into towering behemoths, but an elder like Jacob could plant dozens of them, knowing they'd eventually be useful to him.

Sighing, Jack shrugged, and winced as both Mulder and Scully cawed in annoyance at the sudden movement. “He is on our side, I guess,” he said.

“Is he? I assumed Jacob was on his own side. No one else's.”

“I don’t know. There’s more to Jacob than that. And besides, these disappearances are to fuel his efforts to find the hunters. I can’t fault him for that.”

Damien shook his head. “You mean, to fuel Beatrice’s efforts. She’s not a fledgling. If something goes wrong, she gets blamed. Or, considering the nature of her pursuits, if something goes wrong, she’ll probably be the one to die in some Crúac ritual gone bad.”

“Then I better do a good job helping her. I’m not letting her die, or get herself killed.” It was the least he could do, considering his sire died helping him, leaving her alone and miserable. He felt responsible. Hell, he partly was.

That feeling of guilt was going to haunt him for the rest of his eternal life. Fucking lovely.

“Hey,” Jack said. “Sorry for calling you in on this meeting, since you were—”

His friend waved a hand through the air, dismissing him. “This is important. Besides, Fiona’s asleep now. It was a good... great night.”

Jack smiled. Ashley and Julee always went to sleep after Jack or Antoinette had had their fun with them, draining them. And occasionally, they continued to do things to the two girls, while they were trapped in that post-Kiss bliss. Fiona likely had a great night.

It was more than just Jack needing a partner for this meeting, though. Damien came because a chat with Azamel and the other Begotten meant the conversation could swing to include the mysterious threat Azamel had warned them about. Damien was in on that, so was Fiona, and Jack wouldn’t be surprised if the other nightmare monsters knew too.

The goal of the trip was simple. He had to get an update from Azamel, to see if she had anything to contribute about any of the ongoings. The Invictus and Azamel didn’t get along, and it was in everyone’s best interest that Jack try and head off any disagreements before they escalated. He also wanted to know if she had any updates about the mysterious threat, because Jack didn’t, Damien didn’t, and that was nerve wracking.

But, most importantly, he wanted to talk to them about the thing inside him, the thing whispering to him, asking him to kill and slaughter, with far more verbosity than his Beast had ever shown before.

It was always quiet, this deep in the tunnels. Vibrations from the city above, and the sounds they created, were well below what a human could hear, and his Kindred ears struggled to pick up on it. Lights flickered, forever unable to ever be fully maintained by repair crews. At this point, he assumed the nightmare monsters liked it that way, and were thwarting any Kindred attempts to repair the lights. It certainly made things creepier, deep down in the cold, dark depths of the Earth.

Damien looked around, and reached above his head behind the neck.

“You almost look like you could be the sheriff’s childe, dressed like that,” Jack said. And hey, it was true.

“I... noticed, that many people consider me in the same light as the sheriff. Perhaps, not with the same fear, but many consider me an assassin nonetheless.” Damien shrugged, tapped the spot behind his neck, inside the large neck of his trench coat, and offered Jack a smaller smile. “I’d be a fool to not at least consider his approach to combat.”

“He keeps the whole city under his thumb, I guess.”

“That he does.”

“I... I never did ask, about it.”

“It? I—oh, the Purge. Right, because the sheriff... yeah.”

Wincing, Jack looked ahead, one hand idly stroking the back of each crow’s neck, while he did his best to keep a neutral expression. “People refer to it, talk about it, mention it, but I don’t know much about it.”

“It... it’s a painful memory.”

“Don’t talk about it if you don’t want to. But, you are one of the few who’s seen the sheriff in action.” And if there was one thing his second life had taught Jack, it was the value of information.

With a long sigh, Damien nodded as he put both his hands back into his coat pockets. “You saw him in action, didn’t you? After... you know.”

Right, after Jack forced Damien to kill his sire. What a lovely bonding experience for the two of them.

“Using Dominate like that left me completely drained. I barely remember a thing.”

“I see. Daniel is... able to combine speed with the Cloak of Night, to degrees other Kindred can’t. Fighting him is like fighting a ghost.” The Mekhet shuddered, and rubbed his forearms through his coat. “The Prince rarely fought, when she enacted the Purge. Most of the damage was done by Garry, the Carthians at large, and... Daniel. The sheriff handled the bishops, most of them, and they could do little. Too fast, too difficult to catch, or even see.”

Mekhet didn’t have the brute strength of Nos or Daeva; that’s why they liked swords. Speed and swords worked well together, and Jack did have a faint memory of the damage Daniel did to the

remaining Kindred under Lucas's control, after Damien had cut off Lucas's head. The sheriff had slaughtered Lucas's crew like a scene from a fucking anime, dashing around, a blur of speed and Cloak of Night hiding him from even Kindred eyes, until he was too close to be stopped.

If that was the sort of person Damien wanted to emulate, at least in combat effectiveness, it was a tough goal to reach.

"And," Damien continued, "I was... thinking about asking the sheriff for training."

Pieces snapped into place, and Jack nodded as the image became clear. "Because, if Antoinette's sheriff is deeply involved with you, it'll make your rebirth of the Lancea et Sanctum go smoother."

"Two birds with one stone."

"Maria's idea?"

"Yes."

"She's too damn smart."

Damien chuckled. "She's... she's smart, but not the bastion of cold reason and burning wrath people think she is. She wants to cooperate with the Prince to get the Lancea et Sanctum up and running again, because she's a believer."

Maria was Jack's boss too, but Jack never got personal with her, or Michael. Right Hands in the Dolareido Invictus were the only ones to get personal with the council, and usually one on one, Right Hand to their designated council member. Jessy had her sire, Michael. Damien had Maria, two believers of Longinus. And Jack, had no one.

Jack grit his teeth, forced down the rising bile in his guts, and sighed. "Then I hope she's not the one Azamel warned us about."

"As do I. I'd... I'd hate to kill her."

That, was not the response Jack expected.

"Do you think you can?"

"If I catch her off guard. But again, I do not wish to harm her. She's taught me much, about music, economy, psychology. I have a hard time thinking she's willing to harm the city to revive Lucas, or for any other reason." The Mekhet slowed for a moment, eyes wandering down as his mind dug through his thoughts. "She's well aware Lucas was a menace, and his... aggressiveness had only grown worse after his torpor."

“I’m still worried. Love makes people do stupid things.”

Sighing, Damien started walking again, but his eyes were elsewhere, probably drifting through memories of Maria. “Agreed.”

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Stepping into the lair of monsters was always a frightening affair. It wasn’t as scary anymore, now that Jack had the curse, but that didn’t change the memories he had of Athalia and Azamel.

Perhaps more frightening, was the inevitable conversation he was going to have with Athalia. It was Jack’s job to keep the peace between the groups in Dolareido, and he wasn’t sure he’d be able to do that when he saw her. Losing his sister because of her daughter was bad enough, but losing his sire because of her as well, was absurd.

Would Athalia be afraid? Would she care? The only vampire she gave a shit about was the sheriff, and him, supposedly. Did she feel bad about what her daughter did?

He wasn’t sure, but he knew how he’d respond if she treated his situation callously. He’d get angry, and he didn’t know how that’d go. Maybe anger would trigger the curse, like it had in the past? Maybe he was like, the Hulk now, and he should have been in a monastery or something, somewhere where he could meditate and learn to control his anger.

He sighed, rubbed his head a few times, and stepped around the corner. Stop thinking about the curse. It only ever came out when his life was threatened. There was no reason to think the curse would jump out in a different circumstance. Right?

Athalia sat in a chair on the stage of concrete, not far from Azamel, who sat in her rocking chair as usual. Mark wasn’t on the stage, but he was in the room, sitting in a corner by himself with a book in his hand. The room was quiet. They’d heard him coming.

The three monsters looked at Damien, then him, and their eyes went wide. Mark and Athalia both shot up to their feet, and their hands tightened into fists at their sides as they stared at him. Azamel, for all her usual calm demeanor and imposing presence, froze. She put her cigarette down, staring at him, eyes locked and looking at him from head to toe several times.

Damien raised a brow as he looked at him too. From what Jack had seen from other Kindred, since his curse thing awakened, they were able to tell he was different. They could tell his strength had

grown, that his Beast and its presence had grown, but he'd never garnered a reaction like he was getting from the Begotten. The monsters were able to see other paranormals in a way Kindred couldn't understand. Whatever it was that made paranormals paranormal, there was no hiding it from the monsters of nightmares.

And the monsters of nightmares were looking at him like he'd just dropped a bomb at their front door.

"Jack," Azamel said, clearing her throat as best she could without breaking into a smoker's cough. "You... you are different."

<I>These nightmare monsters see far too much. Don't trust them.</I>

Jack winced, and snapped his head to the side.

I trust them more than I trust you.

<I>Because you're an idiot. What I want is obvious. These monsters have desires so much bigger and disgusting.</I>

Don't give me that shit. I remember what my Beast showed me, the memories of Susanna and the carnage she caused with you.

<I>Because she wanted to. These monsters? They do similar because they have to. It's who they are. You remember what Azamel said, about the villages she controlled. You don't think she spun that story to make her sound a bit less horrible? You don't think she slaughtered innocents, hundreds of them, to feed the nightmare inside her?</I>

Jack sighed, and looked to Damien. His friend was dating one of those monsters, and having the time of his second life. It wasn't like the whisper in Jack's ear was entirely wrong, but just as Azamel had probably twisted her story of her past to make her sound less horrible than she was, the curse in Jack's ear was probably doing the same thing. But, it wasn't like the Begotten were horrible. Fiona certainly wasn't. Was she? She'd been killing people as a part of how she hunted before she was told to control herself, and Damien said she had corpses hanging from trees in her jungle nightmare.

Don't throw stones in glass houses.

"I am different," he said. "I assume you've seen the news."

"I did," Athalia said. "I... I didn't know what to think. What happened to you, Jack?"

Jack stepped forward, and Athalia stepped back. The sight of fear in her eyes sent a thrill up his spine, but he didn't let it make him smile. He wanted to, though. A dark, evil, sinister smile would have



gone a long way toward putting her on the defensive. It would have felt good to make her be afraid, to make her fear for her life from the Kindred who'd suffered such atrocities at her daughter's whim. But he wouldn't. That wouldn't help anyone.

Grinding his teeth into powder, Jack stopped walking, and glared. "I wanted to ask you."

"Me? Why? I don't—"

"Did you see anything... strange, about me, or Julias, or Viktor? I know you Begotten can see things we can't."

A glance to Mark showed the man didn't want to get involved in the conversation. Jack met his eyes, and the man recoiled a little, lowering his gaze back to his book. Another glance to Athalia showed the same thing. They didn't want to meet his eyes.

After a few seconds of silence, Athalia spoke up. "I'm not sure. I didn't see much of Viktor, but you and... Julias, you both seemed normal."

"Are you sure?"

Azamel started coughing, and everyone looked her way as they waited for her to rip her lungs to shreds.

"There has always been a subtle difference, young Kindred, in your bloodline," the old woman said. "I saw it as... chains, bits of metal lost in the shadows of your Beast."

Jack stepped toward the stage, and Athalia took another step back. But after a moment, she came up to stand beside Azamel, setting a hand on the monster's chair. She was shaking.

"You saw that my bloodline's Beast was different than others?" Jack said.

"I did."

"And you said nothing?"

"You Kindred and your Horrors are wisps of shadow and mist, with many limbs of many forms. What is one more oddity among small Horrors, with such liquid features?"

She was describing the Beast, and she knew what it looked like. So, the strange creature Jack and Beatrice had seen in their minds was what the Begotten could see in them, then. The monsters lived in a plane of dreams. Did the Beast live in such a place as well? Or, was connected to it, somehow?

The idea that Crúac could reach into some other realm, communicate with potentially godly entities like the Crone, and perform magical acts, didn't seem so absurd anymore.

“Liquid features?” he said.

The old monster nodded as she took another puff of smoke into her lungs. It came out as she spoke, as natural as anything to the ancient creature. “Us Begotten are a little more... defined. With you vampires, you are small, and adaptable. Like chameleons, you change colors to become one with your environment. Like evolution on fast forward, you grow to fit your surroundings. Adapting, with liquid features that mold to your whim and habitat.” She breathed smoke at him, but he could see the hesitation in her eyes. “Chameleons are minuscule, and usually, beneath our notice.”

“And... now? What do you see in me now?”

The Begotten looked between each other, as if playing hot potato on who would speak. But Azamel, coughing a couple more times, put out her cigarette, and leaned forward toward him.

“A long time ago, I once met a Begotten, little Kindred, and he reminded me of you. This monster fed on... I am not sure. To this day, I haven’t been able to discern what this brute craved. All I know is bodies followed in his wake.” Sighing, she shook her head as she fumbled for another cigarette. Athalia helped her, and where Azamel would have probably been annoyed at the assistance in the past, now, she accepted it without issue. “Within the heart of his lair, I found endless corpses, some fresh, some old. Mountains of them, piled high, until they reached the black sky above. The only light was glints of white against the flowing rivers of red.

“And this Horror, little Kindred, was massive, as massive as I. A creature of shadow, with tendrils of obsidian mist that ripped into the endless bodies it rested upon. It had no single face, and no set of limbs I could identify. It was a... a thing.” She leaned back, and breathed smoke into the air before meeting his eyes again. “I see such a monster, in you, little vampire.”

That was a pretty horrible image, and Jack winced as he met the old woman’s gaze. She wasn’t lying, or exaggerating. Hell, if anything, she was looking at him with pity.

“What happened to him?”

“Slain. The beast was a glutton, and for the Begotten, mindlessly indulging our hungers can leave us... vulnerable.”

Indulging his Beast its desire to feed and destroy wouldn’t make it vulnerable, as far as Jack could tell. Except, indulgence was often the weakness that destroyed many people, and monsters. He didn’t think that that was what Azamel meant, but still.

“You heard about what happened?” he said, looking to Athalia.

“... we did.”

“You know Angela killed one of our thralls, and my sire?”

Azamel frowned, apparently not happy he'd switched his attention. And in the past, she would have wrestled it back with a sharp remark. Not this time.

“We... we heard of Julias's death, yes,” Athalia said. “Jack, I—”

“You heard about the crows, that attacked the hospital?”

Athalia lowered her head, turning away from him. “We heard. I thought maybe that was Julias, until Fiona told us what she learned from Damien.”

Jack glanced at Damien. There wasn't anything wrong with Damien sharing with his girlfriend information that was basically public, but Jack did sort of wish the Begotten hadn't gotten to know about his curse until he told them.

Whether they knew or not, their reaction was blatant, and seemed honest. The three monsters were looking at him like he was a threat, like he was dangerous, like he might attack them at any point. Mark had moved to join his companions, and was standing with fists at his side. Athalia had some of her weight braced on the balls of her feet. Azamel had her eyes on him, staring, ready, as if Damien didn't exist.

It made him feel powerful. Ventrue ego swelled, and Jack struggled to keep the growing smile down. Feeling powerful was addicting, he knew that, everyone knew that, and he wasn't going to let it influence his decisions. Besides, it wasn't him, it was the curse, something that he hadn't earned or developed on his own. It was a gift, and a curse, a tool dumped into his lap by a psychopath from hundreds of years ago. He'd be a fool to rely on it.

But god damn it, it was tempting.

“Before I go,” he said, “does anyone have an update on the unknown threat?”

They visibly relaxed. Maybe they thought, upon seeing him, that he was going to push for violence because of what happened to his sire. They didn't know him, didn't understand he wouldn't do something so stupid just because he wanted to. And, much as a part of him really wanted to, a larger part of him knew it wasn't their fault, or Athalia's fault.

“No, unfortunately,” Azamel said. “With everything that's happening, it's hard to tell what's what, in the mess.”

Jack frowned, and idly scratched the neck of Mulder and Scully, along the back, as he pondered. There was someone out there, doing something. The strange portal Fiona had found, that she'd opened and taken him and Damien through into the Shadow Realm, proved it.

“At this rate, I really only have one course of action,” he said.

Damien raised a brow. “Which is?”

“Talk to Black Blood, or his rivals.” He was playing diplomat with werewolves and nightmare monsters, why not godly spirits too?

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~~Eric~~

He didn't stay in human form. Urshul was the better form for exploring, a massive wolf that was so absurdly muscular and gigantic, using the form in Dolareido was a recipe for a Masquerade violation. The Prince was as likely to string him up by his guts, as hunters would be to snipe him from a distance, if he ever used this form where anyone could see him. But in a mostly empty city with not a single human presence, the giant wolf body was the way to go.

Most of the pack felt the same way. Everyone shifted into the Urshul form as they got moving, except for Clara. Avery's second in command stayed human, probably for better communication purposes. The Uratha could communicate in wolf form, but it wasn't exactly elegant or precise as far as he could tell. Grunts, howls, yelps, body language, he could understand them more than a human, but it was a far call from a refined language. And the vampire wouldn't be able to understand half as much.

Natasha bounced a few times, made some tiny squeals, and hugged her two wolves by the manes. It was adorable, seeing the tiny girl hug the gigantic beasts, and lose half herself in the depths of their fur. It almost made Eric vomit from cuteness overload, when Natasha climbed onto Matt's back. It wasn't like Matt couldn't handle her size, considering he was utterly massive, even when compared to the rest of the pack. It was just that, he was a wolf, not a horse. No saddle on that back. But Natasha was light enough, and Matt fluffy enough, that she had no trouble holding on.

He'd decided they should head to the center of South Side and start there, since the Azlu had an agenda of blocking the Gauntlet, and essence flowed mostly freely there. Made sense, hopefully. Avery

warned him it'd be dangerous, but she'd agreed with his reasoning. So, off they went, to hopefully not die.

Flowing Sanctuary continued behind them. The best comparison he could think of for her was an angel, except made of water. How did Avery acquire the help of a spirit like that? More than just help, a contractual obligation. That's how spirits worked, as far as Eric knew, and his instincts told him he was right. Spirits were creatures of contract, with rules to follow. They didn't do charity work. If Avery had this deadly entity working for her, she had to have earned it, or maybe forced it.

Flow didn't seem like a pushover. Hell, as they walked along the Dolareido street, spirits gave way, scurrying into shadows or jumping around buildings to hide. They were easy to spot, now that he was in this form; and they were easy to smell. Was it smell? The wolf half of his brain recognized it as smell, but the spirit half recognized it as something different. If there was a word for it, in English or in the language of spirits, he didn't know it, but his body knew how to sense it.

There was a giant crow in the sky, following them. That was fine, no aggression there. There were lots of shadowy blob creatures moving along the shadows provided by buildings and benches, and his nose followed them far more easily than his eyes. A flock of what he could only guess were spirits of vehicles and asphalt came by, each rolling along as a single tire, with wings of asphalt they used to keep balance. Fucking weird.

It only got weirder as they walked along. The rest of the pack took in the insanity like it was normal, but Eric paused, frequently, as he took in the sights. The sky erupted with a lightning crack and storm every so often, something in the distance, something unnatural, but the pack didn't pay it any mind. There weren't any crows except for the huge one following them, which made the city feel just as empty as the lack of humans, but as his senses tuned in to the Hisil, it felt progressively less empty. Where there should have been crows, he noticed little dark wisps flowing around, scattering as the wolves grew closer. Some of them flew, and seemed like they had wings. Some crawled, joined the blobby shadows at the base of buildings, and flowed into the sewers.

The buildings themselves were all crazy reflections of their physical counterparts. A casino, Tesauffer, looked basically the same, but as they grew closer, he could see the front doors waver like liquid, and the sign itself pulsed like a heartbeat. A nearby strip joint did the same. The street lights were twisted and coiling upward, heading toward the casino signs like a vine chasing sunlight in a maze. The lack of cars felt strange, but tides of motion flowing in and around the buildings filled in for the missing vehicles.

A lot of the spirits were pink, or aqua, or bright lime, and a bunch of colors that announced their nature. Sex, entertainment, fun, bliss, joy, the spirits here were the blatant reflection of the mood in Dolareido's South Side central district. They weren't the people themselves, but manifestations of the things that defined the area. Some looked humanoid, many others didn't, with strange shapes, extra eyes, tails, glowing body parts, and flowing lines. If they went into those buildings, he doubted the spirits were sitting around at booths, chatting, eating and drinking, and ogling girls. They'd be doing... spirit things, which meant feeding off of the resonating essence in the area, while also trying to get a one-up on competition.

Spirits behaved like wild animals in a way, as far as he knew, and as far as the dark matter of his brain was telling him. But, instead of fighting for resources or mates, they fought to grow and spread themselves. If any of the spirits could grow stronger than the others, they might devour them, and grow into something large and multifaceted. A spirit of sex, and gambling, and other vices, could come out of this arrangement, dominating everything else, devouring them, and taking over South Side, then the city.

That was the sort of thing Avery fought to keep under control, that all Uratha fought to prevent. It was the sort of thing they'd want his help with, a supposed expert on city living.

And there was no denying his instincts wanted to do exactly that. Hunt and kill and keep his territory in a healthy state. Another part of him wanted to bring Jessy here, and indulge in the atmosphere he was feeling, the resonance that filled the walls, the street, the signs and streetlights, and the air. It was a place one could easily get lost in a tide of self-destructive fun.

Funny thing was, as strange as it all looked, and smelled, it still felt familiar. This was his world, in a way, he'd just been living on one side of it, the Gurihal side. Here in the Hisil, the emotions, the concepts and ideas, the geography and how it meshed with the humans it guided, it all created literal things in the Shadow Realm. The spirits embodied everything and manifested in as many ways as his mind could consider.

One of the buildings had a red carpet leading up to the door of glass and lights, and he could see the carpet moved and twisted, creating waves on its length that softly rolled toward the building's door that ushered spirits in. One spirit swam through the air past them, slithering left and right. It looked kind of like an eel, but it had large scales that looked like gold coins. Several more of the asphalt spirits drove by again, following after the eels. One spirit, pink and curvy with nothing but flowing lines, emphasizing feminine features to an absurd degree, hovered past them and drifted into one of the buildings, a strip club.

“Spirits don’t get along like this,” Clara said as she walked up to his side. “Not normally, anyway. There’s so many different kinds here, mixing and interacting.”

“Is it l-like, a zoo?” Natasha said. “Lots of d-d-different animals, all near each other, m-most in cages.”

Avery shifted back into her human form, as smooth as putting on pants, and gestured to one of the casinos. “More like, everything is on a leash. They come here, feed on the essence that seeps in from the other side, and none of them dare step out of line.”

Flow drifted further forward, and the pack spread apart to let the angel of water move between them. Slowly, she drifted toward one of the casinos, but came to a stop as a metal gate began to move.

No, not a metal gate. Something vaguely humanoid made of metal bars approached, each limb a myriad of straight, hard-edge metal pipes. It was seven feet tall, no head, but it did have two legs and arms. Instead of eyes, glowing sparkles dotted various parts of its metal frame. His instinct said they were eyes, but his instinct also told him to not trust what he saw. Spirits could be crafty.

“Uratha not allowed,” it said. “That includes you.” Well, this spirit had guts.

It was a giant thing of metal bars, in a bustling entertainment district where people spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on vices. This was probably some sort of incarnation of the kind of shit Eric did, bouncing for Bloodlust. And many of these places locked up when they were closed, or blocked off paths from customers, using metal gates.

It was a spirit manifestation of a barrier, specific to the environment: casinos and whatnot. Their ban was, naturally, to not let anyone pass who didn’t have permission. There was no option in a spirit’s will to resist their ban, it was what they were. But what sort of bane would these creatures have? They’d probably take damage from things known for breaking through barriers, especially in this sort of environment. Keycards? Maybe the tools of a professional thief who knew how to pick locks? Blowtorches?

Uratha didn’t need to use banes to deal with unruly spirits, but it certainly helped. Against this tin can, any of them could have simply gone Gauru, and ripped it in half. And if Eric’s instincts were right, Flow could have done worse to it.

Flow said nothing, not a scoff or chuckle or groan, and floated there in front of the barrier spirit for several moments. She—it was testing the waters probably, no pun intended.

“Scary,” Natasha said, her eyes locked onto the barrier spirit. “Are... things like that th-the thing... holding the leash?”

Avery shook her head, and dismissed the barrier spirit with a wrist flick. “Strong, but unable to step outside its narrow purview. It’s not why the spirits here are getting along. The war between Black Blood, Street-Tail King, and Red Tide is why.”

Eric’s ears twitched, and he turned his head, looking between the various spirits before watching Avery closely.

Natasha blinked, confused, and let her eyes drift back to Avery. “I d-don’t understand.”

“The politics of spirits are a giant mess you don’t want to get stuck in, vampire,” Avery said. “I—”

The lights went out.

Avery snapped her fingers, pointed at Tash, and stepped toward the center of the street. Tash hopped off of Matt, and moved to the center of the street as well, as all the werewolves collapsed into what Eric could only assume were battle stations. There was no light except for the pulsing moonlight above, but that was plenty for a werewolf.

The spirits around them panicked, and vanished. The sneaking shadows slipped into manholes or alleyways. The barrier spirit stepped back and into the building it was guarding, and the liquid doors of the casino opened for it like oil around water. The spirits driving by on wheels sped off, and the flying eels flew into casinos, bars, strip clubs, and anything that had walls to protect them. In seconds, the place went quiet.

The familiar weight of something alien, something massive, something dark and cold and twisted fell over him, and he snarled through clenched teeth as he backed up closer to the pack. A glance back at Natasha showed she’d pulled a pistol out of her pants, and had a knife in her hand. Silver. She was smart enough to not say anything at least, and draw attention to herself. He grit his teeth and looked away, back to the streets and sky, looking for what could possibly be affecting the area so directly.

“I ain’t ever see such a thing,” the darkness said in a Southern drawl. “Bunch of dogs come through my home, with a vampire to boot, and didn’t have the sense to ask for permission first?”

Oh shit. Yeah, he really should have listened to Avery and avoided South Side central.