

All Souls Pass by S.A. Payne
Chaps 1 - 47, Epilogue

All Souls Pass

Part One:

Macy loved his pants. Black leather, beyond skin tight, they were cut like blue jeans if the blues jeans had done one too many hits of ecstasy. He liked the way the leather moved with him, liked the way it felt to run a hand over his own ass while he was dancing and most of all, liked the eyes that followed him. It didn't matter to him that black was an utter cliché, it was a cliché he liked. There was no need to wear fancy colors or frills to catch notice.

His shirt was his second favorite item of clothing. Black, God he loved black, only not leather but latex. It took cornstarch and a great deal of patience to get the damned thing on, it fit like a second skin, but once wiggled into he felt as sexy as he knew he looked. The little sleeves were short t-shirt style in cut and clung to the strength in his arms, the neckline was scooped wide to show off collarbones and neck and the length stopped just above his navel. The latex was so tight it peaked and arched to show every ridge under it and left nothing to the imagination.

He liked the way it felt on. Almost corset like, it was tight enough to restrict breathing. So tight that the slightest of contact, the merest brush of another person's hand across chest or back, felt like muted fireworks to his skin below. The thought by itself had his nipples hard and that was an area off limits unless the person doing the touching was serious. A fingernail dragged over those hard latex pebbles was a recipe for instant erection followed by quick, hard fucking.

Beyond the shirt and pants, he kept things simple. Black leather bondage cuffs that he liked the feel of on his wrists and the sound the D rings made as they rattled but for which he rarely allowed himself to be restrained in were the only jewelry he had on. Even the sparkles he normally favored he'd removed and set aside. On his feet he wore his favorite boots. Black, of course, leather, of course, and heeled. It was the sound of the heels on smooth floors that appealed to him. The toes came to a sharp point and were tipped in dull, unpolished steel. The running joke was the plain steel tips made it simpler to clean the shit off the points after he'd put his foot up some idiot's ass.

Beyond that, he only wore the smooth, obscene paleness of his skin. No make up, no earrings, nothing but the peek a boo look of dark black and moonlight white. From the short sleeves of the dark shirt extended long, lean muscles of his arms lined and accented with the blueness of veins under the milk pale skin. The pale creaminess of his slender neck rose from the dark to be accented by the tumbled fall of slightly too long black hair. Macy preferred it shorter but had forgotten, again, to get it trimmed so he tolerated it falling about the back of his neck and into his eyes. That left the only other flash of skin his exposed belly.

It was the pants, those beloved pants, that made the display so sexual. They were cut so low, clung so tightly that most of his hips were exposed. It was only the gentle curve of his ass that held them in place, the black leather rode just a breath away from exposing his cock. That, and only that, was the primary reason for only wearing these wonderful pants occasionally. His normal club going partner was too sexy for words and it didn't take long to stir things into interested life. If he got hard in these pants, cut so low, he was one sneeze from fully exposing himself to anyone that wanted to see. Not, in truth, that he minded, but he'd better have some pretty thing right there to take the show further if that happened.

So Macy knew just what a figure he cut inside the club. Sexy, hot, tempting, all without having to try. The club's name was La Vierge, which was French for the virgin and that often set Macy off into a fit of giggles. He found his first prey within an hour of arrival and one solidly good blow job later he was mellowed out and bored. He danced some but it wasn't the same and he drifted about the crush of humanity, drinking, flirting, toying and bored out of his skull. In the end he

flopped against the end of the bar, lit a cigarette and considered going home.

A glass clinked behind him and Macy glanced over a shoulder to the young bartender, a handsome brunette with green eyes before he glanced down to the tumbler of amber liquid on the bar itself.

"Bourbon." The very young man announced. "Looked like you could use it."

Macy turned around, placing his back to the crowd knowing the low cut of the leather would show the very top crack of his ass to anyone that wanted to see. He took a long, slow drag from his cigarette and let the smoke roll from his lips. "Why, Adam," he began slowly. "Are you buying me a drink?"

That made the young man blush a little but he shook his head. "On what they pay me? Hell no, I'm putting it on your tab." He recovered and grinned back. "Where's York?"

Macy waved lightly. "Somewhere in England I'm told."

That made Adam laugh, it mixed into the sounds of the music that melted to their out of the way section of the club. "No, your partner in crime."

"Not so far as England, I'd imagine." He took another drag and blew the smoke into the bourbon. "He had something more important than entertaining me, can you imagine?"

Adam shook his head. "No, I can't." He watched, fascinated, as Macy bent over the glass and sucked the smoke back out. "Having any luck tonight?" He managed to ask without his voice breaking and pushed down the wave of sheer lust that overcame him.

"Couple of blow jobs, nothing amusing, crowds full of posers tonight." He whined, twirling the glass between his hands. "Wasn't worth the time to dress."

"I don't know, makes me happy." Adam managed to flirt back.

That made Macy laugh and the wide smile exposed the overly long sharp point of his canine teeth. The laughter died and Macy's eyes narrowed. He took a swallow of the bourbon to wash the bad taste from his mouth.

Adam followed the insanely pale green eyes when they caught and narrowed on something and saw the source. One of the club goers, a woman made up in overly dramatic make up and nearly wearing pancake make up to make her as pale as Macy was. She was holding an overly slender man's arm in her hands. One of her rings, and she wore several, had a sharp talon on it and she drew it across the man's forearm in slow, dramatic fashion. The man moaned, the woman licked her lips before bending down to suck the small trickle of blood away, smearing her red lipstick with the blood.

"Posers." Macy snorted and took another drag of his fading cigarette.

Adam shrugged. "She claims she's a quarter blood."

"My ass."

"You should go show her the real thing." Adam prodded. "Scare her back into her place."

"What?" Macy blinked innocently. "And remove her outlet of getting back at daddy for taking away her allowance? I wouldn't dream. I've outgrown those games." He took another small swallow of the very fine bourbon and nodded to the bartender. "I thought you quarter bloods kept each other in line? Shouldn't you spank her, not me?"

It was common knowledge that Adam's grandfather had been a full blooded vampire, his mother a half blood and now, he was a quarter. Just enough to make him a night person, have slightly sharper canine teeth and occasionally a tinge of hunger for something other than a burger.

He shrugged. "Quarter's pretty thin."

"Indeed, your girlfriend forgive you yet?"

Adam had slipped up, in the middle of a wild night of really great sex, he'd bitten her and drank her blood as he came. She'd been livid and they'd gotten into a huge fight. Macy had noticed instantly the day after and prodded until the normally private bartender confided in him. It had seemed like the right thing to do, since Adam was pretty sure that Macy was at least a half blood, maybe he was only a quarter but if so the man had spent a great deal of time and money looking more thickly blooded than he was.

"She still won't talk to me."

"Forget her, find someone that understands. Some cute, quarter blood piece of ass that you can have pretty half bloods with." He teased.

"Like you?" It had been months and he hadn't been able to peg Macy down on the truth.

Impossibly pale green eyes narrowed again but this time Macy grinned. "Is that what you think I am? A half blood?"

Adam shrugged. "Quarters can't tell depth, you aren't human. The eyes are a nice touch but they could be contacts, skin is pale enough but again, I'm pretty pasty too."

"You're tan compared to me."

"But I'm pretty pale."

"Granted."

"The teeth are a nice detail but I could have them too if I was willing to spend a small fortune at the dentist."

"So, am I half blood or a very vain quarter blood?"

"You tell me."

Macy sighed. "There's no fun in that. Maybe I'm full blood." He teased and crushed out his cigarette.

"There hasn't been any full blood in these parts since my grandmother got knocked up ninety years ago."

"That could be a full blood." Macy nodded to a woman that sailed by. Her hair dyed bright, fire engine red with black streaks. This time her skin was naturally pale not induced by thick make up. She was leading a man on a leash who seemed delighted to be captured if the bulge in his pants was any clue.

Adam shook his head. "That's full blood Irish and a good dentist, she's a worse fake than you."

The biting response made Macy laugh. "You're too young to be so cynical."

"You're not old enough to warn me of cynicism."

Macy didn't answer, just raised his glass and downed the last swallow smoothly. "I'm so bored."

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Part Two:

The club quickly began to grate on Macy's nerves. No amount of sex was satisfying, it only left him hornier and dancing just made him want sex. The booze wasn't bad but again, it was boring. The flirting that normally amused him so much all sounded the same and the parade of faces all trying to be something they weren't only served to make him pissy. In the end he gave up, retrieved his coat from the check room and shrugged into it.

It was snowing outside, had been for hours from the looks of things. Icy cold air swept across his club flushed skin and chilled it, giving an pleasant contrast. He liked the cold winter nights where his breath plumed out in icy little clouds. Even the little shivers a quick, unexpected cold gust of wind could carry with it was refreshing and something he relished. The people waiting in the falling snow to get inside the club didn't appear to agree with him.

On another night he'd linger and watch them shiver, wait to see how much they'd tolerate to be allowed inside. Tonight, however, he felt restless and he let his feet carry him out down the snow covered sidewalk. The streets were emptying out, the late hour and gathering snow on the roads made traffic limited but Macy felt drawn to that.

It was dark, silent, almost deserted looking. The soft snow reminded him of different places where pavement didn't cover everything and snow brought with it the same silence. He liked the way his feet broke the untouched snow, the black sailing in a sea of white frost. Even the sound of his steps crunching made him happy and Macy let the night carry him on further than he'd intended.

It didn't surprise him when he finally glanced around to find himself in the seedy side of town. There were cars here, driving slowly in the snow and to eye the few prostitutes brave enough or desperate enough to venture the cold. It seemed silly to see the women teetering around on the icy slick streets on frightfully high heels, wearing skirts so short they may as well have been naked, yet bundled under heavy coats in vain efforts for warmth.

At least the handful of male hustlers had it a little better off. Most were in jeans but they lacked the heavy coats and tended to huddle together, shivering, in thin denim jean jackets and other short coats that didn't cover their asses. Macy let his eyes wander over them and found nothing of interest. Even on a good night finding a woman or man more interesting than what he could find at the clubs was rare but the snow had driven most away. Those that remained watched him with guarded wary eyes and he didn't blame them, he was dressed more like a pimp than a john.

Which was fine, Macy knew his own limits and interested or not he rarely refused a come on. It just seemed wrong to fuck a whore in an alley when the snow had padded the city in a layer of innocence. Didn't matter that the few cars circling around were churning the snow into dirty slush or that there weren't any holiday lights glittering in reds, blues and whites in this neighborhood, Macy liked to pretend the world was pure, if only for a few hours.

He was more than happy to stay on away from the handful of people out so late as he made his way to the end of the street. Half way there he felt eyes on his back and was reminded that the hookers and johns weren't the only creatures out so late. There was no point to pausing and

offering a threat, if the eyes were connected to humans they wouldn't understand. If they were connected to something else, well, a threat would only escalate the matter. Another night, he'd push the matter just for shits and giggles but tonight he just wanted to go home.

Human or other, they must have been territorial because once Macy reached the end of the street the feeling of being watched went with it. Which was fine with him, the night was peaceful looking and he wasn't going to shatter that illusion unless forced. It was nice leaving the grim reality of life back in the street behind him and he started focusing on the snow as his footsteps carried him away once more.

It even smelled clean, as clean as the air ever smelled in the city at least. Crisp in the coldness and sharp too, he could smell the water as it floated down, like rain with razor sharp edges. A scent flitted over the smell of snow like flavoring on a snow cone and caught Macy. Bright and metallic, it was a scent he knew. There was blood, fresh and flowing and very near at hand.

It wasn't any of his concern. Macy knew he should keep moving, blood being spilled into the snow wasn't his affair. He wasn't that bored, there were plenty of things to do at home. A ton of York's books he could read and there was always porn, that normally kept him amused. There was no reason he had to even go see where the smell of blood was coming from, none what so ever.

The scent led him to an alley. There was a light over a side door on the one building that glowed in dim orange amber light and cast shadows. The shadows weren't dark or deep enough to hide what was happening at the far end. Two young men, in jeans and cheap coats with gang colors tied to their belts had a third person down. They'd quite obviously kicked the snot from the third, the body lay unmoving and unresisting in the snow. This close, Macy could smell two blood scents so it was a good bet the third person hadn't gone down without a fight.

One of the men standing pulled a belt off, leather and metal rattled as a loop was formed and slim wrists caught in a tight binding. "Get him up." One said and the pair lifted the limp body from the snow. "Put the fucker over the crates."

As the lifted the body up, Macy could make out a masculine profile on a young face. Not a boy, but not yet really a man yet either, damp hair fell in curled tendrils across a blood smeared face. He watched from the shadows as the pair dropped the boy across the cardboard box crates stacked outside waiting for the trash pick up to come by. One yank had the boys loose cotton pants down to his ankles, so they must have already been hanging open.

Curiosity satisfied, Macy turned to leave. It wasn't his bother who got beaten or who got raped. Happened, every day and nothing he did would change or stop it. Didn't matter if he played hero or not, didn't suit him anyway, bad things would still happen. It didn't even matter how tasty the blood smelled, the city was crawling with tasty things.

"Dude, you're fucked up!" The one laughed.

Macy turned for one final glance and saw what prompted the teasing comment.

"Fucker doesn't deserve any lube, lucky I'm feeling so kind!"

The one with his pants already open had a handful of the pure, white, fluffy snow and was smearing it in melting clumps to the boy's ass. As he watched, the man bent down and scooped up another handful and packed it forward to settled between ass and balls. They were using his snow, his innocent, blanketing, peaceful, pure snow to rape some hustler that they could have had for thirty bucks.

There were some lines, once crossed, Macy wouldn't walk away from. He turned and entered the alley and while he knew he could walk, even in snow, without a noise, Macy liked the sounds his

boots made as they crunched. Not a thought was spent on hiding his presences or in advertising it so he managed to get pretty close before the man not smearing melting snow noticed him.

"What the fuck?"

Which got the attention of the one about to fuck the unconscious boy. "Back off cunt, busy here!"

"That's my snow." Macy said softly and considered lighting a cigarette.

The pair glanced to each other. "What?"

"That's my snow." He repeated as if speaking to very stupid children. "See?" He tilted his head slightly and held out a hand. Fat, fluffy flakes floated down into the orange amber light to glow before landing on his hand, his head, on the alley and across the unmoving boy. "It falls down, coats over the rotten ugliness and for a few hours makes everything beautiful. It's my snow, now, apologize for defiling it like that."

The pair exchanged a look again and confirmed that they'd both heard the same thing. There was barely suppressed laughter before the one standing a little to the side pulled a hand gun from his waist band. "Bitch, back the fuck off."

The corner of Macy's mouth quirked up into a grin. "You're not going to shoot me with that."

"Fuck I will, don't like fucking capping crazy fucks but I will!"

"I don't give a shit about the boy, I'm sure he's asking for it or whatever." Macy's sarcastic boredom dripped from his words. "Just save us all a lot of pain and say you're sorry about the snow."

"Just, pop him. Boss is waiting for his delivery." The one with his pants open urged.

The handgun fired, sounding both louder in the cold night air and more muffled than it should have been. Three pops filled the alley, three bullets fired and when the third finished, the two thugs found a body was missing. "What the hell?" The thug with the gun actually glanced to the weapon to see if it had really fired.

A hand, slender and pale, closed over the hand gun and easily plucked it from the thugs grip. "You humans and your toys, absurd." Macy was close enough to kiss the angry young man but instead he brought his elbow up and broke the man's nose. "Really, would saying you were sorry have been that much of a burden?" He stomped the point of his boot into the man's knee. "Can't I have one little thing left unsullied?" The heel of the boot came crashing down into the fallen, bleeding man's groin.

"What the fuck?" The man with the open pants whispered, eyes wide and all his interest gone from his victim. "What the fuck are you?"

Macy sighed and dropped the handgun, the barrel crushed in on itself and useless.

"What the fuck?" The man nearly shouted, close to panic, his eyes darting from Macy to the gun to his moaning friend and back again.

Macy just sighed and stalked closer, not even angry, really, but frustrated. The human staggered back away from him and tripped over his own feet. One pale hand lashed out and caught the strong neck, lifting and slamming the man back against the wall.

"Oh, please, please, don't kill me, oh what the fuck are you?" The man sobbed now, near tears in his panic.

There was a bleeding cut by the man's ear, Macy stepped closer, almost pressing himself against the human. He sniffed lightly at the blood before leaning in to drag a tongue at the drying marks. The taste had a sharp undertone but it wasn't unpleasant. "Drugs are bad for you." Macy purred and licked the wound again.

"What the fuck are you?" The man whimpered, shivering now at the licking and the tight grip on his throat.

Macy let his free hand slid down to the man's open pants and let his snow chilled hand cup the human's cock. It was soft now in fear and shrunk more at the contact. "Not so big now? What? I'm not as sexy as a boy you've beaten bloody? Or maybe you don't like being bottom so much as top? Do you think I care what you like?"

"Please?" The man sobbed. "Please don't."

That just made Macy roll his eyes. "God, like I'd actually fuck you!" He laughed, all menace fading from his voice. "I have standards, thank you very much."

"So... you aren't going to kill me?" The man asked in a tiny voice.

He stopped and pulled away from where he was licking the last of the blood from the side of the human's face. The dark eyes were wide and frightened and Macy blinked innocently at them. "I hadn't thought about it, maybe I should?"

That made the man piss himself. Macy glanced down and sure enough, where he'd tucked the man back into his pants was a long damp stain. The human just moaned in fear and misery and total humiliation.

"Wow, haven't done that to anyone in ages." Macy laughed. "Be glad you didn't piss on me or I would snap your neck after I made you lick it off. Say you're sorry."

"I'm sorry!" The man whimpered.

"For?"

"For... for.... For pissing myself?"

Macy sighed and shook the neck he was holding. "Focus! You defiled my snow!"

"I'm sorry I de...de...defiled your snow!" The man choked out around the tightening hand.

Macy let the human go and without that hand to his neck he fell, choking into the snow. "See? Not too difficult for everything to be better, now is it?"

The man just gasped for air as the snow landed in his hair trying to blanket him in innocence as well.

"Pick up your friend and get out of here, if I see you ten seconds from now, I will kill you both, and not in a happy kind way either."

It took over thirty seconds, Macy counted as he watched the flakes fall into the alley. Twenty seconds longer than he'd allowed but the night was really pretty so he was feeling generous and let them gather each other and their ruined gun up before hurrying away. After they cleared the mouth of the ally, he stood silent and waited. When another minute had passed with no signs anyone was planning or even thinking about returning, Macy shrugged and turned to go himself.

The unconscious boy picked that moment to slid off the crates and land in a bloody pile in the snow. Around one wrist was twisted a strap of a cheap old nylon backpack that got caught in the pile of trash and twisted his arm at a painful angle. Macy stopped and glanced at where the boy had fallen. His pants were down exposing him to the frigid night air, what clothing he had on was thin, cheap and soaked wet from melted snow. The boy's lips were blue but he wasn't shivering any more.

"Aw, fuck me." Macy shook his head and knew he couldn't leave the boy in the snow to freeze to death. Just didn't seem right when there was a hospital twelve blocks over. It wasn't like he had any pressing rush to get home, there was plenty of time to get the boy dumped off and back home before York arrived. Even enough time to make cocoa and pose himself all sexy and ready before his partner returned, so there was no excuse to walk away.

The boy was limp and as cold as ice to the touch. For a moment, Macy thought maybe the human had been killed but the boy's heart was still beating and he was still breathing in shallow, sad puffs. With a rough yank Macy got the loose pants back up and slid the button into place to hold them there and still the boy didn't stir. The skin under the nylon back pack strap was red and torn up looking but the wrist wasn't bloodied.

Macy tossed the backpack over a shoulder and crossed the boy's arms over his chest. He should have worried that the boy had broken ribs or internal damage but he figured he was being enough of a saint just hauling his half dead ass to the hospital.

Somehow, getting the boy situated to toss him over a shoulder managed to get blood on his hand. Macy licked it off absent mindedly as he glanced around the alley for anything else that might belong to the human. Only the taste wasn't what he'd expected. It was like popping a yellow colored candy into his mouth, excepting it to be sweetly tart and finding out it was dark chocolate flavored. It wasn't unpleasant just surprising.

So much so that he paused and smeared more of the boys blood onto a finger that got quickly popped into his mouth. A happy little moan of pleasure slipped around it and he restrained himself from just bending over and licking the boy's wounds clean.

"Odd fellow, aren't you?" He spoke to the unmoving human. "Hmm."

If he dropped the boy off at the hospital his commitment and connection to the human ended there. That had it's merits, without any doubt it had merits, but it also meant he'd never know why the human tasted so oddly. Maybe it was as simple as a new drug just starting to circulate around the lower levels of the streets but maybe it was something more. Bottom line, whatever the answer was, it wouldn't be boring and Macy was all for anything that could amuse him.

Macy glanced up to the sky but the low floating, thick snow clouds blocked any view of the sky. It was late, or rather early, he could feel it. Dawn was coming and once the sun was up it wouldn't be long until York came home. He doubted the human would die by then, if he was taken someplace warm that was. If he did die, well, that wasn't any different than if he'd been left in the snow and Macy knew he could get the body away before York got home and yelled at him.

"That's it, boyo, you're coming home with me." Macy mumbled as he hefted the skinny human over one shoulder. "Lucky, lucky you!" He chirped and patted the round ass that floated near his face. "Lucky."

Part Three:

Seeing the sun rise after the longest night of the year used to bring a sense of hope to York. It was a promise that no matter how long the darkness, light did again return. A promise he used to cling to and believe in. Hope felt too thin in recent years, even if he saw it in the eyes of his coven mates it never seemed to touch him any longer.

He stayed, past the sunrise, to break his fast with them. They were friends, some old, some new but friends. Friends he hadn't told the entire truth to, even if the high priestess stared at him sometimes with a look of knowing behind her dark eyes, nothing was ever said. The closest they'd come was when the high priest had taken him aside, once many years before, and offered to step aside. The man was trained enough, gifted enough, to know that York was stronger and further along the path.

Leading even a coven of friends, held no interest for York. He'd comforted the man and refused the title without denying the properness of the offer. Since that point, his place in the coven had been solidly, if not officially, as the elder, the one even the leaders turned to for advice. It wasn't a position he was entirely comfortable with, even after so many years.

York bided his time and stayed silent. The years slipped away and white gradually was appearing in hair once dark as smile lines crept onto the faces of his friends and York remained unchanged. Every year, every time the night gave way to dawn and returned for another turning of the wheel, some small bit of hope dimmed in York. It left him torn between gratitude for the friendships he'd found and the hollow melancholy of all that he'd lost.

None of it mattered, they were used to him being more silent than talkative and as they shared tofu bacon and whole grain toast the group warmed him. By the time he'd finished his second mug of organically grown and fair trade coffee, some of the emptiness had burned off and he was smiling at their jokes and stories. Some of that softening must have touched his eyes because the group around him responded.

"So, how about it, Chene? You and that fellow of yours consider kids?" Willow, a woman with wide hips and strong shoulders tossed out, poking York in the shoulder as she went by.

He winced a little but hid it. "My fellow? He's almost like a child himself. If he ever grows up, maybe we'll consider it." He smiled softly but that was about as much speaking of his personal life as he ever did.

"You'd make an excellent father." Hawthorn, the high priest, added.

"Shows what you know." He teased back. He was tired and the coffee was only making him jittery and both were combining to thicken his accent. If he wasn't careful he'd be speaking in French and be too tired to notice. "I should go." He announced, downing the last swallows of coffee and standing. If there was ever any morning that could make him say too much, this would be the morning. The only option was to retreat.

"Very well." Hawthorn nodded and rose to embrace his friend. They'd long since learned not to debate or fuss with their Chene.

Hugs and kisses were exchanged along with promises for the next full moon. York snagged his long wool coat and hurried out into the snow. The sunlight was almost blindingly bright, bouncing from so much white. He squinted against it's glow and hurried the four blocks to the subway entrance. Things were easier from there, no one looked twice at anyone on public transportation. He hopped the train that would carry him from the quiet single family neighborhood back into the

more industrial and dirty city and back home.

Normally, he tried to be away from the loft less than a day. Macy tended to get into trouble when left alone too long. Once, he came home to an orgy. A couple dozen men and women he didn't know had all been naked and writhing about and he'd found Macy in the center of it all like some perverse ringmaster. Another time he'd returned to find the kitchen burned and blackened. He'd never gotten an explanation for that one, something about an experiment that had gotten out of hand. The oddest had been the time he'd returned to find marshmallows leading to the bathroom where he'd found their soaking tub half filled with the same. Large and small, but all white, the tub had become a springy sweet mess. He'd found Macy naked playing in them and that mess had been forgivable because the sex had been outstanding.

So he braced himself for anything when he reached their warehouse. The neighborhood had mostly been industrial when they'd bought the building but now it was almost entirely high end apartments. They could have put the building on the market tomorrow and made ten times what they'd paid for it but they held onto it because Macy liked the space. No amount of logic or pointing out that two thirds of that space sat empty worked to change his mind.

York typed in the key code that unlocked the main door which lead to the industrial elevator and another key pad that took a different key code. The lift stopped and he pulled the heavy doors open, braced for the worst that he might find. From the elevator he had a good view of most of the loft, the space was open with the kitchen to the left and a sprawling living area lined on one side with tall windows and on the rest with book cases.

There were no naked people. No signs of fire either and York started to slowly unwind from the fear of the unknown. As he stepped from the elevator and pulled the doors shut behind him he almost smiled. There wasn't even any odd smells in the air, not of perfume or smoke or the sweet smell of candy, he spotted no hookah pipes or bongos or other odd instruments of drug use. The apartment looked just as he'd left it.

Maybe, just this once, Macy hadn't caused trouble while he was out. Maybe, instead of some odd scene that his mind never would have thought up, this time he'd find Macy quietly reading. He tried to picture Macy sitting quietly, reading and failed. Maybe he was asleep already, curled up in their bed, the covers warmed around him. That would be a real treat, to come home and just be able to slip into bed, snuggle close and fall asleep.

He slipped out of his coat and hung it on one of the empty hooks set into a length of old wood that they'd placed by the door for that reason. Of course, Macy's coat wasn't hanging there, it was most likely tossed over a chair or dropped on the floor. Even without the coat, there was no doubt the man was home, York could sense the vampire and Macy was home.

On the off chance that Macy was in bed, hopefully asleep, he walked lightly to the spiral wrought iron staircase that led up to the second floor that covered about half the space they'd remodeled into a livable apartment. It gave the primary living room a cozy feel yet still left most of the space with two story tall ceilings and plenty of airy space. Even on the iron steps he made as little noise as possible because it appeared the second floor curtains had been pulled which was a good sign that Macy was asleep.

The curtains had been a necessity. Not so much for Macy because once the man got to sleep he slept like the dead but for York who had spent too many years waking up with the sun to suit the lazy sleep in life Macy preferred. They'd installed thick heavy curtains along the wall of tall windows which dimmed even the brightest summer sunshine down to a hazy glow but that still crept in and woke him up.

The next layer of defense was a line of curtains they pulled across the open railing that looked down onto the living space below. Macy's habit of sometimes going several days without sleep and watching cartoons at all hours of the day or night while restlessly waiting for sleep to catch

up made those curtains necessary. It also kept the light from the rest of the loft's windows from creeping in.

When that hadn't proven strong enough to hold back York's stubborn habit to wake at the first rays of light, they'd installed a third set of curtains. This time directly around their bed. They'd actually had the bed made to be curtained off, with a wood ceiling peaked over the four, thick posts. The bed was huge and could sleep six easily, four if they tossed and turned or eight if they were real snuggly. There had been occasion since they'd had the bed built for needing that much space. With the curtains pulled around the bed, inside felt like another world.

As the spiral staircase carried York up onto the second floor, it was obvious the curtains at the window were pulled closed but the other two sets were still open. Which still didn't rule out Macy being in bed and it wasn't until he took the last step up and was fully on the second floor that he saw what surprise awaited him this time.

Clothing lay scattered about the open floor, York instantly spotted Macy's leather pants, tossed over the back of a chair. On the floor near by was his black latex shirt, turned inside out from having been quickly pulled off. In the center of the room were his favorite boots, kicked off and left to fall and socks too lay like limp feet beside them. The coat Macy was wearing this winter was dropped by the door to their bathroom.

None of it was unusual, even when they went out together, Macy had this habit of dropping everything when he got home. Like a dog shaking off water, his clothing just seemed to splatter everywhere and it was a habit York had long outgrown being annoyed at. Only this time, it wasn't just Macy's clothes. Near the stairs sat a cheap nylon back pack and dropped around and amid Macy's clothing were items that didn't belong to either man. A thin jean jacket, a cheap baggy pair of pants, an old worn t-shirt, ratty sneakers all lay wherever they'd fallen.

The owners of lost clothing were right where he expected to find them, on the bed. Macy sat at the foot, long, pale legs folded in front of him in a show of flexibility that would make most yogis flinch. He wasn't naked but instead stripped down to a pair of yellow flannel boxer shorts with black smiley faces printed all over.

"Welcome back!" He announced cheerfully but his eyes stayed on the other occupant of the bed. "Have a good ritual thingy? Chant and fuck and whatever it is you do?"

"Macy..." York started, not really surprised or upset that the other man had found someone to sleep with while he'd been gone but surprised that he'd speak so loudly and risk waking his lover. Only, as York got closer he saw how young the man in the bed looked, barely older than a boy and the bruises on his face. "Jesus Mace! I'm gone for one day and you bring some beaten kiddie whore home to bed?"

Macy swung around to let his legs dangle from the edge of the bed. "What?" He asked innocently. "I was horny and he's tasty."

York drew a long slow breath, ran a hand across his eyes and tried to push aside what short temperedness was from exhaustion. The hand ran up over his head and the extremely short hair that was growing out from when he'd shaved it bald a little while ago. When he thought he could move without going into a screaming fit he started forward and began gathering up the scattered clothing.

"God, look at these clothes! I bet he has lice."

"No one has lice anymore." Macy teased, watching York fuss and waiting for him to explode.

"Okay, maybe not but crabs! If he gave you crabs I'm not taking care of it and you sure as hell aren't touching me until you're clean." He crouched down to gather up the dropped latex shirt.

When he stood up Macy's arms wrapped around him, the man had climbed from the bed and across to embrace him without making a sound.

Macy nuzzled the side of York's neck. "I didn't fuck him." He purred and just so gently rubbed his half aroused, flannel covered length against the ass of York's jeans. "Was waiting for you."

He wasn't going to give in that easily but neither was he willing to pull away from those strong arms. "Why is there a teenage whore who's been beaten half to death bleeding in our bed?"

"He's not bleeding, silly. I cleaned his wounds." Macy demonstrated by licking the back of York's ear.

"Why is there a teenage whore who's been beaten half to death in our bed?"

"I was horny." Macy repeated and rubbed himself against his lover again.

All that did was annoy York as much as arouse him. He snorted and pulled from arms that could have stopped him if they'd wanted to and continued gathering dirty clothes. "When aren't you?"

Macy actually tilted his head a little and thought about it. "Good point, but you weren't here and the loft was so empty." He whined.

That stopped York where he was folding the leather pants to hang them back up. "You were lonely."

That earned a small shrug of a pale shoulder. "Horny."

But York knew better and it was really kind of sweet when he thought about it. "Okay, horny, so you tarted yourself up and went out."

"Yeah but it was all lame posers, got bored and went to walk in the snow. Saw a couple of guys beating the snot out of that kid but they..."

York held up a hand. "Don't care, just skip to the part where your brain went on vacation and you brought him here."

All teasing jest disappeared from the vampire. "He's tasty, York, really, really tasty, like you but a different flavor. I've never tasted anything like him. I was going to take him to the hospital, dump him off, but I need to know what he is."

York turned and slid a free hand to the back of his lover's neck and pulled him in for a quick kiss. "That makes more sense." He broke the kiss and picked up the last of the kid's clothing. They were worn, dirty, bloodstained and showed signs of being torn. "Let me take a piss and I'll see about healing him."

A bright smile landed on Macy's face. "I'll make tea!" He hurried off to the stairs, happy faces bouncing on his ass as he went.

York just sighed and shook his head before heading to the bathroom to empty his bladder and splash cold water on his face.

He made it back to the bed before Macy returned with tea and it gave him a chance to look the boy over without his mercurial lover. The kid wasn't bad looking, in a young, poorly fed way. Under the bruises his skin had a light olive tone but the hair that fell against the pillow in twisted drying tendrils was brown with golden tones in it. A small cleft split his chin and his eyes looked a little small, narrow but he had one of those faces that the boy would grow into and be a solidly handsome man.

Macy had stripped the kid, which given how wet his clothes still were was a really sensible idea. More than that, his lover had wrapped the kid in one of their odd sheets so he could be tucked into the warm bed without the risk of him bleeding on or dirtying up their good sheets. It was a small sign that Macy wasn't quite the twit he often acted. The boy's wounds appeared mostly to be bruises and blunt damage with only a few that had split the skin open and those were sealed up and healing. What worried York the most was the damage to the kid's head, when he pried an eyelid open the pupils were uneven.

"I did that too." Macy held the tea out. "Hasn't woken up yet."

"Not surprising with this head wound. Hospital wouldn't have been able to do much."

"But you can fix him, right?"

York shook his head. "Yeah, I can." He took a sip of the honey sweetened green tea before setting it aside on the night stand and sitting down next to the unconscious boy. He reached out with the thin tendril of power and brushed it against the other's energy. "Huh."

"Huh?" Macy asked back, crawling onto the bed with his own mug of tea. "What the hell does that mean?"

"Means he's odd." He stroked out with a touch more strength and saw violet. York blinked his eyes and shook his head to clear the sharp flash. "Very odd."

"Wake him up so I can ask what he is!"

"Shut up and let me work!" He snapped back but without any real anger. He was almost as curious as Macy was and didn't want to delay longer. With a slow indrawn breath he dropped his mind down to the level he needed, a skill that had taken a lifetime to learn and now was as easy as snapping his fingers. He reached out and gently laid a hand on the boy's forehead. When that produced nothing remarkable, York gently settled his other hand on the boy's belly.

Healing was a complicated spell but one he'd had too much practice with. He'd always been good at it, skilled in it's art, but it required both the will to focus and the courage to surrender. Not everyone could be healed or should be and it being a healer meant letting go and becoming merely a focus for the power.

As soon as the power touched them, joined them, York had no doubt the boy would heal. He was strong, stubborn and a fighter. He didn't want to be hurt or die and his body latched onto the offered support like a pit bull. It sucked his breath away, pulled him in and consumed all York offered. He lost all sense of time or self and merely flowed, feeling pain subside, tissues heal, damage retreat below his hands. It was humbling and yet at the same time made him feel powerful, made him feel like he could do anything.

The power began to retreat, the boy's body had absorbed as much of the spell as it needed or could and it was time to back away. Only, as York was withdrawing, he saw something. At first glance, it looked like a knot work of energy, tied up with the kid but as he pulled closer the knot work took on an almost faceted jewel look. He'd never seen anything just like it but he'd seen something horribly similar.

Curiosity got the better of him and even though he knew far better than to poke at something he didn't know or understand, he poked anyway. It was just the smallest of nudges, a tap on the tense node of energy and for a second nothing happened. A soft whisper was returned and York felt it wash over him, felt it identify him as the same person that had offered the healing. Just as softly as it had touched him, it retreated. York was baffled but figured there was time to learn more later, like after a good long nap.

Only as he was retreating that soft whisper returned. There was a moment, a single second when York could have refused it but he saw and sensed no malice in the touch. On a whim, he allowed the contact. The touch this time wasn't a gentle tap or a soft request for identification, it engulfed him. It was like suddenly being dropped into frigid cold water, water so cold that it felt like knives.

York struggled, fought, but may as well have been helpless. The ice solidified around him and shattered, turned to gentle flakes of snow that seared as they landed. Seared and burned and burst into flames, sizzling the cold away and burning. That's when York understood and saw, it was all just raw, pure, unfocused energy. Strength like he'd only felt or seen a handful of times in his life was knotted into the scrawny, dirty boy.

Once he understood, he stopped fighting. It was a gift, the boy, unconsciously, was offering him repayment. There was no fighting that, not without hurting the one he'd just healed. The energy was undirected and blank, unfocused and simply offered for him to absorb into his own person. Which York tried to do, however the sheer, raw amount offered was too much. He felt like a flashlight that had it's nice, simple C batteries removed only to be plugged into a live 220 wire. His last solid thought as the power swept him away, was that this was going to hurt.

All Souls Pass

Part Four:

Macy perched on the bed and half watched, half sensed his lover work. York was so reserved with his skills, so almost shy about showing off that getting him to do any real, serious work any more was almost impossible. It was such a pleasure to watch him, the bitter, serious line of tension he wore so often between his eyes melted away when York was working a spell. His face softened like it did when he was asleep, gentled, and that made Macy want to plant a kiss on the tip of the other man's nose. It was a treat to watch him work.

A treat not just because York relaxed was sexy but because Macy could feel the sheer raw strength the human held. It was tremendous, delicious, and deeper than he'd ever seen in any human. York knotted up all his skill and folded it so tightly inside that it was deceptive, on casual glance he looked like nothing but Macy knew better. He'd seen the power his lover could command. Macy always knew he was attracted to strength, strength in such a sexy package was a sure recipe for a hard on.

The tea was warm in his hands and warm in his stomach. Macy leaned forward and watched the power flow into his lover, focus and flow into the boy. For as skinny and sad as the younger human looked, he took the healing like he'd been absorbing magic his entire life. It was like sitting in front of a fireplace and being warmed, watching the flames dance and as the moments ticked by, Macy wondered what it would take to put a fireplace in the loft.

The flow of power he was watching changed. It was subtle at first and Macy thought it was just York shutting down and backing off but the power didn't fade. Pressure grew, like a physical sense, in the room and Macy found himself wanting to pop his ears to clear it but knew well enough that it wasn't a physical sense. Then, with no warning, the nice, contained fireplace feel he'd been watching, exploded. As if a spark from his imaginary fireplace had fallen out and instantly caught the entire loft afire, Macy startled off the bed in his surprise. He hurried to place his tea on the floor and ran across his limited options.

York was well trained and very skilled. Anyone else, Macy would knock them apart, break the connection and risk lesser damage of the quick sever over the serious damage of being consumed. York wasn't anyone else, in all the years, he'd yet to find anything the human couldn't handle and like it or not, Macy stood back and waited.

The power pulled back a little, sucking in some of the unseen blaze around the two men, before it shattered and exploded outward. The boy on the bed never stirred or showed any awareness of what was occurring around him but York's breath caught in a tight groan. As the power snapped like a too far stretched rubber band, the force of it flung the witch backwards. York went limp and rolled with it, crumbling into a broken ball and let himself be rolled halfway across the floor.

Before he'd even stopped moving, Macy reached the human's side. "York! Come on, York, snap out of it." He called out and reached to roll his lover onto his back. Contact made Macy hiss a little in surprise, York was near glowing to his senses, charged and filled and on fire with energy. "Why'd you pull in so much, you moron." He mocked and forced himself to reach out again.

This time the completely non-physical heat didn't startle him but when he tried to shunt some of the power away, being prevented did. York groaned and flung one arm out to push Macy away which wasn't a very effective gesture. "Come on, York." Macy whispered and brushed his hands across the twisted up face, trying to annoy the human into opening his eyes.

Only the skin below his touch was cool and clammy. The color had drained from York's face and made him look pale, waxen and it frightened Macy. It didn't matter that he could feel the human's heart beat, high, fast and steady like a drum, or see the shortened gasps of breath, he also knew how fragile humans were.

"Wake up!" Macy shouted and hauled back a hand. It came swiftly down in a loud smack across the other man's face. "Damn you, wake up!"

York gasped a long, harsh breath and half sat up. His eyes fluttered back down and he moaned, struggling to get his body to function and move. He coughed and sputtered and shivered but his eyes still lacked focus.

"Tell me what I can do?" Mace demanded and tried to help hold the floundering human steady. "Tell me!"

The human just shook his head but whether it was in answer or in an effort to shake off whatever he was stuck in, was hard to say. He was moving with better focus and he managed to push the smaller vampire away with a hard shove, knocking away the clinging hands that were only trying to help. He tried to stand but fell to his knees, both arms raised to clutch his head as he moaned again.

"What can I do?" Macy asked again, crouching down to try to see York's face where it was hidden away.

York moaned again and tried to stand again, only to fall, this time on his side.

"Where're you trying to get to? I'll help!" He pleaded.

"Bathroom." York moaned out and half curled up into a ball, his body on fire.

"Should have just said so." Macy moved quickly and got an arm across the other man's shoulders. It was no effort to haul York to his feet, even with the other man's greater bulk and couple of inches height. York's feet slid out like a drunkard but Macy tossed one limp arm over his shoulders and lowered his grip to the man's waist.

They moved quickly, on swaying, staggering steps, toward the upstairs bathroom. All the while York was moaning like a thing about to die and Macy dragged them both toward whatever it was the human was looking for. He dragged them into the large space and smacked the light on but York was again mostly insensible.

"What now?" He shook the limp human. "What now!"

York's head snapped around before jerking forward. "Shower." He forced out and staggered to the glass lined section of the room. The shower was big enough for three, lined with slate. York was able to focus enough to see he was nearly there and he pulled from Macy's grip to stagger toward the glassed in area.

"Careful, you'll crack your fool head in!" Macy fussed and got the glass door opened.

Only it didn't seem like York was in the mood to listen, as soon as the door was open he pulled from Macy's grip, tried to take a step and fell hard to the slate floor. Luckily, he avoided landing on his skull but he still lay sprawled and helpless on the cool stone floor. He tried to reach up to turn the water on but was seeing double and couldn't find the right knob to get a hold of.

"Water okay." Macy smacked aside the groping hands and turned on the one shower head, nice and toasty warm the way York liked it.

"No." York shook his head as the water hit him and he arched caught between pleasure and pain. "Cold, all."

He paused but the look of twisted unease made his mind up and Macy figured he'd do better to obey. With a flick of his wrist he swung the knob all the way to cold, which, in the summer was pretty chilly but now with it being below freezing outside was down right icy. The cold water streamed down in a tight shower from the shower head he'd bought York a couple of years ago that simulated rainfall.

The ice cold water streamed down and York about screamed from the shock. His entire body writhed and twisted but the cold water was working. It was shocking him into awareness, forcing his body to ground off the excess energy that had caught him so by surprise. Cold, running water always worked well for him, always, and streambed or shower stall made no difference.

As each second the ice cold water streamed down, soaking York to the skin, Macy could see the fire that had consumed his lover was being slowly controlled. He wasn't sure how long to let the cold water run and York's thrashing had settled down but he offered no direction to leave it on or turn it off. In the end, Macy let it run until his lover's lips were blue and he was shivering hard, only then did he turn off the shower.

He hurried in then, armed with a thick towel but had to toss it over his shoulder. York had lain across the drain and the water in the slate lined room was ankle deep. Which partially explained how quickly York's lips had turned blue, he'd been so intent on watching the man he hadn't been watching the water. Once he rolled York a little to the side the water drained quickly and he got the fluffy towel wrapped around the shivering man.

"Not enough." York whispered out, his eyes still clenched shut.

"More towels out of the stall." Macy answered, half carrying, half dragging the sopping wet witch from the shower. "Here we go." He got his lover dropped onto more of the towels and began tugging off the dripping wet clothes.

Pale hands slid under wet, cold fabric and ghosted against the chilled skin of York's stomach. It made him moan and arch, shivering from more than cold even while his teeth chattered. The clinging fabric was pulled away and air rushed across York's stomach and made him moan

again.

"Not enough." He forced out again but managed to open and keep open his eyes.

Macy got caught on the dark blue, so dark that they were almost like the ocean at night. There was still pain there but something was clawing at the sides, trying to break in. "Whatever you need." He whispered to his lover and meant it. If it was within Macy's power, York could command it.

There was a single, tense, moment that hung in the air between them before York reached up and got a hard grip on Macy's hair. The grip was almost painful but Macy didn't protest, even when it pulled his head down. His lips met York's with crushing force, parting and surrendering, offering anything and everything to the human.

One of his hands was pried up from where it was resting lightly along York's side and Macy didn't protest. He let York guide it and wasn't too surprised when it his hand was pressed into wet, cold denim covering a hidden, growing length. At the touch, York broke the kiss and arched, gasping upwards, eyes fluttering shut and when he settled back down his head and shoulders were pillowed on Macy's legs.

"Need to..." He tried to speak but kept thrusting upwards, rubbing his groin against Macy's hand that he held in place. "Need to burn this off."

The fluttering, painful request made Macy grin evilly. He no longer waited for York to rub against his hand and instead rubbed downward on his own. Each contact made the man moan, still shivering from the cold and displayed out for Macy's sight. He moved his hand to pull at the buttons on the jeans and York writhed and tried to kick off his soaked sneakers. Wet clothing didn't want to behave and Macy ended up scurrying down to yank the shoes off as York struggled to his feet to pull off his jeans.

The denim peeled away, with Macy's help, taking along the soaked cotton boxers with them. It left York naked with his jeans hanging on one ankle, leaning helplessly against the countertop. His skin was chilled and damp but he was still caught in whatever feedback had smacked him. Macy could see it, feel the glow of power under his lover's skin.

There wasn't much time to consider either the sheer strength in the talented witch or the stunning beauty of him naked. One of York's hands groped out and fisted tightly into Macy's dark hair but he didn't have to pull to gain what he wanted. Macy was half way to swallowing his lover whole before York's fingers tightened in his hair but the rough demand only made him more turned on. Over the years, he'd seen a hundred different sides to the complex human and none of them were disappointing. If this side wanted to use him, he'd enjoy every moment.

All Souls Pass

Part Five:

The grip in Macy's hair tightened. "Fangs." York hissed out.

The word startled Macy because he was quickly losing as much control as his lover and had forgotten to be careful. The sharp points could, and in the past had, tear the delicate skin on York's cock. Which didn't cause a great deal of pain due to the nature of Macy's saliva but always pissed his lover off and caused him to pout afterwards. He figured he had pushed hard enough bringing some street hustler home that he wouldn't risk further upsetting York, so he paused in the rapid, hard blow job to further curl his lip over the sharp points.

"No." York tossed his head. "No." He pulled Macy away from his groin until pale green eyes glanced up to his own. "It's okay." He panted out. "Okay."

Understanding was slow to dawn in Macy's mind but when it clicked in he moaned. "Oh, fuck me." Which only made York laugh darkly. "You're sure?" He was painfully hard at the mere thought but was careful to check to make sure he didn't misunderstand.

York nodded and wanted to swear at the pause. Of all the times for Macy to decide to be careful, this wasn't a good one.

There was no pausing a second time. Macy took the hard length solidly in his hand and picked a spot close to the root. Very slowly, he slid York back into his mouth, inch by inch, until he'd gone almost as deep as he could. York moaned, twitching in the need to hold still. With extreme care, Macy let one of his fangs puncture the tender flesh, just deep enough to allow a small amount of blood to well up but not deep enough to really hurt. The wound would seal and look more like a small insect sting within moments but for now, it added a new pleasure to the situation.

Like the kid on their bed, it was the taste of York's blood that had first fascinated him. It was something dark, hidden, secret, a flavor he couldn't really put words to. It tasted nothing like any food he'd ever had but reminded him of the flavors of food. Sometimes, he thought York's blood tasted like some perfectly aged, expensive port wine. Thick and flavorful, intoxicating and rare, it coated his tongue and left him drunk with the want for more. Other times, he was reminded of dark, rich, wild berries. The kind that grew in high mountain forest glades, not the tame, blend berries from in stores. It was a taste of cool shadows and sweet isolation.

There was nothing like the taste of York's blood. Nothing, not in all his years had he found anything he hungered for more. Being allowed to mingle that delicious flavor with the salty bitter taste of his lover's release was as close as Macy could imagine to perfection. Each time he bobbed his head, swallowing deeply his lover's length, that small wound trickled the tiniest taste into his mouth. It made him desperately hard, moaning as he did his best to please his amazing human lover as much as he was being pleased. From the sounds of York's broken breaths and panting moans, he was doing a good job.

"No." York shuddered. "Not enough!" He pulled at Macy's hair, forcefully removing the pleasure that was only driving him more insane, raising more energy instead of burning some off. "Need you." He groaned as Macy glanced up with those near glowing green eyes. "Need you."

"Fuck yeah, baby doll, fuck yeah!" He leaned forward one last time to offer a final, healing lick to the small wound before he sprang to his feet. York nearly tore the flannel boxers from his body before he could get them lowered. Rough, forceful, hands turned Macy around and pushed him forward against the bathroom counter. Which was one of his favorite places to fuck in the loft, the counter gave a good solid something to hold onto and the mirrors let both men watch each other. Not that York ever really watched, he tended to keep his eyes closed, but Macy found it hot.

It was also one of his favorite places because they kept a stainless steel lotion bottle filled with

lube right there. Which was a good thing because he wasn't going to let York stop long enough to find lube and frankly, he wasn't sure the human would have stopped. They'd long since learned to make sure lube was on hand in every room of the house because at one point or another, one of them was being fucked roughly and spontaneously near by.

York kicked his legs apart and Macy wiggled himself into a comfortable position. One of York's arms reached across him to the lube, pumping out plenty, and Macy planted wet, dragging kisses against the flesh, nipping and kissing any skin that came within reach. Every point of contact made York moan and Macy grinned lewdly as he watched the desperate way his lover tossed his head back while pausing to glide the lube on his own cock.

There was no warning after that, hands fell to Macy's hips and pulled his ass back. There was no prep, no pause, no gentle joining, York moaned and with one long, hard thrust, took Macy. It made the vampire arch and a long, keening moan tumbled from his mouth. York had his eyes shut, gasping for air, consumed in as much pleasure as Macy was, flesh no longer chilled from the cold water but damp with sweat and hot from passion.

York was really letting go, grunting in softly muted little animal noises which pulled echoing little grunts from Macy. The slender, strong hands he loved so much were gripping his hips hard enough that if he bruised, would have raised bruises. He loved it, every second, every thrust, every sound, it was just what he'd been missing all night and Macy shuddered and moaned and let his lover fuck him silly.

"Almost!" York panted and forced his eyes open and saw the same aching need in Macy's eyes.

The hand returned to his hair and Macy let it pull him almost to standing, York never lost his savage pace as he pulled his lover closer. It wasn't an embrace Macy fell into but York's one hand did slid under his arm and across his chest, holding him in place. Macy moaned louder as York closed his mouth on the back of his shoulder, it wasn't a tender kiss, strong teeth dug in to the flesh where Macy's shoulder joined his neck. He nearly came when York bit hard enough to break the skin. The pain was sharp and violent and intensely erotic, he nearly screamed as he bucked harder back against the cock taking him so roughly.

The sound pushed York over the edge and his sucking mouth let go of the bite long enough to give a tortured moan as he came, pulling Macy harder against his cock. Only, as the wave of pleasure eased, he was still hard. "Almost." He moaned against Macy's neck. "Almost." He whispered again before returning to his long, hard thrusts.

Instead of suckling on the bite he'd already made, York bit him again. It startled Macy, made him jerk in tormented pleasure. "Oh, fuck, yes!" He hissed as he watched his lover drinking from him and agreed it was almost enough.

Macy groped and found one of York's arms and had to pry it from its strong grip that it held onto his body. He raised it up, turning it so the thin skin of the man's wrists was exposed, and without permission, bit into his lover. This was no small trickle, no tiny beads of red but a real bite. The blood filled his mouth, like piercing a ripe pear and the juice filled his senses. York moaned as the tingling pleasure of being fed from poured down upon him and Macy drank deeply.

Just like biting into a ripe pear, that first burst didn't last and the blood eased to a smaller flow and began to diminish. Pleasure and lust and delight filled Macy and without a single touch to his cock, he lost all control and came. It was as hard as he was being taken and he was blinded by his own release. For a moment, he sucked harder at the healing wound, not noticing in his rapture that it was closing, just needing to be fed and fed from, pleased and a source of pleasure. He was so lost in the stunning moment that he barely felt himself collapse onto the counter, barely felt the fire of York's second release fill him, barely heard the human's choked gasps. He clung there, York a welcome, exhausted weight along his back and some small part of his mind knew that York had managed to burn off the last of the extra energy he'd been unable

to absorb.

"Mission accomplished." Macy giggled weakly and let himself slid off the smooth counter, spent and happy, to puddle on the floor around wet clothes and a panting human.

York moaned softly, clouded by exhaustion and sleep, and managed to get half pillowed against Macy before letting his head drop. "Oh, God." He sighed. "That was..."

"Hot." Macy finished and giggled again, petting a hand over York's short hair. "If you fall asleep will you sleep for a week like that time outside of Madrid?"

Just hearing sleep mentioned made York yawn wide enough to make his jaw pop. "No, just tired..." He sighed and knew he was about to fall asleep right there, naked, on the bathroom floor.

"Then sleep, silly, I'll look after you, wake you before the kid stirs." He pulled the groggy human closer and petted him the way he would a cat until York drifted off to sleep.

It was an odd habit the human had. He could stay awake forever if he had to, if he was around strangers but with Macy, York could drift off two thirds of the way asleep and rest without waking. Macy could do anything to the man when he was out of it like this, and over the years it had been a useful knack. If led, York would even continue to walk while half asleep, or balance on a bike or horse, or even be led through simple tasks like eating. He'd wake later, after getting real sleep or not, and be alert and able to continue.

The trust astounded Macy. Doubly so since it was from York, a man that trusted nearly nothing outside of his own power and yet here he lay. York drifted in that odd twilight sleep of his, waiting to be guided to bed, trusting Macy totally.

"Shower first, lover." Macy whispered and kissed the top of the head pillowed against him. "Up we go." He stood up and half hauled York to his feet.

The human muttered in sleepy protest but stood and with his head lolling, followed Macy's lead into the shower. It was disconcerting, how York's eyes would flutter open but the eyes there would be glazed and unfocused, obviously asleep. Once guided into the shower, York held a hand out and braced himself against the one wall. He swayed but stayed standing, his eyes going fully shut and dropping deeper asleep while he wasn't required to move.

Macy hummed happily to himself, a tune that was so old he'd forgotten where he'd picked it up. The water was hot this time, steamy, and it made the half healed bites on his shoulder sting. He grinned and got them rinsed and soaped up, stealing a grope on his lover while washing him. It earned him a sleepy protest and a groggily batted hand, a reaction that Macy grinned wider at. The hot water washed the suds away, Macy taking care to be gentle and not get soap in York's eyes and wake him all the way up. Every time he got within York's personal space, the human was leaning on him, cuddling in against a shoulder and making happy little sleepy sounds.

He got the water off and York mostly dried off before leading them back into the bedroom. There was no point in re-dressing his sleepy lover, York wasn't body shy by any means and the bed was plenty big enough that the two human could rest on either sides and not touch. It took only a little push on York's shoulder to get the human under the pulled down covers. York muttered again, snagged an extra pillow and tucked it under his stomach and legs as he rolled over, falling on his side and instantly, deeply, asleep.

That made Macy laugh. "Humans are so odd." He found his now cold tea and crawled onto the big bed, naked himself, to sit and sip it while he watched the pair sleep.

York was dreaming of sandalwood. He was in a room thick with the cloying smoke. It clung to his skin, filled his nose, distorted his senses and was making him lightheaded. Shapes moved in the smoke, faces of friends long gone hurried close and when he chased after they disappeared into the scented fog. He tried to call out to them but whenever he opened his mouth it filled with the smoke and stole his words. It was driving him crazy, shattering his heart and he wanted to weep in his frustration but the smoke was stealing everything.

A gentle hand stroked his shoulder. It wasn't from within the smoke. The touch stroked his head, his face, kisses landed on his forehead, on his hands. Like a soap bubble popping, the dream vanished and York startled awake. He was sprawled out on his back, the covers partially wrapped around him and pushed down with Macy sitting across his lap.

"You were dreaming." The dark haired vampire whispered and for a moment looked serious and concerned.

York smacked a hand out and rubbed his sleep fogged eyes. "Yeah."

Macy leaned forward and gently kissed the groggy lips below his own. "Kids waking up." He whispered again as he withdrew, sliding off of York's sleepy body to pull on clothing.

York sat up and let his feet hit the cold floor. He took a moment, leaned forward over his knees, to rub the back of his head and try to shake off the lingering grief his nightmare had left him with. Sleep had done little to make him feel rested but he knew he was good for awhile without more, even if he wanted to crawl back in and get another eight hours, hopefully, uneventful hours, of sleep. With a yawn and a stretch to his shoulders he staggered all the way from under the covers, off the bed and in search of clean clothes.

"I tossed his clothes in the washer." Macy announced, throwing boxers and socks at York when he dug out some for himself. "Just went into the dryer."

He snorted as he pulled on the plain blue cotton and the thick socks. "Didn't look like that t-shirt could survive a good washing, thought the dirt was holding it together."

"They smelled." Macy wrinkled his nose and slid into his own undies, this time there were green and red chili peppers across them with the words 'hot stuff' printed across his ass.

"They smelled like the street, kid's probably homeless." He yawned again and dug out loose cotton pants and a t-shirt that had Einstein sticking his tongue out printed on it.

"Can he stay for dinner?"

"Macy."

"Come on, the thing is skin and bones, doesn't look like he's had a solid meal in weeks! I'll cook!"

Macy was right, the kid was obviously not eating right. Even he couldn't be so cold as to turn the boy out if Macy could convince him to stay for food. "We'll see, let's get him awake first, figure out what he is and then worry about feeding the stray. And at least put pants on."

The vampire rolled his eyes but dug out a loose comfortable pair cut with an almost Middle Eastern width and flare, the outer side of each leg was heavily embroidered with dark red thread and small mirrors. Macy liked to wear them when they'd play Persian Prince and his love slave or Sinbad instructing his new sailor or a dozen other silly role playing games Macy thought up. It made York wonder what was on his lover's mind and hoped they could get the poor kid out of the

door before Macy tried anything lewd.

"Coffee's made too." Macy added pulling on a matching black vest with the same thread work pattern and not bothering with a shirt. It was almost, but not quite, looking like a costume and left him in that grey area between super cool rock star sex god and total dork.

"Coffee works." He nodded and yawned again and wondered what time it was and how long he'd slept. "Food too, I'm starving."

Macy let York wandered down the stairs ahead of him and as his lover stretched and yawned and scratched his ass he shook his head and swallowed the lewd remark he instantly thought of. There would be time enough for dirty thoughts, right now, he wanted to get York awake so they could figure out what was sleeping in their bed.

All Souls Pass

Part Six:

Luke woke slowly. His head felt thick and heavy, sore, like the time he drank too much tequila but without the hung over feeling. There was a metallic taste to the back of his mouth which was unpleasantly dry. All of his limbs felt thick and leaden. He was naked and laying in a bed that wasn't his own with no memory of how he'd gotten there.

It all added up to an unhappy picture. It was the twenty first, rent was due on the twentieth and he'd been seventy five dollars short of his share. Desperate situations led to stupid acts and to waking up from a drugged stupor, naked, in a stranger's bed. He was pretty sure that even drugged out of his head he was an unwavering bastard about condoms but there was no way to be sure. It would mean an earlier trip to the clinic, a couple days of long, nervous wait with hopefully good news at the end. Antibiotics made him violently ill and he couldn't afford to be hurling up dinner when he managed to find it.

He opened his eyes slowly and found he wasn't really naked, he was wrapped up tightly like a baby, in a blanket and set under the covers of the bed he was laying on. Odd but who knew what kind of kink this John had, Luke had seen everything. The bed itself was huge, orgy huge, and looked very expensive. Which fit with the room around the bed's style. Heavy, rich, long curtains hung over industrial windows, the floor was smoothed wood with expensive area rugs, the furniture was quality and costly.

His body protested but he sat up feeling stiff and awkward. It was pretty obvious someone had slept in the bed on the other side, the covers were rumpled, but oddly, the covers between the two sides were untouched. The first order of business was finding his clothes and he winced as he stood up to look around.

Near a metal spiral staircase he found his backpack, untouched or so it seemed, but his clothes

were missing. Voices drifted up from the space below and Luke moved to the railing to peek out between the half way pulled curtains. The space below was large, open, rich. There was a huge flat screen television on one wall with plush sofas clustered around. Art hung framed and unframed on the walls. The kitchen was open to the rest of the space but modern with granite or marble counter tops in a dark stone with burnished metal appliances.

Two men hovered in it. One with black hair and wearing an odd vest baggy pants outfit. He was shorter than the other, leaner, but his arms that stuck out from the vest were toned and strong... and pale. The man was frightfully pale, like he'd never seen the sun or like one of the quarter blood jerk offs playing at being a vampire. He was perched on the counter top, a coffee mug steaming beside him but his attention was fixed solidly on the other man.

He was just a touch taller, with hair cut short and dark brown the shade of walnuts. Dressed simply with casual dark clothes and t-shirt, he was moving about the kitchen talking softly. Whatever was being said, the words didn't make it up to the loft but the tone was harsh, controlled and demanding. It made the one in black on the counter squirm a little and offer up a protesting response.

As much as Luke tried to remember, he simply couldn't recall agreeing to a party with a couple. Only now, seeing the pair in the kitchen below, he was half sorry he'd been stoned to oblivion because they were actually attractive. At least, and this was an assumption that wouldn't keep him from the clinic trip, the odds were pretty good that a fancy couple like the one below didn't have something. Maybe they'd picked him up to spice up their anniversary or something, if that was the case he hoped he hadn't disappointed.

Since the pair below seemed occupied, the one on the counter had caught the arm of the taller one and pulled him to stand between his legs and was currently kissing him silly, Luke figured the least they owed him was a hot shower. The bathroom was as high class as the rest of the apartment but wet towels and lay around. A pair of flannel boxer shorts was kicked, forgotten, into a corner and the room reeked of sex.

Which explained why the bed looked untouched. A lot of folks didn't like to fuck a whore where they slept. He couldn't really say he blamed them, if he owned this nice place he wouldn't want someone like him in his bed either. It was odd though, as he pulled a dry towel off of the shelf and got the water running in the slate lined cubicle, he didn't feel like he'd been fucked all night, let alone fucked, while stoned, by a couple.

Maybe they were really kinky? Maybe they'd just wanted him to watch? Or, maybe, they'd wanted him to top? Not a request he got too often, that was for sure, but it happened. Or, maybe, it was just oral, he wouldn't be able to tell since his mouth tasted like drugs but it was a possibility. Whatever it was, as the hot water pelted down onto his skin, it hadn't left him any the worse for wear. Now, if he could just get his clothes and get out of the place in one piece, with the rent money, life would be good.

The shower was a total, hedonistic pleasure. The water was insanely hot and it poured down in a rich, sparkling flow. Luke understood why someone would invest so much money into a bathroom, it was like a small corner of what heaven had to be like. It was a shame he had to rush such a luxury but to make up for it he used the couple's expensive smelling shampoo and soap.

He sighed when he shut the water off but reminded himself that he had to get home before the landlord, Mr. Gossman, (Mr. Grossman) tossed his shit out into the snow. The towel he rubbed quickly over his body was soft and sucked the water from his skin and hair and he wrapped it around his waist, leaving his hair too damp to drip dry on his search for clothes. At least he was moving easier, feeling less drugged, and didn't feel hurt or sick, that was a plus. Whatever they'd given him must have been good shit.

And speaking of the wonder couple, they were waiting in the bedroom for him. Luke didn't even

flinch and moved easily out into the room. "Hey, where's my clothes?"

"I washed them." The one in black chirped up from where he lounged on the bed.

The brown haired one waved slightly at his lover. "They're drying."

Luke snorted and hated the idea of the long walk home in the freezing cold wearing wet clothes. "How very domestic. Give em back."

"No." The brunette answered. "They're still wet."

"Sucks to be me, look, I just want my money and my clothes and I'm out of here."

The pair exchanged a look and the one on the bed quirked an eyebrow. "He doesn't remember."

"Not a real surprise with that head wound."

"He thinks we picked him up." The darker one laughed and shook his head.

"Hey! Cash, clothes, now!"

"Or what?" The brunette mocked. "Look, kid, we're no threat. You'd be dead right now if Mace hadn't brought you home."

"Couple of guys were beating the snot out of you, about to sample the merchandise for free."

"Yeah cause I feel like I got the shit kicked out of me, pay me and give me my clothes." Luke didn't bother holding onto his towel, not worried about it dropping or them seeing.

"What are you?" The one on the bed, Mace, asked lightly. "That's all I want to know."

"What the hell is that supposed to me? What am I?" He snapped back.

"There's no point in being coy, we both know you're not entirely human." The unnamed one added.

Luke felt his face go red. "I'm not human, I'm a fucking whore and that puts me a good two steps below human." He pulled the towel off and let it fall angrily to the floor. "Now, get the fuck out of my way."

Another look was exchanged and another eyebrow quirked but Luke pushed past them to where his soggy sneakers were set on a heat vent near his back pack. He was prepared to leave wearing on the pack and his sneakers if need be even if he couldn't afford the loss of the clothes or survive the walk, naked, in the snow.

"He's telling the truth." The blue eyed brunette spoke softly.

"Huh." Mace said and rolled on the bed to sit up. "Oy, kid, you should at least thank York, he about killed himself to heal you."

"Fuck off! Ain't no one left that can heal worth a damn so don't pull that shit on me." He was trying to see if he'd left the shorts and t-shirt in his bag or if he'd left them in his room and it wasn't looking promising.

"Actually there are four decent healers in this city alone, not counting York." Mace answered breezily watching the kid's ass as it bobbed while he dug in his pack. He raised another eyebrow at York and it earned him rolled eyes.

York wasn't going to let the boy wander out into the snow naked and he wasn't going to respond to Macy's teasing glances. Instead he pulled open and dug out a pair of socks. They were heavy, finely made, wool for cold weather. Thick and ugly but they worked and kept feet warm even when wet and they weren't cheap but he could always buy a new pair but doubted the kid could.

"Kid, here." He waited until the boy turned before tossing the socks directly at his face.

Luke caught them and turned them over to see what had been thrown at him. "What?"

"Socks, hang on." York moved to another drawer and dug out a pair of grey sweatpants and another grey sweatshirt. Both were warm and loose on him, the kid would swim in them but none of Macy's things were really practical. "Here." He tossed them toward the boy. "Get dressed and come downstairs, we'll have your clothes bagged up and we'll talk about money."

York caught Macy's shoulder and half dragged the other man off the bed and pushed him toward the steps, past where the boy knelt clutching the clothing with a startled, wary look on his face. He had to half shove Macy down the first steps but once he got the other moving he kept going until they were back in the kitchen. He refilled his mug of coffee, adding in sugar and milk, and let Macy perch on the counter again.

"You're letting him go?"

"He's no idea what he is, he can't tell you. Freak him out and you'll never find out but pay him, dress him, let him go and you'll be able to follow him to whatever hole he sleeps in. You'll know his neighborhood and can figure it out later." He sipped at the coffee and watched Macy nod.

"If you're paying him, he should at least blow us."

"I'm paying him because I can and he's just a kid for mercy's sake. For one night he can have some money in his pocket he didn't sell his ass to get!" He hiss whispered back to his lover because the said topic of their conversation was coming down the steps.

The sweatshirt and pants were far too big and made the boy look even younger but dressed now, with his shoes on and pack over one shoulder, he looked less defensive. Made him look far more the underfed kid instead of the independent contractor he was.

York smacked his lovers hip. "Get on with it, go bag up his clothes. Don't forget his coat." Macy groaned and rolled his eyes but hopped down and wandered to where their washer and dryer was tucked in a corner of the apartment.

"Thanks for the loaners." Luke tugged at the baggy clothes. "I'll figure out how to get them back to you."

"Don't worry about them. What's your name?"

"Lucky, as in treat me right you might get..."

"Lucky, cute." York didn't let his smile touch his eyes. "What's your real name?"

The kid smirked. "Warm socks don't earn that much."

He shrugged lightly. "Fair enough. What do I owe you?"

Lucky moved to the counter and took up the mug of hot coffee. He'd swallowed half of the contents before coming up for air. All he needed was seventy five dollars to make rent but there was food money to consider and the fact they'd drugged him. "Three hundred."

That made York laugh. "Really? Even if we had fucked, a skinny scrap of a child like you isn't worth that much." He pushed forward with just the slightest brush of power, picked up the hint of desperation the boy was hiding behind his coffee guzzling and was again blinded by a flash of energy so intense it was violet.

"You drugged me, dude, you and that quarter blood freak boyfriend of yours could have done anything to me. Fair trade, all the way." Luke quickly downed the rest of the coffee before he was yelled at to put it down. When he'd finished the last swallow and set the empty ceramic down he shook his head and looked pained. "Two hundred."

York leaned against the counter a second longer then was needed to make the boy squirm a little before he pushed away and moved to one of the kitchen drawers. He pulled it open and inside pens and notepads rattled around but near the back he found the billfold. They kept it there for easy paying of delivery boys and, in truth, for once, money wasn't an issue for them.

He came over and stood near the boy, the empty mug between them and made sure the boy saw the bills in the billfold. Three fifties hit the counter before York made a show of ruffling past hundreds and more fifties to pull out four twenties and two tens. Last time he'd counted the billfold had collected over two thousand in cash and he saw the hungry way the boy's eyes followed the money back to the drawer.

"For services rendered." York spoke softly, shutting the drawer and the rest of the cash away. When he turned around the counter was bare, the bills tucked away. He could have left it there, Macy was a superior tracker, but he thought he'd give his lover an easy time of it.

Luke's heart was pounding at the cash, the man held more in his junk drawer than he earned in forever. Two hundred was more than he expected to get, to be offered two fifty so casually, so easily, made him feel sick. That much money would keep him fed for a couple of weeks and if things didn't go south cause of the snow, he might make enough to get the hot water turned back on. Two hundred and fifty dollars that obviously meant next to nothing to the taller, broader man was an astounding amount to Luke. It wouldn't change his life but it would keep him in from the cold for the next couple of days. That was all he could ask for any more.

When the man, his boyfriend had called him York, turned back around, Luke felt trapped in those impossibly dark blue eyes. He stepped closer, moving into Luke's personal space, trapping him between the advancing man and the cold counter top. So close, so deliberately, did York move toward him that Luke had a moment to notice the splattering of small, light freckles across the man's nose and cheekbones before he leaned down and lips covered his own.

The kiss was meant to be a distraction only, York was wary of what was hidden inside the boy and wanted him off balance before coming close to those wild and unpredictable energies again. He wanted to make it easier for Macy to track the boy and was going to coat the other human in a layer of his own energies. Like dipping a bon bon in thick melted chocolate, the layer would stick and linger for several hours before being shed off. Normally, he used that little trick to confuse trackers but there hadn't been a decent tracker to worry about in years.

The boy was supposed to be a professional but the lips that met his own held not a scrap of professionalism. York brought his hands up to cup either side of the boy's face and gently teased the tense, tight lips below his own. He didn't stop until he felt the boy shudder slightly and some of the tension dissolve from the body he'd pinned. With the shudder the lips softened, eased, melted into his own and York took full advantage. He deepened the kiss and the boy allowed it submissively, moaning softly as his mouth was invaded. Both of the boy's hands rose up and clutched at York's chest, an erotic mix of protest, desire and submission, he fisted handfuls of fabric and moaned again.

It was easy to cover the boy in his energy trace, York didn't need to even really think about it.

Which was useful since he wasn't sure he could think straight with the boy clutching at him and moaning softly. He kept the kiss tender, gentle, soft but couldn't stop one of his knees from sliding between the boy's legs. That earned him a soft whimper and he found himself surprised when the boy rubbed his crotch against York's thigh.

Things might have gotten out of hand if lips hadn't ghosted across York's neck. Macy had returned from fetching and bagging up the boy's clothes and moved in that utter silence that only a vampire could manage. It was almost too much, to have the slender, oddly inexperienced seeming, boy melting below his kiss and that very experienced mouth behind him hitting every single one of his favorite spots.

Macy's body molded to his back, not surprisingly, the vampire was hard. It pushed York forward a little more, rubbing his leg tighter into the boy's groin. Hands slid across York's belly, pulling, tugging, before gliding down to rub against his groin. That was taking things further than he'd wanted. Macy was too good at touching him, too good at setting his blood on fire and he moaned into the boy's mouth.

Breaking the kiss was almost physically painful, but York managed it. He could feel Macy's hot breath puffing in small gusts against his neck, the slow rub of Macy's body against his own. He forced his eyes open and saw the boy's face was still tilted up from the kiss, his lips still parted, his eyes still shut.

"If you're ever desperate for money again, come to La Vierge, ask any of the bartenders for Macy or York. They'll get word to us." York whispered, turned on enough that his accent was thick.

As he stepped back, away from the scrawny stray that Macy had brought home, he felt arms wrap around his waist. Macy clung to his back, peering over his shoulder in an odd mix of possessive tenderness and simple horniness. The boy's eyes fluttered open as his breathing hitched. Sweatpants with no underwear did nothing to disguise desire and York knew what Macy was staring at without having to see where his lover's eyes were.

"Your jacket's on the counter next to you." Macy purred almost against York's skin.

Luke struggled to breathe. No one had a right to kiss like that, all gentle and wonderful, with total focus and desire. It had almost felt like the Frenchman had meant it and that was what had unraveled all of Luke's careful control. He struggled to regain his senses, and seeing the pair clinging to each other about two steps from one of them tossing the other over the counter and going at didn't help any.

Then he remembered that this wasn't his life. He didn't belong in the fancy, classy loft with fancy, classy men. His life was dirtier than that and the harsh reality was that if he didn't get home and pay the other half of the rent, he'd be sleeping in the snow. Not just him, but his two roommates too, they should have already paid in their share. He scooped up his still damp jean jacket and shrugged into the cold denim. With the pair watching him, the dark one with lustful, mocking humor to his eyes and the taller with a serious set to his face, he grabbed his backpack, the trash bag with his clothes and hurried to the lift door.

Part Seven:

The lift doors were barely shut before Macy was nibbling on an ear. "Seeing you with that child got me so hot." He moaned softly. "I never tire of seeing you on the hunt."

There was lust in York, that was for certain, but exhaustion and nausea as well. It was a tight knot of twisted emotion, balled up with his own thoughts and earlier hopelessness and the bleak outlook for the pretty, boy-whore's life. For as good as Macy's touch felt, he shrugged it off a little. "I was just making your life easier."

Macy nuzzled the back of his lover's neck. "I saw, yummy fake York trail to follow, like gumdrops, my clever boy."

York caught the wandering hands and pulled them from his body. He turned them, dragging Macy around to the front of him and pinning his back to the countertop almost on the spot where he'd trapped the boy a few moments before. There was a smug, amused look on Macy's face, teasing at his eyes and it was as much from having the new amusement of tracking the boy and learning what he was as from any lust.

"No." York spoke softly. "I'm too tired and you've work to do."

"Awww." The vampire whined and added a wicked tone to his expression.

The man was too sexy, too magnetic, for even York to full resist. It wasn't often that Macy poured on the come hither look but when he did, it almost always worked. "Didn't say I was going to abandon you." He caught the ties to the almost absurd pants Macy had pulled on and tugged them free. The fabric slipped down, loosely, over lean hips only to catch for a moment on the tip of the hard cock.

Green eyes fluttered half shut for a moment as the fabric dragged in slow torment off of his length but snapped open to catch the unsurprised but slightly amused expression on his lover's face. He'd slid the purple aluminum cock ring on while he'd dressed and York hadn't seen him do it. Now he stood, all pale creamy flesh, pale hips, thighs, smooth white stomach, with a swollen, dark red hard on.

"And what were you planning on doing with that?" York asked, his eyebrows raising at the sight.

Macy shrugged. "I was certain you'd think of something."

"Confiance de l'imbécile." He muttered under his breath but dipped a little blob of olive oil from the decorative bottle by the stove out onto his hand.

"That's me, trusting to the end." Macy sighed, seeing the grin his lover tried so hard to hide. He leaned his elbows back onto the cool countertop, wearing only his vest and swollen hard on like some obscene statue. York stepped back and half trapped him in place, the oil slick hand wrapped around his hypersensitive cock and stroked gently. "Ohhh and what a lovely end." He sighed and let his head fall back, thrusting his hips out into his lover's hand.

York moved forward and stood to the side of the moaning Vampire. This wouldn't be a long drawn out playtime, even with the cock ring slowing things down. If Macy knew every place to touch and kiss him to drive him wild, York knew the other man just as well. He leaned forward

and nipped at the tense cords of the man's neck as he stroked the swollen length with quick, slick motions.

It didn't take long until the dark haired man was collapsed back onto the countertop, head dropped low, eyes shut to narrow slits. He made no effort to encourage or stop, guide or direct and just accepted all the delights his lover offered. As it always did, Macy's total acceptance of whatever drifted his way, amazed York. He knew the man was competitive, but he wasn't ambitious. He knew he was smart and clever but he delighted in the tiniest, smallest, simplest of things.

Soon the loft echoed and muffled the soft panting moans that escaped Macy's throat. His lips parted in his haze of lust and desire, the sharp points of his teeth obvious and an erotically dangerous counterpoint to the melted, eased creature of lust that had pooled on their countertop. A quarter blood, this aroused, was a dangerous creature and often turned the tables and attacked their lover, biting, feeding, adding to their need and lust. Macy was not a quarter blood and York knew he could push the man as far as he wanted to without worry.

The cock ring made every touch sensitized but this one wasn't tight enough to prevent release, just prolong it. Macy started to shiver in climax long moments before his body actually released. His hips bucked, he held his breath, his muscles trembled and it was beautiful to watch. He arched back, thrusting his hips out and finally really came. Without the cock ring in place, release was a tight, fast, crushing event over a few heart beats. With it in place the pleasure was slower, longer, less sudden and drawn out. That was twice as true for Macy.

Instead of coming hard, his release was pumped slower. It would have almost been a gentle release if it wasn't for the broken sobbing moans and the way his body trembled. York let the release slick his hand further, mixing the smell of sex and desire with olives and bring back memories of other times and other play. He didn't stop his tormenting strokes until Macy's body stopped coming, not just his cock. Only then did he slid his hand once more, this time to catch the ring and ease it carefully from his lover's length.

Macy lay back, his spine pressed to the warming countertop, panting, shivering in the last of his pleasure. He heard water running and felt something damp washing him while he lay, feeling mellow and boneless. "That was nice." He purred as he pried his eyes all the way open and watched York toss the paper towel away. "Your turn, lover." He grinned and caught at the Frenchman's arm.

York shrugged the hand off. "No."

"York,"

He just shook his head and didn't try to hide or deny his arousal. "You need to get dressed and follow that kid. It's too dangerous to have an unknown like him running around a city like this."

"It can wait a little longer." He tried to pull the human closer again. "I'm not so selfish." Instead of relaxing, easing, into his touch, Macy felt the body tense up more. There was something dark behind the blue eyes.

"I'm tired." He sighed. "Later, I need it later."

The dark, hidden hardness in those eyes mingled with the words and Macy understood. York didn't ask often but when he did what he wanted was clear. There was no point in checking to make sure, the man rarely asked and was always sure when he did.

Macy nodded, uncertain what he'd come home to find but ready for anything, and stopped pushing his lover. "I understand."

A small, stuttering breath escaped York and he leaned in and kissed Macy with soft gentleness. "Go, change and get moving. Be careful, I'm going to get some sleep." The mention of the word made him yawn, even while he was still turned on.

"I'll tuck you in." Macy said with soft gentleness and leaned forward to press a kiss to the freckles on York's nose.

All Souls Pass

Part Eight:

Macy was out one the large, hinged window in the bottom floor of the loft within ten minutes of York laying down to sleep. It was his favorite means of coming and going into the loft, magically be-spelled so that only York and Macy could get it open and it led straight to the fire escape. It was so much faster than the lift and Macy tended to only use the internal access to their home when he had to.

Out on the street, he pushed his nearly black sunglasses up his nose. The glare from the snow was blinding but fortunately, there were enough quarter bloods with sensitive eyes still around that he could walk into any convenience store and buy a dark enough pair. Not like the pair he was wearing was from a convenience store, it was some designer name or another that York had bought for him because he said they looked hot on. Macy never turned his nose up at anything York found sexy, ever.

He tugged his fedora a little lower over his face, letting the shade protect him a bit more from the sharp sunlight and the wicked burn it would deliver to his too pale skin in a very short time. He'd pulled on his coat mostly to not draw attention to himself instead of for warmth, it wasn't cold enough out yet to really bother him but people looked at him funny when he played in the snow without one. Prepared with gloves in place and properly dressed, Macy crouched on the cold metal for a moment and opened his senses.

Behind him he could feel the soft, muted feel of his lover. Sleep and the habit of hiding himself kept York a quiet echo against his mind but in front of him, several streets away, was a bright, shiny version of York. It made it too easy, so he slid to the snow covered street in an elegant drop and looked for less obvious clues.

There really weren't sidewalks here, this area hadn't been intended for residential life but footprints came and went from the buildings around them. They'd been turned into fancy apartments but the area around their building was almost deserted. There was only the muffled, softened footprints of York's shoes from when he came home and one sharp, fresh track leading away.

The boy was, at the least, smart enough to not walk in the snow. Even if Macy suspected it was because his shoes were still wet instead of a concern for leaving tracks. The prints led into the

road and from there got mixed in with the rest of the plowed and salted slush. He set off down the street, humming happily to himself.

Even without the energy trail to follow, Macy would have been able to find the boy. By scent or by instinct, any vampire worth his fangs could track someone he'd mentally marked as prey. They were, after all, predators, and few creatures were really able to elude them once on a hunt. One, scrawny street kid didn't stand a chance and it was more a practice in amusement than real tracking.

The kid made a bee line to the rougher areas of the city. Moving along the handful of blocks where whores and pimps roamed, he skirted it without ever quite crossing it. He slipped into a Kum N Go twenty four hour convenience store, the name of the chain and its tendency to be in the seediest sections of towns always made Macy giggle. He hovered outside in that there, not there over looked in plain sight way a vampire had and watched the kid circle the rows.

A pack of condoms, a box of cinnamon flavored pop tarts and a liter of soda joined the packet of ding dongs in the boy's hands, all of which got spilled onto the counter. He watched the kid request and be given a carton of cheap ass cigarettes when it was pretty clear he was underage. The clerk just rang him up, and the boy paid for his items with some of the cash York had given him, only instead of accepting a plastic bag, the kid shoved everything, minus a single pack of smokes, into his backpack.

From there, Macy followed the kid to a local fast food joint. About the only kind of restaurant to survive down in such a hard luck area of town besides one single sit down twenty four hour diner that welcomed as much as frowned on the junkies and whores that made up its clientele. From across the street, Macy saw the boy ordering food and knew from the wrapper it was a large meal, double double meat meat cheese cheese burger with large fries and soda. He hummed the restaurant's jingle while he watched the kid happily inhale the huge meal. Paid for, again, by the money York had shelled out for nothing.

The kid didn't linger and even Macy could tell the huge amount of food was a feast to the boy. He ate almost too quickly to really taste it, glancing to the clock set high on the wall several times. Before he left the restaurant, the kid disappeared into the men's room for an ungodly amount of time. Macy figured the kid was shooting up or something but when he emerged the dampness from the jean jacket was gone, or mostly gone, dried under the hot air hand dryer in the men's room.

"Smart kid." Macy nodded in approval and slipped a little further into the shadows as the boy hit the street again. It was then that Macy picked up a sense that he wasn't the only one following the boy. The new eyes were recent, only since the kid had made it back to what must be his home turf and Macy shrugged and slipped around to see who else was eyeing his prize.

He found the woman a half a block away, slipping in and out of shadows with almost the same ease he had. Half blood, at least, but not a full because there was no way a full blood would have let another full blood sneak up behind them. She was good though and Macy watched as she tracked the boy strictly on a visual basis as he made his way down snow covered streets. It was absurdly easy to slip in behind her, nearly standing on her shadow.

"A little early to be looking for dinner." He whispered.

The woman jumped, startled and spun around. Under her wide brimmed hat was stuffed purple and black dyed hair and her sunglasses were just as dark as his own, only under them, her eyes were pale yellow. She crouched a little in her surprise, drawing a blade from inside her coat and half hissing in alarm.

"Stop that, you sound like a pissed off cat." He squinted a little at her and vaguely knew her face.

She, however, didn't have to squint to know him. The blade was instantly put away and she bowed her head deeply, exposing the back of her neck in the process. "Elder."

"Stop that too." He warned, the light amusement dropping from his tone. "You're one of Oscar's people, yes?"

"Yes, Elder." She kept her eyes just lowered enough to be respectful but not enough to totally drop her guard.

"It's a happenstance of birth that I'm full blood nothing more, stop it."

"It's required to show due respect, sir." She explained softly.

"Stupid, dumb ass, overblown, self important ass that Oscar is I can imagine so."

The woman actually gasped slightly at hearing anyone speak so of her leader.

Macy just waved it off. "What's your concern with that boy?"

"What boy, sir?"

"Don't play games with me child!" He snapped back and wanted to take her by the throat, he held back, barely.

That froze her breath and made her more frightened then when first startled. A full blood was always dominate, even if it was inside of her own home, if a full blood set a single foot inside it became his territory. A smart half blood that wanted to live didn't debate that situation.

"I'm under orders, sir." She nearly squeaked out.

"What are they?"

"To follow with visual only, not to engage no matter what occurs but the human..."

"Yes?"

"He's slippery, sir. Gets away from me and the others. We've a difficult time of it but he always ends up back home, eventually."

"What others?" He was starting to get a fluttery, excited feeling in the pit of his stomach. Maybe, this would be more amusing then he'd hoped for!

"An elf, sir, golden one and a human priest."

"What order does the priest belong to?"

"Black Cross, sir."

That raised his eyebrows. "And what do they say about following the boy?"

"I'm under orders to not engage them as well, sir."

He knew how Oscar worked and if he'd so limited his tracker the other two must have been also limited. It was turning out to be a very odd situation, indeed. York had been right to follow the boy, something was brewing and that was always a risky thing in this city of theirs.

"Go away."

"Sir? Respectfully, I can't sir."

The rage snapped him. "Go away before I snap your silly, stupid, neck and send your fangs to your precious pathetic lord!"

Even past the darkness of her glasses, the darkness of his, she could see the anger flash in the crisp, clear green eyes but she held her ground. "Sir..." She tried again.

"Go... now... or....fight me." He snarled and stepped forward, impressed that she'd stood her ground so long.

The half blood swallowed hard, and dropped her eyes. "Yes, sir." She caved and ducked her head as she slid sideways to get a few steps away. She didn't turn her back until she was halfway down the alley and then it was only for the heartbeat she needed to leap onto an over hanging fire escape and disappear across the metal framework.

Macy took a moment to settle his blood. His territory was defended and he was only slightly disappointed that it didn't require any bloodshed. When some of the sharp, primal anger had faded, he reached out with his senses and found the half blood truly gone and following her was an elf and a human in the hopes of being led to the boy that had slipped their ever present watchful eyes.

That made him smirk. They'd be surprised when she led them not to the boy but right to Oscar's doorstep. He wondered if the pair were good enough to back off before being spotted and disposed of and frankly didn't care either way. Happy again, he turned his thoughts to the very curious human and again followed him into the bright, crisp snow.

The boy made no further stops, his nose gone red from the crisp cold air. Macy caught up to him when he was turning into a building. It was like the other couple of dozen on the block, cheap, run down, old five or six story apartments. Built during a boom in immigration a nearly a hundred years earlier but built with quality of life in mind. Meaning, simply, they were smaller, six stories tops, with ten apartments per floor that really would have been better suited to four apartments per floor. Even in their heyday they'd been cheap, options and one tiny two room apartment would house an entire family. Now the buildings were owned by drug and slum lords, pimps and the like and housed crack heads and whores who didn't mind the rough, dangerous neighborhood. It was, simply put, one step up from a squat.

Macy liked it. He'd stayed in worse, that was for damn sure but places like this were amusing. Not that he was bemoaning the beautiful, comfortable loft that they had, he liked his space but he minded the elements less than York did. A tiny little apartment with little to no heat, that offered an ever changing parade of faces living out the drama of their lives around him, well that was a good Friday night.

There were men and women sitting about the steps at the entrances to some of the buildings, dealing in spite of the cold weather, and a handful called out to the boy as he made his way by. He ignored some, waved back to others but mostly kept his head down and trudged along to his own stoop. None of them called out to Macy, even when he walked right in front of them, they just didn't see him. Their eyes slipped around him and over him as if he really were invisible and it made him grin. It would take a creature with greater will power than a normal human to be able to lay eyes on a full blood that didn't want to be spotted.

He followed the boy right up his steps and into his building, moving a few feet behind him as silently as an unspoken whisper. The walls were painted a cheap, pale lime green that was peeling away close to the ceiling and was covered in spray painted gang tags along the bottom. The kids stopped at a line of steel mailboxes and dug out a key, opened a box that matched an apartment on the fourth floor and didn't look surprised at the empty contents.

Only, as the boy turned the corner to the main hallway, Macy had to step back. The only door at

this end of the steps, which should belong to the building supervisor, opened. The man that emerged was taller than Macy and wider, not just broader in the shoulders but two, three times heavier in fat as well. Middle aged or beyond, his thinning hair was greasy and slicked back in an effort to cover his lack. He had on olive drab plain cotton work pants with a thick brown leather belt and no shoes and in spite of the cold his only shirt was a sleeves undershirt that clung to his round, heavy stomach. It showed off the man's thick, strong, work strengthened arms well and even though he was fat, there was no doubt he was strong enough to bounce most of the tenets around.

The boy instantly tossed up his hands. "Don't start on me, Mr. Gossman, I had a long night but I've the rest of the rent."

"Poor hustling baby." The man mocked. "I gave you a shot kid. I'm not interested in the rest of the rent, all of it would be welcome."

"All of it? I was only seventy five short, Berty was supposed to drop their share and the other seventy five off."

"Well, none of your crackhead boyfriends have been by and you've an hour to clear your shit out before I throw you out." He stepped forward, towering over the skinny boy. "You hear me kid!"

The boy nodded hard. "Wait, I got, I got some money, hang on." He dropped his backpack off a shoulder and dug inside and quickly came up with the three fifties York had given him, two of the twenties and a ten. He thrust the folded over cash at the man. "Here, it's two hundred."

The man didn't touch it. "Rent's three."

The boy tugged the pack back over a shoulder. "It's all I have, you'll get the other hundred."

"When?"

"Soon."

"Wrong answer, kid."

"Tomorrow?"

"Better." The man took the two hundred and made a show of counting it. "Must have had a night to be sporting this green."

"So, we're good until tomorrow?" The boy started to back toward the steps.

"Hold it! I don't run no charity show here. You want the extension, you earn it." He pushed his apartment door open and the female moans from a porno tape lightly drifted out into the hall.

"I thought you didn't fuck boys."

The man snorted. "I'm no fag, boy, convince me to be nice and give you the time, the way you were so convincing to make me rent to your underage ass in the first place. That or pack up and get."

The boy's face was a mask of cold indifference. "Going rate will be knocked off the total owed, I assume." He tossed out as he moved to the apartment door.

The man laughed and caught a strong, meaty hand on a slender shoulder. "Not likely, boy, and if I don't have the hundred tomorrow by four, you or one of those crackhead roommates of yours will be the central entertainment at a friend's party. That will work off some of the debt, some." He laughed again and shut the door behind them.

Macy hovered outside, out of sight, and waited. He didn't need a picture drawn to have a pretty

clear idea of what the boy was doing in the super's apartment. It was only about a half hour before the boy emerged, only this time his face wasn't as coldly masked off. He glanced down both sides of the hallway to make sure no one had seen before he hitched his backpack higher on his shoulder and took the stairs two at a time.

He could have followed, even on the stairs the boy wouldn't sense him following, but Macy had a pretty clear idea from the mailbox where the boy's apartment was. He slipped back outside and around to the side of the building. The fire escape ladder was up but that didn't matter, an easy jump had him on the lowest level and from there it was a quick climb up to the fourth floor. It took a little scrambling around to find the right windows but he made it there in time to see the boy entering into the apartment.

The place was three rooms, a living room kitchen combo, tiny bathroom and a super tiny bedroom. The living room had an old, black and white television sitting on an overturned cardboard box with rabbit ears all twisted at angles. Instead of a sofa or chairs was a single bed mattress on the floor with sheets and blankets rumpled up against the wall. Tossed on the mattress was a pair of half naked boys, older looking than Lucky but not old by any means. They were curled together, as much making out as watching whatever show was flickering on the tv and quite obviously stoned out of their minds.

"What the fuck!" The boy shouted as soon as he'd kicked the door shut behind him.

The pair giggled and came up for air. "Hey, Lucky's alive!"

"Of course he's alive, idiot, he's standing right there."

"What the fuck?" He shouted again. "You're both fucking flying! Is this where the rent money went? So you two could stay in the warm and get fucking stoned all day?"

The pair glanced at each other and the darker haired one shrugged. "You weren't back, we didn't have enough to cover so figured if we were going to get kicked out might as well have a damn fine party first. Here, try some." He groped after the mirror and the clumps of powder dropped on it. "It's really good shit!"

"Fuck!" Lucky paced the living room, livid with anger but his eyes drifted to the drugs. "You know I'm not a junkie like you."

The lighter haired one snickered. "Yeah, you just do a line and than rant about the evils of drugs. Denial sweetheart is deadly, be proud! Come on, you know you want a taste."

The boy looked surprised for a second. "Actually, I don't want it." He said more to himself than to the pair giggling on the bed. That didn't surprise Macy, York's healings tended to re-set everything and even if the boy only casually used, he was now given a clean slate.

"Awww, more for us!"

"Fuck, you two don't get it!"

"Why sweat it baby, we can't pay anyway. Chip in and we'll get take out, have a real party!"

"Morons, focus! I paid Gossman two hundred already, so cough up what you've left and get out working tonight and we might, might not be homeless tomorrow."

"Two hundred? What did you do last night?"

"Doesn't matter, cough up my seventy five."

They giggled again and hands went back to groping each other.

"You spent my money on drugs too?"

"We had debts..."

"Fuck!" He rubbed a hand over his face. "Is there anything left?"

The only answer was giggling.

"It's not funny, fucktards! I just had to..." he stopped and drew a breath. "Fuck."

"Hey, don't sweat it, we'll help you get the rest, when's he need it?"

"Tomorrow at four, or one of us is working a party for him."

"No problem, but, you're missing the party here!"

"Fuck! You two are unbelievable!" He shook his head and started toward the private bedroom.

"Hey, Lucky? We were talking, and it doesn't seem right that you've got the bedroom. I mean, there's two of us and one of you and all." The darker one pushed. "Privacy man, it's not cool when you go to the bathroom when, we're, you know?"

"Not right?" Lucky said softly. "Not right! I pay half the fucking rent! I blew Grossman to get him to rent to us! Not right!" He yelled. "Fuck!" He hurried into the bedroom and slammed the door shut behind him.

Macy had to slid across the metal escape a bit to see into the other room. He watched the boy shove a wedge of wood under the door and click on a small, dim lamp. The room was sadly empty. A single mattress again was tossed on the cheap carpet covered floor and a beat up wood nightstand had the lamp sitting on it. A wind up alarm clock was perched on two feet instead of three and leaned wobbly against the lamp. An empty soda can was being reused as an ashtray and on a flattened black trash bag was a neat stack of folded clothes. One, maybe two outfits if that and the boy dumped the clothes Macy had washed out next to the others.

The boy dropped his back pack next and pulled off the damp sneakers, setting them to the side neatly. Very carefully he fished his pack of cigarettes out of the front pouch of the backpack and lit one. He took a couple of long drags, pacing around the room with a sharp, worried look on his face. Macy watched as the boy sobbed, hiccupped and held in the panic that was threatening to take him over.

"What am I going to do? What to do?" He shivered and dropped to the floor. Knees were pulled up and the boy backed up against the wall. There he folded over himself and shuddered, not quite sobbing, but obviously shut down in a panic attack. The cigarette burned to ash, forgotten in his fingers.

Macy hovered outside until the boy dropped the filter into the soda can and shook off the panic. He uncurled a bit, lit another cigarette and sat taking long slow drags from it. When that one joined the first in the can, he stood and stretched out, wound the alarm clock and set it before he unfolded blankets and laid down on his dingy, thin mattress. Even then, Macy waited until the boy was soundly asleep before moving on to look for answers elsewhere.

All Souls Pass

Part Nine:

There were a handful of ways Macy could get more information. Some, like shaking the right people down, were more obvious than other methods. Normally, he'd not care but he trusted York's instincts and his whispered warning of be careful wasn't a normal statement from him. It was actually a thought out warning and one Macy had learned to trust.

So, that meant finding information quietly and that meant one of a handful of sources. Of those handful, one was more favorable than others and he made his way across town to the quiet auto body shop that sat near the river. Calling it an auto body shop was being nice, it's what the sign out front said and what they occasionally did for friends. Custom body work, tricking out cars and the like but in truth, it was more of a chop shop and that's where they made their money.

There was a half dozen folks working inside, men and women and all swarming over two different cars. A skilled eye could see they were being taken apart but locked doors and soot darkened windows kept skilled eyes from seeing. Doors were rarely really locked for Macy, it took only a niggling of power to have the locks obey, another knack of a full blood. Not that it mattered, he technically owned the building and had a key, he just couldn't remember where he had it.

"Well now," He spoke into the afternoon's work. "Busy as little beavers aren't you?"

The half dozen folks stopped and all the sounds of deconstruction stopped with them. A radio talked in the background, political talk show or something similar and the voice bounced around the large space.

After a pause, one of the workers broke away and laughed. Middle aged, thin and non descript, the man could have blended in anywhere and gone unnoticed. He tossed his head back and laughed as he came rushing over. Before Macy could stop him the man had grabbed his shoulders and planted a kiss to either side of his face.

"Macy! Dear friend! It's been too long!" The man was still laughing before he turned and whistled. "No work! Break out the beer and the dice!"

"I can't stay too long Fairth." Macy grinned and saw behind the glamour the man wore. The brown hair was more like fur and stuck out in random, wild shoots across his head. The nose was too large and the eyes too small and the skin was ruddy and brown. "Typical Brownie, always looking for an excuse to be lazy!" He glanced around at the laughing group and wasn't surprised that four of the six workers weren't brownies but had the long nimble fingers and pointed ears of gremlins.

"Of course! Beer and good company, that's what life is for. Come, come, sit, have a drink and tell us what brings you here."

He let himself be lead to a work bay that smelled of paint but seemed to only be in use as a lunch room. Crates and plastic chairs sat around and the radio here played perky rock music. It didn't take much for cold cans of beer to be cracked open, snow still clinging to the sides of the metal, and Macy let them press one into his hand. He was put on one of the better plastic chairs

and given colored poker chips to bet with. Money wasn't actually exchanged between the group, just ever expanding piles of the chips that re-set every week. When they wanted him to make the first throw of the dice, he grinned and gave it a good toss.

It was hours, and many beers, later that Fairth clapped Macy on the shoulder. "Come, friend, let me show you the new cutting torch I just bought."

Both men knew Macy would had not a single interest in cutting torches but it was Brownie way to drink, play and laugh before discussing anything serious. Macy could have avoided it by just slamming the amiable man against the nearest hard object but the cities gnomes, gremlins, brownies, pixies and the like had an unusual fondness for him that he was unwilling to disturb needlessly. That and he liked their impressions of the other high level players in the city, they did a mocking impersonation of Oscar that always made him laugh nearly hard enough to piss himself.

"Business good, Fairth?" He asked casually as they moved away from the paint bay toward the back offices.

"Can't complain, there's some grumbling about the tribute Oscar asks. Some folks, not mine but some, think he should ask less from other creatures like him. They got their noses out of joint about paying the same percentage as a human." He scratched his ass in thought and farted contentedly.

"Oscar's a hard ass about fairness."

"You don't pay."

Macy shook his head. "No, I don't."

"Some talk been going around, that you need to spank Oscar, that it's time you stepped up and pushed him out." The brownie narrowed his eyes a little and looked for any reaction from his vampire friend.

"God, how boring would that be!" Macy shook his head. "So long as he leaves me alone, I leave him alone. You can pass that around to the whispers."

"Will do, will do." He fingered the necklace he wore, a gold chain with a plain white bead on it. "Thank York again for us, these new glammers he cast, best I've ever seen. No one sees through em, even critters need to squint and look twice if we don't want em to notice."

That made him feel warm inside and he grinned as happily as if the spell had been his handiwork being complimented. "He's good."

"Damn good, can understand why you've kept him around, even with him being a human and all."

"Speaking of humans, you hear anything odd of late? Anything that's caught people's notice?"

They'd reached the brownie's office and the creature frowned in thought and leaned against his desk. "Nothing specific, nothing unusual, things been real quiet of late."

"How long is of late?"

"Couple of months." He farted again and sighed happily at the small explosion.

Which was odd in and of itself, the powers that be were making an effort to keep things level and quiet but not naturally so. "Any unusual gossip?"

"About humans?"

He nodded.

"Well..." he thought and tugged at one of the real tufts of coarse brown fur spikes that sprouted from his head. "You've heard of the new Cardinal coming to town, yes?"

"No."

"Huh, well, Cardinal Deitrich, real hard ass they say. Public face for the committee for moral guidance and purity."

"Black Cross order."

The creature nodded. "Got a lot of folks nervous, him coming here. Arrives next week and is supposed to be staying oh, couple months, maybe more."

"Huh." York almost always followed such things, the arrival of the Cardinal in charge of the order of the Black Cross normally would have set him off into hour long cussing fits. "Is it public knowledge?"

"The visit?"

Macy nodded.

"It ain't being shouted from the rooftops but his movements never are. Too worried one of us otherworldly sorts will forget our manners and bite his head off." He laughed merrily.

"Huh, well, it's getting late, I should get moving."

"Hunting?"

Macy grinned and let his fangs flash. "Got a date with a witch."

"Tell the witch," Fairth paused to belch loudly and grin. "Tell 'im, thanks again and give 'im a good time for us all."

"You should have figured it out by now, Fairth." Macy teased from the doorway that lead back out into the snow and the setting sun.

"What's that?"

"I'm his bitch."

The words broke the stout brownie down into uncontrolled laughter which pulled forth more farts and burps and a call for more beer. Macy left the man that way, happy himself from being so fully amused by the visit and started toward home. Home, and the uncertain needs and desires of his mercurial lover. The yummy double double burger burger cheese cheese song floated back into his head and he whistled it as he turned his steps toward the loft.

The sun was almost gone when he reached the fire escape and the open window to the loft. He let himself in silently, figuring, rightly, that York would still be asleep. York didn't ask for it often, didn't say he needed it often but when he did it set a coil of fire in Macy's stomach that was better than any hunt.

Nothing was out of place downstairs, Macy shut the window behind him and shrugged off hat, coat and shoes. He glanced around to make sure the loft was secure before he moved silently to the stairs. Halfway up the spiral he had his shirt off and dropped to fall where ever it may, by the top of the stairs his socks were gone.

The upstairs curtains were pulled, the set over the windows and the set across the railing to the downstairs but not the set around the bed. It left the upstairs in near total darkness with the sun almost set outside but Macy could see just fine, which was the intention. The sight displayed for him was enough to make him freeze, trapped in place by awe and stunned lust.

When York said he needed it, that meant he wanted to bottom. Which was stunning enough for the guarded, careful man, but Macy could never be sure just how his lover needed it. Sometimes, it would be soft, sweet, slow and Macy knew that when York came he'd be weeping, sobbing in his arms. If he said he needed it, now, that meant Macy could do whatever he wanted, as roughly as he wanted, right where they were. Small, simple words that controlled him, had him stripping his lover half naked, tearing at clothing, using him almost brutally and with York begging for more between gasps and moans. When Macy was told that his lover needed it, later, that could be anything.

Even knowing that, he wasn't braced for seeing York displayed. He was asleep on the bed, his face slack and innocent, on his stomach. On his wrists and ankles were black leather bondage cuffs, cinched in place but not connected to anything. Around his waist was a slender leather strap, a harness. One strap followed the cleft of his ass to disappear between his legs. That strap was holding a black butt plug in place and excepting the plug and leather, the man was naked, even the covers kicked aside.

This was a side of York that only reared it's head once in a while. It would have confused Macy, the timing of such, if Farith hadn't spilled the beans about the impending Cardinal's visit. It explained the toys lined up on the floor so close to the stairs, placed where Macy couldn't miss seeing them. They were lined up, in neat order, on a velvet blanket. Each item was set out with painstaking care and Macy just knew York had spent far to much time lining them up, ordering them, debating if he really needed it.

It wasn't a line up of requirements. York had laid out options. A hood of latex or a blindfold of black cotton, three different styles of gags, quick links for the cuffs, four point hog ties of leather and D rings, spreader bars, rope, chains coiled up in small piles all were gathered together in one section. In the other was laid out floggers, ones made of small round metal chains, ones made of hard and soft leather, ones made of stinging rubber, whips of leather and cords, and instead of the paddles they owned, York had laid out canes. Beside the canes and whips were plugs in different thicknesses, some that vibrated and dildos as well, Macy understood what his lover needed loud and clear.

He crouched down and thought, carefully thought. He made his selections with just as much care and set them aside but he cleared the items he had no interest in away as well and left the velvet blanket empty. There was one noticeable item absent, one that he knew hadn't been left aside by chance. Macy stood and silently retrieved a pump bottle of lube and set it next to his choices. York would want to be hurt, needed to be hurt but Macy refused to hurt the man in that way.

Macy stood, kicked off his pants and balanced what he needed in a hand before just standing, watching his lover asleep. It was a hunt, one without running but with chasing after subtle reaction and emotion. York in this mood stirred the predator in Macy, they both knew it and welcomed it. It was a matter of trust, of release, of surrender and York was giving himself over totally into his hands.

It was easy to reach down to that sleeping form and ease one arm closer to the other. York was surprisingly flexible for a human and while the touch stirred his sleep a little, he trusted Macy

enough to not wake fully up. The clip snapped onto one D ring on one wrist and with a little more gentle nudging Macy got it clipped to the other cuff. That half woke York up and as he blearily tugged at the bonds that now held him, Macy struck.

With no other warning, he dropped his weight on York's body, one knee on the bed beside the sleeping human and the other planted firmly between the tense shoulder blades. Quick hands slid the black cotton mask across York's eyes before he could wake enough to see who was in the room and when he gasped, startled, Macy shoved the bit gag between his teeth. It wasn't the ball gag that he knew York hated, or the inflated penis gag that Macy loved, but the middle ground, the fat flat leather that filled the wearer's mouth and was strong enough to really bite down on. Before York could even grumble a gagged protest, Macy had the thing buckled in place.

The human bucked a little, pulling at the cuffs that bound his wrists. Macy backed away, lifting his weight from the shoulders he'd half kneeled on and off the bed entirely. York struggled, blinded, gagged, bound and tried to get his feet under him. That wasn't in the plan, Macy caught the bound wrists and pulled the human from the bed, letting him drop hard to the floor below. York cried out behind his gag, startled and disoriented but Macy didn't leave him laying there for long.

All Souls Pass

WARNING: This scene contains bondage, S&M and simulated acts of violence

Part Ten:

Before the human could remember his legs were still free Macy half dragged, half carried him by his bound arms across the floor. This was risky, York was touchy about his arms and shoulders being pulled on and while he liked to walk that knife's edge of headspace he often forgot what was real and what wasn't. He was just as likely to surrender and go limp as to lose it and fight like a cornered animal. Neither reaction was Macy's prey and he dropped the human onto the velvet blanket spread on the floor and quickly clipped the ankle cuffs to the spreader bar that lay waiting there.

He'd picked the longest one and clipped the strong legs to the furthest ring. It left York laying face down on the velvet, breathing hard in real fear and borderline panic, every muscle tense. His weight was balanced on his shoulders and head, his arms bound behind him, knees bent with ass in the air. His legs were spread so far apart that Macy could almost see the muscles of his outer thighs bunch and threaten to cramp. He wanted to run a hand across them in comfort but that wasn't the game tonight.

It was no surprise that York was hard. He'd probably gotten hard the instant he'd woken to find his hands bound, been half hard just sleeping with the butt plug in place. Neither was he surprised to see that the harness York had put on no cock ring, bound his length or balls in no way. He knew how much York wavered on that feeling, only accepting it when in a very specific mood. Combined with what he needed tonight, it was no wonder that it had been left out.

The harness unbuckled in a couple of places, Macy picked the buckle that released the strap that

ran between York's legs. He tugged it free roughly and tossed the strap aside with almost violent abandon. The leather hit into hip, swinging forward to smack into York's groin and pull a startled grunt of surprise, worry and pain.

Macy ignored it. Without touching York anywhere, without a comforting hand even placed on his hip, Macy took a hold of the widened end of the plug. Very slowly he turned it, making the man below him whimper behind his gag. He could have teased York with the plug, he knew how much the man enjoyed that, which is why he pulled it roughly from the tight body and drew forth more startled moans.

The plug got dropped onto the floor off of the blanket and Macy picked up one of the dildos, one he had only placed a drop of lube on, a single drop right at the tip. He rubbed this dildo against York's thigh, smearing the lube in mock pre-come. Rubbed it up to jab between his legs with startling force, higher to run along the cleft of the beautiful, exposed ass. Macy pulled the dildo back and away, setting it aside to exchange it for one he'd lubed.

Again, no words, no touch, he just circled the dildo for a moment before pushing it forward. Even with the plug in place, York's body tensed and made his already tight entrance, tighter. Macy didn't let up, he pushed a little harder and the head of the fake cock popped into the bound body. York whimpered, not the whimper Macy was looking for but one that sounded of real fear, between his legs, the cock had softened and shriveled away. The human's breathing was short, stuttering gasps, dancing a shattering step away from real panic. Macy slid the dildo away and the body, the sweet, beautiful body he knew so well, shuddered.

He almost stopped. If he'd pushed too far, pushed York into real terror and panic, none of this would give the man what he needed. Before he unclipped the wrists and ankles, he reached out his senses. Macy was surprised by the broken terror his lover was swimming in and how fragile he felt but he understood the fear.

What if it's not him? What if... what if I'm not safe?

The fear was so solid, so real that it was almost shouted. Macy reached a hand out and slid it across the beautiful ass while at the same time he touched his own energies to the witch. It was as good as if he'd spoken, it confirmed without a shadow of a doubt who it was that had woken York from his sleep and was controlling him. The panic backed down, the fear eased its grip and Macy removed his hand. That was all York needed to let go, to know that this fantasy was just a fantasy, to know he wasn't bound and helpless, that the cocks being put into his body were fake ones and the only real one would be his lover's. That small touch of comfort was all Macy would give him and all he needed.

The dildo returned and this time while he was still tight and tense and the cock had to be forced into his body, it triggered no sharp, brittle terror. Macy made a good show of it, fucking his lover's ass with the dildo roughly, putting force into the thrusts as if it really was attached to a real man and as he simulated the final thrusts of a man coming, York started to get hard again. Macy didn't stop there, he switched dildos, this one a little longer but thinner, a different man and York moaned when he felt the different shape in his body. Macy made this man be a jack rabbit, no slow strokes, just in all the way hard and fast and a quick pounding.

It worked. York was completely hard again, come gathering like morning dew on the crown of his cock to be smeared against his belly during some of the rougher thrusts. The sounds coming from the gagged mouth now were a mix of protest, fear and lust and each one made Macy's own cock tighten and twitch. He was stalking his prey and he'd have it all before he gave in and fucked his lover.

The second dildo was followed by a third. This was short, thick and fat. It was a dildo Macy had bought and enjoyed using but was normally too big for York to take. There was no debate or option, Macy had lubed it up well, the man was stretched and there was no way he was stopping.

He lined the fat cock up and pressed it forward. York moaned and it was tight, low, and painted with pain. Slowly, horridly slowly, Macy eased the cock into the human's body.

As the head breached and slid all the way past that tight ring of muscle, Macy saw what he'd been looking for. York was no longer denying entry to his body. He'd reached a point where he gave in and accommodated. Physically he could take the fat, short dildo but only if he allowed it and York had given in and allowed it. It was still slow progress, he had no desire to hurt his lover, just break him down a bit. A small forever later the dildo was seated entirely in side the tender entrance and York was trembling, his skin coated in a sheen of sweat.

Macy could have stopped there, he'd made his point but York had surrendered. That meant something and he needed to follow through. Slowly, carefully, he slid the short, fat dildo out, knowing first hand how good that cock could feel, or how painful it could be. That first thrust back in pulled a low groan from his lover, the second earned a louder noise, the third transformed the groan to a moan. By the time Macy was taking his lover in shallow, rough thrusts, York was pushing back onto the length. Come was dripping from his neglected length, his cock trembled, his body twitched in pleasure.

There was no stopping until York had come. Macy had already made his mind up and he knew how blindingly wonderful that thick dildo could feel. There was no choice here, it was a simple matter of biology. York could fight it but he would come and Macy could see and feel his lover struggling against it.

No matter how hard he fought, Macy had reduced his bound lover to a moaning, panting, writhing creature. Balanced between bent knees and shoulders, bound hands clenching, hips twitching toward and away from the invasion into his body, it was too beautiful to stand. York wanted it so badly and didn't want to let go that last final fragment of his control and the struggle he posed was beautiful.

One thrust became one too many and behind the gag came sharp, desperate, trapped cries and York lost his fight for the final layer of control. His body betrayed him and he came, hard, trembling, shuddering in pleasure and shame. Macy gave another hard thrust or two, letting York ride out the pleasure of release and being taken, before he pulled the big dildo away. Only, as he eased the head from the still too tight body, he snickered just slightly. It was a low, dark, mocking sound, as much a tool as the dildos and whips and it echoed across the almost silent room. It was a mocking laugh at a whore that comes from being gang banged, a sound made to push the fantasy a touch further.

It would have pushed too far if York still had a single doubt as to who was in the room with him. Maybe even pushed the witch into an attack, something that York rarely lashed out with but would if cornered. That wasn't something Macy wanted to face, he'd only been on the receiving end of the witch's magic a few times and it wasn't something he'd desire to face again. So it was a very good thing that York wasn't lost in the fantasy and that small laugh only deepened the headspace he needed instead of toppling him over the edge.

Macy dropped the dildo to the side and used the light sheen of lube that had gotten on his hands to slick his own cock with. He wanted to fuck the human, badly so, but this wasn't the time but he could pretend to be Mr. Big Dildo and finish what he'd started. It only took a couple of fast, quick strokes to carry Macy over the edge himself. He came and let his release paint across his lover's ass, startling sharp moans from the bound human at the feel. Pretending, in their little fantasy, that Mr. Big Dildo had merely pulled out to come on his fucktoy not in him. York knew and understood and it made him moan, as even his own body was turned into a thing.

It was almost too much to see, in the dim light of the night, York so laid out, come on his ass, his body twitching with sweat gathering between his shoulders to roll down across his skin. Macy took a moment to slow his breath and gather his wits but some things were just too tempting. When he felt a bit more in control and less like he was being swept away in a river of lust and

want, Macy crouched down and leaned forward. With no other touch, no other sound, Macy lapped at the come across the tense, beautiful skin.

The contact made York shudder and pull away only Macy was kneeling on the spreader bar and the human had no means of escape. Slowly, he enjoyed the tease of the contact, delighting in how it was making York squirm. He was careful to keep his fangs from the round, tender flesh, not sure he could keep himself from biting. It was tongue and tongue alone that slid across his lover, lapping up the stain of his release, teasing the tense muscles and the cleft between them. Through it all, York tried to pull away, seared by the pleasure of the contact.

It was a thin, fine line between giving just enough pleasure to torment and overwhelming his lover with that pleasure. Macy sensed it, that single moment when one more lick, one more push of his tongue at that still tight and unyielding entrance would be one too many and he stopped. Below him, York sobbed and collapsed, falling face down on the blanket. His knees trapped under his body, his breath coming in sharp, quick stutters.

Macy let him fall and backed away. He stood and left his lover laying in a heap on the blanket and moved to light some of the candles around the room. The light was warm and golden and made the room glow in an intimate way. It made York's flushed skin glow and made the sharp discomfort he was in seem almost heavenly, like some great martyr suffering for his god. For a moment, seeing his lover laying there, reminded him sharply of how he'd looked when they met and it reminded Macy that gentle words and comments on the man's beauty were not what his lover needed tonight.

When the candles were glowing, Macy stalked over. He made his footsteps heavy and even barefoot they rattled the floorboards. York heard them and grunted in protest, trying to worm away but too disoriented to even make it to the edge of the blanket. Macy caught a hand on the spreader bar and pulled, dragging his lover along by his ankles. He pulled him to the bedpost and dropped the bar, dropping the man's ankles hard to the floor.

The bed had been made custom and they'd designed extra functions into it. The rod that held the heavy curtains in place was strongly reinforced and the carefully hidden rings along the bottom were just as strong. Once clipped in place, the bed was sturdy and strong enough to hold even Macy's thrashing about. He made an awful submissive, moaned and cried like a baby and pulled at his bondage, enjoyed making a fuss as much as the power exchange.

York never fussed, he was stalwart in this mood. Macy unclipped his wrist cuffs and physically lifted the man to his feet. He raised one arm up and clipped it high above York's head before the man really knew what to expect and when he understood he tried to wrench the other arm from Macy's grip. It didn't work, in a few short heartbeats Macy had the man's arms clipped high, stretched out and prone. It was easy then, while York pulled on his wrists and struggled to free them, to clip his ankles from the spreader bar to the rings on the bottom of the bedpost.

Spread out like that, as if York was trying to pretend to be a bedpost, made Macy want to sit back and just watch his lover. He was too impatient tonight for that, he had York tied to the whipping post, there was no point to delay. Before he stepped back, he unbuckled the gag and forced it from his lovers mouth. Without being said, he was challenging the human, telling him he was going to make him call out and seeing how long he could hold out.

He watched as York shook his head and swallowed large gasps of air now that the gag was gone as Macy reached down and picked up the first of the floggers he'd laid out. It was butter soft leather strands and he brought it lightly down across the exposed ass. It wasn't even hard enough to sting, just to warn the flesh of what was coming and Macy grinned and began to flog his lover with abandon.

It was a progression. The butter soft flogger barely even made the skin pink, even swung with force, and Macy walked it up to shoulders and down to ankles. From there he took up the stiffer

leather flogger and continued. The room filled with the scent of warm beeswax candles, sweat and leather. The pale skin soon was a nice rose shade but still Macy hadn't pulled so much as a twitch from the human, not a sigh or moan either.

He stopped and moved to pick up the next flogger, this one made of strands of small meal beads, like the chain cheap key chains were made of. The metal was cold against flushed skin and earned him the first startled twitches. It was a heavier impact and Macy wielded it with skill, leaving small round red marks across the flesh as he went. It wasn't enough, not yet.

The stiff braided leather double tail was heavier, sharper and painful. Macy moved it across his lover's body in quick strokes, lightly at first but with growing force. He varied pattern and pressure and location, striking what ever section of skin caught his fancy and raising small welts. It was closer now, York was trying to hold still but his body betrayed him, twitching from the surprising and unexpected impacts but it wasn't enough.

Macy stopped and dropped the braided leather in exchange for a cane. Made of rattan and almost as thick as his pinkie finger, it was a solid weapon. He flicked his wrist and it sung through the air, making a delightful wooshing sound that pulled York's head in the direction the cane had swung. It was a sound he knew and Macy grinned and brought the next short flick around so the cane landed solidly across the fleshy part of the human's ass.

York didn't cry out but his head fell backwards and his mouth came open in a silent gasp. He tried to spread his legs further but they were clipped close together on the post, held steady and vulnerable. His hands clenched up into tight fists above the cuffs and when the cane landed a second time he didn't even flinch.

Macy loved the cane. It gave such a lovely sound and was so easy to use. A small flick of his wrist produced sharp, stinging pain and wide, red welts. Ass, thighs, calves, shoulders, across his lover's back he went, flicking the cane to raise welts. He stopped counting the strokes at twenty five and it was a while after he stopped counting when York began to gasp sharply at each stroke.

It wasn't a cry, more a quick breath but it was sound. The body tensed up and stopped trying to pull away and Macy was raising welts on welts now, increasing the force of the strokes on already painful and sensitive flesh. His prey was close, he could feel it, all he had to do was push a bit more and he'd have it.

The cane flicked out with even more force across both of York's ass checks. The welt split and blood formed in the bruise the cane left behind. York nearly screamed, a long, shuddering cry of release and surrender, deep from his throat and with it drained away all the tension in his body. His knees sagged a little, putting strain and weight on his arms and his head lolled.

Macy delivered four more blows, carefully placed to less tender areas but each one pulled out a sobbing moan from his lover and drained him further. It left him hanging limply from his wrists, his only reaction now to the pain of the cane across his skin and the hitching breath between those final strokes.

That was what he'd been looking for. That almost magical point when whatever tension York had been holding inside his stubborn, pretty head was finally reached and bled away. It was a threshold that sometimes they didn't reach, a fine balancing act between surrender and abuse, pleasure and fear. Macy had done it this time and he planned to finish it properly.

He dropped the cane and let it clatter to the floor but left York hang for a second or two, limp and alone. When he walked over, it wasn't to release his lover and cuddle him close, no, he knew York better than that and planned to see it all the way to the end. Instead, he slid a hand roughly over the sore and abused skin and York flinched lightly from the contact, swinging a little from his wrists but unable to gain his feet.

Macy let his touch wander forward and for the first time that night cupped his lover's cock in his hand. It wasn't a gentle contact but the half hard length stiffened a little in his grip. He touched his lover as if he were inspecting livestock, coldly, judgmentally, weighing each ball in his hands before giving them a solid, sharp squeeze. The harsh contact was making York aroused and he moaned darkly when Macy pumped him in quick, sharp strokes. Just as suddenly as he'd touched his lover he pulled his hand away.

He knelt and unclipped York's ankles but the man didn't seem to notice. When he unclipped the wrist cuffs, York dropped like a toy with broken strings. Macy caught him and swung him over to drop him face first onto the bed, leaving his knees to brush against the floor. The hands, freed now, fell to either side of the human and Macy held him in place, kept him from sliding off the bed to pool onto the floor, by a grip on the back of his lover's neck.

While he held York down by the neck, Macy pushed two dry fingers deep into the human's body. The fingers were dry but he knew his lover was still stretched and lubed and still York sobbed and shivered but was too weak to pull away. Macy didn't stop, he finger fucked the man roughly, adding a third with no warning and no effort made to offer pleasure.

As with everything, there was a breaking point and Macy took York right to that cusp and stopped. He pulled his fingers out and let go of the man's neck. He stepped away with heavy footsteps and let his lover slid from the bed to crumble on the floor. Even now, with his hands freed, York made no move to remove his blindfold and just simply stayed where he'd fallen.

Macy paced away and drew a couple of slow breaths. He gave the man the moment too, waited until the harsh breaths sounded more like hushed sobs than gasps for air, before he walked quietly over. He knelt down and gently soothed a hand across York's shoulder and the human flinched from the unexpected contact. He gathered his lover up in his arms and held him to his chest, stroking across his sweat damp hair and skin.

"I'm here." He whispered and the balled up hands unclenched and reached out to cling to Macy's chest. "I'm here baby doll." He kissed the trembling lips and eased the blindfold away but York kept his eyes shut. "I'm here baby doll, it's okay."

Macy didn't stop stroking and whispering and soothing until York's own trembling eased. He didn't stop until the grip of the human's arms around his body relaxed just fractionally and he didn't stop until finally, York spoke.

"Fuck me?" He asked softly, his eyes still shut.

Macy nodded, pressing a soft kiss to steadier lips. He lifted the human easily, York pliable and weak still, and got him to straddle his lap. It was easy then to slowly, gently, lower the Frenchman down onto his cock. Long, lean, legs wrapped reflexively around Macy's waist and York buried his face against Macy's neck. York gasped softly as he settled with Macy deep in his body, inside the vampire's arms.

Their joining was slow, careful, Macy overly aware of the welts and bruises he'd raised across the human's skin. He did the work, lifting the trembling human with ease, rocking into his body, shocked as always by how impossibly tight York was. It wasn't long before York was gasping for breath, moaning in small hitching sobs, his cock hard and rubbing against Macy's belly with every slow thrust.

He leaned over and nipped the graceful, proud neck, ran his lips over the pulse that beat so erratically below the skin. He sighed and whispered gentle words into the shell of the pink ear and the soft breath made York arch back a little in pleasure or to pull from the affection Macy couldn't be sure. It exposed the lovely, peachy pink rounds of the man's nipples. It was too tempting, he leaned forward and suckled lightly on the first one he could catch.

York arched back further and Macy found himself holding the human up. Unwilling to let York lay on his battered back just yet, no matter how much his lover seemed to want that. He pulled the human closer, lifted him further off to deepen the strokes and York fell forward to wrap his arms around Macy's neck.

"So beautiful..." he sighed against side of his lover's face. "So strong."

York's body was trembling now in exhaustion and Macy understood. The moans that washed over him, poured over him like a shower, were growing desperate. He reached between them and the crown of that lovely length slid along the palm of his hand. The contact spiked York's moans into a sharp cry.

"That's it baby doll..." Macy moaned. "Let it out... oh God... let it go..." He sighed and wrapped his hands around the shaft, tightly enfolding it. There was no need to stroke York, as he lifted the human off his cock, it slid his own length inside of Macy's hand. He was fucking his lover both ways and that made him lick his lips and moan deeply.

York shivered and clawed at Macy's back. "Oh.... Oh... La Déesse bénissent...." He arched back again, falling with trust into the supporting hands that held him, fucked him and came. It was blinding, shattering, and seared his sense and vision white behind his closed eyelids. Distantly he heard Macy moaning, almost growling, as his body clenched around the cock that still slowly fucked him, holding back to let him find release without further distraction.

Macy held himself still, or as still as he could with that blinding, searing, impossible pleasure tightening in ripples of delight around him. He held York as the man came, breathlessly, sighing, shivering in trembling, consuming release. It was a torment to wait until some small measure of sense returned and York fell, breath heaving, against him. He took a solid hold on those hips then and thrust up into that tight, fiery delight, two, three, four long, deep strokes, groaning in pleasure so deep it was agony.

An agony only stopped when his world ended. Macy never thought much about death, he figured eventually something would kill him, he assumed something eventually would anyway. It was in moments like this, always buried deep in York's body, that he wondered if this could be what death was like. His breath burning in his lungs, his vision gone, his body breaking into a thousand million diamonds of sparkling pleasure. A moment where he lost all sense of himself and just existed in a blinding flash of pleasure. He hoped that if death came for him, it would be like these moments when he released himself into the proud, beautiful human he'd taken as a lover.

They clung together, York an exhausted, trembling form tucked inside of Macy's arms and the vampire held him close. For this short time, York allowed himself to trust the shelter and protection of his lover and let his guard down, it was nearly painfully vulnerable and made Macy's chest feel tight with pride and strength. Most humans were so easy, they were so grateful for the natural protection he could offer, even the brownies and other magical critters were willing to gather under the umbrella of the safety his nature offered. Not York, not his proud, stubborn, powerful, frustrating, annoying, wonderful, amusing, perfect lover. York rarely accepted help on anything and if it was beyond his scope or strength he found ways to make it within his own grasp, except for these rare moments.

Stripped bare, torn down, for these stolen moments he allowed himself to be human. He clung to Macy with shuddering breaths that felt like hidden sobs and allowed himself to feel the grief he normally denied himself. For just a few heartbeats he granted himself permission to be weak, to stop trying to always be strong and lean against someone else's strength and it humbled Macy as few things ever could or did to be that someone else.

He sighed as he felt himself softening, still tucked neatly inside of the human's body and leaned over to kiss the side of the exposed neck. "Did I give you what you needed?" He whispered, softly, gently.

The words weren't instantly answered but after a few breaths York nodded. "As always."

All Souls Pass

Part Eleven:

"Good." He slid a gentle touch across the still red and warmed back before lifting York from his lap. He set the Frenchmen on the floor with gentle ease and stood on slightly shaky legs.

Past experience had taught him a few things about York in this mood and he knew that while the itchy need to have this experience occur was now past, York would linger in his own thoughts if left alone. Caring for his lover after their play was as important as the play itself, in some ways more so, because it gave York a path back to himself.

In the bathroom he left the lights off and lit the candles around the room, they gave the space the same close, warm glow as the bed room. He put the stopper in the tub and started running the hot water, adding a few liberal handfuls of lavender scented bath powder. From the towel bar, he snagged a washcloth and let the hot water run over it. It soaked the fabric and the water was so hot that the cloth left trails of steam in the cooler bathroom air. The last thing he did before leaving was to snag the ceramic pot of salve from the counter top, the one with the cork top.

While the water on the cloth was still hot, he knelt down next to his lover and washed his body. It wasn't enough to clean him but the hot contact was soothing and the touch of water cleansing. York leaned a little into the touch but he kept his head bowed and he hadn't moved from where Macy had placed him.

"On the bed?" He asked into the silent loft.

York merely shook his head and laid on his stomach on the floor.

Which meant the man wasn't ready for such comforts and Macy could understand. They'd spent so many years sleeping and living in far less comfortable surroundings that the loft was still a novel, safe, nest to snuggle in. He waited until York stopped moving, arms folded up by his head and his face turned to the side, before he opened the small pot.

The salve was made by York's own hand. Crafted from strong and powerful herbs, made in a precise order, cooked and stirred and tended in just the right way. It was a powerful healing ointment on it's own but combined with the infusion of York's own healing skills, it was an exceptional balm. The witch kept it on hand for the times when he got hurt and it worked well, but, before Macy scooped any out, there was a healing he could do.

The welt that had broken the skin hadn't bled much but it was a sore, red lash across the round, bruised ass. That was unacceptable, if anyone else had delivered that blow, Macy would have twisted their head off. The blood was dried but he licked it away, dragging his tongue to the sides

of the welt to catch any smears, gliding into the wound to drag the contact across the actual injury. York, long since used to Macy's version of first aid, didn't even flinch at the contact.

When he was convinced he'd done as much as he could, Macy dipped a finger into the salve and began to gently rub it into batter skin. Across red shoulders and the mildly swollen ass, down strong legs and back again. He turned the touch from just rubbing the salve into the wounds to a light massage. By the second pass he could feel the last of the tension draining from his lover's body, turning shoulders that never relaxed into butter. When he'd finished, he gently unlatched the cuffs from ankles and wrists and dropped them to the side.

"Let me fix some tea." He whispered and swooped in to plant a kiss on the side of the turned head. York neither nodded or moved as Macy gathered up the velvet blanket and the coverlet from the bed to carry them downstairs.

York was fastidious and madly opposed to dry cleaning. The suggestion of purchasing something that couldn't be washed at home set the man off on a tirade about chemicals and the environment and how little people respected either. So, most of all the fabrics, even the fancy ones, in their loft could be tossed into the washer, including the velvet and Macy knew if he didn't get the blankets tossed in to wash, York would be fussing at it when he was supposed to be relaxing.

Besides, he liked the washing machine. It was a wide, fat, front loader that he could sit in front of and watch the soapy water and clothes tumble around in. He even liked the detergent, smelling like dried, condensed funeral flowers and all slippery and blue. Pre-treating was a treat, loading the machine and getting it going made him giggle and he pushed the buttons with mad glee. It took just enough time that when he returned the tea was ready to be fixed and he quickly made one mug of the Yunnan black with milk and sugar, and kept one untouched.

York was, at the least, still not laying face down on the floor. He moved about the bedroom fussing. The lighter welts on his back were gone, the darker ones faded to pale lines and lightly swollen ridges and the bloody wound was invisible. He was separating the toys he'd laid out into plastic bins. One for cleaning, one for being placed back into the locked blanket chest they kept such things in. When he glanced up and saw Macy with the tea his lips quirked into a small smile that came and fled quickly.

"Leave it." Macy whispered and pressed the well sweetened mug into his lover's hand. When he was feeling like this, black tea with milk and sugar was a comfort to York and Macy knew the man well enough to have fixed it just so.

"Thanks." York nodded to the tea.

That made Macy grin, he caught York's free hand and tugged. "Come on, you."

The human offered no protest and Macy got the man into the bathroom. He shut the water off on the tub and set the mugs near by. The room, steamy and heavy with the scent of lavender, soon had a hint of tea swirling on the mists as well. Instead of depositing them both directly into the tub, he led his lover into the shower. Hair and bodies were quickly washed with Macy batting York's hands aside to do both for his lover.

"I can wash myself." York grumbled but didn't try to pull away.

Macy chuckled and kissed the soapy neck. "Bitch, bitch, bitch." He shut the water off and didn't bother with the towels but led them dripping wet and pooling water everywhere to the big soaking tub. "In you go." He sighed and half handed, half lifted York into the steamy water.

It folded around him like a heated blanket and York sighed, sinking into the tub up to his chin. The water sloshed as Macy slid in behind him and when strong hands tugged, he allowed himself

to be pulled back to rest on the strong, pale chest. Macy's legs slid around his hips, his arms fell around his shoulders. It was normally York that had Macy snuggled against him, not the other way around and he sighed again and turned a little to the side so he could half curl up against the vampire, resting the side of his face against Macy's shoulder.

They rested together, Macy unusually quiet and still. York let him continue petting him, stroking across his shoulders and back. Wrapped in the gentle touch and warmth of the hot water, surrounded by the smell of the soft lavender, York felt himself settle and level out. After long moments in the candle light he wiggled until he was turned around and had his back to Macy's chest.

"Did you follow the kid okay?" He asked as he reached for his tea.

Macy nodded and let the story of his afternoon spill out but he kept petting York as he talked and liked how the man allowed it. When he got to the part where he'd scolded the half blood and sent her running York was chuckling.

"Oscar's going to be pissed." He wheezed out around the laughter.

"Let him, prissy bastard. Fairth hinted again that I should kick Oscar down a rung."

"Fairth? You went there too?"

"Let me finish the story."

York grinned at the chastising. "Of course, I'm sorry."

Macy finished his story uninterrupted. "And why didn't you tell me about this Cardinal Fuckwad coming here?"

That chased York's grin away. "I didn't want to fuss, it doesn't mean anything."

"Like hell it doesn't!" He scooted and lifted and got York turned so he could kiss the now tense lips. "If you'd told me we could have played sooner before you got so tense."

"I... I didn't think it would get to me so badly."

"Shhh, it's okay baby doll, it's okay." Macy stroked the still eased body but York just shook his head.

"What about this kid?"

"A half blood, golden elf and Black Cross priest? Something's going on around him."

"You're going back out tonight." It wasn't a question.

"Kid's set to get up around eight, he'll be out hustling before nine trying to make that rent. I still want to know what he is."

York nodded. "Rightfully so. It's going to be deeply cold tonight, kid's not likely to get much traffic."

"He'll come around the club, the bait you offered was too much to refuse."

"I'll head over there, wait up in the lounge until he arrives."

"No rush, he won't make it there until closer to midnight."

York shook his head. "It's going to be cold and all that kid had was a jean jacket."

"He's a stubborn cuss though."

"You think all humans are stubborn."

"Well, you are, have to be you're such fragile things. Except you, you're just stubborn for ornery's sake."

Instead of being upset, York just sighed and let his head drop back against a shoulder. "Indeed."

Macy wasn't in any rush to get out of the tub and for a change York didn't seem to be either. They lay together, relaxed and comfortable, in the hot water. Neither one had a need to speak and break the silence with words. It was enough, just enough, to rest, safe, together.

Luke's alarm clock went off and he smacked a hand out of the warm blankets he'd nested into to shut it off. That knocked it off balance and it wobbled and fell over giving one final sputtering ring in protest. The air outside of his blankets was cold, they kept the heat as low as they could to keep the bills as low as possible. It was electric heat and that meant not turning on the lights, using candles when they could and freezing their asses off on really cold nights. His feet were warm though, which was unusual. They were always cold but he'd laid down and slept in the clothes the strange Frenchman had given him.

Reluctantly he poked his head out from the blankets and shivered. Getting up and moving was going to have to happen in stages, that was all there was to it. Still wrapped in blankets he fumbled for his cigarettes and shivered while he smoked the first one. It was going to be too cold to stand a shower and he didn't want to go out in this frosty weather with wet hair so he'd wait until he got home. He'd have to shower then anyway, it was the only way he could sleep after working.

That just left breakfast, dressing and brushing his teeth before heading out. Food was solved without leaving his blankets, he snagged a sleeve of pop tarts and tore it open. His stomach growled but he allowed himself only one before folding the foil over and setting the second one to the side. The other sleeves would have to go into his pack and go out with him or else they'd be eaten by the time he got home. He washed the unheated dry pastry down with the liter of soda, again saving half to tuck aside. The second half of breakfast would make a good dinner and at least he wouldn't go to bed hungry.

Dressing required leaving his warm pocket and that had him shivering hard. He didn't have much that was warm and from how cold the apartment was it was getting cold out there. That left him with his second best jeans, baggy and loose, and the military surplus green wool sweater. The sweater fit snugly and he'd still make a good sight on the street and maybe wouldn't freeze his ass totally off. He kept the socks and didn't bother with underwear, he only owned one pair anyway and never wore them. Too much hassle in his line of work to be fumbling with underwear.

His sneakers were still damp, there was no helping that. He pulled them on and felt some of the warmth from the socks fade away. It didn't matter, he knew they'd be a ton colder soon and he only hoped he got picked up often so he could thaw out in nice warm cars. Before he left the bedroom, he folded up his blankets and went over his backpack. The blankets had to be folded so he'd know if anyone had messed with them and the pack had to be checked because he always left the apartment assuming he'd never be able to go back.

If it was important, he carried it with him. What little money he had was tucked inside. A few mementos of happier times, a picture of his mother among them. Any food he had scrounged up and didn't want to share, any smokes too. Most importantly, the front pouch was condoms, lube and hand wipes. He was as set as he could be so he heaved a sigh as he glanced out the window. It wasn't snowing, thankfully, but everything had a frosty cold look to it. It would be icy tonight, he'd have to be careful.

It wasn't a big surprise that his room mates were passed out on their bed. From what stuck out they were naked too, as if fucking for a living wasn't enough, they'd come home and get high and fuck some more. Luke shook his head and kicked at the mattress.

"Hey!" He snapped but all it earned him was an unhappy groaning. "Hey!"

"Go 'way, Lucky."

"You have to work! Gossman wants his money!"

A hand snaked out and waved directionless around. "Don' worry, we'll be there, jus' go on."

He wanted to kick them and not the mattress. The panic crept back up and he pushed it down. On a good night clearing a hundred bucks by himself would be difficult, on a night as cold as it was it would be almost impossible. It was a bad time of the year to be homeless and he wasn't old enough to go to a shelter like his roommates. Worse, he looked younger than he was so even when he did turn eighteen, they'd still call child services on him. The apartment was all he had and he was going to lose it because of his fuck up roommates.

He rubbed his eyes and held in the string of frustrated swearing he wanted to deliver. Instead, he disappeared into the bathroom and locked the door. He snagged his toothbrush from the mug and shook out some of the cheap baking soda onto it. Even though he tried not to, some of his frustration was taken out on his teeth.

Before he left for the night he emptied his bladder and kept his jeans open. From the front pouch of the pack he found the lube and slicked up his fingers. He was going to be optimistic and make sure he was ready, he needed the money and needed to be ready for anything that came his way. Tonight wasn't a night to be picky and as he carefully slicked himself up and stretched himself out he tried not to think about it. It was just a matter of economics, they had the money, he was willing to sell what they wanted. It wasn't personal.

It was no real surprise that his roommates hadn't stirred beyond pulling the blankets tighter around themselves and Luke refrained from yelling at them again. They were still too high, too hung over to really work safely and he'd rather they went out tomorrow afternoon and tried, even at panhandling, then go out tonight and get killed. He braced himself and slipped out of the apartment, down the steps and out into a cold so sharp that the first gust of wind stole his breath.

Almost as soon as he hit the street he felt eyes on him. It wasn't an unusual sense of late and had started to creep him out. There were three gangs and ten times that number of pimps that claimed the few blocks he worked and lived in and a free agent like Luke was a rare item. He'd been around long enough to be a proven earner but hadn't been threatened or tempted to align himself with anyone. That often meant he was watched or followed about, sometimes a stubborn pimp would put eyes on him for days or weeks just to unnerve him. A year before he'd been jumped and had the crap kicked out of him and sure enough the next day had brought an offer of protection from a gang lord and one of his street working pimps.

He hunkered down into the cold and pretended he was invisible. On the way to the street that he normally worked he avoided alleys and dark corners and kept an eye out for any sudden movement. It was small comfort to know that whoever the eyes belonged to were stuck out in the

freezing cold with him and that they were likely as miserable as he was.

Bentley Avenue might have been a nice street once. It intersected now with Martin Street which was the row of strip clubs, peep shows, porn theaters and the like. Gay and straight, all lumped together in one tiny corner like some perverted shopping mall. The johns came down, got revved up at the clubs and shows and came over to Bentley for cheaper action than they could find from the extra services in the clubs. So long as Luke and his kind stayed on Bentley or the cross alleys between the muscle that worked for the clubs on Martin didn't break their legs.

Both streets looked like ghost towns tonight. The clubs were open, lights flashing neon cocks or tits in orange, red and pinks that reflected almost cheerfully out into the snow but the handful of johns wandering around hurried from cars to club and back without barely looking up. Bentley wasn't much better, half the workers were tucked somewhere warm unless they owed their dealers or pimps or were in a bind like him. The street smelled of desperation and it wasn't going to be a good night.

There were only four young men out on the street, clumped near the side roads of Walnut and Maple. One was obviously tweaked out to oblivion and was sweating in the cold night air, the other three shivered together and huddled near a doorway out of the wind until cars drove slowly by. Luke knew them, by street name and face, and didn't consider them friends. One was in his mid-twenties, positively ancient out here on the street and the other two looked like they'd been living on the streets for too many years.

Luke was, by far, the best of the lot. He knew he looked young, looked clean, looked like a skinny little boy and he knew the johns out tonight would rather that than something that had been ridden hard more than a few times and put away wet. He didn't think he was the best looking, one of the more sober group was actually quite handsome, he just knew he looked the youngest and that had always played to his advantage well. He picked a spot in a doorway a half a block from the others and tried to stay out of the strongest of the gusts.

Nearly an hour later the only action had been for one of the boys down the block, he'd gotten into a car and hadn't come back yet. Business was slow, cold and slow and Luke was shivering hard when he got his first trick. The man arrived on foot, which wasn't unusual during the warmer and even chillier months but not often when it was so cold.

Even if his coat was long and warm looking it was still really cold out. He was pushing into this mid thirties and looked like he might be out to score some dope, not some ass but Luke moved out of his doorway and grinned at him anyway. The man paused and looked him over.

"Let me see your ass, boy." He ordered.

Luke grinned wider and turned around, smoothing the fabric of his loose jeans tighter over his backside. "I'm always a good time, best on the block, real work ethic to be out on such a cold night." He promised and tried not to shiver.

There was a moment's pause before the man grunted. "You'll do. I got fifteen in cash for a blow."

He normally didn't take less than twenty, gambling on the traffic and not selling himself short but he needed the cash and it was damn cold. Luke nodded. "Suits, in the alley."

The man followed him into the alley, just far enough in to be out of easy eyeshot from the street and backed himself up against the wall. Luke reached around to the front pouch of the backpack for the non-lubricated blowing condoms and just as he got one between his fingers the man pulled him close against his body. Hands suddenly were stroking everywhere, hot breath puffing against his neck in small pants and Luke tried to pull away from the unwanted contact.

"Hey!" The hands pulled and squeezed his ass and groin but it let him step back. "Fifteen doesn't

buy you that.”

“Aww come on, it’s cold, just trying to warm you up.” The man grinned as he parted the length of his coat and unzipped his jeans.

“The cash.” He held the condom up and stayed out of reach.

Two fives and five ones were produced and Luke tore the foil of the wrapper, crouched down and got to work. It wasn’t difficult. These guys never looked for style or technique or even interest. It didn’t matter anymore, none of it did, it was fifteen bucks for five minutes work. Luke worried more about losing his balance and being forced to kneel in the grimy snow or not holding the man’s hips still and being choked then the morals of the situation. He knew where he ranked in society and it was just economics, it was easier if he thought it was just economics.

Ten minutes later the man was walking down the street and Luke was huddling back in his doorway. He was shivering and the time was creeping by, the roads and sidewalks were getting icy and what little traffic there was out was getting thinner. So when a car rolled by and Luke’s smile brought the man to the curb, he hurried over to the driver’s window.

The man behind the four door’s wheel was middle aged and nervous. He looked like an accountant, he had the boring office look to him. The window went down on a smooth automatic glide and heat poured from the inside of the car, Luke leaned over to catch some of it.

“Heya, cold night to be alone.” He grinned again.

“How much?”

“Depends on what you want to do?”

The man licked his lips and his hand fell into his lap, rubbing at his fabric covered groin. “Suck you hard then fuck your tight teen ass until you come.”

“Forty.”

“Twenty.”

“Thirty.”

The man shook his head. “One of them will do it for twenty.”

“Twenty five.” Luke cringed but it moved him closer to his goal. Twenty five was better than nothing.

“Get in.”

He shook his head. “Pull into that alley and park, I’ll meet you there.” He watched from the street as the car pulled into the alley, parked and turned it’s lights off. Only then did he go over and open the passenger door. The heat inside the car was turned on high and it felt disgustingly good.

“Backseat.” The man ordered as he slipped from the front door to the back.

Luke drew a cold breath and got in. It was just economics.

Going from almost thawing out to the cold air was worse than if he’d just stayed half frozen. It would have been bearable if there was a hope in hell of making the last of the rent but he’d been shivering in the cold again for almost an hour and not a single john had gone by in the last fifteen

minutes. He'd heard stories of Gossman's friend's parties, gossip from other tenants that had fallen short of the rent. They were more like gang bangs instead of lap dances and stripping and the entertainment got worked over pretty hard.

He couldn't do that, he just couldn't, but he also knew he couldn't get tossed out either. It had taken so much work, so much saving and struggling and suffering to even get that apartment. It was the only thing in his life he was proud of and the last year had been the first time in forever that he felt there might actually be a chance to get out of the life he was in. If he lost that apartment, so close to his eighteenth birthday, to being able to maybe get a real job, he lost everything. It would all be gone for want of seventy bucks.

The cheap watch he wore said it was after midnight and it had been twenty minutes since the last car had gone slowly by. The other boys, even the tweaker, had given up. The women at the other end of the street were down to just a few, huddled inside coats, smoking and shivering. His options were gone but he remembered that warm kiss that morning and that whispered, accented voice.

Well, he was pretty desperate for money and he knew the Frenchman and his quarter blood freak boyfriend had money. Buses would be running for another couple of hours, they were at least heated. He could hop on one, get over to that club, warm up, see if the offer stood. At the least, if it didn't, maybe he'd pick up some work in the club and he'd be in from the cold.

It felt like he was pushing his luck but it wasn't like they didn't have the cash. He'd spent the entire night in their loft and woken up without a scratch. He'd sit and watch them fuck for seventy dollars, hell, for that much money he'd do just about anything. Maybe they wanted him to wear feathers and serve tea, or just suck them off, he could do it, if he was warm and made rent. If they hadn't messed him up last night when he was insensible, it was doubtful they'd try something tonight when he was sober.

The cold convinced him as much as his need for money. His sneakers were soaked again and even with the warmer socks he couldn't feel his toes on the walk to the bus stop. It was worth the cash spent when the bus pulled up because it was warm inside and as he sighed and took a seat near the back he tried to convince himself that this wasn't a horrible idea.

La Vierge after midnight, even in such chill, still had a line waiting to get in. A line of people in fancy clothes and costly warm coats with made up faces and wild hair and Luke felt even dirtier and more plain as he walked the last blocks to the club's door. There was no way he was getting in, none, and he hadn't thought so far ahead as to how he was going to manage that.

"Brain's frozen." He muttered around chattering teeth. He wouldn't survive waiting in line and made up his mind to be a ballsy sort and try to scam his way in.

Luke walked right up to the door and the two huge, mountainous sized doormen that were bundled in heavy coats and standing near a heater. They looked big enough to snap Luke in two, a couple of times over and they exchanged a look when he walked right to them.

"End of the line kid and make sure you have id." One muttered.

Luke shook his head. "Not here to party, I've an appointment."

Another look was exchanged. "Yeah, really? End of the line."

"I was told to go to the bar and wait for York or Macy but I'm sure they won't mind while I stand in line out here." He shrugged and started toward the end of the line. He made it four steps.

"Kid!"

Luke turned and made a show of reluctantly returning to the door. "What?"

"If you're lying, we'll mop the floor with your scrawny ass, got it?"

"Of course."

"Follow Billy here to the bar, stay where he puts you and if you twitch from that spot we'll toss you out."

Luke just hung his head and hurried to follow, it didn't miss his attention that they didn't search him either. They didn't even run the wand across him that picked up metal and the like, which made him rethink just who the pair he was going to meet with might be. It didn't matter really, nothing had changed and at least inside was warm.

Warm, dark, smoky and a far nicer club than he'd ever been in. It was filled with pretty people trying to look even prettier. Swirls of black fabric on dancers that looked like they were having sex instead of dancing, bright eyes flashed as quarter bloods and those trying to be quarter bloods moved around on mock little hunts and grinned around small fangs. It really didn't surprise him any that it was a vampire club but it made his idea of looking for side jobs while here seem less likely.

Billy pulled out a bar stool back along the corner of one bar and pointed to it. "Stay!"

"Arf!" Luke barked back over the loud, moody music and got his butt in place before the big man could throw him out. He tried to be invisible again and it seemed to work because none of the swirling, gothic beauty around him came too close. That or he wasn't pretty enough for them or smelled too much like the bloodshed and scandal they played at.

A mug slid in front of him and Luke glanced up. The bartender was handsome, sharply so and the bright green of his eyes marked his mixed blood. "I didn't order shit." Luke pushed the mug away.

"Down boy." Adam grinned and pushed it back toward the kid. "Compliments of York, it's just coffee, says to drink it and stay put and he'll be right by."

The Frenchman was coming to get him, which set a small tingle of fear and relief into Luke's spine, until he remembered how all of the night before was just gone. He frowned at the coffee with suspicion and no matter how much he wanted something warm, he wasn't going to risk it.

"Oh." Adam paused as he was turning away. "He said this too." He reached out and lifted the mug and took a long, solid swallow from it. "York wouldn't drug you kid, he's about the most honest thing in here. Macy though," he grinned. "Macy would steal candy from a baby just for shits and giggles." He winked and laughed and turned back to the customers that lined the rest of the bar.

That left Luke alone with a cooling cup of coffee and his own distrust. When he'd stopped shivering and the bar tendered didn't seem the least effected by the big swallow of coffee, he gave in. Maybe it was better if he was drugged, since he had no idea what the pair would want him for. Sometimes, it wasn't better to be able to remember. He drank the coffee in gulps and let it settle into his stomach as a warm comfort.

All Souls Pass

Part Twelve:

York watched from across the club as the boy finally gave in and drank his coffee, huddling over it while he tried to get warm. It was child's play to weave a spell around the boy, letting it settle around him like spun cotton candy. The boy was already really good at pretending to be invisible and now with York's own energies wrapped about him they shouldn't have to worry about the trackers finding him.

"Cute." Macy purred and wrapped himself around his lover.

"He's not bad."

"I meant you."

York sighed and frowned. "How'd he do?"

"Slow working. I made sure the half blood on his tail followed the wrong bus. He lost the other two on his own." Macy sighed and danced against York but he knew the focused attention his lover was showing and knew he couldn't entice him out onto the dance floor. "I'll head home, get the place warmed up, start dinner."

"Hmm, already did."

"Oh?"

"Mushroom beef barley, you just put the biscuits in."

Macy chuckled. "Knew I kept you around for something."

As quickly as Macy had appeared, the arms around him vanished. York didn't even bother to look around, to spot his lover would take far more energy than was worth it. He just shook his head and hovered back to watch the boy waiting across the club.

When he felt the boy had lingered enough to make the wait seem proper York moved across the club and to the end of the bar. "Well." He said over the music. "Didn't expect you so soon." He tried to look both interested and put out at the same time.

Lucky shrugged and grinned up at the Frenchman. "Can't remember last night, thought a second go of it, just to see what I missed?"

York raised an eyebrow. "How much did you need?"

That made the boy squirm a little in his seat. "No bullshit, I gotta make rent. I had it but circumstances interfered. I need seventy more."

He pretended to think about it, letting his eyes drift over the boy in a lazy way. "If I take you home, you'll do whatever I say for the rest of the night. No questions and you'll get your rent. Behave and you'll get it and more. Deal?"

"Deal." He nodded quickly before he could think about it.

"Good, follow me." York turned to leave and didn't look to see if the boy obeyed but he sensed him and knew that before he was two steps away the kid was on his feet and hurrying to stay close.

It was short walk to the door and York nodded to the bouncers as he led the boy outside. His coat was warm and the air still cut into York. It could be countered with a small spell but he was trying to not draw attention to them and such casual use of magic would toss up a flare to anyone sensitive around them. The half blood might not get it but the elf might and the black cross priest surely would.

So he shivered and the boy about shivered himself apart on the five block walk over to their neighborhood and the two block trek to their actual building. By the time he got them into the lift and got it moving the boy looked totally miserable again.

"What's your name?"

"Lucky."

"No." York corrected. "What's your real name."

The lift churned to itself for a few seconds before the kid nodded. "Luke."

"Luke it is."

He found he liked the way the man said his name. "So, what is it you want? Want me to watch? Or suck you both off?"

The lift stopped and York paused with his hand on the door. "Let's not worry about that for now. We have all night."

The door opened and warmth washed over him and more, the smell of food. Real food not just fast food. Rich scents of beef and hot biscuits and Luke felt his stomach knot up and wondered if the elegant man heard it growl too. The loft was even prettier than he remembered and he felt dirty and small and ugly.

The quarter blood was crouched down in front of the oven, watching it intently. "Hey." He greeted without looking up.

"Macy, this is Luke, he'll be joining us tonight."

"Cool." He said again without looking up.

Luke stayed near the lift door. "What's he doing?"

"Hmm?" York had to glance over and see what his lover was doing, he was so used to Macy just being Macy. "He's watching the biscuits cook I'd imagine."

"Watching the..."

York dropped a hand on the boy's shoulder and guided him toward the steps. "Come on, let's get this going."

Which kind of startled Luke, but he followed, even if leaving the area of the food was almost physically painful. He hadn't expected they would feed him after all. He had his soda and pop tarts in the backpack, he could eat them later. The idea was wholly unappealing with the wonderful smells that filled the warm loft.

"Strip." York ordered when he reached the top of the stairs.

The bedroom was just as Luke recalled except the coverlet on the bed was missing. He dropped his backpack and peeled off his sweater, kicked off his shoes and dropped his pants.

"At least I get your socks back to you." He half regretted wearing them now.

York waved them off and moved about his dressers. He pulled out another pair of the warm socks and flannel pants and a comfortable long sleeved t-shirt. He dropped all on the bed. "You know where the bathroom is. Clean up, shower, whatever, these should be warm enough and bring your sneakers down with you, we'll toss them in the dryer."

Luke stood naked and confused. "What?"

"Get cleaned up and dressed and come down before the biscuits get cold."

"Biscuits?"

"If you take too long, Macy will smother them all in honey. Get moving."

It still didn't sink in. "You're... you're letting me have dinner? You're not..."

York just shook his head and left the boy alone in the upstairs bedroom.

Luke stood, naked and alone. No one ever left a whore alone, frightened they'd steal whatever they could get their hands on. To be stripped down only to be left untouched had never happened before and it took a moment for his mind to change gears. It made sense, they'd want him clean before they touched him and in clean clothes. The food was simply because they wanted to eat and most likely didn't feel comfortable eating in front of him. His arrival hadn't been planned, after all, and the soup would have taken some time to make.

The bathroom had a new toothbrush laid out and a fresh set of towels, as if he were really a guest and not just a trick picked up for the night. The towels were thick and clean, so much so that Luke hadn't really known they made towels so thick. He didn't delay, not wanting them to change their mind about the offer of food. The shower was as nice and hot as he remembered and he washed quickly under it's spray.

The soft towels dried him quickly and he pulled on the comfortable, warm, clean smelling clothes. The socks, while they looked like the pair he'd been wearing, turned out to be cotton, not wool but just as thick and warm. When he caught a glimpse of himself in the bathroom mirror he was startled by how normal he looked. He could be a high school student or a freshmen in college like he saw moving in and out of the little coffee shops in the better areas of town. It made sense, that such a well off pair wouldn't want him looking so poor. He squared his shoulders, reminded himself of his place and made his way back downstairs.

The biscuits had been pulled from the oven and left to cool on a wire rack. Deep, square bowls glazed on the outside with matte black and finished inside with a deep blood red sat beside the pot waiting to be filled. A plastic tub of soft butter sat beside small plates with a butter knife propped across it's lid. The Frenchman was stirring the soup but the quarter blood freak was to the side, toying with a plastic squeeze bottle of honey in the shape of a bear.

"You're going to make a mess." York warned.

Macy tilted his head back and let the honey dribble into his mouth. "Most likely, god this is good."

Without glancing over, York reached out and plucked the honey bear from Macy's hands and placed it safely on the counter.

"Hey!" But further protests were cut off by York catching both sides of his lover's face and very slowly licking the small sticky spot of honey from the corner of his lips.

Luke watched how the darker haired man trembled at the teasing lick, his bright eyes fluttering shut. But when York was done licking the trace away, Macy caught and held him, kissing him properly, deeply, sharing the taste of honey between them. It was York that broke the kiss and slid away.

"I'm hungry."

Macy groaned. "So am I."

"For food!" York shook his head and batted the hands aside but he could tell Macy was more than half playing and less than serious. Not that the vampire would have refused him if he'd wanted to go further, Macy rarely said no. "Are you hungry too, Luke?" York asked without looking over to where the boy was slowly trying to approach without drawing attention to himself.

He shrugged.

"Macy, can you toss his sneakers into the dryer, on low."

He snorted. "I know how to work the dryer. Toss em here kid." He held out his hand.

Luke glanced from one to the other before he underhand tossed first one sneaker, then the other at the dark haired man who caught them nimbly. A bowl, filled and steaming with the fragrant hearty soup, slid under his nose and a folded cloth napkin and ornate metal spoon followed it.

"Fix up your biscuits now before Macy gets to them, he gets a touch slap happy with the honey."

Luke stared into food that smelled better than food had a right to.

"Thanks."

"Hmm?"

"For dinner, I know you don't have to feed me or anything so, thanks. I'll eat quick so we can get to it."

"Aww poor thing's eager, York." Macy purred and Luke glanced up startled, he hadn't heard the man return let alone return long enough to be leaning on the counter toying with the honey again. "Be nice and let him blow us before dinner."

"He's not blowing anyone before dinner."

"Then, can I blow him before dinner?"

"Macy..."

"Or you?"

York gave a deep sigh and glanced to where Luke was standing silent. "Pay him only half a mind, he was born with a hard on."

Instead of being insulted, Macy grinned wider. "It's true, I was. My father used to brag about it, his first born, coming out locked and loaded."

"I..." Luke didn't know what to say, he stood, standing in the fancy kitchen with his mouth hanging open. He wondered if maybe he'd passed out into a snow bank and all of this was the final hallucination of his mind as he froze to death.

Macy chuckled while sucking honey from his fingers. "He's cute when flabbergasted. I want to blow him."

"Shut up and eat." York shook his head and slid a bowl toward Macy. He moved to split and butter a half dozen biscuits, plating four for the boy and two for himself, before Macy could drown the remaining ones in enough honey to make them into candy.

Luke watched as Macy split the remaining biscuits, buttered them heavily and then gave each half a solid coating of the light honey before he restacked them into buttery, sticky wholes. York was either too used to the sight to notice or ignoring his lover. He pulled out wine glasses and a bottle of red from the fridge. Two of the glasses were filled with a fair amount, one was filled with barely half a glass.

"Should be giving you cocoa." York grumbled but slid the less full glass toward the boy. "We're pretty informal, we eat in front of the television so Macy can watch his shows. He's obsessed with those crime drama shows, tapes them on the dvr to watch when we eat."

York settled on one end of the sofa, sliding his plate of biscuits onto the coffee table next to his wine glass. Macy required no invitation, he'd already dropped himself down into the center cushion and was cueing up his shows but the boy hovered on the kitchen counter looking wide eyed and startled.

"You're welcome to eat there but just as welcome to come and watch the shows, Luke. Whichever pleases you is fine." He made sure to turn his attention to food and show and ignore the boy.

It was an act, he watched and he was pretty sure Macy watched too, how the boy hovered uneasily for a moment before giving in. He made two trips, not wanting to risk spilling wine or food with one, and got his meal transported the feet across the open loft from kitchen to coffee table.

He sat on the edge of the sofa cushion and balanced the warm bowl in one hand. The spoon he was eating from was silver, not silverplate, real silver. Luke had never even seen a real silver spoon and yet it was the flatware the pair ate from while watching television at one in the morning. It made his hands shake as he spooned up a mouthful of the hot soup.

"Oh, God, this is good." He groaned as the rich broth and barely exploded on his taste buds.

Macy murmured in agreement. "York's a dandy cook, he's all French and snobby about it even though when he was in France their cooking was shit."

York ignored the comment and just ate his dinner.

A couple of things became pretty clear to Luke as the time passed and he emptied his bowl. First, he'd forgotten how real food tasted, something not from a can or a fast food place. It reminded him of his mother, her cooking wasn't so good but it was homemade and warm and it made him feel safe. Secondly, he had forgotten how much fun dropping himself onto a sofa and watching tv could be. Third, even though the small cubes of beef in the soup were super tender, Macy picked each one out as if it was something disgusting and dropped it into York's bowl.

Before he knew it, he was wiping the sides of the bowl with one of the still warm biscuits and sighing in happy fulfillment. It didn't matter what the pair wanted, he was willing to try anything in thanks for the wonderful soup.

"You're welcome to more, there's plenty." York spoke as Macy fast forwarded through a commercial.

A second serving would stuff him silly and while Luke was tempted, he still didn't know what they wanted with him. He wasn't going to make a pig of himself only to throw it up later. It was easier to do whatever was asked of him with his stomach not stretched beyond decent limits.

"Thanks but any more and I'll pop."

"Ewww skinny human splattered on the walls." Macy giggled and set his own half eaten bowl down to tackle what remained of the sticky biscuits on his plate.

York placed his empty bowl aside and took up Macy's half finished one, dropping his spoon into it and tackling the remains. It had the feel of a long practiced pattern, something the pair had gotten used to. The casual ease the two showed with each other spoke of a pair that had been living together for years.

Luke waited until the show was over and Macy was licking the honey from his plate like a rude kitten before he asked. "So, how long you too been living together?"

"Forever!" Macy tossed out between delicate licks across his plate.

"Seems like it some days." York sighed and offered the boy a long suffering look at his lover's behavior.

"Good to know, ya know, that some couples can stick it out." He shrugged and downed the last swallow of his wine. "So, what're you into? I do it all." He tried to sound sexy but it sounded more uncertain.

Macy dropped the plate to the coffee table and snuggled back against his lover, licking honey from his fingers but it was York that answered. "We don't want to fuck you."

"Well...." Macy grinned lewdly. "Not for pay anyway."

Luke shrugged. "I can watch, or order you two around, or whatever you'd like."

"We just want to ask you some questions, get some honest answers."

"You brought me here to talk..."

"You'll get paid, be honest and I'll pay you well and feed you breakfast and let you sleep here tonight so you don't have to go out into the cold." York's amusement fled and he took on a serious expression. "Lie to us, even try to, and I'll toss you out into the snow without a dime."

"Trust me, you can't lie to York." Macy added around the finger he was cleaning.

It was a little freaky but if they wanted him to tell them dirty stories or sordid tales from his life on the street, well, it was better than being the star at one of Gossman's parties. "What do you want to know?"

Macy sat upright and forgot about the honey. "What are you?"

"I don't understand. I'm just a kid."

York patted his lover's shoulder. "He's not being coy, he doesn't know." He studied the boy, looking so much younger in the too baggy clothes. "How old are you, boy?"

"Eighteen."

"Liar." Macy giggled as even he saw the falsehood in the word.

"I'll be eighteen in a couple of weeks, honest."

"He's older than he looks." York confirmed. "Do you have parents?"

Luke frowned. "What the hell does that have to do with anything?" He snapped.

"Do you have parents?" York just repeated softer, more gently.

"Yeah, I do."

"What do you know of them?"

"Know?" Luke looked to the pair and felt lost. "Look, tell me what you're looking to hear and I'll tell ya but this beating about the bush bullshit doesn't make any sense."

"Are your parents living?"

"No, well, my step dad is."

"Both your biological parents are dead?"

"Fuck, yes, happy?" He pulled his legs up under him and glared at the pair.

"How did they die?"

"Sick bastards, you know that right? Is this how you get off? Pick up someone down on their luck and dig up their personal shit?"

"Luke," York spoke carefully. "We don't ask to be cruel, but the answers are important."

The answers weren't so easy to get out but Luke needed to keep his clients happy. "My dad killed himself when I was a baby, never knew him. My mom remarried when I was eight, she got killed when I was eleven, stabbed on her way home from work."

"And they both were normal humans?"

"Yeah."

"No oddities in your family tree? A grandmother that was a witch? An uncle that was a quarter blood? Nothing like that?"

Luke shrugged again. "No, look we're just normal folks, nothing freakish in my family."

"Freakish." Macy teased and elbowed York in the ribs. "I think he insulted me, us, me, whatever."

"What the fuck is going on? What do you want with me?"

"Look, Luke, I'm a witch." York spoke carefully. "Last night? You were really hurt, I healed you because Macy thought there was something odd about you. He was right, there is. I've never seen the like of what you are."

"I'm just a kid." Luke protested.

"We know that's not all you are. Has anything odd ever happened around you? Anything that frightened other people but might have seemed normal to you?"

Luke thought and found nothing. "Naw, maybe you're wrong?"

Macy laughed. "You threw him five feet away and nearly fried him when he tried to heal you kid, we're not wrong."

It was too much to believe. "Don't you think if I had some skill, some ability, that I would be doing something other than selling my ass on the street? Hell, the gangs are always looking for folks with a touch of something more, a mix of the blood in them. I don't got that, I'm just nothing. Trash, that's it."

"Trash doesn't get followed by a half blood, a golden elf and a black cross priest." Macy tossed out and went back to sucking the last of the honey from his fingers.

"What?"

York held up a hand. "We just saw it today but Macy found them following you."

"You followed me?"

Macy shrugged. "Was bored."

"What the fuck!"

"Easy!" York snapped back. "We're no threat to you but this group trailing you, none of them would waste the resources or time if you weren't something more than you seem. Trust me, we might mean you no harm but those three groups won't play as nice. The more you know about yourself, about why they're following you, about what you are, the safer you'll be."

"And you're just doing this, what? Out of the kindness of your heart?"

"Hardly."

"This city is our home, it's stable and peaceful. If something tips off those three groups, pushes the balance of power to one side or another, things change."

"And you two want to be nice and sweet and stop that?"

"No, we want the heads up to get the hell out of Dodge before the shit hit's the fan." Macy grinned. "And you, kid, look like a big steaming pile of do-do to me."

"Have no doubts, Luke, if any of those groups think you might be of use to them, they will tear you apart to get you. All we want is to know why and we're going to do some figuring out tonight." York had made his mind up, as risky as the boy's energies were, he needed to get close to them again. "But, you're welcome to walk out right now, we won't stop you. Just, keep an eye over your shoulder and a back to the wall, hmm?"

Luke sighed and shook his head. "Fuck, do what you want."

"Just relax and try not to think about it." York knew the tense, unhappy look the boy wore. "Actually, Mace, why don't you load up that video game you're always whining at me to play with you over. I bet Luke would enjoy that." Macy sat upright. "Yeah! What do you say? He never wants to play, rather do something boring like read."

"I play sometimes at the arcade." He glanced to the pair and wondered if they were just messing with him. They couldn't be serious, they were lulling him into a false sense of comfort before they broke out the livestock and whips.

"Cool! I'll show you, it's not hard." Macy scrambled off the sofa to pull open a cabinet door and show off his game systems.

"Wow." Luke felt himself drawn over to the hidden shelf despite his suspicion. Lined up wasn't just one system and a couple of games but the top three with a good twenty or more games for each and below them was a couple of older models and games for them as well.

York watched as the pair settled down on the floor and flipped across games, debating the merits of a couple before picking one. In short order they sat with controllers in hand, running their characters around on the screen with baseball bats and shotguns wrecking destruction and laughing over each other's good hits. It made him smile because the game was fun, he just wasn't in the mood to play often and Macy much preferred playing with someone.

It worked, the boy relaxed and his laughter had an element of uncertain use to it. York understood, the kid had grown up too fast, had too many worries and not enough things to laugh about. He understood all too well and if for a few hours Macy's odd innocence could rub off on him and give him some space and memory of something other than the abrasive reality of his life, well, all the better. Besides, they were cute together, playing like children, laughing at the joy of smashing weapons into cars and old ladies and York enjoyed watching them.

All Souls Pass

Part Thirteen:

Sadly, it wasn't about playtime and York eventually pulled his thoughts away from how pretty the pair looked together. Dropping into trance was easy, even with the blasts of virtual weapons and the following gleeful giggles. He stayed aware of what happened around him, splitting his consciousness as easily as drawing breath. It was a knack he'd always had and one his teachers had once marveled at. It took a force of effort to fully retreat into his own head and energies and it wasn't one he was comfortable doing too often.

Once securely focused, at ease and calm with his own energies, York reached inside to reach out. He'd tried to explain it to Macy once, that he couldn't just push externally but that the only way out was to turn his focus deeper within. Like a starfish, he had to almost turn himself inside out to slip beyond his own energies, it had left the vampire scratching his head and looking at him like maybe he'd gone mad. That was okay because as York dove into himself he escaped himself.

And speaking of vampires, when he slipped beyond his own body, he had to stop and marvel at his lover. It was always an entrancing sight. Half bloods and quarter bloods all were tinged in the energies of night but Macy was made entirely of them. He was the fluid satin midnight blue of a deep shadow, the slippery silver white of moonlight on water, dark brown rusty reds of drying

blood and the deepest, consuming darkness of black. It was like meditating on a nighttime garden with fragrant flowers that only opened for the moon and shadows that swirled when the wind blew the trees.

He couldn't help it, there was no way he could ease by that dark beauty and not touch it. With a careful touch, York slid some of his energy across the ever changing patterns of his lover and watched as the shades and tones bloomed for him. His touch was known and welcomed and he could feel Macy's lewd smile in it. Some of the shades of night reached back, stroking in soft touch to York's own energies as they throbbed in happiness that vibrated energetically like the pulse of a kitten's purr.

Macy wasn't his target and York slid away from that comfortable cool darkness. He approached Luke with care, not trusting the boy's words after having been smacked so badly by whatever the kid was once already. York studied him without touching his energies and he appeared to all inspection to be just what he said, a perfectly normal human. There was darkness clinging to him, desperation and depression but stubborn will too and the sticky cling of hope but nothing beyond normal humanity.

He moved forward with extreme care, gliding his energies across the boy's in a touch so light that there was no way the kid would notice. York moved around the surface, looked for cracks or loose edges or anything to show the boy's presence was faked. He found nothing to suggest the boy wasn't just what he seemed. Very carefully, he moved deeper, looking for that blinding flash of violet the boy had shown before, that sharp lightening crack of energy that York knew was there.

Then he found it, like a kernel of plutonium surrounded by the boy's own energies like a lead shield. It was tightly coiled on itself, wrapped up like a complex violet knot but it breathed and pulsed like a living thing. There were heartbeat flashes of indigo and glimpses of hot white that York knew was simply a color his mind couldn't name or see. It just curled there, buried under the boy, dormant and deadly like a sleeping dragon.

He approached carefully but the energy didn't stir. York was too paranoid of a man by nature to take foolish risks and he refused to take it's seemingly passive appearance draw him out. He studied this odd tangle of power and found one shocking discovery. It was entirely self contained and not one tendril, not one section came in contact with the boy himself. For all intents and purposes, this intense, strong power was almost a separate being from the boy it lived in.

All of his experience told him that until the boy connected with this frightfully strong power, he was of no use to anyone. York knew that the powers that be would have no moral stumbling over forcing that connection. If they couldn't coerce the boy into working for them, they'd ensnare his mind and use him as a walking atom bomb. The only safe way to stop that was to connect the kid to his own strength and make him aware of it now, before less honest hands did it. The only reason he could think of that one party or another hadn't snatched the boy up was that they were waiting for him to connect naturally, waiting to swoop in when the boy was staggered and disoriented because there weren't too many around that had York's skill and strength to forge a connection without hurting the boy.

He touched the power with care and found it unresponsive and it molded to the contact. With care, he stretched it out, trying to pull a tendril up to where the boy would gain conscious control and awareness to it. In theory, as soon as that power touched the boy's personal energies it should have welded in place, bonded as it was meant to but as York carefully, gently, brought the two energies together, they almost repelled one another. It wasn't brutally but they backed away with enough force to spring from his control and start the beginnings of a feedback headache between his eyes.

He sighed and tried again, using a different amount and again the two forces pushed away from each other. Again he tried, using different forms and again the same results occurred. One by

one, York tried everything he knew, everything he guessed and everything he thought might work to get the two energies to connected and each time they snapped apart. Even when he used some of his own strength to connect the two they still repelled one another.

It was almost comedic and York pulled back to think. The boy's surface energies hadn't changed, all the rebounding and pulling away hadn't even made the kid notice. The same could be said for the vast storehouse of energy he carried deep inside. It still was curled up in quiet sleep, pulsing slightly like a living thing but otherwise unchanged.

He'd never even heard of something like this. Over the years he'd occasionally stumbled across someone that had deeply buried their own skills and talents and it had looked similar. A surface layer of their own personal energies and the denied self shoved deep down away. Those few times all that was required was to help the two sides find and connect with one another, they'd been almost eager to rejoin. It seemed with Luke the two energies were like opposite poles of a magnet and simply unable to connect.

As he sat thinking, trying to come up with a new angle to take, he noticed something. The knot of energy that he'd been struggling to connect to the boy's conscious awareness and control started to pulse in time to York's own energies. As if two people suddenly started to hum the same note at the same volume the knot of power had just fallen into synch with York's own strength.

He moved a little closer to it, carefully because the dragon seemed more awake then before. Only this time, he didn't need to reach for it, the power started to stretch out to him. York skittered back before the pull could draw him too close for he did feel almost like he was being sucked toward that strength. It wanted him to use it, it had adapted to be a mirror of his own energies, it was almost begging for York to touch it.

He doubted it was personal but needed more proof to test it. With long practice, he pulled in different energies, changed the note he was humming and watched as the energy quickly adapted to each new form. York ran across everything he knew and easily could call, energies of fire, earth, water, air, wood, metal, smoke, shadow, countless specific forms he'd learned over his life. Nothing slowed the energy in the least so he mirrored Macy's own energies, reflecting the complex swirls of night. Within a heartbeat the energy the boy carried had changed to be a perfect fit for the vampire.

York pulled away and dropped all reflections and vibrations. As understanding slowly sunk in he felt himself shaken, the deep well of power matched him, pulse for pulse. The boy couldn't touch the power he carried, was almost physically repelled by it, yet York could use it. It would be like his own private storehouse and he'd have a mind numbing power to use as his own.

Understanding struck hard and he stumbled under it. With this boy he could maybe finish his work. He could be done, it could be over, he could be free. With a little practice, a little strengthening, he could tap the boy and use him, drain him and be done. It was still likely that that much power called and focused would kill them both but York wasn't afraid to die.

What difference did it make if one skinny nothing of a street kid got killed too? It was for a bigger cause, something better then anything he'd likely do with his life. It was almost selfish to not take all that the boy held. It was almost morally wrong to refuse all that was placed before him when York had waited and lingered for so long to find a solution. What was one boy's life in comparison? He'd most likely end up dead on the streets in a couple of years anyway, at least this way his death would mean something.

York trembled as he reached inside of himself and unwrapped the spell that was knotted around the deepest, most sheltered corners of his soul. He pulled back the shielding, sheltering layers bit by bit with hands that would have shaken had they been physical. Once freed, the spell sung in thirteen voices, thirteen patterns and harmonies, so complex as to have been almost impossible to weave at all. Thirteen souls, thirteen lives and one small fraction was York's own strength, his

own power, the other twelve merely ghosts now. All that remained of them was this echo anchored in his own life until he either died and the spell faded with him or he found a way to complete it.

The power, that dark, tempting deep power, throbbed at the complex form of the spell. York watched, awed, as it trembled and changed, adding the different tones and threads of the thirteen different powers, interweaving them with shocking ease until it had perfectly matched the spell that he held so dear.

York took up his own thread, his own harmony in the song and wove his soul around it and the power released one of the thirteen harmonies to him. All he had to do was reach out and connect them, direct the power, the song, to the end of the spell and let it be born. It was right there, the best chance he'd found, singing, just out of reach. What was one boy's life in comparison to all he'd suffered, to all the others had suffered?

With a broken sob, a shattering effort of will, York pulled back. Tears, grief and pain poured off of him and he knew his body surely was weeping as his soul screamed in frustrated denial. He had long practice pulling that spell back into himself, wrapping it in layers of sheltering protection and disguising shields. As he muffled it, pulled it away, the power the boy carried slowly ebbed too, dropping the volume of the beautiful song he longed to get lost in. When the last layer was in place and the spell again returned to the depths of his own power and soul, the power in the boy again faded to the soft, pulsing violet. With a wrecking sob he pulled himself away from the temptation and carried his mind and power back into the safe control of his own sheltered body.

For how his soul felt shattered, York was surprised by how placid his body was. Tears streaked paths down his face and his hands trembled but he sat on the sofa silently. The work he'd done and what he'd nearly done had passed unnoticed by the boy but not Macy. He could tell just by how the vampire was sitting and as York wiped a rough hand across his face Macy turned and glanced back at him. He just shook his head and Macy offered a small smile before turning back to the game.

York took a couple of deep, slow breaths and steadied himself. It was the only thing that held in the desire to smack the boy on the back of the head or yell at him. Even if he logically knew none of this was his fault, York wanted to blame him, take some of his hurt out on the boy. At the least, he wanted the boy to notice how upset he was and he knew it was totally selfish.

When he knew he could speak without his voice shaking, York sat forward. "Luke?"

Macy instantly paused the game, he'd been waiting, giving his lover space. Both players on the floor turned and stared up at York, the boy with guarded uncertainty and Macy with poorly hidden worry.

"I need to think about this a bit, clear my head." His voice sounded the same but York saw the way Macy's eyes narrowed.

"What? Thought you were going to muck about in my head or something."

"He did already." Macy added softly. "York's good."

"Oh, thought it would hurt or I don't know." Luke shrugged. "What did you find?"

York hid his hands from sight, they were balled up into fists now. "I need to think about it, figure it out myself. Don't go anywhere until I'm back." He stood up from the sofa and moved to leave, not by the lift door but the small doorway set beside it.

Macy dropped his control and hurried across the room to catch York's quickly retreating arm. "You okay?"

York nodded tightly and told himself that Macy wasn't the issue and picking a fight with him wouldn't fix anything.

"I saw."

He let his eyes drift over to where Luke was watching them. "Don't let him leave, no matter what. Keep him here."

Macy nodded. "Staying in the building?"

"Just need to meditate a bit, you know where I'll be."

"Okay."

"And Macy..."

"Hmm?"

"No screwing him."

"Awww."

"No sexual contact."

It was more than York just being a grump. "Why? What did you find?"

He held a hand up. "I need to think on it, just trust me. For now, keep your hands off him."

"Will do." He knew better than to make the suggestion that York could help him work off tension later or even try to kiss his lover before he left. York in this mood needed space and that was the only thing that would settle him down. He stepped back and let York slip out the small side door to disappear into the black emptiness of the warehouse.

"Well," Macy announced to the waiting boy. "What do you say? Naked hot sex or ice cream with sprinkles and cherries on top?"

All Souls Pass

Part Fourteen:

There was an advantage to having left so much of the warehouse untouched. Macy had cleared space on the concrete floor below and hung a basketball net that in better weather served them well and on occasion had been known to roller skate about the large space. It gave them room to refinish furniture or practice fighting.

There was an office, a section closed off from the main second story area, when they bought the building. It had been a foreman's office, a simple rectangle walled in along one corner of the building. York had claimed that as his space. He'd made little change to it, cleaned it up, repainted it, replaced broken windows but little more. The walls were still thin wood, the door lightweight, frosted glass covered large sections and allowed light to pass but not vision.

It was here that he stored things he didn't want Macy toying with. One wall was lined in bookshelves, and on it were books and jars sealed full of odd items and additives for spells and rituals. He didn't need the formality of it much anymore but was unwilling to stop learning and this space had become his work room. Rich, thick, red carpets in exotic designs covered and warmed the floors. A dark, polished wood table, long and scared from years of service, stood in the center. Around the room were other smaller work surfaces, a few stools and pressed to one corner was a fat, overstuffed easy chair to read in.

The space was heated with a small, low level spell and cooled just as easily. The lock on the door opened only to him, not even Macy though York could change that with a breath. There were defenses here, protections, shielding and it was, perhaps, the most magically secure place in the entire city. Once inside, York knew he was safe, sheltered and able to relax among his trinkets of power and memories.

The door shut behind him on it's own and the small globes began to glow. It was an old trick that he'd adapted, they glowed like light bulbs with the soft warmth of candles and made the room feel secure. He moved to lit the small pot of incense even though the room carried the soft scent of incense past burnt. Tonight, he needed frankincense and was homesick for it's sweet smell.

With the thick smoke curling around the space, he dimmed the lights with a thought and curled up in his soft chair. He stretched and picked up a blanket from where it had fallen beside the chair, warm and thick, and pulled it around his body. It wasn't cold in the room but the weight was nice and he settled in with a sigh and felt his shoulders unknotting.

Part of him wanted to weep but that wouldn't solve anything. York stilled his thoughts, settled his mind and dropped himself down into layers of trance. He pushed deeper, calming his mind further until even that tickling awareness of the physical world faded and all he had was the world of spirit to listen to. From there he let himself drift, not sure where he wanted to go or be but trusting he'd walk the path he needed to.

He wasn't really surprised to find himself walking along the mouth of a cave. The image was a strong one for him, a place he often visited when seeking answers. The cave sat in the middle of a forest that reminded him vividly of the one he'd played in as a boy but the cave trembled with life, nearly breathing like a living thing. It was a meeting place, a crossroads of spirit and York walked into it's cool depths with cautious ease.

As it always was, there were countless beings here. Some appearing as no more than hints, those only half touching this world in deep dreams or in casual thought. Some were like himself, beings with a physical body and physical tie but skilled and strong enough to walk in full awareness. A handful were different, beings of spirit, without a body, strong, powerful, proud creatures that York had learned to treat with respect and so had earned respect in kind. He moved across caves lit by unseen sources of light, hearing whispers of voices and conversations that didn't include him, uncertain what to look for.

"York?" A woman spoke from no where and everywhere.

He froze, knowing the voice. "Should have guessed the reasons I found myself here would find me."

In front of him appeared a woman. Tomboyish, short, with hair cut into an uneven bob of dark brown. Her eyes were black, fully black with no iris or pupil, no white or color and if he wasn't so

used to it he'd find it disconcerting. She smiled widely and her body took on a swirling mist of colors instead of clothing, a small show of focus and strength to warn off smaller, weaker creatures.

"I haven't seen you for ages!" The shorter women tossed her hands out and York let himself be kissed softly, it was a brush of energies, a warm welcome.

"Elina." He nodded in respect. "You've not been about."

"And you've been keeping too much to yourself. Come, someplace quieter." And with a soft flutter of her hand and a brush of her power the noise and beings around them disappeared as she moved them to a smaller, private cave. "Better, too much rabble about these days, too many wandering without any clue as to where they go. You look well."

He nodded. "I am well."

"And Macy? How's that lover of yours?"

"Troublesome but it's the nature of full bloods. How about you? Where are you now? It's been forever since I've seen you."

She shrugged and grinned. "Living by the ocean, quietly. No one wants to listen anymore so I wait for new ears. I'm content but I can't say the same for you. What troubles you so?"

He judged the thin line of trust he always carried and knew there was no better creature to speak to than Elina. "When was the last you saw a true tandem pairing?"

That raised her eyebrows. "Focus and power?"

"Yes."

"Oh my, decades, longer? Centuries? There hasn't been a human born as an anchor for power like that in a long time." She tilted her head to the side. "You've found one?"

York felt his stomach knot up. "Yes. He's just this kid, Elina, not even eighteen. It's like a bottomless well inside of him, knotted up, it mimics power perfectly, flawlessly. I almost..."

"You almost used him to finish the spell."

He nodded. "I'm a monster."

"You didn't do it."

"But I thought about it, wanted to."

"What's one boy's life in the face of the importance of that spell?" She questioned and sighed. "I'm not sure, in your place, I would have been able to stop."

"I almost didn't."

There was a long pause in the small space before the woman spoke again. "York, you've done all you can. It's okay to let go. The burden placed upon you has been greater than anything any of us imagined."

"The spell is important."

"Yes but it's no longer the only option."

"But it's still the best option."

"Granted, yes, but there is only so much you can do and you've more than fulfilled any obligations you had."

"I'm still alive."

"We asked too much of you, if I had one skin left I would have taken your place. I'm sorry."

This wasn't where he'd wanted the conversation to go. "It's my duty. It's my place. I'm proud to serve."

She reached up and gently touched his face. "It's not likely they'll ever be back. It's okay now, to let go."

Let go, she said it so easily, as if it were that simple. He felt the connection that bound him to his body and knew he was the only force strong enough to sever it. It wouldn't be difficult, snap that link, let his body die, his soul, what made him who he was, it was already halfway into the realms of spirit. York shut his eyes and wanted desperately to let it all go away.

"I will fulfill my obligation."

"It's a fine line you walk, my friend. How close are you to immortality?"

"Two skins, two more and there's no promise I'll survive the removal of another so I'm not worried about it." A human was wrapped in seven layers of mortality, seven skins that blinded them from almost being the godlings they were capable of. As power was gained, as effort was made, occasionally, a human tore away one of these skins. If they survived the intense effort, maintained the will to live, they emerged on the other side of the experience stronger, tougher, then before.

Elina had once been human, she'd torn away and survived and now lingered. Not a god, not a being of spirit, not a magical creature and no longer human either. She would live forever, too tough to age and die as a human, too strong to fade away and be overtaken by time. He'd never asked her the how's and why's of her immortality but when she spoke about it there was a bittersweet tone to it.

"I've no desire to peel those layers away." He added again. "I've no desire to live forever. I look forward to death."

"And did you intend any of the past transformations?"

He dropped his eyes. "No, never."

"These things happen when you're strong. We've little say over them and people like you and I rarely hold back when we have it within our skills to make a change. Keep living and eventually you'll reach that threshold again and not hesitate to walk past it, again."

"So you're saying I should give in now?"

"No, dearest, I'm saying it's okay if you want to. You've done all you can, it's okay to be ready. That no one will fault you because you've done a thousand times more than any of us dreamed or hoped for."

"This isn't what I came here looking for."

"Isn't it?"

"I..." Absolution and a chance to stop, a trusted advisor saying it was okay to stop, words he never expected to receive. "I can manage for longer, I will find a way. So long as I live the spell lives and once I manage to complete it my life is no longer necessary." The words made him sick with grief and exhaustion but they were the truth. "I can continue."

Her smile lit up but it was tinged with sadness. "So much asked of you, so much more than any of us thought at the time. Couple more layers and you'll have all the time in the world to finish without that vampire friend of yours."

"I've no desire to live forever, hopefully I finish this before it comes to that." Which reminded him of why he'd sought out advice. "About this boy, do you know of any blank focuses walking about?"

"I've been under the impression they were extinct but we don't look for them to pair together any more. There hasn't been a power born in so long. It's doubtful."

"So there's no lock bonding him, that power will stay open."

"At least until someone strong claims the boy, if he's not claimed already. Are his parents living?"

"No, one died when he was a child the other around adolescents."

"A power doesn't show until puberty. It's unlikely the surviving parent lived to be approached so it's a safe bet that the boy wasn't promised to anyone."

"Doubtful, Macy found a half blood, golden elf and black cross following but not approaching the boy."

"All three? Well now, that cinches it. If any of them had a claim to him they would have enforced it as soon as the others started sniffing around."

York nodded. "That's what I was thinking also. But why hold off, why merely watch when he's still so clueless about what he is?"

"I couldn't even begin to guess the answer to that. He isn't of age yet?"

"Not yet but he lives on his own, works as a street hustler."

"If he had a pimp he would have been sold off already to one side or another. If none have a tie to him yet, someone needs to form one. Someone that can be trusted with such power." She raised her eyebrows.

"No." York shook his head. "You can't be serious. I almost drained that boy dry without his knowledge. He's too much the temptation, too much, it's cruel. I can't do it, he's not safe with me."

"You have the strength to keep him from harm, the skill to bind that much raw power. You're even clever enough to figure out how to give the boy some control over what he carries so he can offer that power or deny it as he wills."

"That'll take training, practice." He shook his head.

"And a good teacher."

"I can't!" He forced out, tense and angry. "I can't be trusted!"

"Dearest, you may be the only one who can be trusted. You've stood face on to that power and turned away, you'll be prepared next time and the time after. I have faith in you." It was another burden to place on already overburdened shoulders. "Think of what will happen if anyone less honorable binds the boy to them?"

He didn't have to, he already knew. "Damn it."

She chuckled. "Indeed." She reached out and pulled him close and suddenly wasn't the short tomboy but taller than he. As she had when he was a child, she enfolded her arms around him and pulled his head to her shoulder.

It was something York found he needed. Those stolen moments that felt like home and safety from a time when things were much more simple. He let that strength envelope him and he drew some measure of courage from it.

"I have faith in you, my boy, and you've never once proven that faith wrong. The choice, as it always is, is yours."

He sighed. "Damn it."

Time was a slippery thing when walking the realms of spirit and York had no real solid idea how long he'd been gone. It was still dark out when he returned but there were no clocks in his safe little workspace. It felt early, or rather late, depending on how a body wanted to look at it, and York sat alone in his chair for long moments. There was truth in Elina's words and he'd never once doubted her judgment, it just felt like one more trial he didn't want to endure.

The choice wasn't his alone and the boy might not be ready to make such an important decision. If their places were reversed, York doubted he'd believe a word of any of it. Which meant that in a few hours time the boy would again return to his own life and the quiet shadowing of three very strong forces. It made the boy a catch and release situation and York would have to bid his time until the time came when he was sought out for help. That meant the boy would need a means of letting him know and York dropped himself into the effort to weave a solution.

The clock in the loft showed it well after four in the morning when he made it back. He was yawning and tired and had opened the door with uncertainty as to just what he was going to find. The controllers for the game systems were still out, waiting to be tripped on. Near them were empty bowls with the residue of chocolate sauce and a few surviving sprinkles hardened to the sides.

York shook his head and gathered them up. He was yawning again as he dropped them into the sink and ran water into them. A few sprinkles melted loose and floated on the swirl of hot water. He loaded them into the dishwasher before turning to store the remains of the soup and load the dinner dishes in the washer as well. The loft was worrisomely quiet but the curtains across the upper loft were pulled. With the dishes done he had no further distractions to keep him from climbing upstairs and facing whatever awaited him there.

The curtains along the windows were pulled as well but not the ones around the bed. York found his lover stretched out on top of the covers, bare feet crossed at the ankles and pillows tucked behind his head. He had earplugs in and was playing on one of his portable game system toys. Beside him, tucked under the covers and almost curled along his side, was Luke.

"You don't need to tiptoe, he sleeps like the fucking dead." Macy announced and grinned, pulling

the earphones from where they'd rested. The faint tinny distant sound of the game's music drifted across the dimly lit room.

The sight made York smile softly and he came over to sit on the edge of the bed. "Don't you look domestic."

Macy shrugged. "He started yawning about an hour ago but I just got him to lay down like a half hour ago. As soon as he warmed up he was out like a light and hasn't hardly moved since." Macy's eyes tracked to the woven cord in the witch's hand and he felt the power entwined with the knots.

"He looks so young."

"He's about the same age you were when I found you." It had been a thought floating about Macy's mind but as soon as he spoke it he wished he hadn't. The gentle warmth on York's face dissolved.

"That was a different time. Kids today don't have to grow up so fast."

"Bullshit and we both know it. Did you find what you were looking for?"

The tone to the vampire's voice was odd and York wondered just which thing he was looking for Macy meant. "I've some answers."

He nodded and turned his game off. "Are they urgent or can you sleep on them?"

"You're tired?"

Macy shrugged. "Enough."

"I can sleep on them. Let me put on something more comfortable and slid him over so I can get in there." He watched from the corner of his eye as Macy got the boy to roll over, using gentle words and more gentle touches. Luke muttered sleepily and rolled onto his other side, almost to the center of the bed which left plenty of room for York to slid in on Macy's other side.

The woven cord got placed on a dresser and York changed clothes quickly. He pulled the final layer of curtains closed and slid under the warmed blankets and into Macy's arms. With a sigh he pillowed his head against the leaner chest and closed his eyes, drifting to sleep with a smooth steady hand petting his hair.

All Souls Pass

Part Fifteen:

Luke woke slightly as an arm draped across his chest and pulled him lightly back against a warm body. It was an odd enough feeling that he drifted half awake and found he was warm, really warm, comfortably warm which even with all his blankets wrapped around him he never was. The bed he was sleeping on was soft and the sheets smelled good and were smooth to the touch. He wasn't in his own bed, that was sure and as he woke a little more he remembered. He was spending the night in that fancy loft, in that wide, fancy bed that they hadn't fucked him in.

In fact, he was still fully dressed in the comfortable, borrowed, clothes and the body he was snuggled against in front of him was also fully dressed. Luke sighed and nuzzled a little at the neck, dark, walnut brown hair tickled his nose. He was awake enough to know that he was curled up against the Frenchman's back and it felt nice.

Which made the body behind him the quarter blood's, the arm that had pulled him closer was his as well. As Luke was curled along York's back, Macy was sleeping contentedly against Luke's. All their legs were entangled and draped around each other. Luke's one arm was tucked along York's spine. The arm Macy had used to snuggle closer was now tossed over both men, hand resting lightly on York's ribs. They were piled together like puppies and it felt really, really nice. With a sleepy sigh, Luke let himself drop back into a deep, restful sleep.

It was the lack of the comfortable warmth that woke him again. This time he drifted up awake enough to notice that the dim light around the bed was because the heavy curtains had been pulled. It dropped them into hazy late twilight and made it possible to sleep soundly long after the sun had risen. He'd pulled away from the pile of limbs and bodies he'd slept so soundly in and now was sprawled on his back in the middle of the bed.

A gasped breath drew Luke's half awake attention and he glanced over. York was on his back too, head tossed up and to the side, his eyes shut but not in sleep. His hands were clutching the pillow under his head and he'd caught his lip between strong teeth. The covers were hiked down and it only took a glance to make out the body under them that had caught the fabric around it. The motion was pretty clear too and oddly, Luke found himself blushing a little.

A hand slid up from under the covers, dragging up the cotton of York's shirt and exposing the well toned body. The touch pulled another hushed gasp from the human and he arched a little. The trapped lip escaped and the Frenchman's mouth fell open in a silent cry. Luke wasn't sure if he was confused at them not waking him, or at how they were obviously trying to not wake him. He did know that seeing the other man so obviously lost in pleasure was one of the hottest things he'd ever laid eyes on.

For a moment, Luke forgot that he was a whore and it was supposed to be work. He forgot that this was a couple that had been together for years and even while paying him didn't want him. He just wanted to be part of that, not because he was being paid but because he was lonely and they felt safe. He remembered how sincere and intense the Frenchman's kiss was and before he knew what he was doing, Luke was leaning over the other man.

He kept his eyes open as he brushed his lips across the parted pair below his own. There was a moment's hesitation and another slow arch to the older man. It was only a moment, the short time it took for York to process the kiss was real. When it registered that it was real, a hand reached up and found the back of Luke's neck and pulled him down. The kiss that met him now wasn't soft or teasing, Luke was pulled down and devoured.

York's other hand soon joined the first and held Luke in place. It was too much, Luke's eyes fluttered shut and he tried to kiss as well as he was being kissed but found that his brain had melted and dissolved into goo. It was like kissing a lover not someone trying to just fuck and it made Luke whimper a little and get impossibly hard.

Until the kiss was broken and the hands holding the sides of his head pulled him away. Luke opened his eyes to see York falling back against the bed, his face twisted up into rapture, into

agony. He groaned, low and dark, and Luke could feel the tremors of the other's release through his hands.

The hands on Luke's neck slid forward as York's breath puffed out in small gasps and he opened his eyes just the slightest bit. They slid across his face in an almost gentle touch, sweet and tender, before dropping back to the bed. The body under the covers shifted and York glanced down.

"Is okay, Mace, the kid's awake." He sighed, eyes locked on Luke and studying the boy in the dim light. "Macy's idea of an alarm clock is a blow job, sorry to wake you." He stretched languidly like a cat as the covers flipped off his body and Macy appeared from under them.

"What?" Green eyes flicked from the slightly puffy lips of his lover to the raging hard on the boy was sporting. "No fair! You two make out and I didn't get to watch!"

The scent of sex drifted on the air and Luke couldn't help but watching the sated way York draped across the bed, his shirt twisted up showing off skin. When he glanced up, his eyes locked onto bright green. Macy had seemed so childlike the night before, so light and frivolous but now looked sensual and serious.

Luke licked his lips even though they didn't really feel dry. "You bought me for the night, not right I shouldn't do something." It wasn't economics, and he was too honest to lie to himself about it. He wanted them and wanted to get off badly.

One of York's hands drifted up to brush Luke's hair back. "We bought your information and your time, not your sex." And he'd have been blind not to see the flash of disappointment that darted across the boy's face. "Not to say we don't desire you, I know Macy would have you pinned to this bed in a heartbeat, just, not because we've paid you. One day, it may be different, hmm?" He waited until Luke lowered his eyes and nodded. "Now, go to the bathroom and jerk off, we'll give you a head start in the shower. Then breakfast and we talk. Okay?"

Macy watched the boy as he climbed from the bed and kept an eye on his ass as he moved to the bathroom. "Not like you to turn anyone away that wants to play."

"Kid's got enough people looking to take from him, I don't want to be one of them." He answered in all seriousness.

Macy frowned and traced the freckles across York's nose. "You're worried."

"He's a power with no focus to bond him to."

"Well, at least you've found a way to finish." The fingers tracing the freckles fell away.

"I can't, it's my cause not his. I can't have him giving his life for it. He should be in school, trying to be a lawyer or something, not being drained dry to finish a spell." He glanced away, unable to meet those bright, clear eyes. "Just stuck with me for a bit longer."

Macy often was selfish and self centered, even he knew it, but even he wasn't so selfish to miss seeing the pain in his lover's eyes. There was so much they carried between them unspoken and Macy had no idea how to get his stalwart lover to breach the subjects. Humans were fragile creatures in more than just body.

As it always was, the words that might tear down the walls York had built didn't come. Instead of speaking, Macy leaned forward and kissed the freckles he'd been stroking. "Good, cause, I haven't figured out how to suck these freckles off you yet." He latched on with wet slurping sounds.

Under him, York squirmed and pushed at his shoulders. "Stop it!" He half protested, half laughed. "You'll give me a suck mark on my face!"

Macy laughed now too. He dropped a couple more of the wet, sloppy kisses to the freckle strewn face making York wiggle and protest with laughing breathes. He might not be able to purge his lover of the sadness he carried but he could distract him, sometimes a distraction was all anyone could hope for.

York made an effort that their morning wasn't any different. They showered, shaved, brushed teeth and dressed with the same level of lewd comments from Macy as always and the same controlled chaos that always followed the vampire. Luke moved around them with wide solemn eyes that looked too old and too sad on his young face. He seemed surprised at their level of casualness and there lack of any real come ons toward him. Which was fine by York, he needed to keep the boy at an arms length. He couldn't afford to get attached.

Once cleaned up, he pulled on loose jeans and an old white t-shirt and left Macy to fetch the boy's clothes from the dryer. The vampire had taken any excuse to wash clothes and had tossed in the boys clothing. York caught the startled uncertainty when Luke was presented with his freshly laundered clothing and he closed his fist around the woven cord he'd made the night before. It was easier to deal with the practical side of things like getting them fed and dressed, then the complex problem the boy had become.

He was plating the scrambled eggs and pulling the bacon from the microwave when Luke wandered into the kitchen. It was just two plates of food and York heard Luke's footsteps pause as he drew close enough to notice.

"Hey, could we, like, finish up? I should get going, get out of your hair."

York slid a glass of orange juice toward one of the plates and stuck a fork into a pile of eggs. "Sit and eat."

"I..." Luke glanced at the two plates. "I should go."

"Macy ate last night, he won't be hungry for a while and I don't get to eat breakfast with someone too often. Sit, eat, we'll talk when he joins us." He poured two mugs of coffee, leaving a third mug waiting, and fixed them both sweet with milk. "Coffee?"

Luke shuffled his feet a little before letting the smells of the rich food draw him over. "Yeah, thanks." He took a seat on one of the tall stools shoved under the kitchen island's counter and carefully started in on his breakfast. "Guy could get spoiled." The eggs were good, with a slight herb taste hinting to them and just a sprinkle of cheese added in.

York set a small pile of bills next to the boy. "Ten tens, a hundred, which should cover your rent and then some." He spoke carefully as he took a seat by the other plate and began eating his own breakfast.

"I don't feel right taking that." Luke sighed, the food forming a warm knot in his stomach. "I don't take what I haven't earned."

"You earned it, I got what I wanted."

Which meant the fancy pair in their fancy loft had no further use for him and Luke felt oddly disappointed. He shrugged and tried to brush aside that sting of emotion with it. "Cool."

They sat silent, the only sound coming from sips of coffee and the scrape of forks on plates, until Macy came traipsing down the stairs, whistling. Today he'd pulled on a long, cotton skirt in a deep purple color that brushed his ankles and an oatmeal colored cable knit sweater that was

York's. It hung on Macy's more slender frame and looked like the borrowed sweater that it was.

He stopped when he noticed both humans staring at him. "What? Felt a little hippie dippy today. Oooo coffee!" The dark brew was quickly poured into the waiting mug and Macy hopped up to sit cross legged on the counter top next to the coffee maker. "So, we're all here, time to tell all!" He wiggled his eyebrows and grinned but the humans wore almost identical looks of serious thought.

"Macy's right, Luke I need you to hear me out."

"I'm on your dime." The boy shrugged but slid his stool back a little so he could watch both men a little more easily.

York wasn't sure just how to explain and the words he'd prepared disappeared. "Nature, you know, loves diversity." He glanced to the pair watching him and saw matching expressions of uncertainty. "There's a dozen species of elves, six different races of vampire. I mean we think, as humans, we're pretty much the same, you know? Homogenous."

"Homogenous?" Luke questioned, confused.

"Think he's saying you humans are just gay."

"I'm not saying that." York snapped back and knew the teasing light in Macy's eyes well enough to know he wasn't being serious. "Homogenous, all the same, all alike. Doesn't matter what color the outside is, we're all just alike."

"Oh."

"We're not, you know, we're as varied as any of the other species out there. I mean sure the majority are just plain old humans but a lot of us are different."

"Different?"

"He means gay."

"Macy! Stop trying to help."

"Sorry." He grinned over his coffee.

"Luke, you know a witch is human, right? Not some odd mixed breed or cross race bloodline, but really just as human as anyone else. Right?"

"Sure."

"Okay, the world you know, there are some that are good with love spells and some good with fortune telling but most are pretty weak, yes?"

"Sure." Luke nodded again and finished his orange juice.

"Once upon a time, before things happened, humans used to have people as powerful as any of the magical creatures, to rival any elf or vampire or whatever. human power is often passed down in family lines but things happened,"

"Things?"

York held up a hand. "Just, for now, things, okay?"

"Whatever."

"Good. So not only did humans have folks that were pretty powerful but we had different sorts of power, like some of the witches today are good at telling fortunes and some good at spells. Yes?"

Luke just nodded.

"Now, one of these different kinds of power was split into two aspects. Occasionally, someone would be born with an almost instinctual skill at being able to focus power. They could visualize things that took most of us years to even imagine and being able to see it makes it possible to do it. The trouble was, no matter how much they understood how power moved and worked, how to use it, they had none. Not even the smallest of spells would work for them."

"Sounds pretty lame, sucks to be them."

"Indeed but there's another side. Occasionally, someone would be born with this tremendous power inside of them. It was like, every breath they took they siphoned off power from the air around them, like living, breathing, walking power plants. Only, all that power? Is buried inside of them and they've no access to it. They could study for a thousand years and never touch that source." He took a pause to sip his juice.

"So, the dude that could do something but had no power teamed up with the dude that had the power he couldn't use?"

"Just so. It was almost vital that a pairing be made. Once a focus and power are brought together, the power bonds to the focus, the two become a tandem pair. Neither can work without the other but if the focus dies it's possible for the power to bond to another focus but impossible to match the energies of anyone else."

"Back up, go slower, you lost me."

"The energy a power carries is like a mirror, or maybe like a shape shifter. It'll match whatever energy it comes in contact with because it doesn't know what it's supposed to be. Once it's shown a focus and allowed to bond or imprint to a focus person, it knows what it's supposed to be. From that day on, the only time anyone can access that huge well of power is if they're a focus. Until a power meets and bonds with a focus, that energy will mirror every energy it finds, meaning anyone that comes across an un-bonded power can use that power as they will." He watched as the seriousness of the situation sunk in.

"Sounds like that sucks."

"I knew a power once, real nice man, but he lived alone, out in the middle of nowhere. Poor fellow understood the seriousness of the situation. He lived as a hermit, barely saw another living soul, because he never knew who he could trust. I was a young boy when I first met him. He scared me a bit because he was so intense, so worried but once he found a focus to bond to he became like a new person. It was as if the weight of the world had been removed from his shoulders." He smiled a little at the memory, the man had eventually become the closest thing York had ever had to a father.

Luke glanced from the silent quarter blood balanced on the counter to the clinging sadness in the eyes of the Frenchman. "And what's any of this have to do with me?"

"Luke, you're a power, a strong one too."

"Bullshit."

"No, seriously, I gain nothing by lying to you. I understand why you're being followed, I don't

understand why none of them have made a move to claim you.”

“Claim me? I’m not stray animal.” Luke frowned.

“You are less then a stray to them, you are merely an advantage, an artifact of power to be claimed and used. Sooner or later, one of those factions is going to make a move and try to take you. Once they own you...”

“Own me? No body owns me! No one ever will!”

“Luke, they don’t need your permission. As we sit here, I could reach into you and take every drop of energy your body has, drain you until you lack the strength to draw breath, and you have no means of refusing or stopping me, none. It’s just a matter of when, not if, until someone takes you.” It was a cold truth but he had no stomach to lie to the boy.

“Then...” he had to think, trying to process what he was being told and make sense of it. “Then tell me how to find a focus dude and I’ll go from there.”

“It’s not that easy. Neither one was overly common, even in the best of times. We haven’t seen a power in, what is it? four hundred years?”

“Closer to five now.” Macy confirmed, nodding lightly.

“And a focus? Not since longer.”

“Bullshit!” Luke sprang to his feet and snatched at the money. “I’m not sitting here listening to anymore of this fucking shit.”

“Luke...”

“No! I listened, done what you wanted, I’m outta here.” He turned around from swinging his backpack over a shoulder and the way was blocked by Macy. The man had hopped down, put his coffee aside and crossed half the kitchen without a sound and quicker than Luke thought possible.

“It’s not shit.” Macy said in all seriousness.

“Yeah, I’m supposed to believe that he’s hundreds of years old? Bull fucking shit!”

York stood. “I was born in a small village outside of Muret in 1223.”

The raw honesty in the dark blue eyes and the sheer weight of York’s words stopped Luke in his tracks. “Can’t be...”

“When I was about your age, I was arrested, set to be put to death but before I could be killed I met Macy. We came to an agreement and have lived together ever since.”

“Impossible, quarter bloods can’t...” He glanced to where Macy stood on the other side of him. “Jesus Christ.”

“Macy isn’t a quarter blood.”

“I’m not a half blood either.”

“But...”

“A full blood that feeds from the same human often enough can extend the life of that human by

offering his own blood. Macy's extended my life but he is a full blood and almost immortal. Trust me, trust us, Luke, we've seen a lot of things, know a lot of things and you aren't safe." York saw the boy teetering between his natural distrust and the fear of the unknown.

"I don't know you." Luke spoke softly, feeling the trapped panic clawing at him.

"You've two options here. You got your money, you've made rent, walk out that door. We won't stop you. All we wanted was to know what you were so we could plan for it. It doesn't effect me if they tear you apart and tear this city apart in wars. If you walk out that door, you're on your own. But, we can offer some small measure of security, if you wish it." York let the braided cord drop to the countertop. Part of him wanted the boy to walk away, to get the temptation as far from himself as possible but he knew all the reasons to help and they weren't selfish ones.

Luke could feel his breath trying to seize up, felt his heart thudding painfully in his chest. He clutched at the strap on his backpack with both hands. "I just want to be left alone!" The words finally found a way out.

"I'm not a focus, Luke, I can't make you safe. Frankly, I'm not sure there's a focus even alive right now, but I can help you learn to block the power you carry and teach you how to offer it only to those you want to have access. It's not easy things to learn, even for a normal human, it'll be doubly difficult for you but you can learn them."

"And what do you get out of it?"

"The knowledge that I did the right thing, my home not torn apart. Macy and I can be gone from this place in a few hours time but we like it here. Sooner or later someone is going to take you and it'll spark a war, just a matter of when."

"So what good will it do? It's hopeless, I can't stop them, I can't."

York moved on instinct, seeing not the hardened, mistrusting street hustler but the absolutely terrified boy under it. He stood and wrapped his arms around the tense shoulders and pulled the kid against him. "You're right, you can't, but maybe, I can." Luke felt good in his arms, his hair smelling like their shampoo, and York reminded himself that the kid didn't need a lover, he needed a teacher.

"I don't know, I..." Luke didn't want to but he pulled away from the strong arms wrapped around him.

"You don't need to make your mind up right now, if it's not a solid fuck off anyway."

Luke shook his head. He thought about how nice it had felt to sleep tucked between the two of them and how the bartender at the club had told him about how honest York was. He thought about how the man kissed like it was the most sacred of things and of how tired he was of struggling by himself. "I just want to be left alone."

"Understandably, think about it but here." He held the woven cord out to the boy. "While you're thinking about it, wear this."

"A rope?"

"A cord I made. It'll let me know if you're in trouble, or if you need me, just think really hard about calling me and it'll let me know. Okay?" He waited until Luke nodded before knotting the cord around his neck. "Now, go home, think about it, if you want the help call me or come by the club."

"I can just go?"

"If they haven't made a move yet, you've got a little time to figure this out." Macy spoke from behind them, he'd moved out of the way so Luke could make a run for the door if he really wanted to. He should have known better, once York set his mind to something, he rarely failed to get it.

Confused, Luke frowned. "Yeah, I'll go think it over, I... yeah."

The pair stood and watched as Luke moved a few steps back, not quite trusting to turn his back on them, before he moved quickly to the door. Macy had reclaimed his coffee as the lift whirled and carried the boy away.

"Catch and release?"

"This is a huge risk." York said into the silence.

Macy shrugged. "Not really, so what? Let them tear each other apart, boy's got at least a chance now. That's only thanks to you. Have you grown so fond of this place?"

It was a serious question and York gave it serious thought. "No, not this place, just this life we've built. It's been good for a long while now."

"That it has." Macy grinned widely, a touch of lewd happiness in his eyes.

"I mean," York waved to the loft around them. "Sure beats sleeping in haylofts and ditches, I'm getting spoiled."

"You deserve to be spoiled. So until you humans blow each other back to the stone age with your bombs and shit, I'm going to spoil you." He grinned but stayed across the kitchen, sipping his coffee, letting York stew in his melancholy. There would be time to cheer him up later.

All Souls Pass

Part Sixteen:

The cold gusts of air stole the warmth from around Luke almost within the first steps from leaving the building. He was confused and more than a touch paranoid. It would be so much easier to just shrug off what the pair had told him, to deny every word of it, but it felt true. It felt like too much for him to deal with. It felt too far from his realm of day to day life.

At the least, he had the money, which was highly important, had a full stomach and had slept wonderfully. All three were odd states to be in but ones he was grateful for and ones he rarely had all at once. There was a downside to it, he had no excuse to put sleep, work or food ahead of thinking about all the stuff he'd just been told. The sun was bright and as he moved to busier

sections of the city he had hours to kill before Gossman needed his money.

It wasn't really a conscious thought to end up in the slightly better residential neighborhood. The apartment building had an elevator and was mostly clean. For once, Luke didn't feel like street trash on his way up to the fourth floor. His clothes were poor but clean and he was freshly showered and didn't look like a junkie. It made a nice change, one he liked.

He rang the bell and waited, and waited but eventually the door opened. The woman was soft and plain. She had on a simple dress and her mostly white hair was cut into short curls. A pair of thick lens glasses sat on her nose and the wrong shade of pink lipstick covered her mouth but her face lit up when she saw him.

"Luke! Goodness boy, this is a surprise, come in, come in."

She reached to hug him and he let her, knowing, for once, he didn't smell of his cheap room and profession. "Hello Aunt Mary."

"Roger will be sorry he missed you, he won't be home from work for hours yet. Come in here, boy and let me fix you some lunch."

"No, really, I'm not hungry, just ate." He let himself be drawn into the cluttered apartment filled with knick knacks and paintings of clowns.

"Tea then? How about a cup to warm you up. Gracious, boy, tell me you weren't out in this cold with just that jacket?" She pressed him to sit at the battered old kitchen table and moved to make tea before he'd accepted the offer.

"Tea would be nice, thanks." He avoided the comment on his coat, the jacket was all he could afford since he'd outgrown his warmer coat. The truth would hurt her because they both knew she couldn't afford to buy him a warmer coat anymore than he could buy himself one.

"You're skinny as a rail, child, don't you eat?"

He shrugged. The last of the tea preparations were finished and she dropped herself down in a chair opposite him. She looked older, more worn down and he tried to count how many weeks, months, it had been since he'd stopped in last. He couldn't remember, it was still warm out.

"We were hoping to spot you out and about, to invite you to Thanksgiving dinner but we just couldn't find you. Did you have a good holiday?"

He'd gotten robbed that night and gone to bed with an empty stomach and a black eye. "It was good enough."

"We managed to talk that stubborn father of yours into coming over. Sort of hoped to get you two in the same room and being civil to each other, at least for a few hours."

"He wouldn't have come by if he'd known I would be here. It's good though, you should have your brother by for the holidays."

"You're both too stubborn."

Luke never had found out just how much of the truth his step father's sister knew but it wasn't something he needed to know. She always welcomed him in to visit when he managed to stop by and never accepted anything other than her place as his aunt. "He made his choices, Aunt Mary, and nothing says he's changed them."

She shook her head and rose to fix the tea, the glass pot on the stove had steam rolling from it's

spout and big fat bubbles rising in the water. "You may not be Jacob's by blood, boy, but you're as stubborn as he is." She fussed with pouring and fixing the tea. "What brings you by?"

He heard it, the slight embarrassed tinge to her voice, the unspoken fear that he was going to ask for money that she didn't have. "Just, wanted to see you, before Christmas." He was trying not to think about the holiday coming up.

"Will you be by for Christmas dinner?" She smiled warmly and slid a plate of holiday cookies onto the table to go with the mugs of steaming, bitter, tea.

He wanted to accept, his heart ached to accept. All he wanted was to curl up against her sofa and be warm for the holiday. It would be a small slice of heaven to be in a place that smelled of humid food and sweet egg nog with holiday shows singing carols on the television and the lights they'd strung around the windows plugged in and glowing.

Luke shook his head and sipped his tea to clear the pain from his throat. "Can't, got things to do. Get dad to come by, tell him I won't be here."

There was just the tiniest amount of relief in the eyes behind her too thick glasses. "You'll at least come to Mass with us?"

"I don't know."

"Not right, missing Mass on Christmas, promise me you'll go?"

"I promise I'll go sometime between now and Christmas, even go to confession." And he meant it even if the thought of confession made him cringe.

"Good boy, you were always such a sweet boy. You getting by? Got a place to sleep that's warm? I'd put you up here..."

"I'm okay." They both knew his father would disown her as well if she took him in, even for a night. His Aunt Mary's love for her step-nephew was strong but only extended so far and she'd not sacrifice blood family for him. He knew better then to ask but Luke needed to pretend otherwise, if just for a little while. "So, tell me, how've you been?"

It was after one when he finally left his aunt's house, filled up on tea and sweet sugar coated holiday cookies cut to look like trees. He loved his aunt and knew she loved him in her own way, but he just always left her apartment feeling sad. It angered him that she could have done so much more to help him then she was ever willing to do. It ate at him that she didn't know just how he was surviving, what he was having to do and at the same time he was terrified she knew. He wasn't sure what was worse, her thinking he was an addict or her knowing he was a whore.

His thoughts made the winter afternoon feel even more cold then it actually was. He fished out a cigarette and lit it while still in the building's doorway and let the smoke settle his nerves. It was looking like the night coming up would be colder then the one just passed but he'd have to consider going out and working. The water bill would need to be paid soon and after that the electric and there was food to buy. The thought alone made him tired.

On a whim, he found himself stopping in to a church. Not his aunt's, or one he'd ever been in before, but one he happened to walk by. The inside wasn't freezing cold but not what he'd have called toasty warm either. The high ceilings and dark, polished woods should have made him feel small but there was solace here in this place. His work, his choices, should have made a place of God feel distant but instead Luke felt safe here, warmed by memory and faded hopes.

He crossed himself and genuflected before sliding into a pew. There was a limit on how long he could stay, not just because of Gossman. Even cleaned up, he knew what he looked like and the priests would only let him huddle in the sanctuary so long before kindly pointing out the nearest shelter. As it was, he gained a few sideways looks from the handful of people waiting near the confessional but Luke ignored them.

Time never seemed stable inside of a church and Luke lost all sense of it while he sat in the quiet. He meant to think about all he'd been told, all that he'd seen and felt, and try to sort out what to do. Only, his mind felt blank, empty and too heavy to think of anything and he just sat, still and overburdened.

When he glanced up he was surprised that the last few people around the confessional were gone. As he looked over, the curtain drew back and an elderly lady limped out, leaning heavily on a cane that looked as old as she was. He didn't go to confession often, but he had kind of promised his aunt and he knew he wouldn't be back before the holidays. Now, at least, when he saw her again he wouldn't have to lie.

He slipped inside the booth, the curtain pulled shut easily behind him. The dim darkness smelled lightly of lemons from the polish used on the wood and the lingering scent of the old lady's perfume. Luke sat down and, as he always did, felt nervous and a little uneasy.

"Welcome, my child." A rich, male voice spoke from the other side of the ornate screen.

Luke drew a breath and crossed himself. "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." He knew that the priest wouldn't know his voice, would instantly know he wasn't from this parish.

"How long has it been, my son, since your last confession?"

How long had it been? "Over a year, Father." He closed his eyes and remembered being a boy when his confessions were things that could be forgiven, disrespecting his step father or stealing gum from his mother's purse. "It hasn't seemed like a useful thing, to come to confess, cause I'm not expecting forgiveness."

"No man is beyond forgiveness."

The priest sounded kind, gentle and good. "But to receive forgiveness I have to promise to try to not repeat my sins and I can't do that, not yet anyway. It's not right, asking God to forgive me and turning around and sinning again right away."

"I still would like to hear your confession, please."

"I'm gay, Father."

There was a moment of silence in the small paired rooms before the priest drew a slow, measured breath. "I know the church's teachings on this issue, I'm certain you're aware of them as well."

"Yes, Father."

"However, I don't believe God makes mistakes, or that His love for His children ends with who they love."

"My father, step-father, he caught me with a friend when I was thirteen. He whipped me pretty badly told me if I ever so much as thought about doing anything like that again, he'd throw me out. It wasn't even a year after that, he caught me looking funny at a neighbor man. We weren't even doing anything but my dad he... well, it doesn't matter what he did, he threw me out." He really tried to speak without anger or bitterness but it was difficult.

"Your father threw you out when you were thirteen?"

"Almost fourteen."

"Was there family to take you in?"

He thought of his aunt. "No, no one that could."

"What about foster care?"

"I just wanted to be left alone." Which was what he'd told York. "Anyway, I learned pretty quick what jobs there were for kids on the street. It's nice to say I did it to get by and eat but doesn't make it right. I stayed off the drugs, mostly, saved up as best I could, got a crappy little rat hole apartment. I've been trying, Father, real hard. I'll be eighteen soon, I just want God to know, I'm trying." He wiped roughly at his face and the tears he refused to admit to.

"Surely there are other options? Shelters, outreaches, maybe if your family knew they would help you or you could reconcile with you father?"

"I'm not a total loser, I've got plans. I've just been waiting, holding out, until I turned eighteen. I'm going to try to get my GED, get a real job, stop hustling." Everyone said that, how many folks on the street said that and none of them ever got out. They all just got old or got dead. "Thing is, Father, I met these guys. They paid me but didn't touch me. They treated me real kind. They said I got this thing inside me, this power and people are going to want to use it. They offered to help me and I kind of like to take that help but I know the church doesn't like the idea of folks with gifts going outside the church but they were good to me." He thought about waking up, snuggled in between the two men, warm and safe and content and wanted to be back there tonight. "I don't know, Father, I kind of want to go back to them and take their help."

"Would it get you off the streets?"

"Maybe but is being their whore different then being a street whore?" Except, he really, really wanted either of the pair to go beyond teasing kisses. It made it difficult to be a whore when he was so willing to give it away for free. "I don't know what I'm going to do but I know I can't starve so I have to go out tonight looking for work. So I can't ask forgiveness for being a whore and I won't. I know I can't help liking it sometimes, wanting other men, so I won't ask forgiveness for being gay either. Now, I might have to add the taking power from the church to list of things I can't be forgiven for. I just want God to know I'm sorry, I'm trying here, real hard but that I'm sorry."

"God loves you, my son, as He does all His children. I'm not sure why some of His children have to suffer so, why some have so many more burdens then others, but I know He understands and His forgiveness is boundless. I offer you absolution, in His name, please, pray the Act of Contrition."

Luke paused, unsure, but wanted to be absolved, wanted to be understood and forgiven. "O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins because of your just punishment, but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace to sin no..." the words stopped because he knew they were a lie.

"I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace to sin no more." The priest prompted.

Luke shook his head. "I'm sorry, Father, I can't lie. I can not ask for forgiveness knowing I can't mean it." He sniffed hard at his suddenly runny nose. "I'm sorry, I should go."

"God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself, and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church, may God grant you pardon and peace. And I absolve you of your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The priest hurried to get the words out.

Luke found himself frozen but he crossed himself on instinct. "Thank you, Father." He whispered but didn't feel forgiven even now that he'd been absolved. He just felt tired and dirty and sad.

"Go with God, my child." The priest whispered but was fairly certain the boy had already slipped out of the confessional and disappeared back into his unforgiving life.

All Souls Pass

Part Seventeen:

York sighed, for the fourth time in twenty minutes and Macy had heard enough. The human had settled in to work on his laptop, like he did most days, to move their investments about from account to account and do all the tedious boring stuff that Macy hated. It was easier when wealth was measured in the gold carried in a pocket, not in stocks and bonds and currency that was little more than a blip on a screen. Like most days, he'd curled up on the other side of the sofa and flipped across all the boring daytime shows, keeping the sound low so as to not be yelled at, but there was only so much a man could take.

"What's wrong?" He finally asked, not sure he could take one more soft sigh.

"Hmm?"

"You're sighing, what's wrong?"

"I am not."

"You are too, every other breath is this dramatic oh, woe is me, sigh."

"Nothing's wrong."

Macy rolled his eyes. "You're thinking about that boy."

York sighed.

"See! There, you did it again. Stop that!"

"I guess I am, a little bit. You never met Franck. He didn't live to be taken, he was killed when they came to arrest us. That made Josette useless, even if the shock of his death hadn't dropped

her, a focus without a power is just a normal person.”

Macy sat up and pulled his legs tight against him. York rarely talked about his past and even more rarely about the friends he'd lost. “Franck was a power, like this kid?”

“Not as strong but yes. He was a good man.”

“You don't think this Luke is ...”

“Franck reborn?” York raised an eyebrow and Macy just nodded. “No, best I can tell, that soul isn't in body right now. I've stopped looking, if they are meant to find me, they will.” But he hadn't stopped hoping that by some off chance even a few would be reborn with the strength to finish and enough memory intact to understand.

“He's not coming back.” He wanted to shout it at the Frenchman but knew it would do no good. It wasn't difficult to see the lonely homesickness that would creep into the dark blue of his eyes when thoughts of that time returned and Macy always was left with the sense that York was still just waiting for them to find him again.

The blue eyes went cold and the laptop closed with a click. “They might, some might.”

“None of them ever are, they've moved on without you.”

The laptop was placed with extra care onto the coffee table and York stood up. “You can't understand this.”

Macy bounced up to follow. “We've followed a thousand leads, hunted down a hundred lives and the few times we've actually managed to get you face to face with one of your friends reborn they've looked right through you. They don't remember, you are as much a stranger to them as I am.”

“They might remember.” He moved to hurry away, not wanting to hear, not wanting the sharp pain and dark anger.

“They're never coming back.” Macy pleaded.

“Stop it! They just need time, what we endured can't be healed in a heartbeat, they just need more time.”

“Time? You've waited almost a thousand years! I'll give you a thousand more if you want but York, they aren't ever going to remember, ever.” He wanted to hit the stubborn human, smack him around a bit. York needed to purge some of the memories he carried and he never would so long as he expected those he'd lost to return.

“Shut up! Don't you understand? Some days that hope is all I have to keep me going, don't take that from me!” York shouted back in frustrated honesty and was startled by the pain that flickered across his lover's expressive face.

“Well.” Macy was the one to sigh now. “I wouldn't want to take the only thing that keeps you going.”

York wasn't sure which surprised him more, the undertone of bitterness in Macy's voice or the fact that the normally flighty vampire understood the seriousness of the situation. Either way, it was pretty clear his honesty had hurt or offended his lover and that hadn't really been his intention. “Macy, I didn't mean...”

“Doesn't matter.” Macy shrugged and dropped himself back down onto the sofa. “Do what you

got to do, I won't stop you. I remember our arrangement."

"Macy..." Whatever York might have said or not said suddenly stopped cold. Sharp pain spiked across his senses and tore at his vision and he staggered. It startled him more than anything else and caught him unawares. That didn't stop him from dropping like a rock to the floor and losing all sense for a few heartbeats.

When sense gradually returned, he found himself cradled in Macy's arms, half propped in his lap, held close. The feel of that strength was comforting and York reached out to cling to the slender chest while he caught his breath and ignored the worried questions.

"I'm okay." He forced out after a moment. "I'm okay."

"What's wrong, baby doll? What's wrong?"

Macy's breath tickled across his hair. "Someone tried to take the cord off of Luke, without his permission, someone with power."

"Did you get a sense of who it was?"

York shook his head. "No, it was too fast. Macy, what I said..."

"Shhh, is okay, baby doll, let's go see what kind of trouble the stray's stirred up." He waited until York nodded and started to pull away before he let his arms drop from around his shoulders. "Can you trace him or do I need to track him?"

"Cord's still on him, I can trace him. Might be faster if you run ahead though."

"Not worried about faster, we'll go together."

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Luke's head hurt and when he tried to raise his hand up to rub at it, he found he couldn't move his arms. He moaned a little, trying to settle his sore head and uneasy stomach, and it slowly sunk in that the world wasn't spinning because of his sore head. He really was moving, the ground a wavering, swerving fluttery thing broken into by the ass and legs of whoever's shoulder he was slumped over.

Generally, when he woke up from having his skull bashed in, he liked to remember what he'd done to get his skull bashed in. Remembering was as struggle, his mind felt thick and lazy. He remembered leaving the confessional and the church. That was pretty clear and did little to settle his stomach. He'd checked his watch and had just over an hour before Gossman's deadline but had decided against stopping at the little grocery store he would pass by to look for something cheap for dinner.

It was closer to home when he'd made up his mind to cut through an alley to get out of the wind for a few moments and save having to walk around the block. Something he knew better than to do at night but it was the middle of the afternoon. That had been a mistake, tall thugs had blocked the one end, literally appearing from no where. When he'd turned around to go back more tall thugs blocked that way.

They'd moved in on him silently, with no threats or demands and it set a cold shiver of fear into his spine. It was pretty clear they weren't from the neighborhood, their shoes were expensive and enough to have gotten them soundly mugged. Their clothing was well made and clean and they wore no coats.

Luke had backed himself against a wall before he understood. "Jesus," he'd whispered as the

wind whipped blonde hair around slender, androgynous faces and exposed the delicate points on their ears. "Elves." He didn't know enough about Elves to know if they were the golden ones Macy had mentioned, they kept mostly to their own communities and ways, but he did know it meant trouble.

It was his moment of uncertain pause that had lost things for him. So startled was he by seeing not just one or two of the elusive creatures but a half dozen of them, that he forgot about the cord tied to his neck and York's promise of help. When he did remember and started to reach for the braided length, the nearest Elf had moved forward and quick as lightening, backhanded him.

The contact was hard enough to make him see stars and Luke fell into the snow, stunned. The creature hit harder than his father, harder than any trick but not quite hard enough to break Luke's face in. He hit just hard enough to let Luke know he could hit harder if he had to. Luke wasn't too proud not to cry out at the sudden pain or to pull away when the elf that had hit him crouched down near by.

Only, there was no where to pull away to and even as he tried, the slender, graceful, beautiful hand just followed. This time, that hand didn't hit him but instead traced the slender knotted cord around Luke's neck with gentle care. The elf, who Luke could see now had eyes the color of gold, hooked one finger under the cord and tugged. Pain lit up like sparkling fire across Luke's nerves and the elf hissed low and soft as well.

That should have ended that, only, the elf wasn't done. Instead of pulling that finger free, he curled more fingers around the cord and tugged with sharp force.

The pain that effort had sparked had been enough to knock Luke out cold, which explained why he felt like his head had been cracked in. Since he was out cold, he didn't know how he'd gotten tied up or where he was. It was a good bet that the elves still had him and the lack of coat on the person carrying him and the clean, well made clothing covering the ass and legs he could see, made it a very, very good bet. They hadn't succeeded, the woven, knotted cord was still around his neck.

Luke couldn't swear he hadn't drifted back out or if he'd just shut his eyes and lost track of time. He was too sick feeling to keep them open and knew if he watched the ground passing away below him he would puke all over the person hauling him. Puking on his captor would be a shortcut to a beating and the bruise on Luke's face was a clear warning to avoid that.

When sense returned a bit, Luke knew right away something was wrong. The group he was being kidnapped by had been moving direct and with smooth fluid ease, now they moved in shorter steps. It was that change in motion that had shaken him a little more alert but looking around offered no clues, except to tell him the afternoon was late, close to sunset. The group around him whispered back and forth in soft, fluttery words that were as graceful and beautiful as their bodies. The meaning of the words was lost on him but not the concerned tone.

The concern proved well founded. As they moved down a new alley the soft zipping sound of a silenced gunshot broke across their worried words. The bullet zipped by somewhere ahead of the man carrying Luke but he heard the impact of it smacking into concrete. The words shared around him dissolved and one voice rose up, in an almost chanting, singing like tone, it tumbled out words that meant nothing to Luke. They must have meant something important because the cord around his neck chilled down and for a flash became a frosty touch.

For a moment, the group moved again in long, steady strides. Whatever spell the speaker had cast, and Luke had little doubt it was some odd elfish spell, it had seemed to end the threat the gun posed. Luke thought about squirming and maybe trying to roll off the shoulder he was tossed over but before he could gain the nerve to try, arrows pierced the pavement behind him. Three in all, they just sprouted from no where like some odd urban flower in their footsteps.

The group slowed and the remaining people formed a loose gathering around the one carrying him. Luke saw more legs and feet and heard the worried, tense whispery words. The slowed pace didn't falter but Luke heard heavier, faster steps echoing along the city pavement.

"Treaty breakers, hold!" Someone shouted and Luke heard an odd hissing metal sound and what sounded like cursing.

"Not here!" The elf carrying him shouted. "In private!"

No more arrows or shouted words came and the party stayed circled around. Now they moved in what felt like cautious deliberateness and the rushing footsteps eased and stayed a safe distance away. Luke couldn't muster the energy to care, somewhere in the chaos around him, he blacked out again.

The jarring force of being dropped and then suddenly hitting a hard floor snapped Luke back awake. It made him cough but whatever he was tied up in wasn't just around his wrists, it was wrapped around his entire body. It was tight enough that coughing wasn't easy and made him aware of how tightly he was bound from shoulder to foot.

"What the hell?" He muttered and tried to lift his head to glance down at his body. It was easier to blame it on the horrid headache and his own misery then to admit that he really was tied up in what looked to be a thousand strands of vine. He had to be seeing things, some of the vines even had flowers blooming on them, small ones, but it was the middle of winter and cold outside. "I've lost my mind." He groaned and let his head fall back down to the bare concrete below him.

Only, laying there like dropped luggage wasn't going to get him out of this mess and Luke knew better than to hope for the best. It took an effort but he got his head lifted up. The space looked like one of the older factories that was in the continual process of demolition. The company doing the work had put the fences up years ago and had just barely gotten the glass out of the windows and some of the internal facade down last summer. That meant he was in one of a half dozen places, none of which were close to home.

He was dropped on the floor with the same half dozen elves gathered around him, but not surrounding him. From what he could make out of feet and shoes, they'd formed a half circle around where he'd been dropped. Across from him was four young men, all clean cut and wholesome looking. One was dark black skinned like true African bloodlines, one looked Italian, one was blonde and the fourth had almost Latino features. Each one was dressed in black from head to toe except for the white collar at their throats.

As he watched, another pair slipped into the dimly lit space. One man and one women, with bright blue eyes that caught what little light there was and shined it back. Their skin was pale, untouched by the sun pale, and they moved into the space with care. The two groups already present repositioned themselves carefully so all three parties could eye each other with sharp distrust.

It took a second for the oddest of things to sink into Luke's mind. While all three groups were dressed in modern clothing, the elves wearing elegant style suitable for a casual boardroom, the priests in carefully tailored dark clothes and the vampires dressed in an odd mix of goth and fashion victim, none of them held a gun. The elves he could see had swords, actual, honest to God, swords. They were long and slender and as gracefully beautiful as the beings holding them. The priests had small crossbows no larger than handguns. Around their waists was a belt holding a quiver of the small bolts and sheathed knives. The two vampires had blades as well, wide, serrated things that looked more like machetes than swords.

"Hey!" A slightly high pitched voice squeaked out. "You're not supposed to be awake!"

Luke dropped his head back down and something fluttered close by his ear. The sound was like

a fat bumblebee. Something the size of his hand flitted by and around and landed on his chest. The creature stood close enough to make Luke feel cross eyed but he focused and stared at a tiny six inch tall person. As graceful and lovely as the elves, it had on pale lavender that looked like died spider webs draped across it's body to form a loose dress. Hair the shade of silver fell in slender threads down to curl around the small being's waist and flutter in the breeze it made from it's wings. Sure enough, poking out under the soft hair and rising up above what looked to be an upturned flower blossom it was wearing as a hat, were wings. Like a dragonfly, in two pairs and black veined with iridescent glittering membranes between, real wings that fluttered and twitched and buzzed and granted the small creature flight.

"What the fuck..."

The small creature frowned. "Stupid human." From it's belt it untied a silk pouch and began to swing it from it's silk cord. "Go, to, sleep!" It spun the pouch around hard and smacked Luke with a painful thump on his nose.

Powder sprinkled up and floated down from the point of impact. It made his eyes burn and his nose tickle and Luke tried not to inhale the stuff. That was virtually impossible, he could taste it even through his closed lips, a faint taste like dust and dried, stale hazelnuts. He could feel it creep up his nose and he started to sneeze. Only, the sneeze turned into a yawn and before he could think another thought, he dropped back into unconscious blackness.

All Souls Pass

Part Eighteen:

The fence around the abandoned building Luke had been taken into was a good seven feet tall. Tall enough to discourage the mere curious both in venturing in and in looking in, the fence had plastic strips woven between the links to make seeing inside difficult. Luckily, what York needed to see wasn't in a line of sight anyway. He circled the building and found a good place to hunker down and wait for Macy at.

The wind was getting biting cold as the sun started to set, whipping into and around York's long black coat and he wished he'd worn a hat, or even a scarf. He was so caught up in being cold and miserable that he almost miss the feel of the vampire pair slipping into the abandoned building.

"Gangs all here." He muttered to himself and crouched down over a frozen puddle. The ice was murky and frosted over but the abstract dull surface was just what he was looking for. York channeled a small amount of power into a tiny, spell and the surface of the ice darkened. Gradually, shapes began to move in the darkness, began to form into light and shadow and slowly into shapes and colors.

"I never get tired of watching you do that." Macy spoke from behind York, announcing his arrival.

"Hmm. Find the boy's trail?" Even York had a difficult time sensing the vampires arrivals, a nasty side effect of a full blood, but he'd long since outgrown being startled by it.

"Easily, they may as well have put up big red flags." He snorted in disgust. "Found the kid's backpack in the alley they snatched him from and followed Oscar's twits here. How's it look inside?"

It took a little more power fed into the spell than York had wanted to use to clear the image up but when it did it gave him a clear view. "They've him tied up, elves got him, black cross to the right of the entrance, your friends to the left. It's odd..."

"Those ninnies aren't my friends."

"Why aren't they fighting? What're they waiting for?"

"Do you want to wait to find out?" He pushed his fedora back from his eyes, as the sun was dropping the shade became less necessary. York shook his head. "Not really, you know, we don't have to go in there. We've no part in this fight."

"Yeah." He made a quick judgment and tried to guess if York wanted to go in or to walk away. "But Oscar has something to do with this and it'd be hellish amusing to sticky up his plans."

York waved off the spell and stood up. "Rabble rouser."

"Been called worse, way worse by you."

That just made the Frenchman grin in a secretive way. "And deserved every one too."

"Most likely."

"Doesn't feel right leaving him in there. We should get him out, least just to see what's going on."

"And to piss off Oscar."

"That too." He rolled his shoulders a little and began to reach for the lines of power that ran like unseen rivers around the city, getting himself ready for a fight. "Ready?"

Macy grinned a pointed tooth smile and drew the jagged, ugly, brutal looking blade from inside his coat. "Always."

There was no point in being subtle, in trying to slip in through a window or side entrance. At the fence, Macy leapt it in one smooth jump and landed silently on the other side. York sighed and weighed the choice of climbing the fence and looking stupid with using some raw power to just knock it down.

He was saved from having to make that choice when Macy's blade popped through the links. The bespelled edge parted the metal links like the teeth of a zipper and the blade dragged with a rattling chime up and to the right opening an inverted L shaped flap for York to walk through.

The vampire pulled the flap aside so York didn't even have to do that and grinned. "M'lord, shall I open the other door for you as well?" He nodded to the wide truck sized garage door that was padlocked shut.

"Show off." York muttered as he stepped through the fence. "And, no, I can manage the next one." He shook his head and stepped toward the door with as much dignity as he was able to

muster.

The door was really no obstacle. Wood, thick and solid but nothing he hadn't battered down before. The major concern was the people inside, well, specifically, not killing or hurting Luke in the process of entering. He paused and reached forward, sensing along the flows of energy and guessing from the way the power flowed around the people inside where they stood.

"Good?"

York nodded and Macy stepped behind him. Once, it seemed far longer ago than it was, using such raw, hot power without a spell to focus it, would have seemed impossible. Time had changed York a lot, toughened him, strengthened him, chilled him, made doing what had once been impossible seem insanely easy. The power gathered into him, curled around his stomach and nerves and with a gentle sigh, York lashed out.

The wood door exploded. It didn't splinter into dangerous shreds but broke like a mirror into chunks and launched inward. The sound roared for a flashing moment, echoing from the mostly empty inside of the building to bounce threatening echoes. The vampire pair, being only half bloods, ducked slightly, the priests tossed arms up to block flying debris from fragile eyes and faces but the elves stood firm and didn't even flinch at the door's sudden explosion.

It was a good way to introduce himself, show off a little of the power he could call and get all their attention on him. York strode into the building, standing a little between and behind the vampires and priests and directly faced the elves.

"I believe you have something that belongs to me." He spoke in his normal tone of voice, casual, a touch bored and deliberately ignored the other two parties.

The elf standing closest to Luke raised an eyebrow and turned golden eyes first to the vampires and then to the priests. "See? The treaty was already broken by their kind, we were merely exercising our right to claim what was left unclaimed."

"We did not break the treaty! You are the one carrying the boy off!" The female half blood shouted back.

"Shut up!" York roared and used a touch of power to make his voice boom. "I don't give a shit about any of your treaties, the boy is under my protection. I will have him returned." He didn't have to wave a hand or anything of the like to call spirits and to prove he didn't, York stood perfectly still.

Around him, puffing into life like soap bubbles popping, formed a dozen round, fluffy edged clouds. They rolled and swirled, some stayed steady and others dipped and tossed about in a close orbit to York. Occasionally, eyes would appear in the clouds, large and bright, sometimes mouths, open and laughing also. From some, puffy, thick arms slid out of the main cloud and fat, childlike fingers would tease hair or fabric. York whispered soft, hidden, words to the swirling fluffy balls of air and they giggled in reply.

They made one final swirl before fluttering across to where the elves had gathered. One of the group stuck out a puffy, cloud like, tongue at the elf closest to Luke before dropping down to join it's fellows. The group surged around the unconscious human, sliding under him flat as a sheet of paper and then inflating to lift him up from the floor. With giggles and more stuck out tongues, the group whisked Luke away from the elves to place him gently down behind York.

"If you want this boy, you must come through me first." He let the air spirits dance about him some, before offering them the small trickle of power he'd promised them as reward.

"See? He even admits it! How can you stand there and dare claim we broke the treaty! The lover

of a full blood has claimed the boy, even a fool could see it's just an excuse! A pretense!" The elf shouted again, angry and his people growing tense around him.

"We are no fools, elf!" One of the priests hissed back. "Even we know that Maceralrus is estranged from Oscar Dorinus. Vampires have no loyalty to clan, family or caste like your kind hold. If his lover has a claim to the boy that makes him the realm of humans and our claim is the strongest."

York's placid expression faded and he almost snarled at the priests. "Do not assume that simply because we share a race that we share a cause! This boy will never come to your care while I breathe, priest."

Macy heard the harshness and real anger in York's voice but he was busy getting the vines yanked away from Luke's body. Something lavender fluttered by the boy's neck and Macy snatched after it. When he saw what he'd caught, he flung the pixie away as far and as hard as he could. His expression was more of someone that had unexpectedly pulled up a large, smelly rat than a fluttery, pretty pixie.

"Ugh! Pixies!" He wiped his hand on his pants leg and ignored the pixie that sputtered to catch itself midair. As soon as the creature was righted, it shot Macy the finger and fluttered back to the elves. He ignored it and the ongoing shouting match between the parties around him and kept pulling the vines away.

Until something bit him. Macy cursed and pulled out another pixie from the vines, this one in pink with blood around its mouth. "Bitch!" He caught it before it could fly off and quickly wrapped one hand around its body and pinched its head between his fingers. "He's fucking infested with pixies! Call off your flying rodents or I'll squish this one!" Macy shouted over to the elves.

There wasn't a pause, the lead elf whistled quickly and in a lovely trilling tone. Within a heartbeat three more pixies, one in yellow, one in blue and one in pale green, slid from the vines and fluttered away. Only then did Macy throw the one he was holding as far away from them as he could, which was almost the entire distance back to the elves. He was still muttering about pixies as he pulled the last of the vines away and wiped the pixie dust from around Luke's face.

"Enough!" York finally shouted. "The boy is mine, I don't need to debate this and I've no interest in your treaties and petty wars. Macy, get the kid up, we're going."
"No, you aren't." The lead elf spoke softly and flung his hand out.

Small black spots left the elf's hand and tumbled toward York. As they tumbled closer they sprouted into small green spots then into larger green specks a moment before they exploded into a writhing mass of vines. Not the cute, flower blossom kind that Luke had been tied up in but thick, course ones with thorns the size of fingers with wicked sharp points.

York reacted in that heartbeat without actual thought. He tossed a hand toward the approaching vines and flames erupted. They weren't hot enough at first to stop the plants growth. Tips of vines, spiked in thorns breached the flames and emerged on the other side as dry, sharp, but not brittle, weapons. York upped the fire quite a bit and the vines turned to ash.

Before the fires had even died down, while the ash was still falling in crumbled bits to the floor, York flung his hand out toward the priests. They scrambled to counter fire, working in unison to match his strength, but it wasn't fire that York sent their way. This time, ice left his will and power and sharp, spikes of icicles threw out dozens of small spears. They were aimed, slightly, to avoid the human's main body and heads, but the ice hit and pierced arms, legs, hands with shocking force. Blood welled up at the wounds and dripped down the smooth ice to pool in watered down drops on the floor.

York turned to the vampires. "Will I have problems from you as well?"

The woman bowed slightly. "We would never attack an Elder's lover, not without a direct order."

"Then get out of here."

They bowed again, the Macy not York, and backed from the building. Macy ignored them, hefting Luke up over a shoulder with ease and juggling his blade in his free hand. He took a step back, almost into the shattered doorway.

"We will not let you leave here with that boy." The elf said with confidence in his voice, not threat.

"Actually, you don't have a choice." York tucked in the last weave of the spell he'd been making and released it.

It took a lot to knock an elf on his ass but it could be done. The trick was to drop something that would knock them all out cold without killing the humans. It was something beyond magic and more into art and York released the power with pride. It bloomed and mushroomed into the space, sweeping all living things with it. It shorted out nervous systems like a fuse being blown, made every living thing it touched, down to the rats in the walls, go black for a few seconds. How quickly they would recover ranged from a few moments to a good half hour or more. It was plenty of time to slip away without more fighting, which made York happy. He didn't like to hurt people when he didn't know just what was going on.

He followed Macy, the boy tossed over his slender shoulder like so much baggage, out into the growing dark and cold. Back they went past the cut fence and down icy alleys and dark turns until York knew they had to get the boy into someplace warm.

"Macy!" He called out to the quickly moving shape and waited until the vampire tossed a look back toward him. "This way."

Macy nodded in a quick, short bob of his head and turned to follow York. They made turns and twists and crossed out of sight of most of the cities emerging night population. The buildings didn't really improve, not on their backsides anyway but the night was soon filled with rich, moist smells of cooking foods. York led them to one of the dimly lit doors at the back of one of the small restaurants that lined the street.

The human rang the delivery bell and waited. When the door opened outward, light and warmth spilled out with the large man that answered. He was wearing a chef coat and a stained apron. "What?" He snapped even before he could see what was on his doorstep.

"Bonjour, Arthur." York grinned.

The larger man made a scoffing sound and folded his arms over his chest. "Je n'ai aucun temps pour jouer en ce moment, York. Nous sommes au milieu de service de dîner."

York nodded. "Je sais, je suis désolé, nous ai besoin juste de quelques minutes hors du froid pour apporter le garçon autour."

"Aucun problème?"

"Aucun problème, je jure."

The chef frowned but shook his head. "Alright, bring him in." He said in an accent so thick he was virtually impossible to understand. "No trouble." He scolded at Macy. "Le séjour dans le coin, restez de la voie ou je lancerai vous tous dehors!"

"We promise." York nodded, he hurried to get them inside before the door could shut and lock them out.

The kitchen was small, with four sous chefs and Arthur but the man pointed for them to sit at a small table back by the large walk in freezer. The surface was old and a deck of cards was set to one side, the top card sliding off the deck and threatening to fall.

"Stay put and leave soon!" He frowned again and left to harass his assistants.

"Sourpuss." Macy muttered when he was pretty sure the large chef couldn't hear him.

"Here, get the boy into a chair." York moved to help Macy lower the still unconscious human into a sitting position. He rested a hand on the boy's forehead and dribbled just enough focused healing into Luke to force his body to expel the pixie's dust.

Luke stirred and coughed, he sputtered and his eyes twitched open. The coughing drew worse, dry and harsh sounding before the boy weakly raised a hand to cover his mouth. York caught his arm and held it away, when Luke struggled weakly, his coughing getting worse, Macy caught his other arm.

With one final, horrible, hacking cough, a small showering cloud of glittering dust burst from Luke's mouth to spark and fade away before it could hit the floor. "What the fuck?" The boy muttered and fell weakly back into the chair. His head lolled a bit before it snapped up. "Where am I?"

"Shhh, is okay, we got you." York tried to sound soothing as he dropped the younger man's arm.

"Elves, there were elves and priests and vampires..."

"Oh my!" Macy laughed.

"No, no, I... God, my backpack!" The pack got dropped into his lap and he hugged it close for a moment. "What time is it? The fuckers hit me." He could hear the whine in his voice but he rubbed the side of his face. It felt hot and swollen and no one wanted to pick up a trick with half his face smashed in.

York tilted the boy's face into the light. "Shouldn't bruise too badly."

"What time is it?" He pleaded.

"Almost six now."

"Shit!" Luke jumped to his feet. He shouldered his way past the pair and almost ran to the door.

"Well, what a brat." Macy frowned. "Go after him?"

"If we don't, he'll just get picked up again." York sighed and rubbed his forehead.

All Souls Pass

Part Nineteen:

Outside they found Luke was almost to the end of the alley and moving fast. "Spry little bastard."

"Screw this." York tossed out ribbons of power, like black snakes, thick and fat, that darted forward. They zig zagged down the alley and caught up to the boy in a heartbeat. One end of each ribbon wrapped around Luke's ankle, the other end grounded itself like a tether into the ground.

They watched as Luke tugged at his trapped leg and cursed as they walked at a more sedate pace down the alley to join him. They weren't even halfway there when he gave up with an angry huff of breath and turned to frown at them.

"Let me go!" He shouted.

"If you can free yourself, you're welcome to." York waved to the dark bindings.

"I have to go."

"Don't you get it? They were ready to start a war over you."

"I don't give a shit about them! I have to go."

"You stupid boy!" York snapped. "They don't care about you, so long as you're breathing you're of use. If one of them gets their hands on you again and doesn't get caught they can inject window cleaner into that pretty dense head of yours and turn you into a drooling zombie!"

"You don't want to be a drooling zombie." Macy reinforced. "No fun at all. Well, unless we put food coloring in the drool and let you dribble out mindless masterpieces. That might be amusing for a time."

"I just want to be left alone!" Luke protested again trying to follow York's example and ignore Macy's oddity.

"I stuck my neck out for you tonight and got you out there. They're going to be gunning for me now too. And this is way more complicated than we first thought; you're not going to be safe on your own for a while. At least not until we can figure out just what is going on."

"I can't, I have to get home. I have to pay Gossman, you don't understand." He pleaded and tugged at his leg again. "Please."

Macy shook his head. "They'll be looking for him there. They know his normal neighborhood."

"Gossman, he's a pig, he makes tenets that can't make full rent work it off. It's not good, okay? Real nasty shit and if I don't get this money there he'll snag me or one of my roommates. Please, I have to get home, it's late." He tried to make his eyes round and pleading and he saw the pair waver.

It worked on Macy. "We could go with him."

"It's a bad idea, people are going to be twitchy tonight. We should get home."

"An hour more? We'll get a cab back."

Now Macy was making sad round eyes at him. He cursed vividly in French. "Quickly and you, boy, no more trouble from you. You do what I tell you to, yes?"

Luke nodded.

"We go over, you pay your rent. You tell no one what's happened tonight or where you're going. We get some of your things and we get back to the loft. Yes?"

"Promise."

York shook a finger at Macy. "This is entirely your fault, mister. If you'd left him in that alley and not stuck your nose into this mess we wouldn't be tangled up in it."

Macy hid the grin, knowing that York would have given him more hell for having left the boy to freeze to death. He knew the grumpy Frenchman well enough to know that for as much as mean, stubborn, uncaring sort that he tried to be, he actually cared too much. "Entirely my fault." He nodded.

Just because Macy was being difficult, York waited until Luke tugged at his ankle again to dismiss the bonds. It sent the boy stumbling a few stuttering steps away before catching his balance. He was pretty sure the boy didn't notice but Macy did and he stuck his tongue out at York while the younger human wasn't looking.

"Here now." Macy grinned and peeled his coat from his shoulders. "Shouldn't fit too poorly."

Luke stepped away from the offered coat. "I'm fine."

"You humans are fragile, pixie dust can mess you up, take it."

"But..."

"He's a full blood, he only wears a coat to blend in, he doesn't feel the cold like we do."

Luke was cold but he was used to that, the underlining little shivers that always seemed to follow him even when he was snuggled under his thin blankets. "Thanks." He finally, grudgingly, muttered and took the offered coat. It was loose across his shoulders and long in the sleeve but warm. Blessedly, wonderfully, delightfully, warm and he hurried to close it so the light breeze couldn't steal that warmth. As he sighed into that warm cocoon, Macy's fedora landed on his head.

The vampire chuckled. "Cuteness. He looks like a kid playing dress up g-man."

"G-what?"

"Kids these days, ya don't know squat. Come on, let's get this done so we can get to someplace safe."

Luke let the vampire drop an arm around his shoulders. "You don't think they'll come after me again tonight do you?"

Macy glanced over the boy's head to look at York and left it to his lover to answer. "Once

back in the loft, there aren't many stupid enough to follow. Out here on the street, anything can happen. If I were them? I'd try again tonight." He saw the worried near panic trapped look cross the boy's eyes again and softened his tone. "All the more reason to get this done and get back to someplace warm. Don't worry, we won't let anyone take you against your will." This sounded wonderfully noble and dramatic but was true. Macy was already growing attached to the boy the way he would to a new video game and he knew the vampire didn't share well.

They hurried across the cold streets and closer to Luke's neighborhood. York wasn't surprised by the district or shocked by the crime and poverty that huddled there. There had been plenty of times when he and Macy had lived in similar places in far worse situations. It made him depressed to see it, to be reminded of it and the knowledge that poverty and desperation were present in humanity when he'd been born and would outlive him.

Luke may have been in a hurry but Macy slowed his pace, as they grew closer to the neighborhood. He sniffed at the air and shook his head but Luke didn't notice and kept moving them closer.

"What is it?" York asked. He hadn't failed to notice the slight change in his lover. Macy was often about games and amusement but when something spiked his instincts he grew sharp and deadly.

"Smoke."

York sniffed at the air and smelled nothing; he shook his head to let Macy know he couldn't smell it. "It's cold, barrel fire to keep warm?"

The vampire shook his head. "Bigger."

"Worth stopping him over?" He nodded to Luke a half an alley ahead of where they'd lagged behind.

Macy snorted. "Only way to stop him is to hog tie him again."

"Fun but not productive." He grinned back trying to lighten his own mood with the weak joke.

"Another time." Macy grinned and saw the weakness of the humor. He looped his arm across the human's shoulders and guided him to catch up with the retreating boy.

Luke was hurrying but the night seemed to be outpacing him as he moved deeper into his neighborhood. Now when he sensed eyes on him it made his shoulder blades feel itchy. He remembered seeing an arrow sprout from the hard ground as easily as loose dirt popped up a daisy and knew it would take far less effort to put an arrow into his far softer flesh. Maybe York was right and they needed him breathing but maybe he wasn't. For as miserable as his life sometimes was, Luke wasn't done with it yet. Certainly not when he was about to be old enough to get a real job and get out of the mess he was in, he was too close to see it all crumble around him.

He popped out of the last alley and red lights coated the night. Flashing off and on in warning shades with sparks of blue to accent and highlight. Half the block was sectioned off with shiny yellow tape and people gathered around to watch the chaos down at the end of the street. What his eyes saw sunk in but made no sense and when sense returned he stood dumbfounded with shock.

"What the fuck!" He cursed to no one in particular; the nearest bystanders were clustered

down around the tape and far enough away to not notice one scrawny boy. A half block away one building glowed in the night and Luke watched his hopes of a stable home and better life burn.

"Whoa." Macy whistled as he led York from the alley. "That puppy's really blazing too!"

Luke's shocked anger found a target and he turned on York. "They did this! They did this because of you!"

"Because of me?"

"My life was fine until you came along!"

"Luke," Macy tried to warn.

"No! I was fine until I met you two. Since then I've been drugged..."

"We didn't drug you." York interjected.

"Kidnapped, beaten up by a pixie and now my home is burning! This is your fault! Fix this!"

York glanced to the burning building and back to the boy. "No."

"Fuck you!"

"This isn't our fault. We're caught in the middle of your shit."

"You say you're some mighty fucking ancient witch? Put out that fire, fix this shit!"

"Luke..." Macy tried to warn again.

"I won't." York answered bluntly.

"You mean you can't."

"No I mean I won't. These things are bigger than one person and it's not my responsibility to play hero to every fire, every flood, and every disaster. This isn't my place to fix or interfere."

Luke shook his arms in frustration at the stubborn Frenchman. With the slightly too long coat sleeves it made the move seem like a child throwing a tantrum over wanting more candy. "This isn't a game, this is my life! Everything I have is going up in smoke, everything I've built up. Do something!" He begged now, feeling tears building in his eyes and voice. It was only then that he remembered his roommates. Suddenly, asking York to put out the fire to save a ratty mattress and a couple of old outfits seemed petty. He doubted the concern for human life would move the witch any more so he shut up and didn't even try.

Luke groaned in frustration, gave one more flap of his silly too long sleeves and turned from the pair in an angry huff. He hurried toward the police line, growing closer to the fire. It made noise, like a living creature breathing that hissed and whispered above the conversations and sirens. Oddly, he noted that the snow that never got cleared from the sidewalks was melted under the heat and water from the fire hoses. If it hadn't been so horrible, it would almost be pretty and he couldn't blame the neighborhood for watching in fascination.

He was almost to the fire line when he saw one of his roommates on a gurney. The other hovered nearby; black soot was drawn in lines and spots across his skin. He was wearing only a t-shirt and jeans but didn't seem to notice the cold, a blanket he'd been given to wrap up in hung forgotten from one hand.

"Kev!" Luke shouted over the crowd, as he got closer to the yellow tape. "Kev!"

The boy spun at his name and his eyes grew wide when he landed on the source. He bent for a moment and spoke to the other boy, who nodded under his oxygen mask and glanced in the direction that Kev had nodded. When he'd gained whatever permission he'd sought, the boy hurried over to where Luke hovered on the other side of the tape.

"God, Kev, I'm glad to see you two! I was worried when I saw the building." He said to hide the fact that his last thought had been for his roommates, not his first.

Kev didn't even stop moving. When he reached Luke he ducked under the tape. The look on his face wasn't one of comfort but of anger. A hand at his side, already balled up into a fist, swung back and landed squarely on Luke's face. The blow landed on the already sore spot the elf had made and knocked Luke to the cold ground.

"Where the fuck were you?" Kev shouted. He stood over Luke anger and menacing. "We were counting on you Lucky!"

Luke sprang to his feet faster than he thought he could, more worried about ruining the expensive coat he was wrapped so warmly in than the fact that his face hurt too much to see straight. "Counting one me?"

"I went out for five minutes to get some smokes and Gossman took Bear."

"How is that my fault? We had rent if you and your dickweed boyfriend hadn't used the money to get stoned out of your minds last night! Did you even go out and try to work?" He felt more than saw York and Macy grow closer but the pair stayed out of the way.

"Gossman wanted Bear to..." Kev shouted and broke off seeing the strange pair come up behind his roommate. "Bear isn't gay!"

"Like hell he's not! He blows people for money and comes home and you two fuck like rabbits. I don't want to hear he's not gay."

"You know he has issues, he freaked out on Gossman." Kev protested.

"Oh so it's okay for me to have to suck that fat pig off but not your precious Bear? Screw you!"

Kev reached out and got a firm hold onto Luke's arm. "This is your fault Lucky. You didn't come home and Bear freaked out and stuck Gossman with a knife."

"Jesus."

"I got back from the store and Bear was covered in blood and Gossman was bleeding everywhere and gasping and it's your fault!"

"What did you do, Kev?"

"The only thing I could do! The only thing..." his voice died off but he glanced over his shoulder at the burning building and to where his boyfriend was waiting for his turn in an ambulance. "You should have been here, Lucky."

"You set the building on fire?" Luke hissed out between his teeth. "You moron! Do you have any idea how many people you could have killed?"

"You should have been here."

"We're fucking homeless now you idiot! Where are we going to go? All of our shit's gone." It was too much to accept when he thought it was as some form of attack but to know someone he almost considered a friend would do something so horrible, well, that was beyond too much.

"They're setting up shelters, giving out food and clothes and shit. It'll be okay, I couldn't like them arrest Bear. Gossman had it coming, he was horrible, he deserved it." Kev muttered.

Luke's knees gave out and he dropped to the ground and snow, hard. He didn't stay there, Macy knelt down and half lifted him back to his feet, supporting him with a hand under his elbow and softly spoken words. "It's okay. It'll be okay."

York knew the expression on his lover's face. He sighed and moved forward to where the dazed and obviously addicted roommate still stood. "Kev?" He spoke gently to get the boy's attention. "You do know if you keep telling people about what happened, they're going to arrest both of you."

Kev's eyes grew wider, as the obvious connection was suddenly made in his tweaked out brain.

"Why don't you go back to your boyfriend, tell him to keep his mouth shut. In fact," York took rested a hand on the boy's arm and started to guide him away. "It would be better if you forgot all about this place and living with Lucky and Gossman." He didn't quite use magic on the boy, just gave him a nudge.

Kev nodded. "Yeah, yeah, you're right. Dude, you're right. I should get back to Bear, make sure he understands."

York followed the boy back across the tapeline and gave him a gentle push toward his waiting boyfriend. Only then did he turn and rejoin Macy and Luke. "We shouldn't linger here." He said more to the vampire than the boy. "It'll draw attention"

"It already has." He nodded to a building across the way with the slightest of nods.

When they got the boy moving, York glanced casually in that direction and noticed the black moving shape of a priest. "They the only one?"

"For now."

"How far to a cab?"

"Couple of blocks, they won't run down here, not willingly."

"Let's get moving." He muttered but glanced again to the now empty alley.

Part Twenty:

Luke moved because he was directed but his mind felt shut down. He'd felt fragile and at the end of his rope for weeks now, months really, and simply wasn't sure how to accept the last couple of days. His face throbbed and stung in the cold air and all he wanted was to find someplace safe and curl up for a few hours. He'd worked so hard, with such single-minded plans and goals that to suddenly have them shredded and lost was a painful blow. It let him feeling directionless and lost and a part of him was ready to give up. Maybe it was better to give in, let one of those groups have him. Being mindless and empty no longer seemed like such a horrible fate.

"We're not going to outpace them." Macy finally announced.

Luke glanced up and saw York nod as he was guided from the main street off into the darker side ways. "What?"

"We're being followed." York answered, scanning around and failing to spot the priests he could feel.

"Followed, who is it?"

"Black Cross." York's mouth was a thin, unhappy line, as if he'd tasted something unpleasant.

"Take the boy, I'll stay behind." Macy volunteered.

"No, they've got someone pretty strong with them. Better off you and Luke heading out and I'll hold them here."

"Like hell! We stay together then."

"Stubborn."

"Empty lot over here, couple blocks up. A good place to make a stand and see whose getting close. Think we can just scare them off?"

"Have you ever known Black Cross to be smart enough to be scared off?"

Macy shook his head. "Good point."

"What's going on?" Luke glanced between the two men and could almost taste the mounting tension.

"Someone's not so willing to give you up."

Macy grinned. "It's that pretty face of yours."

"But, but..."

"It's okay, not a Black Cross born today can take down my York."

"Which is a nice way of Macy saying he's too lazy to fight a spell caster."

"Not too lazy, just, it hurts and I'm not fond of pain."

They hurried along trying to reach the empty lot in before whoever was following caught up or made their move. There was little doubt that the priests would try to prevent them from reaching the loft and the safety of their own ground. Luke stumbled along beside them as they moved from casual teasing to the quick efficiency of a military unit. Even Macy's teasing lightheartedness faded into tense alertness and he moved like a predator tracking prey. The change in York was less noticeable; the man was always so serious. Luke saw it in the way he walked, the casual loping long strides had shortened a little bit as each foot was solidly placed and the man's attention was drawn to fine point.

"I don't understand." Luke whined. "I've never heard of Black Cross Priests."

"Most folks haven't, they aren't conversation for Sunday socials." York muttered and didn't slow his pace.

"Black Cross is the order where the church puts anyone with any magical skills. The nuns are kept in convents but the priests range about like wolves." Macy answered, tracking not one or two but the sounds of at least four priests. "Like wolves, they travel in packs."

Luke stumbled, tripping over his own feet, and fell to the cold ground. Snow and gravel scraped his hands and he was too startled to worry about the coat for a few breaths. Macy was there, kneeling down to see if he was okay and Luke nodded to the help off. He glanced up as he regained his feet and saw York kneeling to place the palms of his hands onto the ground at the edge of an empty lot.

By the time Luke had regained his feet, Macy's hand on his arm to steady him, York had disappeared from sight. The lot was dark, yes, but he could make out no signs of movement and no signs of a man crossing that space. It was as if, in that instant, York had managed to disappear and if Macy hadn't been so busy bushing snow off of Luke's hands and checking the palms for injury, he would have asked the man.

"Awww you didn't scrape them open." Macy sighed but he had already known the answer to that. He would have smelled the blood, especially such tasty blood, the moment the skin had been split.

"I'll fall harder next time."

"Smart ass, come on, let's catch up before York gets all pissy too."

Luke followed the last few yards to the lot, he stepped on his own shoestring a few paces behind Macy and stumbled again. This time he didn't fall, just stuttered in his steps for a pace or two. He was cussing under his breath as he stabilized, only when he looked around, Macy was gone now too.

"What..." He glanced behind him and down the alleys and saw no sign of movement.
"Hey!"

In mid air, with no body attached, Macy's head and shoulders appeared from no where.
"What?"

Luke knew his mouth was hanging open but he couldn't shut it. He took a step back and caught the shoelace again, this time he fell. The ground hit his ass hard but he still couldn't get his mouth open, it gaped wider and slightly more narrow, back and forth like a stranded fish.

"Huh, oh." Macy glanced down and giggled. "Does look crazy huh? No see through spell, keeps things private." He stepped from the border of the empty lot and his body appeared. "But, yeah, you've been out cold every time York's done some witchy stuff huh? Most seem weird, up you go, got to get you safely in here."

The vampire took his arm and hauled him to his feet in one smooth motion and with more strength than someone his size should have. Luke managed to shut his mouth and not look so stupid once back on his feet but he moved forward only because Macy moved him. He watched as the vampire crossed that line again and disappeared, watched as his arm followed and was swallowed up into nothingness. It set a tingle of panic along his nerves and into the pit of his stomach.

He wouldn't have followed his missing arm if Macy hadn't tugged him onward. There wasn't even a tickle of anything, not a puff of breeze, not a buzz of energy along his skin, nothing, just more of the same air. On one side he stood and every part that crossed that unseen line disappeared until he stumbled, startled and uneasy, into the empty lot.

The empty, very well lit, lot. Lines of light glowed like veins along the ground, tracing out grids that gave little room for shadows deep enough to hide in. It looked like a well lit street party or fancy shop, all glowing to make the people there feel safe about being out at night. All it did was illuminate the squalor and ugliness of the abandoned lot and make Luke marvel again at how none of it showed from the outside.

"Wow." He whispered and looked around, he would have kept popping in and out of that invisible line if Macy hadn't kept him moving to where York was crouched down, sketching patterns in the snow.

"Kid's never seen a no see me line before, he's all ga ga over it."

York didn't look up and kept drawing the complicated glyphs. "Figures, something that simple would impress him but not the lights. Takes a thought to do the line but the lights, they take real talent. Never appreciated, over awed whelp."

He opened his mouth to protest but Macy just moved him further back and behind where York was working. "He gets edgy before a fight." He explained softly.

"A fight? There really will be a fight?"

"Just stay close to me and do what I tell you to."

"Really a fight? Over me?"

York stood. "Not over you, over what you carry, listen to Macy, he'll keep you safe."

Luke glanced between them, waiting to see them crack a grin and let him know it was all some joke to scare him. Neither grinned, not in the slightest. "This is crazy, a fight, they've weapons and shit!"

"Guns don't work too well against magic users."

"Least not past the first shot." Macy grinned, remembering a time or two when someone had been sneaky enough or lucky enough to catch them unaware and get a first shot. "Hard to fire a bullet with no fire, first shot had better be quick and good before the witch notices you."

"A magic fight? You're shitting me?" He shut up when Macy's hand fell on his shoulder.

"Shh, don't speak, no matter what." He whispered.

Luke followed to where the men were looking and watched as from three different spots, men in black clothing carefully crept into the open lot. They had small crossbows but all were safely pointed down toward the ground. Their eyes were hard, stubbornly set and they moved with careful grace into the lot and fanned out to form a small bowl shaped half moon.

He counted not three but six priests, none looked like the trio from the warehouse. They didn't speak, but looks were carefully exchanged between them. Luke had developed pretty good instincts while living and working the streets and he had a good sense of who was safe and who wasn't. He'd trusted those instincts before and he planned to keep trusting them. York and Macy felt safe, trustworthy, good to him, the way priests normally made him feel. The priests across from him scared him, made him feel unsafe and like prey. They made him want to run and pull a blanket over his head.

"Oh shit." He whispered, knowing from those instincts that this wasn't going to be good.

Some part of Luke expected it to be like an action movie. The bad guys would arrive and everyone would strike a dramatic pose, maybe banter back and forth a bit before leaping about in dramatic bounds and causing fiery flashes of magic to light up the night. Someone would be smacked hard enough into the ground to cause it to dent but they'd get up and shake it off to launch a counter attack. In the end, York would win and they'd escape easily away back to the loft to live in peace.

Only, it didn't work that way and Luke was acutely aware of the difference between fiction and reality. Luke knew that in real life the good guy wasn't easy to find and it was more a matter of who was working in for your personal best interest. He knew that will and intent and just being kind and good wasn't enough in real life. That was a lesson learned the first time he saw a hooker getting stabbed to death by a john, she'd been gentle and kind and full of life. Reality hadn't cared, she'd bled and died instead of her villain and the man that had done it had never been caught. There was no cool soundtrack, witty exchange of barbs or confident posing, just York stepping forward to stand casually, facing six priests that stood at quiet ease, waiting.

Macy put a hand on the slender boy's shoulder and drew him back a step or two further. "York?"

"I see it." The witch answered and began drawing power up into his senses and skills.

"See what?" Luke hissed out, not wanting to break the silence requested of him but hating being confused.

"Keep him quiet!" York snapped but his eyes never left the small half ring of priests twenty paces across the lot from him.

Macy leaned forward and whispered into Luke's ear, his breath a warm tickle. "The priests, they're linked but they're not attacking, just waiting."

"Waiting for what?" Luke whispered back, softer than the breeze in gusting around the city.

"Waiting for someone better." Macy slid his hand from the boy's shoulder across his chest, draping his arm across thin collarbones and pulling the boy's back against this chest. "Stay close."

All Souls Pass

Part Twenty One:

They didn't wait long. Luke was suddenly grateful for the comforting arm around his shoulders and the lean strength to rest against. The figure that crossed into the lot moved with no hurry or rush. Each step was carefully placed and measured, smooth and confident. The new arrival was cloaked in black, the dark hood pulled up to hide even features from view but from the build Luke guessed it was a man. An occasional step allowed a glimpse of leg to flash from under the cloak, clothed in dark black fabric with simple, black shoes, those small clues gave nothing away.

If Luke's instincts said to trust Macy and York, this new man made every nerve he had scream to run away. There was something cold and dreadful about the man, not just because of the arrogant, unhurried way he walked or because he was hidden behind black fabric, it was something far more primal. He jerked back a little and may even have bolted to run away, trying to place distance and space between himself and the strange man if Macy hadn't tightened his grip on his shoulders. It was only the vampire's steady, solid presence that kept Luke there, standing his ground.

One of the priests stepped forward, standing only a pace or two behind the man cloaked in black. "The boy is of the church and if he has chosen humanity then it is our claim that is strongest toward him and we will claim him."

York shrugged and just slightly widened his stance, bracing for a fight. "Well, I'm so sorry for you that Luke is not property to be bartered with. He has made his own choices and has asked for my protection and care. You will see me dead before I hand him over to anyone least of all slime like you."

"Slime? Well now, I see your manners haven't improved over the years." The man in the cloak said, amusement thick in his voice.

The sound of that voice, one that no length of time, not passage of centuries, could wipe from York's memory, made his legs tremble. It was a cold fear, deep and unwanted, one he thought lost in revenge and the distant past. He stood frozen in place, convinced it was merely a trick, someone similar that knew his history. After all, his past run ins with the Black Cross Order should be well documented.

"Don't tell me you've forgotten me?" The man stepped forwards another pace before he raised hands adorned with several rings to lower the hood. The man under the hood was passably handsome with dark hair, rich olive skin and dark, night black eyes. His smile was easy and light, almost warm and welcoming. There was nothing menacing or cold to how the man appeared.

"Alvaro." York whispered and wondered if he'd stumbled into a nightmare. "Impossible, you're dead, I killed you." He drew his logic around himself and settled his uneasy nerves.

"About as well as I managed to kill you, old friend."

"Impossible." York wasn't even sure he gave the word voice.

"Not impossible, whoring oneself to a vampire isn't the only way to extend a life." The smile widened and amusement touched the dark eyes. "You lasted half a year in my care the last we met and you were just a human, now? With five skins torn away? So close to immortality? How many years, decades, do you think I can make you last this time?"

York stumbled. One foot erased a glyph from the snow and a line of the lights flickered and died, the anchor they were tied to now broken. It had been years, decades, since he'd been so deeply and totally terrified. Every nerve, bone and muscle screamed at him to run away, to hide somewhere at the end of the world and never show his head to civilization again. Revenge no longer burned him on past his fear, the wounds were old and still too bloody for courage to take root.

Until he felt the subtlest of touches, a mere whispered brush of energies along his own senses. Dark like nighttime velvet, the cool refreshing bracing contact of a moonlit ocean, the iron taste of blood, hot and rich, the energies were a softly whispered reminder. That casual contact, so gentle, placed all the centuries into their proper place. It spoke of years of experience, of training, of learning and strength. It held the confidence that York had lost in the face of his fears and gave him an excuse back to who he had become instead of being lost in who had once been.

"I'm not a boy of eighteen any longer, Alvaro. Not so easily betrayed or broken, and I will never be your prey again." He waved slightly to Luke behind him. "Nor shall I let you harm this boy. You will have to kill me for him."

"As you wish."

There was no further warning, the link between the six priests flared as they dumped their power, their strength into Alvaro. The force he swallowed and mastered would have staggered a normal man but he controlled it with easy grace. Instead of taking a heartbeat to shape the power to form, he unleashed it like a wild wave directly at York.

It wasn't an entirely unexpected attack. York braced himself and set up a rock of a shield to let the wave of power hit and break upon. With no direct focus, no form, the power splinted at the resistance and bled away into the earth. It made an impressive display but accomplished little. It reminded him of how poor of a magic user Alvaro had been and had little the man had seemed to change over the passage of time.

York countered, not with his own power but with the broken fragments of the attack that had failed to touch him. As it dropped into the ground, sliding away to be absorbed back into the flow of the natural world around them, he commandeered it. It wasn't an easy skill to use, not one many people mastered, but York had been given a very long time to study and practice. He twisted those fragments of power, bent them around and back across the frozen ground.

It was possible to shape it into some form but York wasn't looking to show off, just startle the group. Most of the priests in the line appeared little older than Luke, all seemed green and inexperienced, he doubted any of them even knew it was possible to take discarded power and turn it around. So he settled on shock and awe and simply burst the power back up at them. It shattered the frozen ground in its force, splintering ice and frozen slivers of mud and dirt up around their feet like flying shrapnel. Five of the six managed to block the sudden attack, Alvaro wasn't even startled, but the sixth young priest was caught unaware. The flying debris tore into

his flesh, piercing deep enough to hurt and bleed but not enough to kill and the power that followed knocked him back a dozen paces. Most importantly, it knocked him out of the bonded link and severed his power from the group.

That settled York's cold fear and reminded him of his own strength. "Need to teach your whelps better than that."

"Won't be them you need to worry about."

Luke was shamefully grateful when the Vampire slid his free arm around his waist. He was trembling, frightened without really knowing why. Some of it was just the stress of the last couple of days topped with seeing his only sanctuary burning to the ground because he'd been kidnapped and drugged by pixies and elves. Some of it, he wasn't too proud to admit, was simply due to the fact that he was absolutely helpless. He couldn't even see what was going on in front of him, let alone understand it or help. At least Macy could watch and help, maybe, but Luke just felt like a child dropped into a horror movie.

He reached and found the strong hand at his waist and tangled his own fingers around the vampire's. It was a small measure of comfort but he took it and tried to tell himself to stop shaking. There was no place for him to fall apart at, no time, no safety, and he simply couldn't panic now and make things worse.

Which was easy to say and far more difficult to achieve when a small tornado ripped across the space at them. It whirled and howled, picking up debris and spinning it with near lethal force toward where York stood his ground. The outer bands reached the witch, tearing at his coat and scratching skin to draw blood with small flying objects. Luke struggled a second, unsure if he wanted to run forward and try to help York or run away as fast as he could, but Macy held him securely in place.

There was no need for his useless help. York shouted a word and flung his hand out. The tornado unraveled like a poorly made sweater, threads spinning away to nothing more than a gust. The debris that had swirled with such deadly force a moment before dropped harmlessly to the frozen ground.

Luke saw both men, York and Alvaro, stumble under attacks he couldn't see. Once, he thought he heard growling, a low snarling hissing sound but he saw no creatures to go with it. It must not have been his over excited imagination because he felt Macy stiffen behind him, felt the hands tighten in reaction. It was both disturbing and comforting to know that the fight, so invisible to Luke, worried or frightened the vampire as well. It made his own fear seem more reasonable, less cowardly.

"Watch it..." Macy hissed softly, so low that Luke wasn't even sure he heard the words.

He heard what had alarmed the vampire a half heartbeat later, the crackle and hiss of fire. It sounded like a tighter, angrier version of the flames that had eaten his building alive. The sound came before he could see the fire, but it appeared. Rolling tongues of blue, sparked with white and red, a small, roaring, living fire that sought to consume everything in its path. It just appeared from nothing and it leapt like a starving beast for York.

It hit York with enough physical force to stagger him back a step. Luke wanted to close his eyes and not watch the man be burned alive but he couldn't. It was like his eyes were pried open, his mind refused to look away. Even though he knew the sight would haunt his nightmares for the rest of his life, he couldn't look away.

Only, when the flames hit York, he didn't catch on fire like a candle. The fire, hot enough

to make Luke's lungs hurt even as far away as they were, enfolded York. It wrapped around him, close, but not quite touching the human. The fire howled in need, sounding more like an animal than mere flames, and pushed harder at the human.

One small, tiny, spot in York's defenses failed. Luke saw it, knew it was a breach as much from what he witnessed as Macy's suddenly sucked in breath. It didn't appear to be larger than a dime, just a tiny weak spot close to York's ankle but the fire felt it and found that spot. That tiny spot caved under the fire's touch and the flames poured inside, moving like slender cords of breathing element. York's leg caught fire and the flames deepened from the blue white to the orange red of secondary burn.

The smell of burnt flesh and charred fabric filled the cold night air and York screamed. The sound was as much rage as pain and Luke struggled against the hands holding him, instinct saying to rush forward and try to put out the fire before the Frenchman was consumed. Macy held on and he held his ground, keeping both of them in place and a safe distance away.

The fire swarmed over York, covering him, but unlike at his leg where the flames had touched off a red flame of secondary fire, these flames stayed the pure blue white tendrils. Luke watched in horror and amazement as the witch's short hair fluttered but didn't singe and it sunk in that while covered in flames, except for this leg, he wasn't on fire.

The fire flickered, change for a moment to a flash of golden tones, before they danced in blue white beauty across York's body. Like an obedient pet, the flames swirled up and around his body and down an outstretched arm. They gathered into a tight swirling ball in the palm of his hand, dancing like angry dragons.

A still, quiet moment had both men standing, stubborn and strong, across the lot from each other. York broke that unspoken challenge by tossing the ball of fire, not at Alvaro but up into the air. It flew up like a rocket into the low clouds, becoming a pinpoint of light.

Fire went up and fire came down, not as flames but as lightening. The speck of flames in the night sky shattered and painfully white electricity returned from the clouds. The bolt landed with a brilliant flash and crisp sizzle, striking the ground in front of the priests and behind Alvaro, melting the snow and causing it to rise up in a cloud of steam. The lightening arched up in graceful, deadly beauty and struck the line of priests.

The lightening didn't even touch Alvaro; it bounced toward him and stopped by an unseen wall of power a good distance away. Three of the linked priests managed to shunt off what little of the lightening broke across their own defenses. Two weren't so lucky, the power danced across them, broke into the shielding shelter of their power and dance small waltzes across their limbs. They fell away, steam or smoke rising from their dark clothes, dead or stunned and Luke found himself hard pressed to care either way.

Alvaro frowned, the first touch of an unpleasant expression on his gentle placid face. He tossed his hands up toward the sky and shouted in words Luke couldn't understand. The thunder that rumbled in the wake of the lightening strike half drowned them out anyway. Luke felt the hair on his arms stand up, an after effect of the lightening or a warning of what the priest was calling, he didn't know.

That's when the sky fell and landed on York. It looked like meteors, or fireballs that just appeared and dropped where York was standing. The heat was great enough to make Luke pull back even as many paces away as they were. The snow melted around where York had been standing, the dead grass under it dried and caught fire. There was no way anything at the center of that kind of destruction could live.

Luke pulled at Macy's arms. "God! Oh, God!" He heard himself screaming, unsure if he was struggling to get to York or get away. There were tears streaming down his face, forgotten

and unfelt, they dried from the rolling heat of the dropped fire.

"No!" Macy hissed and gripped the boy tighter enough that he risked breaking the skinny human's bones. "Stay put! Don't make this harder on him!" He kicked the boy's knee and got his arms tighter around him when Luke dropped.

"He's alive?" Luke heard himself whispering like a child asking if Santa was real, wanting to believe but knowing the truth was harsher.

Macy petted the boy's hair. "He's alive, but it's three of them still feeding Alvaro. He has to wait to use their attacks against them; he's not that strong. He'll be okay, York's managed worse than this."

Maybe it was the trauma of the last couple of days but Luke normally didn't consider himself so dense. Part of him knew that the main priest was being strengthened and supported by the six other priests but it didn't sink in that the main one was really pulling power from the others. It was like being jumped by seven people instead of one and it made the fight very unfair.

He could blame it on the distraction of being witness to a fight between magic users, something he would have scoffed at a week earlier, but it was slow to sink in why they were fighting. They were fighting over him, or rather, what he carried. They were fighting over the power he'd been told he had inside of him and couldn't touch. It wasn't right that York was facing down so many others, by himself, to protect him, it wasn't.

A friend had told him once about a trip to a fortuneteller and he'd said that when asked the teller had said that it was easy if you just visualized it. Luke had no idea if fortune telling was the same thing as what he was but he was willing to try. If he carried power, it should be used in his own defense, he needed a visual image of to get the power to York.

His first thought was of a power plant but that seemed too complicated so he thought smaller and landed on the idea of a generator. He'd seen them in movies, mostly horror movies, where the group struggled to keep a generator going to avoid the monsters in the dark. The image seemed like a good one but as he fumbled for it, the reality was he'd never even seen a real generator. It was too complicated to picture.

Luke scrambled to think of something simpler and the only image he could get his mind wrapped around was of an electrical wall outlet. That was about as simple as it got and something he could picture clearly. A wall outlet with a big orange industrial extension cord plugged into it, and he tried to picture York as another outlet waiting to have the other end of the cord popped in place.

It wasn't the strongest of images but he could really see it. He closed his eyes and clung to Macy and tried to ignore the feel of the flames burning so close at hand. Instead, he pictured the man, the human, in the center of that wild destruction. It shocked him when he felt or saw or whatever York, it was like an echo, or a shadow but he saw it. In one blinding moment he understood that none of this was bullshit, he really was something different, and with that knowledge things clicked into place.

Part Twenty Two:

Luke could feel Macy, not really see him but like darker ink on a black canvas. He could see York, crouched and overcome, struggling with the fire that he now saw or felt but understood was being continually fed and renewed by Alvaro. The priest was making sure the attack was controlled, leaving York no chance to overtake the power and use it against them again. Luke could see the Frenchman struggling to unravel the assault, could feel the edges that frayed of the spell. It was only a matter of time before he broke free but it was also an issue of power.

In his mind, he pictured holding the extension cord and tossing it as a lifeline to a man drowning in a sea. He pictured the line sailing across the distance to the other human, pictured it landing and plugging in perfectly and knew that he'd managed to connect them. Like a light switch being turned on, power flooded him. It was better than any high any drug could produce. The odd half vision half feel sense of the world around him sharpened and Luke knew that it was a flash of feedback from how York could view things. He breathed in the power and glory of it, exalted in the beauty, trembled with lust and the living joy of the hidden worlds he'd walked so blindly in.

At the top of the shocking high, Luke felt cold, sticky fingers of touch sliding across his glowing world. It was subtle but there, and startled him enough that he gasped in shock. Macy and York didn't feel like that and it wasn't much of a surprise after that to trace the touch to Alvaro. The priest felt cold, chilling, unwelcome and Luke could feel the man sneaking about his senses trying to find a way to tap into the power waiting there. The most horrible thing was Luke had no idea how to prevent the priest.

He didn't need to. York surged up; fueled by all that Luke had offered him he shattered the fireball spell easily and let the power merely break into splinters of unformed magic. He didn't unravel it, he destroyed it. It wasn't just the sheer amount of power Luke carried but how perfectly and flawlessly it matched his own. There was almost nothing York couldn't do with that power to push him.

Only as he was getting his senses, he felt Alvaro reaching for Luke as well. York had put a block on the boy, knowing that whatever was coming for them wouldn't be able to handle both York's attack and the task of taking apart those complex power locks at the same time. Except it only worked if the boy stayed behind those locks, by reaching out, he made himself vulnerable with no idea how to prevent any magic user from tapping in as well.

There was too much pain, too much fear, to worry about finesse and style with so much power at his hands. York smacked Alvaro's probing touch away and seared it with way too much force just to show his displeasure. It was like knocking a leech away and then stomping on it, his meaning of don't touch the boy would be clearly understood.

He might not have lost control even with so much raw power coursing in his system, but the image of Luke in Alvaro's hands flashed across his thoughts. The boy had known too much in sacrifice and pain already in his life, it was unspeakable to let Alvaro have him. It stirred memories and pain and York sobbed in rage, lost in the past and the present injuries of his burned leg.

He opened himself wide to all that Luke offered and felt his mind and senses burn with the strength there. There was no thought now to form or structure or even sparing lives and not killing if he didn't have to. With a pained shout he opened himself and let the raw, harsh power pour out. It struck Alvaro like a tidal wave, swept away all his skills at shunting off too much and made it impossible to avoid. The power flowed from him down the link he had with the other

priests, overwhelming them. It was so much force that it physically knocked them backwards, swept them away, washed them back like twigs on a river, from the empty lot to slam into the building and street beyond.

When the shout of power and memory faded, York had just enough time to understand that the priests were lying crumbled and unconscious across the dark street. His lights had gone out, the see me not spell around the lot had shattered like glass in a hurricane. Macy was safe, Luke was safe, he was still alive and standing. He'd won and Alvaro was down, groaning and struggling to rise but down. There was a passing thought to go forward and finish the man but York felt himself growing faint. He had just enough thought left to shut the link to Luke down before his world faded away and he passed out.

Macy knew better than to trust the silence after a fight with magic. Vampires were tough creatures, able to absorb or shake off most spells and what damage they received was healed quickly but a smart vampire knew to run away. Elves sneered at that, calling it cowardice, they would have charged forward for the honor of clan and caste and finished the fight. Macy thanked whatever god watched and laughed at their lives that he hadn't been born an elf.

He let go of Luke; the boy was dazed, hard, horny and confused. He sunk down to the snowy ground, gasping for breath as if he'd danced too long at a club or taken some really bad drugs. Macy's only concern was getting York and getting them out of there. He hurried across the space between them and the witch and knelt down.

The ground was scorched, blackened and the smell of burnt flesh was thick in the night air. The outside of York's leg was charred and raw, blistered and curled but otherwise the human seemed in decent shape. He ruffled the walnut hair as he peeled back York's eyelids to peer inside.

Satisfied with what he saw, Macy grunted and nodded. "Wimp, passing out from that." He muttered and started to fold York up into an easier to carry bundle. "Last time, you were like a hundred times more hurt and still cursing me out for carrying you away. Getting soft on me, huh?" If York had been awake, he'd be cursing. Macy liked it better when York cursed him out; it let him know the human was still kicking. Even though he said it, Macy had never once, in all the years, thought of the human as soft. He hefted the human up across his shoulders in what was called a fireman's carry now a days and balanced the weight easily. "Let's get you home. Oy! Kid!" Macy shouted as he glanced back toward the priests. Alvaro was rubbing his head and trying to sit up and he smelled blood and burnt flesh from the younger priests. It made him grin to think of the destruction his lover could cause when he wanted to. "Kid!"

Luke moaned a little and glanced up at Macy. "Yeah."

"Can you walk or do I need to drag your ass?"

"I can walk." To prove it he hauled himself to his feet. "Feel weird."

"It'll fade, think about how cold you are. Being miserable always seems to shake it off of York." He caught the boy's arm and started to drag him away. "Just get moving, that display will call every magical critter for miles to see what happened, we don't want to be here when they arrive, got it?"

"Yeah, yeah, God, is he okay?"

"He'll live, now, shut up and move."

"His leg..." Luke swallowed hard at seeing the burnt flesh, the smell clinging to his nose.

"Move or I leave you behind!" Macy snapped and pulled the boy along beside him.

That was all the prompting Luke needed. It was almost irrational how frightened being left behind made him. He was on a knife's edge of panic and it was easier to stumble along beside the vampire and unconscious witch than to think or worry. There had been mention of getting a cab but Macy kept them to back streets and moving fast. Luke didn't complain, he was warmer than he was used to in the heavy coat and hat and walking didn't bother him any.

That didn't mean he wasn't grateful to seeing the warehouses ahead or their building. He was cold by then and the bulk of the glow of the magic had bled away leaving him feeling trembling and low. They paused by the side of the building, Macy glancing up the fire escape to the window he'd rather go in. With a shake of his head he led them to the lift instead.

The loft was warm and when the lights clicked on it glowed with a safe light. Luke had only been here a handful of times but it felt good to come back. It wasn't just the warm air of good heating, knowledge of food in the kitchen and awareness that the folks that lived here were decent. He felt comfortable there, safe, like maybe, if he was lucky, that he might belong.

"You don't lock your doors?" The door to the loft had just opened for the vampire with no keys produced.

"It's locked, bespelled by York to only open for us. Better than any keys." He left Luke to shut the lift behind them but he didn't wait to see what the boy would do.

Luke turned around and was alone in the downstairs, the last of Macy's footsteps echoing off the spiral staircase. He hurried to catch up, worried and wound up, he took the steps two at a time. When he cleared the second level he saw Macy gently lowering York to the floor and not the bed.

"Hey, he's burned pretty bad, shouldn't we, like, get him to a doctor." He wondered how they'd explain the burns to a doctor. Most of the folks he knew considered magic an extinct thing, a fun myth but nothing to do with reality.

"He's better off here." Macy answered and moved to lift the hem of the bedspread and pull open a drawer from an under bed storage unit. Inside he pulled out a pair of bowls, a small box and bandages. "Be useful," he held out the bowls to where the boy stood. "In the bathroom, run the water hot, fill the big one and in the little one bring me about an inch deep of water. Grab some washcloths too while you're in there and hurry."

Luke nodded, dropped his backpack, peeled off the warm coat and his own thinner jacket and set the hat on top of the discarded pile. He took the wide ceramic bowls and hurried into the bathroom. There was no time now to wonder at the luxury of the space or the delight of really, really hot water. He grabbed the washcloths from the neatly folded stack and juggled them and the water on his way back.

Macy had stripped York of coat and shirt easily and as Luke hurried back to place the bowls down on the floor near him, he caught a nail on the burned fabric. It parted as if a blade was drawing across it, not a fingernail and Luke swallowed hard. It was a small, little reminder that Macy wasn't human, not even a little bit. He moved to pull off shoes and socks before the vampire could notice him staring like a stunned deer.

The Frenchman's feet were as elegant and graceful as the rest of him, which really was no surprise and left Luke wondering if he was getting smitten or just oddly, extra horny. Only, as he eased the socks from the feet, careful not to tickle or disturb the burned leg any his eyes fell to the exposed arch of on the man's soles. Burned into each one was a brand, the flesh scared and raised in the shape of a cross. An inch wide, two long and burned hot enough to show the

details of scrollwork in the metal. Luke slid a fingertip across one branded scar and glanced up and was caught in Macy's clear green eyes.

"How?"

Those eyes slid downward to the mostly nude man and he shook his head. "Doesn't matter, was a long time ago." He dipped a washcloth into the hot water and began to carefully dab at the seared leg.

Luke sat down and watched as Macy tenderly washed the burn, occasionally using an oddly razor sharp nail to trim away dead flesh back from the wound. York was handsome, lean, strong and almost totally naked. It would have been a pleasant sight under better circumstances and it was easier to study the man than thing about what Macy was doing. It sunk in slowly that there were no other scars on his body, not a single one, burn or cut, anywhere. He looked closer and spotted what could be faint, faded burn scars on the man's upper left arm but it was faint, almost invisible and no where near as violently obvious as the brands on his feet. Even Luke knew that a man that could use magic to heal but kept those marks, kept them for a reason.

He glanced up to ask Macy again but the words stopped. The vampire had set the washcloth aside and was biting his own arm. "What're you doing?" Luke heard the panic in his own voice.

Macy held the wound over the smaller bowl with its inch of cooling hot water and let the blood flow down. "I've been feeding from him for centuries, my blood keeps him alive and young, it can heal him. Trust me, we've done this a lot." He grinned and squeezed his arm above the bite, watching the blood mix into the water until he'd judged enough had been released. He popped the wound to his mouth without spilling a drop and lapped at the bite until it stopped bleeding.

"Bleah, not fair that my own blood has no flavor at all." He licked at the wound. "Nothing like you or York, God you two are tasty."

"You've, you've tasted my blood?" Luke whispered and knew he looked shocked.

"Don't flip out, you were bleeding, it's better than first aid." He licked the bite on his arm one more time before forgetting it. "Just a taste, I didn't feed. I don't take what's not offered." He opened the wood box and shook out the pungent powder, letting it fall into the blood and water.

"What's that?"

"Herbs, things York makes up. This is his 'in case I get burnt up again' batch." He dipped his fingers in and swirled powder, blood and water together. He dipped some of the bandages in, soaking them before placing them against the raw wounds. With quick, expert hands, he dressed the wounds and wrapped them in dry bandages.

When he was finished the bite on his arm was healed and not even red any longer and York's leg was wrapped in clean, white bandages from lower thigh to foot. Macy scooped him up with gentle ease but didn't have to ask, Luke scrambled over to pull the covers down and they eased the limp man into the bed.

"There we go." Macy whispered and soothed the short dark hair. He leaned down and kissed the unconscious human, a soft brushing of his lips to the lax pair. "Rest." He spared one more worried glance to York before turning to the boy that stood looking like some over stressed, frightened, rabbit. All the comments about the fragility of humans stayed safely to himself and he moved to clean up the small mess of torn pants, discarded clothes and dirty wash water.

When he'd finished, Luke stood near the stairs, still wide eyed, clutching his coat and

backpack to his chest. The boy looked ready to dart away at a harsh word so Macy grinned his silliest. "You, mister hot pants, are staying and keeping me company, right?"

"I need to go, have to figure out where I'm going to stay now. My building burned down." He could smell the smoke still on his clothing, from the building fire or the magically called fire he couldn't be sure but he suddenly knew he reeked of smoke.

"I know, I was there." He waved to where York was sleeping. "The bed's plenty big enough and we've a comfy sofa, crash here."

It was such a tempting offer but he shook his head. "I can't, too far away from work." He had a hundred dollars in his pocket but everything he had was gone. He had nothing left, it was all gone. All of it, his bed, his blankets, his clothing, even his toothbrush was gone. It was too much to think about and too much to try to recover from, he had no place to even sleep now.

Macy had seen the look the boy wore before, in his apartment, as Luke had dropped into a panic attack. He stepped carefully over to where he stood but there was no fear of Luke running, the boy was stiff and frozen in place. Gently, Macy pried the jacket and backpack from his stiff fingers. He set them down to the side and out of the way.

"Let's get you something to eat." Food always seemed like a good idea.

"Why?" Luke asked and struggled not to fall apart.

"Hmm? Why what?"

He felt his knees trembling, knew he was close to unraveling and coming apart at the seams. "Why are you being nice to me? I'm nothing. I'm just... just a..." but he couldn't say it in the face of the clear green eyes. He needed to be locked someplace private so he could fall apart for a little while. His eyes landed on the light in the bathroom and he pushed past Macy in his rush to get behind the closed door.

The bathroom was a welcome refuge, even if he'd left his cigarettes in his backpack. Luke shut the door tight and leaned against it, sliding down its smooth wood to pull his knees up under his chin. He just needed a few moments to let go so he didn't shake apart. There would be a way around this, he could find a way, and he knew he could. He'd survived worse and he'd survive this.

"The first time York had a panic attack, I thought he'd been stabbed or something. I'd stripped him naked looking for a wound before he could explain that it's just something you humans do sometimes." An amused, rich voice echoed in the bathroom.

It startled Luke. He knew he'd brushed by the vampire on his way to the bathroom. He knew the bathroom was empty when he'd shut it. There was no way the vampire could have gotten into the room ahead of him or followed him, yet when he glanced up, there he stood.

It startled him so badly that he skidded a couple of feet across the smooth floor and made him flail about in an entirely ungraceful way. "Fuck! You scared the shit out of me! What the hell are you doing in here? How'd you...?" He glanced to where Macy leaned against the counter to the shut door.

Macy knelt down with the same look of fascination he'd had while watching the biscuits cooking. "It is a panic attack right?"

The sheer earnestness of Macy's question and his close scrutiny made Luke wonder if he'd hit his head a bit too hard. "I don't know, I just, I, fuck. How'd you get in here?"

"You haven't passed out yet, so maybe it's not a panic attack. York always passes out."

"What?"

Macy poked a little at Luke's chest. "You're breathing better."

"Cause you scared the shit out of me!"

Macy cocked his head a little to the side and thought about it. "Huh, wonder if that would work for York? He'd probably just toast my ass for spooking him and still pass out."

That's when what the vampire had been saying sunk in and Luke shook his head. "He had panic attacks?"

"Has, though not lately."

"Bullshit." It seemed impossible to think of stable, steady, capable York falling apart into any sort of emotional wreck, let alone hyperventilating until he passed out.

"Honest! He says it's very human, though I'm really not the one to ask. Never bothered to know any of you until him."

Luke wiped roughly at his eyes to push the unshed tears away. "Yeah, it's pretty common, I guess."

"So, you'll stay with us, right? Cause if I let you leave, York will shit kittens when he wakes up."

"I..." he really wanted to but he'd seen what happened when a younger boy got picked up by an older man. Eventually, the man got bored and the boy was left worse off than before. Luke had promised himself he'd never do that, never give in to anyone, never trust anyone to take care of him like that again. "I can't."

"Oh." It hit Macy then how it must have sounded and he giggled. "Oh! No, no, not asking to be your sugar daddy though you're cute! I'd fuck you in a heartbeat if I saw you at a club."

"Thanks." He whispered but frowned a little not sure why he was both confused and oddly pleased to hear the vampire was attracted to him.

"Thing is, York's kind of gone and claimed you. He's made a pretty bold declaration saying you're under his training and care. Won't be safe for you to go hooking on the streets anymore and I'm not going to be amused if York gets knocked on his ass saving yours every day." Macy folded his arms across his chest. "It's like an apprenticeship, until he says you're ready to stand on your own, you're kind of his responsibility now."

"I didn't ask for that."

Macy shrugged. "Doesn't matter, he's taken it on himself. If something happens to you and he allows it, it'll be open session on him. If you're worried, like about charity? Don't, you can work it off."

"I..." but would it really be so bad to be their whore? He was attracted to both of them, they could afford to feed and shelter him. Maybe he could get his GED and a day job and start getting his life together. It wouldn't even seem like work.

"Not like that! Dirty, dirty boy you!" Macy laughed again and nudged at Luke. "Like, doing dishes and helping York cook and learning whatever the hell it is he wants you to learn. Your ass isn't currency here, got it?"

"You're serious."

"Well, yeah, I think. He told me I couldn't fuck you so yeah, I'm serious." He leaned forward and pressed a kiss to the confused forehead. "Now, still feel like you need to pass out or whatever? Cause I'll wait."

Luke shook his head. "Need a smoke though."

"Me too! York gets pissy about smoking in the loft so let's go down to the windows. Then food and tomorrow we need to take you shopping."

"What?"

"All your shit got burned up, so when York's up tomorrow we'll take you to get new stuff."

"He's really hurt, he's not going to be going anywhere tomorrow."

Macy snorted and offered his hand to help the boy up from the floor. "Shows what you know. He'll be awake in a couple of hours and healing that leg. Oh, it's Christmas Eve tomorrow; we'll have to go early before the stores close. Wonder of the fetish shop will be open? So want their latex pants in red. You need shoes too, those sneakers are falling apart and a warmer coat."

Luke stopped in the bathroom doorway. "I can't accept. I'll make due."

"Ask York about compound interest and you'll know we're not hurting for money. It's fun to spoil someone, we've all we need, so just smile and say thank you. Besides, wouldn't look good if our pet houseboy looked all ragged and ill tended. What would people think?"

All Souls Pass

Part Twenty Three:

He wasn't sure how much the vampire said was serious and how much of it was a joke. Luke managed to get his feet moving though and he followed Macy downstairs, snagging his pack as he went by. The vampire waited for him perched by one of the large windows with it tilted outward, shaking out a name brand cigarette and offering one to Luke as if he'd been doing so for years.

"Shouldn't smoke." He muttered around the filter, sparking an old Zippo lighter. "It'll stunt your growth."

Luke accepted one of the better smokes with a shy grin. "Yeah, well, doesn't seem like a big worry. I don't smoke, really, just when stressed." Which was a lot in recent years. "I'll go days

without one then smoke a pack in a day.”

“York smokes that way, when he’s pissed mostly.” He narrowed his eyes and couldn’t miss seeing how Luke’s hands still were shaking. “What we need are hot showers, some food and a chance to relax. You should sleep too, it’s getting late.”

He shook his head. “Not sleepy.” With one hand he dug into his backpack but found it lacking real clothing.

“Don’t worry about it, we got clothes you can put on.” He blew another lungful of smoke out the window, not tasting it. “Look, you remind York of someone from his past, so don’t take it too personally. I think he’s trying to make up for letting that person down by helping you cause it isn’t like him to get messed up in other people’s troubles so easily. Just didn’t want you thinking you owned him anything, he’s doing this for his own reasons.”

Luke let the last drag slid from his mouth and he crushed out the remains on the windowsill. “Those brands on his feet...?”

Macy considered it, weighed the advantages of speaking and staying silent. “The last time he ran into Alvaro. There’s old blood spilled between them, you’re just caught in the center.” He flicked the cigarette out the window and shut it and the cold night away. “If they’d stumbled across each other, they would have fought even if you’d never been born.”

Normally, Macy seemed vain and vacant but there was a thoughtful look of protective loss about his eyes when he spoke that made Luke pause. There was a weight to the witch’s past that kept Macy away, and Luke being an outsider could see it. He just wondered if the pair could see it too.

“Come on stinky, it’s a shower for you. You smell like pixies.” Macy shuddered. “Vile creatures.”

Luke sniffed his shirt. “All I smell is smoke.”

“And pixies, stinky, smelly pixies.” It didn’t miss his notice that Luke carried the backpack with him back upstairs. “Go get cleaned up, I’ll pull clean clothes.”

The backpack was carefully placed next to his jean jacket and Luke only paused long enough to toss a worried look to where York lay. The man hadn’t moved but he didn’t seem any worse. It sounded selfish but Luke was more interested in getting clean and settled down than worrying.

The water was as hot as he remembered, the bathroom as luxurious. There really was little he wouldn’t be willing to do to continue having access to such luxury. It was more a matter of what he knew was best and right but it was a temptation, a serious one. Honest or not, it was kind of sad that he’d be willing to trade his freedom for unlimited hot water and richly scented shampoo.

“What’s with humans hogging the water.” Macy laughed as he stepped into the huge shower.

Luke jumped, startled, and instinctively covered his groin with a soapy hand. “What’re you doing?”

The boy jumped a little and skidded out from under the flow of the water and Macy swooped in to steal it. “I’m smelly, makes more sense to share.” He closed his eyes and ducked his head under the water, sighing as it pelted down across his skin.

"But...but..." Luke stuttered, soap running down across his shoulders.

"Please, like I haven't seen you naked already." Macy laughed under the water. "You're welcome to check me out all you want, I know what a luscious tempting thing I am. Really can't blame you for looking."

"I wasn't... I'm not..." but he had been. Macy was as pale white all over as his face and hands were. He wasn't a large man, his shoulders weren't any wider than Luke's own, but his body was strung with long, lean muscles, wiry, and as he'd seen, deceptively strong. His nipples were pale pink rounds and his chest was hairless. In fact, Luke had noticed little hair on the man. A light dusting across his legs, a small patch at the base of his soft length, more a shadow of black than any real density.

Macy cracked open his eyes as he stepped from under the water to soap up his hair. "Please." He grinned wider at the blush that flushed across the boy's face.

"Do you... I mean, vampires..."

"Hmm?" Macy slid a soapy hand down from his hair across his body and watched the boy's eyes follow the touch. He'd have to get York to explain to the boy about the magnetism a vampire could exude. He couldn't really turn it off, not that he'd try to or anything stupid like that, but the boy wouldn't feel so flustered maybe if he knew the lust he felt was normal. Until then, he'd be amused at the kid's reactions. "It's okay, spit it out."

"You're so pale. Does the sun... hurt you?"

It wasn't the question he'd been expecting and he laughed. "No, but we go from nothing to burnt to a crisp easily. The eyes don't like the sun, we're meant to be night hunters." He slipped under the water and rinsed off quickly. "Hurry up and we'll nuke gummy bears."

"What?"

"Just hurry." The boy hadn't moved since he'd joined him, soap still slid unnoticed on his slender body and his hands still cupped to cover his groin. It was kind of cute, kind of sexy and if Macy hadn't promised York to behave, he might have been interested.

Luke stood alone in the swirls of rising steam for a moment after the force that was Macy had left. The arousal the magic had poured into him and that had bled away with exhaustion, worry and fear had returned now and he was glad the vampire had left before noticing that he was half hard. He finished washing and rinsed off, again cutting short a shower that he wanted to linger in.

He shut off the water and shook off as much of the water as he could. One of the fluffy towels was waiting for him and he rubbed himself down quickly before wrapping it around his waist. There was no need; Macy was bent over toweling out his hair, wearing only black flannel boxer shorts with white skull and crossbones printed on them. On the counter sat a stack of fabric, thankfully more than just a pair of flannel boxers but he found a pair in the pile and quickly pulled them on. They were red with white hearts and he guessed they had to belong to Macy because he couldn't picture York wearing anything so silly.

"Awww, they're adorable on you." Macy cooed as he dropped his towel on the floor and combed his hair out.

Luke hurried to pull the red plaid flannel pants on and the baggy t-shirt. There weren't any socks but the loft was quite warm and he wasn't going to complain about having his feet sticking out. When he glanced down he noticed that Macy had his toenails painted black and it made him grin.

They didn't nuke gummy bears, instead Macy microwaved himself a plate of marshmallows, giggling as they expanded to twice their size. He'd refused to share, saying that humans needed more than sugar and then let Luke help himself to anything in the kitchen. The cupboards and fridge were filled with food and he found himself standing a little lost at the options while Macy licked marshmallow goo from his plate.

He settled on toast as the simplest and cheapest option of the fancy and complex foods the pair had stocked in the kitchen. Only the bread turned out to be one of the fancy, multi-grain, whole grain gourmet loaves that cost an absurd amount of money. He peeled off a pair of slices and dropped them in the toaster.

"Try the honey butter, it's to die for." Macy offered around licking hardening marshmallow from his fingers.

He found the suggested butter and spread it thinly across the hot toast, the smell was rich and wonderful. From the fridge he pulled out the juice and poured some into a glass and then stood in the kitchen and ate the amazing toast with the sweetly rich butter while Macy tossed a second plate of marshmallows into the microwave and giggled again as they expanded.

Macy pulled the overheated sugar apart and played with it more than he ate it while he watched the way that Luke carefully wolfed down the bread and juice. He watched the careful way the boy swept up any crumbs and threw them out. Just as carefully, he rinsed off his glass and plate, his knife too and loaded it into the dishwasher. When he was done there was no sign the boy had stepped foot into the kitchen and Macy was willing to bet that the kid had even placed the bread and jar back exactly as he'd found them.

When the vampire hopped down from sitting on the counter top to just drop his plate into the sink, Luke got out of the way. He watched as the man moved to what he'd thought had been an under the counter freezer or fridge and opened it to show bottles of wine lined up on their sides. The vampire ran his fingers over the corks until he settled on one and pulled it out, shutting the door behind him.

"Red okay?" Macy asked with the cork in his mouth. "Sweet, not dry."

Luke shrugged since he knew nothing about wine. Macy grinned around the cork, bit down and pulled it out with his teeth. He turned and spat it into the sink to join his plate before taking a long swallow from the bottle and passing it to Luke.

"They show Three Stooges over night."

The wine was sweeter than he'd expected and quite good. Luke took another swallow and tried to picture life like this. Clean, safe, warm, food in his stomach with a sexy as hell man offering him good wine and late night television. It seemed a slice of heaven and he grinned shyly.

"They're funny as shit."

"Seriously! York doesn't get it, he just thinks it's stupid and doesn't laugh." Macy was grinning like a fool now, tickled to have someone to watch his shows with. The night wasn't a total waste if you could laugh at slapstick.

The last swallow of the wine disappeared down his throat and Luke knew he was

pleasantly drunk. Not really that bad off, just buzzed enough that he felt relaxed and good. The movie was as funny as he remembered and given that Macy had virtually every line and move memorized it must have been one of the vampire's favorites as well.

As the wine and comedy progressed, they'd slid closer together into the center of the sofa, leaning against each other casually. After one really good belly laugh that had the vampire wheezing a little in small hidden snorts, Luke found the dark head resting against his chest. Somehow, Macy had wiggled his way under Luke's arm and curled up along his side, as if it was the most natural thing to do. It felt good so Luke didn't think about it, the body curled along his was warm and there was such an air of childish innocence. It was almost like being a kid again, snuggled up with other kids, even if the exposed pale skin felt too sensual under his fingers.

The vampire was still giggling as the credits rolled across the screen and Luke found himself grinning more at that than the movie. Macy slowly wound down and found himself nuzzling lightly at the cotton covered chest. It was York's t-shirt and it was loose on the boy. It smelled like the kid and a little like York and it made him sigh.

"God, you smell good." He glanced up and his eyes met Luke's muddy brown. A pink tongue darted out to moisten the boy's lips and they stayed parted. "What the hell." It was only fair, York had gotten to kiss the boy several times and Macy had been very well behaved.

All Souls Pass

Part Twenty Four:

He leaned over and up a little and brushed his mouth to Luke's. There was a trembling moment when neither man wanted to take the kiss deeper than soft, butterfly touches of lip to lip. Macy was never in any rush when it came to these things, he'd spend hours kissing lightly, softly, if that was what the situation led to. It never worked that way, after a moment of barely there kisses, Luke sighed and his mouth parted, asking for more. Since he wasn't one to refuse, Macy slid a hand across the boy's neck and moved him closer. He parted his own lips but made the boy kiss him.

The patience in Macy's kiss was thrilling and infuriating. Luke wasn't used to kissing just for the sake of kissing. He rarely let a trick kiss him, mostly because he didn't like the intimacy of their tongues trying to shove into his mouth but partly because it was work. It was about trading time for money and the longer they wanted to kiss and fool around was money he was losing. That didn't mean he didn't remember what it was like to make out, when it wasn't about getting money to eat or pay the rent. He reminded himself it was okay to enjoy this, to let Macy kiss however he wanted, and he closed his eyes to enjoy it.

Only, Macy didn't demand anything. It was nothing like the intense, focused passion in York's kiss. York made him hard and desperate and ready to beg for more with barely a kiss. The focus the witch put into kissing had made Luke's knees go weak. Macy, who seemed so unlike

someone willing to wait for sexual gratification, or gratification of any pleasure really, was perfectly willing to let the soft kisses they were sharing continue.

It was Luke that sighed and pushed a little, asking for more. He trembled when one of those impossibly strong hands slid along his neck and cupped his head. The vampire parted his lips but made no effort to move the kisses deeper. It took Luke a moment for his lust-clouded mind to understand, it wasn't often that he got to be the one to set the pace. His body shivered again as he understood and he raised his hands up to Macy's face and dove into the deep end of the art of kissing.

The vampire pulled him closer, and Luke could feel the strength in the pale, lean body. There was no doubt that Macy could snap him in two, that carrying York without so much as a groan or struggle was no fluke. Luke moaned softly as he kissed the man, his cock swelling at the strength holding him. His body was unsure if it wanted to be taken by that strength or if he wanted to take that strength and nothing made sense. He froze a little, caught in lust and need and the sweet surrender of Macy's kiss.

Slender, strong hands ran across Luke's hair, down his shoulders, across his back. Macy traced across Luke's chest, down over a curve of his hip, gently glided across the boy's thigh. The touch made the human tremble but the kisses stayed strong. He pulled the boy closer, pulled him against his chest and lowered them down to the sofa.

Luke wasn't surprised when those wondering hands pulled him down, but he was surprised to find himself pillowed on top of the pale man. There was just so much bare skin everywhere and heat, the vampire radiated warmth. He wiggled to stretch out, letting his legs tangle with the pair below his own and he wished he was as short of clothing as Macy was. Hands fell to his hips and guided them downward. Hard length found and rubbed along hard length, flannel caught against flannel and the warmth felt hotter than the night's earlier fires.

The contact made Luke whimper. He tossed his head to the side and didn't need those hands to guide his hips downward a second time. Macy's mouth wasn't as passive now; he nipped at, sucked at, kissed at any bit of Luke that came within reach. He moaned lightly as he felt the human's pulse in his neck, felt the way the boy shivered at the small nip he delivered to the sensitive spots.

"I kept my word." Macy sighed in a moaning whisper. He opened his eyes and fell into the stormy sea of dark blue.

"Just barely from the look of things." York's voice was neither scolding nor approving and had a tight edge of pain.

The Frenchman's voice broke into Luke's lust and he startled guiltily. "I'm sorry!" He proclaimed and tried to pull away from where he was splayed out on top of the man's lover. Macy's hands were stubborn in their desire to keep him lying there.

"For what?" York leaned his cane against the back of the sofa. The vampire had gathered the startled boy into his arms and eased them both up a little to make room for him to sit so York took the offer. He pressed a quick kiss to both men's lips on his way to settling in.

"For..." Luke lost his train of thought at the casual warm kiss. "For making out with your boyfriend."

Macy snickered and gathered York's damaged leg up along the sofa. "Cause York's the jealous sort, careful, he'll turn you into a frog or something."

"You can do that?"

"Are you in much pain?" Macy asked gently.

"No I can't." He answered Luke who'd gathered himself away from Macy and was curled up, wide eyed, on the other end of the sofa. "Least I don't think I can and some, yes. Don't let me stop you." He sighed as Macy settled between his legs, resting against his chest, comfortable as he could get now that he'd made sure the pair were okay as well.

"I think you frightened the interest right out of the boy." Macy pouted but wiggled his eyebrows at Luke.

"I... I...."

"Warned you to only take half of what Macy says seriously." York wrapped an arm around Macy's shoulders. "You okay? Both of you? Really okay?"

"We're fine. Bugged straight back here, half blood followed but no one else."

"Alvaro?"

"Was still alive when we left." Macy felt the way his lover tensed behind him.

Luke saw emotion cross the man's face that he couldn't name before York nodded. "That's something I'll have to remedy, again, and soon."

"He must be traveling with that Cardinal."

"Makes sense."

Macy tailed a hand lightly across the bandage wrapped leg. "Want this changed?"

"No, it's fine. Put a healing on it when I woke up, it'll be okay soon."

"Good! I've talked Luke here into staying with us but all his shit's burnt up. So I thought, you two should get some rest and we'd go shopping tomorrow before the stores close for the holiday."

They still had more unanswered questions about Luke than answered but Macy was right. There was no point in waiting to supply the boy and getting him his own things, returning some of the sense of self he'd lost, might go a long way to solidifying his trust. "Suits me, but I'll need to sleep some more if I want this leg to heal."

"Luke should sleep too."

"I'm not...tired." He had to pause to yawn and that made him blush.

"It's okay, Macy will be up. Sleep here or up in the bed, which ever you want but get some sleep. Never know when you'll be able to rest again." York struggled to his feet but Macy hurried to help steady him and he gratefully accepted the support.

The warning alone worried Macy. The clinging depression that had shown up to stain his already melancholy lover seemed deeper. He knew little about Alvaro, just enough to know that the man deserved death and deserved to die at York's hand alone. The priest's reappearance was obviously stirring memories that were already unsettled by meeting Luke. He hoped that shopping would distract both humans, otherwise he'd have to put on a grass skirt and do the hula to make them laugh.

Macy waited an hour to check on the sleeping humans. Most nights he looked in on York at least once or twice just to make sure the man wasn't caught in one of his unpleasant dreams. Luke had seemed a little edgy taking the other side of the bed but York hadn't made a fuss and in short order both men were safely tucked in.

He knew as soon as he reached to bedroom that York was still awake. Even in the dark, he could hear the difference in the man's breathing and he moved silently to where York lay in bed. The curtain made the softest of sounds as he opened it and inside he smiled to find Luke curled up, head pillowed on York's chest, soundly asleep.

"He's out." York whispered.

"And why aren't you?" He sat lightly on the edge of the bed.

York shook his head and Luke muttered a little in his sleep. He started to pet the boy's head and with a sleepy murmur, Luke drifted away again.

"You need to rest too."

"I know."

Macy sat and watched the pair in the near total darkness, watched the line of tension between York's eyes tighten a little as the man thought whatever thoughts were keeping him awake. "How long has he been like this?"

"Almost as soon as he fell asleep he rolled over." The stress line between his eyes relaxed a little as he petted the boy's head, soothing himself more than Luke. "Demanding cuss, wouldn't stop trying to snuggle until I let him."

"You're cute together."

"I need you to promise me something."

Even whispered, Macy could hear the utter seriousness in York's voice. "Ask."

"Promise me you'll kill either of us before you let Alvaro have us."

"It won't ever come to that."

"Promise me, please." He shut his eyes. "Don't let him have Luke, don't let him have me again."

Macy ruffled York's hair back and put a kiss to his forehead. "I promise you if it comes to that, I won't leave you in his hands, either of you."

Before Macy could retreat, York caught his head and pulled it down to a more solid kiss. "Thank you." He whispered against his lover's mouth.

"Now, stop fussing about things that will never happen. I'll rip Alvaro's throat out if he lays a finger on you. Sleep, I'll be here." He sat and lightly trailed fingers across York's worried brow until eventually the human drifted to sleep. When Macy checked again an hour later, both men were curled up together, sleeping soundly.

Luke woke up, warm but alone, in a large soft bed that he was getting way to used to. He

yawned and stretched and had no clue what time it was and didn't care. The day before, the last couple of days, were taking on an almost dream like quality. A dream not his normal nightmare day to day troubles so he wasn't complaining.

He staggered from the covers, yawning and scratching his side and the smell of coffee made him grin. The loft smelled like coffee and it was warm and clean and no drugged out roommates were screaming at each other. He promised himself for the next five minutes his only concern would be emptying his bladder, getting a cigarette and finding some coffee.

The bathroom wasn't empty; Macy was sitting on the floor next to York. The man had a pile of bandages next to him and his burned leg stuck into the shower. What had been blackened flesh, blistered up into raw red burns, was now a solid dull gray. Both men glanced up but it was Macy that grinned.

"Morning sleepy head, about to come wake you."

"Wow, that looks so much better." Luke whispered and forgot his too full bladder, low nicotine levels and need for coffee. He moved over to where York sat to get a closer look. "That leg was broiled."

"Thanks." York shook his head. "Hurt like it was broiled. Watch." He took his hand over the top edge of the burn and rubbed lightly at the gray.

Dead skin fell away, flaked off in bits and sheets and the layer under it was pinker but still dull. Luke watched, awed and a touch grossed out as York ran his hand lightly over and over the length of his burned leg and more and more of the dry, dead skin fell away. Each pass revealed more pink, more healthy skin and soon only the most damaged spots looked gray at all. The rest was pink, healthy and healed. The color was rosier than the skin around it but that would fade and even Luke could see that.

"Wow." He whispered again and knelt down. "Gross but cool." York was gently working at the last of the dry patches, reveling the newly healed skin. "Can you teach me to do that?"

York smiled a little but shook his head. "I could try but healing is a pretty high level spell. If we can find you a focus, they'll be able to use your power and heal. Things aren't so simple for you, Luke. One thing at a time, hmmm? Let's get you some clothes and such and go from there. Coffee is downstairs, should try to wake up so we can go and get back, I'll be done shedding like a snake soon if you want to shower? Don't worry I'll clean this mess up."

"Wow, yeah." He squashed the sense of unfairness that he'd carry so much power and never be able to learn to do something as complex as heal, and given the aggressive nature of the parties interested in him, he had a feeling he might need to know how to heal and often.

All Souls Pass

Part Twenty Five:

A smoke, some coffee and a trip to the small bathroom downstairs had him feeling better than ever. When Luke wandered back up to the bedroom, Macy was sitting to the side, quiet and still and York was carefully making the bed. Neither man ignored him or went out of their way to acknowledge him, it was more like he'd been living with them for years and they were all comfortable. Inside the bathroom, he found a neat stack of clothes, a toothbrush and other toiletries, all lined up and waiting for him, even socks and underwear. He showered and dressed and made ready for the day as quickly as he could, trying not to feel guilty for taking so much help.

When he was finished he found the pair downstairs, Macy was watching cartoons and York sat in front of his laptop. It wasn't the men themselves that stopped him in his tracks but just how good they looked. York had pulled on dark dress slacks, casual but elegant and fitting the man himself. He wore a white t-shirt under a fine dark green cashmere sweater that looked light and expensive. Macy had somehow poured himself into an old pair of faded jeans that were literally so tight Luke didn't need to use his imagination to wonder what he looked like naked. He'd opted for a black t-shirt with a large fading decal of Mr. Yuck. The pair were both drool inspiringly hot and in two totally different ways. It made Luke grateful that York's jeans were baggy on him. They weren't baggy enough, apparently, because Macy tossed his coat at Luke and had a lewd knowing grin plastered on his face.

He was a little surprised to be led out the entrance into the warehouse instead of the lift. The space was large and cold but not as cold as it should have been. A section in the open space was reserved for weights and basketball and he tried not to picture the two men competing, half naked, sweating and make the condition of not baggy enough worse. He was more surprised when he was taken down to a sheltered corner that had a glossy black car sitting, waiting to be used.

"Oh God." Luke whispered and moved forward, worried that he'd sneeze on it and piss them off. "Mercedes S550."

York paused. "You know cars?"

"I know this car." Luke grinned less worried about approaching a car that had to cost a good ninety thousand dollars. He glanced inside at the leather and upgrades and raised the price to over a hundred thousand.

"It's boring!" Macy moaned. "All the hot cars in the world and he buys this four door piece of shit. Black with tan inside, ooooo exciting." He pouted and nearly tossed himself into the front seat, the door slammed shut behind him.

Luke trailed a hand lightly across the side of the hood, touching the car as softly as he would the flanks of a horse. "Not boring, elegant." He sighed and couldn't believe that York would even consider letting the car go out on the still wet and slushy streets, let alone consider letting Macy or himself inside of it.

He glanced up across the car and fell into dark blue eyes. For once, there was no melancholy distance there, just warm understanding. It was the most human Luke had seen the man look, short of being blown anyway, and there was something distinctly erotic to the look in his eyes. It made Luke think naughty things. Things like seeing the man stretched out across the leather of the back seats, his pants open, his cock hard and the sheer eroticism of knowing he'd be the one blowing him this time. Or better, of being pressed down onto the hood of that elegant, beautiful car, his pants around his ankles, York taking him hard and deep. His breath would fog

up the paint, his fingers would leave prints on the flawless surface and his release would be a slick glossy mark against the high shine of black.

The corner of York's mouth quirked up in a small grin. "Get in the car." He chuckled and slid gracefully into the driver's seat.

There was something in the smile that said that York had seen the thoughts that had drifted across Luke's mind and he blushed a little. It was enough of a distraction that he worried less about somehow damaging the perfect, stunning car.

A button was pressed on a remote and the large door facing the car slowly and smoothly slid open. A drift of snow had gathered against it and York snorted softly as Macy fiddled with the radio. As Luke watched, the snow drifted started to steam and melt and in the blink of an eye it was gone and the ground was dry.

"Wow." He whispered over the clicking of his seat belt.

"Show off."

"Did you want to haul your ass out there to shovel?"

"No." Macy admitted.

"Then shut up."

The mall wasn't a place Luke went to often, even before he'd been tossed out by this stepfather. The mall took money, which he never had. After he'd been homeless, he didn't like to go there because even though it was warm in winter and cool in the summer, it made him feel poor and dirty and bitter. He found himself resenting all the angsty teenagers that whined about school and boyfriends and all the things he couldn't ever have. He'd stopped taking the bus out there when he'd picked a fight with some would-be punk suburban moron and kicked his ass.

This time, he wasn't taking the bus out to the shopping Mecca. This time he didn't have to worry about whether he had enough change and crumbled ones to add up to a cheap lunch. He shifted against the fine leather and unclasped the seat belt.

"Look," he said as he leaned forward to talk more easily to the pair in the front seat. York was driving with precision skill, making the car hum across the gears and gripping the stick shift with grace and strength. Macy had his eyes shut and head back, lulled by the motion and music and oddly subdued. "I'm not comfortable with this. I didn't pay that last rent, I got the cash still, just swing me by the Salvation Army, okay?"

York didn't even take his eyes off the road. "Put your seat belt on."

He sighed and sat back and re-buckled the belt. Before he knew it they were whipping into a parking garage and slipping into an empty parking space. Macy hopped out before the car was even in park but York lingered and turned around in his seat.

"I know you're proud, trust me, I get that but shopping is one of Macy's favorite things to do. There's little we need that we don't already have and it's not often I can do something to make him happy. So, just for now, let us do this and try to have fun."

Macy knocked on the window and in a loud voice that carried across the holiday-filled garage nearly shouted at them. "Hurry up! I still want to go to the fetish shop!"

York sighed. "Agreed?"

"Still don't feel right, but yeah and thanks. Not too proud to be stupid."

"Good boy. Consider it a holiday gift or early birthday presents."

Luke sat for a second alone in the fancy car. His birthday seemed forever away. He hated this time of the year. Being alone for his birthday, being alone for Christmas, it was difficult to feel festive when you were turning tricks just to scrap up food money. It took a little effort but he swallowed the reality of what his life was like, fancy cars and handsome rich men aside, and smiled as he got out of the car.

The mall wasn't as bad as feared. It was busy but not as packed as it could have been. The stores were decked out in festive garlands and music played cheerfully. Santa sat at center court looking jolly and a little drunk and Macy fussed about going to sit on his lap. It took both of them to talk him out of it.

"Fine!" He announced as they passed the row of families. "I'll just have to sit on your laps when we get home, see what kind of present springs up."

York was conditioned enough to Macy's remarks that he didn't even blush but Luke tried to look apologetic to one horrified mother. He followed them, York loosely leading them and half wrangling Macy from the specialty stores. With only one stop to buy Macy a cookie as they passed the food court, they arrived at one of the higher end clothing stores with a good selection.

"Oooo good place to start!" Macy announced and clasped his hands together before diving in. He started to flit around clothing racks like a hummingbird to flowers.

"Don't worry." York took Luke's elbow and guided the boy to the dressing rooms. "He's actually really good at this. Let him know if you like something or not and he'll refine his choices to your tastes."

Luke nodded and proceeded to spend the next twenty minutes changing clothes and trying not to look at price tags. Macy circled around him with each outfit, checked the fit and his face frowned or smiled at the style. When Luke actually disliked something he spoke up but for the most part the clothes the vampire picked out were casual, attractive and stylish. They made him feel like some young trust fund kid, some one raised with money and not some dirty little street whore.

The last outfit he pulled on was a pair of torn up, faded jeans that even he had to admit looked damn good on. Macy had picked out a soft black sweater to match that was lightweight but warm and made the whole style look like something from a fashion magazine. He stepped out of the changing room and Macy's face lit up.

"Perfect! Keep that on!" He hurried over and again used the side of his nail to cut tags off.

"But, it's..."but the vampire was already gone, carrying a stack of clothes and York's credit card to the register. "Ninety dollars for jeans already torn up? That's insane."

"But they look fine on you." York smiled gently as Luke balanced on one foot to get his shoes back on. "What kind of underwear do you want? If you don't speak up, he'll buy you boxers as loud as his."

He tried to imagine living a life where ninety dollar jeans was the norm and underwear didn't get in the way of his occupation. "I ah, I don't normally wear any."

The kid looked so overwhelmed and so on the verge of a just falling apart, that York tossed an arm around his shoulders without thought. "Don't worry, we'll get a couple of styles and you'll figure it out from there."

Macy bounded back to them, his hands full of bags and he stopped. "Aww you two are just adorable together. Hurry! I want to see about getting you some club clothes and some more jeans and socks, and boxers, and shoes, he's going to need shoes, York, and boots too, something kick ass looking, and..." but whatever else the man was saying was lost as he hurried out of the store to find the next place to spend money at.

York ignored any notice or stares they might have garnered and ruffled the boy's hair. "Better hurry or we'll have to page him like a lost child."

The next two hours were spent the same way. Luke had to try on four types of boots before they found a pair that both he and Macy liked and it took effort to talk the vampire out of the flashy, fancy sneakers for the simpler pair that he preferred. There were a couple more pairs of jeans, some casual dress pants, socks, underwear and flashy printed boxers that Macy found for himself. They hit the younger, more club orientated shops where the sales clerks seemed to know Macy and he flirted horribly. Luke had no idea what he tried on was actually purchased but he had to admit the black goth t-shirts and darker more street worthy clothes made him feel more comfortable.

York ended up taking him to find a coat while Macy ran the bags out to the car. It made Luke feel like a leech but he never once asked. In truth he was too embarrassed to ask even what was being purchased. His hesitation made York sigh as they tried on the tenth coat and Luke found himself unable to offer any feedback because all the price tags were too high.

"Look, it's not an issue of cost, it's an issue of style, warmth, durability, and taste." He finally folded his arms and dug his heels in, knowing he could out stubborn the boy any day of the week.

"It's just." Luke glanced around and scratched his head. "Do I get to keep it?"

York frowned. "Of course you do."

"They're too expensive, they're too nice. I'm going to get jumped for it. They're warm and nice but, I have to be able to work in them and they can't hide, well, and if they look too good I'll get robbed." He saw the quick look of sadness in the handsome dark blue eyes and had to look away.

It had never occurred to York, not for a moment, that Luke would ever be back on the streets turning tricks. "Luke." He spoke softly, dropping his voice down so the last minute shoppers hurrying around them didn't over hear. "You don't get it do you? Unless you want to leave, you're welcome to stay with us for as long as you wish. It's not going to be safe for you, until you learn to lock yourself down or we find someone to bind you to. Teaching you these things isn't going to happen in a couple of days or months. We didn't take you in thinking it would be a short term thing, so unless you want to leave, you won't be out turning tricks again, ever, if I have my say in the issue."

The words were so deeply honest, so intensely real that Luke found his breath caught in his lungs. "You really mean that don't you?"

That earned him that guarded half smile. "Really do, though we have to figure out how to shake those wolves from your trail first."

"I like these two best." He admitted, pointing to a butter soft, dark brown leather jacket

that would stop at his waist and a long ankle length heavy black coat.

"Good, now we're getting somewhere." York nodded and gathered both up, gloves and a scarf that cost more than Luke was used to spending on food for a week.

It wasn't until Macy rejoined them and Luke's stomach growled that both men stopped. "We should feed him." York announced like Luke was some pet.

"Food court."

The Frenchman made a face of disgust.

"I love the food court and it's fast and we'll still finish and get over to the fetish shop before it closes."

"I'm not hungry." Luke interjected to the debate but his stomach growled again.

"Food court." York sighed and led them to the collection of small fast food options.

As seemed to be the trend, Macy took cash from York's wallet and hurried away to survey his options. York waved to the row. "Take your pick, what're you in the mood for?"

"Chinese?"

"Suits."

While they were waiting in line for their fast food Chinese, Luke noticed that Macy had a tray with nothing but ice cream, a brownie and French fries smothered in ketchup. "All he eats is candy." He muttered more to himself.

York nodded. "He's a full blood, they don't need to eat as often so he tends to eat for pleasure. Really, there aren't too many vegetarian options in a food court for him."

"He drinks blood but won't eat meat? What's the sense in that."

"All full bloods are pretty much vegetarian. Macy can eat some chicken, fish but more than a few bites will make him sick. Heavier meats he can't even keep down. I half think that's why they evolved to drink blood. He doesn't even have to eat really. There's been plenty of times when we've had too little for two and he goes without, just feeding from me."

Luke picked up his tray and followed York to where Macy had staked out a table in the busy court. "But, he's immortal, right?"

"Vampires can be killed, they're just not at all easy to kill. Well, we're assuming he can be killed, the older a vampire gets the tougher they become."

"How old is he?"

But they'd gotten too close to the table and Macy overheard the question. "It's not nice to ask about age! I would rather be a man of mystery."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be, he's being difficult because he doesn't know how old he is."

"You spoil all my fun."

"How can you not know?"

He shrugged and dipped a French fry into the melting ice cream. "It was a long, long time ago and far far away... oh wait that was a movie."

Movement caught Luke's eye and he glanced over to see a group of four or five people all dressed in black and dark clothes with pale skin. Obviously quarter bloods or half or just pretending to be, they were laughing loudly but he swore they glanced a bit too long at him. It made him sit up straighter in nerves and remember that maybe it wasn't really safe to be out in public.

"Don't worry." York spoke. "No one will be ready to try again for a while."

"Not after how York trounced them last night anyway. Dumb fuckers, besides, those were just pretend make up vamps, not even smart enough to see the real thing." Macy grinned and his fangs showed, glistening under the dull mall lightening. "Hurry up and eat, I want to get your hair cut too before we go."

"My hair cut?" He hadn't paid someone to cut his hair since he'd been a child. Normally a friend just trimmed it up for him.

"Yeah." Macy reached over and ran a hand across Luke's hair. "It's all shaggy. We should have time right? And..."

"And still make the fetish shop, yes." York sighed and nodded.

"Cool!"

Luke felt awkward getting his hair cut. Macy directed what he wanted done which was basically a stylish version of how his hair already was and the young woman nodded and stared wide eyed at what she thought was a half blood. Macy flirted boldly and made her giggle and blush and she spent the entire time while clipping his hair asking about the handsome dark haired man.

He shook out his slightly shorter hair and the layers fell in a messy, trendy tumble. It made him look like he'd just rolled out of bed or been styled made up for a magazine cover. The cut was flattering and he knew he wouldn't have any trouble getting johns to notice him looking as good as he did now.

"Aren't you adorable!" The stylist gushed. "I bet your friend will love it, you look like a model."

He shrugged. "Don't try so hard, he has a boyfriend." Oddly, Macy's flirting had made him feel protective and possessive and he knew he had no right to either emotion. York certainly didn't need protecting and he had no claim to the vampire to feel jealous over. It didn't matter, his caustic comment shut the woman up and she only smiled brightly at Macy while the vampire paid the bill and left her a generous tip.

"Where's York?" Luke glanced around but the man wasn't in sight.

"Oh he said he'd be right back." Macy waved lightly to the general crowd. "But he left cash so lets go get some bubble tea."

"Some what?"

"The hair is adorable. Makes it look like you've just stumbled away from being fucked silly. Gives me naughty ideas." Macy let the boy look confused and took his arm to guide him over to the bubble tea stand where York was supposed to meet them.

It was Luke who ended up thinking naughty thoughts. The bubble tea turned out to be quite good, if a touch odd. Sweet with large round pearls of tapioca floating at the bottom, they came with huge straws to slurp the pearls up through. Macy didn't so much eat his as molest it and by the time York rejoined them, claimed his own drink and they'd made it back to the waiting car, Luke was thinking of very naughty things.

When they got to the car, Luke was surprised to see the bags piled on the back seat but even more surprised when Macy started to climb into the backseat as well.

"Just what do you think you're doing?" York asked around a grin because he had a pretty good idea what was on Macy's mind.

"I'm going to pretend the kid's a bubble tea." Macy grinned at how wide Luke's eyes grew.

"What makes you think he wants to pretend to be a bubble tea?"

"Well..." Macy actually seemed to consider the question and he glanced in where Luke was sitting pressed against a mound of plastic shopping bags. "He's all hard and cute."

"He's seventeen, breathing makes him hard. Get in the front seat, mister, unless you want to go straight home and skip the fetish shop?"

"He's such a prissy bitch, always wanting to join in." Macy rolled his eyes dramatically and leaned inside long enough to offer a sweet flavored kiss to the wide-eyed boy before he retreated and shut the door.

All Souls Pass

Part Twenty Six:

The fetish shop turned out to be a little, plain storefront back in town. Luke had never been there before, hadn't even heard of it and it sat blocks and blocks away from all the other sex shops and the streets he used to work. They parked a half block away and walked down, Luke still wearing Macy's coat and Macy moving easily in the cold with nothing but a t-shirt and his hat.

He tossed the door open, an old bell jangled above them and stormed the shop as if he owned it.

"Rodney!" Macy declared as he hurried over to the clerk behind the counter and pulled him

forward to kiss both sides of his face. "You look stunning as always."

The man was olive skinned with hair as dark as Macy's and eyes the sexy kind of brown not Luke's muddy, dull, boring brown. He wore tight jeans and a leather harness and nothing else but the tight collar around his neck. Even his feet were bare but the store was warm enough that it quickly countered the cold blast of air from the outside.

"Macy, dear, so good to see you again. My Master will be sorry to have missed your visit, we didn't think you'd be by until after the holidays."

"Where is Richard anyway?" The shop was empty and it was getting late in the day.

Rodney moved around the counter and turned the sign from open to closed and clicked a lock into place. "Finishing up some last minute shopping. Apparently, I've been a good enough boy to earn extra rewards. How may I serve you?" He asked boldly and locked fully onto York's eyes. It left little doubt that Rodney was offering a board range of services.

"I want those red latex pants." Macy started. "The ones that lace up the sides? And those velvet pants for the boy, oh this is Luke; we've kind of adopted him. He was too cute to let go."

Rodney licked his lips. "You two always had exquisite taste." The flash of silver in his tongue was clear. "Can I help you, Luke, find something you like? Are you top or bottom, or maybe, middle?"

"I...I..." Luke glanced to York to be saved.

"We're waiting for Luke to seduce us. Macy has shown amazing restraint, and yes, please, Rodney, if you could help Luke around? Make sure Macy doesn't put him in something absurd."

Rodney smiled deeper and his voice took on a rich, lush tone. "Anything for you, York."

He just smirked a little and moved off to browse on his own. Rodney had lusted for them since they'd wandered into the shop. One night, as guests of the co-owner of the shop, the Master and dominate in their relationship, Richard, he'd granted Rodney permission to play with them if Rodney could seduce them. Macy had been easy, the two of them had fallen together like playful, lusty, horny puppies right on the floor in front of the pair's sofa while York and Richard had continued sharing wine and conversation.

It was York's aloof indifference that kept Rodney fascinated and coming back to beg unsuccessfully. The masochist in him needed to beg and it wasn't consciously part of any elaborate seduction play on York's part. It wasn't even that he was uninterested in Rodney, the right mood and situation had simply never arrived and he wasn't as easy as Macy to seduce.

York took his time browsing and made a selection while Rodney and Macy tried to educate Luke on the advantages and disadvantages of latex, vinyl and leather. He slipped into the small curtained off changing room to try on the outfit he'd picked out, boots and all and stepped back into the store and over to the trio. He cleared his throat to get their attention and when they turned all three men went silent.

He'd picked out a pair of heavy, lace up black leather boots, a black leather kilt and a black mesh shirt that did nothing to hide his torso. It was as close to over the top as York ever went for club clothes and it had been years since he'd worn a kilt. Apparently, even the healing burn on his leg wasn't enough to ruin the effect.

"Holy fucking God." Macy whispered.

Luke dropped the pair of pants he'd been holding.

Rodney didn't even pause; he stepped lightly over on his bare feet and dropped to his knees. Without asking, he began to lick and kiss the leather of York's boots, working up over ties and grommets to the exposed flesh of York's knees.

"Fuck me, York, we are so buying that." Macy breathed, uncertain if he meant the kilt or the kneeling man and not caring.

York caught a hand into Rodney's hair and pulled the man's head away roughly when he began to nuzzle at the hem of the kilt. "Now, who gave you permission to be so bold, slave?"

Warm laughter behind them echoed across the shop. "Indeed, especially without me being able to watch."

Richard was a tall man, pushing close to six four he towered over them. His shoulders strained under his conservative button down shirt that tucked neatly into casual khaki pants. His eyes were a soft tan and his skin was a rich dark blue black. He was stunningly handsome, strong, powerful and sensuality flowed from him. York had always felt it was more likely that Richard would seduce him than his lover Rodney.

Rodney stayed on his knees and shuffled across the wood floor to place a kiss to each one of Richard's loafers. "Welcome home, Master."

"Been a busy boy, hmmm?" He petted his lover's head before touching him to tell him to stand up. He stepped away to press a kiss to York's face. "And you had better not even think of leaving here without that kilt or I may cry. I need the hope of seeing you in the clubs, dancing in that, now that I've seen it on you." His deep voice purred.

"Wow." Luke whispered and prayed he wasn't the only one hoping that the taller man would do more than kiss the side of the Frenchman's cheek.

York turned his face and returned the friendly but very chaste kiss, one to each side of the man's face. "I'm glad you arrived home soon enough to see us." His accent was just the slightest bit thicker at the very presence of the other man. Macy flirted and teased and was just pure sexuality but there was nothing secret or subtle about him. Richard moved like raw power and spoke with tones of hidden pleasures.

"So am I, did Rodney serve you well?"

"He's well trained." York nodded and knew it was a compliment to both Master and slave.

"Still, you should have called, we'd have prepared dinner and made a fuss."

York shook his head. "I wouldn't presume so close to the holidays. We were out shopping and wanted to swing by. Macy hasn't stopped talking about the red lace up pants and we wanted to get some new things for Luke."

Richard smiled. "I'd wondered who the handsome young man was, if he was with you."

"A kissing cousin, he's in our care now."

"Well, it's a pleasure to meet you, Luke." Richard moved over and bent down to kiss the boy on both sides of his face as he had York. "And Macy, not sure I should kiss you hello. After your last visit, Rodney screamed your name every time he came for a week."

That made Macy smile brightly. "Such a tease, Richard." And he leaned up and pressed his lips to the other man's mouth, unwilling to accept anything less than that. "We won't keep you, we're about done here."

"Please," he waved about the shop. "Take your time."

"Not an issue of time, it's an issue of needing to get my lover home so I can strip him naked and have my evil way with him. Fuck me, York, I'd forgotten how hot you are in a kilt." He pouted. "I just look bow legged."

Richard chuckled warmly at the predatory look in Macy's eyes and stepped back before the vampire could surge forward. As much as he wanted to stand and watch the Frenchman be kissed with such hunger, it was pretty obvious that Luke was new to them and off balance. He stroked a hand across Rodney's arm and moved to where Luke stood trying to figure out if he should watch or pick up the pants he'd dropped. Richard saved him the trouble and scooped them up as he approached.

"So, shall we finish the hunt for what will look astounding on you?" He touched the kid's arm and made him jump a little. When his ordinary brown eyes lifted up to meet his own, Richard wasn't surprised to see lust there but was surprised to see something more.

Luke just nodded slowly; frightened if he opened his mouth he'd be begging to be the center delight in an orgy featuring these four men. He let Richard lead him off to another rack and tried not to gawk at how Macy had almost pressed York back against the nearest wall.

There was always something to Macy's kiss that took any will York might have been able to muster and melted it. Macy, hungry and hard, pressing all over him, running his hands from York's ass to his neck and back again, while wearing the sexy club clothes, left York defenseless. Right then, Macy could have talked him into anything.

"Oh, baby doll, go change or I'm going to lose all control."

York nodded. He cupped a hand lightly over the hard length hidden in the far too tight jeans. "Want Rodney to help with this before we go?"

For once, Macy shook his head no. "I like being hungry."

The look gave no room to protest, he nodded and slipped from the strong arms to disappear behind the curtain and change back into his day-to-day clothes. When he emerged, Macy was fidgeting his weight from one foot then back to the other and Rodney was ringing up their total. The submissive was carefully folding each item with slow care, torturing Macy without the vampire even being aware of the delaying tactic.

He added his own outfit, boots and all, to the small pile and Richard brought over several more articles of clothing as he escorted Luke back to join them. "Sure I can't convince you three to stay? I've made up some of my famous egg nog, we can all get drunk."

Macy didn't even glance over, he was watching every fold, every slow addition of every item with focused intensity. Luke looked wide-eyed, slightly tired and horny. So it fell to York to smile warmly. "Thank you but it's been a long day."

"You'll be by for the New Year's party, right?"

"Wouldn't miss it."

That made Richard smile broaden and it lit up his face. "Good, you're forgiven then."

In short order, Luke had bags pressed into his hands and Macy was hurrying them out the door. He was bundled into the backseat with the bags and this time Macy didn't worry about the radio. Luke watched as the vampire pressed himself back into his seat, eyes shut and they

were barely moving before he was fidgeting.

"Screw this." He moaned and his seat belt unlatched. Macy leaned across the space between the two front seats and lightly nuzzled at York's ear. Gently, he slid in to place kisses, teasing and soft, to the human's neck and ear. It earned him the smallest of gasps from York but the man never took his eyes from the road and the car never wavered. There was only the slightest of hitches in the skilled driving when Macy's hand dipped down and the sound of a zipper being lowered filled the car.

There was a sense that maybe Luke shouldn't be watching but he found himself unable to pry his eyes away. He saw Macy's lips move, half heard the whispered words but it was too softly spoken for him to understand over the thrum of the engine. There was no missing the way York's hand on the stick shift was white knuckled from his struggle for control or how his breath was moving in shorter gasps. There was no denying the meaning of the soft motions of Macy's arm or denying the effect it was having on both humans.

York roared them down and around the warehouses and turned into their own with such loose abandon that the door barely had time to open first. He didn't bother trying to turn the car around, as soon as he'd stopped the car one of his hands snapped up and caught a handful of Macy's hair. The vampire moaned as his lover pulled his mouth onto his own and consumed him.

"Inside now." York ordered and Macy nodded with half shut, starving eyes.

Eyes that drifted to where Luke sat, wide-eyed and aching, in the back seat and he grinned softly. Involuntarily, Luke glanced away. An invitation had been made and for as desperate as he felt to join them, he lowered his eyes for that second of uncertainty.

"Luke can get the bags." Macy moaned out, York suckling at the tense cords of his neck. "Better move, witch, or I'm going to keep you here."

York was breathless but he glanced back to Luke.

"I can manage." Luke forced out and was grateful his voice didn't crack like some horny teenager.

"Thanks." Blue eyes sparkled.

Luke didn't move until both men were out of the car. He watched as they stumbled on the stairs a few times, trying to touch and kiss as they went up to the second story to where the door to the loft was. It left him alone in the backseat of a very expensive car that smelled like fine leather, pressed against plastic shopping bags holding a small fortune in new clothes, and hard enough to hammer nails with his cock.

It took two trips to get all the bags from the car and the cold air had done little to subdue his need. When he shut the loft door behind him and fully entered the warm space, he almost turned around and to spend another couple of minutes out in the cold. The setting sun lit up the entire space; it was glowing like fire into the windows and made the specks of dust sparkle like glitter. The downstairs was empty but the echoing sharp moan made it clear that the pair wasn't far away.

Luke was drawn to that siren sound, caught by it, and he found himself half way to the spiral stairs before the glint of the sun on burnished metal stopped him. One of the lotion bottles he'd seen around the apartment was on the floor, brushed aluminum with a black plastic pump top, he'd wondered why it seemed like there was one almost literally on hand everywhere. Only, when he stooped and picked it up, the drop on the tip of the pump wasn't hand lotion and the slick feel gave its real use away.

It awed him a little, now that he knew how long the pair had been together, to think that they were still so passionate about each other to require lube in easy reach at all times. A cry came again, sharp and desperate and Luke had no doubt it was Macy's voice that voiced it. He glanced up and saw at the top of the spiral a foot and trailing behind it like a banner of glory, Macy's inside out jeans pulled from his legs as York stripped him bare.

He wanted to climb those steps and join them. Macy's hungry moans, soon joined by the deeper, huskier panted breaths from York, called to him. He could almost taste their skin under his mouth; feel the heat rolling like waves from their bodies. Even if all he did was watch, that would be enough.

It was just that such raw passion, such honest desire, made him feel small and young and unworthy. There was a beauty to the pair that went deeper than their mere bodies, and Luke knew he'd sully that somehow. As much as he wanted to be part of their beauty, it was their beauty. What frightened him most was finding out that their beauty wasn't a world he could belong to, like the preppy, spoiled kids at the mall. He didn't want to chance it and risk finding that growing closer only made him feel more alone, more broken, in contrast to their wholeness.

He glanced down when the leg twitched and the jeans flipped like a living thing, the moaning cries sharp and bright in the setting sunlight. Carefully, he set the aluminum bottle down on an end table, pumped out a small amount and quietly moved to the small downstairs bathroom. Inside he opened his expensive new jeans and leaned his back against the door. He could still hear them, hear the growing desperation of their moans, and when he closed his eyes he could imagine them. More, with his eyes shut and his hand on his weeping length, he could imagine he was with them and it wasn't satisfying but it was safe and would have to be enough for now.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Twenty Seven

Even after he got his hands washed and his jeans shut, Luke hovered in the bathroom for longer than he needed to. It wasn't an issue of embarrassment, it was difficult to feel shame when the couple in question felt none, but of composure. His life had taken a radical turn and he hadn't ever been one to accept such quick changes lightly or well. He survived by clinging stubbornly to his own sense of self-control. Life may have smacked him about a bit but he's kept his wits about him and a goal in sight. No matter if they were bad choices, he'd always made choices and not let himself get tossed about passively. He'd been feeling too passive since meeting the strange pair and it was grating on his nerves, making him unstable and he wasn't sure what he could do to change that.

When he finally emerged, the loft was dark and silent; a small glow of a tiny light spilled under the railing above him and he distantly heard water running. He wasn't so comfortable with the loft to know right off where the light switches were but with a little hunting he found it. With nothing else to do, he knelt down on the floor and started to sort out the astounding amount of shopping bags.

"Hey."

Luke jumped, startled and glanced up to see Macy standing at the edge of his pile of jeans. The

vampire was wearing a bubble gum pink t-shirt and black boxers with pink flamingos printed on them. "Jesus, stop fucking doing that!"

That made the vampire's grin go from slightly goofy and mellow to teasing. "Sorry." He said without sounding sorry. "New clothes stink, they need washed."

Luke nodded and crumbled up an empty plastic bag.

"York has comfy clothes laid out for you, you should go change."

"I should finish this first."

"Go on, I'll take care of it."

That didn't seem right but Macy was already kneeling down and pulling the remaining bags away from him. Luke nodded. "Cool."

"I want what you have on, to wash." Macy pulled out a handful of cloth from a bag but as soon as he'd dropped it he caught Luke's wrist and stopped him from standing. "You're welcome to join in, whenever you want." He let his fingers slide down the boy's wrist to tease the palm of his hand. "Better than this, I promise." He dropped the hand and went back to using a nail to cut tags from the new clothes and humming softly to himself.

He had to blink his eyes a few times but Luke kept from blushing or gawking like an innocent kid. When he was certain he could face York and his sated stormy blue eyes, he moved to the stairs and climbed them as quietly as he could. The light upstairs was coming from the bathroom. It shone just bright enough to make the space easy to navigate without being bright or harsh.

Near the bed, York was pulling on a well fitted gray-blue long sleeved shirt over looser gray flannel pants and bare feet. His hair was slightly damp and he smelled of shampoo and soap. It didn't matter, Luke's eyes caught on the exposed stomach, the ridges of muscle that were slowly covered by soft fabric, and his brain spun away.

"There you are." York spoke in a bedroom husky tone. The smile that perked at his mouth was lazy. "Macy is going to make you wash all the new stuff so I've tossed out some clothes for you. We'll make space in the dressers for you and do you like trout?"

"What?"

"Trout, do you like it?"

"I don't know, never had anything other than tuna and fish sticks."

York chuckled and it was sultry and low. "Well then, I guess we'll find out. Was going to make this fillet I have for dinner. Willing to try?"

Luke nodded.

"Good." But as he slipped by he stole a quick and almost chaste kiss from the younger boy. "Don't dally and I'll show you how to make it."

Luke nodded again but the Frenchman was already working his way downstairs leaving only the feel of his lips to linger. The bedroom smelled like sex and clothing lay where it had been peeled off. He found his fingertips tracing where the kiss had touched his mouth. It was in that moment that he realized that his face didn't hurt. The elf had hit him pretty hard and his roommate had slugged him almost on the same spot but it hadn't bruised and didn't hurt.

The clothes were another pair of simple flannel pants and a t-shirt with warm socks and no underwear. Luke changed quickly and was surprised at how comfortable it felt to wear the pair's clothing. It was starting to feel all too comfortable, all too perfect and no matter what happened he'd go with it. With a grin of his own he made his way back downstairs.

"My face isn't banged up." Luke wandered into the kitchen. Macy was still humming to himself and was sorting out the new clothes, gleefully snatching what Luke had been wearing from his hands. He was making little piles to be washed and had already stuffed the first load into the washer.

"I had to cast a little healing to get you to cough out the pixie dust sooner so I figured you wouldn't mind. Hold this." He pressed a pan with a large fillet spiced and laid out set in the center of it.

He took it when it was pressed his way. "Oh. Of course. Would it be okay to go out for a little bit tonight?"

"You aren't a prisoner here." York slid the carrots from the cutting board into the steamer and took back the fish.

"I meant, would it be safe?"

"Depends."

He sighed and leaned on the counter. "It's Christmas Eve, I want to go to Mass."

York's eyes narrowed. "If you walk into a church right now, it's likely you won't walk back out."

"Even a local parish? I mean, come on, a common priest isn't going to be looking for me, right?"

"You could go with him." Macy offered from where he sat in front of the washer, watching the soapy water and clothing chase each other in circles. He glanced over to catch the look York gave him and it was blistering. "Or, I could go with him?" He added in a small, worried voice. Time hadn't softened York's feelings toward the church.

Hard blue eyes locked with Luke's. "It's not safe to go alone."

The idea of Macy in church was blood chilling. "No, it's okay, I don't have to go."

"I can behave." The vampire protested.

Luke glanced to York and the witch shrugged a little. It wasn't a resounding confirmation but neither was it a denial. "Well..."

"It's not a horrible idea. I could use some time to meditate and think about things and you know what you need to do, Mace." York turned the flame down on a burner under a covered pot and put the tray with the fish into the oven.

"What do I need to do?"

"We need to know about this treaty, we have to talk to Oscar."

Macy stuck his tongue out.

"Oscar?"

"Oscar Dorinus." York added as if that explained everything. "He's the full blood in charge of this territory. Almost all the vampires are answerable to him."

"Like a prince or king?"

"More like a gang lord. Vampires have no loyalty beyond what amuses them and only a loose sense of cultural rules. They respect power and strength and little more so the biggest, baddest of them is normally in charge, or what passes for in charge for the full bloods. Like herding cats, that lot doesn't respond well to authority but Oscar has a pretty tight rein on most of them and all the less than full bloods listen to him without question. If some arrangement was made about you, Oscar will be the one to get information from."

"Can't we just find an elf and beat the arrogance out of him until he talks?" Macy whined.

"We could, but I don't want every elf within a hundred miles seeking revenge. Just send word to Oscar and let him know we're coming by." York peeked in and checked on the fish and the smell of hot, fresh herbs wafted out over them.

"You suck, you know that? You royally suck stinky ass."

"So it's settled then, you'll escort Luke to his service, and behave and while out send word to Oscar." The steamer dinged and shut off and York was pushing plates toward where Luke slouched.

So it was that Luke found himself having a nice dinner of a surprisingly good broiled trout, sweet steamed carrots and wild rice blend. Macy stole carrots off of their plates and sulked but agreed to behave. He had to borrow more clothes, his new outfits were still in the washing and drying process and with his father's rosary dug from his backpack and tucked in his pocket; he followed Macy into a cab and drove toward his parish.

They sat in the back and arrived late enough that the service was about to start. Macy settled in beside him with a blank eyed stare of intense boredom but he sat still and mannerly for the entire service and drew no attention and caused no trouble. When it was over, Luke held back and let the crowd file out but a pair of faces he knew caught his eye.

"Aunt Mary!" He pushed forward and saw the moment she noticed him, her eyes lighting up.

She moved over and pulled him into a hug, pressing a kiss to his cheek only to have to wipe off her horrid shade of lipstick from his skin. "My goodness, look at you!" She ran a hand down the sleeve of his brand new long coat. A weathered looking man with thinning white hair moved up behind her and nodded.

"Uncle Roger."

"Luke, you look fit."

"Thanks, you look well yourself." He grinned but glanced behind the pair. "Did Dad come with you?"

"He had to work tonight, said he'd come to Mass tomorrow before coming over."

"Oh." He wasn't sure if he was disappointed to hear that or not but he nodded. "It was good to see you though, both of you."

"And you, Merry Christmas to you and your," she paused, unwilling or unable to say the word easily but she glanced behind Luke to where Macy hovered out of the way. "Friend."

"I'm sorry, Aunt Mary, Uncle Roger, this is Macy, a friend of mine. My apartment building caught fire last night; maybe you saw it on the news? Anyway, they're taking me in for a while." Macy

had moved closer at the mention of his name but still stood a little distant.

Roger nodded but moved off into the crowd to file out, leaving his wife to deal with the uncomfortable situation. "Well." She started and forced a smile. "That's kind of you."

Macy shrugged. "We had the space and he's a good kid."

"That he is! Well, it's good to know you're okay and with friends." She smiled a little broader but it had a sad, bitter undertone. "Merry Christmas."

"And to you." He nodded and smiled and Luke promised himself he wouldn't get all emotional.

"I should go, Roger will be waiting for me, it's late and we're not as young as you two." Her fake smile faltered, sputtered for a moment like a candle flame in a sudden gust, before brightening again. "It was nice to meet you."

Macy just perked an eyebrow up a little and half smirked, knowing the truth but not speaking it. He'd promised to behave and he was really, really trying hard. He watched the older woman hurry away and how Luke's shoulders knotted up.

"She's a good woman, it's just, they have so little themselves..." his voice died off. "After my mother was killed, she was really kind to me."

"Not kind enough to take you in." Macy hissed a little under his breath and instantly wished he hadn't.

"She couldn't have. My step-dad, he wouldn't have ever forgiven her. I couldn't ask her to do that."

He put a hand on one of those knotted up shoulders that felt too frail to handle all that had been placed on them so young. "Whatever, kid, let's get moving. Churches give me the creeps."

He guided them out into the cold night, the Christmas lights glittered from windows in an attempt to cheer the frosty night. From some windows, they could see the reflection Christmas trees glowing to themselves, presents and happy families gathered around. He could have snagged a cab but the night air was refreshing and he still had to find someone to send word to Oscar.

It didn't take long, Macy picked up a scent and followed it a couple of blocks. At the end of the street a couple a young punks had gathered. Three but only the one with the Mohawk was the one that Macy was interested in. He was grinning as he led them across the street.

One of the young men whistled low and made a catcall at them. "Lookie! Santa brought me what I asked for! My very own fuck toys!"

The trio laughed but Macy ignored them, turned to the half blood. "Lose the clowns."

The pair laughed on but it didn't take much for the half blood to see what had found him. His bright gray eyes went round and he stopped laughing. "Guys, beat it."

"What?"

"Get lost!" He snapped more in fear than threat.

"You heard him, move your asses before I forget my manners." There was no threat to the tone of his voice but the air suddenly grew heavy and charged with danger.

The pair glanced to their friend with the spiked hair and at his nod they hurried away. When they

were half a block away and moving fast, the only one that remained inclined his head just slightly. "Elder."

Macy made a face. "You smell like arrogance, you one of Oscar's whelps?"

The half blood shook his head. "I don't know what you're talking about."

One of the vampire's hands snapped out and caught the taller man by the throat, he snarled and lifted him a foot from the pavement and dragged him into the nearest alley. Once out of sight, Macy slammed the punk into the wall, hard and growled again. "Don't fuck with me, youngling!"

The half blood struggled for a moment, his eyes flashing brighter and he clawed at Macy's hand with both his own but he wasn't going anywhere. "I beg forgiveness." He forced out around his increasingly crushed throat.

Macy held on for another moment, tightened his grip just slightly, before he let go. The half blood's feet smacked hard into the pavement and he sagged against the wall he'd been slammed into. "I've a message for your master."

"It would be my honor to deliver it for you, elder."

"Tell him that Maceralrus will be arriving for a visit tomorrow and that I expect hospitality."

The half blood's eyes grew wider. "You ... you're not..." but that line of thought narrowed the full blood's eyes and the punk swallowed hard. "What time shall I tell my Lord to expect you?"

That snapped Macy's patience. He slashed out and caught the side of the punk's neck with sharp nails. The scratch was really just a scratch but it made his point that he could have ripped the man's throat out just as easily. "He should expect me when I arrive."

"I'm sorry, Elder, please, forgive me. I've never been asked to deliver something so important."

The half blood truly did look scared silly and humbled. To make up for his ill temper, Macy leaned forward and dragged his tongue across the bloody scratches he'd just made on the man's neck. The sharp, crisp taste of a half blood slid on his taste buds. "Behave and be forgiven. Tell Oscar, not to take his anger out on the messenger or I shall be displeased." He purred into the man's ear and by marking him with his scent and small feeding reinforced the small offer of protection.

"Thank you, Elder. How else may I serve?"

"Remove yourself from my sight." He ignored how the man shivered with fear and lust at the feel of Macy's tongue across his wounds and stepped back to let the man scurry away. "Well." Macy sighed into the now empty night. "Hope York's happy, he has his god damned meeting. Come on, kid, let's get you home and warmed up."

Luke wasn't entirely sure what he'd just witnessed but he did know that the vampire was unusually silent on their hunt for a cab and stayed that way all the way back to the loft. He stayed silent as they rode up the lift and he moved to check the laundry as soon as they arrived.

The loft was silent and dimly lit but he found York sitting on the floor, his back to a wall, his legs folded in front of him and his eyes shut. Luke guessed the man was meditating of some sort but he'd never actually seen anyone or knew anyone that meditated so he had no means of judging. Just in case he followed Macy to the laundry.

"Shouldn't we like, I don't know, be quiet or something?" He asked when Macy slammed the door shut on the dryer.

"Huh? Oh, no, if he didn't want to be disturbed he'd have gone to workroom. He's just thinking."

"Oh." Luke hadn't ever known anyone that thought that much either. "Thanks, by the way, for going with me."

Macy shrugged. "I so should demand sexual favors for being bored but hey, it wasn't horrible." When they moved back into the main room, York had his eyes open but he was still sitting quietly.

"Everything go okay?"

"Yeah." The vampire nodded and offered his hand to help the human stand. "Found one of Oscar's puppies and sent him word but I should get some rest in case there's trouble tomorrow."

York nodded. "How about it, Luke? Tired enough to sleep? If not, feel free to stay up."

He wasn't sure how tired he was but the idea of snuggling in bed with the pair again felt like a Christmas treat better than anything that came in wrapping paper. "Tired enough." He nodded and followed the pair upstairs to change and get ready for bed.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Twenty Eight

It wasn't long until the lights were clicked out and they were piled into the big bed together, the curtains pulled to block the sunrise. Only, no matter where Luke tried to rest, his side or back or stomach, he just couldn't get comfortable. He heard York sigh and felt strong hands catch his shoulders and hip and before he knew it he was being pulled across the space between them. The demanding grip didn't stop until he was flush against York's chest, snuggled in his arms, legs naturally falling together. He was instantly comfortable.

Macy was quick to snuggle in behind him, melding his chest to Luke's back, his hips into his ass. Another pair of legs tangled into the pile, and Luke found one of his thighs brushing upwards to rub lightly into York's groin. The contact was like fire and it burned across his nerves.

He suddenly became too aware of the feel of York's chest pillowed under his head, of the beat of his heart, the movement of his breath. He could feel the curve and warmth of Macy's body pressed to him, the soft puffs of the vampire's breath against his neck. A hand snaked across his chest, just brushing under a nipple and Luke gasped slightly. He tried to hold still but the touch made him shiver and that made the teasing hand stroke lower, across his stomach to flutter a moment before resting still.

It was impossible. He sighed and shifted in the arms holding him. "Still awake?" He whispered softly half hoping there would be no answer.

"Yes."

"Yeah." Macy sighed behind him.

"Did you mean it?" He asked softly, frightened to breath too deeply.

"Mean it?" York questioned into the darkness.

"About waiting for me to seduce you?" He asked softly but heard a sharp breath from Macy behind him.

There was a moment that hung, thick and weighted, in the darkness before York answered. "You don't need to sell your ass to stay here."

"Not selling it." Luke sighed and reached up. His fingers found the side of the witch's face a moment before his lips did. He kissed over seeking a mouth he expected to be startled but instead found open and waiting for him.

The kiss was as intense as he remembered, maybe more so because of the darkness. Luke found himself being rolled over, but not under the Frenchman but onto the man's chest. Hands pulled at him and Luke agreed with their direction and straddled the prone witch. Flannel covered hips slid and dragged along flannel-covered hips as he let the hands hold him. He dug a hand into York's hair, hungry to hold the mouth below him steady.

A small light flared and a tiny bulb set high in the headboard glowed to life. It gave just enough light, soft and indirect, to make it easier to see without being glaring. Luke cracked his eyes open and saw freckles and squinted shut eyes below him. York's kiss alone was enough to make him hard but the man's hands running across his body wasn't helping either.

Macy licked his lips and half way crouched on the bed. He wanted to pounce and spring on the pair but York had been clear that the boy needed to progress things on his own and Macy had agreed. Watching them would be enough; the sight of the two humans kissing and touching was making him crazy.

He cleared his throat lightly. "Am I allowed to join in?" He asked in a small voice, knowing if they ignored him or said no he'd have to back off to the other side of the bed and just enjoy the show, maybe pounce on York later.

The pair broke the kiss and two pairs of eyes glanced toward Macy. Luke glanced down to York and when he caught Macy's eye again there was a light smile on his face. That was all the invitation Macy needed, he was surging forward as the boy was reaching for him and he claimed his own kiss. Luke moaned into his mouth and by the time Macy released him the boy was lightly grinding his hips into York's.

He leaned away, breathing hard and bent to kiss York lightly. "Shirts off, both of you." Macy sighed, he was already stripped down to his boxers but he wanted to see them.

There was no pause, Luke shoved his hands under York's shirt and started to pull. It made the Frenchman chuckle. "Eager little thing isn't he?"

"I think he wants you naked."

York let the shirt be peeled from his body and be tossed aside before he caught the boy's face in his hands. "Do you want me naked, Luke?"

"I..." His brain didn't want to work long enough to process the question. It seemed all his blood had traveled lower. He ran his hands across the exposed chest displayed before him. "God, you're so fucking perfect." He heard himself whisper. He glanced over to where Macy sat, waiting, watching and just as stunning as York was. "Both of you, I'd be happy to just be able to watch you."

York traced a thumb across the boy's cheek bone, down to follow the line of his jaw. "You can have far more than that if you wish it."

The touch was so tender, the voice so sincere and comforting that it startled Luke. He wasn't used to any of those things when it came to sex, his private non-work experiences limited and certainly not experienced enough to leave room for much more than lust and passion. It startled him enough to glance down and he fell head first into the most open blue eyes he'd ever seen.

For a moment, he was certain York could see his soul and read his mind and Luke felt some of his control crumbling. For a flash he felt like a kid again, uncertain and desperate and the words fell from his mouth without thought to censor them. "I'm so lonely." He almost sobbed.

York saw the battle between lust and desire and the need to simply breakdown and weep being fought in the teary brown eyes. He pulled the boys head down and very gently kissed the crinkled up forehead. It broke his heart because he understood, far too well. "Whatever you wish Luke, you're not alone now."

His eyelashes fluttered but he blinked back the tears that had welled up at facing the sheer honesty in York's eyes. "Please, touch me?" He forced out and glanced over to where Macy sat watching them as he had the laundry in the washing machine. "Please?"

That was all he needed to say, two pairs of hands fell upon him. They touched him, sliding over shoulders down to his flannel covered ass, slipped forward to ghost a touch over his groin and even with his eyes shut he knew that had to be Macy, York was too restrained to be so bold so soon. Hands pulled at his shirt and he lifted his arms and let them strip the fabric away and the hands returned to trace across his ribs and stomach.

"So skinny." York sighed. "Growing body needs to eat better."

The fingers mapping his torso tickled and Luke squirmed and giggled a little, giddy at the touch that was everywhere. "Yes, mommy, I need to eat better." And he let one of his own hands creep lower to find and cup the hard, hidden length tucked in York's flannel pants.

The touch made York hiss a little and his head lolled to the side but Luke didn't have long to admire it because Macy had latched onto him. He straddled York's thighs behind where Luke was sitting across the man's hips and he'd wrapped his arms around Luke's waist. The vampire's mouth was latched onto his neck, suckling, kissing, nipping and the sharp catch of his teeth only added to the pleasure instead of detracting it. It made Luke wonder what it was like to be fed from and for the first time the idea seemed erotic and intimate instead of threatening. Then, Macy arched forward and pressed his groin, hard and ready, tight to his ass and all thought dissolved.

It toppled him down to land in York's arms, to rest on the man's chest. Luke heard moaning and knew it was from his own throat. Macy held onto his hips, guiding them in a teasing grind with layers of fabric between them but the intent was there and Luke was quickly dissolving into a being of lust and need. His mouth found York's neck and attacked it and the rougher he kissed and nipped the more the Frenchman groaned low in this throat, under Luke's mouth.

York's eyes opened to mere slits and he saw Macy grinning behind the boy and the look in the clear, bright green eyes made him moan. He knew the vampire well enough to know what he was thinking and he nodded softly his agreement.

"Oh, Luke." He sighed and caught a hand on the boy's neck, pulling him away enough to place kisses on his face. "Tell us to stop or Macy is going to have his way with you."

He wasn't entirely sure what that meant but Luke didn't care. "Don't stop, please, don't." He nearly sobbed. That was the final stopgap measure holding the pair back. One set of hands turned him over and the other stripped his pants off in one smooth motion. Luke found himself on his back, settled between York's legs, wrapped in the man's arms.

"Slide up." Macy whispered and watched as York gathered them together and half reclined against the headboard. York was still half dressed but Luke was laid out, naked, hard and displayed. He smiled wider, knowing that York had done that, displayed the boy for him to see and admire and it almost made him purr. He ran his hands up the boy's legs, loving how they twitched at the teasing touch and how he struggled to keep his eyes open to watch.

That was a fight Luke lost when Macy dropped down and swallowed his length. There was no pause, no slow licks, no teasing touch, and going from nothing to being almost entirely consumed made him cry out and his eyes shut. He arched and writhed but strong hands held him. York's mouth fell to his neck and licked his ear; one of his hands found a nipple and teased it.

"Macy's very orally fixated but so good at it no?" He whispered into Luke's ear, surprised by how turned on he was and how heavy his accent was.

"God, oh, yes." Luke moaned but forgot how to speak when Macy slid a finger into his ass. He gasped and shuddered and wondered when the vampire managed to find lube. What was worse, was that every movement rubbed his lower back into York's cock and he could feel how hard the other man was.

York glanced down and felt his own chest grow tight at the sight, his own cock twitched in delighted memory of how skilled Macy was. The vampire glanced up at that moment and quirked an eyebrow, the unspoken question was clear to York. Did he want to fuck Luke? It would be hot to be deep inside the boy while Macy blew him, the thought alone made him tremble and he could feel his cock weeping in need. But... was he ready for that? Was Luke?

He shook his head slightly no and caught the confused look that passed across what he could see of Macy's face. There would be time to deal with that when his arms weren't filled with writhing, sexy, teenager. "He won't stop, not until you come. He likes to taste his lover." York whispered but knew Macy could hear him too. Both men moaned in reply. He pinched the nipple he'd been teasing and Luke rubbed harder into his groin. It was good motivation to encourage the boy to fall over the edge.

Macy must have done something right because Luke cried out and arched. The boy's legs slid against York's and his toes curled. His head fell back onto York's shoulder, his mouth open in a cry that was silent and York petted and soothed and teased Luke as he came tucked in his arms. The boy was beautiful and Macy was beautiful and York knew how fragile and fleeting beauty could be.

He held the panting, exhausted boy as Macy slithered up their bodies and braced his weight on his hands on either side of them. When the vampire leaned down, York met his kiss eagerly and it tasted sharply of Luke. It made him moan, it was even hotter feeling the boy held so tightly between them.

Macy pulled away long enough to scoop up the sated and tired boy, betraying the strength that his body didn't show. He placed Luke gently on the bed beside them, petting him and earning soft little mews at the contact before he turned his attention back to York. The Frenchman rested below him, blue eyes bright and holding such unexplored depths.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Twenty Nine

"I love your eyes when you're turned on." He whispered but leaned forward and dragged his tongue across the tiny freckles under those haunting eyes. "And these freckles." He lowered his body down and rubbed against York's in a cat like stretch and delighted at how the human's eyes fluttered shut and his breath caught.

Luke caught his breath and opened his eyes. His legs still trembled from the force of his orgasm, and his mind was still trying to process just what Macy did to be so much better than anything he'd ever felt before. Until he opened his eyes anyway and saw the two men kissing, running hands across each other's bodies, moving like one flesh to slid sheltering fabric away.

The vampire was all pale, creamy flesh, just like he'd seen in the shower, but he nearly glowed in the dim light. Luminescent and fair, like some odd night blooming flower that hid from the garish colors of the day bloomers, he was even more stunning when aroused. York was all peachy tones and sighing life, broader in shoulders, physically looking stronger, vital and bright. The two together were sun and moon and Luke was struck blind and dumb from staring too long at them.

He watched as Macy kissed the exposed flesh, worshipped it. York shut his eyes and arched below hand and tongue, moaned in deep gasping breaths when Macy found all the tender spots on neck and chest and lower to circle the man's naval and down to place long, slow teasing licks across his cock. It was nothing like the devouring that he'd done on Luke, this was meant to arouse and not sate.

If Luke could have mustered any strength he'd have moved to kiss the witch. The way the older man was gasping almost begged to be kissed, Luke wanted to suck on that trembling bottom lip but he could barely lift his head let alone think about a round two. York's hands fisted into the sheets, clenched up in his struggle for control and that pouted lip got sucked in and bitten between strong teeth.

Some unspoken breaking point was reached and York's gasping breath growled out. His hands released the sheets and grabbed a handful of Macy's hair and he pulled the vampire up with what should have been a painful yank. It didn't even make Macy flinch, in fact, the loss of control in his lover made his face a mask of twisted delight. Before the vampire could begin his next assault, York caught him under the arms and roughly rolled the slighter man under him.

"Oh, yeah baby doll, oh, hard." Macy moaned in a hiccupped voice and he glanced over and shared a lewd, warm smile with Luke.

"Oh, oh fuck." York sighed softly and his accent made the words sexier. He'd pressed forward, as always he loved to feel the head of his cock against Macy's body, against that so seldom touched upper thigh, against the soft feel of the vampire's balls and back to the entrance that Macy would beg to have impaled. Only, he'd found that entrance slick and ready and the hot unexpected feel of it shocked him and almost shattered his control. He had to freeze to keep from slamming into the ready body.

"No, no, no, don't hold back." Macy petted the dark brown hair still so short. York had shaved his head a few months earlier and never explained why he'd done something so extreme. "Hard, baby doll, hard like only you can..." Macy trembled and found himself cursing, purely internally, York's extreme will and his stubborn reluctance to let go. Whenever he thought he'd taken the human to the ends of his control, York always surprised him and found a touch more.

York growled at the words and caught Macy's legs. The vampire was beyond double jointed and it didn't seem to matter how long he held a position, his limbs never lost feeling or cramped up. He teased them both by just circling that slick, hot, entrance, his eyes open and locked on Macy's teasing green and the mocking challenge held in them.

That was it, that was all he needed and he pushed forward with violent need. Macy wailed but there was only pleasure and delight in the sound, his body folded further up inviting deeper invasion and York took that invitation. York moved easily, each thrust long, quick and rough and made the vampire arch to meet him and moan in desperate hunger.

York sighed and moaned in French and had no idea what he was saying. It was too much, he was too turned on, Luke had been too sexy to stand and Macy was like falling into an ocean of pleasure. He gasped and forced his eyes open and was surprised to see that even Macy had retreated behind his own eyelids. The vampire loved to watch.

"Feed." York growled out.

Green eyes fluttered opened, stunned, hazed in lust and rapture. "What?"

"Feed." York ordered and lowered down so his neck rubbed at Macy's mouth.

He knew better than to question, knew York meant more than a taste. They were going to meet Oscar tomorrow and it was only smart to be as strong and full as possible, that. Or, maybe, the motive was more urgent, deeply feeding pushed Macy closer to release more than a hand on his cock and, in the past, he'd come just from feeding, at least he had when it was York he was feeding from.

He mouthed the tense neck and tried to focus around the blinding pleasure. It was too much, the smell of his skin and sex, the taste of Luke in his mouth, the feel of the blood surging below such fragile skin. Macy knew he wasn't going to be gentle and he bit down anyway.

Distantly, he heard the hushed cry of startled pain from his lover but the feel of flesh tearing in his mouth and blood spilling from the wound cut off any worry. This was life, the taste of that exquisite blood making him strong and his body trembling on the cliffs edge of a pleasure bright enough to blind him. It filled his mouth and ran, hot and sweet, down his throat. He glowed in pleasure and held York's neck to his mouth, awed by the trust because no one offered their throat to a full blood, and yet, York did. He felt York coming, felt the hot release inside his body and the trembling waves of pleasure but knew the ripples from being fed from wouldn't allow the human to find satisfaction so easily.

Without breaking his mouth from the bite, Macy rolled them. He flipped them easily, York was limp and shuddering in his arms and Macy felt strong enough to wrestle alligators. He propped his lover against the headboard and dropped his ass, with careless abandon, back down onto that still hard length. He fed and fucked himself and knew nothing the world could offer him could be outshine what he held in his arms.

It felt like an eternity and yet a single instant, the bite slowed it's flow and Macy heard the dark, soft, whimpers rising like bubbles in champagne from York's throat. He reached down and stroked himself, once, twice and didn't make it to three before his body lost it's hold on tension and tease and came. He arched back, blood trickling from his mouth and the healing wound on York's neck, and let himself come with a desperate, predatory growl.

He felt hands on his chest, nails scratching weakly at his sides, across his back, his nipples, down to clasp tightly to his hips. York thrust hard, or as hard as his spent and weakened body would allow and his head fell back with a thump to the headboard as he came again. His breath was fire that burned as it tried to escape his lungs and he was swept away, lost in the waves of his release.

As his body stilled and dropped, eased from passion, York tried to catch his breath and still heard himself moaning softly. Macy still sat across his hips, holding his softening cock inside his body from the sheer unwillingness to let the joining end. The vampire had his hands wrapped around his own chest, hugging himself and sighing, his bright clear eyes half closed like a satisfied cat.

He hung there for a few heartbeats before his tongue licked out to lap the blood spilled from the corner of his mouth and he made a soft, purring sound of contentment. When Macy lurched forward, York caught the man in his arms and let him lick softly at the healing, tender, wound on his neck.

It was then that York remembered Luke and he glanced over to where the boy lay beside them. His eyes were wide and his cock half hard but there was only lust there, not fear, and just a touch of hungry loneliness. York petted Macy's head with one hand and reached out to stroke the other hand's fingers across Luke's face.

"Anything you wish, Luke, anything."

Luke drifted like a feather on a light breeze up from a sound sleep. Memory was just as light and slow to awaken but when it did he smiled in the dark. They drifted asleep, he had a sense he'd fallen asleep first. He vaguely remembered two warm and naked bodies snuggled around his own very naked one and then, nothing. No nightmares, no bad dreams, no long struggle to sleep or cold shivers waking him up, just deep, peaceful, contented sleep.

He woke snuggled against one body, not two and he lifted his head enough to make out the pale shape of Macy's chest under his head. The bed was big enough that York could have slid somewhere else but Luke extended a leg and didn't find the Frenchman asleep behind him and a quick glance over Macy showed no mound in the covers on the other side.

A yawn shook him and he considered dropping back to sleep but it did worry him that York wasn't in bed. The man had to be exhausted; just watching had worn Luke out. He lay very still and tried to hear if anyone was moving about, tired to hear if maybe York had just gotten up to go the bathroom. There were no sounds of running water and when he glanced over between the crack in the curtains he saw no light under the bathroom door. That settled it, he had to know to be able to get back to sleep and he pushed himself up on an elbow.

And pulled back when he saw Macy's eyes open. It was like something from a horror movie, waking to find the man in bed with you dead or watching you sleep like some crazed stalker. Only, Macy wasn't dead and he wasn't actually watching. The steady pattern of the slower breaths of sleep never faltered and the vampire never moved. He leaned closer and saw that the half opened eyes were unfocused and Macy really was asleep, sprawled out on his back, with his eyes open.

There was no way he could get right back to sleep after seeing something that odd so instead he slid from the covers and out of the bed. The pants he'd been wearing earlier had seemed to vanish but he found Macy's boxers and figured it was better than nothing. They weren't too loose on his hips even if the flamingos made him feel silly.

Now that he was out of bed, he saw the glow of a light from downstairs seeping in under the rail curtain and heard softly playing classical music. Luke went to the bathroom, emptied his bladder, scratched his hip and figured the light and music would most likely be where York was. With a wide yawn, he padded down the spiral stairs as softly as he could and sure enough spotted York curled up at one end of the sofa.

The older man was fully dressed and in the same clothes he'd worn before bed and how he managed that, Luke didn't know. Maybe a 'find my sex scattered clothes spell' or something but it made him feel even sillier wearing Macy's boxers. The Frenchman's legs were curled up under him and he was gazing out the night dark windows. In one of his hands he cupped a brandy snifter and a bottle sat open on the table beside him.

Luke approached carefully, making no effort to be overly noisy or silent and he stopped near the sofa. "Is it okay to join you?" He asked just above a whisper.

That got York's attention and he glanced over. His mouth quirked up in a small smiled smirk at seeing what the boy was wearing but there was nothing malicious in the expression. "Grab a blanket before you freeze to death." He waved to one of the throw blankets tossed on the back of a near by chair and waited until Luke had wrapped it around his bare shoulders. "The boxers are very cute. Macy will be sorry to have missed seeing you in them."

Luke prayed he wouldn't blush. "Yeah, well, couldn't find my pants." But that made him think of Macy and how oddly he was lying upstairs. "Does he always sleep like that, you know, the eyes?"

"All full bloods do, none will sleep, soundly, really, sleep, with their eyes shut all the way. Too much the predator for that, it's really creepy to watch, he'll even blink, sometimes his eyes will track movement. He didn't wake when you got up?"

"I don't think so."

"Huh." That would be odd, Macy tended to wake when someone sharing their bed moved too much. Which meant that his lover trusted the young boy more than he'd expected. "What are you doing up? I didn't wake you, did I?"

"No, I..." but it sounded silly to say he'd woken up and noticed the absence and wanted to check up on a man that was utterly more capable of taking care of himself than Luke was. "What're you doing up?"

The brandy swirled around the fat bottomed glass for a second before York sipped at it. "I was thinking, I might be able to craft a spell that will lock that power you carry away. Without the key, no one could use it, not without breaking the spell and that won't be an easy task. Not many folks on my level around any more. Might be a good option until we can teach you some measure of control, or find you a focus." That meant if they wanted Luke, they'd have to pry the key out of York. It was proper for someone more experienced to place themselves between harm and their apprentice and York knew there wasn't much they could do to him to force the key from him.

The swirl of the rich drink in it's clear glass was oddly hypnotizing so close to dawn and Luke sat and thought about the answer York and given and how he hadn't actually answered. Right then, in that moment, he didn't want to think about magic or Elves or being in danger and he didn't think York was really thinking about it either.

"Why didn't you fuck me tonight?" He asked into the silence of the night.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Thirty

"Why didn't you fuck me tonight?" He asked into the silence of the night.

"What?" The brandy stopped swirling.

"When Macy was sucking on me, why didn't you fuck me? He wanted you to, I wanted you to, god you were so close and... well... why didn't you?" A small bruised part of him whispered that it was because he was a whore and the elegant man didn't fuck whores.

"I wanted to." York answered honestly.

"Then why didn't you?"

Those sad, blue eyes glanced out into the dark of the night and another sip of the brandy was slowly taken. York licked the taste of the fine liquor from his lips. "Macy thinks I wanted to help you because you remind me of someone I knew before I met him."

"What?"

"His name was Franck, he was a power like you are. When they came to arrest us, he threw himself between a soldier's sword and my body. It's not like in the movies, one slash and someone is dead, it's not so easy. He was like a father to me."

The words that spilled into the night were accented and soft and the pain was heavy in them. It left Luke feeling a little overwhelmed. "I'm sorry."

That earned him another flashed, small, bitter smile. "Don't be, none of us expected to live to see home again. It's not because you remind me of Franck that I felt compelled to help you." York sighed and set the brandy down next to the bottle. "But because you and I? Have far too many things in common for me to not see similarities."

Luke puffed a small, snorted breath of protest and shook his head. "We're nothing alike, you're so... and I'm just nothing."

That took some of the bitter sting from York's smile. "I never knew my father either. I was a greenwood baby."

"I don't know what that means."

"It's a nicer way of saying bastard. Among my people, during the spring festivals, it wasn't unheard of for a woman to conceive a child in the woods at night. Even if she knew the name of the father, it was to never be spoken of because he became the embodiment of the Lord God during the rituals. A child conceived this way is considered blessed but outside of our people, I was nothing more than a common bastard. So I never knew my father, like you, but I adored my mother."

"Like me." Luke agreed and let the witch glance off behind him to stare out the windows at the night again.

"She was a priestess, a witch as you'd call it and saw that I had talent and skill greater than her own. As a small child, I quickly outpaced what teachers were around our village so she moved miles and miles away from all she knew to a village that had the teachers I needed. I don't remember much before our move, I was quite small but I remember walking for days and days with everything we owned upon our backs. She gave up everything she knew, everyone she knew, for me."

He sighed and took the brandy back up and sipped at its warmth. "My teacher's name was Elina, she was this short little thing, maybe a hundred pounds sopping wet, all stubborn will and power. She'd been human once, ages before but she'd grown so much in strength and skill that she'd shed her skins of humanity and was immortal. She was so wise, so human still but so old, she became like my aunt and those of power that gathered around her my extended family. Franck lived deep in the woods near there, isolated for fear of the power he carried being stolen against his will. It was a pleasant way to grow up.

"But like you, I too lost my mother and almost at the same age. I was maybe, ten, eleven or so? It was late summer and some soldiers stopped by our home. They were drunk already but

demanded more and food and my mother ordered me to slip out the back and run through the woods to Elina's home. I'd never once disobeyed her, but in the woods I heard her scream, I don't know if I actually heard it or if it was more of power than voice but I heard it and I returned. I hid in the back room, I saw the men rape her, one stabbed her and she bled..." even a thousand years wasn't enough time to block some memories or dull some pains. "They panicked, frightened they'd be punished because we were a very close community. So they set fire to our home. I tried to get her out but I was just a boy, skinny like you and small for my age and she was most likely already dead but I was distraught and unable to make much sense of things. The roof was thatch and it caught fire and it caught her dress fire and the fire burned up her and up my arms and I still couldn't let go and leave her." He forced a bitter half smile. "Anyway, I was pulled from the house by another student of Elina's or else I would have died there. So we've both had mothers we've loved desperately stolen from us. We both had to grow up too quickly, had too much responsibility too soon, survived difficult things at too young of an age."

Luke felt the weight of the words he was being offered and sat awed. "I'm sorry."

"You asked why I didn't fuck you tonight, even though I wanted to? Because you remind me so much of what I was at your age, I want to make sure you know, really know, that people can value you for who you are and not what you can be for them." He downed the last swallow of the brandy and set the glass down near the bottle. "Oh, I'm so drunk."

There wasn't anything Luke could say. The words spoke so much more than their base meanings. Like small darts, they'd struck him both on emotions he'd felt but didn't have the words or bravery to admit and of all the limitless things it said about the man brave enough to speak them.

He dropped the blanket from around his shoulders and stood up, offering a hand to York. "Then come on you, let's get you to bed to sleep it off." York's hand was solid and warm in his own and he accepted the help to reach his feet with just the smallest of staggers.

"I shouldn't drink after Macy's fed, Goddess bless me, I get drunk so easily."

He draped the man's arm over his shoulder. "All the more reason to sleep."

York leaned some of his weight on the boy and patted the too slender stomach. "Sleep, but those boxers are coming off."

Luke grinned. "Say the magic word."

"Brat." York growled and Luke chuckled and neither man noticed the curtain wavering a little as the form up above them slipped back into bed to pretend to be asleep.

Brandy rarely left him with a hangover but he wasn't normally stupid enough to drink so much after Macy fed so deeply. York woke with a headache and tongue that felt like sandpaper, light stabbed in from a crack in the curtain and he pulled a pillow over his head. He trickled a small amount of power into a healing spell but knew that spells and magic could only do so much. Getting drunk left a body dehydrated and that would only be cured by staggering out of bed to find some water. Which would be easier to do since he'd woken up alone and there was no snuggling warmth to lull him in place.

That still didn't mean he wouldn't lie there until the spell dimmed most of the headache and a lot of the light sensitivity away. Only then did he sit up and push the curtains back, he pulled on the day old clothes and shuffled to the bathroom. There was evidence that the bathroom had been used, Macy's damp towel was dropped on the floor and Luke's was folded neatly but damp to the touch. It made him wonder how drunk he'd been and how deeply he'd slept.

He debated finding the missing duo right away but after rubbing a hand over the day's growth of

stubble and sniffing himself, he figured a shower and shave were in order first. Drinking always made him feel dirty, even if he wasn't. One of the best things about the current day and age was it's plumbing and he relished it. Unlike a lot of his contemporaries, York, as well as his people, had been a clean lot but a hot shower in a private stall beat a cold wash in a stream any day of the week.

Cleaned, shaved and with fresh casual clothes on, he felt almost ready to face the day. Even if his head still felt to large and his mouth too dry, he could fix that with some tea and the fluttery feel in his stomach wanted dry toast. He stumbled now, instead of shuffling, down the metal stairs and found both the men he was seeking.

They'd camped out in front of the television, playing another one of Macy's violent video games. It made York smirk a bit when he saw which one, it featured vampires and magic users and they ran around beating up humans, trolls, and the like. Macy had giggled for a week when they'd gotten it and now it seemed it was amusing Luke almost as much.

He yawned and made his way past them to the kitchen. "Morning."

"Not morning anymore." Luke added cheerfully.

"How late is it?"

"After one, there's tea made up, mug's in the microwave, Macy's idea."

"You left the bottle out, figured you were really drunk."

He yawned again, grunted noncommittally, and started his tea reheating. It felt good to wake up with both of them near but his thoughts were still heavy and he was going to need time to adjust to the memories Luke stirred to lighten them again. He wanted to be twelve again and able to go and sit at Elina's knee and pour his heart out and know she'd have the words to make it at least a little better. She would have no words strong enough to ease him now and the world wasn't as simple as leaning against her strength.

He carried his tea over and settled on the sofa behind the pair and sipped at it, trying to settle his mind and worries. When he felt less leaden and more alive, he set the tea down. "When do you want to go over to see Oscar?"

The game continued but Macy sighed. "Damn it, I was hoping you'd have forgotten that bullshit."

"He's the easiest source of answers."

"And a raging asshole as well. You know he'll go all ceremonial on me, and I hate dealing with that shit. We'll be lucky to get out of there without a fight."

"There won't be a fight if you don't start one, and he won't make a move on Luke while I'm there." He noticed the boy sitting carefully, listening, and it was affecting his game play. "When do you want to go?"

"Should make the fucker wait."

"But?"

"But I want to get it over with, so when ever you're ready."

He took his tea back up and sipped at its mostly cool contents. "When you get to a save point, stop. I want to get Luke armed before we go."

"Armed?" Luke questioned but while he glanced away his character got killed. "Aw, damn it!"

Macy laughed. "Don't worry, kiddo, unlike today? The game can be started over."

All Souls Pass

Chapter Thirty One

Luke turned the blade he'd been given over in his hand and looked at the pair with skepticism. "I know jack shit about knives, couldn't I have a gun?"

"No guns." York ordered, his fingers deftly finished buttoning the nice dress shirt closed.

"How about a little one?"

"Guns aren't much good with a vampire or magic users. Bullets don't do much against us and well, hard to fire a gun against someone that can tell the gunpowder not to burn. If you're lucky you get one shot." Macy hadn't bothered to dress nicely. In fact, it seemed he'd gone out of his way to look as sloppy as possible. His jeans were worn and old, complete with a few tears and his t-shirt was faded and stretched. "Here." He took the blade from the human and re-settled it in Luke's hand. "It's a push blade."

"Oh that helps me so much." He sighed and glanced down to where the odd blade hilt now tucked under his fingers.

Macy shook his head. "Curl your hand into a fist. There? See? Harder to knock it out of your hand this way."

"Blade's so small." He turned the steel over from where it sprouted from his fingers.

"You're no fight for a quarter blood even. If things go badly, stick whichever idiot grabs you and run, use surprise to get away. Don't stop running until you make it back here or the club. If you get back here, don't come out, no matter what you see or hear. Even if you think you see us being skinned alive in the streets."

"But..."

"It'll be a trap." York added and strapped the nylon sheath to the back of the boy's belt. "If they had one of us, they wouldn't need to lure you out, the spells on the doors would open for us."

"If you make it to the club, sit your ass down at the bar and wait for one of us to come get you. Don't leave that bar, not even to piss." Macy added and shook his head. "Maybe we should leave him here?"

"We need to show we can protect him."

"It's my life we're talking about, I have a right to know what's going on."

"Babes to the slaughter." Macy mumbled and shrugged into his coat. His own blade was settled neatly inside of it, a comforting weight.

"There won't be a need for a fight if you mind your manners." York reminded him.

"Mind my manners? Prick needs to mind his first!" He turned back to Luke who looked uneasy but had sheathed the small blade. "Stay in sight, better, make sure you stay in York's sight. We should put a leash on him so he can't be snatched."

"What?"

"He's kidding."

"Am not."

It wasn't long until they were headed to Hotel del Morte Dolce with York driving in tight knuckled restraint and Macy sitting slouched beside him. Everyone on the street knew about Morte Dolce but gossip was done behind closed doors and with trusted friends. Just how the city was divided up wasn't clear to street hustlers like Luke and he didn't care to be frank about it but everyone knew that to live a long life, you stayed out of the big boys way.

That meant avoiding the closed gates of the city's largest church where only those with invitations were allowed to worship, the office building planted dead smack in the city's largest park and the turn of the century hotel downtown that stood in quiet elegance but never actually checked anyone in.

No one really knew who ran the elves and the church could be followed by very open hierarchy and everyone knew who Oscar Dorinus was but few people knew anything about him. Proud, structured, controlled, stubborn, often cursed as cruel and ruthless, he'd been the only one to wrest order from the chaos that was the vampire community. Now, quarter and half bloods strove to be invited into his ranks as foot soldiers and yet when they made it in, they never whispered a word of their involvement.

"Luke?" York finally spoke up from the front seat when it was pretty clear that Macy wasn't going to.

"Yeah?"

"There's always other full bloods with Oscar, so watch yourself and don't talk to anyone."

"But, why would other full bloods bother with him?"

"Oscar's from a very strong line, he's younger than some of them but stronger already, he's set up a system where if a full blood follows his rules, they get a cut of the pie. They obey because they don't want to fight him and because he's made them rich but really his rules aren't too horrible or difficult to follow. He's the closest thing the vampires have had to a real leader in centuries. Just remember, full bloods are trickier than half."

"Ah, okay."

Macy shook his head. "Babes to slaughter."

"Full bloods," York continued, ignoring Macy. "They don't really have magic, not like a human or elf has but they're creatures of flesh and power anyway. They have limited control over their physical bodies, lengthening nails and teeth at will, sharpening both at will. They're able to move soundlessly, go unnoticed, they're strong and fast and quick. The older they are, the better they are, the stronger, the faster, the tougher. No speaking, not wandering away, no questioning

anything we tell you, you're nothing more than a pretty pet to this crowd. All vampires view humans as little more than pets."

"I'll stay close and keep my mouth shut."

"Good."

They rode the rest of the way in silence and when they reached the hotel in the afternoon sunlight, a parking space right out front was sectioned off. A trio of what looked like quarter bloods stood near the spot, almost guarding it and one disappeared inside as York pulled the car to the curb. Another hurried over to open Macy's door, bowing slightly but no one moved to open the door for York or Luke.

The third stood waiting for the car keys and when York moved to pass him he cleared his throat slightly. "I can park the car for you."

"I think it's fine where it is and forgive me for not giving the likes of you the keys to my car." York nearly sneered and raised an eyebrow, knowing the quarter blood wouldn't be strong enough to see the power in him and making it clear from manner who was superior.

The man nodded and stepped back. "Yes, sir."

"Good, boy." York smirked and moved to take Luke's elbow. "Whenever you're ready Mace." He moved them to stand slightly behind his lover.

Macy nodded but just looked pissed. He rolled his neck slightly and popped the vertebrae. "Alright, let's get this over with." He shrugged his shoulders under his coat to settle the blade into an easier position to reach and was glad he'd worn his metal tipped ass kicking boots.

They were lead to a wood door with brass accents and it was opened ahead of them. Inside was a hotel lobby from the turn of the last century, filled with rich red carpets and ornate carved wood, accented with brass that shined and smooth marble. The large wood counter had been turned into more of a receptionist's desk and the day and age was betrayed by the high tech computer monitor perched on it's marble top.

Inside was a handful of people, all looking more like quarter bloods than half and they stopped whatever they were doing to openly stare. Macy paused and tilted his head to the side for a second before he wrinkled his nose up in distaste. "Ballroom." He nodded with his head to the door at the top of the short flight of stairs. That stopped the young woman that had been approaching them in her tracks, her services no longer required.

Macy led them up the stairs with the same strong steps as if he were climbing a mountain to storm a fortified castle. He looked out of place in all the elegance and style in his tight, ratty jeans and un-tucked t-shirt. There were others dressed casually, hiding around corners to peek out and openly stare at them but all the people sent to open doors or guide them were as formally dressed as the hotel's grand style demanded.

At the top of the stairs, one of the sets of large doors opened from the inside ahead of them. The door was held open by the same Mohawk wearing punk that Macy had slammed into a wall the day before only this time he was dressed in a better style and had his hair flattened down as if he was going to his mother's funeral.

Macy paused just outside the door and smirked. "Didn't kill you, huh?"

"No elder."

The smirk grew nastier. "Pity."

Luke's new sneakers didn't make a sound on the polished wood floor of the ballroom and the silence made him feel like a ghost next to the clicking of Macy's boots and York's loafers. The ballroom was grand, wide and long with huge crystal chandeliers hung over head that cast warm light across the room. The windows were tall and stained glass and the setting sun pierced in and tossed colors across the floor and walls like a child's spilled paints. It was, easily, the most elegant thing Luke had ever seen and it made him feel small even before he saw what they were walking toward.

The elegance didn't seem to intimidate Macy; it just seemed to annoy him. At the far end of the ballroom stood two lines of people, men and women, all very pale. The ones closest to the door they'd entered at looked more like half or quarter bloods but closer to the massive fireplace at the end of the ballroom the eyes betrayed them as at least half or full blooded. Each one was dressed in their best, groomed and styled and about as fancy and uniformed as vampires ever got. That meant instead of dresses and gowns, suits and ties, there was leather and latex, corsets and black lace. There was an expensive elegance to them but most looked like they were wearing their club best and it was decidedly sexier and darker than what fashion considered proper for a formal event.

Both lines stood flanked on either side of a length of dark, blood red carpet and at it's end, standing as straight as if a board was hidden under his suit coat, was Oscar Dorinus. Luke had never seen him before but gossip said he was either very handsome or disfigured and ugly, young or maybe an old man, tall like a giant or shorter than average and he'd prepared himself for the worst.

Only, Oscar wasn't the worst. He was as tall as York, just taller than Macy by that half a head or so, as pale as Macy in that same luminescent milky shade that all full bloods had. He wasn't a physically intimidating man, wider in the shoulders than Macy but only just slightly and still he looked like York could knock him on his ass. He was wearing a perfectly tailored suit that had to be designer, dark black with tiny thin pinstripes, a dark blood red shirt and a slender black tie.

His hair was black, as coal, night, raven wing black as Macy's but it hung down in a thick shower to the middle of his back. Since he was only the second full blood Luke had ever met, he couldn't say if there was a racial similarity to the two or not. They looked similar, Oscar had Macy's nose, the shape of their mouths were similar. Oscar's face was more round, less angular than Macy's. His cheekbones slightly less sharp, his chin a little more square, his forehead a touch more wide. He had green eyes as well, less crisp emerald glowing like Macy's and more murky, with touches of clear blue and light brown mixed in the overly bright, obviously full blood, shade.

It left Luke wondering if all full bloods looked similar but when he glanced around the lines standing as an almost honor guard he wasn't so sure. There was black hair present, a lot of them had hair so dark, and green eyes, and pale skin but none looked as similar as the two full bloods. Since he didn't know which of the group they passed might be the warned of other full bloods, he had no way of knowing. He just knew the pair looked similar and definitely knew one another.

Macy's shoulders had hunched a little more as he walked dismissively past the lines of people on either side of the carpet. He tipped his hat back on his head but made no move to remove it respectfully and he shoved his hands in his tight jean pockets like a pouting child or bored teenager. Oscar tried very hard to keep his expression neutral, Luke could see that, his eyebrows twitched slightly but held in place. The corner of his mouth frowned for a heartbeat before settling out into its schooled mask. He was struggling to not look displeased or disappointed. It wasn't just Luke, everyone in the room felt the growing tension as the pair become closer with each stride. As if they were magnets of the same polarity, trying to push each other away and everyone around them could feel it.

Finally, Macy stopped about four paces in front of the taller man. He stuck his chin out looking even more stubborn and kept his hands in his pockets. There was no difference, no subservience

in either man and for a tense moment they locked eyes. Neither man looked away.

"Elder." Oscar finally acknowledged and inclined his head.

That was a cue for the gathered crowd. Almost as one they knelt, bowed forward, the backs of their necks exposed. It was a sign of submission that no vampire, half or full blooded, gave easily and yet not one of them balked at it.

Macy sighed. "Always were a pompous ass, Oscar." He saw the way Oscar's eyes narrowed just slightly but he'd turned to glance at the gathered people. "Get up you ninnies. If I want your necks I'll take it, don't offer it."

There was an uncomfortable moment of glances exchanged before Oscar gave the slightest wave of his hand and the gathered group rose back to their feet. None were quite willing to meet either full blood directly in the eye.

"I tried to warn them of your more relaxed ways." Oscar smirked just slightly.

"See? I always saw it as you having a stick up your ass."

There was a second and a half when even Luke could see the insult Oscar had on the tip of his tongue. They all could see that the gang leader wanted to trade barb for barb desperately but he squared his shoulders and held it back.

"You bring honor to our house with your visit. May I offer you refreshment?" Oscar forced out around his tight jaw, falling back on ceremony.

With the smallest of gestures, the line to his left stepped back and six people dressed in white moved forward. Three men, three women, at least half appeared to be human and the other half quarter bloods or maybe a weak half blood. All six had their eyes lowered and were obviously right where they wanted to be. It was an honor and they were nearly overflowing with pride at having been chosen.

Macy stepped to the line of offerings in white and walked with casually slow steps down the line. It surprised him that one of the human women was in fact a low level witch and he was tempted to accept her. Any magic user would taste better than a normal human and Oscar knew him well enough to guess where his tastes were. Not that Macy had ever made a secret of his preference for witches, or humans, but still, this was about letting Oscar off the hook and he wasn't prepared to do that yet.

"Really, Oscar, I would have thought your palate was more sophisticated than this, rabble." He turned away from the line and the instant sense of rejection that swept the ones in white. He was being cruel and if they were so poorly educated to know that he wasn't being cruel to them but to Oscar, well, it wasn't his fault they'd gotten their feelings hurt.

If they'd been better educated, they would know what an insult it was to Oscar to refuse them. For Oscar to fail to provide acceptable refreshment was a huge loss of face and if the quarter bloods and humans didn't know this, the half and full bloods should. Some looked shocked, frightened and more than a touch worried. It was Oscar's duty to please him and Macy was being difficult and refusing to be appeased.

There was a silent moment when bright green eyes met slightly hazel green before Oscar nodded his head tersely. "Of course, I beg your forgiveness. It was inexcusable of me to offer you anything less."

A ripple of a hushed whisper tickled at the handful present that were informed enough to understand what Oscar's words meant but that ripple spread as the strong, proud man stripped

off his expensive suit jacket. He handed the jacket to a woman that moved up beside him and unclipped a simple cufflink from one of his sleeves. The link slipped easily into a pants pocket and Oscar didn't delay on rolling up the sleeve to above his elbow.

"It would be my honor to offer you refreshment."

Macy hid his smirk and accepted Oscar's bared arm. There was protocol for this as well. From a lover or human, the spot chosen should be on the inside of the arm. It hid the healing mark better and was a touch more intimate on the softer, more tender skin. From a vampire, the spot chosen should be on the back of the arm or hand where the wound would be quite visible until it healed. Macy chose a spot on the side of the proud man's arm, half way between the two areas and making the crowd whisper in hushed tones again. He let his teeth tear a small hole and let the rich blood of another full vampire coat his tongue.

This wasn't about sex or sensuality and it wasn't about feeding. It was fully about dominance and protocol. If Oscar wanted to revive the old ways and the old manners, he'd have to remember that he wasn't the biggest fish in the pond and occasionally face being humbled by those rules. There were reasons the old manners had fallen out of fashion as their people had grown scattered around the globe, because no one liked to be vividly reminded of their place.

He glanced over as the small wound began to close and was surprised at Oscar. His eyes were half shut but his face was closed off and expressionless. Macy had expected to see hate there, or, at the least, rage, at having his rules and games turned around. He wasn't so old to have forgotten what it felt like to be in Oscar's shoes in a day and age when the manners were all that kept two full bloods from ripping each other's throats out. Instead, he saw frustration and something almost like melancholy.

He gave the small wound one final drag of his tongue but didn't step away. It was an odd choice but one within his rights and Macy pushed the sleeve of his coat up and offered his arm to Oscar. The vampire stood for a second, bewildered until the meaning of the offer sunk in and his eyes grew wide. He gripped Macy's arm a little too roughly, his unease expressed in the touch too much strength in his hands.

The wound he made was tiny and he fed for only a moment but Oscar's eye brows bunched together and his eyes went shut. He'd picked a spot on the back of Macy's wrist, safely within the proper respectable area of manners. His mouth broke from the wound and didn't offer the final touches to finish sealing it, not that it was really necessary on another full blood but for a man so caught up in what was proper it was a huge lapse.

They stood like that for a moment, Oscar still holding onto Macy's arm and his eyes locked to the greener pair. "Everyone, out." He ordered barely above a whisper. One of the group closer to him tried to step forward and Oscar shot the woman a look. "Now!" He snapped.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Thirty Two

It took a moment for the room to be cleared but the ballroom felt very large and very empty with just the four of them. Oscar had released his grip on Macy's arm when his people began to move away but Macy was lapping at the healing wound on his arm without any concern to wait until the room was cleared.

"Do you do this just to irritate me?"

Macy glanced over his arm before dropping it to his side and shaking his sleeve back down.
"Sometimes."

"Why?"

"Because it amuses me."

Oscar tossed his arms up and paced, some of the strict control cracking. "You're such a.... such a...."

"Brat?" York offered and earned a smirk from Macy.

"Child!" Oscar finished. "I used to hate when mother would say I tasted like you but she's right! Why must you be so difficult?"

That raised one of Macy's eyebrows and he glanced to York. "I'm difficult?"

It made Oscar growl in frustration and York chuckled lightly. "Often, yes."

"I thought I was tolerant. If I'd spoken to my father the way you speak to me, well, let's just say I would have been damaged more often than I was. These rules you play with, these old ways you admire so, you never, once, had to live with them." Macy lowered his voice and the teasing silliness he normally showed was gone, replaced by the predator.

"There are reasons for structure and order."

"But you pick and chose which of the old laws you desire to enforce. Where one weed's root remains, the tangle returns. In a century you'll have wrapped us in so much bullshit we won't know the sun from the moon. That's why I'm difficult!"

"Would you have us live as cockroaches scurrying for the crumbs dropped by those in power? If we are to survive, claim what is our place, we must have some order."

"It's our way that the strong survive and the weak fall aside. There is no room in our ways for sentimentality and false protection."

"Sentimentality?" Oscar shook his head. "You dare accuse me of sentimentality when you've kept a human pet for how many centuries? No offense to you York, you're good for a human but still just a human."

"York has nothing to do with our ways, whelp!"

"Do you think I am weak?" Oscar was pacing now, a sign of frustration greater than any he could offer. "You've tasted the blood in my veins, was it thin?"

"If you were weak I wouldn't have allowed you to reach maturity. That's one of the old ways, one of the duties of a father. Tell me, are you prepared to fulfill that? To look your own child in the eyes and destroy them if they aren't strong enough to carry the bloodlines?" Macy paced forward and stopped his son from wearing a path in the carpet.

Given the choice between stopping or pushing Macy aside, Oscar stopped. "I don't know, I have no full blood children."

"You pick what you want and forget the rest and play elder! You're a hypocrite."

Oscar growled. "You're the only person who can say that to my face and live!"

"I also say it behind your back."

"See? Why do you have to be such an embarrassment? Such a child about things?"

"Oh, grow up and stop being such a whiny ass bitch! You should be on your knees thanking me for not being like my father, thanking me that you never had to deal with him, that these old ways you adore had faded to history when you were born!" He wanted to fight but knew York wouldn't forgive him if he threw the first punch. "I can say you're an inflated, arrogant, flatulence filled asshole but I've never once, not once, told you not to be an inflated, arrogant, flatulence filled asshole."

"This gets us nowhere." Oscar sighed and rubbed at his eyes. "You're here now, Father, come, sit at my table and we'll discuss things in a more civilized manner." He glanced to Luke but his eyes drifted to York standing so protectively close to the boy. "I have an idea of what you want to know."

Oscar led them from the empty ballroom and all the shooed away people stood in the lobby. They'd clumped together in groups, whispering and watching the ballroom. York even was fairly sure some were taking bets on the odds of a fight having occurred inside the emptied room. He saw the disappointment in several sets of eyes when both men emerged as undamaged and tidy as when they'd gone in.

They were taken across the lobby to what must have once been the hotel's main dining room. Covered in dark paneled wood walls and rich elegant colors, it felt intimate and was suited to candles on white crisp tablecloths. The room had been cleared of all small tables and only one long one was in place. The long length was set with fine linen and silver, crystal and china. The chairs were old and almost with an art deco style to them.

York and Luke were the only two humans in the room. The table was set for twenty and sixteen pale faces with crisp bright eyes stood in formal clothing, waiting to be seated. That left the seat at the head of the table, one to the head of the table's right and two spaces to the left empty. York guessed he should be honored that Oscar hadn't tried to place the two of them on the other end of the table, where good humans belonged.

Macy stopped dead in his tracks and locked eyes with Oscar. "I will tolerate an endless stream of hypocrisy from you, child, but I will not sit at a table with those monstrosities!" The gathered guests shifted uncomfortably but no one moved.

Oscar stood just a touch straighter. "Everyone in this room is a valued advisor and trusted ally."

"No self respecting full blood will sit with those cross blooded freaks! You wanted these rules so be it. If I were your grandfather they'd be torn to shreds by now just for daring to think they are our equal!"

"It is you and I standing here. Grandfather went into a grave unmarked and un-mourned before seeing our tribe taken to the brink of extinction."

Macy moved almost too quickly to see but the low growl echoed in the still and silent room. Oscar was the only one that had the reflexes to react, he started to step back, move away but Macy was on him before he got very far. The pair tumbled to the floor, Oscar landing hard on his back and Macy perched himself on the taller man's chest. For as quickly as Macy had struck, neither man moved now and the hand at Oscar's throat explained why. It wasn't just fingers holding the

younger vampire's throat in place, but nails as well. Small pearls of blood welled up around where Macy's nails had stabbed into the pale throat, four to one side, one to the other.

The trusted advisors in the room moved slightly to come forward and York shook his head. "I wouldn't do that." And he swirled just a ghost of power about the room, making it clear he was willing to throw anyone not just against the wall but through it if they interfered.

They didn't like it, but it was either York's threat or the raw fact that that all Macy had to do was pull his arm back to several injure their leader, maybe fatally injure him. A vampire was difficult to kill, York had seen Macy be nearly totally beheaded and recover in a matter of days, but damage to the neck made killing them so much easier.

Macy leaned down, his face close to Oscar's. "You dare to mock my efforts as a son?" The hand on the throat tightened and Oscar's face tightened up but he held very, very still.

"No, father." He forced out. "Forgive me?" His voice was soft and strained but there was nothing humbled about his eyes.

The hand squeezed tighter for a second and even Macy wasn't sure he was willing to let go until he pulled his nails from his son's throat. The nails that slid from flesh weren't the short rounded ones normally on his hands but ones he used for hunting. Pointed and a good two inches long, he could claw through almost anything with them. Blood had coated them but the holes they'd made were slender, Macy stepped back and left his son on the floor to cough and rub at the small wounds. Before he retracted his nails back to harmless rounds he made a point to lick the blood from them while Oscar sat up and discreetly coughed blood into a snow white handkerchief.

"I'm sorry, father, I meant no disrespect or to say that you failed in your efforts to find him." He glanced up to where Macy stood looking more pissed in general than in specific and wondered for the hundredth time just what it was his father believed in.

"There are reasons why a full blood does not breed with a half, Oscar." Macy finally announced in a mockingly condescending way. "I will not share a table with them."

Oscar cleared his throat and stretched his neck a little to see how much damage there really was. It didn't surprise him really to find it all felt fairly minor, Macy wasn't a sort to threaten or joke about violence. If he'd wanted to kill or seriously harm, he would have, but since he didn't, well, it was pointless to be clumsy. Something Oscar was grateful for as he found the small wounds already healing by the time he got back to his feet.

The room was tense and worried but he tried to look as if he got knocked on his ass and had his life threatened every day. "Please, out of respect to the elder, obey his wishes." His voice was only a little raspy. He stretched his neck a little and dabbed at the small smears of blood on his throat with a clean spot on his handkerchief.

All but four of the room exchanged glances and left. Those that remained were full bloods and they stood with the arrogant confidence of a full blooded vampire. It made Macy a little nervous, the games Oscar was playing. They weren't meant to group together, they weren't meant to be social and if crowded too long, would as happily kill each other as someone else when cranky. It was a tight rope his son was walking and one that he could slip from so easily.

"Would you see our people extinct?" Oscar asked as they settled in, the room much more empty now.

Macy watched as the room sat down and very properly placed folded napkins into laps. He watched Luke stutter a little on the manners before copying York, who was flawless in his motions and as alert as a hawk on the hunt. Instead of settling his napkin in his lap with a soft

fold, he snapped it open to the side and tucked it in his collar. Across from him, York discreetly rolled his eyes and Macy smirked back.

"I would see us stay strong and not pollute our blood with humanity." He finally answered as a quarter blood waiter placed a fancy salad in front of him. The portions were small for a human but ample for a multi course dinner for a vampire.

"Odd, hearing you talk about keeping the bloodlines pure when half the quarter bloods in this city are your offspring." Oscar barbed back.

"Only half? Good god, York, have I really been slacking off that much lately?"

The witch kept a straight face. "You haven't been nearly the whore you were a few decades ago, but don't worry, I'm sure you'll get back into the swing of things soon."

"It's a serious concern, father, how many offspring have you produced?"

Macy frowned. "Seven, as you well know."

"Seven in how many centuries? We simply reproduce at a frightfully slow pace and with so many of us murdered in the last handful of centuries we can't afford to sit around and wait centuries more to bring our numbers back up. Avery was born three hundred years after I was, Lucynda is barely an adolescent. Speaking of Cynda, mother wants to know if you plan on taking her soon."

It was tradition, a child spent their childhood with their mother before being sent to their father when they reached adolescence. It was the father's job to see them raised to adulthood capable of surviving or to end their lives before turning them loose. Oscar had driven Macy half mad but York had been a tempering influence. Avery was a reserved and quite man, full of subtle power and quiet challenge but Macy had been stalling on taking Cynda.

"That would be between Tally and myself, child." Macy warned, he wasn't on close terms with his children's mother. Vampires didn't breed easily, strong family lines preferred to breed with other equally strong lines and it was the women that made the final choices. Tallius was quite powerful, very lovely and frightfully stubborn. She'd stalked them until he'd agreed and fathered children but mating with another full blood was a dangerous effort tangled in power, threat and lust.

Oscar shoved a bite of greens into his mouth and bowed his head slightly. "Indeed, forgive the offense."

The salad looked expensive and Luke was a little hungry, he put a forkful in his mouth and nearly gagged. The greens were so intensely bitter and he choked a little on them. He wanted to spit them out across his plate so great was his desperation to get the horrible taste from his mouth.

York raised his napkin to dab at his lips. "Don't spit, swallow." He whispered.

The words startled Luke and the salad bite hit the back of his throat and he gagged it down. He reached for the red wine to wash it away but at York's slight nod against it, he picked up the clear water instead. It only then occurred to him what was dark red as well and easily mixed with wine. From that point on, he did as York did and pushed the salad about the plate but didn't actually eat any and never let anything cross his lips unless he'd seen York take a bite of his own first.

"My point is still valid, father." Oscar continued to push as the salad was cleared and plates of fragrant coconut rice and green curried vegetables were brought out. "A half blood inter

bred with a full blood produces a child very similar to a weak line of vampire. If they breed with a full blood their child is indistinguishable from an ancient line. Only we can reach that new full blood in a handful of decade's time instead of centuries. It grants us diversity as well and is preferable to half siblings inter breeding. We'll secure our numbers and undo the damage done to us within a century instead of some vague distant future."

"It weakens the lines."

"A weak family line is better than no lines at all." Oscar pleaded. "We'll have the time to strengthen them, cull them, and be great again. Of all the tribes, ours was nearly lost and now we're scattered across four continents. Don't you consider this a better choice than intermixing with other tribes?"

"There has always been interbreeding among the tribes."

"Yes but never when one was so close to disappearing. Even during the wars, no line ever grew as close to vanishing as ours is now."

"A vampire speaking with the urgency of time pressing on him and of wars he never fought in."

"Father."

"Enough." Macy sat straighter and stopped slouching like a petulant child. "I'll hear no more of this. I will never give it my approval but you're your own man, Oscar. Do as you will, lead as you will, pull together your little armies and make money. I want nothing to do with it."

All Souls Pass

Chapter Thirty Three

Conversation stayed on safer subjects for the remains of the small portioned dinner but as the desert of roasted pears drizzled in almond honey was cleared away, tension began to grow again. It was time to get to the point, all etiquette now fulfilled and it was time to point out the obvious.

York dabbed at his mouth and placed his napkin back into his lap. "Oscar, you've been very kind to offer us such hospitality. As I'm sure you've already been made aware, I've taken this boy as my apprentice."

Oscar inclined his head at the compliment but his eyes flicked to where Luke sat before settling back on York. "I've been told, yes."

"There seems to be a great deal of interest in this child, I know you will tell me the truth of it all." He leaned back a little and made room for the waiter to remove the last of the plates from in front of him.

"That child you've so casually taken in holds the power of a god." Oscar dropped his hands onto the cleared table in front of him.

"I am aware."

"Are you aware that some other parties may not be so willing to let that power slip away simply because you've claimed it?"

"I understand the situation, Oscar." York dropped his voice down to icy cold levels, the same tone he had once used with a much younger boy when scolding in.

"Very well. The boy should rightfully belong to us." He cracked a small grin. "I had good teachers in the arts of human magic. When one of my people noticed the boy smelled odd, purely by chance, I knew what he was even before his power fully developed. The balance of power in this city is precarious, at best."

"I'm certain you didn't advertise what you'd discovered."

"No but we made moves to secure that power. Your apprentice's only living relation was his mother. We approached her, came to an agreement."

York placed his hand on Luke's knee and squeezed slightly, reminding the boy to stay quiet. "What kind of agreement?"

"I would purchase the boy from her for sixty thousand dollars. Additionally, I swore to respect the child, raise him kindly, not force him to do anything he didn't wish and see he was educated. All things I would have done anyway, I know how to keep a pet and frankly my primary concern was removing him from other hands." Oscar spoke coldly and was surprised when Luke's only reaction was to glance at the table and shift a little in his chair.

"Obviously that didn't occur, why?"

"She was murdered by the Black Cross before the deal could be finalized." He toyed a little with his wine glass. "Which was actually quite clever, it left the child with no one to barter with and placed us all on level ground. There were a few skirmishes over the situation until an agreement was reached. We would all back off, use no magic or influence on the boy and not interfere until such time that he developed a tie to someone that could sell him or until he came of age as an adult, at which time the treaty ended and it becomes whoever can secure him first."

"Which seemed like such an unlikely ending. None of us could imagine the boy going so long without bonding to anyone. Not his stepfather, not a pimp or dealer, not a priest or cop, no one and now here, days before he goes up for grabs? He stumbles into your lap and bonds to you. I don't suppose you can be persuaded to sell me the boy?" He heard Macy's chair legs scrap against the floor ever so softly. The sound was meant as a warning because Oscar knew if his father was really going to attack, he wouldn't see it coming.

York smiled warmly. "Would you sell such a pretty thing if it was in your hands?"

"No, but I had to ask. You've angered a great number of people, York."
"That's nothing new or unusual."

Oscar's eyes narrowed. "This time it may be."

"Do I need to watch my neck, Oscar?"

The vampire sighed and shook his head. "No, I won't send my people after the lover to an elder. But the elves are stirred up and this Cardinal is coming here for the boy, he won't leave until he has that power or until he knows no one else is in control of it. Blood will be shed before this is settled, I can offer the boy the entire scope of my organization to protect him. What say you

child? Stay with me? Spare this good man the trouble and pain you're so very certainly going to bring upon his head." Oscar's voice was smooth and sweet like honey.

He wanted to keep his face down, but Luke found himself glancing up and falling into the sleek vampire's eyes. They were so like Macy's full of life and strength and he found it difficult to look away.

York dropped his fist onto the table hard enough to rattle crystal glasses and make the remaining silverware dance. "Enough, Oscar! Unless it's me you'd like to challenge?"

Oscar huffed a little, a soft breath of amusement, and held both his hands up, palm outward. "Can't really be mad at me for trying, now can you?"

"That sad puppy look only works on me when it's coming from your father. I won't have this child toyed with. I speak for him now and he is not for sale."

"My goals have been met, the power that boy carries is not in my enemies hands. Know this, York, I don't care who you are to me or who you're bedding, I will not risk the lives of my people in defense of property that isn't mine. If you keep that child, you stand on your own with him. If you fail, then I shall be forced to step in."

Macy stood up. "Just stay out of our way and remember who it is that you'll have to fuck with if one of your people harms York." He leaned forward, hands on the table. "The destruction I can bring down upon your head will make the wars look like a teddy bear picnic."

There was a moment of silence where the room tasted of impending bloodshed and both men locked eyes but it was Oscar than glanced away. "Did you find your answers, York?" He turned away from his father. He may bow to the other man's greater strength but he wasn't willing to roll over all the way.

"Enough of them."

The grin that crossed Macy's face was sheer mischief. He reached a hand out and ruffled his son's hair the way he would a very small, very human, child. "Awww, this was so much fun, we really must do this more often. Say we'll get together as one big warm fuzzy family for the holidays next year? We can roast an elf over an open fire and decorate a tree and give each other shiny gifts." His voice was mocking and sing song and he heard the other full bloods sitting at the table whisper under their breath. They weren't a concern, he could take down the lot of them without even trying and they knew it as well. "I'm bored, let's go."

Oscar had risen to his feet and but Macy quickly tossed his coat over an arm and got the humans moving. It cut off the formal leaving procedures that secured one full blood from another's territory. That wasn't a concern for Macy, even without York's help there was little real threat to him here and with York, that threat level dropped down dramatically. His only worry, either way, wouldn't be for his own skin. Humans were just so fragile, they broke so easily, he'd have to fuss about them first.

Not surprisingly, no one offered any resistance to them leaving. York got Luke on his feet and bundled into his coat. The boy was moving with a glazed over look of someone who was wavering on the border of shock but Oscar's stronghold wasn't the place to worry about it. Halfway across the lobby, Macy felt eyes watching him.

He turned to see Oscar standing in the doorway, looking as serious as always. It made him grin and he spun around in a wide circle, arms tossed out. "Oscar you're always good for a giggle. I'd say I was sorry for pissing in your pond, but well, I'm not!"

He hurried outside, snarling a little at the young fool that opened the door for him and actually

had to brush aside the one trying to hold the car door for him. York had gotten a rather pale looking Luke into the backseat and by the time Macy's ass was cushioned on the fine leather seats, the car had purred to life. There was no pause or bother with seatbelts, York whipped them from the curb onto the street with slick easy motions.

"You okay, kid?" Macy asked, turning around in his seat.

Luke was groping his own pockets and finally fumbled up a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. "No, not I'm not okay!" He snapped back and his hands shook so badly he dropped the lighter. "Fuck!"

York just glanced in the rear view. "No smoking in the car."

"Fuck." Luke sighed, clutching the pack and lighter, trembling like a leaf.

Macy slid back into his seat and slid a hand onto York's thigh. "I could use a smoke too, find a spot to stop?"

The Frenchman's lips pressed into a thin line and he sighed but a few turns later, he pulled the car into a parking garage. A few twists and turns later, he was drifting slowly across the few scattered cars on the roof level before pulling the car into a spot far from the others. He turned the car off, the headlights too and left them alone in the orange glow of the sodium lights.

Luke was out of the car almost before it was fully stopped, the two in the front followed at a little more leisurely pace. He shook out a cigarette and put it to his lips, only to find it was broken. "Shit." That one got dropped and he fumbled for another only his cheap lighter refused to lit and he stood sparking it over and over, growing a little more frantic with each effort.

Until a light bloomed almost under his nose, a small flame danced in the cold winter night. Macy held the old zippo out until Luke cupped his hand around the fire and sucked it into the dried tobacco. Smoke curled and Luke stepped away with a sigh and a long drag. The cigarette was keeping him from puking his guts out but it wasn't doing much to settle his nerves.

Macy lit his own cigarette and snapped the lighter shut with a sharp metallic click. Only, before he could take a drag, York snatched the smoke from his lips and placed it in his own mouth.

"Nasty habit." He muttered and took a long, deep drag, held it and carefully blew the smoke out to the side.

"Hey, that one was mine!" Macy muttered but seeing York smoke was sexy and he just grinned a little and lit one more cigarette.

"You okay?" York ignored Macy's protesting and tossed the question toward the boy.

"No, no, I'm not, I'm pretty far from okay. My mother tried to sell me! Would you be fucking okay if you knew that?" He angrily sucked down another drag.

"It actually sounded like a pretty good deal."

Luke stopped in his tracks, too shocked to even pace. York just shook his head.

"What?"

"I'm sure she was doing what she thought was best." York knew the words would do little to sooth.

"This wasn't sending me off to some private school for fucking human freaks! She tried to sell me!" The thought followed itself it's own natural conclusion. "And she was killed for it, because of

me, if I'd been normal, if she hadn't... and a priest did it... a priest!" His back hit the side of the car and he slid down it. "How could a priest do something like that, she hadn't done anything wrong, not something to deserve being killed. They stabbed her so many times."

It was pretty obvious that Macy wasn't going to try to comfort the boy and York wasn't sure the vampire really could grasp the level of betrayal Luke was feeling anyway. Vampires were far less sentimental, and even Macy who wasn't as cold as some full bloods could be, didn't speak of some of his children and York had never met them. He crushed the last of his smoke out below his shoe and moved to where the boy had crumbled.

"Priests are just people, so are mothers." He crouched down near Luke. "It's never easy being born different, Luke. It makes things more difficult, makes you have to take on too much responsibility. The people around you rarely know how to handle it. Isn't like Dr. Spock wrote a chapter on 'my child is a magic user' for parent's to read." Luke didn't even glance up at the sad attempt at a joke and he took a long drag from the cigarette, burning the ember almost down to the filter. York plucked it from the boy's fingers and dropped it to the concrete. "Can't sit here all night, let's go home."

Luke let himself be picked up and bundled back into the posh car without protest. They rode back to the loft in silence and the lingering smell of the smokes they'd shared but Luke wasn't paying attention. He sat with bent forward with his head in his hands wavering between weeping and screaming in rage. His jaw was tightly clamped shut to hold back both emotions and he sat, grateful, for the silence.

When they pulled into the warehouse, the lights glowing to brighten up the open space, Luke was slow to get out of the car. Choices had to be made, painful, unhappy ones but he made choices and didn't let life just shove him around like a leaf on the wind. There was no point stalling, he knew what he had to do because as soon as he'd made his choice, his hands had stopped shaking.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Thirty Four

Inside, the loft was warm and safe but Luke fished his pack of cigarettes out of his coat pocket and slipped them into his old jean jacket as he hung the new, warm and costly coat onto one of the hooks by the door. He walked past Macy and York, they were talking about Oscar and York was putting coffee on to brew, neither man stopped him and he went upstairs unnoticed.

Logically, he knew he had no right to anything but he had nothing left. With a promise to repay all that he took as his only balm for his guilt, Luke pulled his old backpack out of the corner it'd been tossed in and stuffed a couple of the new pairs of jeans inside. He followed it with a couple of t-shirts and one of the warm sweaters, handfuls of socks but he skipped the underwear. His line of work didn't require it anyway and it would only take up space.

With the backpack slung over his shoulder, he went back downstairs as quietly as he could. His old sneakers were still wet and while he hated leaving wearing the new ones, he couldn't justify walking out in damp shoes. The smell of rich, expensive, quality coffee had filled the loft and it made Luke want to stay.

"Leaving us?" York asked as Luke grew closer to the kitchen and the door out.

Luke just nodded and didn't look at the pair or the three mugs sitting on the counter.

"Where you going?"

The voice was steady and Luke glanced over. York was pouring coffee and avoiding looking his way but Macy leaned with his elbows on the counter top and stared at him intensely. "I'm sorry for taking the clothes. I'll pay you back when I can."

York glanced over, his eyes blank and giving nothing away. "Where are you going?"

Luke shrugged. "Bus always going somewhere." He forced a small, bitter smile. "Hopefully somewhere warmer, being cold sucks."

"Better question, why you going?"

"Look, you two have been so kind to me but no one else is going to get stabbed twenty six times in a dark alley because of me." He shrugged. "Don't sweat it, I've made it this long, I'll make it a just fine."

"Stubborn cuss." York muttered.

Luke glanced down but he'd made his mind up. He moved to get his jacket and had to stop, startled, because Macy was standing in front of the neat row of coats. "Jesus, stop doing that!"

"The treaty only covers this city." Macy warned but it didn't seem to sink in to the boy. "As soon as you leave it, they'll be on you. They'll stop that bus, drag you off and they won't give a shit about hurting you."

"Doesn't matter." He tried to step around the vampire but no matter which way he went it seemed as if Macy was blocking him.

"Do you really think seeing you hurt would mean nothing to us?" York whispered into Luke's ear, moving in close behind the boy while he fussed with Macy. "We've come against tougher foes and we're still here. Running will only make things worse because I will follow you."

Macy glanced up at that, not that they would follow but that York would. The witch was looking down, face decidedly upset at the boy leaving and the pain that small exclusion caused surprised him.

"I can't, won't, be the cause of you guys getting hurt, I won't. I've caused too much trouble already." Strong hands slid the backpack from his shoulder but Luke had no will to protest it. The same hands slid across his neck, to rest on his shoulders and Luke shivered when gentle lips touched the back of his neck under his ear.

"People like you and I? We're different, we need to stick together, stay." York wrapped his arms around the tense shoulders and felt the boy teetering between leaving and doing what he thought was right and staying and doing what he wanted.

It was Macy that tipped the balance. He stepped forward and cupped the sides of the boy's pain tightened face, tilting it up before he kissed the unhappy lips. There weren't too many people alive that could resist a vampire's kiss and Luke wasn't one of them. The boy tried to, tried to keep thinking clearly and to stay stubborn but pressed between the two men, his heart stuttered in it's beat. With a moan, his lips parted and his body melted into York's arms and he let go of the idea of leaving and escaping feeling so safe.

"That's it." York whispered. "Let it all go, it's okay, you don't have to take care of everyone any more." But he wasn't sure if they were words the boy needed to hear or words he wanted to hear whispered into his own ear. In the end, it didn't really matter, they worked just as well as he could have asked for and Luke shivered in his arms and reached to pull Macy closer.

Luke wasn't entirely sure how his plan to just walk away and disappear into another city in an effort to start over had gone awry. It seemed simple enough, pack a few things, grab his jean jacket and just go, don't debate it just leave. It seemed the world's simplest thing and yet somehow that plan got cast aside. He was held tightly between two of the hottest men he'd ever seen and they'd picked opposite sides of his neck to attack. It shorted out any effort to think and Luke was pretty sure if they let go of him he'd fall to the floor like a rock.

His breath gasped and his heart pounded and there was no way he could leave. Being held there, in the arms of two people who loved each other so much, made him feel warmed. There was no bitter outsider anger like he normally felt when seeing what he couldn't have, this included him, enveloped him. They were willing to share what they had with him and even though he knew it wasn't his to own, it made him hopeful to find a love like theirs one day. That was more than he'd ever had, more than he'd ever been able to wish for, and lost in the feel of those teasing mouths on both sides of his neck and those delightful emotions, nothing could make him leave.

Macy's mouth pulled away and crossed to the side of Luke's neck that York was molesting. They kissed over his shoulder and Luke moaned as both men pressed and rubbed against him. "God if someone doesn't get me naked soon I'm going to die." He heard himself whine and it made the Frenchman behind him chuckle.

"Wouldn't want that." He purred and let Macy go. The two of them worked and quickly got Luke naked, the boy stood gasping for breath and unashamed, naked by their kitchen.

Luke didn't stand there for long. He caught the first one of them he could, Macy it turned out, and shoved him hard against the end of the counter. There was no point in being shy, Luke hadn't been shy about sex in a long while and he wanted too badly to wait. He pressed himself to the lean body and devoured the grinning, mocking mouth in a quick, sharp kiss. His hands didn't so much slide as drag across the clothing covered body and pull at fabric, desperate to reach skin underneath. Even that wasn't enough and Luke's fingers had no trouble undoing the jeans that covered the vampire's hips.

"Humans." Macy sighed and licked his lips after the kiss. "Always so impatient, why I outta... oh fuck yeah!" His complaints slurred away when instead of just stripping his pants down or forcing a hand inside of the denim, Luke opened the fabric enough to lap delicately at the head of the length he exposed. "Fucking tease."

York paused with his shirt halfway unbuttoned and just stared. "Think we may have made a monster." He chuckled when Luke moaned and about tore the denim further apart to expose more of Macy's pale flesh.

"He's got... god... potential... but lacks... oh god..." He fell back against the counter.

The shirt he'd been unbuttoning fell away and York kicked off his shoes. It was almost too pretty to watch, Luke with his almost olive skin exposed and bare, crouched down with, devouring his lover. Macy falling apart under the desperate attack, shivering, trying to get his hands to work well enough to strip off his own clothes and not being coordinated enough, was just too pretty.

He let the tips of his fingers trail up Luke's spine when he slid the pants from his legs and the boy shivered and moaned at the touch. Up the soft pads of his fingertips went to flutter lightly in the lighter brown hair, up to slip onto Macy's body and pull at the twisted up fabric of his t-shirt.

"What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?" He teased at Macy's stuttering.

Brilliant green eyes opened into mere slits. "Something's got....oh fuck right there... something... shit you try being a smart ass withoh..."

He chuckled again until a wet slurping sound and a hand on his hip made him look down. It was just in time for York to see Luke slid from torturing Macy to settle in with long, neat licks to his own cock. Pleasure shot across him both from the sight and the tormenting feel of the contact. Macy chuckled beside him and tossed his t-shirt away, trying to shimmy out of his jeans without stepping away from Luke's hand that was teasing his thighs, his hip, his ass.

"Not so funny now is it?" He chuckled and leaned over to nip at the witch's parted lips. "You put two thoughts together, kids like a vacuum." York moaned into the kiss and Macy knew the hand fisted in his hair wanted to be fisted in the boys. He broke the kiss and knelt down, pressing soft, wet kisses to Luke's shoulder and running his hands hungrily over the boy's bare skin. "If you don't stop, Luke, he's going to fuck you right here. He won't let himself come this way, not when he wants more and I can always tell when he wants more."

The words were a torment and Luke moaned. His entire body nearly convulsed and he wondered if he'd have to beg them to take him. He wondered how to beg with his mouth full and soon had the choice taken from him when his head was pulled back and hands cupped his face.

York was panting, a light sheen of sweat had gathered on his skin but he'd meant what he'd told the boy. "Do you want this?" He asked, eyes locked to the muddy brown pair below his own.

All Luke could do was nod and beg with his eyes but it was enough. The hands petting him picked him up as easily as if he were nothing more than a toy. Before he could do more than gasp in surprise, Macy had tossed him over a shoulder and was heading toward the stairs. It crushed his arousal into a lean shoulder and gave him nothing to look at but Macy's ass.

"What the hell?" He squeaked, surprised at being on the receiving end of Macy's oddly deceptive strength.

"Hush you are my captive, prepare to be molested!" Macy giggled and smacked the human's ass with the flat of one hand.

"Ow, hey now!" But as he started to wiggle in protest, and as a side point rubbing his trapped cock painfully into the shoulder he was tossed like a sack of potatoes over, he felt an odd sense of gathered strength. It wasn't just the bunching of muscles in Macy's leg, but something more and before he could ask, the ground below his captor's feet retreated and the top of the railing on the second level of the loft was suddenly under Macy's toes. It happened too quickly for him to be startled but when it sunk in that Macy had just leapt up a good twenty feet without even straining, it made him shiver a little. It was that or seeing the floor so very far below them.

Macy turned to glance over his shoulder and down into the space below. "Coming?" He asked York who was grinning and kicking clothes out of the way.

"I'll take the stairs."

"Better hurry." He grinned wolfishly and hopped from the railing to a point about halfway to the bed. He brushed the half open curtains aside and tossed Luke onto the bed. The boy landed with a startled squeak and bounced a little from the impact but Macy's attention was drawn to a small slick spot on his shoulder of glossy pre-come. He dragged a finger across the spot, popped it the digit into his mouth to suck hard on it while Luke's eyes went wide.

Footsteps made him turn and glance over his shoulder and the grin on his face fell to open awed lust. York had reached the top and paused to slide a soft, flexible cock ring over his length, grimacing a little as he did so. It made the already pretty pink flesh turn dark red and Macy felt

his heart stop in his chest and his stomach do a back flip. If York felt he needed help holding on to his control, York Mr. Stubborn Will Power, Macy knew to be braced for a good romp. He grinned and popped the finger he'd been sucking on out of his mouth.

The witch crossed to the bed where Luke was still sitting sprawled and wide eyed and Macy looked like he was plotting something evil. When he reached the edge of the big bed, Macy fell toward him, mouth nipped at his shoulders and collarbone, suckling lower to lap a firm tongue across his chest to tease a nipple. York grinned and petted the vampire's hair but his eyes stayed on Luke, even when Macy dragged the sharp point of a fang across an already hard, tender nipple.

"What do you want, Luke?" The boy's eyes drifted up from where they were watching Macy tease him and locked onto his own. "Do you want to bottom? To top?" His words dried up when one of Macy's hands trailed up a leg to cup him.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Thirty Five

Luke had to lick his lips, they'd grown dry from his mouth hanging open in lust. He was surprised he wasn't actually drooling from watching the pair. The question hung in the air and his brain was too turned off to think about it too much. He answered with the first word that came to his thoughts. "Both." He whispered and heard Macy chuckling.

"You're right, we have made a monster." Macy giggled and lapped a wet tongue back up to York's neck.

The giggle was met with a sharp quick spank to Macy's fair, bare ass that made the vampire yip a little in surprise and arch away. "Hush, trollop, you just want to bottom to both of us, greedy slut."

The insults or the suggestion made Macy moan, his back arched as his hips twitched but there was no part of York close enough to rub against. "Oh, please, let me be your dirty little boy."

"Oh, my god." Luke whispered.

The whisper got Macy's attention and he turned from York to slink on hands and knees across the bed to where Luke sat. When he'd wiggled over, he dropped his chest down to rest his forearms on the bed, ass sticking up in the air and grinned lewdly. "Luke," he said in a sultry whisper, with only half his normal mocking jest. "Can I be your dirty boy?" Only Macy didn't wait for an answer before he started to kiss his way up Luke's knees, up his thighs, with a single-minded destination in mind.

The bed shifted as York climbed onto it next to Luke but he batted Macy away before the vampire could get in more than a few licks. "If you want him Luke," he wrapped a hand around Luke's hard cock and felt it twitch at the barely warmed lube. "Take him."

Luke's hips snapped up into the teasing hand and the cool gel. York wasn't only allowing him to fuck his boyfriend, he was helping him. The offer was nearly more of a turn on than the skilled

hand stroking him, teasing him and Luke fell back onto his elbows on the bed. He had to remind himself that this was all real and not some luscious dream but while he was reminding himself, Macy wasn't still.

The vampire wiggled around, upper body still lowered and ass still popped up to swish in the air only now he moved to attack York's knees. Up he kissed across the witch's thighs, moving higher but painfully slow and with each inch up he went, he swung his hips around a little in small teasing begging circles. The sight was too much and Luke had no conscious thought of moving, one moment he sat watching, York's hand still lazily teasing him and the next his own hands were dug into pale flesh and he was kneeling behind that teasing ass.

York bent down and found Macy's mouth. "He's got you now, there is no escape." His accented voice was dark and rich and he let the words whisper against Macy's lips before he kissed them.

"Lucky me!" Macy moaned and arched his hips back, just barely making contact with Luke who was slick and hard and so close but still holding back. "Better brace myself, those quiet shy ones are real brutal when they let go." He sucked on York's lower lip a second before releasing it with a sigh to slid up and grip the headboard.

Behind him, Luke moaned in frustrated torment and while he followed those few inches forward, he wasn't quite sure it was really okay. He'd topped before, sure, he had several customers that paid him well for it and always left happy but never anyone that looked like Macy, felt like Macy, moaned like Macy.

The vampire spread his legs a little bit and arched his back again. With a small buck to his hips that still gained him no friction, he tossed his hair back and glanced over his shoulder. "You want me to beg? Please, please, Luke, please, I need it so badly, please, fuck me until I scream, please take me so hard I'll forget to breath, please Luke, I need it, need you in me so badly, pretty please?" His words were chopped up into panting gasps of breath and his hips tried again to pull the boy closer. He was about to look to York and was wavering between begging the witch to get the party started or maybe just tossing Luke down and using his pretty hard on, but he wasn't going to stop begging or whining until one of them thoroughly fucked him senseless.

Fortunately, he didn't have to make that choice. With one final glance to where York was lounged beside them, Luke groaned. He used one hand at the base of his own cock to steady himself and the other to hold Macy still and pushed forward. The vampire was tight and hot and Luke heard his pulse pounding in his ears and almost missed the delighted, whimpering cries Macy was making. He faltered, convinced that no one would share something this good with someone else, worried he'd made a mistake or misunderstood and crossed some line. There was no way York would willingly let someone else have this, it felt too good, was too amazing, it had to make someone want to horde it selfishly and as he seated himself tight and full and firmly in Macy's body, Luke felt his mind splintering away under the weight of the pleasure and his body tremble with the need to let go and really fuck Macy hard.

Hands stroked Luke's shoulders, his back, his ass, slid forward to cup and kneed his balls and he moaned. His eyes opened lazily and the mixed sight of Macy writhing, twitching and gasping and York kneeling beside them both, his hands petting them, touching them, nearly made it the shortest joining in history.

"Oh, oh fuck." Luke moaned but his whimper was swallowed up by York's mouth covering his own and that deep, sincere way the Frenchman had of kissing. "I can't, I..." Macy bucked against him, sliding his cock about inside that tight passage. "Oh! Fuck.... Oh fuck me..."

York chuckled and bit the boy's ear. "Later, now, fuck him, hard, quick, fast, use him like he's begging you to." Macy moaned at the words, his hair tossing about and hands gripped hard to the headboard. "Don't worry about him, he'll have fun, I promise."

With a final lick to the ear he'd been teasing, York retreated and Luke closed his eyes again. He shivered and slowly slid from the fiery pleasure. Macy moaned and begged and cursed the entire time, rambling encouragements and babbling around sighs and whimpers. When he slammed back in, hard, deep, rough, they both cried out and Luke knew he wasn't going to last long.

"Oh, oh... fuck yeah... just like that... fuck me...oh god you're so fucking hard.... Please, more... again... fuck..." The words spilled mindless from Macy before they suddenly died off to a garbled halt. "Oh shit, ohoh.....god."

Luke risked opening his eyes just enough to see why, to see if maybe he'd done something wrong or done something surprisingly right and found that it wasn't really either. York had slithered under Macy and from what he could see of the other man and make out from Macy's suddenly short circuited moans, was sucking the vampire off.

"Oh, god, that's so fucking hot." Luke whispered and for a second forgot about driving into the man he was taking.

Macy whined, his hips snapping forward with a sigh into York's wet mouth and pushing back to slam himself onto Luke's cock. "Please!" He begged, sounding truly desperate now. "Please! Hard!"

Luke's shock faded and he met Macy's frantic thrust with a hard slam forward. The vampire nearly screamed in pleasure, sliding forward into York's mouth, back to meet the hard thrusts onto Luke's trembling flesh. Hands slid across both their legs as York reached up to touch them. Hands that explored over Luke to tease, study and finally to slip back a little and just ghost a touch over the boy's own entrance.

For Macy, it was better than chocolate, even dark, sweet bitter chocolate, which was saying a lot. He wasn't sure who was touching him where and he didn't care. Every nerve buzzed and tingled and twitched and he lost himself in sheer physical pleasure and hung there, clinging to the headboard, moaning in whimpering gasps until his body gave out and he gave in.

He arched, his spine folding over a little too far on itself and betraying his greater flexibility. He tossed his head back, feeling the ghosting tickles of the tips of it brushing his lower back and making the shattering release seem even more otherworldly. Luke kept pounding into him, deep, hard, demanding and he felt his body tighten down on the boy and heard the shuddering moans the suddenly tighter constriction brought up from the human. Below him, he was trying to be gentle but that seemed impossible with his mind turning to goo and his body breaking into bliss. He came so hard, so deeply, that he could feel the muscles in York's throat swallow him alive.

"Oh, fuck yeah, that's it baby doll, swallow me whole." He moaned out, shivering in pleasure with just enough sense to hear the spiked cries from Luke a moment before the boy lost his own struggles and released himself, hot and sweet, deep in Macy's body. It was perfection, well fucked, with York deep throating him at the same time, having to do nothing more than hang on and let them fill his senses with delight.

He hung on long enough for Luke to still against him before he giggled. York had already slinked back from under him so Macy let himself drop face first down onto the bed, his ass twitching in delighted throbs at being suddenly so empty, his cock flaccid and warm and his entire body limp and content. "Oh fuck yeah, perfect...." He sighed and nuzzled into a pillow.

When he glanced over his shoulder and turned a little onto his side to see better, he found Luke still kneeling. He was wrapped in York's arms, shivering, straining for breath. The tension the boy normally carried, the strain of always being alert and in control, had bled away and he was held fully in York's care, face rested against the Frenchman's shoulder.

It was a pretty sight, gentle, innocent in spite of the wild, hot sex that had just occurred and

York's still red and weeping cock. What struck Macy the most, laying there, watching, was how vulnerable York look as well, how open he seemed while holding the slender, underfed boy against him. Even with their eyes shut, Macy could feel it, see it and it was a vulnerability that York almost never exposed.

After a few more gasping breathes, Luke placed teasing, light kisses against York's neck and it earned him a careful ruffling pet across his head. York licked his lips but he kept his eyes shut and whispered. "It's okay to stop."

Luke kissed the tense neck, felt the faster pace of the other man's heart. He licked at beaded sweat up to nibble an ear. "Please, I want you to take me." It was more a sigh than spoken words but they made York tremble.

They laid down, in a tangle of limbs and Luke's legs fell apart for York to rest between. His body was limp, spent and sated but his eyes were dark with emotion. The kisses they exchanged were soft, slow, almost lazy and languid. There was no moaning now, just soft mews from Luke and the fluttering breath from York. Slick fingers crept across Luke's inner thigh and he tossed a leg high up onto York's hip inviting, asking without words.

The slick fingers entered him and Luke arched, his head rolled back. He wanted more, he wanted less, he wanted everything and nothing and just wanted. Most importantly, he didn't feel like a whore when he fell into those intense blue eyes. He felt like a lover, like something fragile and cherished and it made his chest ache in tight, buried emotion.

"Shhh..." York whispered. "It's okay, relax, I'm not going to hurt you, I promise, I won't let anyone hurt you."

Luke nodded and closed his eyes. He kept them closed as his body melted around those gentle fingers that slid so easily into his body and stretched him with far more care than he ever offered to himself. He kept them closed when York slid the cock ring from his body with a groan and a shuddering sigh. Kept them closed at the feel of that hardness teasing at his body, gently, softly touching him to give him time to change his mind like some blushing virgin.

He opened his eyes when York finally pushed forward with a whimpering moan. Their eyes were locked on to each other as Luke arched up, pulling his other leg high to wrap around York's waist and slid the man in as deep as he could get. He kept his eyes lost in those oceans of blue as his body adjusted and his muscles trembled. When York moved, Luke slide with him, finding a rhythm like the moon pulling the tides. He tossed his head back, closed his eyes and let go.

It occurred to Macy, resting lazily to the side, happily watching, that what he was seeing wasn't fucking. York fucked well, freely and often. What he was seeing wasn't about lust, desire, passion or pleasure. It had all those elements but this was more. It sunk in slowly that this was what humans called making love, the polite way to say fucking that Macy had always scoffed at. Both men were vulnerable, open, needing and it was beautiful to watch.

Only he was just watching. He hadn't been included in the moment playing out in front of him. He wasn't sure why, or why it bothered him so much. There was nothing in their agreement about being lovers, about sharing even a bed to sleep in. Macy had no claim to York and certainly had no place to feel an ache of pain that he wasn't part of the pretty picture. Nonetheless, he felt it.

York trusted him as he never trusted anyone else. He showed Macy sides to himself he never reveled to anyone but it was always a struggle. York never once had given in to his own vulnerability to Macy as easily as he was now with Luke. Even when he surrendered, there was still always a barrier, a gulf, between them of something that York always held back and refused to expose. Macy couldn't say that in the slow, gently love making he was watching if York exposed whatever lurked in that distance to Luke or not, he just knew that York had never shown him. It wasn't a pain, not really, but it didn't make him happy.

He brushed aside the heavy thoughts, reminded himself that he was a vampire and not another human like Luke was. It was only natural that York would take the boy differently, it was to be expected and they really were very pretty together. With a sigh he watched as Luke tossed his head and quietly came a second time, shuddering, gasping for air, held in York's embrace and how quickly there after York followed him with slurred whispered words in French.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Thirty Six

The humans dropped into sleep almost as soon as they caught their breaths and barely stirred when Macy, humming contentedly to himself, glided warm washcloths over lovely exposed skin. They slept on as he tucked them into the covers and nudged them to curl up together. It didn't take much encouragement and he smiled happily at how pretty they looked sleeping in each other's arms. Convinced they were taken care of, he moved into the bathroom to take a long hot shower, singing softly and completely off key while he scrubbed clean.

He returned to the bedroom wet and awake and content as only a good sexy romp could make him feel. He hummed softly as he dressed and dried off but once done he stopped and stood near the foot of the bed. The two humans had cuddled close together, snuggled in tight to each other and looked adorable. He couldn't help but stand and watch them sleep. Only the longer he watched the more obvious it became.

York didn't cuddle up with strangers. They'd had their share of guests in their bed over the years and when it came time to sleep York always ended up as far from touching anyone but Macy as possible. Luke was cute, yes and he pulled at the heart like a lost stray puppy but it just wasn't like York to warm to someone so easily.

Unless there was more to it than just a cute face and some vague reminder of his past, something deeper that called to him. York was human after all, and humans were such emotional creatures. He'd seen how softly, how emotionally he'd taken the boy and all the pieces were right there he was just too stubborn to really see it.

York had fallen in love with the boy. It was as simple as that. Macy had seen humans fall in and out of love for centuries, for longer than centuries and he'd seen York love before. The human had never once hidden any emotion he felt toward another lover from Macy and yet, this time he had. Which meant this time it was deeper, more serious, and he didn't think Macy wouldn't understand. Which meant, he was being excluded.

It was bound to happen sooner or later but somehow Macy had convinced himself that it wouldn't. York was so emotionally distant, his emotions were so buried that he was almost like a vampire, subtracting out the brooding silences and lingering silent melancholy periods anyway. He'd lulled himself into believing that what they'd shared was enough for the witch and that he'd never be so human as to want for more. As he watched them sleep so soundly in each other's arms, Macy knew he'd been wrong and it caused a sharp pain under his ribs that he couldn't explain away.

He stood and watched them for long hours and tried to tell himself that maybe this was good for

York and maybe this was okay. In the end, he sighed softly and placed a small, soft kiss to the side of York's face, on the edge of those wonderful freckles. He left them to go downstairs and watch television, forcing that pain to go away and leave him be.

Luke was grinning when he woke, still grinning when he showered and dressed and still was grinning like an idiot as he went downstairs looking for the pair that had made him grin like a fool. He found Macy sprawled out over the arm of the sofa watching York fuss in the kitchen with an oddly serious look on his face. York had his back to the vampire, a pot simmering on the stove but he was rinsing dishes and loading the washer.

"Morning." Luke announced, still grinning and watched the serious look flee from Macy's face but stay in his eyes.

"Ah here is the other half of the evil human duo that made me squeal like a little girl last night." He grinned but the smile didn't quite warm his eyes.

"Morning." Luke paused and leaned down. Macy turned his face up and met his kiss as if they were doing it every morning for years.

"mmm, minty." Macy grinned.

"With extra whitening too, apparently." He slid away into the kitchen. "Something smells good." He stepped up closer to York and kissed him as well. When he turned to move to sit on one of the stools on the far side of the kitchen island, the same distant, serious look had flitted back on Macy's face.

"Oatmeal with apples and honey, be ready soon. Coffee?" York motioned to where the pot sat keeping warm and the mug waiting to be used beside it.

He slid off the chair and happily went to claim the coffee. "I slept like a rock, you two wore me out. Last night was freaking amazing." He sweetened up his coffee and poured a little milk in it. "That was the best, you know, no ones ever made me feel like that." He muttered a little, uncomfortable with how happy he still felt.

Macy waited to hear what York would say but the man stayed silent which spoke more than any words could. "York's not bad for someone that had to be seduced into losing his virginity." The comment found it's mark and he saw York's shoulders stiffen and his spine go a little straighter.

"I get drunk one night centuries ago and tell you one thing about my life before you and you never cease to toss it out. Fuck off, Macy." He scooped out a bowl of the oatmeal, shoved a spoon into it and slid it toward Luke. Macy had been picking at him since he'd woken up and York wasn't in the mood to take any more. "I need to work."

Luke glanced from where York moved stiff and proud to the door that lead into the warehouse and where Macy slouched looking sullen and unhappy on the sofa. "What's going on?" He asked but the slamming of the warehouse door startled him, York must have been pissed, he didn't seem like the door slamming sort.

"Don't worry, cutie pie." Macy slid off the sofa and came over to where the bowl of oatmeal sat forgotten. He spooned up a bite and tasted the well-made breakfast. "You're still on his good side."

"But?" He glanced to the door and back to Macy.

"Don't worry, he'll take care of you." The words came out more wistful than Macy had intended and he blamed it on the sticky oats he'd eaten. "The treaty stands until your birthday, once you're eighteen, the shit's going to hit the fan. He wants to have you safely locked down before then."

Take you out a little, let some of them take smaller pop shots at you to smack them down. Maybe keep them from forming a full on assault on us here. He wants to keep you safe." He ruffled the confused kid's hair and moved back to the sofa. He didn't feel much like watching the shows that were on or playing a game but the sofa felt like a comfortable place to crash.

Luke ate the oats in silence. The vampire was lumped on the couch like a puppet with its strings cut and staring blankly at a spot on the floor in front of the tv screen. It was so contrary to everything he'd seen from the vampire that if he hadn't known better he'd say the man was depressed. When he was done he didn't feel right breaking into whatever thoughts were bothering the vampire and instead he moved into the warehouse to follow where York had stormed off.

Only the witch wasn't to be seen and Luke wasn't sure where the man could have gone. Faced with sitting with a sullen Macy, Luke chose to stay out in the colder warehouse. Down below was a basketball hoop and nearby, hung on a support beam, was a net that had some basketballs in. It seemed like a good way to pass the time and chase off the chill of the unheated warehouse.

In the end, Luke was sweaty and tired and hours had gone by. Macy hadn't come out to join him and York was still missing so he gave up and went back into the warm loft. The vampire was still curled up on the sofa, not-watching the show on the screen in front of him.

"Did you and York fight or something?" He asked, lingering behind the sofa, knowing it wasn't any of his concern and ready to run away to shower if the question annoyed the other man.

"It's okay kiddo, just, remember, he ain't going to grow old with you."

"What?" Luke glanced to the door that York had hurried from. "Did I miss something?"

"Nothing, squirt, just go shower already, you stink."

Luke nodded but still frowned. Macy's words held no mocking tease, no mirth at all, he just sounded tired. "Yeah, I do, sorry."

Upstairs and still confused, Luke showered in the hot, hot water and re-dressed quickly. Macy was still sullen and York was still missing but he dropped himself down beside the vampire anyway.

"You mad at me?" He asked again.

"Nope." Macy flipped the channel, clicking from one bad show to another.

He twisted a little at the hem of his new shirt. "Should I go?"

Macy just glanced over and there was no way he could bring himself to resent the boy. If he were human, the kid would be beyond refusal too. "Don't be stupid." Besides, what was one lifetime? His relationship with York had ebbed before, withdrawn to barely speaking terms on occasion and always returned with time. It was the nature of things and the only thing that surprised Macy was how upset he felt, almost angry, this time around.

Luke frowned. "I don't want to cause trouble between you two."

"No worries, boyo, I know how the cards will fall."

They sat together for over an hour until Luke dared to ask what was on his mind. "Did he really have to be seduced?"

"He really did. His mentor set him up, was worried about him missing out on life cause he was

too serious all the time. Sent him on a trip with this minstrel, the guy seduced him on the way home." Macy grinned a little. "York still has a soft spot of musicians."

"He was also the man that betrayed us, did you tell him that too Macy?"

The only sign that Macy felt the least bit bad about being caught was a slight tightening of his shoulders. "No, I didn't."

"The thing with secrets is you're not supposed to tell everyone you meet."

"I didn't tell everyone." Macy protested as he turned around to look at the angry Frenchman. "It's just Luke."

"Did it ever occur to you that maybe I didn't want him to know?" He snapped back. "Or if I'd wanted him to know I'd tell him?"

Macy snorted and slouched back into the cushions. "I'm sure you'll be braiding each other's hair and sharing all the oh so sweet secrets together soon enough."

"You're such a prick." York snapped back. "Come on Luke, I think I've found a way to lock up that power you're carrying. Want to try it out, see if it works."

Luke glanced between the pair. "Okay." He answered meekly and stood up to follow York.

"Want me to fetch the polish? You can paint each other's toenails too while you're at it!" Macy had to shout the last words because York had almost pushed the boy from the loft and again slammed the door behind him. "Bitch." He pouted and turned back to the totally unentertaining television show.

Luke followed the witch out into the chilled warehouse but they didn't take the stairs, instead they followed the walkway around to the far side. York's spine was stiff and the man moved with careful, rigid grace that betrayed his anger.

"I'm sorry." Luke finally offered when they were a good dozen feet from the loft.

"It's not your fault. Macy always acts like a brat after having to see Oscar. And he likes to push my buttons." He felt the knots in his shoulders growing deeper. "You'd think I'd learn not to let it get to me."

"If this is about me..."

"It's not." York answered a little too quickly but he stopped and drew a breath and turned to look at the worried boy. "Don't worry, we do this, often. Can't live with someone for so long and not know how to drive each other crazy." Luke didn't look like he necessarily believed him but he nodded and that was enough for York to continue on to his workroom.

He paused outside the door. "This is where I work, when it's serious. Macy doesn't come in here. Actually, no one really comes in here. Don't touch anything, some of the items are quite dangerous and some may react very badly to the power you carry. Do you understand?"

Luke nodded but the door they stood in front of looked like a normal, older, office door. "Sure, lookie no touchie, I get it."

"I'm serious, pick up the wrong thing, it could blow your hand off."

"I like my fingers."

"Let's keep them attached." He pushed the door open and brought the lights back up a little. The warmth had lingered but he checked the spell and was happy to see it was stable and barely flickered when Luke crossed the threshold.

Somehow, Luke had been expecting a neat and tidy office. The Frenchman was so tidy in the loft, he always folded his towel and loaded the dishwasher. The throw pillows Macy seemed to delight in throwing were always neatly lined up by York later and the bed was always made and Luke knew it was because of Macy or himself.

Instead, the office was cluttered. Actually, full on almost messy even and it felt like a warm, cozy, pack rat home. Books lined shelves, shiny stones and feathers tucked into corners, an old bird cage was tired to a rafter, it looked like a junk collector had moved in and died. Nothing was dirty or dusty, not really, but there was a heavy smell of herbs and incense and age to the space and he stood inside the door and felt his mouth fall open.

"Holy shit, this... this looks like... wow...looks like a movie set of what a witch's workroom should be."

Rather than be offended York shrugged. "Never know when something will be useful." He pointed to the comfortable chair. "Go sit, and remember..."

"I know, no touching." Which seemed so much more difficult now when every inch was packed with interesting looking things. When he sat into the old comfortable chair, he sat on his hands just to be safe.

York leaned against his worktable and folded his arms across his chest and sighed. About a dozen items in the room were screaming to suck the power from the boy and twice as many were throbbing in low desire, it was almost enough to give him headache. If he had any room else, anywhere else, as secure as the workroom, he'd have taken Luke there. Truth was, he doubted there was a vampire, elf or witch alive, let alone in the city, that could batter their way into the workroom if York was inside. This was simply the best choice.

"In theory, with a lot of work, you're going to learn to sense the power you carry." He started; trying not to sound like a teacher because that really wasn't a role he wanted to fill again.

"I already can, a little, I think. When you were fighting those priests, I thought I could, maybe." Luke nodded and felt silly.

"True." He raised his eyebrows, he'd forgotten that the boy had managed to toss the power out to him. "With practice, you'll have a very clear vision of it. Once you master that, I'll try to teach you how to control it. For you, control means being able to pick who can and can not use that power. It might not be possible, Franck never learned full control but he wasn't as strong as you are. Once you get a handle on that, you'll know how to disguise it. You'll be able to walk around and so long as you don't do something stupid, go mostly unnoticed."

"Sounds good."

"Until then, you're a walking time bomb. Everyone is a threat to you, including me."

Luke shook his head. "You wouldn't ever hurt me."

"I nearly killed you the first time I saw that power. Even now? I want to hang morality and drain you dry. Everyone is a threat to you Luke, myself included."

The look in the dark blue eyes was so pained, so tormented, that Luke couldn't deny the chance of danger from him. He nodded. "Okay."

"However, I'm your best shot. I want to contain the power you carry, think of it is putting something radioactive into a big lead jar and slapping a really complicated padlock on it. I'll be the only person that can unlock it, no one else."

Luke swallowed a little and started to understand how serious the situation was. "Shouldn't I be the only one to be able to unlock it? I mean, what's to stop you..."

"From killing you? Nothing except I haven't yet and I think knowing I have to undo all the locks will give me the time to cool off and get a level head."

"You think?" He shook his head. "I'd be happier if I was the only one able to undo it."

"And what happens when you see someone hurting your aunt? How long will you refuse if that's the choice given to you?"

"Not long but you wouldn't let something like that happen either."

"Look at me Luke." He waited until the boy had again glanced up and met his eye. "You are a nuclear bomb waiting to go off. I would let them skin Macy or myself alive before I give him access to the power you carry. With that power? Cities can be leveled and no one will be strong enough to go against that. I don't need your permission to do this but I would like to have it."

It was silly to even think too much about it, because York had already said he was going ahead one way or another but Luke still took his time. Sure they'd only just met but already York had tossed himself into danger to help him and pissed Macy off to find out more information about him. While he didn't like giving control over anything so personal, and the power he barely had a sense of was growing to feel very personal to him, he doubted he could find a better caretaker than York.

"Alright, just be gentle with me, it's my first time with this magic stuff." He tried to joke and grin but it fell flat and made him sound even younger and more scared than he felt.

The unsteady tone made York smile in a sad, bitter way. "Don't worry, you won't feel a thing."

"Good cause I really am a wimp, I just really don't like..."

It was mean to drop the boy to sleep mid-sentence but York wasn't sure how much more he could stand of him trying to be brave without feeling too guilty to continue. It would be easier to work with Luke asleep any way, it would let him focus completely on the task at hand. The spell was complicated enough to require all his focus, one wrong twist of power and he could get the opposite effect and lock Luke wide open and vulnerable forever.

"Some days I really hate that I can do this shit." He sighed and settled in to drop into trance and get to work.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Thirty Seven

Luke woke slowly, drifting up from a deep, restful sleep that felt comfortable and safe. There didn't feel like there was any rush to wake up, he was warm and cozy. He might even have drifted back down into sleep again if the softly muffled sounds of someone weeping didn't sink into his thoughts. It wasn't a girl, the voice was definitely masculine, and it wasn't loud but the very hushed nature of the tears begged him to notice more than a deep sob would have.

He wafted up to a level of wakefulness where memory really returned. Macy, York, their new found care of and for him, the safety they offered and the danger he was now in slipped back into his thoughts. It was followed by just what he was doing curled up in a comfortably stuffed chair that smelled vaguely like the incense used during mass. No memory of whatever spell or magic York had woven returned and his sleepiness suggested that he'd been knocked out for it. Since he woke up where he'd fallen asleep and the only other person that should have been in the room was York the sound of weeping couldn't be good news.

When his bleary eyes opened, they focused quickly in the dimmed light. York wasn't difficult to spot, the man was sitting in front of the office door, his back to the side of a bookshelf that lined the wall next to the door and he was half curled up against the door itself. One hand covered his face and his eyes were squinted shut, his breath was ragged. A box of tissues was dropped within easy reach and a few crumbled wads were testament to how long the witch had sat there crying alone.

"York?" He asked softly and still the man flinched. Blue eyes darted up and stared at him blankly before they dropped. "You okay?"

York shifted where he was slumped and sat a little neater. It took a couple of steadying breaths but he nodded, rubbing at his eyes with the tissue he'd crumbled into one hand. "I didn't expect you to be awake so soon." He sniffed and cleared his throat and told his hands to stop shaking.

He slid out of the chair and came over to sit on the floor across from York. "What's wrong? What happened?"

"Nothing." York shook his head but he had to rub at his eyes again. "Everything went fine, I'll need to run some checks but I you should be locked pretty well down. Doesn't mean folks still won't try, least until they get the point that I won't stand idly by."

"Stop it. I don't give a fuck about this power or if it's locked up or not, tell me what's wrong." It was disturbing to see someone so stable with a tear stained face. When York still wouldn't meet his eye and showed no further signs of answering, Luke pushed anyway. "I'm sorry I'm such a painful reminder to you."

"It's not you, well, not entirely you." York admitted and when he saw the earnest desire on the boy's face he was surprised at how deeply he wanted to tell someone. "That priest, the one from the other night, Alvaro?"

Luke nodded but kept his mouth shut.

"We grew up together, we had the same teacher. He left when it became clear he was her second best student, ended up joining the Black Cross to gain more power." He shook his head. "It brings up a lot of bad memories, I thought he was dead, thought I'd killed him."

"I'm sorry, were you two close?"

"We were..." York felt the muscles in his jaw clench up and he struggled between wanting to pour out the words and memories of so long ago and let off some of the horrible strain he felt and wanting to stay silent and protect himself. He doubted Luke would ever knowingly hurt him and it wasn't fair to hide the history the boy would be walking into. It was different if Alvaro was truly dead but he wasn't and he was in the city and he wanted to own Luke. "We were

competitive. He was competitive of a lot of people, he tried to seduce me.”

“He was your lover?” Luke curled up a little to take in the story, feeling the weight of so many years and how rare it was that York shared them.

That put a bitter feel in the pit of his stomach. “We shared sex occasionally, we were never lovers. He never forgave the minstrel that eventually did seduce me, somehow, he thought my first time was to be with him. He used to get so angry that he wasn’t my only partner and worse, he’d accuse me of sleeping with people I hadn’t.”

“Possessive.”

“If I hadn’t rejected him so badly, been so cold to him, he might not have left.” He swallowed hard and blinked away the memories. “Easier to see a bigger picture after so many years but I was fifteen, sixteen at most.”

“Sounds like he was a jerk.”

“He was egotistical, his desire for power was for personal gain, not so he could use it for greater causes. He was a perfect fit for the Black Cross. He knew what we were planning, knew that if he could get control of that spell he could hold ten times the power he had. We were very careful but the minstrel? My first lover, he arrived in the city last and had the misfortune of being spotted by Alvaro. He was arrested on the spot and tortured into telling them when and where we were meeting. He betrayed us.” Something that had once cut too deeply, hurt too much, to be spoken of, now only made him feel tired.

“I would have been pissed.”

York smiled softly at the boy that should have been born in a different age. “I was, for a good number of years. All he had to do was keep his mouth shut for a day, one more day and he didn’t.” He sighed and let his head drop back against the door. “He was handsome, brown hair that gleamed in the sun, such a quick wit with this deep voice and calloused hands. It wasn’t so much that he was weak but he was alone in Alvaro’s hands, sometimes being alone to face such horrors is the more cutting blow.”

“That’s how you were arrested, because he betrayed you.”

“Alvaro made me watch while the minstrel was burned alive. He made sure I either saw or knew when each of the others was killed. There was no point to it, Luke, none. He didn’t need them to confess, we were arrested on the charge of plotting treason. The others couldn’t give him the power he wanted, the spell was anchored in me. He tortured them just to break them, people he knew, people he grew up with. He was sanctioned by the church to weed out heresy but those weren’t the charges brought against us.”

“The scars on your feet, he tortured you too.”

“It was a long time ago.”

“But he did, didn’t he?”

York shut his eyes. “For months, months even after the others were killed. He made sure I lingered. Those scars? It’s the Black Cross pendent he wore, said it was to remind me every step I took until he killed me, so that I’d never set foot upon holy ground again, he’d always be between me and the earth. Now you understand why it’s important to take what you are seriously? The people who want you are not good, they have no mercy.”

“And you’ve put yourself between them and me, why?” It was one thing to be powerful and know

you can handle just about anything and another to know, vividly, what the price of failing would be. York hadn't been joking about being skinned alive, he'd seen the horrors that could be inflicted.

York reached a hand over and brushed some of the lighter brown hair back. "Because, you've already had to see too much of the worst of this world." He drew the touch back when Luke looked sad. "So, it's not you. I'm just a very old man and humans aren't meant to live so long. Vampires are lucky that way, they rarely have regrets, never grow attached to anything enough to miss it, they live in the now and the future. Humans? We're haunted by the ghosts of who we used to be, and what we never became."

The sadness in the deep blue eyes seemed untouchable and Luke had no experience dealing with something that had cut so deep, a wound that was so old. All he knew was that he didn't like seeing that pain, it made him feel hurt as well and there was only one thing he knew that might brush some of the sorrow away. He leaned forward and brushed his lips to a pair that tasted like tears.

It startled York a little, he certainly didn't expect Luke to kiss him in reaction, but there was little of sex in the gentle fluttering touch. He wavered, it was so much more difficult to keep a grip on his control with the gentle offer of comfort and sympathy. The trouble was, he wanted comfort, wanted to just stop pretending the past didn't hurt him, and let someone sooth him. Even if that comfort was transitory and false, he needed it. With a sigh, he closed his eyes and returned the soft kiss, nibbling a little on the boy's lips, reaching out to touch his face.

The scrawny little street hustler that Macy had brought home on a whim, who less than a week ago was struggling for the cash for food and some semblance of safety, felt so right in his arms. It was almost impossible to imagine the future without Luke there. The boy was so young, so alive, so blindly trusting that with a good plan and hard work he could make his life better, that it humbled York. He found he needed that blind trust, or at least the reminder of it, because somewhere, long before, he'd lost his own innocent hope.

As he pulled the boy closer, urging him to straddle his legs and yet still kissing so gently, he wanted to love Luke. It was a sharp hunger, to love and know it was possible to be loved in return. He'd loved others across the long centuries, mostly silently, mostly without ever telling the object of his heart what he really felt because he needed to continue, he had his promises and vows, and no right to ask anyone to love him under those conditions.

Only, maybe, Elina was right. Maybe it was okay to let go and trust that other ways could be found. Maybe he'd carried the burden too long, longer than was fair or right and maybe he'd earned a chance to be happy. Luke was warm in his arms and so young that there was no doubt in York's mind that he could make the boy love him. He was already half way there now and it would be so easy to turn their relationship from growing friends, allies, to something deeper. Luke would love beautifully, under the armor he had crafted to protect himself from life's cruelties was a lovely young man. It would be so nice to love and know that love was given to someone capable of returning it.

There would be danger, that was a given. The elves would need to be negotiated with and it was going to take a display of power to get them to talk but that just required planning. There was the Black Cross too, relentless bastards, he'd have to knock them down until they stayed down but that was almost a pleasure. Alvaro was a different story but York would have to deal with him sooner or later.

It was the thought of his former friend, the one person that could really make York frightened, that settled a sick feeling in his stomach. Remembering Alvaro brought with it the memory of so many faces, too many, that had believed in what they were doing. Friends, loved ones, family to his soul, people he'd believed in who counted on him and the power he was born with to do what was right. If he'd died, so many centuries ago, locked in that prison cell so far from sunlight and

clean air, they would have welcomed him into the next life. There was no failure with that fate, in that end.

But he hadn't died there. The vampire that he'd begged to end his life had taken it upon himself to pull him from that hell. York had never asked Macy why he'd made such an odd choice, at the time he'd been too close to death and too broken in spirit to care and as time passed and his body healed, he'd been too angry. Too angry being left the last one alive, too angry at Alvaro, too angry at fate and mostly too angry with himself for giving up. The spell was done, it was woven and finished, it just needed that last flood of power to set it in motion. And Macy gave him a means of living long enough to find the power he needed and York had promised all the dead and living to never give up again.

As warm and tempting as Luke was, as much as York wanted to let go and just finish his life like a normal man, with a normal man's wants and desires, he couldn't betray so much just to be selfish. He broke away from the teasing kisses and pulled the slender body tightly into his arms. He buried his face into Luke's neck and felt his soul cracking a little and he just hung on.

"I can't." He finally forced out. All sense of time had stopped and he'd no clue how long he clung to Luke before he found his voice. He pulled away and caught the boy's worried face between his hands. "I can't ever have a normal life. There's too much I have to finish." He swallowed more tears, refused to let them out, and gathered his control again to face the world outside of his safe workroom. "As much as I want to love and be loved, that isn't something I'll have in my life."

Luke frowned but didn't look away. He liked being with the pair, liked being part of what they had but hadn't once thought either man could love him the way they loved each other. It was just so obvious to him the depth of the feelings between the witch and vampire that he never imagined a place beyond deep, trusted, friend. Loved, maybe if he was lucky but not loved like that and to hear York say he wasn't loved shook him.

"But Macy loves you." He heard himself saying, confused.

York just shook his head sadly. "He's a vampire, he loves me the way he loves his flannel boxers and his video games. As a luxury he enjoys and is used to but that isn't love, vampires don't love." He stroked his thumbs across the boy's cheekbones. "We should get back, I've a headache. Want to take some aspirin or something before I test those locks I put on you."

He slid off of York's lap, trying to subtly adjust his pants to hide the reaction the tender kisses had stirred, and wondered if York really believed what he'd told him. It was so clear to him that York and Macy felt deeply for each other, it seemed impossible that it was just nothing more than a comfortable agreement. It didn't feel like a proper time to debate the issue but he knew it would continue bother him. As they left the workroom, he wondered if maybe he should talk to Macy about it, find out first hand if vampires really were incapable of love.

The warehouse was cold and the loft's heat felt chilly when Macy turned his eyes on them as they crossed the threshold. He didn't stare long before turning lazily back to the television.

"That took hours." His voice held only minimal concern but was sharp edged and tight.

"Spell's woven, he's locked down, it's nothing that would interest you." York's tone was just as cutting and he left Luke standing inside the doorway as he moved toward the stairs.

"Oh, yeah, you come back with your eyes red from crying and the boy's got a hard on, nothing interesting at all."

York paused, his shoulders tightening up and his hands balled into fists before he could shake his head and force himself to keep moving. "I'm taking a shower."

Left with little choices, Luke made his way over and sat on the sofa next to where Macy was half curled up and staring away blankly. He figured it wasn't the most polite thing to just blurt out and ask the vampire what he felt about York so he sat silent too. After much thought, Luke ventured forward anyway.

"Can I ask you something?"

Macy didn't even look over. "No."

"Come on, you don't even know what it is."

"Don't care."

He sighed and shut up.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Thirty Eight

York returned to the heavy and sullen silence of the living room and almost retreated back upstairs. He'd showered longer than was necessary to get clean, trying to wash away the heavy touch of memories and tension, before he'd dressed in casual jeans, sneakers and one of his lightweight, well made sweaters with a t-shirt under it for extra warmth. Not that he was actually cold, he just liked the comfort of feeling the layers around him.

It was getting late in the day and pushing close to dinnertime and he didn't feel up to making something. He'd happily skip the meal but Luke was still so thin, the boy shouldn't skip a meal at all for weeks.

"I'm calling out for food. Do you want anything, Macy?" He asked while digging out the menus from the places that would deliver to them.

The vampire snorted softly. "Nothing from you."

York snapped and slammed the papers down onto the counter top hard enough to make Luke jump. "I'm sick of this, you want to fight, Mace, fine, we'll fight but no more of this pissy bitchy little school girl bullshit!"

"There's nothing to fight over." Macy tossed back but he didn't take his eyes from the television screen.

"Chiennel!" York cursed in French and tossed a tendril of power out at Macy. It hit the vampire and knocked him from the sofa hard enough that he broke the coffee table when he landed on it. "Ne m'ignorez pas!"

"Shit!" Luke shouted and scrambled to the far side of the sofa when Macy went flying.

Macy shook his head a little and bits of broken wood splintered out of his hair. "Punk ass bitch! You really want to throw it down?" He kicked the larger broken sections away and climbed to his feet.

"I will not be your whipping boy because you're pissed off at Oscar! I'm not in the mood to put up with your bitchy attitude!"

"You're a fucking idiot if you think I'm upset over Oscar." Macy shouted back and with barely the flicker of movement hurled a broken table leg at York.

It took only a thought to shatter the wood, before it was half the distance to him it was falling to the floor was a fine powder. "I won't take your abuse right now, I can't."

Macy smirked as he moved a little closer to the angry man. "I thought you liked my abuse."

There was a moment when Macy was certain he was about ready to really be attacked. York's face took on a horrible expression of rage but as the words sank in slowly the anger faded away and left only hurt in the dark blue eyes.

"Fuck you." York whispered and even that sounded strangled and torn.

"Fuck me?" Macy raised an eyebrow. "Fuck me? I think you've done a good enough job of that already! I've watched your back for centuries, followed you into any fight without question and in a few days you tell him," he flung an arm out and stabbed a finger toward where Luke sat wide-eyed at the end of the sofa. "Things you've never told me!"

"I don't tell you because you never once ask! Because you don't give enough of a shit to care! And when I do tell you something you never ask me about it but you'll tell everyone!" He was shouting, hurt and angry and aching so deeply. All he could think, all he could feel, was how unfair everything was.

Macy felt cold and predatory and it wasn't a good feeling to have directed at York. The witch was touchy about such things and Macy wasn't too sure he could win in an all out fight but he knew he didn't want to find out. "We have a vow, so long as you wish to continue it. I don't give a shit what you and little boy blue there do, all I've promised is to watch your ass and keep you alive. Frankly," he paused and knew he shouldn't say it but he was too twisted up inside to stop the words. "I'm bored with you anyway."

The words were worse than a thousand knives flung into his body. York stood, staggered for moment and he wanted to lash back but not with magic. His fists were already balled up and Macy had moved closer and closer while they'd screamed at each other. He really wasn't aware that he'd thrown the punch until it connected with Macy's face, a blow the vampire should have been able to avoid easily and yet allowed. York hit him hard enough that Macy went down, stumbled, and fell on his ass with a startled look on his face.

"I won't make you keep a vow that bores you!" York heard himself hiss out in angry reply before stepping over where Macy had fallen and moving blindly to the lift doors.

"Wait!" Luke called out but York was angrily pulling on his coat. "Where're you going?" Macy still sat where he'd landed on the floor, one hand cupping the reddened spot on his face.

"I need some air, stay here!" York snapped and slammed the lift doors shut behind him. Safely alone inside the lift, he stumbled back against the wall and with a sob of anger and hurt slouched against it.

There was a few heartbeats of stunned silence in the loft, like the steady center of a pond once the ripples from a dropped stone had spread out. The lift hummed, carrying York out into the cold night and Macy stayed where he landed, hand still cupping his face.

Luke was the first to move. He hopped off the couch and went to the kitchen. Onto the counter

he tossed a tea towel and he popped some ice into it's center. God knew he was vividly aware of what it felt to be cracked across the face, it was just a luxury to have a clean towel and some ice and to not have to buy a soda to bring the swelling down.

He knelt down and pulled Macy's hand away to press the twisted up cloth against the reddened spot. "Do you have to work to be an asshole or does it just come naturally?"

"He hit me." Macy answered instead. "He actually hit me."

"He tossed you into the coffee table too, in case you didn't notice."

The vampire waved the ice off. "That's just his way of getting my attention but he's never actually hit me."

"Well, you pissed him off." He pushed the ice back against the vampire's face. "You know, I think he's wrong about you, I think you're just clueless beyond all belief."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Macy took the ice pack away from the well-meaning boy and tossed it over his head. It sailed up in a slow lazy arc and crashed to a landing in the sink.

Luke refused to be impressed. He folded his arms over his chest and stared at the vampire. "He thinks you feel more about your video games and flannel boxers than you do for him."

"That's ridiculous."

"Ridiculous or not, he believes it. Humans need to feel loved, you idiot."

"Well, he's got you now."

"You really don't see it. York is never going to be able to love me because he's too much in love with you." He wondered if smacking the vampire across the back of the head would knock some sense into him.

"York can barely tolerate me most days."

"Idiot, does he seem like the kind of man to tolerate people for no reason? And don't pull this you let him live longer bullshit! That creep Alvaro has managed to make it this long so there has to be other ways."

"Vampires aren't just humans with pale skin and odd tastes, boy. We don't get attached to things like your kind do, we certainly don't take a single lover and never a love!" Macy snapped back, growing frightened and not really knowing why.

Luke smacked the back of Macy's head and hard enough to get his attention.

"Ow!"

"Don't you owe me! I'm not buying that bullshit and I'm not going to let you buy it either. Now, I'm going to go after him because he was really, really hurt and shouldn't be alone but you mister are going to sit here on your sorry ass and try to imagine what your life would be like without York in it! When it sinks in how important he is to you, maybe then you'll admit that you love him and for Christ's sake, tell him that. He needs it to be happy, he needs that to let you all the way in." The words tumbled out in a rush of breath and Luke stood up when he'd finished. Macy didn't move or stand or speak as he pulled his coat on, he just sat there, looking wide eyed and confused. Luke paused in the lift door to glance back one more time, shaking his head. "And if you're too much the pussy to tell him that? Then lie to him and let him to go so he stops wasting his heart on a coward like you."

Luke was actually surprised that Macy stayed where he sat on the kitchen floor and didn't make any effort to follow, even with words. The lift whirred and carried him down into the cold of the setting sun and out into the snowy street. York was nowhere to be seen but the only fresh tracks in the snow around the door led away from the building so he figured that was a good bet.

He followed them for over two blocks and over a couple before the newer footprints got lost in the churn of other feet. He knew it was a long shot, being able to find York, but he figured the man wasn't going to go far on foot and really did leave just to blow off some steam. Without anything to really go on, he continued in the direction the footprints had appeared to be going and kept his eyes open for any sign of the other man.

Which, wasn't as difficult to spot as he'd thought it would be. The warehouses a few blocks over had been converted into high end apartments and condos and an open space between a couple of them had been made into a small park. It was snow covered now but the frames of some swing sets stuck up from the ice and little patches of snow rode the swings when the wind gusted. A few sad, small little trees were planted around and a couple of benches sat wearing their own coats of ice. All of them but one, which sat bare and dry with a patch of ground around it looking soggy with melted snow and a huddled form sitting on the exposed seat.

Luke waded across the ankle deep snow and stepped carefully on icy patches but York didn't even glance up at the sounds of footsteps. "You shouldn't be out here."

He glanced around at the empty and still evening. The only person in sight was someone walking hunched from the cold to one of the building entrances. "I got a warm coat. Mind if I join you?"

York sat up straight and sighed. "Free bench." He didn't glance over as Luke settled in and they sat in silence, watching the wind puff the snow coated swings about.

"Would you really want him to?" Luke finally asked.

"Would I really want him to what?"

"Ask." He glanced over but York wasn't looking at him. "Would you really want Macy to ask you things?"

The question surprised him. "I don't know."

"You said yourself, it's not in a vampire's nature to look back, to linger on things that are gone, maybe he doesn't ask because of that."

"He doesn't care." But he'd never considered it from that angle before. He'd always just assumed that if Macy really wanted to know he'd ask him.

"But you care about him, don't you?"

"I'm tired Luke, and my head still hurts."

He nudged the Frenchman with an elbow. "Answer the question."

"I..." York sighed and slouched back into the bench. "I have a history of being attracted to unattainable men."

"Okay so, like, I know I'm really stupid about all this magic shit but there are other ways of living a long time, right?"

He nodded. "Several, some more moral than others."

"But you have other options. Even I can see Macy is a pain in the ass, you say he doesn't really care about you, that he's unattainable, so why do you stay with him? Just help me understand that." He knew he couldn't just whap York on the back of the head and tell him to admit that he was love with the vampire. That worked with Macy but York was way more guarded and subtle, Macy was about as subtle as a sledgehammer.

Luke's question was a good one and one he'd never thought about. Now, posed it directly by someone he had bound into his life and actually really liked he did think about it. Only, the answer that came to mind seemed stupid. "You'll laugh."

"Promise you I won't do more than snicker a little."

"Fair enough." He glanced up to the bright shades of the last of the sun's light as it was fading into indigo. "My freckles."

"Your freckles?"

He nodded. "Most folks, don't even notice them but Macy? Even after all these years he's still fascinated by them. I like the way that feels. That sounds stupid."

"No, it doesn't." Luke replied right away without thinking about what to say, just saying what he felt. "I'd give almost anything to feel that, to be that important to someone. It's okay to love someone, you know, even if they can't love you back the same way. Shouldn't beat yourself up for that."

"He's bored with me."

"He was speaking out of anger and you know that. He went too far, you didn't see his face. He was shocked you actually decked him."

"I did hit him pretty hard."

"Knocked him on his ass."

"Maybe anger made him honest. I can't blame him for being tired of a promise that was never supposed to last so long."

"Or, maybe, here's a shocker, he was just being a cruel petty bitch. What do you say? Come back to the loft, it's warmer, talk to him, figure it out? I mean, what have you really got to lose?"

"Nothing really." Which was only the truth. If Macy was tired of their arrangement he'd leave, might even give in and just let himself grow old and die while he still could. It was also just as likely that Macy hadn't meant what he said and that would mean York would have to make up his mind on his own to continue to cling to eternity and a man that could never love him or to walk away and no longer have someone giggle at the freckles sprinkled across his face. It never occurred to York that there might be a third answer that Luke believed in, that they both could admit how they felt and find something deeper and better than was possible to dream of.

"So, let's go, my ass is freezing off." It hurt, in a way, to nudge at them to get them to see what they were too close to notice. He wanted to be selfish and worm his way in, replace one of them with himself and steal what they had. All his life he'd dreamed of being loved so fully but this was their love, not his. Maybe, if he got them to see it, he'd earn enough karma to find his own soul deep partner. At the very least, he knew that Macy and York were generous and he could curl up, snuggled tight inside their warmth and never really be lonely.

He told himself that he was giving in and going back to the loft to keep the boy from sitting out in the cold with him. It was an easy lie because Luke could cope with the cold and was way

stronger and tougher than he looked. It gave him a means of going back and saving face if Macy started on him right away.

"Alright." York stood and when the boy grinned and stood as well, he tossed an arm about the slender shoulders. "Didn't scare you did we? Fighting like that?"

Luke shrugged under the warm arm. "My last roommates used to try to knife each other when they'd fight. Only they'd be too high to actually get he knife into the other one and the only time they even drew blood, they cooed over each other for a week."

"Some how I doubt you'll have to put up with that." He took a step but his back foot refused to move. York glanced down and saw the threads of red writhing like small rivers of blood across his foot and up his ankle. "Shit!" He shoved Luke away, hard. "Run, Luke, Run!"

Luke stumbled from the hard shove and glanced back, red threads, glowing like sick neon in the deepening darkness were climbing up the witches body. "What?"

"Fucks sake boy! Run! Now! Go, find Macy!" The power from the binding spell spiked and York dropped like a rock. His body simply shut down, his muscles going weak and he fell into the cold snow and ice. He tried to shout again at Luke to run but the words only came out as a garbled groan, the tendrils of the spell were too attached to him now to allow speech

It was more annoying than worrisome. There wasn't anyone in the city that could cast a binding on him and be powerful enough to seal it in place. Even Alvaro with a slew of priests linked together wouldn't be able to, this spell took the focus and power from only one person. It was a person too, not an elf, it was very much a human spell and while it would knock anyone down, York had broken such bindings countless times before.

Only this time, as he poured power into a defense against the binding spell, the spell didn't shatter. It shivered a little, but still it held and after a moment, strengthened and began advancing again. Angry, York held nothing back and hammered at the magic that had caught him and still it held steady, neither breaking or retreating. It was like being swallowed alive by a snake, he couldn't feel his feet or legs, his hips were going now too. When the spell reached his throat it would seal and lock his magic away and leave him vulnerable.

Panic drove him now, York screamed in rage and frustration and pulled in every ounce of strength and power he could muster. It was far more than was actually safe to use, he felt his brain spark in unseen fire, wondered if he was about to give himself a stroke and still tried to peel the binding from his body. It was just enough to stop the progress of the spell, to hold it in place, with a bit more he'd be able to push it from his body and free himself.

The will was there, York knew if it was a matter of sheer stubborn willpower he'd have succeeded. Unfortunately, that will was still contained in fragile flesh and it was that flesh that betrayed him. It wasn't quite a stroke, but York knew the feel of a power stress induced seizure well. He felt it tingling, creeping across his brain as connections and neurons overloaded and protested. When the seizure grabbed him, it short circuited his control on the magic for just a second, a blip and that heartbeat of time was all the binding spell needed to surge forward and claim him.

As the convulsions hit him, York's only small hope was that the footprints that led off in the snow meant that Luke had gotten away. If the boy had listened and run, maybe, just maybe he'd be quick enough to make it back to the loft and safety. It was a small hope, and a thin one when the hem of black pants came into his limited and fading range of vision. Mercifully, he blacked out and lost all awareness shortly after.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Thirty Nine

(warning: contents of this chapter may be disturbing to some readers)

The only way York knew he was awake at first was the hard, painful throbbing in his head. It was bad but not the worst he'd ever felt, when he really pulled in too much power and instead of killing himself merely shed another layer of humanity, well that was worse. That was waking up with explosions inside his skull and it took days, sometimes weeks for the pain to fade. This was pretty bad but not that bad, just painful enough to remind him he was still alive.

He became aware of three things slowly. The first was that his eyes actually were open. The room he was in was dark, almost totally dark but as he adjusted to the pain in his head he made out the faintest of light seeping in from under a closed door. Which was a good thing because he was pretty sure his eyes were open and didn't like the idea that maybe he really had given himself a stroke and lost his vision.

The second thing that sunk in was that his arms were bound behind his back. The weight and feel of metal cut into his wrists and when he shrugged his shoulders a little bit the interconnecting chain rattled. Normally, this wouldn't mean anything but the binding spell prevented him from just snapping the metal like tissue paper. Metal was a bad sign, metal cuffs wasn't something improvised. Metal meant that whoever had snatched him meant to keep him for a while and had made careful plans.

The final thing to seep into his bleary mind was that he was totally naked. Not that being nude bothered him, not really, he wasn't skin shy any more but it made the picture more grim. They'd removed everything he had on, leaving no chance that something he wore could be a weapon or a means of being found. If he'd been planning this, everything stripped off would have been promptly destroyed. There was no point to panicking, not yet anyway and his head hurt enough to distract him.

Time was a fluid thing when trapped in such darkness. York thought he might have drifted into sleep but with nothing to mark the time and the little glimmer of light unchanging, it was difficult to say. It was so easy to slip away and lose all sense when bound like a bug in amber. Ten minutes could feel like hours, hours like moments and it all became a muddled soup of nothingness inside his aching head.

He was alone long enough to push at the binding spell holding him. It was expertly done and as much of a prison cell as the one his body was trapped inside. This spell was old and York hadn't seen this version cast in a long time. It formed as necessary on five points of the body, the neck being the first and primary spot. Once sealed, the spell created a red cord, like slender strands of string, as a physical representation of the spell.

York was bound at all five points, neck, both wrists and ankles. The binding was solid and nothing leaked past it into his senses and he struggled and searched, feeling along the inside edges of the spell and found no way to seep even a small amount of his power out. That meant there was no way he could pick that spell apart. It also meant that he couldn't sense anything, other people's magical skills, the feel of the earth, the change from day to night. It blinded him and just like a prison cell, it contained him. He couldn't even reach out and slip his mind into a spirit plane and try to gain some help because his skills and mind were completely controlled.

Under other circumstances, York might have admired the spell. It really was a cast bit of wonder. So skillfully made to almost be art, delicate in its balance and form but yet strong enough to overwhelm him and contain him. As he picked at it as best he could from the inside, which wasn't great, he felt rather like a shark that had just found out he wasn't the biggest fish in the pond. York didn't like being caught so unaware and blindsided. Whoever had bound him, was strong and good and very careful to go unnoticed.

The darkness ended in blinding light. The ceiling of the room had been too dark to make out but the lights that suddenly burned to life were overkill. For as dark as it had been, it was just as suddenly as bright and York flinched. The light made his eyes water and his head start to pound again. He turned his face down into the floor trying to let his eyes adjust slowly so the first thing he saw when the door opened were the toes of shoes.

They were black and as they drew closer York saw the black cuffs of pants as well. One of the toes extended out and hooked under his chin, it lifted his face up and forced York to glance through watering eyes up the legs of his captor. Black pants led to a black shirt. He squinted and the face came into focus.

Whatever small hope York had carried that someone other than Black Cross had managed to snatch him died. Alvaro's hair was pulled back, his eyes dark, his face empty of any emotion. It was a cold look that still woke York from nightmares, one that promised very, very bad things. He jerked back; pulling his chin from the shoe that had lifted it and clawed after his stability. The only thing worse than being in Alvaro's hands and helpless, was letting Alvaro see him fall apart while in his hands and helpless.

The foot that had prodded at him didn't go far. It swung down a little and landed hard against York's ribs. It wasn't a heavy kick, just one to get attention with just enough force to knock the breath from York. He was actually grateful for it, it gave him something to focus on instead of the sheer raw panic that was squirming up over him. He gasped for breath while struggling to still his mind for whatever was to come.

The dark shoes stepped away, closer to the door. York watched as best he could and saw the man accept a small leather bag and a rattan cane from someone that hovered in the doorway.

"Leave me." Alvaro commanded.

"But, Father...."

Alvaro struck like a viper, his hand made a cracking sound against the younger priest's face. "Obey. Do not question my orders!"

There was the shuffling of feet and two voices that answered with meek "Yes Father." The door was swung shut, it rumbled heavily in its frame, shutting York alone in the room with his own worst fear.

He heard Alvaro's soft footfalls as the man walked around him. York didn't cower, not quite, but he wasn't able to meet those dark eyes either. It had once been a small measure of pride, back before the long days had stretched into months, that he'd always been able to meet Alvaro's eye. At first, he thought it would shame the man but he soon learned that all it did was make him crueler. It didn't take long until York found himself unable to even glance up when Alvaro was in the room.

Shoes scuffed on the dirt floor and a hand fisted tightly into York's short hair. It was just bad luck that it had grown out enough to really get a handful of. A month earlier and there would have been no way. It was easier to think about that then to think about how compliantly he let his head be yanked back. He opened his eyes but the light blinded him, made them water again and squint shut.

Alvaro was silent but York could taste the hate and rage in the man. He'd always been able to sense strong emotions from the boy he'd spent so many years training with. Across a room, filled with people, Alvaro had been able to glance at York and York was able to know what he was feeling, anger, frustration, lust, it was as clear as if the darker boy had shouted. Time, distance and hate hadn't blunted that any and no spell could block such a bond.

A tug on his bound arms made York's breath shudder. He'd barely got it back under control from being kicked and now it was startled away by fear. His arms were always something he didn't like tugged on, even Macy could set him off by pulling too roughly at his shoulders. Having Alvaro do it made him want to vomit or scream and he pulled away.

The slight, silent, refusal earned him another kick. This one caught his side and just hurt. Still, it wasn't with all of Alvaro's strength and while York was reacting to the unexpected blow, the priest was busy. York felt tugs again on his arms and soon the chain connected the two shackles came free. Before he could react to that, Alvaro had him by the hair again, dragging him to the nearest wall and was pulling him to his feet. York managed to stand because he didn't want a handful of hair ripped out but his legs didn't hold him long.

It was enough time for Alvaro to loop the chain into a metal ring and reconnect it to the other wrist shackle. When York's legs went out, he fell limply but his arms caught him. It gave him pretty good motivation to shake off the numb haziness of the spell's backlash and at least support some of his weight on his legs. He gasped and struggled and his head grew dizzy and felt like it might fall off.

Then Alvaro touched him and all concern for weak legs or dizzy heads went away. The hand that darted across his skin was warm and it made York flinch, which set his balance off and he fell forward and his forehead hit the wall. The touch wasn't sexual or violent, just appraising and it ran across his back and ass, forward across his chest and lower. When the hand cupped between his legs, York tried to pull away but his body wasn't working properly. The touch just cupped him, stroking slightly, judging, studying in a cold distant way. When the touch retreated, York shivered and wondered what his odds were of passing out again.

Behind him the scuffing sounds of footsteps echoed in the room so quiet that York could hear the lights buzzing. It was broken by the sound of a metal zipper hissing, it went on for a long moment and York clenched his hands around the chains. There was a pause while Alvaro rummaged in the small bag he'd brought with him before the scuffing footsteps drew close again.

That was the only warning York was given. There was a wooshing sound and pain lit up on his shoulder. He jerked, startled, but didn't cry out. Again the sound came and again with it was pain but York was ready this time. He had enough experience to know it was a flogger but one with stiffer leather. A light blow would sting, swung with this much force and there was a real chance of it breaking the skin.

York wasn't seventeen anymore. Even lightheaded and disoriented, frightened and captive, he wasn't going to be shaken with a beating. Alvaro was blowing off steam, venting anger and hate, retribution, and nothing York could say or do would stop him. He didn't count the blows but used the pain to focus and keep his wits about him.

It wasn't until his back was one long burning pain from shoulders to ankles that the blows stopped landing. The flogger hit the wall beside York, thrown in anger that was only fueled by York's control not quenched by the pain inflicted. Behind him, he could hear the other man's sharp breathing and with a growl a new pain appeared.

To most people, saying he actually liked the sharp feel of pain from a cane seemed a strange statement. York knew his pain threshold was high and knew that there was little that could carry him over into the headspace of endorphins and release better than the sharp bite of a well used

cane. He couldn't explain it, other than to say that he'd been young and Alvaro had mixed pain and pleasure together for so many months that some part of him would always, occasionally, need that. Sometimes, it was far simpler than that. Sometimes he just needed to be hurt, brutally, painfully hurt to make the pain he carried stop for a time.

Only, this time, it wasn't Macy holding the cane. The crisp shock of the cane's biting pain was doubled as it landed on already welted and bloody skin. There was nothing purging here, nothing wanted. This was just pain to be endured with no end to the promise of more. While Macy landed each blow with the skill of the warrior he was, carefully avoiding any areas that might actually do harm, Alvaro had no such worries. The cane landed across York's body in random places with random force so he couldn't anticipate it. It landed with the intention of hurting him and hurt it did.

It wasn't too many blows until he was gasping with each contact. A few more and he was flinching, struggling to get away with nowhere to go. He wanted to scream in rage. He wanted to beg for it to stop. He wanted it all to just end but he bit his lip and the only sound that escaped was a moaning whimper. The sound only made the blows land with more force and York stopped thinking, stopped trying to brace himself and just silently gave in.

Eventually, the cane stopped cracking like a whip into his flesh. It clattered to the bare floor with a hollow sounding rattle but York didn't really notice. He hung from his wrists, dazed. So dazed that when Alvaro unclipped the chain that had been looped to the ring in the wall it too dropping hard to the floor for York to really know the beating was done.

He'd been dizzy before, now his head felt detached. His vision was doubled slightly and his stomach was flipping over. He knew it was shock. The shock of the seizure from fighting the spell, combined with the shock of the binding spell settling into his energies, mixed with the shock of knowing who had him and then the pain, horrid burning pain, of the beating. Everything felt fuzzy and numb but the bright red feeling of his back and legs. Until something cool touched him and York's hazed mind wrenched from the understanding of the source.

The touch of the lube was painfully cold and York shuddered as fingers plunged into his body. It hurt but that was just another pain. It was a bad sign if Alvaro was using lube and stretching him at all. The man liked to keep his toys in working order, it meant that he had no plans to end things soon. It meant that a thousand years had made little difference, he was helpless again and captive. He was going to be tortured again, raped again, torn to shreds again until his body physically couldn't go on. Only now, his body was tougher and it could take him years to die.

He sobbed at that cold, invading touch and tried to crawl away. His legs weren't working and he was already pooled around the wall, there was nowhere to go. Alvaro's breath was almost a growl behind him and both men knew this had nothing to do with lust. This was revenge and power. Fingers slipped from his body roughly and hands caught his hips and lifted them up.

It was easy, even after so many years, to disappear. Slipping his mind and soul away to a spirit plane may have been denied him but York had learned how to survive this. Inside his head he pulled memories around him, trying to find one that would keep him sane. He remembered the blue waters outside of Greece and Macy laughing surrounded by handsome dark haired men. He remembered Venice and taking painting lessons with Oscar during the Renaissance, courting from gondolas. Neither were strong enough to hold the present away.

He remembered the South Pacific, the months he'd spent there with Macy before tourism and war had changed them. The feel of laying on the soft sand beaches basking in the golden warmth of the sun while Macy hid in the cool shadows under a tree was almost enough to overshadow the feel of Alvaro plunging into his body, raking hands across the fire of pain in his skin. He focused on that time and the sound of the waves sliding up the beach and back out again covered the sound of sharp, rough grunts and the sickening wet sounds of flesh hitting flesh. The smell of clean salt air in his memories covered the scents of sex and sweat, blood and

dust. Inside his mind he disappeared into that memory and pretended he didn't feel Alvaro. It was a very thin illusion but just enough to keep him from screaming.

As roughly as it had started, it ended. Such short moments to shatter so much and York lay where he'd been dropped, shuddering in long convulsive tremors. He landed with his face out from the wall, and from the corner of his eye he saw Alvaro standing there, breathing hard, his face still cold and empty but hate burning in his eyes. He knelt down and wiped lube the last drying spots of lube from his fingers onto York's body before he stood and tucked himself back into his pants. It was just another spot of filth on York's skin but he knew that feeling well.

Alvaro stood there, his breath slowing but his hands still balled into fists. York struggled to get up, on to his hands or knees or sitting, anything other than simply laying there. As soon as he moved at all, his stomach turned over and he vomited, violently. Retching trying to purge out the memories and horrors that couldn't be. It left him laying there weaker than before. When he collapsed with a moan, Alvaro made a sound of disgust and spat a glob of spit out. It landed on the side of York's face and added a new insult to the humiliation.

Without ever having spoken a word to him, Alvaro pulled the door open. He paused in the doorway and addressed the two young men that had followed him. "I want him cleaned up and healed enough to be alert, no more. Make sure he gets some water, no food, and rebind his hands. I want him in sound health and brought to my reception room in two hours."

York saw the straight-backed Alvaro give the order while glaring down his nose at the already frightened men. When the dark haired man left, he took a huge horrible weight with him and York shuddered again, uncontrollably. The younger pair came in, looking innocent and so inexperienced. The one cursed under his breath and they both went wide-eyed and slack jawed in shock at what they saw. York just closed his eyes.

The young pair were no threat to him and he dismissed them from his thoughts even while they tried to figure out how to obey their orders. He was bound, caught and had no idea where. There was no real hope of Macy coming for him, not this time. He's last words to the vampire released him from his vows, he couldn't even count on Macy finding him to kill him.

It was that thought, that he really was going to stay here until Alvaro killed him, that pushed his mind too far. He knew it was a panic attack; he just had no strength to fight it. The sobs were shattering but too deep to allow room for tears and his breath shut down into gasping spasms. This was it, torture, pain, Alvaro using him, until he could find death to free him. It was his worst nightmare made real and as his vision faded he was glad he'd hyperventilated until he passed out.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Forty

Macy sat on the floor long after the lift had carried Luke out after York. The bruise on his face was already fading but it still hurt, a shadow of pain more from the startled hurt he'd seen in York's face than the impact of the blow. Luke's scolding words sunk in and he tried to think about them. It seemed stupid to think that York would believe he meant so little to him but he saw no reason for Luke to lie.

Nothing in the loft mattered to him, it was all just things. He only cared about the loft because it was comfortable and knew York liked having the secure, comfortable nest to tuck in. All of it, the video games, the leather pants, the huge shower and tub, all of it down to the washing machine he enjoyed so much could disappear and Macy wouldn't care. They'd only mattered because he'd built them with, around and for York.

The loft seemed painfully empty now that he was alone in it. It was absurd, of course York meant more to him than mere things. As he stood up it, it started to sink in how it must have felt to York, if he really thought he meant so little. Not once, in spite of their agreement, had Macy ever felt like York was just with him to live for a long time. The human took care of him with tenderness; saw to it he was never hungry or bored. Even when they went shopping, Macy didn't have to worry about stupid things like a wallet because he knew York would have cash on him and he only had to ask. When he wanted cuddled, York was there. When he wanted someone to spar against, York held nothing back. When he was horny, York always surprised him and was hotter than anything he'd ever seen. When York went away for the night, to visit his coven and celebrate holidays that bored Macy, it left the loft and his life feeling empty and restless.

Of course York meant more to him than any stupid possession. The idea was ridiculous. Maybe he'd never been really clear about that, made it human level obvious to York because humans were so blind sometimes. It started to sink in how hurtful it would feel to think someone he'd spent so much time with felt nothing for him. He tried to imagine he was York, the proud, stubborn witch wasn't someone to feel things lightly. Macy had seen how York pined in silent pain for people he knew he could never have, or how the death of an innocent haunted him for years, decades, past the incident. York liked to pretend to be cold and distant but Macy knew it was a cover for a man that simply felt too much. Hell, York was still wounded from the loss of his friends and the betrayal a thousand years before.

What did it feel like to be a man like that and think the person you'd twined your life around, the person you cared enough about to take such care of, felt you were nothing more than another distraction or possession? Macy wasn't sure his imagination extended that far but he knew it would cut deeply. He knew he'd hold that person at arms length, try to keep them away for self preservation sake. He knew he'd react a lot like York had.

He dropped himself onto the sofa and asked himself the biggest question. Did he love York? It seemed like an absurd question. Love meant nothing to him he'd never loved. It was silly really. Humans loved their parents, Macy would have happily slaughtered his. Humans loved their offspring. Well, Macy may not have held the same distaste for them as he did for his parents but they meant almost nothing to him. Humans loved their pets even and Macy found that absurd. He'd forbidden York from getting another cat when the man had been so broken hearted when their last one had died of old age. Sure, Macy missed the fluffy thing, had enjoyed it's warmth and the comfort of it's purr but he hadn't been hurt when it passed.

Was that love? Being hurt when the thing you loved was no longer there? He'd never considered it like that before because humans used the word so lightly. They loved their cars and potato chips and their spouses all in the same breath. He tried to think about that, curled up on the sofa, tried to imagine that York finished his spell and no longer had a need to continue living. York would die, he was mortal, he would die and leave him.

The pain that thought caused stole his breath and crushed his chest. He secretly had been hoping that York would be forced to shed his humanity and gain his own immortality so that when the spell was finished, he'd have to continue living. It wasn't even the selfishness of wanting to keep York in his life, because the thought of him leaving and living elsewhere bothered him but didn't cause pain. It was the thought that York would really be gone that nearly doubled Macy over.

One of Luke's points was that humans needed to feel loved, not just be loved or taken care of but to feel that elusive emotion. Macy didn't know how to do that, wasn't sure he was really

feeling love but as he lay on the sofa waiting for the pair to return, he knew York had become vital to his happiness. More, he'd become vital to his very life because if he couldn't be happy he didn't want to live. If York needed this, well, he'd always tried to give the human what he needed.

That was it then. He'd sit tight until they got back and then drag York away to talk to him. He'd just have to tell him how the thought of living a day without him made him hurt so badly. He'd admit that he didn't know jack shit about love or what that word meant and just try to make the silly human know how need and necessary, how vital, he was. Then they'd have wild, crazy, make up sex where Luke and York could both bang him into the floor boards to make up for having been punched in the face.

Only an hour turned into two and then three and Macy still lay on the sofa curled up. Time started to slip away and the hour when the bars closed came and went and the little teasing voice that York and Luke were just out getting drunk and bitching about what an ass he was faded. He started to feel sick and started to understand.

He'd told York he was bored and he'd seen the hurt in the man's eyes. He'd hurt York deeply enough that the human had done the thing he'd never once done in all the long years, he'd offered Macy an out to their vows. York and Luke now and he was obviously fond of the boy and Macy had been so cruel.

As dawn arrived it began to really sink in that York wasn't coming back. He'd said too much, done too little and he couldn't blame York for finally having enough of it. It made him want to cry but he was too miserable for that. Instinct said to go out and find York, to make him listen, to make things right again and bring him home but he just stayed there, laid out on the sofa, waiting. It was a thin hope to cling to, that York would come back on his own and Macy just needed that hope right now.

The buzzer to the front door rang and Macy ignored it. It buzzed a few more times in short angry bursts and he flipped it the finger. If he got up to hear some little ninny of a schoolgirl was selling cookies, he'd make her into cookie. York indulged the few kids brave enough to come selling things for school fundraisers and was always a good buyer but Macy was in no mood to deal with them and they were the only ones that rang the buzzer. He was glad when they got the hint and went away, the buzzer falling silent again.

Until a rapping sounded on the window outside the fire escape. "Father!" Oscar shouted and Macy lifted his head to see the other vampire crouched down to peer in the window. His suit was still flawless; the sunglasses on his face were designer.

Macy met his eye and flipped him off too. "Fuck off, Oscar, I'm in no mood!"

"It's urgent. Let me in, I won't stay long."

"Annoying, fucking, dumb ass, pain in my neck, troublesome, dim witted shrubbery!" Macy muttered insults as he stood and went to open the spell locked window. Any other day, it would have amused him to see Oscar crawling in the window like a thief in his fancy important suit, today it didn't even make him chuckle.

"Thank you." Oscar nodded and smoothed out the wrinkles. "I know you must be busy but because it's York I'm offering you the respect of a warning."

Macy frowned and folded his arms across his chest. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

"Because I know York won't do a thing to help Black Cross, I'm going to take my people in tomorrow before dawn. We will kill them, him and the boy, I can't allow them to be held. Out of respect to you as my father, I'm letting you know since I'd imagine you've something planned." But as Oscar spoke he saw only confusion on his father's face. "You haven't heard, you don't

know.”

Cold dread settled into Macy’s stomach and he dropped his arms. “Apparently not.”

“Last night? One of my people saw York be ambushed, a binding spell. The boy tried to run but he didn’t get far. I assumed you knew.” He’d never once seen Macy look so horrified. “But you didn’t know this.”

“No, we quarreled, I thought he was just away because he was angry.” He shut up and shook his head. “You’re certain it’s Black Cross?”

Oscar nodded. “Yes, father. You’re welcome to check for yourself.”

There was no need, he’d taught Oscar and for all the flaws and mocking that Macy did to the other vampire, Oscar was good. He stumbled a little backward and half turned to grip the back of the sofa. “Alvaro.”

Over the years, Oscar had seen his father angry any number of times, a lot of them directed at himself, but he’d never felt such black rage in the normally flippant vampire. There was something horrific here, something that made his instincts say to run before that anger found him.

Instead he stepped a half step closer to his father. “This isn’t just about a power play.”

Macy straightened up. “Keep your people out of my way or I will kill them too.”

“Father, what’s happened?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Yes, it does.” He drew a breath and made a difficult admission. “York is important to me as well. Who is this Alvaro?”

The confession was what tipped the scales for Macy. York really had helped raise Oscar, Avery had been easy but if it hadn’t been for York, well, Oscar might not have survived to adulthood. “You’ve seen the scars on York’s feet?”

“The brands? The crosses?”

“Alvaro did that, he tortured York brutally.”

“That would make him...” Fragments of information fell into place. “This Alvaro is the Cardinal’s right hand man we’ve heard whispers of. The hound that has all of Black Cross on it’s toes.”

“The man is a fuckhead but there is bad, old blood between him and York.” At least he knew there was little chance that Alvaro would kill York outright, that didn’t mean York wouldn’t have found a way to kill himself by now. “Stay out of my way Oscar.” Macy turned and with an easy leap reached the loft and began to change clothes. He was buttoning the more functional black leather pants when the footsteps coming up the staircase stopped at the top. This pair was for fighting, soft, agile, strong and protective, the fact that they looked good on was secondary to the protection they offered.

“What are you doing?” Oscar asked with a tone that sounded more like he was speaking to a child not his father. He knew the situation was odd when Macy didn’t even call him on it.

“I’m getting him back.” He pulled a shirt off of a hanger and let the hanger rattle to the floor, black cotton spandex that breathed and clung to his body like a second skin. He tossed a case

onto the bed and flipped it's latches. Inside were knives, all sorts of them and he began to pull out his selections.

"What was the first thing you taught me."

"Not now!"

"The first thing you taught me father was that humans are neither prey nor predator but both, that Elves hunt in packs during the day and our strength is their weakness and the night is our friend. If you go after him now, you won't get him back. Everyone of them is a magic user, everyone of them will be alert and watching."

It was a valid point but Macy was seeing red. He caught up a wood box from the top of a dresser and threw it on the bed near Oscar. The box opened and jewelry spilled out. "I'm not worried about their petty spells!"

The power in the jewelry was amazing. Oscar picked up a finely made silver ring and felt the magic humming into it. "York made these for you?"

"Protections against magic. Enough that not even an entire stronghold of Black Cross can't drain them all away."

He placed the ring back on the bed next to the rest of the spilled metal. "It's foolishness to rush in without thought, to attack from emotion. If you're going to risk your life for a human, don't be stupid about it."

"He's not just a human!" Macy snarled. "Be glad I'm otherwise occupied or I'd have your blood for that!"

It wasn't an idle threat, Oscar had only really been frightened of his father a few times and right now was added to that list. "Father." He gentled his voice. "York may already be dead."

"He's not, Alvaro wants to own him for years."

"Then half a day more will make no difference. Wait until dark, wait until they think you aren't coming. These is your teachings, Father, there is strength and logic in them." He reminded.

"He's hurting him!" Macy shouted. "And you ask me to stand by and do nothing!"

"No, I ask you to wait until you can do the most." He fished his phone from a pocket and clicked a number on speed dial. It rang twice and was answered. "Shawn? Cancel my appointments for the night, family emergency and tell Jennifer to implement order Henry Twelve at oh three hundred tonight. Confirm." He waited until the order was confirmed and verified before hanging up. "The orders are in place, Father."

"Perfect army you have."

He shrugged a little. "I try. They're moving in sooner. We hit them at 2 am, we should be able to get them free before my people tear them apart. That gives us time to survey the structure, find points of entry, lay a logical groundwork."

"We?" Macy sneered and added some smaller blades to the pile.

"We. Black Cross attacked the lover of an elder; I won't stand by and allow that. I won't stop you from going sooner."

"Can't stop me."

Oscar nodded. "Quite true."

Macy's hands balled up into fists but he knew Oscar was right. "They're hurting him, Oscar."

"I know but he's strong. It's better to form an assault that can reach him rather than try and fail."

"Damn it." Macy gave in and hated it but knew it was the only way to give him a solid shot to free York. Killing the man as he'd promised to was out of the question, they'd both emerge alive or neither of them would. "Fine, but I won't slow down or hold back for you, whelp."

Oscar nodded. "I wouldn't expect you to, but I'm from a good bloodline, you won't have to."

All Souls Pass

Chapter Forty One

The priests left in charge of getting him cleaned up and stabilized weren't slouches when it came to magic. Not that York could sense them from inside the binding spell, but one of them was able to call water to wash him and the other was able to form a low level healing. It was the water that woke him from having blacked out but York found he couldn't bring himself to respond. It was like his body had shut down and he lay limp and numb, unresponsive to their care.

They talked but he couldn't understand the words. Some layer of his mind knew it was just mindless chatter, gossip and the like, but the actual words slid off his brain and left no meaning behind. That wasn't good, he was falling apart, he could feel it. For one giddy moment he wondered if all the memories and years had been a hallucination. Maybe he'd never really gotten away from Alvaro. His mind was certainly back in that dark cell, back into the desperation of just trying to stay sane and survive another day as if there had never been a break from it.

But there had been and he knew it. This cell was different. The metal of the shackles was steel or aluminum not heavy iron. The walls were concrete block not stone and mortar. The men left as his caretakers weren't city guards but young priests and they spoke English, not French. He wasn't seventeen again and the screams of his loved ones weren't echoing in his ears.

Two hours wasn't enough time to brace himself for whatever it was Alvaro had planned for him but the time disappeared. His keepers returned and grabbed his elbows and hauled him to his feet. York stood, wavering, but he stood. The light healing they'd placed on him had taken the worst of the pain away and most of the shock but he still felt weak and drained. He wasn't sure how far he could walk but he hung his head and moved because he didn't want to be dragged.

It wasn't far. The cell he was being kept in was obviously part of Alvaro's section of rooms. The passed through a door that had a crash bar on it which seemed odd, it wasn't the heavy wood creaking thing that York had expected and it drove home again the passage of time. The hallway beyond was carpeted and well decorated with the ornate over done beauty the church favored.

The room he was taken too was paneled in dark woods and there were no windows. It left York still clueless about the time of day or even how long he'd been captive. The feeling was one he remembered well, he just needed to find a way to keep track of things, cycles to count like when he was fed or when he was hurt. The room was carpeted in dark reds and dramatic ornate rugs.

The furniture was heavy and old, carved wood. A third of the room was slightly raised, up three shallow steps where Alvaro sat in a heavy chair that looked almost like a throne. The image might not be far from the truth, he was nearly like a king here in his world.

"Bring him here, beside me." Alvaro ordered and watched with dark eyes as York was lead to the dais and up it's stairs. "That's good enough." He waved in dismissal of the two priests and they moved to hover near the far door.

York stood as still as he could given how his body trembled. He locked his eyes on a point ahead of him, where the wall merged with the floor and kept them there while Alvaro circled him. He felt the man's eyes inspecting him before the feet stopped.

"Well, old friend, I believe you said you'd never again be my prey, yet here we are." Alvaro stood and waited but York made no sign he'd even heard the words. "How long do you really think being silent will last?" Again, silence and Alvaro shook his head at the stubbornness. "Fine, kneel."

York wasn't going to obey. He'd fight giving in with all he had and make Alvaro take by force anything he wished. For this command wasn't difficult to achieve, one solid kick to the side of York's knee had him tumbling to the carpet. The impact jarred his aching body and his breath caught at the surprising shock of pain. He stayed as he'd fallen, arms still chained behind his back, and bowed his head.

"Better, so much you must re-learn but we'll work on it." Alvaro purred out softly, a hand petted across York's hair before he moved to sit in his chair once again. "I'll receive her now!" He called to the priests at the back of the hall.

The door opened and shut softly a moment later but York kept his eyes down. It didn't make much difference if he looked up. He was here because having someone naked and kneeling, waiting beside his chair, re-enforced some idea or image Alvaro wanted impressed in the person's mind. York didn't expect the display to have anything to do with him.

"What's this about?" A woman asked, short temped and unhappy. It was a voice York knew and his head snapped up. She stood there in stylish dark pants with a well tailored sweater set. Her dark hair hung in an uneven bob about her face and occasionally, when glancing just right at her, her eyes were solid black with now pupil or white before the after image of the power she carried slipped into hiding again and her normal hazel eyes returned.

Hope broke into York's heart, chased by fear. "Elina!" He called out, begging and worried. She was technically neutral now and unable to forcibly free him without loosing the neutrality she'd struggled so hard to create. That didn't mean she couldn't negotiate for his release or at the least carry word to someone that might free him. That was assuming she was free to leave and not caught in Alvaro's web as well.

Her eyes grew sad as they danced across York but she quickly dismissed him and faced Alvaro. "Answer me." She demanded.

"What? This?" He reached over and petted York's hair again. "Do you think I'd miss the opportunity to see his reaction when he learns it was you who betrayed him?"

The earth could have split open and swallowed him whole and York would have been less surprise. "What?" He heard himself gasping and he glanced from Elina to Alvaro and saw nothing to betray the words as a lie.

"His knowing wasn't in our arrangement." She kept her eyes on the priest and not her student.

"You underestimate him. He'll figure it out sooner or later. There's only a dozen humans alive

able to cast a binding on him and of those maybe three would have chosen this spell. Even bound he'd have picked up your touch in the weaving of that spell eventually. I won't miss seeing this beautiful look of betrayal for anything." He was studying York, soaking in as the witch's face went from hope to fear to confusion to deep, horrible hurt.

York shook his head. "It's not true."

The hand he'd been petting across York's hair tightened and pulled it. "I'm afraid it is. She sold you out, her beloved best student of all her years as teacher. When I found her price, she didn't even flinch at trussing you up and dropping you into my hands. How does it feel to know that someone you've given so much to would betray you so easily?"

"No, no." York trembled but Elina refused to look at him and Alvaro was right. There weren't too many people able to overpower him any more and even fewer that would use this version of the binding spell. "Why?" He pleaded.

"Why?"

"I'm not here to play your mind games, Alvaro."

"No, you're here to give me the boy. Have you broken the locks yet?"

"It's not that simple, you saw the spell on the child."

It sunk in around his shock that they were talking about Luke and York sobbed a little knowing the boy hadn't gotten away.

"What of it witch? You're stronger than he is, break the locks."

"You never got why you were always second best to him, did you?" She spat out the words. "This isn't about strength, it is rarely about strength, it's about skill and finesse. Two things you always lacked because you assumed raw power, brute strength would do the job for you. York is an artist with magic, this spell is exquisite and too beautiful for a dilettante like you to appreciate. It's layered and woven in a thousand ways and at every corner he has it booby-trapped. One false move and the entire spell folds in on itself, making the weave tighter and more complicated. Too many false steps and it tightens to the point where no one alive will be able to remove it. Do you understand that?" She snapped out, her words quick and angry.

"I understand complexity but if you wish your price to be paid, you must fulfill your end of the bargain. I want that boy." He tightened his hand into York's hair again and yanked his head closer to the chair. "He knows how to undo it doesn't he?"

She frowned. "He would have set a key to it, yes, but I doubt he'll give that key to you."

"He will, in time, when the boy screams often enough he'll tell me that key."

"No, he won't. You can't torture the boy. Prolong pain in the close proximity to magic users will lock the spell down. He wove that into the spell so you couldn't hurt the boy. Try it and I'll never break that spell down."

York had been more clever than Alvaro had expected. He tossed the head he'd been controlling aside. "Than break that spell woman, or you will never receive your reward!"

She nodded. "I'll get it unwoven, might take a long time but I'll do it. It'll be faster to just get the key from him."

"You do your job, I'll do mine."

"What was your price?" York growled out, angry hurt mixing with desperation. "What was it Elina?" He glared at her but she refused to look his way.

"I'll send you progress reports. I want no part of your games." She answered Alvaro and turned on her heel to leave, not waiting or needing permission to exit.

"Her price was surprisingly low." Alvaro chuckled; amused at the level of pain the betrayal had sparked. It was more than he'd hoped for.

"Shut up." York hissed, not wanting to know.

"In exchange for binding you and securing you into my care and giving me that boy unhindered, all she wants in return is for me to kill her."

"You lie!" He shook his head. "She's gone too far, she can't die, it's impossible."

Alvaro shrugged. "Maybe it is but I don't care if it is or not. She believes I can end her miserable life. Trust me, I'll happily try. Who knows? With that boy's power to back me I'll eventually wrest that spell from you. Cast it on myself and with access to every combination of spell possible, with the entire library of human magic imbedded in me with all the power the boy offers? I might just find a way to grant her wish."

He was trembling now. "Damn you."

"Damn me? I think not, I am a servant of God, doing what must be done to secure his church, faith and word in these godless times. If one of us is to be damned it will not be me." He crossed his legs and studied the pattern of welts still on York's back. "I'll ask nicely to start. Tell me the key to unlocking the boy."

"There is no key." He lied.

"Good, I'd rather do this the hard way." He raised a hand and snapped his fingers at the priests that lingered near the door. "Take him to the room and make him ready. I want to get some wine before we start."

A torture room hadn't changed much over the centuries. The only thing that surprised York was that it was in the more decorated areas, so obviously well within Alvaro's personal rooms. It was a clean room, smooth concrete floor with a drain in the center. Hooks and pulleys hung from the ceiling at adjustable lengths and rings were firmly placed in the walls. A sink, wide and deep and industrial was shoved in one corner and a small area was sectioned off to almost look like an open shower. That had its own drain.

There was a rack, not the wooden monster York remembered but now made of stainless steel with a small motor to pull arms and legs from the body. Chairs sat to one side near a small table. A cabinet of stainless steel stood closed but well polished and clean. One wall had rope and chains, different cuffs and shackles, whips and canes hung from it. There were smaller devices for restraining a body, some looked right from one of Richard and Rodney's fetish parties.

York was brought in and one of the hooks in the center of the room was lowered. One of the priests removed the chain that linked his arms behind his back and switched it for a shorter one. There was some small comfort when York found his hands being bound in front of him, the shorter chain looped over the hook and his arms being raised until he felt his heels lifting from the ground. Not quite high enough to be on his tip toes but not comfortable either.

Alvaro came into the room with a glass of deep red wine in his hand and a priest following that carried the rest of the bottle and a bowl of grapes. He waved and the bottle and fruit was placed

on the table and he pulled one of the chairs over to sit so it was within easy reach.

"Methods of persuasion have changed so much over the years." He began in a lecturing tone.

"Forgive me sounding like the old man that I am but some of the classics are the best. We used to cleanse the soul by pouring scalding liquids down the subject's throat. I saw a man once pour boiling soap down a woman's throat once, it was impressive..." His voice wandered off and his eyes lost focus for a second. "We would use hot pinchers to rip flesh away, tear off the breast, that always gained a confession. The boot and thumbscrews, old friends, some clever fellows even took to roasting people alive in brick ovens. They object with my old, dear friend here isn't to kill him, it never was, so the methods used must be a little more subtle. Do you remember the times we've shared, York?"

York didn't answer, he kept his eyes on a spot across the room and tried to steady his mind. He could manage this, he could. He just had to keep his focus.

Alvaro watched as York braced himself and it made him smile softly. This wasn't something to be finished in one session or even ten, this was going to take years but eventually he'd bring York back to the docile, broken creature that had escaped him so long ago. He set his wine down and stood, and crossed the room to run a hand over York's bare side.

"You've removed most of the scars." He glanced to the other men in the room, they weren't the boys that served him for their talent, these were just strong enough in magic to qualify for the order and had a taste for cruelty. "I've flailed this subject's back to ribbons with whips, set a healing on him, and repeated the beating again over the scars. I tore every fingernail and toenail from him and drove needles into the quick. I branded him, cut him, boiled him, drowned him, strangled him and still he refused to surrender to me. I broke his bones and pulled his joints out of place. Once I left him in thumbscrews for hours and still he remained stubborn." He stroked his hand up York's ribs before letting his fingers slid away.

"Time has made some improvements but I'm old fashioned. Fill the sink." The water was turned on and the wide deep sink began to fill. "Don't worry, we'll start out slow."

All Souls Pass

Chapter Forty Two

York was dropped, what felt like days later, onto the soft comfort of a rug and lay there panting. He was still wet. They'd half drowned him by dunking his head in the cold water of the deep sink but that was unpleasant but not so frightful when the threat of drowning was removed. He'd been smacked around a little but even that hadn't been too bad. When they switched the metal shackles for rope and hooked that rope over the hook in the small shower area, he hadn't known what to expect.

"I must say." Alvaro's smooth voice filled the room. "I have missed the sounds of your screams. Something must be said for technology, electricity had you wailing almost faster than with strappado. Don't worry, we'll get to your favorite soon enough, it's just, the sound of you screaming in pain makes me so horny."

Hands stroked across York's flesh, over muscles still twitching in spasms. There didn't appear to

be any lasting harm done to him which surprised him given the extreme level of pain he'd just felt. His heart was thudding still and he was trembling but aside from maybe a spot or two of lightly burned skin, there didn't seem to be anything wrong.

"Just do it then, you've never needed my permission to fuck me before." He tried to sound defiant but the thought of what was to go on again made him ill.

Alvaro sat down on the floor next to where York had been dropped, the rope was still on the man's wrists and he'd pulled so violently at his bounds that he'd cut the skin. He stroked the walnut brown hair softly, almost tenderly.

"What is it about you that I can't purge?" He sighed. "I've had women ten times as beautiful as you beg for my whims, men twice as handsome. I've had the powerful at my mercy, and yet, there is this need for you in me that I can't expel."

He tried to pull his head away from the falsely tender touch. "It's called insanity."

Rather than being angry, Alvaro smiled softly. "Perhaps. When it comes to you I do feel half mad. Do you ever remember what it was like when we were boys?"

"No." His teeth were chattering now, his nervous system wrecked from the shocks it had sustained.

"Liar. I do too. I was always fond of you, even when we were still so young but I think I started to become obsessed after I pulled you from your burning house. Seeing you screaming, your arms on fire, refusing to leave her corpse? God forgive me that was amazing. I tended your wounds every day because hearing you gasp in pain as I washed those burns made me feel invincible." He laughed softly. "And you were grateful for it! You'd thank me for hurting you!"

The hand pulled a little more in York's hair. "Yet you kept denying me, even after you gave yourself to that minstrel whore. Some days, even after all this time, I think back to that first time in the woods. How you fought me saying you didn't want it but we both were so hard. I'll never forget how you looked, spread out, legs open in the afternoon sunshine when you gave in to me, or how it felt to take you that first time."

"You were a lousy lover." York muttered.

"True, want made me too rough but I learned from that. Being denied your sweet body for weeks while you healed taught me the value of caution. What did you tell your other lovers? What excuse did you give them for not being their whore? Did you tell them it was because my cock had split you open while you moaned for more?"

"There wasn't anyone else." That was one of the reasons he'd finally given into Alvaro's desires; he'd been lonely, horny, hungry for someone to want him.

His hand tightened in the damp hair before he regained his control and stroked softly again. "There's no need to lie any longer, pet." He shook his head. "You're never more beautiful than when you're like this. Trembling, weak, stubbornly holding out against my will, I've missed this."

"What do you want?" The games were exhausting and the waiting hurt almost more than what he knew was coming.

"Hush, why be so impatient? Your body is still recovering, just rest." He let his hand trail down over a shoulder. "Such a fine man you've become. Do you ever wonder if the guards you whored yourself to kept their word?"

That made him stiffen, it wasn't a memory or a place he wanted to return to. "No, I don't."

"Liar, I bet it's kept you up at night." He laughed. "They didn't. How does it feel to know your sacrifice, like so many others you've made, was utterly meaningless?"

"I don't believe you."

He shrugged. "I witnessed it with my own eyes. Once I learned of the deal you'd struck with the guards, I actually encouraged them to dally with the others. Did you really think I would allow that? They were stupid bringing you to me with grease on your skin and come still on your ass. I took apart two of those fools after I learned the truth. Peeled the skin from their bodies for daring to touch you. I should have known you'd offer to pleasure them so they wouldn't rape the others."

York shivered and turned his face to the floor trying to not remember.

"I've been thinking a great deal about that these last weeks, knowing you'd been in my care again. Remembering when I set six of them on you while I watched, how you responded to them, made them think you enjoyed their touch. How you made sure to keep your end of the deal so well. It made me angry because you fought me so deeply. I had to have you aching hard before you'd even moan for me. Still, you lay there like a corpse, I won't have that this time."

"You've never had trouble taking what you wanted, you've already proven that." He spat the words out but shied away from the fresh memories and the feel of Alvaro still on his skin.

"That boy you took in. He's quite handsome in an underfed street way and he's amazingly loyal to you. He's offered to do anything I want to protect you, anything. I find myself wondering if he'd be as pretty being gang raped by a half a dozen men as you were."

York pulled at the ropes on his wrists and tried to struggle. "Don't touch him, he's just a boy."

"He's older than you were."

"You don't want him." He pleaded.

"True, my only interest in him is the power he carries."

York shut his eyes. "What price for the boy? What is it you want from me to keep him safe?"

"So stupidly noble of you, just as I expected. It's a simple thing, I want your co-operation." He sighed. "I want to feel your touch on my skin. I want to hear you moan my name, I want you to give yourself to me as my lover when I wish it rather than lay there forcing yourself to not respond." He traced a welt that had curled up across York's shoulder. "The choice is yours."

It wasn't a choice, not really, and he knew it but still he struggled to agree. It was one small thing he could deny Alvaro, one tiny bit of himself he had always held back. Something small and meaningless really but one thing that they couldn't whip him into agreement, it was one thing he could cling to and fight with. Luke wasn't so innocent, he'd worked the streets but York knew that what Alvaro would do to him would break the boy. He knew first hand.

He buried his face into the carpet. "Don't hurt him, I'll do what you want."

"Of course you will."

It was one of the most difficult things York had ever had to do. He'd played Alvaro's seduction game, shared soft kisses with lips that had trembled and let the man devour his mouth. He used hand and mouth to tease the lean, strong body and tried to tell himself that it was just someone

he'd met in a club. Because Alvaro wasn't unpleasant to look at and if they'd met as strangers in passing he would have found his dark eyes and smooth olive skin very attractive. Alvaro wasn't a stranger and just who it was he was naked with never left his mind no matter how hard he tried to pretend otherwise.

He found himself spread out on Alvaro's rich and soft bed. His own slick fingers were stretching his still sore ass with one hand and desperately trying to stroke himself into hardness with the other. It just wasn't working. He was in too much pain, emotionally, because physical pain had rarely stopped him from getting hard before, with Macy.

"If you're not interested?" Alvaro's smooth voice fell across York and what little bit of arousal he'd managed to coax from his body faded.

He closed his eyes and tried to think of Luke. Not what would happen to Luke but that night they'd shared, the innocence the boy still carried at being taken so gently. The vulnerability he'd managed to preserve in the face of such a difficult life. It helped but it wasn't enough to get him hard. In fact the only twitching stirrings of arousal came from when he thought about how delicious it was to watch Luke taking Macy.

Macy, his mind tripped over the vampire he'd been trying not to think about too much. He'd been angry and stupid and lost his temper and control. He knew the vampire couldn't feel for him but what Luke had said was true, there was no shame in loving someone not capable of loving in return. There was never any shame in love. He could stand the occasional pangs of pain, the sharp bitterness of knowing he loved in solitude but he knew he'd never be any happier away from the moody, annoying, troublesome vampire.

Not that it mattered now. Macy wasn't known for his restraint and York figured even without knowing how long he'd been captive that it was plenty of time for the vampire to have attempted a rescue. There hadn't been one, even a failed one, Alvaro would have smirked about it and rubbed it in. No, he'd stomped out and Luke had followed and neither of them returned. It would be days, weeks, until Macy figured out what had happened, if he ever did. By then, well, he would be in another city, disappeared into the church's complex hive of properties and holdings. It could be a lifetime before Macy found him, assuming he'd even bother to look.

But York had more than a lifetime of memories. He'd never forget the feel of the vampire's hands on his skin, the feel of his breath against his ear. If he thought about it, he could remember the smell of Macy's skin, the tone of his laughter. He built that in his head and his cock slowly hardened at the memories. Macy, dancing in the clubs, grinning like the predator he was at the men and women flirting with him, how he'd toss a look to where York hovered away from the press of the crowd. Macy sliding into a cool, moonlit mountain stream, skin glowing in the dim light, teasing York to join him.

"That's it." Alvaro whispered and moved onto the bed. He caught York's hands and pulled them away, pinned them to the bed as he slid naked flesh against naked flesh. "Open your eyes."

He obeyed but worried he'd become ill, seeing Alvaro so close over him. They fluttered shut when Alvaro moaned and slid into him, he knew he was supposed to moan but it just made him whimper.

"You like it."

It killed him to agree. "Yes."

Alvaro groaned when York's hips lifted to meet his own. "Tell me what you like." He demanded, wanting to hear the words.

"I like you in me." He whispered out and was grateful when Alvaro moaned and fell forward

against him so he could close his eyes again.

"How do you want it, pet? How?" He gasped into the trembling ear, surprised at how little York was fighting him. The touch of the witch's hands on his back, the small, almost shy movements of the other man's hips, were driving him crazy.

"Harder." York whispered. "I want to feel you come in me." He forced the words out because he needed Alvaro to finish as quickly as he could. When the hands on his body pulled him and changed the angle of the thrusts to hit that hidden spot, pleasure exploded and York let himself gasp, more startled than pleased. It didn't matter, Alvaro didn't care.

A hand snaked between them and closed over York's cock. "Come for me, my pet, show me how much you like it."

The touch was like acid and York cried out, disguising it as a sound of passion. He squinted his eyes shut and thought of Macy. He let his body find release but tears slid from the corners of his closed eyes.

Macy knew he'd been as difficult and angry as a stirred up hornets nest but every time he stopped moving and stilled for a second he had an image of York being hurt and he wanted to rip something apart. He'd ridden in Oscar's car back to the hotel and the preparations that were being made for the night's assault and he'd taken some of his anger out on the mostly half breed gang. A shoelace not tied tight enough earned snarled criticism but he didn't actually attack anyone.

He'd actually been pretty surprised at Oscar's level of readiness for war. The people were well armed with blade and crossbows and they moved like a group trained to use them. Even the half breeds had enough skill that they nearly replicated the silent stealth of a full blood. What surprised him most was the main planning room had been turned into a war room and as the day passed, full bloods began to arrive.

Macy had known there was a good two dozen or more full bloods in the city but they never, ever met in one place. It just wasn't done, no cause had been great enough since the wars to get wide spread cooperation and it surprised him when so many showed up. He knew their faces and names but didn't really know them, they were all far younger than he was, most around Oscar's age and several quite a bit younger.

"Are you well, Father?" Oscar asked when he'd noticed that Macy hadn't snapped at anyone, sent any quarter bloods running for their lives or even tossed a pissy barb toward anyone for a good hour.

"Why so many?" He nodded to the room where full blood chatted softly, carefully with full blood and the blue prints of the Black Cross Order's main hall was being reviewed.

Oscar glanced around the room. "A younger generation, father. We believe in being a little more cohesive than before. Most have human lovers, human friends and allies, once they heard what had happened, I didn't need to ask them to help they merely arrived."

He snorted. "Doesn't hurt that Black Cross steps on toes and doesn't ever get smacked around for it. How many here have personal scores they wish to settle?"

"Most." Oscar admitted.

"Vampires don't change, we don't run in packs no matter what visions you might have for the future." He drew a slow breath and settled himself down. York was being hurt and he was standing in a room full of children playing at combat. It was either brilliant or absurd and he was too angry, too on edge to hazard a guess on which side things would land.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Forty Three

Darkness and the cold of the night sharpened Macy's anger down to a razor's edge. It was time to hunt and he had no room for anything other than the goal. He was going to find York or die beside him, there was no other results possible. Then, once he had York safely home, he wasn't ever letting the human think for a moment that he wasn't the most important thing in the world to him.

Oscar stepped forward to stand beside him. They were on a rooftop a half a block away from the small church and its parsonage. The parsonage was larger than the church and it served as the main offices for the Black Cross. From where they stood they had a clear line of sight view of the building and Oscar shook his head.

"Lazy of them, they should have these roofs secured to prevent observation."

"They're counting on the detection spells around the perimeter to alert them." He glanced to his son, looking like a hunter now and not a lawyer. Dressed in black now as well, hair tightly and securely pulled back he was armed and alert. The bolts of his crossbow were charmed but most of his magical protections were laughable compared to what York had made. "Here." He nodded and fished a hand into a pocket.

Oscar glanced over and was surprised when Macy slipped several pieces of jewelry into his hand. He frowned but felt the power in them. "You're certain?" It would make their invasion easier, almost make them ghosts to all the fancy spells they had in place.

"You won't do me any favors if you set off their alarms." It was a piece of York he was handing over to the other man, something he felt like hording and holding close.

"Thank you." He accepted them with solemn care and slipped the necklace, two bracelets and ring on his person. "They'll be holding them below ground."

Macy nodded, memorizing the patterns and timing of the guards. "This raid will start trouble, you know that right? They'll have to hit you back. This might be their main strong hold but it isn't their only one."

"I know. They stepped over the line, if they push back too much we will crush them down. There is a loose alliance of hatred toward the Black Cross, if things get bloody, the Elves will hit them as well and we'll split their holdings between us. I doubt Black Cross will risk being pushed entirely from this city." He smiled a little. "You really don't pay attention to the politics around you, do you?"

"Politics bore me. I'm too old and crass for that, if something bothers me I kill it." He mocked

back but his eyes never left the building down the block.

Oscar knew better but he wasn't going to provoke Macy by denying his grumpiness. "What about the boy?"

"York's my concern." It wasn't even a choice but if he left Luke in there, York wouldn't be happy. "If we can get Luke too, we will, but if not he has to die. I promised not to leave him in Alvaro's hands."

"I can't leave that boy in their hands. I trust him under York's care."

"So we're agreed." He glanced up to the stars but didn't need them to know the time. "Let's move."

They were able to walk up to the building. Once or twice the jewelry York had spent so much energy on vibrated but the careful movement and the strong spells kept them from going unnoticed. If Macy wasn't so angry, so focused, he'd almost have been proud of how silently and skillfully Oscar moved. They melted in the darkness from one shadow to another and once even walked silently behind one of the guards on his rounds and never were noticed.

Together, silent as a breeze, they slipped along the side of the building to a door that wasn't in use. The light over it had burned out and no one had replaced it. It was metal but hollow and the locks were secure but not that secure. Macy glanced around, counted off the time for the guards and pushed against the cold metal. It popped with a muffled bang and he reached out to snatch the doorknob before the door could swing in and slam into the wall. They slipped inside and Oscar shoved the door tightly back into its frame.

"Fucking priests." Macy cursed. "All I smell is incense." Time was ticking off in his head. "Stairs." He nodded across the darkened kitchen they appeared to have entered in. They slipped across the kitchen and out into the hallway where they nearly stepped on a pair of priests.

Macy was on the nearest before the pair could do more than curse. He'd twisted the man's head nearly off such was the violence he used to spin it around. Fire bloomed around him and curled off the protections he wore. The second priest looked startled that the spell didn't work but he didn't get a second try. Oscar pounced and dragged the man easily back into the kitchen where he slit his throat and let the blood spill into the dark room. The one Macy had killed was easily tossed in to join his friend.

"Got to try to avoid that until the way out." He warned.

"I'm aware." Oscar nodded to the hallway again. "Stairs."

The late hour made people moving about minimal but there was still activity. Several times crossing the hallways to the nearest stairwell they had to duck into doorways and around corners. As much as Macy wanted to tear them apart, the goal was to reach York. Once he had the human in his arms and protection, he was going to slaughter any Black Cross in his path.

There had been some debate about what to do once the stairs were reached. The information they had, from blueprints and Oscar's sources stated that this building only had two sublevels. It wasn't used to playing host to such important ranking officials and was smaller than some of the complexes in larger cities. The Cardinal was staying across the city in a posh church owned building but Alvaro would be holed up here. Macy was pretty sure he'd be on the lowest level but Oscar had a point about searching the first basement as they came across it, just to be safe and so they'd know what they'd face coming back out. It was logical and sensible and if York hadn't been involved Macy would have totally agreed. Now it just made him cranky to delay.

The floor seemed to be mostly empty. Storage rooms, workrooms, conference rooms, it was all

rather dull and boring and at two in the morning the hallways almost echoed in emptiness. Until they turned a corner and found a pair of locked doors, they were more secure and harder to break open. Luckily, not much stood up to two full bloods kicking on it and after a few blows, the metal snapped and the doors flung open.

It wasn't just a locked door, a pair of priests stood wide eyed and startled on the other side. They'd come to check out the noise and arrived in time to see the door smash open. A blade appeared in the throat of one as Macy pulled and tossed one of the tiny weapons but the one he didn't target poured raw power at them and he wasn't some weak slouch. These guards were good.

Macy stepped in front of Oscar and braced himself against the flow of raw power. A tendril of it had thrown him into the coffee table the day before but now he was wearing defenses, it shuddered across him but he stayed planted and the power parted around him like water around a rock. Until it stopped and the second priest stumbled backward with an arrow in his chest, the crossbow bolt's charm cut it across the waves of power and it had flown true.

"Watch it." Oscar warned.

Macy glanced up and saw the priest was pawing at the bolt that had appeared in his chest. The powers around the man trembled, churned and Macy glanced away having a pretty good idea what was going to happen. A few seconds of panic later, the priest exploded with a wet popping sound.

"Fuck!" Macy cursed. "What do you have those things charmed with?"

Oscar shrugged. "It makes magic unstable, pulls it apart. It's not a spell these blokes know how to counter. Sprays them all over, messy but makes the point of who it was that attacked. Elves never leave such a mess."

"Tidy bastards they are." They moved into the hallway, not minding the blood that sprayed on them or the bloody footprints that they tracked into the hallway.

Oscar paused to slide a few gloved fingers into the cooling blood on the wall before tasting it. "Magic users, no wonder you keep them close."

Macy snorted and kept moving down the hallway. "That fucker? Tastes like shit compared to York."

It appeared the two guards were the only ones awake on the floor and the locked section was small. It was only a few rooms and the only entrance or exit was the locked door. Which seemed odd because the first two rooms looked like break rooms. They had coffee pots and small round tables and were empty. One appeared out of use even, deserted and empty.

The third room they stopped at Oscar reached out to open and Macy caught his wrist. "What?"

Macy shook his head. "Don't. It's, I don't know, it's subtle."

Oscar reached out and sensed the spell on the door and it was subtle. "So?"

"Have you picked up a subtle spell on anything here?" He shook his head. "This is private, personal, different."

"Alvaro's work?"

"No, it's, it hums like York's but it's not. It's like what he'll put up when he's sleeping someplace he doesn't trust. It looks like nothing so people blunder into it and alert him."

"Would he have used it to secure a room holding someone?"

Macy shook his head. "Doubtful."

Oscar pulled his hand back from the door. "Let's wait then, until we have to open it."

"Clever choice." He nodded to the last door on the floor, down the hallway. "Besides, door number three is locked from the outside and no bespelled." At the door Macy stopped and sniffed. "Luke." He pulled the locks back and pushed the door in.

The room was brightly lit, almost painfully so and almost empty. Nothing hung on the walls, the floor was bare, everything was painted a pale off white. The only things in the room were an empty chair and a second, occupied chair. Luke sat in it, head lolled down. His arms and legs were handcuffed to the chair.

Macy hurried across the room and lifted the boy's head. Blood was dried around the boy's ears and his nose had bled badly enough that it stained his shirt but there didn't appear to be any damage to the boy. He didn't look beaten or even smacked around, Macy slapped the sides of the kid's face lightly.

"Hey, Luke, wake up, come on wake up."

Luke woke with a jerk and the chains holding his limbs in place rattled. "What? Fuck off!"

"Shhh, it's me, it's okay."

Brown eyes blinked and focused. "Macy?" But understanding fled and he shook his head. "Stupid trick, not buying it, not buying it."

"No trick kid." Macy muttered and snapped the ring off of the boy's wrist. "Nit wits used human grade cuffs." He bent down to snap the metal from Luke's ankles but hands cupped his face, ran across his hair.

"You're real." He gasped and then sobbed a little. "Oh god, you're real."

"As real as can be, can you stand? Are you hurt?"

Luke shook his head. "I'm wobbly. They didn't hurt me, I, this chick she kept digging in my head and it hurt, a lot. She left a while ago to sleep but she'll be back, she was trying to get the locks off that York put on me. Oh God, York, did you find him? They have him too!" He stood up but his legs were numb from being held immobile for so long. They occasionally let him up to walk a little bit and to use a bathroom but that had only been a few moments out of hours locked in a chair.

"He's here too, we'll find him."

"We?" Luke glanced up and saw Oscar in the doorway and frowned.

"It's okay." Macy soothed and steadied Luke. "Do you know where York is at?"

Luke shook his head. "That chick, she said she was going down to meet with Alvaro. Ah, I have to go down and see the asshole, I'll be back, keep him awake was what she said, so I just thought the asshole was Alvaro." His knees buckled and he stumbled forward but Oscar swooped in and got an arm around his waist.

"Bottom level, what about that last room?"

Macy shook his head. "Let sleeping mages lie if you ask me."

"Good enough." The boy felt steadier but Oscar kept an arm around him as they moved back into the hallway and down the hall.

"Jesus!" Luke cursed when they turned the corner and found the corpses. "Did you put him in a blender?"

"Something like that." Oscar grinned but he felt the boy pause at walking across the blood pool. He didn't pause, he lifted the slender boy up and carried him the half dozen paces to the other side. "Sorry, didn't have a coat to toss down."

"This is a hallucination isn't it?"

"Nope, it's a jail break." Oscar teased and squeezed the boy's shoulder before holding the broken door open for him.

"This... I.... But... what...."

Macy frowned as they hurried down the hallway back to the staircase. "You should get him out of here, he's still confused."

"It's fine." Oscar continued to guide the human.

"So be it but you're babysitting him."

"Fair enough."

They made it back to the stairwell and down the silent steps in quick order to the next level. Macy stopped and sniffed the air. "York." He nodded toward the door and the hallways beyond.

Oscar sniffed too but shook his head. "I don't smell anything."

"I know the smell of his blood."

The stairwell let out into a poshly furnished hallway lined with rich rugs and expensive furniture. Over the door a glowing exit sign hummed to itself marking the emergency route out. As humans were, none took the stairs when elevators were open to them and this lonely end of the hallways was deserted. They moved lightly to the end of the hallway and Macy pointed to the cameras that were watching this level and none of the others. They could slip by a camera but Luke would show up clearly. Another thrown dagger severed the cord running into the unit and disabled it.

"Your people will have hit before they figure out why one camera is out." Macy whispered and sniffed at the cross hallway. "Down here."

At a junction of two hallways, they found another pair of guards. They were leaning against the wall and gossiping, not at all paying attention and Macy charged them. He was on top of the pair before they noticed. One quick spin and the one's head came clean off and he spun a kick hard into the second's face. It spun his head around in a full circle and the feel, eyes wide and neck floppy, to the soft, expensive carpet.

Luke trembled and blood from the headless body sprayed on him. That was it, his body doubled over and he puked. Oscar's hands held him steady and kept him from falling to the floor but there was nothing he could do to stop himself from becoming ill. "His head...." Luke moaned and wasn't sure which one he meant. "God."

"Can he walk?" Macy demanded.

Oscar nodded. "He's fine, it's just the shock, I've got him."

"Good." He didn't wait to see if it was true or to see if Luke was okay, he could smell York's blood and that was all that mattered. He followed the scent around corners and back one hallway set with a handful of doors. There was no doubt which room the scent was coming from and Macy hit the door full force.

It slammed open into a white tiled room. A priest was crouched down by one wall scrubbing with a hand brush and a bucket of steaming hot water at blood splatters on the wall. The room was heavy with the scent of York's blood and the humid hot air of a good washing. A table had metal shackles laid out, freshly washed and placed on towels to dry along side a few blades, whips and other items Macy's mind didn't bother cataloging.

The priest swore and stumbled backward, knocking the bucket over and sending pink tinted water to steam and swirl toward the drain in the floor. He didn't get far, Macy was on him and had him by the throat before he could focus or call out. He lifted and dragged the human up the wall, pinned by the hand on his neck.

"Where is he?" Macy growled out and knew this close the priest wouldn't even be able to get a spell formed around so many wards and protections he wore. He saw as the man tried and failed and the real panic and fear in his eyes.

"Who?" He gargled out.

Macy pulled the man back and slammed him so hard into the wall the tiles cracked around his back. The priest made a choked sound of pain as bones cracked as well as tile but Macy didn't care. "Don't fuck with me! I can make this fast or slow, where is he?"

"Please..." The priest begged.

Macy tightened his grip and let his nails dig in. "Where?"

"Down the hall... to the left... past the service door... please, I don't want to die."

"Sucks to be you." Macy pulled and ripped the man's throat out. The white room suddenly darkened and the water swirling into the drain wasn't so clear anymore. Macy brushed past Oscar and Luke and didn't wait before turning down the hallways.

There were spells on the door, but weak ones and poorly made. It was pretty clear who had cast them because sitting in a chair, tilted back and asleep was the priest that had placed them. A simple tripwire to wake him should another mage get too close, it was set up to let him sleep when he should have been awake. The smell of York's blood was thick in the hallway and Macy gutted the sleeping priest. He was dead before he hit the floor.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Forty Four

He threw back the locks and pushed the door open. It was pitch black in the room but Macy could see well enough even before Luke flicked the light switch outside the door to on. Painfully bright light flooded the room and Macy hissed as his eyes adjusted but he was too upset to snap at the boy to turn them off.

York was naked, huddled in the corner of the room. His back had been whipped into raw bloody lines that had crossed over each other and now stood in dark red smears of drying clots. One shoulder hung at an odd angle, obviously dislocated and from how York was positioned into the corner, it was pretty clear he'd used the juncture to force the other shoulder back into place. His wrists were shredded from how he'd been bound, his chest was burned and cut. Carved into his skin across his stomach was the word slut and on the back of one thigh was written whore.

Macy moaned and hurried over. He dropped to his knees and cradled York's limp head in his hands. Under the scent of blood was one of sex and mingled with it the smell of Alvaro. He sobbed as he stroked damp hair back from York's forehead. "Aw, baby doll, baby doll... come on open your eyes for me... come on baby doll." Macy begged and pleaded and coaxed the human to open his eyes and didn't notice the tears that slid from his own.

Eventually the dark lashes fluttered, fell shut and opened slightly. The blue eyes under them were blood shot and red. "Macy?" York whispered from a throat grown hoarse.

Even so weak, that voice made him smile. "Yeah, baby doll, I'm here. I'm getting you out of here."

York shook his head weakly. "Just kill me." He swallowed but his mouth was dry and it didn't help much.

"No, no, I'm getting you out of here." He just wasn't sure how he was going to move York without hurting him more.

"You promised."

"I promised if I couldn't get you out, I'm not leaving here without you!"

"Luke?"

"Is safe, hush, it's okay."

"Please, kill me, please." His eyes fluttered shut and tears slipped out again only this time they ran down over Macy's hands.

"Come on, can you walk if I help you?"

"My feet."

Macy glanced down, York's feet were half curled under him and he straightened them out carefully. They were bruised and welts were raised on the soles. The ankles were as torn up as the human's wrists and he ran his hands over them carefully. It was pretty obvious the beating applied to the soles of his feet had broken some of the bones, Macy wasn't even sure that York could stand on them right now.

His fingers slid across something that wasn't dried blood or damaged skin. He caught a claw under the slender red strand and it lifted up away from the wounded skin. When he looked he found another on the other ankle and a quick search turned up two more imbedded in each wrist. The one around York's neck wasn't caked in place but it sat along a dried line of blood and been disguised.

"Binding spell."

York nodded from where he'd propped his head in the corner. "Please, I can't move, just kill me and get Luke away, please, please don't let me stay here."

Macy cupped the freckled face and forced himself to smile. "You're not staying here, baby doll, I promise." He dropped his hands down and just tried to think.

Oscar crouched down next to the pair with extreme care. "Can we snap the spell by breaking the string? I've never seen a binding like this."

"It'll hurt him to do that." The look in those dark blue eyes was desperate and didn't seem like they could take much more pain. "The neck is the anchor."

York shook his head. "Please, no more."

It was Oscar that reached out and slipped his fingers under the red string around the witch's neck. "I'm sorry, York, but you can't give up."

"No." Macy stopped him. "I'll do it." It was his responsibility. "I'm sorry baby doll, I'm not killing you." The string settled along the curl of his knuckles and he pulled. The cord cut into his gloves and York moaned and tried to pull away. The human's moaning grew louder, turned into sobs and the cord cut into Macy's fingers, the gloves split. It took Oscar's hands to steady York but the sounds the witch started to make were more tortured animal than human. Finally, when Macy thought he could take no more, the red cord snapped and dissolved into a tendril of smoke.

York fell forward, sobbing in broken, desperate breaths and was still supported by Oscar's hands. Macy hated himself but he knew what he had to do and it was better to do it sooner than later. Without warning his lover, he took a grip on his arm, braced the dislocated shoulder and yanked it back into place. York screamed, his voice hoarse and raw from too many screams and he toppled over to fall against Macy's legs and soothing hands.

"Sorry, baby doll, I'm sorry but it had to get put back in, I'm sorry."

"Please, Macy, please, please, I can't, I don't want to live please."

"No." Macy shook his head and stroked the short hair back. "No, baby doll, you can't give up, you can't." He bent down and put kisses to the side of the exhausted face. "You've got to fight the rest of the spell off, come on baby doll, don't give up, don't give up." He moved his lips over to the blood splattered ear and licked it softly before he whispered into it. "For me baby doll, for me, I need you, please, I love you, don't leave me."

York sobbed and curled up a little more but he could feel his power right there, within close reach. He just wasn't sure he had the will to call it or the desire to try. It sunk in slowly the feel of Macy's soft, comforting kisses and his pleading words. When it sunk in that he'd begged York to try because he needed him, because Macy loved him, something small and fluttery sparked inside of him. It wasn't quite hope, but it was brighter than anything he thought still existed and he used that to reach for his power and call it back to him.

One by one the red cords dissolved into puffs of red smoke and disappeared. York was exhausted, barely conscious but the feel of his senses returning, the power that hummed for his command stirred him a little. He tried to sit up but nothing wanted to move and everything hurt.

"Elina, she'll know, it was her spell."

"Elina's here?"

"Working with Alvaro." The name made him want to vomit but he had nothing left.

"Who's this?" Oscar questioned.

"She's immortal, York's mentor." He tried to figure out how to get York moving. "We need to go, our time is about up and I'd rather not be in this room when every priest in this building is startled from their sleep. Baby doll, I have to carry you, are you hurt anywhere that'll be made worse if I do?"

"No, nothing that will kill me." That had been Alvaro's order; pain not death and they did their job well. He'd blacked out a couple of times and been revived before they continued.

"I'm sorry, baby doll, this is going to hurt." There was no way around it and Macy maneuvered his lover so he was draped over a shoulder. It wasn't dignified but it was the only way he could carry York without a stretcher. It placed the raw, bloody, torn up skin of his back so close to Macy's face he had to fight the urge to clean the wounds. There would be time for that later, just like there would be time to hunt down Alvaro and Elina and skin them alive. Right now his only concern was getting York away and safe. It worried him more that York was so still, he barely whimpered when Macy stood up but at least he wasn't begging to be killed any more.

Luke found he was crying and he had to snuffle back the tears before he approached where Macy was gaining his balance with a full-grown man tossed over one shoulder. He bent down a little and pressed kisses to York's dry lips. "I'm sorry." He whispered. "I'm so sorry, this is my fault, I'm sorry."

York forced his eyes open but his arms hurt too much to move them easily and Macy had done a good job of tucking them securely in place. He shook his head. "No, isn't, you okay?"

Luke nodded.

"He didn't... hurt you?"

"No, no, I'm fine." He sobbed and wiped at the tears on his face wishing he could do more.

York nodded and closed his eyes, comforted by the smell of Macy so close to his nose. He didn't want to but it just hurt so much. He found himself pulling in power and weaving a light healing spell to dim the pain and stop the swelling and bleeding. Luke was safe, Alvaro hadn't touched him, that meant a great deal. Macy had come for him, and for a second time was carrying him from hopelessness. It still didn't fade away his desire to simply surrender and die.

Macy made sure he'd be able to run with York over a shoulder before he nodded to Oscar. "Fastest way out you know?"

It didn't take any thought. "Back the way we came, to the main room, up the elevator, out the front. We're close on time too."

"Good." He nodded to the door and got them moving. York was limp under his hands and his head lolled, Macy wasn't sure if the man was unconscious or not but he hoped he might be, being carried had to hurt.

They followed Oscar's directions, back down the better decorated sections of the hallways and finally past a side door into a larger, open room. To one end a slightly raised section had a heavy carved wood chair and Macy snorted at the mock throne room appearance of the place.

"Bastard." He muttered under his breath and it was killing him to walk away and not turn around and find Alvaro.

The option was taken from him when a blast of power struck the small group like a wave. It

crashed against the wards and protections the vampires wore and spilled over them, knocking Oscar to his knees and Macy to his side. The humans had no such protections and Luke tumbled across the floor several feet and York skidded away from Macy. If he wasn't unconscious before, he was now.

"That's my pet you're stealing, bloodsucker!"

Macy growled at hearing that voice. "Protect them!" He snarled at Oscar while he scrambled to his feet. He spotted Alvaro near the chair on the dais and he charged full speed across the room. He'd covered nearly half the distance before his world exploded into flames. They swirled around him, he felt the heat but didn't quite reach him.

He jumped from the fires touch, feeling it sparkle hotter as he passed through it. A spell like that was aimed and localized, the easiest way to counter it was to simply keep moving. His feet touched the ground and he gained another few feet, the fire swirling out into nothingness behind him.

The wood paneling along the walls shaved off. It flew at Macy from dozens of directions, forming an equal number of projectiles. He spun and his blade danced out knocking some aside, splitting others off course. Still several sections, some small some larger, found their mark. The pain was nothing, Macy pulled the larger lengths of wood from his legs and arm and kept advancing.

Alvaro had come to the edge of the dais and he tossed his hand out. Light flooded the room, blinding to a human, crippling to a vampire. He focused and the small tables around the room lifted and soared at the vampire.

Macy closed his eyes. He was a full blood, sight was only one of his senses and all gave him vision. He kicked out and knocked the first table down, his sword deflected the next and the third one he caught by the legs and spun with. When he was aimed toward Alvaro he released it and the furniture went flying toward the priest.

The human wasn't a full blood. The light affected him as well and he didn't see the table until it had knocked into him and knocked him down. He spilled onto the dais, tangled into wood legs and lost his concentration. The light in the room returned to normal and he glanced up in time to see Macy covering the last feet with ease.

"Vampires don't need to see, fucktard!" Macy cursed and swung with his blade.

Alvaro tossed a hand up and the weapon stopped on an invisible barrier a few feet away. The protections on the vampire were greater close up and made working around them much more difficult. He could defensively hold the man at bay but he'd eventually have to think of some spell to push him back.

For every attack Macy pushed, Alvaro had a barrier ready. He tried, kicking, sword, dagger, claws, all were kept harmlessly a few feet from the smug priest. He growled, needing to hurt this man, needing to tear him into small parts and not being able to reach him.

A crossbow bolt sailed past Macy's shoulder. It should have pierced the energies gathered around the priest. It should have bored an opening that Macy could exploit. It didn't. It reached a point a half a foot in front of him and stopped. Alvaro grinned and the bolt skittered away to the side.

It made the priest laugh. "He's mine."

"Fuck you!" He moved faster, with more force and still didn't get any closer.

"He moaned my name, begged me for more. I took him so hard.... he's such a good little slut."

Macy growled loud enough to be heard across the room. He attacked harder and sparks popped from the contact but he was closer now. Each effort gained him fractions of an inch and Macy pushed harder. He'd smelled the priest on his York and he knew what that meant. It wasn't an option, anyone that hurt York like that needed to die, slowly, in his own blood.

Power swirled around him. Not from in front of him, not from Alvaro, but behind him. It was warm like tropical waters and smooth. It hit Alvaro's protections and swirled like a tornado, eating them away in torrents of unseen power. Macy felt it cracking it down, giving it too many places of attack to protect them all and he could have kissed York if he wasn't so focused on smashing through and reaching Alvaro.

He picked one spot and used every bit of force in his body. The energies tried to compensate while holding off York's energies and it didn't work. It was like trying to pat a head and rub a stomach; the attacks were just too different, in too many different spots and Macy broke in. His claws, long and razor sharp, swept forward and raked up Alvaro's body. It opened long gouges from hip to shoulder, sliced open flesh as easily as fabric and Macy got the scent of the man's blood. He charged in for a second attack, needing to use his own hands and not a weapon, and the floor trembled.

It took a second for the sound to hit them; somewhere above them something large had exploded. The floor rocked violently and parts of the ceiling broke free and smashed to the floor. Dust rolled across the room and an alarm sounded. The lights flickered out before returning in a blink back on. The room was silent for a heartbeat as pebbles of plaster dribbled like powdery rain to the floor.

It was only a heartbeat. Macy growled and reached to slash deeper into Alvaro's body. He was going to tear the man into shreds, then rip the shreds into smaller parts, then maybe stomp those parts into the cracks in the floor. They'd have to mop the priest up when he was done and he still wasn't sure it would satisfy him. His claws dug in again for another slash and something big and strong smashed into the side of Macy's head.

He was tossed a dozen feet to the side and landed roughly on his side to skid in the dust. Before the momentum was gone he was rolling and back on his feet, ignoring the fact that his head was ringing and looking for what hit him. He'd expected that Alvaro had simply tossed a chunk of debris at him. What stood between him and the priest wasn't a chunk of debris but a full on manifestation.

"You've got to be shitting me."

It wasn't real flesh, Macy knew that, he could slash at it forever and it wouldn't feel pain or trauma. The creature stood as tall as the room and was three or four times as broad in the shoulders as Macy. Its face was blank, testament to how quickly the being had been formed, the small details of features for useless mouth, nose and eyes wasn't there. Its arms were strong but lacked hair or other signs of reality. It wore no clothing but needed none because it was as featureless in gender as it was in its face. The blocky feet even lacked toes. What was detailed was the large hammer the thing carried and apparently all it knew was to smash scrawny vampires with it.

It was a spell way to complicated for Alvaro. Even York would have a difficult time calling something like this up on short notice. Macy glanced to his lover, who was still laying as he'd fallen but his eyes were open and he didn't look happy. Oscar was a half dozen feet away, he was covered in debris and picking his way out. When the roof caved in it seemed it had dropped on Luke and the vampire and run in to shelter the boy. Oscar wasn't going to be much help, blood was running down his back and he was still half covered.

He shook his head. "Peachy." And had to leap back to avoid another blow from the monster. But

he spotted the source, the short woman with her slender body and cold eyes, had slipped in a side door and was moving to where Alvaro lay. "Elina, you traitorous bitch!" He brought his hands up and caught the hammer blow that swung at him, holding the monster back by sheer strength.

Elina moved carefully into the room, crossing quickly to where Alvaro was getting up. He'd been bloodied and about to be killed and as much as she didn't want to help him, had.

"Took you long enough." He snarled at her.

"The entire building is swarmed with vampire. Your people are too weak, they're being slaughtered in their beds. The day is lost." She had to admit, she was impressed that Macy managed to knock her monster back. The thing stumbled and nearly fell, having to go to one knee to catch its balance.

"No!" Alvaro shouted, his eyes falling on York but the dark blue were focused on the monster, trying to unravel the spell that had his lover occupied. "I won't give him up so easily!"

"Then stay and die, you are not immortal."

That was the choice, hold on now or retreat and return. He'd waited so long already, what was a few more years, a few more lifetimes? "Fine, witch, you wished to die so badly, stay. I'm not sure York is strong enough to end your worthless life but I'll bet he tries!" Another distant explosion caused more dust to fall from the ceiling as Alvaro turned to run to the exit set on the dais.

"No!" Macy shouted when the movement caught his eye but the moment of distraction earned him a hammer into the ribs. He sailed back and smacked into the wall, stunned for a moment. He caught the sense of the hammer falling again but it didn't hit him.

He glanced up to see Oscar had caught the monster's arm, holding the hammer above his head but he was straining. "You made this look easy!" He shouted, his footing slipping.

Macy whirled up, bringing his sword around and let it cut into the monster's arm. It made it halfway through the slushy, meaty width, not slowed by bone but just the sheer squishy thickness of the solid matter. He growled and forced the blade free, detaching the hand at the wrist. The severed hand fell, hammer still gripped into it so tightly that Macy started to wonder if the hammer was an extension of the creature and not just a weapon. The monster's head swung around blindly at the loss and his other fist caught Oscar, knocking him back and off his feet.

The monster stumbled forward until the edges of its feet where toes were never formed bumped into its severed hand and weapon. The hammer melted, the hand with it and began to flow back into the creature's foot. Slowly, from the stump of a wrist, something began to bud and grow back.

"Aw, hell no!"

York was struggling not because the power he held was in anyway diminished but simply because his body was too exhausted to focus it. It didn't help that Elina had more experience, more power, at her command and even one of her hastily thrown together monsters was impressive. He pushed himself up on an arm and struggled to sit.

"Luke?" The boy had been dazed by nearly being buried alive but seemed relatively unhurt.

"You shouldn't try to sit up." Luke fussed as he slid over to support the witch. He wished again he had some coat or blanket. York's naked skin was chilled and cold to the touch. He tried to help

without hurting him further but there didn't seem to be anyplace on York that hadn't been damaged somewhat.

"I need more, I, help me?" He needed so much power poured into him that he wouldn't feel his body and he just didn't have the will to call that much.

"Of course, how? Just tell me how?"

He unlocked the boy, just a little bit and brushed against that well of power. It throbbed and pulsed, danced like sparks over a bonfire and instantly molded to match York's own energies seamlessly. He met Luke's eyes and saw the surprise and understanding dawn in them a moment before Luke nodded.

"Help me to stand." The power was surging into him, as if he'd grabbed lightening or had learned to fly. There was a pause when Luke knew what a bad idea that was but he nodded anyway and tried to figure out how to do that. York wasn't too sure of that one himself. He couldn't put his arm around the boy, his shoulders were sheer agony and there was no way Luke could put an arm around him, his back was a sea of fire. If he wanted to stand he had to get to his feet on his own power with Luke helping to stabilize him

It was a bad idea, a very bad idea and York would have fallen as soon as he put weight on his battered feet if Luke hadn't held onto him. Nothing wanted to work right but the power was surging into him and he was feeling it less and less. Skin moved and pulled open cuts and burns and he didn't feel it now, it was just the lack of function that warned him something was damaged.

The knots and tangles of the monster currently smacking both vampires around was complicated. It seemed impossible to dismantle, a tangle of power and pathways but now, with Luke open and fueling him, it simplified. The lines he needed to sever glowed in silvery blue and the support lines, the ones that would dissolve on their own, faded away to dull gray. York reached out his power and tore the lines that glowed apart; it felt so easy now, so simple.

The monster stopped and it's ill formed head cocked to the side. It took one more swing at Oscar but as the hammer made impact the monster fell apart into thick, pudding like slush. It splashed out, thinning into runny ooze and pooled like spilled milk on the floor.

All three of the immortals in the room turned their eyes to him and York felt his body trembling. He saw Elina pull in power, and he was ready when she tossed an attack directly at him. This wasn't a battle of manifestations. No fire danced across the room, no ice spiked out to impale, furniture and debris remained where it had fallen, they were beyond the need for that. This fight was power directly forced into power, will to will, knowledge into knowledge.

It wasn't a fight he ever wanted. Just thinking about fighting with the slender woman seemed impossible. Elina was stronger than he was, but he started to see her will might not be as strong. She wasn't fighting for her life, for the lives of her loved ones and she didn't have Luke and the endless well of perfectly matched power to fuel her.

His mind burned in the fury of the assault, a pain he knew as the warning that he was reaching the limits of reach. If he kept pushing, he was risking losing another skin of humanity, tearing away another veil which suddenly seemed less important to protect. It was only the thought that his body, already so weakened, might not survive a full cycle of growth that worried him. It turned out not to be necessary, as the edges of his limit began to fray and pull away he saw something he'd never seen before. He saw weakness in Elina's attack.

It was small, a loose thread on a wall sized tapestry, but it was there and he snatched upon it and pulled. The thread grew and he absorbed it, now he wasn't just being fed from his own and Luke's power but he was slowly, fragment by fragment consuming her own. He heard her gasp

and stumble backward as he forced his broken feet to move him step by pain filled step closer. He wouldn't be able to hold that power but small section by section he was weaving a new style of binding around her, one that used her own strength against her.

The first outward sign that something had changed came when a bit of glossy black formed on Elina's feet. It grew and her eyes went wide and wild as the slick black stretched out and snatched up her other foot, forcibly pulling them together to cocoon her feet in dark, oily glaze. Slowly the binding grew, creeping up her ankles to her knees, to swallow her legs and hips. She lost her balance and fell and the surprise allowed the darkness to consumer her up to her shoulders. It reached out and wrapped around her wrists and sucked them inside. When every inch of her from the shoulders down was bound in the dark cocoon the impossible happened, the spell sealed and with it, shut her away from her power.

It flashed a little, sparking from matte black to peacock iridescent like antique carnival glass. Dark, rich colors swirled and danced on the dark cocoon's surface and it breathed like a living thing, fed from and supported by her own power. That sealing in place back lashed into York and spilled the shock of that whip of energy into Luke. They stumbled and would have fallen but the vampires moved.

Luke actually crumbled to the floor but Oscar managed to slip in and keep the human's fragile head from cracking on the hard surface. He moaned, the areas of his mind he was learning were magical had already been bruised, swollen and sore feeling from Elina trying to tear the locks from them and now he thought he might die it hurt so much. Suddenly, nothing in the room mattered but the need to wrap his hands around his skull and keep his brain from dribbling out of his ears. He gratefully fell against a warm body and didn't care who's it was while he struggled to get his vision to stop showing him double images.

York didn't come close to hitting the floor. Macy snatched him as he fell, not worried about hurting the wounds on his body. He helped York to stay standing and helped the spent and exhausted witch to move the last feet to where his mentor lay. She was wrapped in the odd binding spell, the darkness crawled and swam around her like currents in a nighttime river.

"York..." She started, frightened by being cut off from her own power for the first time in centuries.

"Shut up!" He snapped back, not wanting to hear it. "I'm not going to kill you." HE wasn't sure he could. Even with her power locked away, she was still nearly as difficult to kill as the oldest of elder vampires. Yes, without that power it should be conceivably possible, but it still may not be. "How could you?" He was shivering now, shaking in exhaustion and pain, weakness and shock. And rage, he was angry and hurt and wanted to weep but had no tears left. "I loved you! You were like a second mother to me! Did that mean nothing to you?"

"York..."

"Shut up!" He screamed and his voice broke, what last bit of strength he had dissolved and he reached out after the ghosts of it and locked Luke back down. "Just don't speak to me." He sighed when Macy pulled him closer. "Everything you taught me to believe in you've forgotten, what of honor, duty, responsibility? What of all that you held dear?"

"You can't lecture me child! You've no idea what it's like to live so long, to see everything lost to you even your own humanity!"

He was just tired now, and his heart hurt as much as any wound to his body. "No, Elina, you sold your humanity." He reached out and nudged the binding that was still feeding from her power and it swelled up and fully engulfed her.

Macy nudged the black encased form with a toe. "Will that kill her?"

He shook his head. "No, but it'll take her a while to figure out how to break it." His teeth were chattering now and he wasn't even pretending to be standing on his own power.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Forty Five

Oscar approached carefully and offered the tablecloth he'd found in the destroyed room to Macy. He sniffed the air lightly. "Smoke, we need to move."

He'd smelled it too and he wrapped the cloth around York's shoulders before lifting him in his arms. "Let's go home, baby doll." But the words feel on deaf ears, York had dropped into unconsciousness.

"I've got the boy." Oscar nodded and lifted Luke to his feet. He was able to walk but not without help or guidance and Oscar wasn't above tossing the skinny young man over a shoulder if he slowed them down. "Elevators are a bad idea now, unless you want to climb the shaft?"

"Stairs."

They had to backtrack and stumbled across a stray priest who was blood splattered and clutching a wound on his side. It looked like he was running from whatever chaos was occurring on the floors above them. It didn't matter. Oscar leaned Luke against a wall and finished the man before the fellow even knew they were on him. Oscar was the last of them in any real shape to fight. York was still out cold and Luke didn't know how and Macy was pretty sure he'd broken things taking so many very strong blows.

The smoke was thicker in the stairwell, one level up it started to make things look hazy and by the time they'd stepped over a few corpses to reach the ground floor the smoke was making Luke cough. It didn't help the situation any.

"Is this your bright idea? Burn the fucking building down?"

"We had some charms to trigger traps, the explosions are their doing not mine." Luke was coughing harder now and lagging behind. Oscar scooped the boy up and tossed him over a shoulder. "Out the way we came in?" He pushed the door to the hallway open and the red glow of flames hit his eyes. The fires seemed close but not impossibly so.

"If it's still possible to reach it." He tucked the tablecloth over York's face trying to shelter the human a little from the ash and flames. They moved out to trace back their steps, moving without fear of detection this time and so much faster.

They passed bodies, occasionally those of quarter bloods or half bloods but Macy didn't spot one face of a full blood or even one of Oscar's freakish three quarter bloods. Most of the bodies they passed were priests, sliced, bitten, torn apart at the hands of a vampire. They had to dart down hallways where the flames had danced up the walls and once Oscar shouted over the fire at a few stragglers of Vampires to get out. One hallway from the kitchen they found the way too engulfed to continue safely and had to reroute. It made going out the door they'd come in at

impossible and eventually they stormed into an office. It had been ransacked, the files scattered the computer destroyed and the windows were broken out. It gave them their way outside into the cold night air as sirens began to echo down streets.

Oscar had pick up points for his people already established, close by and at several points further away. Those that were uninjured were to reach the furthest cars leaving the closer ones for the wounded. He hadn't been above reserving one for himself, figuring from Macy's state of mind that there would be little room for reservation and they were going to need a car close by for their own wounded bodies to tumble into.

"May I take you back to the hotel?" Oscar asked carefully as he helped a wobbly and still coughing Luke into the back of the waiting van. He knew better than to ask Macy to hand over York to anyone.

"No, I'm taking them home."

"Father, you're hurt."

"No one can get in there, it's safe."

"Alvaro slipped away."

"And he'll be too busy licking his wounds and running to hide behind the Cardinal to make another try again. Home, now, or I take the boy and walk."

"Very well, I should at least send someone with you to help. York is pretty badly wounded."

"Fucking amazing I managed to live this long without you to baby sit me." Macy snapped but he gratefully climbed into the van, settled in and pulled York close.

Oscar drew a slow breath and steadied his temper. "Tell me how I can help you, Father and I will."

Macy was loath to ask for anything but he didn't want to make the trip out and leave the two humans alone. "Send for Fairth, have him come to the loft. No one sets bones and fixes a human better than a Brownie."

"Brownies." Oscar frowned. "I never did understand your fascination with them."

"Will you send for him or not?"

He nodded. "I will." And inside he watched as Luke slid over and leaned against Macy's other side and how naturally his father slipped the boy under one arm, managing to hold both humans close to him without struggling. He took a moment to speak to his people and give the orders necessary before he climbed in and shut the door. Before he was even settled in they were pulling away leaving the burning church a smudged glow behind them.

"Can you manage?" Oscar asked as he watched his father herd a dazed Luke out of the car while carrying a still unconscious York.

"I'm fine." But he wasn't sure if he could or not he just hoped Luke would stagger into the lift. Once there the kid could collapse.

Oscar nodded. "Fairth is on his way, he'll be dropped off within the hour."

Luke was shivering like a leaf in the cold but York wasn't, his body was limp still. Macy nodded and paused, turning to glance back for a second. "You did good."

The compliment startled Oscar. He couldn't recall ever receiving a compliment from his father, at best he was occasionally given grudging acceptance. "Thank you." He swallowed hard and refused to debate the rare occurrence. "If you need a hand, call."

Macy nodded again and turned away, nudging at Luke to get the boy moving. They shuffled through the icy snow that coated the concrete and into the warehouse. The lift was a welcome sight and Luke leaned against the wall, shivering and tired.

"If you fall down you have to wait until I get York inside before I can haul you in." Macy warned.

Luke shook his head. "Not going to fall down." His throat hurt from the smoke and his head was pounding. "Aspirin?"

"In the bathroom cabinet." The lift stopped and he had to balance York and pull the door open.

"Macy, I'm sorry."

"Not your fault kid." He didn't feel like talking about it.

"Thanks for coming for us."

He nodded but ignored the thanks and carried York inside. The loft was dark and warm and he would have kept the lights out but Luke turned them on. He watched the boy wander forward, blank eyed and still dazed to run fingers over the smooth counter top in the kitchen. Humans were fragile things and too easily broken in more than just body.

Macy had more important worries and he carried York upstairs to rest him on the floor by the bed. "We're home, baby doll." He soothed dirty hair back from York's face before moving to the closet and the big box of medical supplies York kept there. It was filled with sterile gauze pads and medical tape to apply them, gauze rolls and bandages and they were going to need most of them.

By the time Luke joined him, he had everything laid out around the still unconscious human. Towels were stacked to one side, wash clothes beside them, basins of hot water sat ready and always within easy reach were the bandages. Macy had debated but the wounds to York's back were the ones he wanted to get bandaged first. He'd rolled the limp form carefully onto his stomach and began washing away the dried blood as gently as he could manage.

"Can I help?" Luke asked softly from several feet away.

"No!" Macy snapped but he drew a breath. "I need to do this." He tried to make his voice explain and wasn't sure Luke was in any state of mind to understand.

"You're bleeding too."

"I'm fine." He glanced over as a glass of cool water was set beside him and he looked up to where Luke stood skittish and uncertain. The boy had seen him killing, coldly, horribly and Macy was surprised he was getting this close to him.

"Thought you might be thirsty." He shrugged and clutched his own glass.

"Thanks. You should take a shower, get cleaned up, you'll feel better."

Luke hovered for a little longer before shuffling into the bathroom. Macy heard the medicine

cabinet open and a pill bottle rattle before it creaked shut and the shower switched on. He knew he was responsible for the boy too, York would be pissed if he woke up and found Macy had been mean to Luke, but he was struggling to devote any thought to anyone other than York and what he had to do to make the man better.

The shower stayed on for a long time and Macy couldn't blame the boy. He wished he could haul York in and scrub his skin of any scent of Alvaro but he'd have to settle for the less than perfect washing in from a basin. When Luke emerged, his hair was wet and he wore nothing but a towel wrapped around his waist, he moved silently to rummage around in the dresser drawers for clothing to put on. When he found clothing, he dressed to the side where Macy could see him from the corner of his eyes, figuring rightly so that the vampire was still a little jumpy.

By the time Luke finally came and sat down on the floor near by, Macy had all but finished taping the last gauze pad in place. He'd washed the wounds, with hot water and a washcloth and with his own tongue and bandaged each one carefully. The bleeding had at last stopped but the wash water was dark.

Macy glanced up and a small smile pulled at the tight line of his mouth. Luke had pulled on one of his new t-shirts but a pair of Macy's pants and a very old flannel shirt of York's that Macy had been begging the witch to throw out for years. It made Luke look young and oddly cuddled into the baggy borrowed clothing.

"Feel better?" Macy asked, trying to be nice and he spotted the raw skin around the boy's wrists from the cuffs he'd worn.

Luke nodded. "Is he going to be okay?"

"He'll live." But before he could say anything more, the door buzzer rang. "Stay with him. I'll be right back." He waited until the boy nodded again before slipping down to greet Fairth.

He pressed the call button. "What?"

"Your delivery, Elder." In the background he heard Fairth farting loudly and the slight hissed inbreath of distaste from his vampire escort. The sound was followed by a low chuckling that the mic barely picked up.

Another day, Macy would have found it amusing now his only thought was to get the brownie inside. He rode down the lift and met the pair of half bloods at the door, the brownie caught between them.

"Elder, the brownie you requested."

Fairth let another one rip and grinned at the unpleasant faces the pair made. "Macy, my friend, you could have called."

"Inside Fairth." He pulled the brownie inside and slammed the door shut behind them. Brownies weren't known for being on time, if he'd called, it might have been hours until he'd shown up. "York's hurt, there wasn't time to call."

The brownie snorted. "You as well, wouldn't have anything to do with that Black Cross building blowing up tonight."

"Want a beer?" He avoided the subject and pulled the lift doors open.

"Of course!"

He waved to the steps. "He's upstairs." He pulled a half dozen bottles from the fridge and carried

them up with him. No one offered a brownie one beer, that wasn't hospitable.

Even that short head start had been enough. Fairth was kneeling down beside York, humming softly to himself and working on cleaning wounds and prodding bones. Luke had retreated to the bed, knees drawn up to his chin and eyes wide. Macy cracked the cap off of one of the bottles and handed it to the brownie.

"He's really messed up."

The vampire nodded and cracked another beer, he offered this one to Luke and the boy happily accepted. "You can put him back together, right?"

"Oh truly can, no fussing there. The boy need mended too?" He downed half his bottle in a couple of long swallows.

"Nothing broken on him you can fix."

"Rightly so, rightly so, now shut up and let me work."

Macy didn't point out that Fairth was the one still talking, he just crouched down nearby and stayed within reach. The brownie hummed happily, prodding at the dislocated shoulders with skill. He moved the joints and poked at it, pulled on the arms a little and eventually made satisfied grunting sounds. It about killed Macy to sit back and watch as Fairth went over York, checking bones as he went but the brownie only stopped when he got to York's feet. The humming became whistling as Fairth poked and prodded and used more than just his physical touch to pull tiny bones back into place.

"These really should be plastered into a cast for a couple of weeks, even with how York can cast a healing." He glanced up to Macy and saw something he'd never seen in the confident vampire's eyes. Macy was worried. He forced a wide smile onto his face and finished another beer. "I doubt he'll be walking about tomorrow anyway, right friend? I can wrap them well, hold them in place, but tell him healing or no he's not to go jumping on these poor abused bones for a good couple of weeks or more. Let em firm up if you ask me."

Macy nodded. "He'll stay off of them."

"Good, good, really, not much in the way of brittle things broken. Mostly it's all soft squishy stuff torn up. You've a good hand at cleaning that up, so I'll it to you, yes?"

"I'll take care of him." He was itching to.

Fairth popped open another beer. "Okay, well, time for you to strip."

"I'm fine."

"Really, and you expect that boy there who's half drunk on a quarter bottle of beer to stitch those gashes closed or set your ribs? Hmmm? Poor baby looks green at the thought. So strip already."

He sighed and gave in and sat still while Fairth hummed around him. It was disconcerting to feel the brownie's fingers pressing against skin and feel the touch inside on bone. It was just one side of their nature, the skill at putting things back together, of being able to reach into places their physical hands couldn't. It was handy for putting bones back into place or for fishing splinters out of wounds but it wasn't a pleasant feeling.

Fairth tied off the last bandage, not even really sure Macy needed them wrapped. "There, lucky vampire, the bruises are already half healed!" The gashes were mostly closed and the ones that still had splinters of wood in them started to close as soon as the wood was removed. He'd never

worked with a vampire before and seeing how quickly he was recovering was a little frightening. Worse was thinking about what might have happened to be able to deliver such damage to a vampire. "That's about all I can do for you two."

"Thanks, Fairth." Macy pulled on clean clothes and glanced over to the bed. Luke had fallen asleep, his half finished beer placed on the bedside table.

The brownie stood, farting as he moved and scooped up the boy's beer and finished it in long swallows. "No, no, is the least we owe you two! York's always been good to us! Just, you'd tell us if there was a war brewing, right, Macy my friend?" He frowned in a worried glare.

Macy shook his head. "I don't think so but I have no say over what happens. Just, Black Cross is going to be stirred up and angry for a while, might want to spread the word to keep heads down and lay low for a bit." Wars, even smaller city wide gang wars, didn't just kill the strong power players. The smaller, weaker creatures got hurt too.

"Will do!" He spared a glance at the injured witch and wondered if even the brownies would stay neutral when they heard what had been done to the human. "Call me if you need me, and I can see myself out, friend, just finish cleaning him up and get him to bed." He forced a grin over his worry and pulled Macy close enough to put one beer scented kiss to either side of the vampire's face.

"Thank you for coming, Fairth." It was as close as he'd come for saying he was sorry for sending two half bloods to fetch the brownie.

"Anytime, anytime!" The creature waved and hummed louder and made his way quickly to the door, eager to be home and offer warning to his friends and people.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Forty Six

Luke woke slowly, warm and comfortable. His head hurt but it felt more bruised and tender than pounding sore which was a vast improvement. His throat was sore too, dry scratchy feeling but not really painful. The pillow he was curled around smelled wonderful and it sunk in that it smelled like Macy.

And that thought brought back all of the floating, hazy memories. He remembered the fight between the pair, being kidnapped and strapped into that stupid chair. He remembered the slender woman that made his head scream in pain and his nose bleed without her ever having to touch him. More, he remembered Macy breaking him free and the bodies everywhere, seeing the vampire kill so coldly and how horribly wounded York had been.

It startled him so badly he sat up from his warm cocoon of blankets with a startled gasp. He felt panicked and unsafe, his heart thudding in his chest and his half awake mind blurred by fear. Until he saw Macy sitting cross legged on the far side of the bed. Sure, logically Luke knew the vampire was there for York, holding one of the man's limp and bruised hands in his own, but it was comforting to know that someone had watched over him while he slept.

Green eyes barely flicked up to meet Luke's. "Welcome back."

There was a sad quality to the vampire Luke hadn't ever seen before. Something still and thoughtful and it didn't seem to suit him. "How is he?"

"Resting, he does this, he'll be okay." But the words had the sound of self comfort more than truth.

Luke wondered how long Macy had sat there, unmoving, just watching York sleep. He was laid out gently under the covers but the white of bandages betrayed his real state. The need for coffee hit Luke hard and he sighed. "I'm going to make some coffee, I'll bring you a mug." He knew better than to make it a question. He doubted the vampire would admit to anything so mundane as a wish for coffee while York was so injured.

"I..." Macy started before he paused and nodded. "Thank you."

He yawned and slipped from the covers. The loft felt like home, he'd been there such a short time and yet it felt so right. It was a feeling that made him edgy but one he was desperate to cling to. He started the coffee and used the downstairs bathroom. By the time he'd emptied his bladder and washed up the pot was gurgling to itself in the final spats of brewing.

Feeling like home or not, he still had to pull open a couple of cupboards to find the coffee mugs, a few more to find the sugar. He poured out the bitter brew and made both mugs the way he liked them, heavily laced with milk and sugar. Somehow, he pictured Macy drinking it that way more than drinking it black but doubted the vampire would complain too much either way.

When he returned upstairs, he found that Macy hadn't moved but when Luke held out the mug he finally, carefully put the York's hand down. "Didn't know how you like it."

"It's fine."

Luke crawled back onto the bed and sat watching Macy who sat watching York. The coffee had cooled before either one spoke again and it surprised Luke that it was Macy that broke the silence.

"You were right."

"Hmm?" From what he'd seen, Macy didn't admit to being wrong too often.

"There's nothing more important to me in the universe than this man and you humans are absurdly fragile." He took another sip of the bitterly sweet coffee. "Even tracking Alvaro is less important, no matter how much I want to tear his insides out for what he did. Make him eat his own fucking heart." He took a slow breath and pushed the rage down, there would be time for that later and really, York had first dibs at killing the man. As much as he wanted to protect his lover, he knew better than trying to shelter him too much. "Did York tell you how we met?"

Luke forced the swallow of coffee he had in his mouth down his throat. "Don't know if you should tell me his secrets."

Macy snorted and shook his head. "These aren't his, boy, they're mine." He grinned bitterly. "Besides, you're family."

For such a casual statement, it hit Luke like a fist and he blinked back surprised tears. Family, yes, sitting on the bed with Macy did feel like family and to hear it from the vampire made him feel so safe. "No, he didn't."

"There are duties we require of our children. The stronger the child, the more there is expected. I am the strongest child my father produced, stronger in some ways than he was himself. It is my

duty as his son to mourn him. It's a ritual we do but the body must be found first, we can hibernate kind of, last indefinitely in places that should kill us." Macy spoke softly, eyes on York.

"I don't understand."

"God, like once, I was on a boat, it sank, I went down with it. Took me forever to fucking get back to shore but I managed it, spent weeks underwater. One of my sisters? She got caught in a mudslide, was stuck there for years while she dug herself out an inch at a time. When a parent goes missing, it's the duty of all the children to find them, retrieve their body if necessary and mourn them. It's doubly so for the strongest.

"My father is missing and for as much of a bastard as he was, it's my duty to find proof of his death. There's no comfort to it that none of my siblings have been able to either it's my responsibility. One I've failed in, totally failed in. For a while there were rumors, stories, remote hopes but they all were futile. So when I heard that the Black Cross Order had a couple of vampires in this piss ant French town's prison, well, it was only some time and bribes to look for the bastard."

"You didn't like your father?"

Macy laughed lightly. "I doubt any child of my people really likes their parents. It's not how we're made but no, I didn't and he detested me. It made what I have with Oscar look like a sitcom family. But a child doesn't become an adult on the approval of his parents."

He sipped his cooled coffee and hid a grin. "That's profound of you."

"Got it from a fortune cookie." Macy leaned over and put his empty mug on the floor but when he sat up he wiggled a bit so that he could see Luke a little easier. "So, there I was, bribing and threatening my way into this disgusting prison. My escort was unwilling to say for sure if there was anyone of my blood in the cells and I was unwilling to trust him so I made him take me to each cell, each holding area and let me visually inspect them."

"You didn't find him."

"No, found someone that could have been a quarter blood but they were all humans. Huddled, broken, half dead, it's not something someone from your day and age can really understand. This wasn't about serving time, it was a place of pain before death. I was shown every cell but one and the guard told me that only that one was off limits, I agreed until I'd seen the rest and then demanded, violently, to be shown that last cell.

"I had never seen anything so wretched. The human inside was wasted down to skin and bones, they'd tortured him to within a hair of death." Macy shook his head. "I won't sicken you with the cruelty of your own kind. I wouldn't have kept a dog in that cell, too tiny to move in, no bedding, reeking of filth. The only water given him was a small tin cup and it had been spilled and not replaced. There was no food, no light, no air. This shattered thing smelled of rich magic but it was muted, trapped and under the stench of the cell and the smell of the men that had raped him, his blood smelled amazing."

"York." It made Luke ill to hear and the coffee turned a little in his stomach.

Macy nodded and petted the nearest of the witch's limp hands. "He wasn't the only thing in that prison to smell tasty but he was only one that glanced up when the light of the guard's lantern fell on him. He looked right at me with these deep blue eyes and he said please, I'll do anything, please vampire, kill me." It was a memory that normally didn't hurt him but it had sounded so similar to York's begging of the night before. He gathered the hand back up between his own.

"Why didn't you?"

"It was a whim. There was such stubbornness in those eyes, it fascinated me and while he begged a single tear slipped across his face. It washed the dirt away and there were these little, tiny, freckles under the dirt. It wasn't a thought of saving him, I just didn't like seeing such a proud creature dieing in such filth. My thought was to just take him someplace light and warm with fresh air and let him die. He looked so close to death, never figured he'd live more than a day or two." He smiled lightly but it was empty and held none of his normal mirth. "Seems he wasn't as fragile as he looked."

"He'll recover from this." Luke had no doubt of it, York was tough and had obviously already survived much worse.

"I know." But he didn't speak of how it took years after Macy had pulled him from that prison cell before York could relax when touched or of how it was longer until he could let himself sleep naked and vulnerable with anyone else in the room. He didn't tell Luke that for how well York had recovered physically, mentally some part of the man had never been freed from that prison and all the promises and obligations that tied into it or of how even after so many centuries the guilt at surviving still haunted the man. He stroked the hand he held so carefully. "I'll just feel better once he's awake."

The day would pass and the sun would set before York showed any signs of stirring. Macy, literally, didn't leave his side, sitting quietly and seriously on the bed, simply holding one limp hand. He drank if Luke brought him a glass but refused food and there was nothing Luke could do to get Macy to even step away to stretch his legs.

Luke tried to sit vigil too but after a few hours of such heavy silence he gave up. Macy didn't seem to mind when he wandered away or when Luke played the cd of classical music York had left in the player. It left him little to do, there were books around but he wasn't much of a reader. Worse, they were York's books all filled with history and scholarly insights and just thinking about them made his head hurt worse. In the end he busied himself with straightening up, scrubbing the kitchen and downstairs bathroom and trying to figure out how to cook without setting the loft on fire.

He kept himself so busy that he wouldn't have noticed York was awake if he hadn't been taking a glass of juice upstairs for Macy. When he'd been fussing the kitchen he'd found the cartoon of pineapple juice and figured it was too sweet for York so it must have been one of Macy's treats. He hoped to maybe cheer the vampire a little, because they'd won. Sure bad things had happened but they were home and safe and everyone would live and frankly it was freaking him out how focused and quiet Macy was being.

Only when he reached the top of the stairs Macy wasn't sitting quietly. He was bent over York, brushing the man's short hair back in soothing strokes across the pale face and placing gentle kisses to the York's forehead and temples.

"That's it baby doll, wake up for me, come on wake up."

York moaned again a sound mixed between groggy sleepiness and pain and he moved a little, trying to slide into a position that wouldn't make something hurt and finding it impossible. Eventually Macy's pestering must have sunk in because Luke could see the blue eyes smudged now under them in dark rings of pain and exhaustion, flutter open. He knew he should have retreated and left them alone but he didn't want to go so he sat down on the top step and stayed out of the way.

"Macy?" His voice was still weak, scratchy and soft.

The vampire nodded and kissed the tip of York's nose. "Right here baby doll, right here."

There was a moment when York flailed a little, confused and still more than half awake. "Where?"

"Home, you're home and safe and it's okay now, going to be okay."

That stopped the confusion and York set his head back against the pillows with a groan. "Everything hurts."

Macy nodded. "I imagine so. Fairth put your feet back in place and your shoulders but there wasn't anything he could do for the soft tissue damage. We'll get that fixed up, baby doll, be back to new in no time. Here..." He lifted his wrist to his mouth but before he could bite into his own flesh and offer the added support of his blood to heal the human, York's weak hand caught his arm and stopped him.

"Don't."

"Baby doll?"

York sighed and shut his eyes. "We need to re-evaluate the nature of our agreement."

Macy shook his head. "No, baby doll, I'm stupid. I'm selfish and mean spirited and cruel and horrible and it's not true. I swear it's not, I just was feeling bad and said shit I didn't mean. I'm not bored, I've never been bored, not one day since we met. I swear, I'm sorry."

"Not you, I'm just..." York's voice drifted away before he found the strength to continue. "I'm tired."

"That's cause you're hurt, baby doll, it'll be better soon, I promise but you have to do the things to help you get better."

"No." York disagreed and for a single word his voice held some of its former strength. "Humans aren't meant to live forever."

The words caused Macy to glance away and pull back a little. The loft sat in silence with the softly playing violins and cellos of whichever piece of music drifted from the cd player as the only sound. Luke placed the glass of juice down beside him and pulled his knees up to his chest. It hurt him to hear York sound so broken, it must have been killing Macy.

"You aren't her, baby doll." Macy finally broke the silence and his voice was steady, intense and convinced. "She's alone, out of touch, lost in time. Hell, we saw her house a few years ago, remember? No radio, no tv, nothing modern, barely had electricity and running water and she still used candles to read by. All alone, up in the mountains like that? That's not you."

"It's okay, Mace, you can't know how it is to be human. How it feels to be so alone, so empty, I'm just tired. I've given up everything I ever wanted for an ideal and it's turned out to be a lie. I'm just tired and I'm ready, let me go."

"No!" Macy's voice broke and he took the witch's face between his hands. "It's not a lie, it's a good cause, it'll secure magic for generations. Nothing will be lost so long as you don't stop believing. Not one day has been a waste for you, I swear it. I'm so proud of you."

"I never wanted this." His voice broke. "I just wanted..."

"Shhhh baby doll, shhhh, it's okay, tell me, what is it you wanted? If Elina had picked Alvaro and not you to anchor this spell, what would you have wanted with your life?"

York just shook his head and tried to pull away from Macy's hands and voice. It was too painful, required too much strength to say more. He was to blame for his own regrets. He'd believed in their dream of creating a library of spells and magic and sealing it on a spiritual plane. Woven to weed out those merely seeking power for the sake of power, it would hold all their knowledge for times of desperation, need and self sacrifice that humanity always faced again and again. He believed in that and had been prepared to die for it. When he survived and the hope of that dream had continued, still anchored inside of him, he lived for that and now it was all a lie. All the ideals of sacrifice, of duty and honor and causes greater than one person's desires taught to him with such clarity had been poured into him from a liar.

"Tell me, baby doll, shhhh tell me?"

More, he'd been given a hundred lifetimes of opportunities. A hundred lifetimes of chances and he'd failed them all. The simple dream of living his ideals and loving while being loved had eluded him not because they truly were incompatible visions but because York had time and again given his heart to the men least likely capable of returning his feelings. He'd even silently pined for straight men and clamored for the false affections of close friendship to sooth his aching heart. And now, he'd sabotaged his desires to an impossible level and allowed himself to silently, deeply, love a vampire for centuries knowing it was futile and foolish.

It was just too much, he was tired of it all. He didn't want to think about what he'd just survived or the thought that Alvaro was still running loose somewhere obsessed and growing more powerful. He didn't want to feel the pain of Elina's betrayal, a woman that he'd loved so deeply for so long. He didn't want the cold comfort of duty and dreams and obligations, he wanted to slip away and feel no more. He was ready for all the pain to just stop and too tired to continue to live.

Macy's prodding only seemed to push York further away, to slip him a few more steps out of reach and he shut up to think. Humans were so fragile and silly and illogical and senseless and stubborn they drove him crazy. He wanted to take York's shoulders and shake him until he'd gotten some sense knocked back into him but that didn't seem like a solid plan.

"Luke called me a coward." He admitted into the still room and the words were shocking enough that York turned his face back to him and opened his eyes. Instead of the joke or teasing comment that York normally would have tossed back to a statement like that, the Frenchman stayed serious, watching from solemn blue. "A strong vampire isn't supposed to need anything. If we want something we take it, satisfy that want but need? That's different. He told me that humans need to feel love to survive. I don't know, sounds like a crock of shit to me, I don't understand needing things too well. I know less about love, real love I mean not stupid unimportant kinds of love. No one loves a vampire." He snorted and glanced away. "Even vampires don't love other vampires. It's a need thing, we don't have that."

"It's okay, Mace, I know."

"Shut up you drama queen." Macy teased lightly, retreating to taunts and more comfortable ground. "Always stealing my monologues by being so smart."

A shadowy ghost of a smile fluttered for a moment on York's lips. "I'm sorry, go on?"

"Should be." He sighed but dropped the act of lightness. "I know squat about love, it's not something I feel a need for, not something I miss. What I do know, York, baby doll, is that I need you. I know that counts as nothing and I know I'm selfish. Luke told me to think about what it would be like without you here and I couldn't fucking breath. I'm not saying we won't fight or I won't be a total prick occasionally but I need to know you're in this world with me. Even if you hate me and never speak to me again, I need to know you're out there somewhere or I can't function." The words had grown ever more difficult to force out and his throat and chest had twisted up in pain but it wasn't until he stopped for a breath that he felt the tears on his face. He

wiped them away brutally. "I know I'm not the man you would have picked to share your life with, god I fucking know I'm not and I know this isn't the life you would have picked for yourself. I doubt my needing you to live counts for much but you're my baby doll. Please, please don't give up, please. I'll do whatever I can to help you get what you need, anything you've missed and want I'll help you find. If loving Luke makes you happy, makes you want to stay here, love him and I'll behave I swear just don't go, don't die." Wiping the tears from his face didn't stop more from taking their place and Macy had to stop babbling to get himself under control.

It was a shocking confession and York never would have guessed such depth of emotion existed in the flighty, almost air headed vampire. He forced one aching painful arm to raise and he took his turn at sliding a hand along Macy's face. "I love Luke." He heard himself whispering and felt the vampire flinch a little at the words.

Macy caught himself and covered the hand that rested against his face. He nodded. "Good, so live for him, please. He's a good kid."

"Macy, shut up." York cut the words off. "I love Luke but I don't need him." He wasn't sure he wanted to say more, to lay himself so bare and vulnerable emotionally when he was already exposed so much physically. Macy was right, he could be cruel and thoughtless and hurtful too but the vampire had just done the boldest, bravest thing York had ever seen and he was unwilling to sully that with his own cowardice. "I need you."

"Oh, baby doll!" Macy took the hand away from his face and started kissing it, pressing his lips to the chilled fingertips.

"Needing you doesn't change how tired I am." That stilled the kisses on his fingers. "I can't...you don't know what happened...what I did... I can't..." Kisses softly brushed his palm.

"Whatever you need, baby doll. We can go away for a while, go to some beach somewhere or back up into the mountains, for as long as you want but you have to get these wounds fixed up first." He knew better than to say that whatever had happened didn't matter. It didn't to him, nothing York could or couldn't do would change his thoughts about him but it did matter. He'd seen how guilt, pain and remorse clung to his lover, he just never knew how to help with that. Maybe now, with York being so fond of Luke and Luke being able to call a full blood vampire a coward, maybe the boy would slap him on the back of the head often enough to teach him how to deal with a human.

He could see it though, the wavering in York's eyes, the desire to give in and give up. It wasn't a choice Macy could make for the human and he knew it would kill him, but he'd respect the choice York made. He saw the shame York was trying to hide and the deep almost bottomless well of pain the man carried like a security blanket. York shut his eyes and promised himself he could always die tomorrow, there was no rush today. Something new had appeared between his heart and Macy's and he wanted to see if it would grow or if it was just in reaction to the stress of what had happened.

"Okay but I want some water and I have to go to the bathroom."

Macy laughed softly more in relief than amusement and leaned forward to brush his lips to York's dry pair. "That's fine, baby doll, I'll help you." He sat back up. "Luke?"

The louder voice startled him where he sat, curled up on the top of the steps. He hadn't thought either man knew he was there. "Yeah?" He asked, sniffing back his own tears and pushing down his own worried feelings.

"Can you get York some water?"

He hurried down stairs but had to pause. Suddenly alone and overwhelmed, emotion swept away

Luke's footing and he hurried into the small bathroom downstairs and shut the door. It wasn't a panic attack but he sobbed violently for a few moments. Oddly, mixed with the sobs was a small bit of laughter and even as a rain shower of tears sparkled across his face he was smiling. It wasn't panic, pain or fear that startled the emotion out of him but something deeper and a lot more frightening. For the first time in a long, long time, Luke felt really hopeful and it wasn't an empty hope this time.

As quickly as the emotion hit him it vanished and he washed his face and eyes. He gathered up the cool water and hurried his way back upstairs. He arrived in time to see Macy pull his bloodied wrist from York's mouth and pop it into his own. The feedings he'd seen before had been so erotic but this time it felt warm, comforting and safe.

"Water."

"Thank you, Luke." York sighed and dropped his head back down. His arms hurt too much and his strength was fading.

"Here, baby doll." Macy took the glass and held it to parched lips, letting York drink his fill before setting it aside.

"Tired."

"Than get some more rest." Macy sighed and took up a slightly less chilled hand again.

Blue eyes fluttered open. "Don't hover." He scolded but knew it was useless. "Luke?" He reached a little but the boy moved closer and took his other hand.

"I'm here."

"Make him go play with you while I rest, 'kay?" He yawned but it hurt to yawn, hurt to breath too.

"Okay." Luke nodded but he clung to the hand.

"Jus', both of you, wait 'til 'm asleep." He sighed. "Like feelin' you both here."

It wasn't a long wait.

All Souls Pass

Chapter Forty Seven

There was little play in the loft over the next few days but Luke did manage to convince Macy to move from the edge of the bed to the sofa. They didn't play games but snuggled together and watched old movies that Macy knew every line to and Luke had never seen before. York spent most of the passing days sleeping, or resting quietly alone upstairs and while Macy might not have understood it, Luke knew the man needed some distance. Oddly, Macy listened to him and didn't sit silently by the human while he was awake but nothing stopped him from watching both humans sleep at night.

Finally, Luke judged that York had been left alone long enough. The wounds were healing at the same extraordinary rate and the lighter cuts were already faded to pink scars and still York

showed no interest in leaving the bed. His feet hurt too much to stand for too long and he hadn't allowed Macy or Luke to help him bathe, instead he had let Macy carry him to the bathroom while the bandages were removed and ordered them both out. Pride or shame or something more had the witch washing himself without help and alone and it was time to push him little before York retreated too far inside his own thoughts.

The big excitement in the loft was the afternoon York gave in to Macy's nagging and let himself be carried downstairs. He sat huddled up in one corner of the sofa and ate take out food with shaking hands. It was the silence of the witch that was the most disturbing and it poured over and silenced Macy as well. It left the loft painfully quiet and made York feel a little worse on some small level. He was the cause of all this.

"I'm going to have to teach you to cook, Luke, man can't live on take out food alone." It was weak and lame but some fragment of conversation that felt harmless and ordinary.

Macy grinned with his chopsticks still in his mouth. "Want to bet?"

"Dude, I suck at cooking."

"You'll learn." York sighed and let his head drop to the arm of the sofa. "So, I guess we're keeping this stray, huh Macy?"

"He can't cook, knows shit about history, can't fight his way out of a wet paper bag, is going to be a world more of trouble..." each teasing insult made Luke's eyes look more worried and young and tickled a little bit of mirth into York's eyes. "But he's cute and cuddles well and isn't actually stupid and he's really hot in bed."

"Well, if you could teach me how to fight, you can teach him."

"True." Macy nodded in agreement.

"And I can show him how to do more than just order food for delivery."

"True."

"And we can see to it he actually gets an education, we're pretty smart fellows, well, at least I am."

"Hey now."

"And he can't be any more trouble than you are, not even sure that's possible with the laws of physics still in place."

"Hey!" The vampire protested but there was no hurt in his voice.

York sighed. "So, we're keeping him."

"Yup."

Luke was blushing now and feeling as vulnerable and broken as York looked. "Thanks guys."

"I think I need to get away for a while." York closed his eyes and tried to push the memories away. "It's been a while since we've traveled."

"Anywhere you want, baby doll, just name it."

"Don't care, someplace alive and quiet, let Luke pick."

"Sounds good, how about it boyo? Where would you like to go for a couple of weeks or months, maybe a year?"

"You're kidding right?" Luke asked, looking between the pair to see the joke and not finding a punchline.

"Nope."

The idea had never even occurred to him. "I don't know. I...if either of you laugh I swear I'll kill you!" He warned. "I just never thought that far. Big dreams for me are stupid things like getting my GED and not having to suck off old men to buy food." He shook his head but neither man laughed. "I don't care, I'm happy." And that was the truth.

"Well, you won't just get your GED, you're going to college so start thinking about what you want to study if you could study anything in the world."

"I can't, I... wow...okay..." He met York's eyes and for the first time since Alvaro had snatched them there was more hope and pride in them instead of broken pain. If the idea of his going to college did that, he wasn't going to protest.

"And think about it, the traveling, I'm not going to be ready for a while. Any country, any scenery, any place, name it and we'll go."

"Oooo Venice is lovely and Rio or the Cascade Mountains or China you haven't lived until you've been to China. Or I could show you where I grew up, it's in Russia now or where York grew up or..."

"Macy! Stop being a brat and let the kid make up his own mind."

"I am, just being helpful." He pouted for a moment but the teasing bled away. "What about them? What do you want done with Elina and Alvaro, baby doll? Want to hunt them before we go?"

"Elina is dead to me." He forced the words out, the reality of why he wished to go away for a time dropped on him again. That's how it had been feeling and would for a while, he'd be fine and some stray thought would flash what had happened behind his eyes and he'd suddenly feel lost and dirty again.

"And Alvaro? Bastard needs killed, slowly." His trail was still fresh enough for Macy to track, he knew it but that wasn't important right now.

The thought of having to face Alvaro made York's breathing stop. He felt the panic attack trying to consume him and he fought it but apparently not well enough. Macy surged over and cradled him gently, loosely, in his arms and Luke fetched a small brown paper bag to breath into and a glass of water from the kitchen.

"Shhh, I'm sorry, baby doll, I'm sorry... shhhh it's okay, I've got you..."

He slapped the petting hands away. "I'm okay." But the words were shaky and he didn't even believe them. He wasn't okay, he wasn't going to be okay for a long time but he was going to try to be okay. "I just, I want to hurt him, I do I... I need to kill him but I can't, I can't yet. I just can't." He didn't expect Macy to understand that. He hadn't the last time and as soon as he'd learned that York was considering killing the man that had destroyed so much he'd pushed the issue. York had given in, not wanting to appear weak to the strong vampire and faced Alvaro before he felt he was ready. That obviously didn't go well, because somehow Alvaro had lived and it gave no comfort to York for the attempt. "Not yet..." He forced out and ordered his lungs to take deeper breaths.

"Shhh, it's okay, he's not going anywhere. Shhhh you take all the time you need, baby doll, when you're ready, we'll find him and if you don't want to see him again I'll do it. It's okay...shhhh....it's okay." The moment his words sunk in to York, Macy felt it. Some of the panic ebbed from the tight short breaths and the shoulders eased a little and Macy swore a little because he'd bet Luke twenty dollars that the boy's idea wouldn't work. York would need revenge, yes, eventually, Macy knew this but it was Luke that ordered Macy to back off the idea and leave it until York mentioned it. It would kill him to wait; it wasn't in a vampire's nature to delay anything let alone something this important but this wasn't about what he wanted. Luke had been right, York would need time for the memories to dull a little and if York needed six months, six years or sixty, he'd wait, ready to hunt with a single word from his lover. "Not until you're ready baby doll..."

The words were so un-Macy like that York wondered if he'd imagined them. As Macy repeated them and they really sunk in he felt a chunk of his panicked fear break off and disappear. It didn't make holding off a full-blown panic attack any easier but he didn't spiral away into hyperventilation. When he regained some control he glanced up and found Luke's worried brown eyes and he saw the source of Macy's new found depth of human understanding and in that same moment he knew Luke understood from first hand experience.

"Merci." He whispered but not just to Macy but to the hidden pain in the boy's own eyes. "Thank you." He melted into the vampire's careful embrace and the shelter of his strength and shivered.

"It's okay." Macy sighed against York's hair, holding the most important thing in the universe in the circle of his arms.

And York really believed that it just might be okay. Maybe it was Luke's stubborn, innocent faith that things would work out or some long banked hope that had sparked to life again, but he really felt that things just might be okay. Not easy, or simple, nothing with Macy was ever simple, but okay, safe, fulfilling. He closed his eyes and pushed memory and shame, pain and fear aside and just breathed in the hopeful promise that things really would be okay.

the end

Epilogue

The bar wasn't the sort Macy bothered with. Kind of dingy and old, filled with working men that came to drink and bitch about their wives and children. The music had a twang and the eye candy was decidedly lacking but it was in out of the snow and cold and not too full given the later hour. There was a cluster of men around the pool tables and another playing darts with the almost obligatory big haired women fluttering around.

Conversations actually stopped when he walked in and eyes swung to him. The boldest stared and made it clear this wasn't the sort of dive to welcome mixed bloods and Macy stared back and put a spark of energy behind it and made it clear he didn't care. It almost made him pout, if just a little. He'd taken pains to blend in, wearing jeans and his boots and York's old, boring flannel shirt open over a black t-shirt with the words 'My Other Ride Is Yo Mama' written on it. Didn't matter, he didn't even begin to fit in here and he made a show of brushing off their glares with the snow from his coat.

He made his way to the bar and slipped onto a barstool. He waited until the bartender made his way over, frowning but unwilling to actually ask a paying customer to leave.

"What you want?" The man asked, pushing into his golden years and looking as rough as the men he served.

Macy shrugged. "Whatever's on tap." He wasn't fussy and this stop wasn't about the beer. He waited until the mug was delivered and he'd downed a few swallows before nodding to the man beside him. "Cold night, huh?"

The man grunted a huffed sound that was almost a positive but just a touch too ambivalent.

"Friendly crowd."

"It ain't personal." The man admitted. "We just don't get much of your kind here."

"My kind?" Macy tried to sound surprised at the almost slur.

"Half bloods."

"Ah, yes, well, just want a beer and a moment from the cold." He grinned. "You don't mind do you?"

"Free world, I ain't got a problem with nobody who ain't got a problem with me first. Don't care what you are."

"Good to hear, been a crazy day, had to get out of the house. Need a beer in peace, the holidays just make everyone a little nuts, ya know?"

The man just nodded. "But they pay double time so it's good."

"You look like a family man, married? kids?" Macy prodded.

The man just drifted a closed off and hard look toward Macy for asking such a personal question.

"I've got a family. Drive me insane. My youngest, well, I've never met, her older brother? Total bookworm, just can't relate to the kid and the oldest? He's got no clue, thinks he knows everything and he's still wet behind the ears. If I'd talked to my father they way he does to me?" Macy snorted and shook his head, taking another long swallow of the surprisingly good beer before continuing. "Well, let's just say I'd still be out cold."

The man nodded in agreement. "They think the world owes them, like they're special or something, like they're entitled. Most ain't never worked a day in their lives and you ask the littlest thing of them and they got to go and disobey."

"You've got kids, or had them." Macy grinned. "Pains in the asses, should have drowned em at birth." He took another swallow and wondered if the peanuts were safe to eat. "Can't say all kids, we took in this boy a couple years back, my partner and I. Street kid, found him getting the snout kicked out of him about this time of year. Took him home and well, boy was good sorts, got attached and let him stay. He didn't have anyone else. Real good kid, better than my own brats." He dug in his coat pocket for the wallet he never, ever carried. "I got pictures, here." He flipped it open and slid the picture sleeves out.

The man glanced over half-heartedly but when he saw the young man grinning up from the plastic his face went pale.

"Here, this is us on some beach in Greece, and this one? India. Look at that stupid kid on the elephant, he'd never even seen a real one before and York, my partner," Macy pointed to York sitting behind Luke on the back of the beast. "When he heard that he made the kid ride one,

scared him silly." He noticed how pale the man had grown. "Doesn't bother you that I'm gay does it?"

"N...no." Thick, strong fingers took the plastic covered pictures and flipped across them. The vampire was in some of them but most were of the boy and the older man.

"That one is Africa, ah Paris, oh the mountains were in Oregon. We spent two months living surrounded by redwoods less than a mile from the ocean. We're real proud of that kid, he had nothing when we found him. He was turning tricks, letting slime balls use him for money just to get by. Poor thing, his father tossed him out when he was fourteen for being gay, can you imagine that? What kind of man would do that." He dropped his voice down to carry the threat he meant it to. "Kid didn't even know how to read well when we found him but York got him caught up. He's home for the holidays now, back from school. He's in college, pre-med and doing really well. York's fussing over him and doing the whole holiday thing, they're driving me insane." He chuckled a little. "They're actually stringing cranberries and popcorn, I had to escape and get a beer somewhere." He downed the last couple of swallows and plucked the pictures from the man's numb fingers. They slipped into his wallet easily and he dropped a fifty dollar bill on the bar. "Hey, my tab and my friend's here, okay?" He called out to the barkeep as he stood up.

The man turned tormented eyes up to Macy, mixed with pride and pain. "I wasn't a good father to him."

"No you weren't."

"I just... I told him not to." Some of the old anger rose up in the aging man. "He was doing those perverted things under my roof, the roof I worked myself to the bone to provide him."

"He was a kid and you tossed him onto the streets to die." Macy hissed. "I've thought about killing you for that, the things that boy had to do?" He shook his head. "All because you're too proud to risk someone knowing your stepson was gay! Just be glad he's a better sort than I am, my kind? We hold grudges and have long memories. Luke's found it in him to forgive you, he actually worries about you and your sister. I'll be escorting him to Mass Christmas Eve. In case you've ever felt like admitting your sins, might be a good day for confession." Macy flipped the collar of his coat up and when the man glanced down in confused shame, he left the bar totally unnoticed.

It startled the man to glance down for a moment and have the vampire simply vanish. He would have wondered if he'd imagined it all, some hallucination of regret if there wasn't an empty beer mug on the bar next to him. Beside it, sitting between mug and peanuts, was a picture of Luke, smiling, arms loaded with books standing on the green lawn of his college.