

~~Antoinette~~

“Do not lie to me, Begotten. I can see your thoughts.”

“No you can’t.” Sándor did not so much as blink as he looked at her, and then back down at his electric guitar.

The two of them sat together in her Elysium Tower, in one of its many deep, large rooms. This one was a carefully balanced room with acoustic panels in strategic locations, to ensure whoever played their instrument within its center, would experience only the most perfect balance of sounds. The appropriate amount of time smearing and echo, minimal but existent. No standing waves. No loose bass to bury their instruments and hide their depth.

But other than the various, and sometimes intricate arrays of white panels along the black walls and ceiling, with especially thick panels within the room’s corners, it was an empty room. Large enough for plenty more than Antoinette and Sándor, but small enough that such a small arrangement felt natural. She had been tempted to invite Maria, but ultimately, she was happier to have not. The two of them would never get along, and she wanted to speak with Sándor alone.

“Nonsense. I can see it in the way you move. I can see it in your eyes.”

Sándor effortlessly played a scale along his guitar’s neck, and the tiniest smile appeared, only to vanish. The man did not like showing his emotions, but he had them. It would be an interesting challenge discovering them, a challenge that likely intrigued Beatrice to no end.

“Fine. It’s going well.”

“I would imagine so, for it to garner such massive reactions from you.” She grinned at him as she mirrored his scale. Alas, the cello was not designed for such quick notes. She did well, and Sándor watched with a pleased, if subtle expression.

“It’s going very well,” he said at last.

“That is good. Beatrice, and even that little minx Jennifer deserve some happiness. As do you, whether you believe it or not.”

He nodded slowly as he looked back down at his guitar, and quickly tested another scale.

“I believe it.”

“Oh?”

“I do.” He nodded again, and played the scale faster.

She eyed him as he continued to warm up. Any other man would have explained what he meant, but Sándor was content to let his words stand. He knew that she knew he referred to the night of Jacob’s death, and the advice the dead souls had given many. A powerful night for all present, and perhaps Sándor most of all.

Antoinette mirrored the scale.

“I can only imagine the sex has been quite the adventure for a man such as yourself. Two women at once, with appetites as large as theirs? Jennifer is a buxom, beautiful woman. And of course, Beatrice and her rather... large *derrière*.”

He missed a note, paused, and resumed playing the scale again, faster.

“You’re shameless.”

“Of course.”

He closed his eyes for a moment, as if rolling them would have been too great an emotion.

“The sex has been great, and they’re both gorgeous. And, they’re both wonderful.”

“That they are.” She offered the man her most warm, inviting smile, and scanned his expression as he peeked up at her from under his stern eyebrows still aimed at his guitar. A confirmation. The two women had indeed satisfied some of his fantasies, helped settle his nerves, and perhaps, even opened him up to new experiences he had not considered.

Antoinette was tempted to tease him about it. A threesome was hardly a step above vanilla, and neither was anal sex, two forms of sexual activity that had been practiced by many cultures for thousands of years. But she could not tell how sensitive the man would be to teasing. Some quiet men were quiet because they were fearful, with sensitive egos. She doubted that applied to him, but still, no reason to poke the bear and taint his newfound pleasures.

But that did not mean she could not indulge the conversation and satisfy her curiosity, either.

“And the gargoyle?”

He lifted a brow as he looked up. “What about it?”

“Forgive me for asking, but it gave me the impression it was capable of sex, when I saw it. Am I wrong?”

He looked back down at his guitar. Hiding his facial expression then. Embarrassed? Unsure of himself? She could not tell, not yet.

“Not wrong.”

The small inflection was enough to tell her much. He had had sex with the girls while transformed, and it had been good. And considering who he was now dating, the girls had likely been the ones to suggest the idea.

Antoinette tapped her chin with a finger, before again setting her bow to the strings of her grand instrument. She paused, opened her mouth, and closed it, before again playing a scale.

“You want to say something,” he said. He had not looked her way.

She smiled. “You know I am interested in sexuality in many ways. Academically and artistically.”

“I do.” He tuned one of his strings.

“It appears you have indulged Beatrice and Jennifer in what has likely been some of their greatest sexual fantasies. I would be in your debt to learn of the details.”

“Details...”

She grinned as she looked back to her cello, and again played the scale he did. The cello would never be as fast an instrument as the guitar, but a few centuries of practice helped mitigate the issue.

“Details. Such a fantasy is so tantalizing, so delicious, I am afraid I must ask for the particulars.”

“I’m not sure I get... why my sex life would be so interesting to you.”

She laughed and shook her head. Sándor was an ancient, wise man, but the ways of a woman’s mind were, perhaps, still a mystery to him.

“The idea of a beast, gargantuan, deadly and dangerous, powerful and beyond intimidating, even terrifying, and yet strangely handsome and oddly masculine? And, dare I say it, perhaps a touch tortured, morose, and longing for companionship? That, is a romantic fantasy given life, Sándor. Have you not spoken with Jessie? Or rather, has she not bombarded you with tales of what it is like to be pinned and thoroughly ravaged by Eric when he is transformed? To be filled to bursting by hot flesh, claws wrapped around her throat, while a hungry beast glares down at her with an aching need to wholly possess and own her? She craves such a fantasy.”

“I...” He gulped. Finally, she had managed to dent his armor.

“Have you not seen Disney’s Beauty and the Beast?”

“I... have.”

“Then be aware that many, many women, found the idea of Beast in said movie, to be utterly carnal.”

“Because he transf—”

“No, not because he transformed into a man at the end. I mean, as the Beast, Sándor. A deadly, terrifying, massive, strangely handsome monster. To be held down and ravaged by such a creature? Many young girls — and boys — had their sexual awakenings watching that film.”

He frowned slightly. “You might ruin that movie for anyone listening.”

“Then be glad it is only you that listens.” Chuckling, she played her scale again, faster, faster than a song would require, until she felt comfortable her Kindred half would not interfere with her muscle memory tonight. “There is no need to feel self-conscious. Women everywhere would love to taste such a fantasy, not just Beatrice and Jennifer. And as you and I become better friends, I hope you will share with me the details of such an indulgence. I envy those girls.”

He eyed her, a little suspicion in his gaze.

“You never—”

“Alas, never. Looking back, I can see I was too absorbed in my own growth of power to ever dare risk a sexual encounter with a deadly creature, such as a werewolf or monster. Now, I am centuries old. There are few creatures on this planet I could not fight face to face. The delight in being helpless and at the mercy of a colossal creature about to force his massive length into my dripping, boiling insides? I will never experience such a treat. And while I adore my life with Jack, and our sexual dynamic, a wandering mind cannot help but peek over the fence to examine the grass elsewhere.”

The man said nothing for a while, watching her, looking for the joke in her words. There was none. She was serious, and she made sure he knew it as she held her smile.

“You’re a strange person, Antoinette.”

“Do not be ridiculous, Sándor. No one can live as long as us and not become a touch bizarre.”

“Touché.”

She laughed, and motioned to him and the small tablet in front of him, held up by a music stand. It could display sheet music, and scroll through it automatically, along with a metronome beat for them to follow. She had her own.

“I assume you know Vivaldi.”

He frowned slightly. “I do.”

“But...”

“But I was kinda hoping we could play something a little more contemporary.”

“Why would we, when we can play the true classics?”

With his subtle frown unrelenting, Sándor looked at her, and began to play.

She stared, and forced herself to keep her jaw from dropping, as the man effortlessly played Vivaldi’s Summer. He did not glance at the tablet, and needed no metronome. Indeed, as his left hand smoothly danced the fret board, and his right hand’s picking missed no string nor struck too hard, Sándor continued to look at her. And despite herself, her mouth did part slightly as he began to tap his foot. To play a fast, complicated piece of music from memory without error, on beat, was the territory of a master musician. To do so while tapping the foot, was a place where even the virtuoso struggled.

She stared on and listened as he completed the movement, and she managed to close her mouth once again.

“I... did not realize you were this talented, Sándor. Dare I say, you are more talented than I, or even Maria.”

“Thank you.” He nodded as a small smile crept onto his face, and he looked down at his guitar as he effortlessly swept an arpeggio. “The gargoyle likes to... sit around, and watch the world go by. I like music. So I practice a lot.” And by a lot, the quiet man likely meant several hours a day, every day, for literal centuries.

“I can only imagine.”

“So, Maria’s good, too? I’m surprised you didn’t invite her.”

“We do not get along, she and I. I am a scientist. She is a devout, religious...”

“Simpleton?” he said, offering her a knowing eye.

“She is not simple. That is part of the reason her blind faith in a religious figure infuriates me so.” Shaking her head, Antoinette set her bow against her strings. “You think I should invite her regardless.”

“I do. I can play the piano about as good as I play the guitar, but it’d be nice to have a pianist join us. Three instruments. Fuller sound.”

She frowned. “I will... invite her another night, if you play some classical music with me now, dear Sándor.”

He chuckled, a quiet sound that carried with it a gentle breeze that soothed her. It was likely a sound he rarely made, and she could easily imagine Beatrice savoring each one she managed to pluck from his soul.

“Alright. After that, how about some Pink Floyd?”

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~~Jack~~

Down and down into the Elysium Tower, down past all the sealed off doors and long hallways where Antoinette did her crazy experiments.

Which one of these rooms did Antoinette kill all those people in? He didn't want to know. It wasn't like she kept it a secret from him, and it'd been just a matter of time before the Invictus — and Damien — stumbled onto the information. A lot of kine had disappeared, a lot lot, enough to be a Masquerade risk, and the Invictus and the Prince were doing some double duty on the media to keep it from spreading. A shit load of people had disappeared off the street, in one night.

Jack wasn't going to ask her about it, either. He knew she'd done, did, and would do everything she could to make sure she only killed kine who deserved it, but, damn that was a lot of people.

Elders were scary. No way in hell could Jack do some twisted shit like that, just execute a bunch of people who deserved it... Except, that one time, with Beatrice and Jacob...

He shook his head and rubbed his buzzed hair. Don't think about it. That was then, a lifetime ago. Now, he was on a trip to visit his amazing girlfriend, and hang out and talk about stuff. Just, hang with his girlfriend, and talk. Not strategize or talk about politics. Just, hang, and talk.

There were two people in the whole world he actually liked talking to, just to talk about stuff. Damien, and Ann. Yeah sure, the others were his friends too, but not like Ann and Damien. And now he was going to have a conversation with Ann—and Sándor, apparently.

He stepped into the music room, and made sure he raised his eyebrow in a very obvious quizzical manner, as he looked between Sándor and Ann. She had her giant cello, and the gargoyle had an electric guitar in hand, plugged into an amp.

Where the fuck did Ann get an amp? Did she even know anything about amps? Or had Sándor brought it?

Jack joined Ann's side, and she smiled at him as she finished off a song, a song he knew pretty well.

"That," Jack said, grinning at her before giving Sándor his 'I know that' eyes, "is Pink Floyd. Comfortably Numb, right?"

"Indeed," she said. "I am not unfamiliar with the band."

"You're... not?"

"Of course not. But, no, I do not know how to play the song. Sándor was teaching me."

"Sándor?"

The man nodded, and rested his hands on the guitar, letting the neck strap keep it on his thigh and knee.

"I'm a fan of the classics. Unfortunately for the Prince, she thought I meant classical music."

"Which," she said, "are the classics?"

Sándor snuck in a quick smile, so fast Jack almost didn't notice, before he looked down at his guitar and slipped his left hand under the neck, fingers to the fretboard.

"Agree to disagree," he said.

"You like Pink Floyd?" Jack asked.

"Yes."

"And..."

Sándor shrugged. "Classic rock from the sixties, seventies, and eighties, are my true loves."

"Oh shit." Jack grabbed one of the tiny stools and sat down. "I mean, I knew you played music. Triss mentioned that, but we haven't talked much lately." On account of her hanging out with Sándor pretty much nonstop since they started dating. "You like metal, too?"

He nodded.

“You like... Metallica? Megadeth?”

He nodded.

“Journey?” Sándor had to like Journey, if he liked rock.

He grinned, again a sneaky thing that vanished quickly as he nodded. He loved Journey.

“Judas Priest?”

He nodded.

“OZZY?”

He nodded.

Fucking god, finally! Finally, someone else who knew music. Sándor probably didn't live in the modern era of metal, like Jack did, kinda, but Jack enjoyed the classics, too. If it weren't for the classics, his favorite metal bands wouldn't even exist.

“Dio?”

He nodded. It was practically a given.

“Queen?”

The man outright smiled, bigger this time, almost as big as a normal person's smile.

“I think it's safe to say I'll like most of the classic bands you do, Jack.”

Fucking. Awesome.

“Newer bands?”

“Maybe.”

“Ayreon? Avantasia? Nightwish?” Not exactly new, but new by Sándor's standards, for sure.

Sándor nodded.

“Unleash the Archers? Devin Townsend? Blind Guardian? Sabaton?”

He nodded again. Okay, maybe some heavier stuff.

“Lamb of God? Architects? Sold Soul?”

He nodded. He knew the names of all these bands? Did the guy just live and breathe music?

“Lorna Shore? Mys—”



“Jack.” Ann reached out and pat him on the shoulder. “I think it is safe to say, that Sándor has dedicated his free time to music in a way none of us have.”

“Well, damn. I mean, I uh... I had no idea.”

With a hint of a smile again, Sándor plucked a string, but didn't play anything.

“I assume you play, Jack?”

“Nah. I've tried, but I could never stick to it, you know? Fiddled with some instruments when I was younger but never stuck to anything.”

“No time like the present.”

“From what Damien and Triss have told me, learning to play an instrument as a vampire is a pain in the ass.”

Sándor nodded as he looked at his strings and tinkered with them idly. “Supposedly. But...” He gestured to Ann.

Ann grinned at Jack, leaned over, and kissed him. “You do seem to like music in a way few do, my love. You should learn to play an instrument.”

“But I suck at it.”

“Then it is a good thing you will have centuries to learn.”

He couldn't help but laugh. Encouraging words, with absolutely zero attempt to bullshit him. No ‘oh I'm sure you're fine’ or ‘I bet if you just put your mind to it, you'd be great’ or any of that crap. God, he loved her.

“Well, I mean, I do like guitar and piano, but it's the singing that really sucks me in.”

Ann and Sándor looked at each other, considered, and smiled.

“Then,” Ann said, “you have some work to do, my love.”

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Garry's apartment building was old, shitty, and strangely comfortable. There was something freeing about knowing you didn't need to worry about making a mess. Scuff marks, dirty footprints, no one in this building cared, and its hallway carpets showed enough wear and tear you could see the story

in them. A fight here, some old vomit stains over there, claw marks from a local cat using the carpet to sharpen their nails, shit like that.

“I miss this place,” Triss said.

Jack grinned at her. “Take your pick. Crappy apartment buildings and crappier bars, or underground caves filled with bones and stuff.”

“Oh the caves, definitely.”

They both nodded as they walked the stairs up toward the top floor of the building. The stairs creaked, unhappy with the intruders.

“You know your boyfriend is a great guitarist?” he asked.

“Dude is a fucking virtuoso, with guitar and the piano.”

“And he loves music. A lot of really, really good music.”

“I know! Wait, how do you know?”

“I caught him playing with Antoinette. She had her cello and he had his guitar.”

“Oh damn. I knew she played, but, she can play with Sándor?” she asked.

“Maybe not Sándor good, but still damn good.”

“Bet they’d make some awesome metal.”

“Ha, good luck convincing Antoinette to play metal.”

“Not a fan?”

“Fan, no. She can enjoy it, some of it, but she’s a diehard classics lover. And by classics I mean—”

“Mozart and shit.” Laughing, Triss gave him a gentle punch on the shoulder. “Shame she hates Maria. With Maria on piano, the Prince on cello, and Sándor shredding, they could play some pretty wicked shit.”

“That... is the plan, I think.”

“Really?”

“Sándor wants her to try and get along with Maria enough to at least play with them. He hasn’t had anyone to play with, especially not at his level.” Jack looked up at the old ceiling as they walked. “If he can manage that, he can have my job as peacekeeper.”

“Thought that was only for dealing with the Uratha and Begotten? Not Maria.”

“He’s better suited for the job than I am, if he can get Maria to play with Antoinette.” And honestly, Jack wouldn’t mind someone else taking the role. Then again, with Azamel and Mark dead, and Athalia best friends with his mom, the Begotten were now easy to deal with. Avery, on the other hand, not so much. She was next on the visit list.

Triss knocked on a door, but didn’t bother waiting. With a little more force than was probably necessary, she swung the door open and marched in.

“Garry, long time no see.” And without so much as a glance to the man to see if this was okay, she sat down in one of the shitty chairs in front of his big, wooden, chipped and worn desk.

“Beatrice. Nice to see you’re still a bitch.”

Garry sat behind the desk in his chair, wearing a black t-shirt and blue jeans. He was leaning back, feet up on the corner of the desk, and the shaved-bald man smirked as he looked at Jack.

“Mister Tones,” Jack said.

“Jack. I suppose you’re here to get an update on shit and get back to your job? Took your sweet time, jackass.”

“Sort of. May I sit?”

“Yes you can fucking sit, Jesus Christ.” He pointed a thumb at Jack while looking at Triss. “This guy. Just like Julias.”

Triss smiled. “He is.”

Jack sat, smiled at Triss, and gave Garry a stern look.

“I—”

“This isn’t about Vicky and Parker’s brothels, is it? Those two little fucks can suck my dick, Jack. Those brothels are getting problematic, and—”

Jack put up a hand. “Not about that.”

“Then the fuck do you want? And why’d you bring the witch?”

“Hey!” Triss yelled.

“Oh come on, you telling me you’re not a witch?”

“You said it like I was some ugly bitch making villagers sick. Which, I mean, I could do, but I resent the implication.”

Garry laughed, plucked a knife that'd been stabbed into the corner of his desk, and idly flipped it in his hand as he looked back to Jack, waiting.

“I'm here,” Jack said, “to talk about Jacob.”

Garry stopped flipping the knife.

“I've already talked about Jacob with the Prince.”

“All official, right? As official as a Primogen meeting can get.”

“And?” Garry asked, narrowing his eyes.

“And, that's not what you want to hear, is it? What was said in those meetings. I know you and Jacob were friends, sort of. You want to know more about what happened, right? No Carthian was there to fill you in on the details.”

With a heavy snarl, Garry stabbed the knife back into the desk's corner closest to him, and Jack got ready for a fight. But, nope, Garry stayed sitting, feet still up on the desk as he looked up and stared at the peeling, stained, white paint on the ceiling.

“And what will this information cost?”

“Nothing.”

That got him to take his feet down.

“Nothing?”

“Nothing,” Triss said, “you fucking asshole. Not everything needs to be a transaction.”

“With the Invictus, it does.”

“I'm not here as Invictus,” Jack said. “If I were, I'd be telling you to stay the fuck away from Vicky and Parker's brothels before Michael retaliates.” It took some doing to not make it a more personal threat. Talking with Garry was always a struggle, like trying to help a wounded animal who didn't understand you were trying to help, so they kept snapping at you as you tried to undo the trap. It put Jack on edge.

The man laughed and shrugged. “Alright. Lay it on me, kid. What do you want to tell me about that fucker?” And there it was. Garry frowned, voice darkened, and followed his words with a quiet snarl. He wasn't happy with Jacob.

“That Jacob wasn’t a villain.”

“The fuck are you talking about? He’s dead, right? You and the Prince and that bitch Elaine killed him because he—”

“We killed him, yeah.” Better he think that than knowing Sam did it. “And stopped Black Blood. But, Jacob wasn’t a villain.”

“He stirred up the hornet’s nest on purpose, Jack, and got me and Michael fighting. He got Avery on Maria’s ass, and nearly got her killed.” Her, being Avery. Garry didn’t give a shit about Maria. “And unless I’m wrong, Antoinette was pretty clear Jacob is the reason Avery showed up in the first place, and lost people to the azlu. Jacob—”

“Jacob barely lifted a finger and had you and Michael ready to burn the city down to kill each other and ruin each other’s lives. Don’t put that on Jacob. Yes, he tricked Avery and others to go after Maria, but if Avery had just taken a second to talk to Maria, that wouldn’t have been a problem. And yes, Black Blood lured them here to fight azlu for him, but Avery wants to fight azlu. Her whole pack does. Even if he hadn’t specifically lured her, she’d have happily come.”

Garry raised a brow. “You’re seriously defending him? You?”

“I figure you deserve to know the truth.” Or at least some of it. “Jacob, and even Black Blood, weren’t just a couple of villains trying to fuck everything over. Sure, their goals were selfish, but they wanted to share their goal with everyone. They legitimately wanted to help the whole world, Garry, especially Jacob. Fucked up as it was, twisted as it was, they wanted to help. Hell, Jacob could have killed us at any time, at the end there. He didn’t. He wanted us alive and around when things changed, and I don’t think it was to gloat. He just... He...”

“Jacob was awesome,” Triss said. “And yeah, he needed to be stopped, but no one walked away from that fight thinking Jacob was some shithole fuckwad, Garry. He was a great guy. Maybe misguided and fucked in the head, I don’t know, but he was a great guy. I miss my boss.”

Garry looked between the two of them, silence heavy in the room. But after a minute to think about it, Garry nodded as he leaned back in his chair and put his feet back up.

“Jacob and I were always strange friends. We agreed on a lot of things, and disagreed on others. He really fucking hated Avery for what Simon did. If I hadn’t talked to him, I wouldn’t be surprised if he... if he woulda killed her. Poor guy was really fucked up.”

Jack didn't say anything. Triss didn't say anything. Everyone stewed in the shitty reality that Jacob hadn't been some horrible person, some vile asshole villain who needed to be put down. He was a man who'd been hurt, and saw a way to 'fix' that problem for everyone.

"How's your mom taking it?" Garry asked.

Jack didn't flinch.

"She's recovering, pretty fast, too. The whole situation was weird. She really liked Jacob, but he also really helped her... find herself, I guess. She's not the same person anymore." He smiled. "I owe Jacob for some of that." And his sister for a lot of it, too.

After an awkward laugh, Garry grabbed his knife again and resumed tossing it in one hand, flipping it handle to handle each time.

"You came all this way just to have a chat about Jacob?"

"You're not that far."

"Far enough. But don't think I'm taking this as a favor done, Jack. I don't owe you anything for this, got it?"

"Got it."

"But... thanks, anyway."

Nodding, Jack got up and made for the door, but stopped.

"Garry."

"Yeah?"

"You play an instrument?"

"The fuck?"

"He plays a bit of bass," Triss said as she got up and joined him. "Just a bit."

Jack nodded, grinning.

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"The fuck do you want, Jack?"

Oh boy.

Wincing, Jack forced himself to keep eye contact with Avery. Every time he talked with her, it was more and more obvious the woman was wolf software running on human hardware. He had to treat her like a dangerous animal, and that included not showing signs of weakness.

“Just wanted to check up on the pack.”

Avery grumbled and looked back to her TV. She sat on her couch in her apartment, a couple of her pack nearby watching as well, but it was clear Jack’s arrival had soured things a bit.

No Clara. He looked, but no, she wasn’t around, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

“We’re fine,” Avery said.

“Yeah, you sure sound fine.” Maybe a little bit of his classic cynicism and sarcasm would push the conversation along better.

“You really gonna visit just to get on my bad side? And why’s the witch here?”

“I’m already on your bad side. And Triss is here because she’s my friend.” He smiled at the Nosferatu standing beside him, and she fist-bumped him in return.

“Figured you’d take that Damien dude with you,” Avery said. “He was damn good with a sword.”

“It’s his day off. But that doesn’t matter anyway. I’m here because... we haven’t really talked much since that night, and—”

“What? That fucking surprises you? Jack, I had to watch that curse thing use your body and kill two of my family. Not to mention nearly kill the rest of us.”

“I know. I just thought—”

“Thought what? That because I got to talk to their ghosts, or souls or whatever, and that Monica and Caleb gave you a pass, that I’m going to stop seeing your face every time I think about how they died?”

Fucking ow. Jack looked down, shaking his head. “I... I...”

“Fucking bitch,” Triss said. “You just fucking said that wasn’t Jack.”

“I know it wasn’t.” Avery got to her feet and marched up to them. For a little woman, she could march. “And Caleb and Monica told me to not blame you. Hell, they told me to thank you for everything you’ve done. And sure, I’ll do that, I’ll thank you for everything you’ve done, kid. But... I’m only human.”

“You’re not human,” Triss said.

“Oh shut up, you know what I mean. I’m just a fucking person, and... and I think about Stephanie and Carter, and I’m fucking wrecked. I think about Monica and Caleb, and I’m fucking wrecked. But at least with Steph and Carter, I get to have my revenge. I hunt and I kill those fucking abominations and have for a fucking century. But... Monica and Caleb? All I can see when I think about them, is that Ripper asshole wearing Jack’s skin.”

Heavy silence, even worse than with Garry.

“Yeah, I get you.” Nodding, Jack turned and reached for the doorknob. “Sorry. I thought—”

Avery put a hand on his shoulder and turned him around.

“Kid, what I’m saying, is... just give me a bit of space, okay? Give it a few years and maybe I’ll be able to look you in the eye.”

He breathed relief. “Okay, sure. Um, and Clara, she—”

“Is handling it better than I am. She’s still young.”

“Good. Where is—”

“Out with Harcourt, getting laid I assume.”

Triss and Jack smiled at each other, before stepping out.

“Hey, Avery,” Triss said. “You play an instrument?”

“Bit of drums. Why?”

Triss and Jack’s smiles only grew as they left, leaving Avery with eyebrow cocked and confused.

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Triss and Jack walked the streets, slowly heading back to the more populated center of South Side. They didn’t say anything for a while. Not an awkward silence, just a silence that didn’t need to be broken. If it hadn’t been for Julias’s visiting them to say goodbye that final time, it definitely would have been an awkward silence, and painful. It’d be the sort of silence most people had to deal with when hanging around with people who used to be connected by someone, and now that someone was gone.



Jack and Triss were lucky. Unlucky, and lucky.

“I’m on my way to Damien’s,” she said after a bit. “Piano lessons.”

“So much for him having a day off.”

“Dude. Teaching me is a delight.”

“Ha. Good enough to play anything yet?”

“Nah, not really. I mean, some simple Disney stuff?”

He laughed. “Figures.”

“How’s that?”

“You’re the type who’s probably always wanted to be a Disney princess.”

“Hey, fuck you. I am a beacon of feminism. I don’t need no king or—”

“You want to sit in bed, get fed pancakes — or blood now, I suppose — by a bunch of servants, while your dad rules a kingdom and owns a giant castle. You want to try on fancy custom-made dresses, and have suitors doing everything in their power to win your hand.”

She snorted and shoved him. He shoved her back.

“Hey, that... does sound awesome.”

“As awesome as a cave filled with skulls and candles and ritual symbols?”

“I mean, yeah? I live in a cave filled with skulls and candles and ritual symbols. Being a pampered princess would be novel.” Despite her attempts to hide it, he could see her grinning.

“What’s up?”

“Well, Sándor asked me to move in with him, sorta.”

“That’s... wait... weird? I mean—”

“Not like that. I mean, into his lair. We still haven’t seen Aaron, and I’m pretty sure he’s just up and left Dolareido. But if he hasn’t—”

“He’s not gonna—”

“Dude, you don’t know. You didn’t see him, at the end, when he tried to stop me. He—” She cut herself off this time, and waved both hands for a second. “Don’t worry about it. He’s my problem, and I’ve got a few rituals set up to hopefully warn me — us — if he shows up. I was gonna say, because no place I sleep is perfectly safe, Sándor’s letting me stay at his place, his lair. And, uh...” She squirmed a

bit, rubbed one of her arms once, and looked down as she smiled. “He was pretty insistent I could stick around.”

“Stick around? You mean, live there?”

“I guess? Kinda? ...yeah, live there.” She shivered. “That’s fucking scary!”

“He is a nightmare monster. The castle is, literally, a nightmare.”

“Not because of that. Er, mostly not because of that. I meant more normal shit. How the fuck do you live with someone else?”

“You hadn’t been living with Jennifer and Jacob and them?”

“Fuck no. I hung out there, sure, slept there too but that ain’t exactly ‘living’. Sándor thinks I could, like, live with him.”

“Which is... what? Hanging out in his lair slightly more than you did the witch cave?”

She threw up her hands. “It’s symbolic!”

“Symbolism is a trap. Just think about the reality. You’re gonna spend more time with the guy you love—”

“Whoa whoa whoa! No L words have been exchanged yet.”

He leaned in and eyed her. “Really?”

Rolling her eyes, she shoved him away hard enough to hit a lamppost. None of the nearby kine looked. Her Obfuscate skills were getting better.

“Really. Awesome monster sex aside, my relationship with Sándor is very... normal, and new.”

“And normal means what? You can’t say things like ‘I love you’ because there’s no big, dramatic moment to underline it?” He leaned in again, eyeing her until she turned away slightly. “The relationships that need big dramatic moments are called ‘toxic relationships’.”

She put a hand on his shoulder, but instead of shoving, she pat it slightly, and smiled.

“Getting smart in your old age.”

“My sire taught me a lot. He was awesome.”

“Yeah, he was.” Laughing, her pat turned into a shove, and she timed the shove so his shoulder hit a lamppost dead on this time. “Yeah, it’s normal, and I’m very afraid of ruining that. It’s so comfy.”

“I admit, comfy does sound nice.”

“Dude, there is no one living a comfier life than you.”

“Eh?”

“We all saw you getting jerked off by Elaine onto the Prince’s tits, with five”—she held up five fingers—“kine there to kiss it all off.”

“Oh... right.” Damn it, Ashley. “Sex aside! I love Antoinette and my relationship with her, but I wouldn’t exactly call it comfy, in a normal kinda way. And thinking about it, maybe I wouldn’t like normal? I dunno.”

“Well I do, apparently. I like that I can get in bed with Sándor and we can cuddle and watch a movie and no one has to say a fucking thing. It’s almost like... all the drama shit got wrung out of us before we ever started dating.”

“If you’re gonna be basically living at his place now, then maybe it’s something to think about?”

That got another smile out of her, and she nodded as she looked down, thinking. She loved the guy, she knew it, but it was just so weird for her to be in a normal relationship she didn’t know how to approach the topic. In another month or so, they’d sit down and have a romantic, powerful, but otherwise normal and healthy conversation where they’d share their feelings with each other. In her lover’s castle.

Before he could stop himself, he laughed.

“The fuck is so funny?”

“Disney princess is moving in with a beast and his giant castle. Does he have talking utensils?”

“Dude, fuck off.” She tried to go for a shove again, but he managed to jump out of the way. “And Belle wasn’t a princess. Plus, the castle is creepy as fuck.”

“You like creepy.”

“And it has a giant ghost town outside of it.”

“You like the ghost town.” He put up a hand before she could retort. “Go live your Disney fantasy... metal version, I guess.”

“Ha, I guess that is what it is, isn’t it? Fine, fine, I’ll go live in a giant castle, safe and secure and getting routinely railed by a giant sexy monster. And hey, maybe I’ll invite your mom, and she can join Jen and me riding Sándor. Think she can handle two giant dicks at once?”

“Dude... not cool.”

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~~Damien~~

“Aye? Ye did?” Fiona asked.

Jen grinned wildly as she nodded. “Yeap.”

Damien groaned as he rolled his eyes, and glared down at the piano keys in front of him. They were in his apartment, Beatrice beside him on his piano bench, and they were supposed to be going through piano lessons for her. But when Fiona and Jennifer were around, it was impossible to get her to focus. She sat on the bench backward, facing the others on the couches, laughing and even occasionally giggling, a sound she never used to make.

He didn’t say anything. Much as this chattering annoyed him, it made Fiona happy. And, it made Beatrice happy. It even made Samantha happy. She sat beside Fiona, and couldn’t help but giggle along with her, sometimes outright losing control and letting out a snort from how hard she laughed. Triss and Samantha deserved some happiness.

And, in a painful way, this was sort of like exposure therapy for him, all this socializing. The problem was when Jen steered the conversation toward sexual topics, and Fiona not only did nothing to stop her, she pounced on the opportunity.

“We were both dying for it,” Jennifer said. “After seeing what your blood did for Damien, first thing we did is head back and do that to Sándor, and—”

“You saw Fiona with Damien?” Samantha asked. “Details!”

Triss chuckled, glanced Damien’s way, snickered at him and his probably very obviously uncomfortable expression, and looked back to the girls.

“We found Fiona and Damien having some wonderful sex at Bloodlust a couple days ago,” Jennifer said. “He’d taken a drink of this cute little creature already.” She leaned in and gave Fiona a playful slap on the knee. “So naturally, Fiona was making quite a mess all over the man. But it was Damien that surprised us. A private man, not exactly prone to outward acts, correct?”

Everyone looked to Damien.

He put his fingers on the keys and played the famous eight notes of Beethoven's 5th symphony. All the girls laughed.

"Well!" Jen continued, "it definitely left an impression with us. Lots of hugging, and choking, and spanking."

"Oh my." Samantha peeked over the couch to Damien, and Damien caught her in the corner of his eye before looking back to his piano.

"So we tasted Sándor, and... oh my, the rush. The absolute rush. It was so powerful, overwhelming, and frightening. It was like... getting drunk, very quickly—if memory serves. But also the same adrenaline rush of a flight or fight reaction. It was extreme. We were unprepared."

Fiona giggled as she nodded. "I hope ye enjoyed it."

"We did. But then Sándor surprised us. I mean, he told us he was going to do it, but it still surprised us."

"What did? Oh aye, right. He took ye to his lair."

"Yes. And... proceeded to fuck us until we couldn't walk anymore."

Damien slowly peeked back over his shoulder again. Okay, yes, this wasn't a conversation he'd planned to be a part of, but they were here, in his living room. And the idea of Sándor, the giant gargoyle, having sex with two women at once, while transformed, was... intriguing.

"Details!" Fiona said, squealing.

Jen, obviously thriving on Fiona's and Samantha's enthusiasm, held up two fingers.

"Two. Two cocks."

"Two?" Samantha asked.

"Two. And they were... very, very large. And one was bigger than the other."

"Which," Triss said, "I had to handle, because Jen here was too much of a pussy."

Jen scoffed. "Well I'm sorry if—"

"No no no, you don't get to play innocent here." Apparently giving up on the pretense of being here to learn piano, Triss hopped off the bench and sat down beside her girlfriend. "This bitch here was fucking the smaller dick, which was still fucking giant mind you, while I had to handle the bigger one. And then Jen taps out! Like it's wrestling! Before I knew it she was helping Sándor get both dicks inside me, and I was lucky I didn't just explode by the end of it."

“How big?” Fiona asked.

“Fiona!” Damien reached out from the bench and gave the back of the couch a slap. Of course that did nothing to deter his girlfriend. She just giggled, stuck her tongue out at him, and leaned back toward the girls.

Jen held up hands, indicating a size. A huge size.

“Like that,” Jen said. “Thicker than my wrist. And that was the smaller one.”

“And you took both!?” Samantha asked Triss, voice rising a lot more than expected.

Whoever said women were prim and proper and didn’t talk about extremely intimate details, never met two or more women at the same time. Utterly filthy creatures. Vile. Eve tempted Adam, and Jezebel was fed to the dogs.

Damien laughed quietly, shaking his head as he looked back to his piano and gently practiced some scales. Lucas’s old lessons sounded so ridiculous in hindsight.

“And I lived to tell about it,” Triss said. “Joys of being a vampire. We’re pretty durable.”

“I mean, I’ve seen some porn of normal women putting some large things inside them,” Fiona said. “Even a living lass can stretch quite a bit.”

Everyone went quiet, before erupting into laughter again.

“It’s nice you ladies are having fun,” Samantha said, with a little inflection Damien hadn’t expected. Ah, right, she’d had some sexual interactions with all the witches. Her friendship with them was different than the one with Athalia.

“How about you?” Triss asked. “Taste any interesting kine lately?”

“I’ll have you know I met a very nice man at a book store a few nights ago.”

“Really? How’d he approach you in at a book store?”

“I approached him.”

Jennifer whistled. “Oh my.” No need to say it. No one expected Samantha to have that much courage, not in a social situation like that.

“I did!” Samantha said. “And I... I um...”

“Tell us tell us!” Fiona said.

“We uh...” Samantha was squirming. Damien didn’t have to look to tell. “I took him into one of the quieter corners, hidden behind some bookshelves, and I... I Kissed him.”

Jennifer clapped. “Quite the Daeva, aren’t you? Seducing kine... in strange places, but seducing nonetheless. Did you sleep with him?”

“No. I—”

“Why not?”

“Jennifer! I just met him.”

“So?”

Jennifer. A modern day Lilith.

“Because I... I don’t know. He was a kine. I don’t want to start a relationship with a kine... do I?”

“Plenty of books about it,” Triss said. “You know, those black tragedy books about vampires romancing a human, getting the human all obsessed with them, only for it to all go down in flames.”

“Triss!” Fiona said. “Dinnae be mean.”

“Hey I’m just trying to be real. Human-vampire relationships can get pretty fucked up, especially if she makes him a thrall or ghoul. Then you’ve got a dotting servant who’ll do almost anything for you. That’s fine if you’re keeping them at an emotional distance. Not so fine if you’re looking for more.”

“But, couldn’t I just... not give him my blood?” Samantha asked.

“Sure, if you’re cool with your lover dying of old age. But what vamp is going to let their lover, or even their fucking pet, die of old age? It’s a pretty weird, shitty situation. Buuuut, if you just want a fuck toy and a servant, thralls and ghouls are awesome.”

Fiona hopped up from the couch, and sat on Damien’s bench with a loud plop, body facing the couches and the girls, but head pointed directly at him. That, was a Jezebel grin.

“You want me to adopt a thrall, or a ghoul,” Damien said, eyeing his wicked, sinful girlfriend.

“Aye!”

“A man, I assume.”

“Ha! Aye, a lad, if ye can stand it. But I wouldnae mind having a lass in bed with us.” She walked some fingers up his arm to his shoulder, very spider like. “Someone we could both have some fun with, ye ken?”

He rolled his eyes, now intimately familiar with the dark space hidden inside the upper eyelids of his eyelids and brain.

“Ya dinnae want a ghoul?”

“Mekhets like to do things quietly, and alone.”

“Is that so?” Triss asked, and she replaced Fiona on the couch beside Samantha. “Sam, you shoulda seen the way this church boy fucked Fiona in Bloodlust. I swear he was putting Fiona on display for Jen and me. We got to see everything.” Triss leaned in toward Samantha. “I mean everything. Big dick, her little pussy, making a mess. Damien made it all very visible.”

Samantha gasped and looked over the couch back at him. “Damien!” The look in her eyes was a combination of surprised and disappointed, classic mother look. Damien had never been close with his parents, at all, hence his attachment to Lucas back then, but even he could feel the ancient weight of a mother’s mom gaze.

“I... it was...” He grumbled and looked back down at his keys, earning more laughs from the girls.

“Aye, and it was great,” Fiona said. “Begotten blood turns vamps into truly wicked creatures. I love it.” She scrunched up her nose, leaned in, and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. She knew this social environment was Hell for him, and this was her way of telling him she’d make it up to him.

“Damien’s aversion to joy aside,” Jennifer said, watching him and apparently reading his mind, “Triss makes a good point. If you want a fuck toy, or even just a blood bag you can trust, a thrall is a great option. You’ll definitely want to run it by Antoinette first, though.”

“Okay,” Samantha said. “I’ll... think about it. About that, and what Triss said, ‘cause I like him and I don’t wanna ruin that.”

“Smart,” Triss said. “It’s a whole lot healthier to be in a relationship with someone who has some free will, ya know?”

“That... is a little sad to hear. My son has three thralls, and—”

“Antoinette probably has a dozen or so, Sam, not to mention her two ghouls. It’s just a fact, the older you get, the more you need some thralls and ghouls to keep you safe during the day, and be a food source in emergencies. But she also seems to know better than to get romantically into one. And, speaking of, how is Jack?”



“Jack is good!” Naturally, Samantha’s voice rose in pitch. She liked talking about her son. She was proud of him. “I was talking to him yesterday. He’s... He’s different. Very different, than when he was alive. But, very different than he was after that, too. When I woke up that first night, as a vampire, I could tell Jack was all torn up inside, you know? He was worried about me, but he was the one who...” After a slow, heavy sigh, Samantha sat up a bit straighter. “He’s doing much better than before.”

“Sam, you have a serious mother complex,” Jennifer said. “Stop worrying about your son so much. Yes, he had to deal with some pretty horrible things, but he also had some powerful friends to help him.”

“I know! I can’t help it. He’s my boy. My... only child...”

Before Damien could blink, Jen and Triss both got close to Samantha, and hugged her. Fiona ran over to join them, leaving Damien to stare at the trio of heads surrounding Jack’s mother. That was way too much social contact. But, instead of getting up and shoving people away, Samantha let out a very happy ‘aww’ sound and gave everyone hugs in return.

How Jack came from this women, Damien had no idea.

“Jack’s fine, like you said,” Triss said. “You, on the other hand, need a man.”

“I don’t need—”

“You need a man to snuggle with, and talk to about your day. You know it. I know it. And we’re gonna find you said man.”

Samantha grumbled. Ah, there it was, a noise Damien had heard from Jack many times. They were related.

“Come on,” Jennifer said, “let’s go to... um... I would say Bloodlust, but you’d rather hunt for men elsewhere.”

“Not hunt!” Samantha stood with the Ventrue and Nos, shaking her head. “Not hunt. Socialize. We could try a... quieter night lounge, maybe?”

“You mean an expensive club filled with preppy types and rich shits?” Triss asked.

“I mean... yes?”

The girls laughed and hugged each other some more, before Triss gave Damien a small wave.

“Same time next week, Damien?” Triss asked.

He frowned at her with his most intense glare, which wasn't very intense. Jack could do intense. Not Damien, and she knew it. Laughing, she waved, and she, Jen, and Samantha left.

"Your friends are evil," Damien said.

Fiona giggled up a storm as she came and sat with him at the piano again.

"They're nae evil!"

"You don't see it because you're too close, but they're very evil."

"Samantha?"

He shook his head. "Not her, but she will be soon enough. Daeva blood, Antoinette as a sire, and those two as close friends? She's doomed."

Laughing until he had to grab her shoulder so she didn't fall off the bench, Fiona eventually leaned in toward him and hugged him.

"I'm nae?"

"You're just as corrupted as those two. Always were, even before you came to the city. Probably before Vrall joined you."

She stuck out her tongue. "I blame the internet."

"So do I. Clearly you've been living a sinful lifestyle since you hit puberty."

He got her. Giggling like a maniac, she blushed and hugged him, and rubbed her nose into his.

"When I was a wee lass, I read those vampire novels every girl loves."

"Those aren't exactly healthy reading."

"Pffft. They're fun!" She kissed him, and tightened her hug on him before getting up, and reaching for the light. "Vrall wanted to spend some time wit ye. Ye up for it? She dinnae have two dicks, but I think she'll keep things interesting."

He hadn't spent much time with Vrall lately, not since Azamel died. Fiona wanted him around, and he wanted to be around.

"Only if it's okay with you."

"I am Vrall, ye ken. Of course."

She flipped the light switch, and the room went dark.

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It was the jungle. Her jungle. Usually when he visited Vrall they went to the haunted hospital nightmare. A dense jungle wasn't exactly the best place for a chat, or sex.

"Vrall?" he said. No response. That happened sometimes when she pulled him into her lair. She told him it was because of the nature of opening and closing chamber doors, but he was pretty sure she liked making him stumble around in the dark. It was kind of frightening.

That's why she liked it. No matter how comfortable he grew with the spider woman, there was always that element to her that wanted him to be afraid of her. Begotten struggled with that, and how it ruined their relationships with the people around them, Athalia being the prime example. It was also part of the reason Fiona left her hometown. But it was a good move, coming to Dolareido, both to get away from her family so she didn't hurt them, and to find more food.

It also meant that, every time Damien interacted with Vrall, there was always that tiny element of fear in the mix, because there had to be. Vrall was beautiful, and frightening. Triss felt the same way about Sándor's Horror, and it probably made their romantic encounter... spicier.

He'd never admit it to Triss, but it made his encounters with Vrall more thrilling as well.

Sure enough, after a couple minutes of careful walking through a jungle of dense foliage full of insects and stalking predators, he found a dangling, thick white rope of spider silk. In the darkness with the canopy blocking out the two moons, he couldn't see shit, but the rope caught just enough light to glint slightly. Plus, he basically fell into it. And surprisingly, it didn't stick to him.

When in Rome. He grabbed the rope, and climbed. And climbed. And climbed. There were a few trees around that were absurdly thick, and the canopy of the shorter trees hid their tops from him, until he managed to get a good fifty feet up. Past the first canopy, he found another fifty feet to climb up to a more parse canopy, giant leaves and branches spread apart so the moons were visible. Stars, too.

It would have been a beautiful sight, and it sort of was, except for the distant howls of predators.

The rope took him up to a giant... trampoline? Something like a trampoline, made of web, spread out over empty air.

"Lie down," the darkness whispered.

Damien smiled, and stepped off a branch onto the huge, tightly wound web. It didn't stick to him, which should have made him feel a little less nervous about tangling with a spider monster. But it also meant a very large fall was right beneath him, and from above, it looked more like a death pit trap, the sort filled with poison spikes.

But, thankfully, the web didn't have any gaps in it larger than an inch, and he was free to lie down on it. If he rolled too far to any side, he'd plummet, and probably break a dozen bones, even as a Kindred. He wasn't afraid of heights, but still, it was a little frightening. Which was, of course, Vral's goal.

The spider woman descended from the shadow of a tree, and Damien gulped as she lowered herself with such smooth, seamless motion, it was chilling. Eight spider legs, each coming out of her spine, each ridiculously long at almost thirty feet, thin, and almost a pure shade of dark steel, ending in tips she could easily skewer him with. Eight Blade Arach, her old title, made sense.

But, terrifying as the blade legs were, the human-ish part of her was always a treat to look at. She didn't bother with her usual white silk dress this time, nude and onyx-colored skin on full display, glistening slightly in the moonlight. Human-like legs that ended in blade points, and three claws instead of fingers and thumb. Breasts just as massive as Fiona's, but on a slimmer body and an inhumanly small waist.

Even more distinct than that, was the lack of eyes. An onyx bone-like plate covered where eyes should have been, and raised up and back into giant horns that curved back like a crown. Not a single hair on her body, anywhere. Combined with her sharp chin and small, sharp navy-tinted lips, it was no wonder ancient tribes worshiped her, feared her, and lusted for her.

She grinned down at him as she used her spider legs to walk onto the giant, flat web, and stood over him, licking her lips. She was about as tall as Damien, without the horns.

Without a word, she leaned forward slightly so two of her spider legs rested on the web near Damien's feet, and two more rested on the web past his head, putting her horizontal. He smiled up at her, doing his best to not let her see how vulnerable he felt, a spike pit of death beneath him, deadly spider monster above him. And he smiled because her hanging like that made her huge breasts hang and sway underneath her.

She used her other four spider legs to poke at and undo his clothes. He helped her. No need to cut them off this time, not without any stick in her web. And with how sharp her spider legs were, he had plenty of reason to undress quickly. She did like to stab him, gently, when he didn't obey fast enough.

Naked, he spread out on the web as if it bound him like a trapped fly, even though this was one unusual web. It was the first time she didn't bother with the stick. Or, was sticky default, and she had to do something to make it not stick?

Vrall lowered herself down toward him, until her heavy hanging breasts brushed against his face, and the rest of her hovered a single inch over his skin.

"Beatrice and Jennifer had sex with Sándor, while he was transformed."

He nodded, cheeks brushing against the inner contours of her breasts.

"She told you?"

"I am her. I hear what she hears."

"Right, right."

Chuckling, she lowered herself down more, and buried his face with her breasts as her stomach settled on his chest. Her thighs spread around his waist, and he shivered as the long, sharp points her human-ish legs ended with teased along his own legs, almost hard enough to cut him.

"The gargoyle is quite the beast," she said.

"Pretty scary, last time I ran into him."

"And gorgeous."

"You think?"

She chuckled, voice quiet and deadly. "I do."

"Going to make me jealous."

"Oh? Fiona adores her pretty vampire boyfriend. She loves that you are beautiful, and would look good with mascara."

He frowned up at her, but she just laughed and slid forward until her breasts fell off the top of his head. Higher and higher she slid up, until she righted her torso over his neck, thighs spread around his shoulders.

"I'm not a pirate in a movie," he said.

"Of course not." Nodding, she reached down, and ran her long claws through his hair. She was looking down at him, but without eyes, it was hard to tell. And with her sitting up directly over him, huge breasts hanging down and blocking a lot of his view, it was hard to notice anything else.

“You made it sound like my girlfriend would prefer to be ravaged by a giant gargoyle.”

“I think being ravaged by you, more thoroughly, interests her. You should experiment with inserting large objects into both of her holes.”

He blinked. That was pretty forward advice, even for Vrall.

“I’ll... talk to her.”

“By all means.” Nodding, the spider lady shifted her hips forward, and lowered her sex directly onto his mouth.

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Vrall’s proportions were exaggerated, in the most sexual, alluring, deadly sort of ways. A ridiculously tiny waist with huge breasts, a small mouth hiding long fangs, and a very, very small slit. She wasn’t just some spider monster. She was an ancient nightmare god, worshiped and loved, with ritual sacrifices done for her, and she’d likely slept with many of her followers, hundreds of years ago. A divine gift in the eyes of the tribes that paid her tribute.

What she saw in him, he’d never know.

He Blushed Life, and ran his tongue slowly along the outside of her smooth lips, wetting them before sliding his tongue higher. A quick brush against her clitoris was enough to make her shudder, and he grinned up at her before moving his tongue back down to explore the lips of her entrance some more.

“You may be wondering why my web does not stick to you tonight.”

He nodded.

“I thought,” Vrall said, “I would enjoy tonight more if my prey was... not so much my prey, as my helpless, doting servant. You will do as I say, with the utmost enthusiasm. Understood?”

He nodded, and gave her clit a quick kiss, earning an evil, soft chuckle from the spider woman and her quiet, raspy voice. Like a lounge singer who’d smoked her whole life. She hadn’t sounded like that when he’d first met her, but she’d adapted to Dolareido quite a bit.

“Good. I want my lover bound by my words tonight, not my webs.” She leaned forward, and set her claws onto the web over his head. How she managed to dance her claws along the web without cutting it, he had no idea. “Now, continue. Devour me.”

So he was going to be a slave tonight? He could do that. He spent so many nights tying Fiona up, and sometimes he also ordered her around and made her do things for him. To him. Maybe Vrall wanted to try that?

“Hold my legs, vampire.”

That was, indeed, what she wanted. He put his hands on top of her thighs, and helped hold her snug against his mouth as she got comfortable.

They went slow at first. No need to rush things; the novelty of that truth was still euphoric. They could spend all night doing things to each other, and no emergency would blink on their phones to greet them. So, slow kisses on her inner thighs, one for the left, one for the right, before again his lips found her sex, and explored her lips some more. Gentle, teasing, playful, a part of him he hadn't ever known.

When he tasted a drop of her juices, she leaned forward more, and pressed the front of her slit down against his face. He opened his mouth wide and devoured her, like she'd ordered, and her smile was positively evil. She shifted her hips back and forth slightly, barely moving them at all, only helping him bury her clitoris in heavier a longer strokes of his tongue. More of her juices wet his face, and the spider monster moaned as she shivered on top of him.

Her claws took her breasts, and squeezed, causing their huge softness to spill over her fingers. Her bodyweight never planted down on him hard; she weighed very little even if it did. Her spider legs kept most of her weight off him, giving him no trouble keeping his mouth latched onto her slit, so he could hide her clitoris in his mouth and massage it in faster and faster licks. She preferred it when he started soft, and got faster and harder as she grew more and more aroused, and the beautiful spider creature was growing more aroused by the minute.

She grabbed his head, and pulled it up into her pussy until his lips were flattened against hers.

“Faster.”

He licked faster. The dark, steel-skinned creature groaned openly, quiet voice erupting for a single moment before quieting again as she ground her pelvis down against him. After a few shudders, she came to a halt.

“Stop.”

He stopped. Tongue still pressed to her clit but no longer licking, or daring to move in any way, he let Vrall move in whatever way she wished that milked the most pleasure she could from her orgasm. And she did, grinning down at him with her small, dangerous smile and dark purple lips, as more beads of her juices wet his cheeks.

Once her shaking body recovered, she slid herself down over him until she straddled his waist, and it was his turn to shiver as another droplet of her warm juices fell out of her onto his abs.

And then she moved lower. He managed to push his torso up a bit, weight on his elbows against the webbing, and he gulped as the skinny, curvy creature reached down with a set of claws, took his cock, and aimed it up at her tiny slit. With a subtle, hypnotic sway of her hips, she pressed her small, clenching hole down on his cock's swollen head, and licked her lips as she slid his glans into her wet insides a single inch. She squeezed, and electric tingles shot down his length and in between his thighs.

"Tell me," she said, "that I am beautiful."

"You're beautiful," he said, voice wavering slightly as she worked her pelvis up and down, so her clenching muscle stroked the tip of his length and nothing more.

She sank a little lower, and squeezed hard, making him shudder again as a warm bead of her juices trickled down his girth. With that quiet evil chuckle she'd developed lately, she let go of his cock, keeping its tip inside her as she reached out, and set both her hands against his chest. Her human legs lifted up and forward, and rested their rapier tips on his shoulders, leaving her eight spider legs to do the work of keeping her from falling on his cock.

"Tell me I am terrifying," she said, and one of her spider legs reached up and around to run its blade tip along one of her horns. The spider legs were hyper flexible.

He was tempted to tease her, maybe say something like 'not all that scary', but it'd be a mistake. It was the grin. No eyes made it borderline impossible to read her, except now her grin was wearing an especially evil smile that was more than a little scary. Was she angry with him about something? He'd definitely been paying Fiona a lot more attention than Vrall lately, what with Azamel's death and Fiona being far more emotionally... hungry, than Vrall.

Plus, even with how utterly beautiful and sexy she was, she was still a monster, with claws and horns and a web. Maybe she'd always looked this scary? He'd gotten used to it, but he could still remember the first time he'd ran into the spider monster, the panic of getting caught in her webs, the chill that'd run down his spine when she'd shown herself.

The memory was enough to send that chill up his spine again. His erection didn't mind.

"You're terrifying."

Her grin softened, and she lowered herself down all the way, squeezing on him in spurts as she did. Hot, wet, clenching flesh surrounded his cock and buried him in heavenly warmth that didn't fit the



spider woman's exterior at all, and he groaned as he fell back, lying on the web again. She was so ridiculously tight.

She folded her legs, putting her right leg over his left shoulder along with her left leg. Her hands found her breasts again, and she gently caressed them, teasing her claws up and down her dark skin, while her eight spider legs slowly lifted her up. When only the tip of his length was inside her, leaving it coated in her juices, she lowered herself, and Damien sighed bliss as her gripping pussy swallowed every inch of him.

“I haven't been entirely happy with you as of late, Damien.”

“I... had a feeling.”

She chuckled. No, it was more of a giggle. She wasn't the sort to giggle, and it sounded less lovely and inviting than Fiona's would, and more like a scary spider monster who impersonated a beautiful woman, about to enjoy her meal. The lure of a siren, or angler fish.

“You fought Black Blood and Jacob without me.”

He lifted his head. “That's what—”

She clenched. He froze, wincing as her boiling insides squeezed hard enough to almost hurt. It felt amazing, her powerful muscles gripping him from base to tip until more of her juices trickled out of her, but she made sure to do it hard enough to border him on the edge of pain.

“It annoys me that you did not bring me.”

“Fiona was out like a light, and everything happened so quickly, and Jacob trapped us, and—”

“Are you sure you could not have stirred her awake?” She relaxed her grip on his cock, only to tighten it again, and folded her arms across her chest under her heavy breasts. Even without eyes, he could tell she was looking down at him, sorta, in a royal manner. Combined with how her legs crossed at the knee and sat on his left shoulder, while her spider legs shifted her back and forth along his body while she sat like a queen, it was a very imposing look.

“No, I couldn't have. She was completely exhausted. You were... there, right?”

Vrall sighed, and stopped squeezing so hard. If he'd been human, he'd have let go of his breath he'd been holding onto. Nodding slowly, she slid her feet off his shoulder, and sat sideways on him, legs still folded at the knee and blade tips sticking out over the web, perpendicular to him, dangling off the web's edge. She put her hands on her knees, contemplative, again like a queen considering her options. She'd used her eight spider legs to turn her seamlessly, and she continued to use them to move

her body around and around, making her beautiful ass squash down against his pelvis as she went up and down, while also swaying side to side.

She was dancing on his cock, while also sitting on it like she was on a throne, pondering the politics of her kingdom. It was strangely beautiful to watch.

The warning signs began, and he let out a soft sigh. Heat built up underneath his testicles, and sparks of pleasure flowed out of his swollen glans, down through his length and into his core. Inner muscles flexed, and he pushed his pelvis up—

“Don’t move,” she said, and she licked her small lips as she grinned at him.

He didn’t move. Every part of him wanted to thrust, or grab her hips and yank her down, but the moment he lifted one of his hands, one of her spider legs pressed down on it. If he didn’t give into it, its sharp tip would penetrate his skin. He relented, and gulped as he watched the spider woman slowly sway her body around and around on his cock, up and down in a slower, milking rhythm.

She knew exactly what she was doing. Much as he loved Fiona, cherished every moment he was with her, and enjoyed pinning her and choking her as he fucked her, she wasn’t a very self-aware woman during sex. Vrallar’takla of the Eight Blade Arach was an entirely different woman, completely in control of every motion, every muscle, and she milked his cock of every gush of cum with deliberate purpose. She was making sure his orgasm was almost painfully pleasurable, and he groaned a couple times as she clenched.

Only when the final spurt of cum flowed into her, and then out of her around her spread lips, did she stop her dance.

“I was there,” she said at last, and she slowly turned her whole body to face him again. The wringing sensation of her soaked insides squeezing on his cock was euphoric. “And I admit, Fiona was incapacitated.” She spread her legs, and leaned forward. Her claws found his shoulders, and she pulled him up into a sitting position before wrapping her legs around him. “But it was... frustrating, to learn that so much happened. To learn you almost died?” With a heavy sigh, she leaned in, and hugged him tight, burying her face in his neck and her breasts against his chest.

“I... I didn’t...”

“Hug me,” she whispered.

He hugged her.

“Use your hand and stroke my horns.”

He lifted his hand, and ran it along the texture of her horns. Surprisingly smooth, but not perfectly smooth, almost like a turtle shell. He'd never touched her horns before, not like this at least, and to his surprise Vrall let out a content sigh as she relaxed into him.

“Caress my back, and the grooves between my legs. Both hands.”

He did as ordered, and ran his fingers between the bumps where her spider legs connected to her spine. A hard, firm texture, again almost like a turtle shell, that quickly softened into a normal skin texture outward. He rubbed, massaged, and experimented, pushing in on those places with his thumbs hard, as if trying to work out the knot in a muscle. Vrall sighed bliss again, relaxing against him. She liked it.

“Now, hold my hips, and bounce me on your cock.” She leaned back, and with her human legs still wrapped around him, she used her spider legs to keep her from falling as she leaned even further back, while her claws gently held his shoulders.

She was now weightless.

He licked his lips, took her hips, and stared at her glorious body, her huge, dark steel breasts spreading out over her ribs as she leaned back, and her tiny waist underneath them. He held her waist, caressed it for a moment, and enjoyed the softness of her skin there despite how lean and tiny it was. After, he slid his hands onto her hips again, and lifted her.

Still weightless. Her spider legs were, somehow, working with his motion to keep her bodyweight nonexistent.

He slammed her down onto his cock, and couldn't help but smile as the deadly spider monster let out a squeak. A weird, raspy, quiet sound, but a squeak nonetheless. Her huge breasts rippled across her chest, taking a couple moments to settle. Her hands on his shoulders tightened slightly. And her mouth smirked, as if judging him for only now figuring out what she wanted.

He tightened his grip, and bounced her hard. And didn't stop.

“There... we... go,” she said between bounces, and she moaned with that quiet, alien voice, as she leaned back further until her torso was horizontal. Flexible. And as much as he wanted to look down and admire her tight slit drenching his cock in new layers of juices, he couldn't help but stare at her breasts flowing back and forth over her chest. Her dark, purple nipples jutted out from her onyx steel skin, and her breathing — now panting — raised them with each gasp.

“Faster,” she said. He bounced her faster. “Harder.” He bounced her harder.

A part of him was acutely aware of how much the web trampoline shook with each bounce, as if it was getting ready to launch him out of it, or maybe tear. But it didn't. He was free to hold Vrall's hips tight, and slam her down on his cock as hard as he wanted. With her being weightless, it didn't have the same sway and motion of normal sex. Every bit of strength he put into moving her meant speed. He bounced her harder.

She let go of his shoulders, and let her arms dangle as she came. And after a quick smile, she let her head dangle back as well, body going limp, and yet not, spider legs still keeping her weightless. He slowed down a bit, indulging in the muscle spasms of her insides milking his length and coating him in wet warmth, but she lifted her head and frowned at him.

"I did not give you permission to slow," she said, even as her body quivered, and voice wavered slightly.

He got back to work, bouncing her hard on his cock, even as she squeezed like a vise. An affirming nod from her, and she leaned back again, torso going limp again as she relaxed and quivered. The way her enormous breasts flowed in circles along her chest was mesmerizing, and he stared, mouth parted, as he watched them jiggle with each motion he made.

He could feel his juices build again, and he squeezed her harder as he lost himself to his own desire. Closer and closer to orgasm, it became less about sex, and more about doing whatever he needed to do to milk pleasure from his length with her clenching insides. He pulled her down hard enough to make noise, and to feel her ass ripple as her pussy took his length. And—

"Stop," she said.

If he'd had Fiona's blood in him, stopping would not have been an option. Begotten blood, or the Begotten's vessel blood, filled him with enough mindless need and aggression that he always succumbed to it, and fucked Fiona until she was either begging him for a break, or went coma. Tonight, the sex was far more controlled. Vrall wanted to have a more aware and intimate night with her, and he was going to make sure she got what she wanted.

He stopped, and couldn't help but frown slightly as she pulled herself upright again.

Vrall chuckled as she took his shoulders again, and pulled herself in until she put kisses on his neck, and her huge breasts molded to his chest.

"You make me climax easily," she said. "I wonder if that's because of Fiona, or because you are a talented lover." Grinning at him like a playful devil, she leaned back again but kept her hands on his

shoulders, and slowly ground her hips up and down, rubbing her clit into his pelvis as she massaged his length. But she was going too slow to push him over the edge and let him cum, and she knew it.

“I don’t exactly have a long list of lovers in my past.”

“There is two, right? Fiona, and me.”

He smiled. “You’re a lot different to Fiona.”

“I am.” She slid one set of her claws down his chest, and traced the lines of his pectorals and abs. “I am much, much tighter.” If Fiona and Vrall ever talked to each other, they probably had a catty relationship.

Vrall squeezed on him hard, and again he shuddered as her boiling insides pulled more pleasure sparks from his swollen glans. She wasn’t wrong, but no way he was going to say it.

She chuckled. “Sit up on your knees.”

He gulped, got his legs underneath him, and knelt up straight.

Vrall smiled up at him as she leaned back, her spider legs again seamlessly moving around. Even with her pussy wrapped around his cock and thighs holding his hips, he couldn’t feel her spider legs doing any movement. Weightless. She used her spiders legs to lay her body horizontal, hovering and perfectly in line with his pelvis, and she folded her thin arms across her chest under her breasts and held the huge pillows together with her biceps and forearms.

“Fuck me.”

He tightened his grip on her hips again, and pounded into her. On his knees like this, he was free to thrust, and with her still making herself weightless, yanking her toward him was beyond easy. Hard, powerful, rough, he fucked her until the entire web was shaking, until the branches it was bound to were shaking, and her breasts, still held together by her arms, bounced up and down beautifully and inversely to her movement.

He continued to stare, almost oblivious to her grin, as he came inside her. He slowly pulled her off most of his length, and yanked her back down hard, earning a heavy gush of his cum, and a flowing wave of tingling bliss through his length down between his thighs. Again, he fucked her, slow but harsh thrusts that had her skinny body and her huge breasts jiggling, as her muscles clamped down and more of her juices joined his own. Her expressions were impossible to read, but her mouth was open a bit, and she made a few moaning sounds with each thrust.

She was cumming along with him.

Eventually everything slowed down. He held her balls deep, and let her squeezing muscles milk the last few drops of his cum out of him. She was content to do just that, and she shivered between muscle clenches, grinning at him even as a mix of their juices soaked his testicles.

They both stared at each other for a little while; he did, at least, and could only assume she was also looking at him. After a minute of simply holding still, and letting the jungle night fill the silence, Vrall raised herself in a seamless, all too creepy motion using her spider legs, until she was sitting upright. She hugged him, and hid her face in the groove of his neck.

“You should stay here, too.”

“What?”

She kissed his ear, and hugged him tight, squirming on his cock as she did and making sure to mold her breasts into his chest. Eventually his cock softened, fell free of her, and their juices fell through the web to the jungle canopy below.

“Stay here, with me, where it’s safe. I cannot protect you out there. I can protect you in here.”

Where it’s safe. Like Sándor had provided for Beatrice and Jennifer.

“I don’t—”

“Not to stay here all the time. I’m no fool. But, you should... rest here, more often, during the day. I’ll protect you. No one will lay a finger on you. I will not... not let Fiona suffer another loss.”

He smiled into her neck, and kissed her skin as he hugged her back.

“The sun won’t catch me here?”

“There is no sun in this chamber. Forever darkness, where it is safe.”

He nodded slowly as he stroked her back and the hard skin between her spider legs, using his newfound knowledge to make her melt against him.

“I can do that.”

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