



*Waltzing*

**Z.A. MAXFIELD**

# NOTTURNO

Z.A. MAXFIELD

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## DEDICATION

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For He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named — not Lord Voldemort— because kindness and generosity should always be remarked upon, and also for Elisa Rolle whose scholarship, friendship, and Man Candy Days always bring a smile. Thank you, Elisa, for your help with the Italian in this book. (Any mistakes are all mine.) I'm grateful to you both from the bottom of my heart.



## CHAPTER ONE

---

When Adin woke up on Lufthansa flight 456, it had already landed at LAX and he'd had the strangest night of his life. Words stuck in his sandy and arid mouth.

"I know he didn't have too much to drink. I served him myself," one of the flight attendants said. "Does he look pale to you?"

"Yes," said the air marshal. "Better call the EMTs." Two other people gathered around him as he fought the dizzy spinning of his brain. He looked out the window and his heart slammed into his rib cage when he saw a familiar, handsome figure walking confidently away from the gate inside the terminal. A sudden feeling like he'd never known, a hunger, coursed through him, and he flushed from his head to his toes.

"Water," Adin croaked.

"There you are." The flight attendant, Marcia, motioned to someone farther to the front of the cabin. "Welcome back. You were beginning to scare us. Do you have a medical condition?"

"Blood sugar gets low when I travel," Adin murmured, and someone brought him not only water but also a can of orange juice.

"Thank you." He took a sip. It would hardly have been appropriate to tell them that he became a member of the Mile High Club, not entirely consensually, in the bathroom somewhere over the American heartland. "I'm sure I'll be fine." He looked around at the worried faces.

"If you're certain...? We can call for assistance. Is there someone waiting for you?"

He reassured her. "I'll be fine. I must have been more run-down than I thought." He threw the blanket off onto the seat next to the window and got carefully to his feet as if he was feeling better already.



“Oh, you’re bleeding.” She pointed to a smudge of what looked to be blood on his shirt.

Adin held the collar away from him; his tie was gone. “Oh, odd. I don’t remember cutting myself yesterday when I shaved. Maybe it’s the electric shaver. Sometimes they bite a little.”

“Well.” She didn’t look convinced. Adin could hardly tell her that the man who’d broken into the bathroom and fucked him had also bit him. He stood, carefully testing his legs against the hollow airplane floor. He turned away from their curious faces to open the overhead bin.

“I’ll just get my case,” he said. “It’s in the...”

Nothing was there. Motherfuck. The bastard had stolen his case. Adin felt a terrible surge of disappointment. He’d known somehow it would come to this, had felt that he was being played. He cursed. Even as he’d allowed it to happen, he’d known better.

“Sir?”

“Never mind,” he ground out, walking slowly to the cabin door. He felt stupid tired; his limbs didn’t move when he told them to. He imagined he was jerking like a marionette. “Thank you.” He nodded to Marcia.

“See you next time,” she said. He couldn’t help but think it would be a long time before he flew again. A long, *long* time.

He got his checked bag, went through a groggy and embarrassing hour in customs, and left the international terminal to find a cab to the Westin Bonaventure.

At midnight, jet-lagged and unable to sleep, Adin looked out from his hotel room to see all of Los Angeles glittering below him. He had a cut-glass tumbler with three fingers of Bushmills in it, and a chance to think. The feeling, he knew, the *stalking* began in Frankfurt. It was on his mind that last night when he’d gone out with Tariq. He’d even tried to rationalize it away in the airport lounge the day before. He would never put ice in a glass of good whiskey, but the cold glass might have felt good on his aching head. He closed his eyes and tried to remember everything that happened at the airport the day before.



Adin checked his watch again. He'd come to the airport hours early to deal with security checks and now sat in one of the lounges trying to look relaxed with the last third of a drink in his hand. He didn't want to project the image of overt wariness, but neither did he want to look vulnerable... It was enough to maintain the discreet and politely disinterested persona he had to affect when he was carrying something important. He shifted his eyes down and checked his case. Still there. Of course it was.

Only a handful of people in the world would be interested in his case and not simply the money its contents represented. Adin knew he was taking unusual precautions. Yet the feeling that he was being followed persisted. Even the night before, when he'd gone to the opera with his friend Tariq, he'd been completely unable to concentrate on the pleasures the evening afforded. He'd sensed another presence with them. He noticed it at the theater, and then later at Tariq's home, where he spent the night. It bothered him enough to sweep the gauzy draperies back and open the French doors onto the balcony of Tariq's lovely old flat, but there was no one there. Tariq teased him for being paranoid and then coaxed him back to bed and made him forget. Tariq could make him forget his name. Yet still...

Adin shook his head. He should be overjoyed. He was already famous in academic circles as an authority on antique erotica. Among his kind, the bibliophiles and the professors from the small private university where he taught English literature to recalcitrant undergrads, he was thought to be a dashing if somewhat eccentric fanatic with more energy than sense, who hared off after any clue to a manuscript that promised to be just what this one was—if the rumors about it turned out to be true.

Those colleagues who knew him well envied his gift for sourcing rare books; even those that historians and scholars claimed could not exist, as they had this one. He could also claim a gift for ruthless and intuitive bidding at auctions. But *Notturmo*? Finding that was going to cement his status among his peers for a lifetime, as well as garner him the notoriety he

worried he secretly craved. More than one of his peers thought of him as the shocking and unnatural Dr. Adin Tredeger, purveyor of exotic porn.

*Notturmo* would have been a great prize, regardless of its subject matter, regardless of its age, because it was in amazing shape, from what Adin had seen of its carefully preserved pages. But with provenance in place, the nature and quality of the art scattered throughout the leather-bound journal, and the kinds of entries the owner made within it, *Notturmo* was proving to be the most exciting find of his career.

Adin's interest was piqued when a veiled reference to a journal, said to be written by an Italian count, used the term *amore vietato*, or forbidden love. Swirling the remaining whiskey in his glass, Adin almost laughed again, remembering the look on the faces of the collectors he'd called in Frankfurt to confer. They had been unprepared for the ferociously erotic text, or the fact that it illustrated a pair of very well-hung and hungry early-sixteenth-century Italian aristocrats, known vaguely by historians to have married advantageously and procreated and lived their short lives in relative obscurity.

At first glance, *Notturmo* didn't seem to describe a love affair as much as it chronicled a series of blistering sexual encounters between two men who wanted each other and, for whatever reason, played at games that would only become more widely written about and practiced after de Sade made them famous in the late eighteenth century. The rumor, in fact, was that de Sade himself had come into contact with this very manuscript on his travels in Italy and had stolen from it extensively. The rumors had turned out to be exaggerated, but what little Adin had seen of *Notturmo* was enough to put a blush on his face for weeks. The journal itself, packed and preserved as best it could be for travel, weighed heavily on his mind. He hadn't wanted it out of his sight, and yet... Circumstances made him cautious. The nagging feeling that someone else wanted it, that someone was out there waiting for the chance to get their hands on it, hadn't left him.

Adin finished his drink and picked up his case. Any minute the call to board Lufthansa flight 456, nonstop from Frankfurt

to Los Angeles, would go out over the PA system, and he was ready. Glancing around again, he headed to the gate. The weight of the case shifted in his hand, heavy, a potent reminder of the gravity of the situation. Still uneasy, he turned a full circle but could see no one paying him any particular attention. He shook off the feeling and walked on.

Flying west at this time of day, Adin always had the peculiar sensation that he was chasing the darkness. He was cold and needed a shave. The seemingly endless hours on the flight made him thirsty and dry. They'd had good weather so far, and he guessed that it would continue, given that it was midsummer. The weather in Los Angeles was bound to be hot, and he hoped the final authentication would go smoothly so he could get home to the Olympic Peninsula—for a while at least—before business called him out again or the school term started.

Adin always wore two watches when he traveled, a habit that was so ingrained he even did it when he was traveling within the same time zone. One had been his father's, a large and handsome round gold analog with a brown leather strap that he'd replaced at least twice since his father's death. He looked at the second watch on his wrist, a more modern white gold Rolex, California time, and figured that he was probably somewhere over the Midwest. He made his way through the darkened cabin in his stocking feet, headed toward the bathroom with his toiletry kit, knowing that later he would have less opportunity as people began waking up.

Adin got out his electric razor and plugged it in, getting ready to defoliate. He had his iPod on and was listening to the Black Eyed Peas' "Pump It" as he prepared for his morning routine. He didn't want to arrive in L.A. jet-lagged and spacey. A quick look in the mirror revealed that his suit was rumpled, but as soon as he got to his hotel, he'd change. He'd closed his eyes and brushed his teeth, taking a moment to enjoy his music, when he felt a draft and a change in the light. He looked up, stunned, as a man entered the tiny, cramped airplane bathroom. The man closed the door and leaned against it, looking at Adin, squeezing him farther back into the small space.

“What the hell?” Adin asked, sure he was drooling toothpaste. He almost choked, and wiped his mouth on a paper towel. “I’m sorry. I was sure I locked the door.” He waited for the man to catch on. “Occupied.” He pointed to the little sliding sign on the door. “I’ll be out in a minute.”

The man made no move to leave. He stood implacably, and Adin took in the rich texture of his clothing, which appeared completely unaffected by the long flight, and his face, which Adin might have described as darkly handsome had he not been pissed off.

“Excuse me,” said Adin, pausing his music. He looked into dark brown eyes that showed a hint of warmth but gave off none.

“Of course,” said the man. “Go ahead with your ablutions. I will wait.”

“Excuse me?” Adin said again, this time framing a question. “It’s customary to wait outside.”

“I think you’ll find that I’m not a very customary man, Adin.” He said Adin’s name like a warm caress, carefully, saying *AH-din* like it was supposed to be pronounced.

“Have we met?” asked Adin.

“No, not really.” The man had a full, mobile mouth, sensuous, with lips that looked stained dark but were probably just a little dry from flying. Maybe he, like Adin, had been compensating by licking them. The thought made Adin want to look at them again. His gaze dropped from the stranger’s eyes to those full, soft lips, and sure enough, that tongue swept out and over them, luscious and glistening. “If we had, you would remember.”

“I see,” said Adin, not quite sure what to make of that. The man still didn’t move, and Adin removed his earbuds. “Who are you, exactly?”

“I don’t know who I am, exactly, Adin. I doubt you know who you are, *exactly*. I will say that sometimes I’m a Russian poet, sometimes I’m an Italian count, and sometimes I’m a French fur trader. That was fun. Once I even owned a brothel

in San Francisco, but the girls were far more trouble than they were ultimately worth.”

Actor, thought Adin dismissively, turning back to shave.

“I really must get ready.”

“Where are my manners? I’m called Donte.” He reached for Adin’s shoulder and turned him back around.

“Donte? Not Dante?”

“Dante? No, *DOHN-tay*. Like you are *AH-din* and not *AY-den*.” The man had a peculiar accent, as though he tasted each word like a treat, rolling it on his tongue and biting it off like it was juicy to him.

“I see,” said Adin.

“I doubt that,” murmured Donte. “I saw you, you know, at the opera with your friend. What was his name?”

“Tariq.” Adin wondered why he answered. Something about Donte’s gaze was so compelling...

“Tariq. A good name. I saw you together and knew...”

“What?”

“That he would get to fuck you at the end of the evening while I would have to go home and imagine it.” Donte put out a finger and lightly trailed it down Adin’s cheek. “So pretty.”

“You are on crack,” snapped Adin, jerking his head away. He’d known he was being stalked. Worried now, he eyed the door against which the man was standing. He originally thought no one could harm him on an airplane at thirty thousand feet, but this man...

“Don’t be afraid, Adin,” Donte crooned to him, his voice moving through Adin like good liquor. The man stroked his hair softly, and Adin leaned into his touch.

“I’m not afraid.” Adin found that it was true. He was alarmed but unafraid. He shook his head to clear it. His brain felt fuzzy and filled with noise. “But I could call for an air marshal, and I’m sure neither of us wants to go through that.”

“No, we don’t. You’re curious. You want to know why I’m here. You want to know why I invaded your privacy.”

Adin's mouth, already dry, was now crusty and stuck. "Why?"

"For this," Donte whispered, seeming to come even closer without moving a muscle. He slid his hands up to the collar of Adin's shirt and caught his fingers in Adin's tie, unknotting and removing it. Donte's hands feathered Adin with gentle caresses as he slipped them across Adin's chest to undress him. Donte found skin and slid a hand under Adin's shirt to graze it. One silky finger moved over his nipple.

Adin hissed in response, and Donte smiled.

"So pretty," he repeated. Donte openly admired Adin, tugging the shirt down off his shoulders and letting it slide to the floor. They had no room to maneuver, less than the space they stood in, but somehow, where once they stood not touching, suddenly their bodies were pressed together, straining, the heat between them growing exponentially. Adin's body responded with lethal hunger.

"I don't..."

"No, of course you don't, *caro*."

Nevertheless, he was certainly about to... Damn it. Adin strained toward the beautiful man who now worked open his trousers, pushing and tugging until he was almost naked. "No, but I really, really..." Adin's trousers and briefs hit the floor, and he stepped out of them in a daze.

"I can see that," said Donte with a smile. "You are willing only for me, yes? *Un amore vietato, non?*"

"Yes...no!" Adin tried to back up, but there was nowhere to go. "Please, this is crazy."

"But here we are." Donte cupped Adin's face with both hands. "You are already nude, and you haven't yet even put your lips to mine. Come, Adin. Kiss me." And Adin did. His whole life, his whole world, all his thoughts and feelings and desires, were supplanted by the suggestion to kiss Donte.

Adin's mind registered that it could not be real. It was some kind of glamour magic of the moment, something that worked within his brain like oxygen deprivation, but he kissed Donte

and went on kissing him. When Donte pulled his thick, uncut cock from his trousers and pushed Adin up against the wall, Adin wrapped his legs around the handsome man and pressed his feet on the backs of Donte's muscled thighs for traction, his only murmur causing the briefest time-out for Donte to put on a condom and slick himself with lube, which Adin supplied from his own damned toiletry kit.

Nothing could have prepared Adin for the exquisite feel of Donte parting his ass cheeks and taking him in a single powerful thrust. The red-hot burn that seemed cold at the same time, the pressure, the fullness, and even the pain evolved into something hot and primitive. Adin breathed in sex and man and something else, something extraordinary that infused the air with the aroma of fresh herbs like thyme or basil. Something that teased at his nostrils, complex and earthy and completely at odds with getting busy in an airplane bathroom. Something that felt warm, even though the man who held and coolly fucked him felt anything but.

Donte was impossibly strong; his muscled arms held Adin steady while his cock surged into Adin's ass. His kisses were possessive and demanding. Adin could only cling, kiss back, and feel the heat race through him. He lost himself in the moment completely, so that when Donte sought out the tender flesh at the junction of his neck and shoulder and bit down, immense shock waves of pleasure slid down Adin's spine and ended in explosions from his cock. Adin soared into his climax without ever having touched himself, and Donte followed as Adin convulsed around him. He jerked his hips, fierce and hard, slamming Adin back against the wall and pressing in deep until he emptied himself into the latex.

After they stopped pulsing together and their ragged breathing turned to sighs, Donte allowed Adin to slump to the commode while he removed and tossed the condom. Adin's legs trembled uncontrollably. Donte cleaned the semen stains off his suit as well as he could, looking at himself in the mirror. Adin didn't see him. The angle, Adin supposed, was wrong. He would have liked to see Donte's face just then.



“Adin,” said Donte. “You have something that belongs to me.”

“I do?” Adin looked up at the man who seemed like a dark tower in the tiny space. “What?”

“You must not be angry when I take it from you, caro.” He took Adin’s arms and helped him to stand, then kissed him tenderly, opening Adin up again and taking his mouth. “I will give you something of equal value in return; I’ll find something extraordinary, and it will be yours.”

“Oh,” said Adin. Truly, when he got back he was going to have a thorough neurological workup.

*“Per favori, non dimenticarmi,”* he whispered. *Please don’t forget me.*

When Donte left the bathroom quietly, the privacy slider on the door still clearly said OCCUPIED. Adin gazed around him for a moment, still foggy, still wondering what the hell was going on. He dressed himself, his trousers, shirt, and jacket looking even more disreputable than they had before. His tie was gone. His tie? Was Donte a trophy hunter?

Adin stared at his face in the mirror. He looked at his hands, which gripped the counter next to the sink, pressing down hard, white at the knuckles. He still tasted that deeply green herb scent on his tongue. He’d had impromptu sex before; in fact, he had fucked men without even the exchange of names. It was all aboveboard, a very *civilized* primitive exchange. Something told him that Donte was neither aboveboard nor civilized. Yet the simple truth was that if he had it to do over again, he would.

Adin left the bathroom sometime later, having made his clothing as presentable as possible. Anyone seeing him would think he was just another tired traveler. A little pale, maybe. By the time he got to his seat, he was so dizzy he could hardly stand, and he dropped into it, glad he’d chosen the aisle, glad his seatmate was two spaces over in the window seat, sound asleep. He tried to smack his lips together to wet them. He didn’t have the strength to lift his arm and push the flight attendant Call button. He was suddenly afraid that something was very wrong. His hands fell into his lap and curled up into

fists as he lost consciousness. He knew there was something he ought to be doing—something he ought to be thinking—but then the darkness claimed him and he knew nothing more.



Adin turned back to the window of his room on the seventeenth floor. He saw his face clearly reflected. He sipped his whiskey slowly, allowing it to warm him, cautious because he'd lost blood. Donated blood. Because whatever Donte had nicked him with had been razor-sharp, and he hadn't imagined the sucking, couldn't have imagined the intense pleasure that it brought him. His breath puffed steamy air against the glass. He wondered if he should tell anyone and then thought better of it. After all, who could he tell?

"Fucking out of my mind," he said aloud. He turned back to the room and the rolling Pullman on the bed. It was funny. He tried not to laugh, because he was alone and he already felt more than a little insane. His last act as he packed and finished electronically checking out of his Frankfurt hotel was to switch *Notturmo* with the informative hotel binder from the room. Even as he switched them, placing *Notturmo* and his laptop in his Pullman and the travel guide in the missing carry-on case, he knew he was right to do it, even though it meant letting the journal leave his hands. Adin hadn't liked giving in to his paranoia, but as the feeling of being stalked persisted, he'd forced himself to act in the interest of caution. Which meant that somewhere, out there in the night, a gorgeous, appallingly sexy stalker-who-bites could order pizza from any one of a dozen German restaurants. If he could eat garlic.

Adin did laugh then as he placed *Notturmo* securely in the hotel room's wall safe. In the morning he'd take it to the lab. While the sun was out. Just in case.



## CHAPTER TWO

---

When Adin finally slept, he dreamed of Donte, surrounding him in whispers of Italian, French, Romanian, and Greek, sometimes all at once, like a chorus of bad angels building up to a crescendo in his veins. It was as if his blood were alive, independent, and pulsing with possibilities. Several times Adin woke, sweating and chilled, his cock banging against his stomach, leaving glistening trails in its wake. Adin could almost hear Donte laughing at him as he broke out the lube and gave himself to pleasure, a minute's worth of frustrated groping that left him nothing but damp and hungry for more.

Eventually he must have slept; it was full light when he awoke. He was so completely disoriented that it took a pot of room service coffee and a large breakfast before he could think again. He headed down for a cab with the *Notturmo* manuscript in an expensive new leather briefcase, one he'd had delivered by personal shopper to the concierge and which he would mind very much losing. He stepped into the bright sunlight of a ninety-something-degree day and caught a cab headed for Welkeil Pharmaceuticals. The cab was full of religious symbols of every conceivable faith and smelled of coffee and mint gum. The cabdriver was a portly man of unknown ethnic origin who was pleasant and talkative and followed the shortest distance between where Adin started and where he was headed. A definite plus.

They stopped at the foot of the Welkeil Building on Wilshire, a towering edifice wrought in steel and smoked glass, and the cabbie came around to open the door for him, depositing him on the sidewalk like a Sherpa delivering a climber to base camp. Together they looked up, and when Adin glanced back, the expression on the driver's face was one of mistrust, as if he'd had dealings with people in large buildings and didn't approve.

Stupidly, Adin blurted out, “My sister works here,” and the man smiled as though that made a difference. Adin paid him, and he left.

Welkeil was not the most welcoming place. After following protocol and checking in at the large, busy reception desk, Adin’s briefcase and person were searched, and a handheld metal detector was run over his body. The blonde woman, in a navy blazer with a tag on a lanyard that read SECURITY, smiled apologetically.

After a time, one of the doors in a bank of elevators opened and Adin’s tiny, energetic sister, Deana, rushed out.

“Adin, oddball, you jerk!” she said as he picked her up and swung her, simply to illustrate that he still could. “You could have told me you were coming. It would have been a lot easier.” She smiled at the security guard and took him by the hand.

“You look great, Deana Beana,” he exclaimed, trailing after her, taking in her bronzed skin and sun-kissed hair. “You’re all golden and glowing.”

“It’s a spray-on tan,” she said, laughing. “It makes me look like a proper Angeleno.”

“You’ll never be a proper anything,” he teased. They returned to the elevator and got in just as the car was about to close its doors.

“Look who’s talking,” she said. “What have you brought me this time?”

“Renaissance porn.”

“No kidding?”

“Entirely on the level. I thought we could take a peek...”

“And you want into the lab.” Deana raised her eyebrows, and Adin grinned. “That’s fine, but not the clean room. I assume you don’t want to prepare a slide?” They exited the elevator on the sixth floor.

“Oh hell no. This stays intact. Nothing invasive just yet. It’s my precioussssss.”

“Well.” She pursed her lips. “Jeff’s got the electron microscope, so you’ll eventually have to. You know the drill.”

He held up his case and patted it. “You won’t even believe this manuscript. It’s unbelievably graphic. I want to look at the parchment under a standard microscope first before I make the decision to prepare a slide sample for electron microscopy. I’ve brought my digital camera, and you can help me photograph the pages. This is pretty racy stuff, Deana Beana; better gird your loins.”

“You and your smut.” She led him down a gray-carpeted hallway.

“This is historical smut, I will have you know. Erotica is an art form that has its beginnings in cave paintings—”

“Save the speech, Adin. I’ve heard it. What makes this one so special?” She swiped her card in a reader and then followed him as he entered a brightly lit white lab room filled with long stainless steel surfaces. Various stations held microscopes, centrifuges, and burners, and each had file drawers underneath.

“Ah,” he said, finding a long stretch of clean counter. The room was a good one for handling the book. The temperature and humidity levels mimicked those in which he would eventually store his precious find at the university. He took out his case and handed her a pair of white cotton gloves. She pulled them over her small hands and watched with amused condescension as he carefully opened the special box in which the manuscript traveled. It was designed to allow the manuscript to be removed without any kind of pressure on the object itself. Gingerly, he opened to one of the pages. “See for yourself.”

“You are shitting me.” His sister stared at the book in shock.

“Nope.” He grinned.

“Gay porn from beyond the grave?”

“You can’t be terribly shocked.” He laughed outright.

She shook her head. “Oh, oddball. Only you...”

She went to the phone and dialed four numbers. “Hello, Jeff? I need the TEM. No, Adin’s here. It’s for ink.” She

glanced over her shoulder at her brother, who was sticking his tongue out. “No, he still doesn’t spell it *O-D-D*. You have to promise not to file sexual harassment charges, Jeff... I *am* serious... If you aren’t okay with *Brokeback Mountain* meets *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, don’t hang around... Okay, then we’ll be up in a while.”

Deana leaned over him to explore the page further. “Oh, Adin,” she said. “It’s gorgeous.”

“I know. I looked it over as carefully as I could in Frankfurt, but I didn’t have the time to read much of it.” He took a magnifying glass out of his jacket pocket, and Deana pulled over a couple of stools.

“*Can* you read it?” she asked.

“It’s Italian, but of course not the Italian we use today.” He thought of Donte, whispering “*un amore vietato*.” *Forbidden love*. He shivered a little, and Deana looked at him, not missing a thing.

“Cold?”

“Just thinking,” he said, going back to the manuscript. “Somebody tried to steal this from me on the plane.”

“No. Adin?” His sister stared at him. “That is so very *not good*.”

“I know.” He peered at the words under a nude rendering of a really beautiful man. “Oh, this is interesting. He refers to the man as his award. Like a prize or the result of a bet, almost; something he won. Hmm. ‘I possess him, yet he possesses me entirely. My will is no longer my own.’ Whoa. Time for an intervention. Ye olde Codependents Anonymous.”

Deana looked closely at the page. “Yet look at the drawing. Wow. *That* is the expression of a man in love, isn’t it?”

“How would *I* know? It’s a lovely drawing, though, isn’t it? Look at the eyes; they’re so...soft. I can assure you, I don’t inspire that look at all.”

“Yet you persist in playing hit-and-run all over the world with what, fuck buddies?”

“Friends. I have really good friends when I need them and strangers when I want them. It’s not like I need much more than that.” He turned a page gingerly and drew in a deep breath.

Deana gasped and clutched at her heart. “Oh, hell, I don’t care what century you’re from, that has got to hurt.” They both tilted their heads in the same direction to look at the drawing more closely. Her face caught fire. “Sorry.”

“No worries,” he replied, schooling his expression. He wished he could just sit somewhere and read this damned book in private. His dick was interested now, and his sister was watching... “What?”

“Maybe we should go see Jeff now.”

“Oh, you think he’s ready?” He replaced the book in its case without meeting her eyes.

“No. I don’t seriously think Jeff will ever be ready for the contents of that book.”

“I know.” He followed her out into the corridor and then pressed the elevator Call button. “To be honest, I’m not sure even I am, and I bought the damn thing.”

“Think this time the university will say you’ve gone too far?”

“Maybe. Probably.” He turned to her and grinned cheekily, a persistent memory of their childhood.

“You go, oddball!” She high-fived him.

They spent an hour in Jeff’s lab and two more meticulously photographing each page of the journal. It was painstaking work, each page carefully checked on Adin’s laptop to see whether the writing was legible enough for translation and the drawings could be reproduced adequately for study. Better copies than these would eventually be made of the work, but Adin couldn’t help wanting to get started on the translation right away, and Deana had always been a willing accomplice. She drove Adin back to the Bonaventure, leaving him with the firm promise of lunch the following day. He wasn’t about to tell her that he planned to stay indoors at night. He merely begged off dinner, using jet lag as an excuse, and of course he *was* tired and looked like hell.



When he returned to his room, he stored the manuscript back in his wall safe. So far, he'd been right about it. The document was written in iron gall ink on true vellum. Step one to authenticating the manuscript. Next, paleographers and codicologists would assess the writing and the binding. Translation and further testing would be required to prove its actual age. At this point, however, Adin had no reason to believe it was anything other than what it seemed. He allowed himself a small, triumphant smile and went to the window. Still light out, it was a balmy Southern California evening, perfect for dining alfresco at one of his favorite Westwood eateries. Adin even longed to take in a Dodgers game. But Germany had messed with his internal clock, and his own fertile imagination supplied a reason to succumb to his exhaustion. He knew he had to rest this night and rise early again the next day in order to get himself back on Pacific standard time.

Adin was so exhausted he fell asleep on his bed with his laptop still glowing from when he'd checked his e-mail. The dream from the night before returned; his blood sang in his veins. It heated his body and stained it with crimson at the surface of his skin. He woke flushed, knowing that he'd heard Donte's voice again, murmuring with that peculiar accent in his ear, coming from under his flesh even as his cock, which had always had a mind of its own, rose to seek the man out.

"Crap," said Adin, taking a few deep breaths. He dressed and headed for the BonaVista Lounge, hoping he could still get something light to eat as well as a drink. For whatever reason, eating alone in his hotel room didn't feel like an option. Entering the elevator, he was glad to see a few smiling faces, an older couple holding hands and two Asian girls who were dressed for and talking about business. By the twenty-second floor, everyone exited the elevator but him. He stepped off at the top floor, looking for the lounge, when a large hand swept out from behind him and pulled him back in.

"Caro." *Donte's voice.* He was looking at the light panel on the elevator, watching the floor buttons fire up in a chaotic, random way that made him think of science fiction movies from the '50s. He jerked forward to step off again but was prevented by

the hand holding his arm. He felt the whisper of Donte's breath against his ear.

"I've called you and called you, yet you only just now come to me. *Stubborn.*"

"What do you want?" asked Adin, refusing to turn.

"Only that which belongs to me."

"And what would that be?"

"What do you think, Adin? Of course I want my journal back. And yet...I wonder if you recall how completely you gave yourself to me." Donte's sigh lifted the hair on Adin's nape. "Perhaps I would like that back as well."

Adin watched the flashing elevator lights and concentrated on thinking clearly. He kept his voice even. "Does this kind of thing work for you?"

"What kind of thing?" Donte stiffened.

"This whole, *I am Donte* thing." Adin affected the accent, giving it a little more Bela Lugosi than was strictly necessary. "*Come to me, caro, and your blood will sing in the moonlight.*"

"Now, I know I have never said that." Donte put a hand on Adin's shoulder.

"It's only a matter of time, I'm sure."

"I fear it loses a little of the *oompah* if you are not looking at my face."

Adin snorted. "I gathered."

"Turn around, caro," Donte ordered.

"Nope. When I look you in the eye, things happen inside my head that I don't necessarily like."

"I promise I won't use mind tricks on you right now." Donte tugged at him. "I am a man of my word, if nothing else."

"I can tell when it's happening; it's no use anyway." Adin turned.

"You would be foolish to assume that in the future. Just because you can tell it's happening doesn't mean you can stop it."

“What is it, anyway?” asked Adin. The lights on the panel had stopped blinking maniacally, but the elevator descended in a leisurely way, giving the impression they were hovering, floating in the glass-enclosed space.

“What? Oh, I don’t know, a kind of hypnosis, maybe, a push of thought that takes root in someone’s mind because they are weaker.” Donte leaned against the round brass railing that surrounded them like a skeleton inside the elevator car.

“I see.”

“You don’t like to think of yourself as weaker. I understand, but Adin, you cannot hope to prevail against me as you are.”

“You can’t have the journal; I bought it with proper provenance, but you may try, if you like, to dispute it in a court of law.”

“Yes, well. That presents a problem, though, doesn’t it?”

“Do you really expect me to believe the impression you have been constructing? The biting, the mind control, the Vlad the Impaler accent.”

“Vlad—I’m *Italian*.”

“Do you expect me to believe that you are...? I can’t even say it.” Adin raised his brows. “The undead. A creature of the night. The prince of darkness.”

Donte pursed his lips. “I believe *that* was Satan.”

“Yes. Well. Do you?”

Donte’s eyes met his, and he was relieved to feel only an attraction, not a confused jumble of painful desire and fear. “I don’t care whether you believe it. Your belief doesn’t alter the facts. The journal is mine: I drew it. I illustrated it. I *lived* it. It belongs to me, and I want it back.”

“You will have a hard time proving that in court.”

Donte looked out over the skyline. “Did you ever hear the story about the brothers who were camping in the woods when a bear crashed into their campsite, enraged, and began to chase them? The first brother says, ‘I must outrun the bear,’ and the second says, ‘I don’t have to outrun the bear. I just have to

outrun you.” He shook his head. “You know I cannot take this to a court of law, caro.”

Adin peered at the city and the darkness beyond it. “Fair warning?”

“Yes.”

“I like you a lot better without the glamour, you know? Whatever causes it.”

Donte’s teeth shone even and white as he smiled, and Adin wondered about that, Renaissance dentistry being what it must have been. Looking at Donte, he wondered about a lot of things. His most immediate question, which he framed with a smile of his own, crowded out all those other thoughts.

“So, how long do we have the elevator?”

Donte’s bark of laughter caught them both by surprise. “Caro, you imp. This is almost as unseemly as that airplane bathroom. There are cameras...”

“Then in the morning we can google ‘gay elevator sex video’ and see if we get a hit on ourselves.” Adin approached Donte, which seemed to be the last thing he expected, and touched their lips together lightly. “I find I very much like tight spaces if they have you in them.”

“This is a *glass* elevator,” Donte countered, kissing him back hungrily. “I think you should know that whatever you have planned needs to be accomplished before we reach the tenth floor or everyone in the lobby court will be witness to our passion and subsequent arrest for indecent exposure and lewd conduct.”

Adin snorted. “I think you might be that quick off the mark, at your age, but—”

“Invite me to your room,” whispered Donte.

Adin froze. “Ah, yes, well.” He backed up, regret in his eyes. “Sorry. I can’t do that.”

“Superstitious? I could make you do it.”

“Actually, I don’t believe you could.” This seemed as good a time as any to test it. If Donte could get Adin to do anything he

wanted, then the game was over before it began anyway. A tremendous wave of emotion washed over him, deep fear that crawled up his spine like a vine. It was an interesting sensation, but because he expected it, he could remain distant, acknowledging and exploring it without letting the suggestions touch him. Adin searched the fear, probing it like a sore tooth. At its core was the desire to reach out to Donte for protection.

Donte watched him curiously.

“Hey, nice,” said Adin. “If you could make people think they’d eaten, you’d be a remarkable diet aid.”

“I am the very apex of the food chain on this planet, Adin. Try to have a little respect.” Donte’s mouth quirked, the beginnings of a smile forming on his luscious lips.

“Nevertheless, it isn’t going to work on me now that I can feel it coming.” Adin smoothed a hand over Donte’s jacket and tie. Adin’s *own tie*, which Donte took from him on the airplane. “The color suits you,” he remarked with asperity. “Trophy tie?”

“You spent on *my* tie, Adin. I’m having it cleaned.”

“Ah.” There didn’t seem to be much more to say. Adin looked back at the numbers.

“Well. This is awkward,” said Donte.

“Give me a minute. I’m warming up to asking you out for dinner.”

“Really?”

Adin looked up at Donte. “Yes.” Donte’s perfect mouth formed in a small O of surprise.

“If I go with you, does that qualify as takeout for me, I wonder.”

Adin laughed again.

“You seem remarkably calm in the face of what could be a very short, very frightening night on the town. Do you realize this?”

“Yes, I realize. You could probably kill me, then rent my room and get your manuscript back. But you haven’t, yet. Instead you’ve turned on your enormous personal charm and

turned off your mojo, so I have to figure I stand a chance, at least, to greet the dawn alive.”

“You think my personal charm is enormous, do you, Adin?” asked Donte, leaning in.

“As if you didn’t know you were *every* month in my Undead Playmate Calendar.”

“I like you, Adin,” said Donte warmly.

“I hope you don’t mean that in the epicurean sense, love.”

“Of course.” Donte smiled. “First course, entrée, dessert. Perhaps you could come between the cheese course and the après-dinner coffee.” He lowered his lashes. “You were delicious. A hint of Irish butter...a note of berry...a little sweet, a little tart.”

“I must admit I have been called a little tart before.”

Donte tilted his head back and laughed. “Where shall we go, caro? Someplace where you will sparkle for me all night, yes?”

“Oh no. Am I sparkling again?” asked Adin. “I have just the place, Donte, but first tell me, do you eat? Or just drink?”

“I won’t be eating.”

“Ah, then no porterhouse for two at Table 8.” He sighed. “Too bad, it’s rather wonderful. I think in that case we can head over to Vin, my sister’s favorite.”

“All right, do you have a car?”

“No, we’ll get a cab. It’s over on Santa Monica, in West Hollywood. On the way, perhaps you can fill me in on the whole garlic thing. Is it a dating do or don’t for vamps, and will I get kissed if I eat it?”

“You are remarkably sanguine, no pun intended, for a man in an elevator with a vampire.”

“Little reality check. *If* I believed in vampires, and I’m not saying I do, you haven’t proved you are one to my satisfaction. You fucked me in an airplane bathroom, bit my neck, and tried to steal a million-dollar manuscript from me. I think I’m being remarkably optimistic about the whole affair. I’ll even pay for dinner. No stakes, I promise, just poultry or fish.”

“Very funny.”

The elevator started to move at its normal speed again. “Ladies and gentlemen, how does he do it?” murmured Adin.

“I’m beginning to feel mocked,” said Donte sourly.

Adin caught his hand. “Apologies, Donte. Truly. If you are who—and what—you say you are, then I apologize from the bottom of my heart. I’ve read only a few pages of that manuscript. It’s beautiful, the art and the entries. They were highly skilled and lyrical.”

The elevator doors opened at the lobby. “After you,” said Donte, ignoring the looks on the faces of the maintenance men who had apparently been called in to deal with a rogue elevator.

Donte continued to talk while they waited for the doorman to get them a cab. “I know what you think. When people of this age look at that journal, all they see is sex. It is *Boys Gone Wild*, the Florentine edition.” He looked at Adin. “Don’t look at me like that. I know what you called it, Renaissance pornography. So thought de Sade, that *amf* little shit.”

“Do you dare,” asked Adin, stopping in his tracks, “to compare me to the Marquis de Sade?”

“You collect manuscripts like mine, yes? You are the quintessential American man who reads those glossy sex rags for the articles. Certainly, it is compelling that Tanya enjoys long walks on the windy moor at night, needlepoint, and Labrador retrievers. But is that why you read it? I think not.”

“I’m sorry,” said Adin quietly as the doorman opened the cab door for them. Donte automatically tipped him.

“For what?”

Adin told the cabdriver the address, and the cab pulled out. “I don’t think you understand my interest in that manuscript,” said Adin, pulling his seat belt around and clicking it into place. He raised his brows at Donte when he didn’t do likewise, but Donte raised his eyebrows back as if to say, *Hello, already dead*. “Oh, right, where was I? I’m a professor of literature, Donte, and among other things, I specialize in antique erotica. In fact, my credentials are such that people pay me to search out and

authenticate manuscripts for private collections, museums, and academic institutions.”

Donte gave that some thought. “So this makes you the Indiana Jones of what you call antique pornography.”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing,” Adin teased.

“All I see is an acquisitive man with a healthy disrespect for authority.” Donte looked out the window. “Someone for whom the private lives of kings and princes and priests are merely fodder for prurient speculation.” He returned his gaze to Adin. “Tell me that I’m wrong. Tell me that you see the authors of your manuscripts as people, like you, with a tiny little sliver of mortality to sustain or enjoy or endure in any way they have to.”

Adin was silent.

“I speculate that you cannot place yourself in the shoes of these men, that you think you are far superior and above the normal cravings and desires these books represent.”

“You can’t really believe that.”

“But I do,” said Donte. “I believe you have it all very neatly sewn up. Tariq in Frankfurt, who offers the opera and his perfectly lovely flat. There must be others, perhaps located in major cities all over the world. Tonight, I am Don Giovanni de Los Angeles. Will someone else be disappointed this evening? Was someone expecting you?”

“No. Except my sister. We were going to have dinner, but I asked her if we could do lunch instead.”

Donte rumbled with laughter. “In the daylight.”

“Yes.”

“While you dine, caro,” he said, “I will fill you in on what you can and cannot expect from me, in the interest of fairness. At least some of it. It wouldn’t do to give out all my secrets.”

The cab pulled up to the curb, and Adin removed his wallet to pay the driver. “Thank you,” he said to the man, who looked at him with curiosity. Adin smiled and exited the cab. Donte followed him, rising easily to his full height, and closed the car door behind them.





## CHAPTER THREE

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As usual Vin was packed; even late at night, a crowd thronged the bar. They were informed there would be a wait for a table, but Donte turned on the full power of his charm and the electrified host sat them at a lovely, private table immediately. Adin noticed others staring hard in their direction, no doubt wondering who they were that they got the star treatment. Adin shrugged his shoulders, and Donte took it as his personal due, nodding regally at those who gazed at him.

“Noblesse oblige?” asked Adin.

“It never hurts to be kind, Adin.”

“Said the aristocrat vampire pornographer.” They sat in silence until it was time to order wine.

“Hartford Court Pinot Noir 2005,” Donte told the sommelier. “If you have it.”

“We do,” the man said. “A good choice.”

Donte returned his attention to Adin. “He’s thinking, ‘not an *excellent* choice,’ and wondering why I would order a small California wine here, in a restaurant famous for its cellar.”

“So, you read minds?”

“No, I read faces. And to be honest, they are all beginning to look remarkably similar. It puts me in rather a quandary. For instance, how much of my attraction to you is because of you, and how much is because you remind me of a certain French portrait artist named Gilbert who completely rocked my world during *la Terreur*?”

“I can see the dilemma.”

“Can you? Do I remind you of anyone?” Donte asked idly.

“No, Donte,” Adin admitted. “You are like no one I’ve ever known in my life.”

The wine arrived, and the sommelier enacted the wine drama that never failed to make Adin wish he'd just ordered a Bushmills. Donte didn't play along much, refusing the cork, then simply breathing in the aroma of the wine in the glass.

"Fine." He smiled. "Thank you." The sommelier retreated. "This wine is delicious, but to be honest, I picked it because it goes very well with—and I hope you won't take this wrong—you."

"Ah." Adin was almost speechless. "Well. *I* was going to order the roast pork."

"Oh, that has a cherry sauce. You'll find that dish goes with the wine as well, as there's a complex cherry-berry note that comes right through. Taste it if you want. You'll notice it right away." Adin lifted his glass and took a small sip. Donte was right. In its dry elegance, it had a definite undertone of cherry, and something indefinable and sweet, like winter food.

"It tastes like Christmas."

"Ah, that's the allspice. You noticed? You have a good palate."

"Not really," Adin murmured, absurdly pleased.

"So, you wonder about the garlic, which is a myth, by the way. And you hope daylight will prevent me from taking what's mine."

"Yes."

"Well, in theory, it would. But I am sorry to tell you that a number of things make it easier, including modern pharmacology, which I believe is your sister's purview, is it not? Well, it makes the world a safer place for me. Better living, as they say, through chemistry."

"So you use sunscreen?"

"Yes, and hats and gloves. Oh, it's a tedious process, and far too hot in Los Angeles, but in the end, I can go where I like, whenever I like. Even if I look like Michael Jackson while I'm doing it. Still, there are few, if any, things I choose to do during the day, especially now that baseball is played at night, with lights, even at Wrigley Field."

“You like sports?”

“No.” Donte took a sip of his wine. “I don’t like sports much at all. I like *baseball*, which is not a sport. I thought you were a literature professor. Baseball is a metaphor for innocence.”

“I see. And the current controversy over performance-enhancing drugs?”

“Once again, man bites the apple. It’s the oldest metaphor in the book, literally. Now the sons and daughters of God are again thrown from Eden.” He lifted the corners of his lips in a half smile.

“And what about you, Donte? What did you do to earn immortality?”

Donte’s eyes met Adin’s implacably. Adin didn’t consider that he’d just refuse to answer, but refuse he did, changing the subject adroitly after the waiter came to take their order. Adin relaxed as the wine traveled its path through his body, warming him and loosening his tongue.

“Well then, let me tell you why you will eventually give the journal back to me,” said Donte.

“Yes, why?” Adin was beginning to feel thoroughly pleasant in a toes-wrapped-in-cotton-batting kind of way. “What’s in that book that you would be so determined to get it back? What is in your own journal that you couldn’t write again?”

“As if I could begin to explain to you the complexities of Italian noble life in the time during which I wrote that journal.” Donte leaned his head on his hand. “Everything we did was ruled by the nature. By the church. By the season of the year or the light of the sun. We had little control over our destiny.”

“I imagine.”

“I doubt that very much. We were boys, Auselmo and I. I was called Niccolo then, and we were fostered together, destined, as third sons, for the church.”

“Really?”

“Yes, although fate has a way of changing one’s plans, we were both remarkably well suited to religious life. At the time we were both serious and studious, yet filled with passion. Our thirst for knowledge was insatiable. But then we noticed each other; how could we not?”

“I see.”

“Well, no. You probably don’t have the first idea of that kind of passion. If Auselmo sighed, it came from my lungs, Adin. I might have been kilometers away, but I felt every beat of his heart. From everything we knew about the world, this was madness! We were completely incapable of understanding. Completely innocent. Then one day Auselmo caught me in the kitchen gardens and kissed me as no man has been kissed before or since.”

Adin could say nothing.

“You believe the persistence of that memory has probably been made more intense by the time afforded to me as an immortal.” Donte nodded. “Yet when you read the journal, when *I* read it, that kiss is as fresh on my lips as the day my lover placed it there.”

“Then he’s not...”

“No.” Donte was silent for a moment. “Auselmo is not an immortal, like me. After five hundred years, it’s as if he was barely more than a breath of wind that caressed me. Yet not a day goes by that I do not wish to feel it again.”

“*Motherfuck.*” Adin raised his glass and drank to soothe the ache in his throat.

“Well.” Donte cleared his own throat. “I’ve turned morose. Perhaps this would be a good time for you to sparkle.”

“I...uh,” said Adin, “would have liked to sit and read the journal, but I haven’t had the time to go over it carefully in a safe environment. Above all, I would like to protect it so it’s not lost.”

“So that everyone may see my most private and intimate—and sometimes painful—thoughts. Yes. That surely is a worthy goal.” Donte’s luscious lips thinned into a brief line.

The waiter arrived with Adin's dinner, so beautifully plated that he felt the absurd desire to just stare at it for a moment. "This is nice," he murmured, picking up his napkin and his fork. "Look." He stopped with his fork halfway to his plate. "Usually, when I find a manuscript, there's no one around, living or undead, who can lay claim to any part of the intellectual content inside it. This is utterly new to me. Can you understand that, very possibly, it's that slight breath of wind that I'm trying to preserve? If the journal goes, everything that was Auselmo goes with it, except for that which is in your remarkably well-preserved person. He is gone as irrevocably as if he never existed. I'm not a panderer, Donte. I'm not just some pimp looking for erotic cartoons."

Adin returned his attention to his food, and Donte watched him thoughtfully. Adin continued to eat, content for the moment to remain silent, and it was in this silence that he felt Donte's hand cover his on the table, the long, elegant fingers stroking gently, thoughtfully, over his more square ones.

Adin looked up at Donte, who was then in the middle of taking a sip of his wine. He took in Donte's demonically beautiful face, long and angular, with its hooded eyes and high cheekbones, its wine-darkened lips. He watched as Donte savored it, imagining the warmth of the wine on the inside of Donte's mouth and against his tongue. He could almost feel it as it slid down the column of Donte's throat, teasing his Adam's apple into a subtle bob, and suddenly Adin was the wine, slipping down that throat, and just as inexplicably, Adin felt Donte's mouth on him everywhere at once, biting...licking...sucking. Adin's breath sped up; his skin warmed with the beginnings of a flush brought on by arousal. He shifted in his seat, and where his clothing touched his cock and balls, it was electric, setting intimate little fires along his nerve endings, which were so sensitive they were painful.

"Donte," he murmured as his back arched totally out of his control. He slid a little farther down in his seat, his fork clattering to the table noisily. "Oh." He sighed as the sensation of being invaded physically broke over him in waves. His head dropped back while his body rang like a bell. As he dragged in a

lungful of air, he shuddered around what felt like the fullness of Donte driving his cock into him over and over. All he could do was breathe through it, panting in the throes of sexual stimulation that gripped him like a vise.

Donte watched him, his own face completely impassive. Adin felt overly warm, and his breath huffed in little gasps as his face slackened, his brain whitening out in the moments before his release. Donte smiled into his glass like a ventriloquist who drinks water and watches his puppet speak as Adin's body jerked once, twice, and a third and final time, his hips snapping below the tiny bistro table, as he moaned and rolled his head from side to side.

As his breathing returned to normal, Adin snatched his hand out from beneath Donte's and returned to sitting upright. He looked around him in an agony of personal shame and carefully picked up his fork, then placed it on his plate with the knife to signal he was done with his meal.

*"Complet, mon cher Adin?"*

French, was it then? *"Salopard,"* Adin ground out. *Bastard.* He threw his napkin on the table and got up to find the men's room.

Adin squeezed himself between patrons in the wine bar and edged through to the bathroom, where he could hide alone in the single tiny stall. *Alone*, he realized, was a relative word since he'd met Donte, as his blood was doing its peculiar whispering; Donte's voice in a myriad of different languages, singing to him, lighting fires all along the shallow capillaries below the surface of his skin. As he cleaned himself up, Adin had his first very real frisson of fear.

Donte could be amusing, entertaining, urbane, even boyishly charming. But it would never do to forget for one second that he was—in his own words—the apex of the food chain on this planet. Adin looked at himself in the small mirror over the sink. He'd never been the type of man to back down. Back away, maybe. Reevaluate his options, certainly. He prided himself on being pragmatic and shrewd and slow to panic when the shit hit the fan. He'd caught Donte off guard more than once.

Yet faced with the kind of power that Donte seemed to possess, his charisma, and his experience, Adin had to acknowledge that he was intimidated and afraid. It had been so long since he'd felt either of those emotions, he hadn't even recognized them for what they were. Faced with imminent danger, yet subject to a perverse and powerful erotic longing, he was fucked. Entirely and completely fucked.

Adin took stock as he looked at his face in the mirror. He saw nondescript brown hair, slightly long, slightly on the wavy side, atop what he thought was an unremarkable face. Blue eyes looked back at him. When he smiled, people told him they found it charming. He rarely got angry, yet was known around the school for a badgerlike determination to get what he wanted. *I am Donte, the apex of the food chain on this planet.* He shoved at the large round knob on the hand dryer and rubbed his hands together briskly under its jet of hot air.

"And that," Adin said to himself, "makes *you* beer snacks." He turned and bumped into Donte, who had come up behind him as silently as fog and whose face didn't seem to appear in the mirror unless Adin was turned obliquely, and then he could catch him out of the corner of his eye. Neat trick that, but just a trick, like all the others.

"Caro. I've frightened you." Donte sighed, running a thumb over Adin's trembling lower lip. "I meant only to tease. *Sono perdonato? Mi perdoni?*"

Adin brushed his hand away.

"Come have a cigar on the patio with me."

"I don't smoke."

"But surely you can't argue that it would harm me? I don't breathe, therefore, I'm not really *required* to inhale."

"Cigars are foul," said Adin, thinking of returning to the table and paying the bill for dinner.

"I've paid our tab, Adin. They have already given our table to some other young couple, who ordered an execrable wine that they read about in a magazine."



“Would you just...?” Tears stung Adin’s eyes, and he swallowed his shame.

Donte took his hand and led him through the busy bar to a bench on the patio, where he ordered a cigar and Courvoisier for himself and a Bushmills, neat, for Adin.

“How did you know I drink Bushmills?” Adin asked finally.

“I tasted it on your skin in the airplane bathroom,” Donte said matter-of-factly, which drew a stare from an older man close by. Donte waved an impatient hand and the man looked away.

“You are still angry with me.” Donte clipped and lit his cigar, then nodded his thanks to the waiter as he returned the implements to him.

Adin remained stubbornly silent, yet he was taken by the way Donte seemed so natural in this venue, an aristocrat with his cigar and after-dinner cognac. He was stunningly attractive, and he knew it. Adin felt his breath leave him with a terrible moment’s fear that Donte was having him on again, and then realized he was just intrigued by the man, who literally, and figuratively, took his breath away.

“Caro, you make me feel like a child who has played just a little too hard with a bird. I am all contrition. Look at me again with brave eyes, or I shall hate myself.”

Adin didn’t know what to feel. “When you’ve finished your cigar, I would like to return to the hotel.”

“*Più amato*. What can I do to find forgiveness in your eyes? Would you like to tie me up and have your way with me? This might be what you call a win-win.”

Adin stared at him.

“I see I shall have to work harder then.” He smoked in silence while Adin worked on his whiskey. “Will you come someplace with me on faith, Adin? Will you let me show you something special, that perhaps only I can show you?”

“You’ve already shown me things only you can show me.” He thought about his damp trousers. “I’m not exactly standing for the encore.”

Donte processed this. "I am truly sorry, Adin."

"I know." Adin tossed back the rest of his drink. "*I know*. I just...wasn't afraid until that moment."

Donte's dark eyes found his as he stubbed out his cigar. "You should have been." He got up and walked away, turning to see if Adin followed. To Adin's everlasting shame, he was on his feet and right behind Donte even before he'd looked back.

Slightly worse for drink, Adin looked out the window of the cab and checked his watch. Almost 1 a.m. Donte was silent except for a brief phone call during which he spoke in hushed tones. Adin paid little attention to it, preferring to give Donte his privacy. Donte snapped his phone shut and said nothing. After a time, Adin noticed they were staying on Santa Monica Boulevard, and they traveled only minutes more before the cab stopped on Santa Monica near Gower, at the Hollywood Forever Cemetery. They exited the cab, and Donte paid the driver handsomely to stay where he was until they returned.

A security guard was at the gate, waiting, it seemed, to greet Donte.

"Hello, Michael," said Donte in a warm voice. "Thank you for this."

"My pleasure, Mr. Fedeltà. I'm glad I could help." He unlocked the gate and pulled it open, allowing the men to enter. Donte walked along, seeming to know where he was going, so Adin followed. He comprehended that this silent, contemplative Donte was someone he didn't yet know. Most of the grounds were lit by the ambient city lights, but Donte was leading him to shadowy places, niches where the overarching trees or monuments blocked the light.

"You, of course, can't see this in the same way I can, Adin. I am at home in the darkness, as you might imagine. I have the permission of the family that owns this cemetery, and others like it, to research some of the names that are found here, they believe, for a nonfiction book about Los Angeles." Adin could almost feel his smile. "My credentials *were* impressive. At any rate, I've made friends with the guards."

“Why would you do that?” Adin asked as he followed along, careful to step where Donte walked rather than stumble in the darkness.

“It suits me to walk among the dead.” Donte caught Adin’s hand and led him around a metal grid where water drained from the landscape. “I know that’s vaguely cliché, but believe me, it’s a delight to find a quiet place to think in a city this size.”

“You could try the botanical gardens,” Adin told him. “Far less cliché, and they have things you can eat there.”

Donte looked at Adin pointedly. “I have *things* I can eat here. Besides, as you can see, I have the run of the place at night. This cemetery was opened in 1899. That is comparable to the Dark Ages in terms of Los Angeles history. This is a city with little or no memory. Actually, I cannot like it much, but I like this place, this city of the dead.” He led Adin across a footbridge to a small building that seemed to float in the center of a lake. Donte urged Adin to sit with him on the steps. “This is the Clark mausoleum. Frankly, I neither know nor care who William A. Clark, Jr., was.”

“He was the founder of the Los Angeles Philharmonic,” said Adin. “I come here mostly in the daylight when I’m in town to visit my sister, although last year they did *Hamlet* here in the summer evenings. That was fun. You’re going to get your nice suit all dirty, like my trousers, which will require dry cleaning.”

“I said I was sorry, caro,” Donte repeated. They stayed silent for a few minutes, absorbing the sounds of the night. Adin heard the city traffic against the soft music of the fountain in the small lake before them. The air smelled like earth and grass, and Adin shifted, leaning into the windbreak Donte provided. Donte put an arm around him and then unexpectedly kissed his forehead gently.

“Fraternizing with the enemy?”

“Me or you?” asked Donte.

“Both.” Adin was afraid to take his hand. “Can you do that...thing if you’re not touching me?”

“Yes.”

“I see.” Adin sighed and took Donte’s hand in his, finding it cool to the touch. He interlaced their fingers and lifted them up in the dim light. “You have lovely hands. I was going to mention it. Artist’s hands. Your work is wonderful.”

“I was a young man who found endless fascination in drawing the boy he loved. What you have is the only surviving proof that he lived. My—the woman I was married to, Renata, destroyed the rest. *Notturmo* was hidden, along with some other things of mine to which I didn’t choose to allow her access.”

“Why is it *Notturmo*? I’ve wondered that, the musical meaning of *Notturmo* came later, and—” Adin felt Donte rumble with laughter.

“That was my private joke, a kind of blasphemy. Of course I was to make my nightly supplications to God, say my prayers like a good boy and shun vice and temptations. Yet even then, I often found myself reliving the time I was able to spend with Auselmo. So the nightly vigil, the *nocturni*, became the time I used to ruminate on the boy I loved. I mouthed words by rote and let my mind wander. *Mea culpa*. I gave the journal the name to flaunt my transgression.” Donte shrugged. “I was young.”

Adin swallowed hard. “*I’m sorry.*”

“For what?”

“For your loss. It must have been terribly painful.” Donte said nothing. “What happened?”

“Renata had Auselmo killed. As you can see, she had a particularly spiteful way of dealing with me.” He flicked a moth off his jacket.

“*She* made you what you are?”

“Not personally, no. She outsourced—isn’t that what it’s called? She hired a foreigner.” Adin shivered, whether from cold or fear he didn’t know, but Donte gave him a squeeze. “The joke was on her, though. I renewed our acquaintance at a masked ball she gave some years later, and invited her out to the garden. She went with me quietly, thinking I was someone else. I gave her no pleasure and it was like drinking battery acid, but

she had a nice finish, which went rather well with a quite good Chianti they were serving that evening.”

“You are *making that up*,” said Adin, shocked.

“Only the part about the Chianti. I’m a rather-devoted cinemaphile and always liked that line.” Adin couldn’t help his laughter. “Now, have you forgiven me?”

“No.”

“Ah well. The reason I brought you here is to show you something, and show you I mean to do, whether you like it or not.”

“All right.”

“So acquiescent sometimes...so stubborn at others.” Donte gave his hand a firm tug but didn’t rise. An eerie glow began over the lake, as though Adin were looking through weak night-vision goggles. He could perceive the movement of things...insects and small animals where before he’d seen only darkness.

“Donte...”

“Shh...wait,” said Donte, still holding his hand.

As if the dawn were breaking, Adin now saw the cemetery itself, the lake, the fountain, the pathways... It was incredible. He felt the grass trembling in the breeze, saw and heard a cat moving stealthily behind some bushes. Farther away, he heard Michael, the security guard, humming the “Macarena” in his office where he watched the monitors. Adin smelled things like doughnuts frying in some distant little shop and the arousal that Donte had hidden all evening. He heard the beating of a number of hearts, only vaguely aware that Donte’s was not one of them. He heard birds rustling and exoskeletal insects scuttling along. Adin turned to Donte in awe.

“Why are you doing this?” he asked, seeing Donte as if for the first time, his newly heightened senses drowned by the nearness of this man who attracted him so powerfully.

“Because I can. Because I thought it might please you.” Donte kissed the palm of his hand. “Does it?”

“Yes,” breathed Adin. “I want...”

Adin turned in Donte’s arms and kissed him, pressing the advantage he gained by rising to his knees and looking down at the taller man. He cupped Donte’s face with his hands and looked into his eyes, finding a kind of curious look, like surprise but far more subtle.

Adin used his thumbs to trace the dignified sweep of Donte’s brow and once again touched his lips to the vampire’s, running his tongue carefully along the teeth and finding nothing more unusual in the act than the unfamiliar taste of cigars.

“No vampire teeth?” he murmured against Donte’s lips.

“No, not when I’m not planning to use them,” Donte whispered back. Adin felt wrapped in a cocoon of night and sensation with him.

“And you’re not?”

“Not now, anyway.” Donte hesitated. “I brought you here so you could see things as I see them.”

Adin was quiet for a while, listening at what he considered the closed door of something he could never possibly comprehend. This was what Donte was privy to all the time, the thrumming, vibrant exchange of air and rushing of fluids that was life itself at its most primitive. Adin was completely unprepared for the fear this evoked.

“It’s immense,” he said at last.

“It frightens you,” said Donte. “I can taste your fear on the air around you.”

“Yes.” Adin pressed his face against Donte’s cheek, allowing a shuddering sigh to escape his lips. It sounded terribly loud to his newly keen senses.

“Caro, you must understand that while I was once a human man, I am no longer anything of the kind. That which made me human, and sympathy for humans themselves, that elusive quality of empathy, has long since been eradicated by time and experience.”

"I find that difficult to believe; that it was completely eradicated." Adin sat back down, straddling Donte in an unseemly and erotically thrilling way.

"Believe it," Donte said implacably. "I'm sure you can understand now that we perceive things in a remarkably different way."

"Yes, but—"

"Please, Adin." Donte took Adin's hands off his face and laced them with his own in his lap. "Please don't underestimate me. It would be the height of foolishness to see me as a man, and I don't believe you are a fool."

"You look like a man."

"Looks deceive." The mist coming off the grass made Donte's hair curl up in the front, where it was longer. It gave him a boyish, vulnerable air that made Adin ache to put his hands in it.

"They do. That's very true." Adin gave Donte's hands a gentle squeeze.

"I am no longer capable of love, Adin."

"I understand."

"Do you?" Donte asked. "Do you really understand what it means? The book you bought with *money*, transported in *plastic*, looked at under a *microscope*, and joked about with your friends is all that is left of my soul."

"Your soul." Adin could almost feel the individual pistons firing in the cars going down Santa Monica Boulevard as they sat, their hands intertwined, experiencing everything at the same time and nothing at all *together*. "Donte?"

"What?"

"Do the dead walk? Are there ghosts here I can't see?"

Donte gave a small smile. "No, caro. I don't think so, although often I have wished they would walk with me if they did. I think only the undead walk, the living with them, and those that are in between, who are alive but do not know how precious that is." He pushed Adin back and got up off the cold

stone step. “Come, caro. It’s time you got back. I fear I’ve been thoughtless; you’re cold.” He tugged at Adin’s hand, and they began on the path again. Adin took time to experience the richness of what he was feeling. The sensations surrounded him like water, pressing in on him, even crushing him as he sank deeper and deeper into Donte’s world. The cool, new familiarity of Donte’s hand in his was vaguely reassuring. A piece of tenderness in a place made up of nothing but sensation.

“Donte, in all this time... There’s never been anyone else?”

“Oh, caro. There have been many, many, many...and none.” They walked back to the gate where Donte had left the cab waiting for them and said good night to Michael. Adin’s senses returned slowly to normal. He entered the cab and was glad; even with his normal senses, the smoke clinging to the driver’s clothing overcame him.

“Bonaventure Hotel,” Donte said, and the man started the car, the sound of his radio talk show puncturing the silence in back.

When they reached the hotel, Donte only went as far as the elevators. He caught Adin’s hand again and tugged him closer. “I don’t suppose—”

“No.” Adin cut him off. “Please don’t ask...not after—”

“I see,” said Donte. Adin, finding no one near the bank of elevators they waited for, caught Donte to him and kissed him hungrily. The bell chimed, signaling the elevator car had arrived on the lobby floor. Donte broke off the kiss. “Do you at least wish it could be different?”

“Is that a trick question?” Adin asked, stepping into the glass car by himself. Before Donte could frame a reply, the doors closed. He caught one last look of frustration in the vampire’s beautiful, dark eyes, and then he was being lifted, up to his room, his Bushmills, his bed, and his amazing literary find, and he wished...





## CHAPTER FOUR

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The doors opened on Adin's floor, and he got out his key card, then slid it in the mechanism and waited for the green light. Walking into his room by himself seemed almost an anticlimax; he'd at least expected an argument. He changed into a pair of comfortable jeans and a T-shirt and rather petulantly took *Notturmo* out of the safe, deciding, in an uncharacteristically daring frame of mind, to read the damn thing right there in his hotel room. He put on his white gloves, but as far as exercising more care than that? He merely left his drink on a different table. If the president of his university could see him, he'd be fired on the spot. He would do the work on his laptop, but somehow, having the manuscript open, its yellowed pages worn with time and use, made Adin feel the connection to Donte more strongly. Adin got out his Mac, a number of mechanical pencils, and a yellow legal tablet, preparing to translate.

Page one comprised several small drawings of what Adin thought must be the young Auselmo. He was striking, as depicted by his lover, ethereally and angelically beautiful. He had the round face and sensuous mouth characterized as the ideal of the time, and the sketches made him look innocent and vibrantly alive. In one of them, a shy smile touched his lips like a caress, and his hair fell onto his forehead, spilling over one eye in what had to be the most unconsciously provocative pose. No wonder Donte burned for him still. Adin resized the corresponding page on his laptop so he could read it better, and went to work.



*Today, I draw Auselmo, not as he is now, but as he was when I first laid eyes on him, so lovely, like an angel fallen to earth to tease and mock me with his beauty. Even though we have not been together this whole month, I have held him in my heart and keep our vow, though Renata burns me with her eyes. She is a fool, who will have wealth and sons by me, or so I believe, and I have nothing more to give to her.*

*Ah, Auselmo! I have your letters with me always. I have your love. I need nothing more to fill my heart, yet I am greedy, for my body cries out for yours. When the weather warms, beloved, my very life will thaw in your arms, and you may catch me in the kitchen gardens, once again among the herbs, where I promise to delight you until you can bear it no more.*



Adin stood and walked to the hotel window with his drink, wondering if he'd ever been in love. If he had to wonder, the answer was probably no. At the very least, he'd never felt the kind of love and loyalty that Donte apparently still felt for Auselmo. Adin had come out to his family when he was fifteen. They hadn't exactly held a parade for him, but they'd worked hard to come to terms with his orientation and always showed their respect for him. He'd had lovers even then, his own age and older, and often enjoyed a no-strings-attached one-night stand.

Adin was cool and distant with his lovers, unable to feel for them everything they might have liked. He imagined he was fundamentally unable to form a bond because he'd been unwilling to commit. His friends teased him that he was elusive, but he worried that he was more likely self-absorbed and thoughtless. If nothing else, his inability to form deep and lasting attachments had hurt people he'd cared about. At least Donte had his one true love. Adin wanted to imagine it. He wanted to know what it felt like, to hold a real *lover* in his arms. Someone with whom he forged a connection, someone for whom he would make the kind of sacrifices that he sensed Donte had made for his Auselmo.

Adin shook his head a little. That kind of thinking, longing for love for the first time in his life as the result of a brush with Donte Fedeltà, vampire, had to be an event in the Irony Olympics. Of all the sophisticated academics, the handsome athletes, the freshly scrubbed and earthy farmers and cowboys, firefighters, policemen and politicians and diplomats. Out of all the men he'd dated, Donte was the only one who made him feel like what he could have was *not enough*.

He sighed, going back to the manuscript. Translating would take the place of sleep for whatever remained of the night, because he felt restless. Anxious and something else entirely. Something he couldn't quite define even given his ability with language and his penchant for relentless introspection. He stood on the precipice of something so new and huge it both frightened him and held him on the sharpest edge of excitement and arousal. When he looked into the abyss, he was very much afraid that what he saw there might be love.

The next page in the journal depicted the two boys on horseback, traveling somewhere in a retinue with a number of pack animals and several older nobles, along with women and children. Donte had drawn the two of them as if they were separated from the rest, in their own world, looking shyly at each other. He rendered himself as a young, nondescript teenager with eyes that gazed hungrily at the angelic-looking Auselmo, and how Adin wished he had some way to see what Donte really was in those days. Just as he had played up the perceived beauty of his lover, Donte must have given himself an equally transformative makeover. Adin could find none of the man in the boy, and yet surely, the way they looked at each other, it had to be Niccolo in the drawing.



*I am in the snow today, my Auselmo, its whiteness and silence like the death I feel when you are not within my reach. Today I have chosen to draw the time when I returned home to take my place after my brothers died. Do you recall? I know you must. We endured the ride and the endless chattering of the women, playing word games and kissing with our eyes. I remember seeing you riding your horse, the stubborn one I always called Affligere for the way it chased you and stole your bats. We slipped away in the night and clumsily tugged each other into spending.*

*The way you kissed me... There were more stars in the sky that summer, Auselmo, because you placed them there for me every time you smiled. The closer we got to San Sepolcro, and home, the sicker I felt in the pit of my stomach. I knew then, as you know now, that our life together, our pleasant idylls in the herb gardens of the monastery were over. My family had a woman waiting for me, older, promised originally to my*

*brother, who passed. I couldn't bear to tell you, to see the stars in the sky wink out one by one with your unhappiness. Forgive me, Auselmo.*

*That was when I noticed the guard, the dark one with the scar over his eye, watching us. In return, I watched him, and one night got an eyeful of the most amazing thing I'd ever seen. I'm sure I never told you, love, but I paid him for information, and he let me watch him with his lover. The things they did with their bodies both appalled and inflamed me, and I knew—I thought I knew—that if I could have one night like that with you, I would go to Renata and my family uncomplaining.*

*Was I ever that foolish? Please, my lover, never answer that, for you, with your beauty and your innocence, could never have understood my dark desire for you in those days.*



*Auselmo, as I write this I am reading the entry in my journal from our procession to my home in San Sepolcro. It has been much on my mind this winter, although I cannot say why. Can you remember the impossible madness of that? My heart never beats that it isn't filled with thoughts of you. I wrote...*

*“At last, I have had my wedding night! Auselmo and I slipped away from the retinue and made our way to the soft earth together. I believe Auselmo's beautiful brown eyes have never been larger than when I explained what I'd seen, and yet he held me to him and let me love him as I wished, risking all for me. He cried when I took him; I am such a foul thing sometimes.*

*Yet after, when I loved him with my mouth, he cried again and said how much he loved me!”*

*And oh, how the night progressed from there. The promises I made to you that night, with my words and my body, have been kept, my beloved. And you...you give me more joy still, even in your absence, than I have gotten from another thing in my life.*

*By dawn I was ready for Renata, thinking stupidly, Bring her to me, this bitch who must bear my children. I have had my wedding night, and my life will play out as it must from this moment on. And yet later, when riding with you, Auselmo, I became aware that there would never be a time when I did not curse the day I finally had you, for I would never give you up*

*completely. You knew that; I could see it in your eyes. And how unfair it is of me to have taken from you the refuge of innocence...*

*Auselmo, my love, my lover, I pray that you are well where you are, and that I will see you soon. Thoughts of your sweet countenance are the only ones that I entertain willingly anymore. Please, please, be well, my love, be happy and cling to thoughts of me.*



*Auselmo, it has been a year and still your sweet face is the first image in my mind every morning and the last I think about at night. Being parted from you is unbearable. If not for your letters, I would surely have lost all desire to live. But live I do yet, my love, if only for the faintest hope that I shall see your face again.*

*My wife has given birth, beloved, to a son, and for this, if for nothing else, I will esteem her. She is such a vile woman; I have constantly to make amends to guests and servants alike. She goes about complaining from morning until evening, and while she was with child, I thought I would go mad and kill her myself. Yet the boy is perfect, Auselmo, his tiny face the image of my mother. He does nothing at all but bawl and spit back food, but he holds my heart in his fisted hands, and I am well and truly enraptured by his every squawk.*

*I have been given to understand that you too will make a marriage in the spring. Please forgive my presumption, but I know you. I know your innocent heart better than my own face in the mirror. Go to her and let her give you pleasure and fine sons. This takes nothing from me, you know that, and God willing, you will believe me also when I say that nothing I do, nothing I engage in with my wife, could ever even begin to fade the color you bring to my life.*

*Speaking of which, yesterday the snow fell and the lack of light sucked all the color from the world at once, as though my eyes had simply failed me and refused to register anything but gray. This, Auselmo, has been my world without you and will continue to be until I hold you in my arms again and love you until you give me the sweet cries I crave. I will wait for you, and the color and warmth that only you can bring to me, as long as my life allows it.*



Adin sipped his drink with shaking hands. Still fully dark, the night sky held so few stars that it wasn't hard to believe that what little sky Adin could see from his hotel was blank, as the young Niccolo imagined, because of Auselmo's despair. Adin closed the journal. It was four in the morning, not yet dawn, and he was exhausted and ashamed. Had he made light of this? Had he really trivialized the man and his journal, calling it porn? He threw his reading glasses down on the desk, put the manuscript back into its protective housing, and restored it to the room safe. He grabbed his key card, intending to go for coffee somewhere, anywhere, where that manuscript wasn't making him think things, *feel* things, he'd never contemplated before.

Donte, he thought as he closed his hotel door behind him. *Donte, forgive me...* It was so easy to look at those drawings and make assumptions about the artist and the book. Now that he knew...now that he'd read even a little piece of it, he didn't want to fight anymore. He wished he'd never seen the damn thing.

He punched the elevator Down button, and when the doors opened, Donte was there, inside, still in his suit, looking as fresh as if he'd been on ice for the night.

"Donte?" Disbelief and not a little fear limned Adin's face.

"Adin." Donte wore a small and slightly bemused smile. "Did you know you could call to me?"

"What, me?"

"Yes, apparently...only with you...it works both ways."

"Why should that be?"

"I don't know. But I was called here to this place by you."

"I thought about you. I thought your name." Adin got into the elevator. "You're not playing some kind of twisted vampire game?"

"Not at the moment, no," Donte murmured dryly. "Although I reserve the right, if I should choose to do just that."

"I see." Adin paused. "Fair enough."

“What were you thinking, caro, that brought me here?” The elevator slowed down considerably, and Adin had the sensation of hovering above L.A. in a clear glass Christmas ball.

Adin chewed his lip. “You didn’t eat last night when we were out.”

“No, I didn’t,” said Donte.

“Have you...since then?”

Donte raised his eyebrows.

“How often do you need—”

“Often, if I don’t want to take too much from someone... What are you really asking me?”

“I—” Adin stepped closer to Donte in one easy move, kicking his legs apart and sliding between them. He put one arm around Donte’s waist along his spine, and one on his neck, pressing Donte’s beautiful face into the junction of his own neck and shoulder. “Here,” Adin whispered into Donte’s ear. “Take what you need.”

Donte froze. “Why are you doing this?”

“Donte.” Adin pulled him in.

“No, I need to understand why you would offer yourself to me.”

“I’m sorry,” Adin said into the skin on the side of Donte’s face. “I didn’t understand. I decided to read a little of...”

Donte stiffened. “So...you decide to offer your neck to a hungry vampire out of pity? How *does* the race survive?” Donte put his forehead against Adin’s.

“Not pity.”

“What then, caro? What, if not pity?”

“Regret? Compassion? I don’t know, Donte. I just wanted to—” Adin pursed his lips. “I *want* to. Take it or leave it. Your food’s getting cold.”

Donte laughed. “Of course I’ll take it. Don’t be afraid, più amato.” Donte’s hands wound around Adin and clutched at his ass cheeks as he lifted him up. Adin wound his legs around the



man's waist, and Donte struck. Adin felt both searing pain and pleasure deep within his skin. There it was again, the impossibly erotic thrill of being devoured by this man. Adin knew he hadn't mistaken it. Donte was suckling at the wound on his neck, lapping at the blood as he crushed Adin's smaller body into the window. For the second time in twenty-four hours, Adin came in his trousers, completely taken by surprise.

Donte licked the wound on Adin's neck to seal it. "Thank you."

Adin said nothing.

"Invite me in, Adin," pleaded Donte, who rocked Adin's light body gently, swaying with the minuscule motion of the elevator.

"You know I can't."

"I know you won't," Donte complained.

"It's not mine to give back to you, Donte. It doesn't belong to me. I'm a courier."

"What will you feel, I wonder, when I take it from you?" Donte asked grimly. "Because make no mistake, I will."

"I understand."

"Do you? Or do you hope that by giving me scraps, like a trail of bread crumbs, you will distract me from my purpose? Please don't underestimate me, più amato. I have no wish to betray your trust."

"Don't worry"—Adin sighed—"and don't make the assumption that I trust you."

"You offered me your neck. Your very life. Yet you keep my journal from me and make us adversaries."

"My life is mine, Donte, and all that I *can* give you."

Donte hissed at him, then kissed him like he meant it.

Adin looked at the floor numbers. "I'm on seventeen." He was beginning to feel a little faint from the loss of blood again and knew he had to get to his room, without Donte, to lie down. He left the elevator without a backward glance, assuming fatalistically that if Donte had a trick up his sleeve, he wouldn't

stand a chance anyway, but he entered his room alone, using his key card, and fell finally into bed and a dreamless sleep.



## CHAPTER FIVE

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Adin groped for the ringing phone.

“Yes? Tredeger here,” he murmured around an eye-exploding headache.

“Oddball? Where are you?” asked Deana. “I’m at Greengrass. You’re late.”

“Oh, hell...” Adin picked up one of his watches from the nightstand. “I’m so sorry. I couldn’t sleep...jet-lagged...and then I started translating the journal.”

“You stood me up for porn?” she asked incredulously.

“It isn’t porn,” he snapped, more harshly than he’d intended.

“Okay...”

“Look, stay where you are. I’ll be there as soon as I can. Shop. What’s not to love? You’re in Barneys.”

“Well, there is that... But I’m supposed to get back to work...”

“Like work ever derailed one of your shopping expeditions. I’ll buy you shoes...” He dangled a carrot, qualifying, “If they’re on sale,” while he rummaged through his bag looking for a T-shirt.

“I’ll be here. Don’t take forever.”

Adin showered quickly and dressed, placing both his suit from the day before and his jeans in the hotel laundry bag to be cleaned. How horrifying. No doubt they would think he made a habit of creaming his trousers. There was probably some obscure dry-cleaning blog where acne-cruste minimum wagers shared their thoughts. *You won’t believe it, everything we get from this one room is soaked in semen...and the guy is staying by himself...*

Arriving by cab at Barneys on Wilshire, Adin was just in time to purchase a pair of strappy white sandals for his sister at

the end-of-season sale. They looked cool against her inauthentically tanned skin and had lethal heels, which put her at just about five feet four inches, still short by most standards. She was shamelessly delighted.

“Having a queer brother with a credit card?” She mimicked the popular commercials. “Priceless.”

“Sorry I’m late.”

“All is forgiven,” she said as they got into the elevator to go to Greengrass, the deli, on the top floor. “You look like yak splat, Adin. Are you okay?”

Adin avoided her gaze but answered her serenely. “I’m fine, Deana Beana. I’m damned run-down, though. I’ll need lots of food, maybe a protein shake.”

“You are taking care of yourself, though, aren’t you? You’ve been...”

Adin heard the subtext. “I’ve been tested, and I’m still negative. Bean, I may play hard, but I play safe.”

Deana unconsciously let out a breath she’d been holding. “I’m a scientist. You know I worry. Especially when you look like you do now.”

He’d seen himself in a mirror. “Point taken.” Even Adin was a little surprised. He looked like one of those worst celebrity DUI booking photos. He had dark shadows under his eyes and was paler even than usual. It didn’t help that the light yellow of his T-shirt, which he’d gotten from some charity event, was not, and never would be, his color. His jeans fit like skin, with a wide belt holding them in just the right place to show off his butt and the hollows of his pelvis, but today they made him look thinner and more hollow than usual. He needed *Queer Eye* for the Dead Guy.

The door chimed and they got out.

“I should never wear yellow,” he stated before they asked the host to seat them. They were late for the lunch rush, and he led them to a table on the terrace.

“Good observation,” Deana said, picking up the menu. “Yellow was never your color, or mine for that matter. Makes you look bloodless.”

Adin almost did a classic spit-take with his water.

When the waiter came over, Deana took the lead. “I’ll have a Caesar salad with diced chicken. What are you having?”

Adin briefly scanned the menu and made up his mind. “I think I’ll have a cup of matzo ball soup and a brisket sandwich.”

Deana smiled at the waiter as he left and then as if she’d used up all her patience she confronted Adin. “When are you going to tell me what’s bothering you?”

“What?”

“Come on, oddball. Who knows you?”

Adin sighed deeply. “I’m translating that book. It is, of course, erotic. But the man writes so intimately of his love affair that I feel...”

“Whoa, back up. It’s a love affair? I thought it was a book of erotica.”

“So did I. Except I was mistaken. It isn’t at all what I thought it would be.”

“I see.”

“Do you? Here I was kind of flip about it, you know? But this man, he was in love and faithful for his whole life. He writes about it as if... In such rich detail... I don’t know. I feel as though I’m intruding.”

“How could you be intruding? It’s five hundred years old. It’s a lucky thing you found it, or it might have been lost.”

“I know. I just wish...”

“Adin, it’s your job. If you didn’t do it, no one would even care about these men. No one would have any idea that a love like that existed in those days, right?” Deana smiled at the waiter when he brought Adin’s soup.

“I didn’t.”

“What?”

“I didn’t know that it existed in any age.” He stirred his broth with a soup spoon to cool it.

“Do you think it’s true?”

“What? That the journal is authentic?”

“No. That their love existed. That it was real, and not a story, like a fairy tale for an audience.”

“It was real.” It is real, he thought. Donte still cherished the memory of Auselmo as if he were alive. He watched as Deana drank her water. “What about you? How is Miss Deana’s love life?”

“As usual, nonexistent.”

“If I believed that...”

“Well, there are one or two,” she said and then told him what she’d been up to. He concentrated on listening and filling himself with nourishing food. After lunch they shopped some more, and he made a solemn promise to find a charity and give his yellow T-shirt right back. He kissed her cheek at the foot of the Bonaventure Hotel and thanked her for the ride. They made plans to meet again before he left Los Angeles, and as usual, she begged him to consider moving.

“Not a chance. I like Washington. The sun here makes me feel like beef jerky. I hate the traffic. The people are nice to look at, but not always nice—”

She cut him off. “Just call. We can shop again or go for dinner. I’ll be seeing you.”

“Bye, Deana Beana.” Adin grinned at her. He went through the revolving door, scanning the lobby idly. There was no sign, nor did he expect one, of Donte. But that didn’t stop him from feeling disappointed. He checked the desk for messages hopefully, something he’d never done before, and on finding there were none, he took his Barneys shopping bag and walked to the bank of elevators. Outside his room, he nodded to a couple in the hallway and used his card to enter.

Immediately he saw that something was terribly wrong. His Pullman was on the floor, the clothes strewn like rags on the bed, which had been made up by the staff. He could smell his

bottle of Bushmills, which lay on its side, dripping onto the floor. He turned a full circle in a kind of panic and saw that the hotel safe was open and his manuscript was gone.

*Donte... Motherfuck...*

Adin ran from the room and past the elevator, running down all seventeen flights of stairs without giving it a thought. He raced to the registration desk and demanded to see the manager.

“Sir,” said the woman behind the counter. “I’m sorry, the manager is—”

“I need you to telephone the *police*. My hotel room has been burglarized, and a very expensive document was removed from my safe.” He stared at her as she dialed hotel security. A man in a dark blue suit joined them moments later.

“How can I help you?” he said. “My name is Donnelly, and I’m the chief of security.”

“I’ve been robbed. Room 1724.” Adin found he could keep his statements clear and concise, and he didn’t blurt out, *I suspect a vampire stole a priceless piece of gay erotica because he wrote it five hundred years ago and he wanted it back*. He took a small amount of pride in that. Together, he and Donnelly took the elevator up to his room, and Donnelly allowed Adin to show him around.

Donnelly telephoned the police, leaving the room and completing his call discreetly in the hallway. He was a soft-spoken man who didn’t seem remarkably expressive.

“Okay, sir.” Donnelly looked around the room one last time. “Was the manuscript insured?”

Adin felt a surge of irritation. “Of course it’s insured, but what difference does that make? You can insure the California coastline, but if an earthquake causes it to drop into the sea, it’s not like you can use the money to make a new one, is it?” He raked a hand through his hair.

“I understand you’re upset, sir,” said Donnelly quietly. “We’ll do everything in our power to help you, but this looks like it was done by professionals. I’m sorry. The police will be here shortly.”



Adin thanked him. As well as he could, he answered the questions of the LAPD officers who got the call. They were meticulous, and it seemed to take hours. Hotel security and the officers finally left him, conferring with each other on the way to the elevator. He watched as they got on and the doors closed behind them. He was about to shut his own door when a shape melted away from the wall down the hall. It proved to be Donte, who came to him, a question in his fine brown eyes.

“What has happened?”

“As if you didn’t know.” Adin entered the room, leaving the door propped open for Donte to enter behind him.

“What do you mean?” Donte asked.

“All right. I’ll play along. The manuscript is *gone*. The least you could have done is leave my Bushmills alone. You should know better than anyone how much I’ll need it after I make the calls I have to make.”

“Are you saying you think *I* did this?”

Adin laughed out loud. “When you first came to the airplane bathroom, I thought, *actor*. You missed your calling. Or have you done that too? Oh, for heaven’s sake. Why are you still standing in the damned hallway?”

“I *cannot* come in unless you invite me, Adin. You *know* this.”

Adin rolled his eyes. “I’m past worrying about minutiae, Donte. You can drop the innocent act. I have to make some calls.”

“I really, *really* cannot come in, Adin. Is there no one else who might have done this?”

Adin froze. “Donte, don’t do this to me. The manuscript is gone, and if you have it... Well...maybe it’s not my best-case scenario, but it’s not my worst.” He spoke quietly. “But if you tell me you don’t have it, I swear by all that’s sacred, I’m going to be sick.”

“I don’t have it,” confirmed Donte from the doorway, and from the pain in his eyes, Adin knew it to be true. Adin rushed to the bathroom and threw up. He washed his face and hands

and rinsed his mouth, and only then did he recall that Donte was probably still in the hall, waiting.

Adin felt cold all over. “Come in.” He wrapped his arms around himself to keep from shaking. “I’m sorry, Donte. I lost your journal.”

Hands caught Adin’s shoulders. “It was stolen. It could have happened to any one of the people who have had it over the years. As a matter of fact, it was stolen from *me* in the first place. Which is why I’ve been trying to get it back.”

“Stolen from you? How?”

“Let’s just say I put my faith in the wrong mortal at one time. I’ve regretted it for more than sixty years. Did it never occur to you that I wouldn’t have let that journal out of my possession if I’d had a choice?”

Adin shook his head. “What happened?”

“I lost *all* my possessions when the Germans marched on Paris in the Second World War. There was a man there I trusted, a café owner named Philippe, in whose care I left my things when I went to help some friends who were going into hiding. Jews weren’t the only minority scorned by the Third Reich. Two of my acquaintances were sent as criminal incorrigibles to Mauthausen, an Austrian concentration camp, and I believed I could get them back.” Donte sighed heavily. “After failing utterly, I came back to Paris to find that Philippe was collaborating in bed with a rather-dashing SS officer, and all my things were gone. Sold or stolen or on their way to the caches of art and precious gems and metals the Germans were pilfering at that time.”

“Shit.”

“Indeed. When the journal came to light, I was beside myself. I had the money, even, to buy it. I could have...” He swallowed hard. “There was a problem, they said, with my bank, and later I found that it had been hacked, specifically to prevent *my* participation in the auction.” He shook his head. “I am understandably eager to find out why anyone would have done such a thing.” Adin noted that Donte looked grim and troubled.

“I am so sorry.” Adin closed his hand around Donte’s cool one without thinking.

“Thank you.” Donte smiled sadly.

“I have to make some calls.”

“I know. I’ll leave you to it.” He walked to the door. “I heard you call my name again, you know? I heard it in my heart.” He gripped the front of his suit jacket in his fist. “It’s very strange, Adin. That has never happened to me before.”

Adin shrugged. “I wouldn’t know anything about that.”

“I know.” He turned to the doorway, then looked back. “You know I’m still hunting for the manuscript. I won’t give it up if I get it back.”

“I know.” *I know.*

“Then you should also know I won’t let anything—or anyone—get in my way.” He took a step toward Adin. “Adin, please! Go back to your home and file an insurance claim.”

“I can’t do that, Donte. I’m sorry, but I can’t.”

Donte took one long look back and left, closing the door quietly behind him.

Six hours later, Deana burst through his hotel room door like a rocket, latching onto him with her small self and clinging a little. “Tell me you’re okay, oddball.”

“I’m fine, Deana. I was robbed while I was with you at Barney’s. The worst part was dealing with the police.”

“Were they rude?”

“No, of course not. It just took time I didn’t want to spend. I’ve got a ticket to San Francisco tonight to speak with my friend Edward, who brokers manuscripts and art from legitimate sources. I think he’s got contacts that are not so aboveboard. His partner is an insurance investigator. They might be able to point me in the right direction.”

“What if someone just wanted it badly enough to steal it and doesn’t ever want to sell it?”

Donte immediately came to mind. "I can think of one person who wanted it and *could* steal it, but I don't believe he did. I need other ideas."

"Why?"

"Basically, the people who collect these kinds of things aren't exactly James Bond, Deana."

"You are." She grinned.

"No, I'm not." Adin shook his head. "But I can and have kept myself out of trouble so far. The people who took this manuscript were professional thieves. They took out the security cameras on this floor and opened the safe. They probably aren't the kind of people who sit in clean rooms translating sixteenth-century Italian love letters."

"But you can't rule it out."

"Well, no. Of course, it's always possible that Ned Harwiche the third, who I am told I outbid for the manuscript by a very narrow margin, has grown a couple and gotten his *Mission Impossible* on to steal it from me. Somehow I doubt it."

"Ned Harwiche. Isn't he the one who favors a less-masculine Truman Capote?"

"Yes. But he's basically honest, I think. He does have the money to send a large ninja army, though. He's on my list. The thing is...I really want this back."

"Oh, oddball," said Deana, making small circles on his back. "How can I help?"

"I'm packing," he said, "and then I'll need a ride to the airport. I'm checked out of here, and I don't know when I'll be back."

"I'm sorry to hear that. When it's over, can we have a long visit? Maybe a good weekend together somewhere in the middle?"

Adin smiled at her as she removed the tags and folded the clothes he'd purchased that afternoon. "Sure, that sounds really nice."

"You'll be careful," she said without looking up.

“I promise,” he told her. “I promise you I will be very, *very* careful. I left some things with the dry cleaners here. Maybe you could pick them up?”

“Sure.” She smiled and continued folding and packing until everything was in his Pullman, ready to go. “My car’s down in the parking garage.”

He hefted his case and took a last look around. “Good to go then.”

“Where will you be staying in San Francisco?” she asked.

“The Kabuki.”

She frowned. “Do I know that one?”

“It used to be the Miyako, near the Japan Center. Next to the plaza with the tower?”

“Oh... yeah.” The elevator arrived, and they entered it.

“They have Wi-Fi, so e-mail me if you need me, okay? I have my laptop.”

“I thought you said your case was stolen on the airplane from Frankfurt.”

Mention of that plane trip made a ruddy flush stain his cheeks. “It’s weird, you know? I didn’t put my laptop or the manuscript in it. I checked them. I had a feeling...”

“You’re fey, oddball,” she said, getting off the elevator with him and heading across the parking garage. She pressed her remote and her car chirped cheerfully.

“That’s Mr. Oddball to you,” he said, following her. After a few steps he stopped, then turned, as he’d done in Frankfurt, an entire three hundred sixty degrees.

“What is it, Adin?” asked Deana, her hand poised on the handle of the car.

“Nothing,” he said. “Sometimes I get the strangest feeling I’m being watched.”

“Look, maybe you shouldn’t go,” Deana said, looking at him over the roof of her BMW.

"I'm sure I'm just paranoid. I was robbed twice, after all. It'll take me a while to settle down."

"I hope that's all it is."

"What else could it be? They've got what they wanted," he pointed out. He opened the trunk and put in his Pullman and garment bag.

Deana finally opened the driver's-side door and got in. "I guess so. The Kabuki, right?"

"Right. It'll be fine, Deana Beana," he said, getting in on the passenger side. "You'll see."

As she pulled out onto Flower Street, Adin had to force himself not to swivel his head in order to look around. His blood was whispering to him, a low hum he'd begun to regard almost like foreplay, which threw his body into a chaos of longing. He had no doubt that Donte was in that garage, watching him from somewhere. He felt it. His blood told him Donte was near. He wondered if the feeling would dissipate with time and distance.

Adin's heart constricted. He would probably never see Donte again, unless he got *Notturmo* back. Even that would be no good, because they'd be on opposing sides, each struggling to take it and hold it for their own. The faint thrill he felt was disappearing, and it saddened him. For a while at least, he had known, in as deep a place as the molecular structure of his body, a connection to a person not in his immediate family. For a moment anyway, he hadn't felt alone.



## CHAPTER SIX

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Adin emerged from the plane, part of a crowd of tired people being funneled into the long hallway leading to the terminal. It was around ten forty in the evening, and he followed the tide from his plane down to the baggage claim area where the hotel driver was scheduled to pick him up.

While he was standing by with his case waiting for his luggage to slide down onto the carousel, he saw a dark, diminutive man with short, curly hair holding a sign that read TREDEGER. He nodded and smiled when the man scurried over to introduce himself. Adin wasn't a tall man, but the driver, who identified himself as Boaz, came only to his chin. He chatted amiably and seemed to have energy to burn, so that when Adin's suitcase and garment bag came around and he pointed them out, Boaz shot between a number of larger, more determined people to retrieve them.

Once in the limousine, a luxury that made Adin thoroughly ashamed, he tried to relax. He'd thought they were sending a car or a shuttle bus, but here he was riding too comfortably in the back of a white stretch limo, sinking tiredly into baby-soft leather seats, and he *loved* it. It wasn't a long drive, but Adin took advantage, finding a classical radio station and allowing the pimped-out neon stripes on the walls and ceiling to soothe his nerves as they changed from one color to another.

"Boaz," he called out, turning the radio down for a minute. "Do you think you could stop so I can buy a bottle of Bushmills?"

"Certainly, Dr. Tredeger. I'm completely at your service." Adin restored the radio's volume and rested his head against the back of the seats. He was thinking how used to the experience he could get when Boaz slowed down to park in front of a liquor store. Just as Adin went to open the door, it was opened for him.



"I'll be back in a minute." Adin left the little man with the car. He entered and started up the aisle, looking at all the different types of wines and liquor they offered. They had snacks as well, and Adin automatically picked up some chips and Lindt chocolate truffles, things he liked to have on hand in the middle of the night when he just wanted a handful of something. He found his whiskey, Bushmills 16, in a locked case, so he flagged down an employee to get it for him. He was bending himself back through the limo door that Boaz held open for him in no time.

"That was quick," said Boaz as Adin seated himself.

"It helps if you know exactly what you want," Adin replied. Something tingled on the periphery of Adin's awareness, and he looked past Boaz to see a tall man in a long, dark overcoat. Adin's heart rocketed around his rib cage once or twice before he realized the man reminded him of Donte. He was looking at Adin curiously, staring in a frank way that Adin was unused to and uncomfortable with. Boaz closed the door, and in minutes, they were on their way.

Adin didn't think about Donte again until he was alone in his room at the Kabuki, a lovely, comfortable hotel with down pillows and comforters, terry-lined silk robes, and shoji screens on the windows. He was in the garden wing, on the fifth level, a private floor he'd needed his key to access, there being no fifth-floor number on the elevator panel. He hung up his suits and placed his Pullman on the luggage rack before pouring a drink and settling into the soft bed. After taking out his reading glasses and the yellow legal pad on which he'd written his translation of Donte's journal entries, he reread them slowly. Adin felt a faint hiss of awareness as he closed his eyes, but thought it was primarily arousal, because reading the words Donte wrote made the man come alive in his imagination. He took out his laptop, grateful he'd gotten the photographs of the manuscript before it was stolen. Even though they were a poor substitute for holding the centuries-old journal in his hands, it didn't take long before he was lost in the entry after the last one he'd translated.



*My best loved, I write this in the spring, after the snows have melted, when the sun warms the earth a little. I know very well that if I could move through time and space to be by your side at this minute, and I lifted your hand to my lips for a kiss, I would find it redolent of basil and maybe fennel. You may not deny this! I know you've been in the garden. I can see you there, and if I have a quiet moment with no distractions, I can imagine the scent of your skin, warm from the sun and sweetly green from rubbing your hands on the plants.*

*My son thrives, and I have no idea how. He is his own worst enemy. He chases the animals and has no fear of the stairs or the water in the fountain. There are four girls employed just to see that he doesn't get into mischief. Renata quickens again, and the house trembles with her moods. For myself, I am man enough to want more sons, the only reason I ever go near her at all. And you, beloved, are married and might have a child on the way for all I know.*

*It breaks my heart to have no message from you. Is it possible that you don't know that I wait for word as though it were water and I were dying of thirst? I shall never believe, my love, though my heart fails me, that you have no wish to write to me. I would die deluded before I would die faithless. So now I wait and hope and dream and love, with such a love that were it a tangible thing, you would feel it rush to Liguria and crash over you like wind and water speeding from where I sit. Dear heaven, Auselmo, what are we to do? I ache for you.*



*Auselmo, sweet lover, how handily you made me a fool and surprised me on my own doorstep! I was beginning to feel almost tragic when I saw your standard bearers! Renata is in an uproar, as always, ordering the servants about and making everyone miserable. Naturally this delights her. Your sweet wife said not more than two words the entire noonday meal, and I feared she would faint dead away when Renata suggested they spend time together.*

*As I write this you sleep beside me, still damp and sated from our endeavors. I am breathless with joy and cannot sleep, so I will draw you as you lie beside me, and I will record your blotchy, well-marked skin for all eternity. What we shared felt sacred, my love, superhuman almost, divine. That I asked you to fill me with your body and your seed distressed you, I*

*could see, but when you loved me I could see the passion glistening in your eyes, and I know you felt it too.*

*We are something new, Auselmo. Something powerful and eternal. There is nothing and no one who has been as we are, and none shall ever know what we know. I am yours, as completely as if you bought me for a slave, and you, my love, are my prize, won by what magic I do not claim to understand. I cherish you completely, Auselmo, with the certain knowledge before all the gods that ever were, that I would gamble all except for you, and they may reward me for it or not. As long as you are by my side, I care not what befalls me. Mad words for a man who must rise before the dawn and slink like a penitent, beardless boy back to his room in case his bitch of a wife sends servants to find him... I asked you again last night, should we have run while we were boys and had no one to disappoint but ourselves?*

*Wise Auselmo, you never answer, save to use your body to make mine burn. Will I ever be worthy of you, I wonder?*



Raking an impatient hand through his hair, Adin tossed the tablet aside and rolled over, pulling the soft pillows to his chest. He fell fast asleep with the light still on.

In the muffled quiet of the night, Adin dreamed of his sister and their family as they'd been while he was growing up. They'd lived everywhere, from Alaska to Saudi Arabia to Kuwait to Indonesia. Anywhere with a possibility of oil. His geologist father's small consulting company had grown, and with it their fortune, and when his father finally retired at an early age in San Francisco to teach, he'd sold the business, cashing in at exactly the right time.

Adin remembered his father as a literate and charming man as well as a thoughtful scholarly professional. They'd had a wonderful family life in the years before he and Adin's mother passed away in a tragic boating accident among the Channel Islands of Southern California, even during the difficult time after Adin came out and they'd had to adjust to...what? Adin knew they'd been disappointed. Not in him, or his choices, but for him. For what they'd perceived his choice meant. They'd seen him rootless in his middle age, without a home, without a family, and he'd tried to reassure them that those things would

be there for him regardless of his choices. That he'd make a home and create a family if he chose.

They'd come to a loving acceptance, but then tragedy struck. Adin had been in graduate school studying abroad in England for a year when his parents died, and Deana was a junior at USC. During those terrible weeks of the search for the boat and the missing Tredeggers, Adin returned to San Francisco and discovered that he could no longer sleep in the city he called home, and he hadn't slept a single solid, dreamless night there since.

This night, for the first time, Adin thought he might actually *feel* rootless. It didn't surprise him at all that his own family returned to him in dreams. Adin dreamed his father was sitting in his tiny office with his hands up in a halfhearted defensive gesture as a group of girls pressed a plastic-wrapped plate of brownies on him. As if Adin were only a disembodied presence in the room, he found he could wander and look at the pictures on his father's desk, the books lining his bookshelves, and the view from his window. He spent, in dreamtime, what seemed like a pleasurable afternoon there.

Lying quietly, he tried to figure out just what he was feeling. The thought once again brushed his mind that his blood was silent. *Donte?* Nothing. He closed his eyes and dreamed again, this time of elevator cars that felt like clear glass Christmas balls and eyes the color of the rich brown leather club chairs that once dotted the large library of his parents' Victorian home.

He awoke sometime later feeling vaguely lost. He resolved to call Boaz first thing after breakfast, hoping the small man wouldn't be too busy to drive him for the rest of his stay. While being driven in an ostentatious limousine was pretentious, he liked the idea of renting a car and driving himself through San Francisco's overcrowded streets even less. The memory of Boaz's smiling face reassured him in an odd way, and he looked forward to the company of the diminutive man, which made going back to sleep a little easier.

Adin finally slept deeply enough, then woke about the time when the hotel put out their continental breakfast. He slipped into his hotel spa robe and padded out to get a plate of fruit and

rolls and some coffee. He smiled genially at the other guests doing the same. Once back in his hotel room, he phoned Boaz, who said he would be happy to drive him wherever he needed to go while he was in town. They made arrangements to meet in front of the hotel at ten a.m., and Adin hung up the phone feeling better than he had since he'd landed.

"Where to, Dr. Tredeger?" Boaz inquired as he handed Adin into the back of the car.

"I'm meeting friends for breakfast at the Buena Vista."

"Very good, sir," said Boaz, and Adin gave him a look that said, *Don't push it*. Boaz grinned and closed the door, leaving Adin alone in the back with his thoughts. Adin touched the button for the classical radio station again and prepared himself. Edward and Tuan were old friends, comfortable allies to have at a time when he felt so unhappy. Edward was an art dealer from a long line of men and women who either produced art or traded it.

Tuan was more of an enigma. Adin didn't know him well, only that he and Edward met while Edward attended school in Paris. Tuan worked as an investigator for an insurance firm, and Adin privately suspected, although it had never been spoken of out loud, that Tuan was part of another kind of world altogether, perhaps military, certainly secret, and that going to school in Paris was a means to an end at a time of crisis, with Edward as a bonus.

Boaz pulled the limousine up to the front door and Adin got out, straightening his leather jacket and smiling his thanks. Boaz practically bowed. "You may phone me, and I'll be here to get you in a matter of minutes, Dr. Tredeger."

"Adin. Please, Boaz, call me Adin."

"Yes, sir. I shall do that."

Adin rolled his eyes and left the man standing on the sidewalk.

Once inside the crowded little diner, he caught sight of Tuan first, in his dark suit and tie, reading the paper, and then, almost

as if he existed in a completely different world, Edward. By contrast to Tuan's conservative attire, expensive watch, and the round little glasses he wore that made him look like a well-built Asian banker, Edward's look screamed fetish from his head to his toes. He wore Doc Martens under jeans that crouched precariously on his luscious ass. Over that he wore a tight Sex Pistols T-shirt, and a number of belts, chains, bracelets, and visible piercings, which Adin knew to be the tip of the iceberg. His skin bore the ink of a dozen artists. What never failed to surprise and delight Adin, though, was Edward's ever-ready, sweet smile, which was just short of angelic.

Just then Edward was gazing at Tuan with the look of a besotted teenage girl, and Tuan gave him an indulgent smile back. Despite their differences, these two were the happiest couple Adin knew. Tuan hadn't noticed him yet and held the newspaper up at an angle so he could kiss the delighted Edward behind it.

Adin cleared his throat, and the paper came down to reveal two red faces. "Guilty as charged, Adin," said Tuan with a grin.

"You go. Wish I had one of those." Adin sat down. Tuan immediately signaled the waitress for coffee.

"One of what?" asked Edward.

"Someone who looks at me the way you look at Tuan." Adin fiddled with his napkin. He didn't know why he said that. It certainly hadn't even been in the top one hundred things he wanted until recently. "Been a while since I've seen you."

Edward leaned over and kissed him on both cheeks. "Missed you. Tell me about your manuscript, and we'll brainstorm. You don't think Ned Harwiche? He was certainly pissed when you outbid him."

"Harwiche wouldn't hire thieves; he couldn't. His reputation is everything to him," Adin said, and Edward nodded. "If he had it, sooner or later someone would talk, and then the provenance of every piece he has in his collection would get looked at under a microscope."

“You’re right; he couldn’t help bragging. He’d be locked up within a week if he stole that from you. Besides, if he had *Notturmo*, he’d have called me by now to gloat,” said Edward.

Tuan put his paper down. “I’ve heard something, although it may be simple talk.” He watched Adin carefully.

“What?”

“I got an e-mail from an acquaintance last night, an Asian friend who lives in Paris and does work similar to mine. She said that something unpleasant was coming my way. She warned me because she knows Edward is an art dealer. She told me not to let him get between the parties involved. From what she indicated, I gathered she was talking about *Notturmo*.”

“What?” asked Edward incredulously. “You didn’t tell me that.”

“You were asleep when the e-mail came in.” Tuan patted Edward’s hand, stroking over the fingers gently. “She said that three parties want that manuscript badly, and only one of them will walk away.”

“That seems crazy,” said Edward.

“Not if it’s *Notturmo*,” Adin told him. “It’s special.”

“It’s just a book,” said Tuan dismissively. Edward and Adin both gasped, but he ignored them. “Anyway, apparently someone in Italy was illegally prevented at the last minute from bidding on the manuscript, and that’s contestant number one.”

Donte, thought Adin.

“And contestant number two isn’t so easy to flush out. It is thought that he’s the one who relieved you of your book, Adin, and that he has ties to organized crime. In fact, I can’t discern why party number two wants the book, unless it’s to drive the price up for the other parties, because recently there’s been talk of a mystery man who just heard about the manuscript and is moving heaven and earth to get it. It’s possible that the second man relieved you of the book in Los Angeles to encourage a bidding war between the first and third. I’m sorry. It’s all hearsay and speculation right now.”

“How do we get it back?”

“You don’t.” Tuan looked tense. “You won’t. It’s asking for all kinds of trouble. You never heard me say this, but file your claim, Adin.”

Adin leaned over the table, absently rubbing his tired eyes. “I can’t do that.” He toyed with his coffee. “I have photographs of the pages that I made while I was at my sister’s lab. I read some of it. I couldn’t sit by and watch it fall into obscurity again.”

“What do you care? If you have the photographs, just read it. Then it won’t be obscure,” said Tuan.

“Without the manuscript, there’s no proof that it ever existed. It’s a huge find. I don’t want to give up this early in the game.” Adin looked at Edward, who nodded his understanding.

Tuan broke into his thoughts. “I think you’re making a mistake, Adin. It’s not a game. I think you’d be better off to let—”

Edward took Tuan’s hand and squeezed it gently. “How can we help?”

“Edward, I don’t think—” Tuan began, but Edward put a hand up.

“People who steal art can do only one thing with it, Tuan. They have to hide it from the world forever or sell it to someone else who will.”

“That cannot happen to *Notturmo*,” Adin said. “I’m begging you, Tuan. This is more than just my career. The man who wrote that book is as real to me as you are. If the book disappears, he’s gone forever, and along with him, the man he loved. For a lot of different reasons, that’s not acceptable to me.”

Tuan looked at Edward. “I’ll see what I can do. Check your e-mail at intervals today. And take Edward shopping; he’s bored.”

Edward grinned. “We were supposed to have the day off, but *somebody* had to work at the last minute.” He stood as Tuan got up to leave. “Big kiss. You owe me a whole day in bed, Tuan, and I’m collecting interest.”



“See you,” Tuan said as he gathered his briefcase. “Be prepared for disappointment, Adin. And watch your back. Party number three may not know the manuscript’s been stolen yet.”

“Okay,” said Adin, just glad to have some kind of ally. “But really, Tuan, I’m in this. I want it back.”

Tuan left, and Adin returned to his coffee. Edward stirred his around idly. “Why this manuscript?”

Adin shrugged. “Even though I’d only roughly translated about five of the entries, I was more than half in love with the author.”

“Oh, Adin.” Edward sighed.

“I know.” Adin looked away. “It’s stupid, isn’t it? Like falling in love with a portrait from another century. Have you heard me talk about love, ever? Even once?” He idly watched as a mother and daughter sat down together, laden with shopping bags.

“It’s happened to me. I’ve been obsessed by portraits. Have you ever seen *Portrait of an Artist* by van Musscher? I loved that when I was growing up. I also loved his painting *The Sinfonia*. I used to gaze at pictures of it for hours hoping it would come to life.”

“I’m not having a hard time imagining that.” Adin smiled.

“When you read that book, don’t you do the same thing?”

Adin lowered his lashes, unable to look at Edward’s earnest face. “I do.”

“Then it’s settled,” said Edward, looking at the check and dropping money into the plastic tray. “We’re going to Chinatown. I know just what you need.”

“Ah. Edward... I don’t know...”

“Trust me. You need this.” He took Adin by the hand and led him outside. “How did you get here?” he asked, walking through the parking lot. Boaz was parked on the side street, and when Adin caught sight of him, he was leaning against the driver’s-side door of the limo.

“Dr. Tredeger, sir. You said you would call me.” Boaz sounded disappointed in him.

“My apologies, Boaz,” said Adin. “Our departure was somewhat abrupt. Edward, this is Boaz. He’s my driver for the day.”

“Cool,” said Edward, folding his long body to get into the limousine. “Oh, gray leather, and me without Tuan, damn it. Adin, would you mind awfully holding my phone camera on me while I lie on this and...?”

“Yes. I would.”

“You’re no fun. Tuan was supposed to stay home today. We were supposed to lie in bed all day and tell each other secrets.”

Edward was relentless. Boaz raised his eyebrows and the privacy shield. In the end Adin recorded a video of Edward jerking off to a Mendelssohn piece. The evidence was sent as a file to Tuan’s iPhone, and by the time they got to Chinatown they were laughing like children.

“Edward,” said Adin, perfectly relaxed under the hands of a masseuse in the tiny spa. “This was a really good choice.”

“When we’ve been polished to a high shine, I’m going to take you to an import store where they have special little resin erotic statues of men doing the nasty in absolutely mind-boggling ways.”

“My mind is not easily boggled, Edward.” Adin groaned when the masseuse cranked an elbow down on a particularly vulnerable spot in the middle of his shoulder blade.

“Wait and see.” Edward grinned.

They emerged from the spa two hours later, buffed, shiny, and boneless. Adin felt more serene than he had since the flight from Frankfurt and looked forward to a pleasant afternoon. There was nothing to be done while Tuan checked into the theft of the manuscript with his dubious resources, anyway. After a brief walk, they entered a small incense-scented store. Resigned, Adin stopped worrying and leaned over a brightly lit glass case, looking at the tiny figurines there.

“I was right, wasn’t I?” Edward asked from the other side, looking through the case at him. “You’re boggled?”

“I wouldn’t say boggled, exactly,” said Adin, checking out a particularly interesting piece in which two tiny Chinese characters with queues held a third, suspended over a wide piece of fabric, while he was being entered from behind by a fourth. “Kind of puts a new spin on rock your world,” murmured Adin, biting his lip.

“Aren’t they fun?” asked Edward. “When Tuan turned thirty, I put them all over his cake.” He smiled. “I think they’re cute. What I would really like to see is somebody who could make them like wind-up toys. How fun would that be?”

Adin rose from his exploration of the case and indicated to the shop owner that he wanted to buy. “I’d like to see this one wound up. I’m trying to get the visual...”

Edward’s eyebrows disappeared behind the fringe of his hair. “It’s probably best if you don’t.”

Adin grinned. “Says the man who jacked off in my limo.”

The sales clerk wrapped their purchases carefully, giving each of them a small silk bag, and bowed them out. It was about three in the afternoon when they left the store, and Adin suggested they find somewhere to eat. They were walking down Sutter, discussing the merits of one type of Chinese food over another, when Adin felt the blood in his veins begin to speak to him. Adin stopped walking and listened.

“What is it?” Edward asked him.

Adin looked around carefully. “I don’t know.” Adin had experienced this sensation before and associated it with Donte, but this felt different somehow. He saw nothing, even when he turned again. “It’s nothing.”

“You look pale. Are you feeling all right?” asked Edward, real concern on his face.

“I’m fine. Maybe I’m just not used to...” Adin heard the voices then, in Spanish. Words he barely understood hissed throughout his body, just under his skin. He looked across the street and saw a man standing in the shadows of the alley

between two shops, where a delivery truck sat waiting for men to offload crates of vegetables. The man was tall, with light skin and ebony-colored hair, worn long, past his shoulders. He had on supple dark dress trousers and a gray sweater, over which he wore a black leather trench coat.

The man stood motionless and stared at Adin, his hands tucked casually in his pockets. Not Donte, but *like* Donte. The shock registered, and he barely had time to put a hand out to the wall beside him before his knees buckled and he fell to the ground.

Dimly, he was aware of Edward shouting his name, then nothing.

When Adin regained consciousness, he was in the limousine, which was parked illegally on Sutter, under the watchful eyes of both Boaz and Edward. He felt like an idiot.

“And you...and you...and you were there,” he quipped. “And I only knew I wanted to go home...”

“Shut up,” said Edward, testily. “It’s not funny. You scared the hell out of me.” He got out his phone and dialed a number, presumably Tuan’s, and got out of the limo to talk privately.

“Dr. Tredeger?” asked Boaz. “You okay, sir?” He spoke quietly, concern etched on his face.

“Fine,” said Adin brusquely. “I’m fine. I guess I’m going to have to see about my blood sugar. That’s twice I’ve felt faint in the last week.” He straightened his sweater, which had bunched around him, he guessed, when they’d loaded him in the limo. He sat up carefully, exploring how he felt. He remembered the buzzing sensation he’d had when he’d seen the man. His heart felt like ice. There were more of *them*. He slumped back against the seat. Boaz handed him a water bottle. He nodded his thanks.

Somehow, in the brief period of time he’d known Donte, known *of* Donte, it never occurred to him that there might be more. Adin accepted, albeit unwillingly, a world in which vampires could exist; indeed, he accepted that Donte did exist. Adin had offered himself to Donte, knowing full well that if he did it, he would be slamming the door on the world he’d known

for his entire life. But he'd never thought this far ahead. There were others, not just Donte. There were whole legions, maybe, of things out there that he'd never believed in that he had to make room for now, in his imagination, surely, and maybe in his life.

"Boss?" asked a worried Boaz. "You're sweating. Do you think we should go to the hospital?"

"No!" Adin said, louder than he meant to. "No. Just...take me home, okay? Back to the hotel. Then take Edward wherever he needs to go."

"I'm not just going to leave you..."

"Boaz, maybe I have a touch of the flu, nothing more serious. I promise. Please, just do as I ask. I have a lot to think about. Bring me takeout when you return to the hotel, okay?"

"All right," said Boaz, looking at him speculatively, when Edward climbed back into the car. Boaz still didn't take his eyes off Adin, looking as if he were going to say something but remaining silent.

"Feeling better?" Edward asked, looking closely at Adin's face. "You need to rest, Adin."

"I know." Adin patted the seat next to him. "I only just came back from Frankfurt a few days ago. I really haven't been taking care of myself. I'm sure I'm just run-down." He sighed. "Boaz is going to drop me off and then take you wherever you'd like to go. If you're feeling motherly, maybe you can help him choose something to bring me for dinner, okay?"

"I can do that." Edward nodded at Boaz, who was backing out of the limo door. When Boaz closed the door behind him, Edward said plaintively, "I want a Boaz. He's so cool! Do you think he would drive me if I needed him every once in a while?"

Adin smiled. "I'll bet he'd be delighted. He's very efficient."

"And he didn't even get mad when I..." Edward bit his lip on a snigger.

"I'll bet you're not exactly the first," Adin remarked as the car pulled away from the curb.

Edward tried to suppress a smile. He got serious a minute later, gazing at Adin with naked anxiety. “Something’s different about you. You’d tell me if...” He didn’t finish. He didn’t have to.

“I’m healthy,” stated Adin. “I promise. I’m fine. I’ve had a shock with this manuscript, and then with the theft... My heart feels broken.”

“Oh, Adin,” Edward murmured sympathetically. “I know. *I know*. But don’t bother telling that to Tuan. It’s like trying to teach a rock to sing.”

“I believe that.” Adin took Edward’s outstretched hand in his. “I’m glad I’m here with you.”

Edward smiled his wide, white smile and chattered all the way back to the hotel. Adin tuned him out. There was so much he had to find out. More of them. There were *more*. And while Adin could cope with a world that had Donte in it, he was wholly unprepared to deal with vampires as a large and lethal group of undead people who actually existed. Suddenly he wanted Donte with such longing it took his breath away. Was it a trick? Donte had used fear with him before, had made it seem as though he were the only safe haven in a world gone crazy. It was part of the glamour. But Donte was not there, and in his heart, Adin knew it. This was something entirely new. Someone entirely different.

*This was the devil Adin didn’t know.*

Boaz dropped Adin off at the Kabuki, where he retreated immediately into his room. He showered quickly and slipped into the luxurious robe, which was large enough to drown him in its silk and terry opulence. He poured a Bushmills and looked out the window at the street below. The week before, even the day before, this city would have seemed as familiar to him as his running shoes. Warm, recognizable, and broken in to the shape of his foot, molded for his comfort. Now it was as if those same comfortable shoes had taken off running down the street by themselves.

What was out there in this city, arguably his hometown, that he never knew existed? How ignorant did he yet remain? Was

there more lurking unnoticed in the alleys and side streets than vampires?

As Adin watched the street below, he caught sight of a man on the sidewalk who wore a dark suit and walked with a briefcase. He walked at a brisk pace, like a million other businessmen in the city at twilight doing the same. But when he was exactly across the street from where Adin stood, he stopped, looked up directly at Adin's window, and smiled. With shaking hands, Adin shut the shoji screens. It wasn't the same man, but like the others, he was beginning to sense the threat. The man from the liquor store, the man from Chinatown, and the man outside only moments before felt the same. Like Donte. He sat quietly on the velvet chaise longue, neither noticing nor caring that the light was fading, until he was left in almost-complete darkness.

A knock concussed the silence. Adin tied his robe more tightly around him and answered it. Boaz stood there, a brown paper shopping bag in one hand and a bottle in the other.

"Dinner, sir"—he smiled—"compliments of your friend Edward."

"Thank you," said Adin, uncertain what to do. "Come in, Boaz, unless you have something else to do. You could join me."

"Thank you, sir, that's very kind of you," said Boaz as he placed the food on the low glass cocktail table. "I'm afraid I can't, though. You did say you wouldn't require me this evening, didn't you?"

"Yes. I'm not going out."

"Very good, then. I could open the wine for you, if you like." Boaz pulled a Swiss Army knife out of his jacket pocket.

"Thank you," said Adin. "This is really quite the royal treatment."

Boaz remained distantly polite. "I find having a wine opener useful, as no one can fly with one anymore."

"I see. That's good thinking."

“I believe you’ll find I’m rather useful in lots of ways.” Boaz gave him an enigmatic look and then started pulling out the food Edward sent. “Edward believed you might enjoy some seafood.”

“Did he?” Adin lifted the Styrofoam lid to uncover some sort of fish with a citrus glaze and vegetables. “Oh, yeah. He might have been right.” He grinned.

“And sir?” Boaz said, as he was about to open the door to leave. “Don’t hesitate to call, even if...” He trailed off.

“Even if what, Boaz?” asked Adin.

“Even if a request sounds...crazy.”

Adin looked at him for a long time, wondering if he could possibly know the dark turn his life had taken. He shook his head. “All right,” he said, dismissing Boaz, and the thought, for the night. “I’ll call if I need you.”

“Very good, sir.”

After he left, Adin decided Boaz’s formality was as much to tease him as it was the professional demeanor he presented to the world. Edward was right: Adin liked having a Boaz.

Much later that night, Adin dreamed again. He tossed warmly in the extravagant bedding, listening to the music in his blood. This wasn’t Donte’s song; it didn’t speak to him of sun-warmed earth and sex. Of skin that smelled like herbs. It didn’t feel like Donte, like swimming naked in the Mediterranean amid a thousand silvery fish. The bloodsong this night was dark and angry and reeked of death. Several times, Adin woke, only to turn back over, disoriented, into that dream-filled sleep again.

Adin woke at nine a.m. with a headache and dry mouth. He pulled on his spa robe and left the room to get coffee from the continental breakfast buffet. He smiled pleasantly at the maids as he left his room; they were just exiting the room next to his. Finding a newspaper to read while he sipped his coffee, he gave them time to do their work. The hotel guests came and went, some chatting with him amiably, some quiet, until he finished his paper and a third cup of coffee. Adin hoped he didn’t look as bad as he felt. He folded the paper up under his arm and



walked back to his room. He used his key card to enter and tossed the paper down on the desk. It came as a terrible surprise when a hand snaked out from behind him and grabbed him by the neck.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

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Adin felt like a rag as he was slammed against the wall and held there, his breath cut off in his throat.

“Where is it?” someone asked him through the little black spots dancing before his eyes. His attacker must have realized that he couldn’t speak, because the pressure on his neck was loosened slightly.

“Where is what?” croaked Adin, stunned.

“The manuscript. *Notturmo*. What have you done with it?”

“Whoa,” Adin said, finally getting enough leverage to shove back a little. “You’re too late. It was stolen from me in Los Angeles.”

That hard hand slammed him back. “You lie!”

“Sorry,” said Adin angrily. “It’s gone. Somebody stole it.”

Adin was released as his attacker ran his hands through his dirty hair. “Oh shit,” the man muttered. Adin began to move, but instantly he was sorry. The man lashed out, punching him hard in the gut. Adin doubled over as the man began to pace.

“Oh shit,” the man said again, turning to grab Adin’s hair and pull it hard, yanking him to standing again, his face inches away. “You’d better not be fucking with me. Give. It. To. Me.” To punctuate this, he gave Adin’s hair a vicious tug and slammed his head against the wall.

Adin could smell coffee and something else, something rank like wet dog, coming off the man. He winced and wondered if his hair was coming out in patches. “It was stolen from my hotel room in Los Angeles,” he said again. “There’s a police report. Check if you don’t believe me.”

They hung there, suspended in time, as Adin watched the man try to decide what to do. Suddenly Adin’s attacker shifted on his feet, and Adin knew, without a doubt, that the man meant to kill him. Hands wrapped around his throat, squeezing

hard enough to bruise. Something desperate inside Adin came to life, and he grabbed the metal lamp on the hotel desk and swung it in a huge arc, using every ounce of strength he possessed. It crashed down on his attacker, who barely seemed fazed by the blow. The man hurled them both to the floor. Then Adin noticed a sound, something low and angry, a rumbling growl that didn't sound human. For his part, he couldn't speak, could make hardly any sound at all, save a kind of mewling as he struggled to remain conscious.

Unexpectedly the terrible weight of his assailant was gone, and Adin lifted his head to see Boaz pulling him away. The small man shouted something to him that sounded like "eyes" even as he shoved Adin away with his foot. With a *pop*, light so bright it blinded Adin filled the room. Things crashed and fell and roared, and when at last he could see again, his vision filled with black spots that floated and moved and obscured everything around him. Boaz knelt over someone who lay on the floor with a thick wooden stick protruding from his chest. Adin closed his eyes, blinking them rapidly to regain his sight. The contents of his stomach roiled, threatening to disgorge. He opened his eyes again to see the man who'd jumped him dissolve into powdery grit on the richly carpeted hotel floor.

Boaz was shaking his head, disgusted. "Damn vampires." He looked up at Adin. "Are you all right, sir?"

Adin couldn't reply; he just lay there dazed.

"Sir? Sir, can you hear me?" Boaz leaned over him, rubbing circles in his hand.

"You..."

"You've had a terrible shock, sir," said Boaz, helping Adin to sit upright. "Let me get you some water." The little man left him, and Adin heard water running. When Boaz returned with a glass, Adin drank from it. He touched his sore throat gingerly, swearing. That was going to leave marks.

"How the hell did you get in here?"

Boaz looked guilty. "I took the liberty of removing your spare key card, sir, from the little envelope on the desk last night. When I brought you your meal."

“But...why?” Adin’s head hurt, and nothing since he’d woken up made any sense.

Boaz looked to where the vampire had been lying and shrugged.

“*Crap*,” muttered Adin.

“One good thing is no corpses,” Boaz said brightly. “You gotta love killing a vampire. Hardly any cleanup at all.”

He looked to the floor where there was nothing left but some granules of sandy dust and shook his head. It didn’t bear thinking about for the moment. “Am I the only one on the planet who never knew they existed?” he asked, more rhetorically than anything.

“Oh no, sir,” said Boaz. “Most people never know. You don’t live to be five hundred years old like Donte by being high profile. Maybe one out of a thousand people ever find out...and most of them learn the hard way, if you know what I mean. Not just as a snack, which can be... Well, I’m sure you know. But as a *prix fixe* meal, if you get my meaning.”

Adin digested this. “Wait, you said Donte! Do you know—”

“Sir, please don’t get so overwrought. It would be best if you would lie down on the bed, don’t you think?”

“Oh, all right.” Adin allowed himself to be pulled up from the floor. Once he was comfortable on the bed, he asked, “But how did *he* get in here? I know Donte couldn’t come into my room unless I invited him.”

“Ah.” Boaz looked around. “Probably the maids. He only had to be invited in, after all. Not by you personally.” Adin thought about that. Then what on earth had stopped Donte from...?

“Who the hell are you?” asked Adin. “You’re no limo driver.”

“No. Well. As to that, technically, I am. I was hired to drive you. You hired me yourself, remember?”

“Boaz...” Adin warned.

“Yes, all right. It was Donte Fedeltà. I received a phone call...”

“Donte? How the hell did he know where I would be? I certainly didn’t tell him.” Adin stood up and paced in agitation.

“I imagine he overheard you. They have excellent hearing. He phoned me and told me to watch out for you. When I discovered that you were having the hotel car pick you up from the airport, I just... Well. Let’s say I impressed on the driver that he needed to go someplace else for a few days.”

“But—”

Boaz held his hand up. “I take it you’re new to all this?” Adin nodded. “Suffice it to say that there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are...”

“Oh, piss off! I want to know what you’re doing here.”

Boaz shot him a look. “I received a call from Donte, for whom my family has worked from time to time, telling me that he would like me to see that you stay out of trouble.”

“So he can go after my manuscript. You’re fired.”

“You can’t fire me. I don’t work for you. I work for Donte, and I understood him to mean that I should keep you safe. And look how it turned out.”

“You should have mentioned that you were working for Donte,” said Adin, “before I paid you for your services.”

“Seriously, how would it have looked if I didn’t charge you money? Wouldn’t you have been a little suspicious?” He put out a placating hand. “Adin. I’m here to see to things like what just happened. You’d be dead right now if I hadn’t intervened.”

Adin slumped into the desk chair. “It seems I owe you my thanks,” he said quietly.

“I don’t need your thanks. Donte was concerned that you might run into trouble. The manuscript that was stolen from you remains the prize in a contest between three very powerful entities.”

“But why?”

“That I couldn’t tell you.” Boaz held up a hand before Adin could speak. “Not because I don’t want to, but because I don’t know. The only thing Donte told me when we spoke is that he would take it very much to heart if something bad were to happen to you.”

Adin stopped what he was doing. That Donte was concerned felt...kind of nice. Maybe even warm. “I see.” Adin remained in the desk chair where he sat thinking. “Boaz, can you explain...? When I’m near Donte, I feel something. It’s as though he calls me. The same feeling came over me when I saw the man yesterday on Sutter Street. This morning, though, I came into my room and felt absolutely nothing. No warning, no threat. As though I were completely alone.”

Boaz seemed to consider this. “Donte is a very old and powerful predator. For someone whom he has marked as his, it’s like a brand, yes?” He put his finger on Adin’s arm and mimicked the motion and the *sizzzle* sound of burning iron on skin. “Other old vampires, like the one you saw yesterday, react to that. It may please them to test it, to see its strength. The man in your room was new, only a baby by any vampire standard. He had a job to do and wished to fulfill it. He had neither the subtlety nor the intuition of an older vampire. He would have killed you and not given it a second thought, simply because you didn’t provide what he was told to acquire.”

“Donte marked me?” Adin was incredulous and angry.

“Did he feed from you?”

“Well, yes...but—”

“Then he marked you.” Boaz got up. “Every vampire worth a damn in this city will know to whom you belong, and none will bother you...except those with a death wish.”

“What?”

“Never mind that, sir.” Boaz’s customary pleasant smile firmly affixed to his face. “Where to this morning?”

“I said you were fired,” said Adin as he headed for his closet to find some clothes.

“That’s what I like about you, sir.” Boaz turned away with a smirk on his face. “So droll.”

They rode the elevator together, and Boaz continued to deny pleasantly that he had any intention of leaving Adin’s employ. As the doors slid open, Boaz’s cell phone rang, and Boaz held a hand up and walked a short distance away to answer it. Adin went to the registration desk to pick up a complimentary green tea–flavored mint, when he looked up to see Boaz coming toward him.

“It’s for you,” he said.

“Me?” asked Adin, perplexed. He took the phone and said, “Tredeger.”

“Caro,” said a rich voice. “Tell me you are unharmed.”

“I’m fine.” He rolled his eyes at Boaz, looking around to see who could hear. “Didn’t Boaz tell you? He...eradicat~~ed~~ the problem.”

“He told me.” Donte sounded grim. “I wanted to hear it from you. I shouldn’t like it at all if anything happened to you, Adin.”

“Why?” asked Adin. “I no longer have the manuscript.”

“Don’t be a shit, Adin,” said Donte impatiently. “You must know I care for you.”

“No meals-on-wheels in L.A.?”

There was a protracted silence on the other end.

“I’m sorry.” Adin picked at a tiny thread that he needed to cut off the waistband of his trousers.

Donte sighed. “I wish we’d had more time together. You have no idea how rare that is for me.”

“I guess you usually just dine and dash? Me too.” Adin swallowed hard. “Donte, I just realized there is so much I didn’t know.”

“This frightens you, yes?” Adin could hear him smile. “Allow Boaz to watch over you, caro. For me. Do this, all right?”

“All right,” said Adin, stalling. He did not want to hang up. “Look, will you—”

“I have to go,” Donte said abruptly. “Please watch your surroundings. Don’t be an idiot, *più amato*.”

Adin closed his eyes at the endearment. *Best beloved*. He started to say something, but then Donte hung up. It worried him how much he felt like he’d been disconnected from the only important thing on earth.





## CHAPTER EIGHT

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Boaz drove Adin to the Alamo Square Park neighborhood where Edward and Tuan lived, ironically, only a few houses down from where Adin lived when his family had finally settled in San Francisco. He took the porch steps up to their colorful Victorian and knocked on the door.

Edward answered, holding his hand up. He had his cell phone to his ear and was talking earnestly in French, while two men in white coveralls behind him waited patiently. Adin walked past the foyer into the parlor and noticed Edward was having it painted. Everything was covered, and the men had begun masking, with blue tape, everything that wasn't to be painted. Adin had painted his own room as a teenager and knew how painstaking masking all the crown molding and chair rails could be. He smiled at the man who was on his knees taping around the fireplace mantle.

"Adin." Edward hung up the phone as he sailed past the parlor and motioned for Adin to follow. They walked together down a small hallway and up the stairs into a bedroom-turned-office. "Tuan called this morning. He says there's not a sound out there about your manuscript, which is probably a good thing, because he thinks whoever stole it hasn't moved it out of California yet."

Adin entered the tiny but elegant room and dropped into the seat meant for visitors in front of Edward's exquisite mahogany writing desk. "That's good, I guess." Adin fingered one of Edward's foiled and folded business cards. "I'm feeling a little hopeless, though. I keep thinking that I'm languages and authentication. Not exactly an action figure. What am I going to do?"

"That's not productive," Edward said, going to a tiny alcove in the wall where a coffeemaker sat. He poured two coffees and brought one to Adin, then went back to retrieve cream, sugar, and tiny, ornate silver spoons. "Of course you can't be expected

to steal it back or anything like that, but if we find out where it is, Tuan can alert the authorities. Once it's recovered your problems are solved."

Adin took a sip. "I know, and I'm grateful. I am. Still, I can't help but feel..."

Edward smiled. "Tuan promised he'd call my cell phone if there's anything new. Let's wait and see, all right?"

Adin relaxed in his chair and looked around. There was a wonderful Degas ballerina sketch on the wall that Adin knew was genuine. Edward might appear to be an enfant terrible, but he knew his business, all facets of the art world, really, and it reassured Adin to know he was in capable hands. Holding his cup and saucer, Edward got up and wandered idly as he talked. When he looked out the window, he gasped.

"What?" Adin jumped to his feet, startled.

"You left Boaz outside? How *could* you?" Edward was already skipping down the stairs when Adin placed his own cup down on the table. Moments later, Edward returned with a sheepish, out-of-sorts Boaz, whom he was pulling along like a toy.

"Really, sir, it's fine for me to stay with the car. I have a crossword puzzle and a book of sudoku."

"You can't really mean to say you'd rather do that than—" Edward's phone rang, and he picked it up. Boaz looked helplessly at Adin, who grinned. Edward moved out of the room for privacy.

"There's coffee," said Adin. Boaz merely looked at him. "Or tea. You really can relax. I'm not the king of the undead. I don't expect you to behave like a sixteenth-century vassal."

"Donte doesn't expect that either," said Boaz. "He does, however, expect that I do my job well, and how can I if I'm having tea in here and not watching the street?"

Adin changed the subject. "How long have you known him?"

"Donte? All my life. I've never *not* known him. The year I was born, he was in Lebanon for one of his import businesses

and befriended my father. I believe I told you my family has worked for him off and on. When I was old enough, I came to the U.S. to go to school. Donte has been very kind.”

“So you don’t drive a limousine ordinarily.”

Boaz laughed. “No, not ordinarily.”

“What do you do then?”

“A little of everything. I’ve been an interpreter, a courier, and a liaison to certain Middle Eastern corporations where Donte has holdings. Often I entertain business associates for him. I’m a good man to have around.”

“I see,” said Adin. A hint of jealousy crackled beneath his skin.

“Sometimes I take care of meals,” Boaz said, as if to remind him that he was merely food to Donte and his kind. Adin flushed and looked away.

“Speaking of food,” said Edward, coming back into the room. “I’m starving. I didn’t have breakfast. Who else needs to eat?”

Neither Adin nor Boaz said anything, but in typical fashion, that mattered not at all to Edward, and soon they were headed to Scoma’s for lunch. Once there, Boaz flatly refused to dine with them, arguing that he needed to remain with the vehicle. Nothing Edward said or did could change his mind. Edward and Adin were seated and ordered drinks.

“What a stubborn little man,” remarked Edward, still angry. Adin watched out the window as boats bobbed in their docks. Gulls dashed about from one to the next, fighting over territory, swooping and circling in the pearly gray late-morning light.

“Edward.” Adin hardly knew how to approach what had been uppermost on his mind. “Did you ever wonder if there were things on earth that you didn’t imagine existed?”

To his credit, Edward gazed at him seriously. “Like what?”

Adin looked away. “Like, oh I don’t know. Ghosts or monsters or ESP or something?”

Edward laughed. “My grandmother used to say she had the ghost of a little Pakistani boy in her home in Sussex. I think she just said it to freak me out. She said she saw him playing ball on the stairs at night. It kept me safely tucked in bed till morning every time I visited.”

“I’m surprised you didn’t go running off as soon as you heard about it to make his acquaintance.” Adin nodded at the waiter when he brought their drinks. “But, did—”

“What’s this really about, Adin?” Edward watched him closely. “Have you been seeing ghosts?”

Adin shook his head. “No, it’s nothing that silly. I just feel...twitchy. Like nothing today is the same as it was last week. Maybe it’s because I’m home, but home isn’t here anymore. I’m disoriented.”

“I felt that way when I met Tuan.” Edward leaned forward. “Like I was being sucked into something and nothing would ever be the same. It wasn’t something I was looking for... I was happy just to play, you remember?”

“Oh yes, I remember.” Adin fondly recalled his first meeting with Edward and their subsequent adventures together, first in Paris and then in London. Both had vowed to take most of it to the grave.

“Did you meet someone, Adin?”

“Yes... No... It’s that damned manuscript.” Adin played with his forks. “The lovers in that diary were just so beautiful, Edward. I wish you could have seen the drawings. The entries made me feel rudderless.”

“Rudderless? You?” Edward acknowledged the waiter when he brought the appetizer. “You’re hardly flotsam, Adin. You’ve always steered your own craft; what’s happened?”

“I’ve never felt anything remotely like what I read in those journals. Is that real? Or is it just somebody making things up for dramatic effect. The man who wrote that diary was a man wholly given up to his lover and not the weaker for it. His love gave him immense strength. He was just...different from

anything I've ever imagined. He said when his lover sighed it came from his own lungs."

"Scary. Boundaries are healthy."

Adin peered at him, knowing Edward had none where Tuan was concerned. He raised his eyebrows.

"Oh, all right. When I met Tuan in Paris I spent at least six months running away from him. He scared the crap out of me. He made me want things..." Edward took up his napkin and primly folded it in his lap. "It's crazy when you know you'd die for someone if they needed you to do that, when you think that would make you the happiest person on earth."

They stared at each other for a long moment. "What a drama queen you are," Adin whispered.

"Hey!" Edward growled, dipping a calamari ring into cocktail sauce after lacing it liberally with Tabasco. His many bracelets and rings clanked as he shook some of it off. "I'm not the one who's in love with an Italian petty noble from the sixteenth century."

"Who are you calling petty?" asked Adin, feeling a little better. He dug into lunch with a newly returned appetite while Edward talked about his most recent work. It seemed he'd been hired as a go-between for an old man who had some of Max Perkins's private notes on Thomas Wolfe's work and a Dartmouth grad who had studied Perkins and collected anything he could find on the man. Adin let him talk.

"So," he finished up. "It's time you thought about what you're going to do if you never get your manuscript back."

"I'll get it back," Adin said. "If Tuan can't find it, I'll start putting feelers out as a private buyer."

"What? You would seriously do that?" asked Edward. "Can you come up with that kind of cash?"

"I can." Adin was grim. "I would. It would take everything I have that's liquid, probably a whole lot more. And there's no guarantee that the other men who want this so badly can't buy me and sell me, but at least I might find out where the manuscript is. I was going to talk to Tuan about it."

“If you find out where it is, and the authorities can’t get it, you could probably have it stolen back, for a price.” Edward looked away. “Tuan could give you names.”

“Now that our rank desperation is on the table, shall we be a little more optimistic? Maybe Tuan chased it down already and will be calling any minute with the good news.”

Edward raised his glass. “I’ll drink to that.”

Adin raised his own. They clinked the glasses together just as their entrées came.

Adin was smashing his crab with a mallet when Edward’s phone rang. Edward quickly wiped his hands and answered, motioning for Adin to continue, while Edward left to talk in private outside. Adin was just finishing extracting the crabmeat from a final claw when he felt a body drop into the chair beside his.

“Hello,” said a man he didn’t recognize. Adin wiped his hands carefully, controlling his face. “I’ll bet you’re wondering why I would come over and sit down next to you, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I am.” Adin looked around furtively. The room was filled to capacity; it was hardly likely anyone could harm him here.

“I’m just here to deliver a message, Dr. Tredeger.” The man seemed to be in no hurry, and Adin worried about Edward. He darted a glance in the direction Edward had gone. “He’s fine. This is just a friendly chat, all right?”

Adin nodded, not trusting his voice.

“Here’s the thing. Three parties are at war over *Notturmo*. It’s all about old anger and personal grudges and, shall we say, blood ties. This is not something you want to be involved in. Leave it alone, and you’ll probably survive.”

“I can’t do that; it belongs to the university I work for.”

“Not anymore. That book has a far greater purpose than study. Leave it alone. You can’t hope to win.” He snaked his hand out and picked up Adin’s wineglass, then helped himself to its contents before turning to leave. “Last warning, eh?” He

put the glass down and left. Adin sat in silence for a few minutes until Edward came back.

“Did I see you talking to someone?” asked Edward.

“Not someone I knew,” Adin admitted, thinking hard. Had that been yet another vampire he’d failed to detect? In the daytime?

“You’ve still got it. I swear, when you go out men come out of the woodwork.” Edward picked up the crackers for his crab.

“You have no fucking idea,” said Adin, earning a surprised look. They finished their meal in silence, and then Edward had Boaz drive them to the de Young Museum. Adin was agitated, and Edward had energy to burn.

“Do you mind going ahead for a minute?” asked Adin. “I need to talk to Boaz.”

“Sure.” Edward stepped out to the curb and headed for the museum. He turned back to call out over his shoulder, “I’ll meet you inside.”

Boaz held the door open, and Adin stepped out. “Something the matter, Dr. Tredeger?”

“A man approached me in the restaurant to warn me off *Notturmo*,” he said. “He told me if I stayed out of it, I’d survive.” Adin tried to remember the exact words. “He said the manuscript had a greater purpose than study. What can that mean?”

“Can you describe this man?” Boaz looked concerned. His hooded eyes were earnest as they watched Adin. “It would help.”

“If you had paper I could sketch him.” Adin thought about Donte, who could have rendered him perfectly. “I’m not really an artist, but...”

“I’ll get paper while you’re inside.” Boaz chewed his lower lip. “I’d better call Donte. You go. Have a good time, sir. Phone me when you’d like me to pick you up.”

Adin and Edward explored the de Young’s collection of American painters, and as he had been when they’d first met,



Edward was an intelligent and knowledgeable guide. He more than put Adin in a good mood with his witty remarks and anecdotal information about several of the artists, and they were glared at by more than one serious art lover before they left.

Tuan called as they were leaving the building, and Edward excused himself while Adin phoned for Boaz. When the limo drove up, Adin climbed in by himself, as Edward seemed to be arguing about something with his lover. Adin found a sketch pad and pencils in a bag in the back of the limo, so he idly began to draw the man from the restaurant. He was working on that when Edward returned.

“Oh, hey! That’s the guy who was talking to you. You’re not a bad artist yourself, Adin. How come I never knew that about you?” Edward slid into the seat next to him.

“I’ve taken some classes. I’m just a technician.” He thought about Donte’s work, and it gave him a hollow feeling. “I can hold my own in a class of amateurs.”

Edward took the finished sketch from him. Adin thought it was more of a doodle. “Adin, I think you should pursue it...” He frowned. “Did this man threaten you? You made him look...”

Adin tried to laugh it off. “I was going for seductive meets rough trade. Must have nailed it.” He tore the page off and waved it at Boaz, who rolled the partition down and took it from him, then looked at it briefly when they were stopped at a light.

Edward was looking at him. “That was no pick-up, Adin. That man did threaten you, didn’t he?”

Adin looked away. “He just warned me off trying to get *Notturmo* back is all.”

Edward gripped his hand hard. “Or what?”

“Nothing. He just said don’t go looking for it.”

“That’s it?” He raised his eyebrows and took out his phone, pushing the Number One button and tapping his foot. “Tuan, it’s me. Someone threatened Adin.” He looked over at Boaz. “No, I only saw him for a second, but Adin sketched him...”

Okay, good. Love you too.” He hung up. “We need to fax that to my partner, Tuan, Boaz.”

“Very good, sir,” said Boaz. “May I ask why?”

“You may ask,” he said dramatically, “but as the information seems to be flowing in one direction, I will feel free to remain silent.”

“Edward—”

Edward held up a hand. “Adin, the man I love is out there trying to get to the bottom of this. If you know anything and aren’t sharing it with me, I would say that’s a deal-breaker, wouldn’t you?”

Adin was silent for a moment. “I can’t tell you everything that happened to me. You wouldn’t believe it, anyway. I swear to you that the guy you saw me with just warned me not to try to retrieve *Notturmo*. He told me I wouldn’t survive it. That’s all.”

Edward punched Adin’s arm angrily. “That’s all? You fucking idiot! It’s like we’re all running around trying to find something that’s going to get you killed. We need to regroup.”

“Edward...”

“Let me put it this way. Drop me off at the house, and I’ll talk to Tuan. You go back to your hotel. Boaz?”

“Yes, sir?”

“If he leaves the room, kill him yourself.”

“Will do, sir.” Adin stared a pit into the back of Boaz’s head while Edward nodded.

When they arrived back near Alamo Park, Adin was left in the backseat alone to weigh things in his mind as Edward skipped lightly up the steps to his painted lady-style Victorian home.

“You should go back to the hotel now, Dr. Tredeger, all right? I’ll bring you what you like for dinner. Just...find something on television and stay out of things for a while. Mr. Edward is right. Things have changed.”

“You’ve got that right,” muttered Adin resentfully. “They sure *the fuck* have.”

## CHAPTER NINE

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Adin checked his watches again. In the darkness, the illuminated markers on his Rolex glowed faintly, telling him it was half past eleven. The television was still on, recapping the news of the day. Adin had screened two pricey pay-per-view movies and eaten the steak dinner Boaz brought him. He hadn't ordered it, but apparently Boaz didn't feel compelled to listen to him when he said he wasn't hungry. It turned out that as soon as he smelled the food, he was ravenous anyway.

Turning off the television, Adin opted for music on the clock radio. It had an iPod docking station, and Adin placed his player in it and cued up his classical playlist. He sighed as he sank deeply into the pillows, punching them around to make himself more comfortable. The truth was, he didn't want to be lying in bed. He wanted to be anywhere else, preferably forgetting he'd ever seen that *fucking* manuscript, and that called for drunken anonymity and men. Adin rolled over onto his dick as it came to life. Finally he threw the covers aside.

"Fuck this." He lurched out of bed and dressed in his club clothes, low-slung jeans that were indecently tight in all the right places, but loose in others so he could dance. He threaded a too-long, wide leather belt through the loops, pulling the end up through the belt itself and then down through its excess. He slipped a lightweight olive cashmere sweater over a tight T-shirt. In the bathroom, he messed up his hair and brushed his teeth, then added a dab of cologne at the last minute. Adin stared at his reflection in the mirror, liking what he saw.

When he was ready, he put condoms in his wallet and dialed Boaz. "Yes, Dr. Tredeger?" Boaz answered. At least he didn't just ignore him like a jailer when a prisoner rattled the bars with his tin cup.

"I'm going out. You can drive me, or you can watch me leave in a cab," Adin growled.

“That’s not strictly true, sir, as I’m not near the hotel at this time. I’ll be there in twenty.”

“To drive me or to watch me leave?”

“Once again, so droll, Dr. Tredeger.” Boaz hung up. *What the hell did that mean?*

Adin was out in front of the hotel, chatting with the doorman, when Boaz arrived with the limousine. Its size required that he park it on the street, but Adin saw him pull up, so he murmured his good-byes and went to meet it. When he got there, Boaz was holding the door open and only looking slightly reproachful.

“Good evening,” he said, as he took in Adin’s clothing. “I see it’s hunting season.”

“Yes, Boaz. I’m particularly fond of the sport.” He gave Boaz a defiant look as the man closed the door.

When Boaz entered the vehicle, he turned to Adin. “I take it it’s futile to try to talk some sense into you?”

“It is.”

“Where to, sir?” Boaz asked, all business.

“Take me to The Bar on Castro. I’m going dancing.”

“Would it do any good to mention that Mr. Fedeltà would prefer it if you—”

“Is there no ‘food’ to be had in Los Angeles? Did he miss a meal?”

“Dr. Tredeger.” Boaz sounded disappointed in him.

“I’m going dancing,” Adin repeated. “I doubt there will be many ancient-manuscript enthusiasts there. I will be perfectly safe.”

In answer, Boaz raised the privacy partition and headed to the Castro district. Adin looked out the window. A little dancing was just the thing to pull him out of his mood. If he could get his swerve on and get laid, maybe he could sleep.

The place was as packed as he remembered, an eclectic group of men and women from the young and hung to the straight and curious. The Friday crowd was well ahead of him,

the drunks loud and the bodies rocking. He got himself a beer and waded onto the dance floor with it, not caring that he was alone. He didn't stay alone for even the length of the song, a number of other bodies joining his, some guys, some girls, all pressing and groping in the tiny space until he'd finished his dance and his beer and was flushed and shiny with sweat.

"Hey, pretty." A man behind him snaked a hand over his shoulder to rest on his chest. Adin looked down and saw the hand had neatly trimmed nails. He turned to find a reasonably good-looking, dark-haired man with a tattoo of an eye on his neck standing behind him. Adin smiled. He continued to dance to the throbbing beat, not knowing and not caring whom he danced with, content to brush and touch and work his body hard. The other bodies, most of whom Adin never actually looked at beyond ascertaining what space they occupied, began to exert a soothing kind of pull on his senses, like the ebb and flow of waves when he swam in the sea, lifting him, pulling him down, challenging his equilibrium, and lulling him into a kind of transcendent euphoria.

It was within this space that he first heard the hissing sounds, like the slithering of hundreds of snakes beneath his feet. It began as part of the music, the noise, and—much like the sweat that dripped from his face and caused him to remove his sweater and tuck it into the back of his jeans—it wasn't a distraction. The hand that now caressed his chest pulled him closer into a solid, muscled body, its contours and valleys brushing Adin's like hard wind. Adin felt the man's erection and deliberately rocked into it, taking pleasure where it was offered, indicating he could give pleasure if he chose. The man slid his hand down to Adin's waist, pulling him back flush against his cock, grinding a little, and Adin expelled a sharp breath.

"Pretty, *pretty*." The man spoke into his ear, causing the hair to tickle the back of Adin's neck.

Adin sighed and leaned back against him, putting a hand up to caress the stranger's hair. Another man moved up beside Adin, also touching him, running a finger down Adin's face and taking his hand; the new man joined the erotic dance with them, finding new places to graze a hand or brush a body part. The

three of them swayed there, under the hot strobe light, with the bass thumping inside and outside their bodies. A fourth man came to join them then, another tall man, who brushed and touched and bumped until Adin was breathless with wanting. He swayed and moved, rubbing up against the first, who held him flush against his body as the others groped him.

The hissing in Adin's head turned to whispers, then strange words that soothed and excited him, as his arousal numbed his brain and turned off his other senses. He heard Spanish words, under his skin, like crawling, predatory insects that burrowed deep within and moved about in a parody of the dance the five men did on the dance floor.

"Who?" asked Adin, unable to move away, unable to feel the fear he *knew* should be making his heart race and his mouth dry.

"*Querido mio,*" said one, "*que guapo.*" He lifted one of Adin's hands and, turning it over, took a sharp, stinging bite out of his wrist, lapping at the immediate blood there and, just as quickly, closing the wound with a sensuous lick of his tongue.

Adin reacted to the pain, now stirring from the drugged stupor of the dance, when the man who held him bit his neck. Again, he delivered a bite and a lick so quickly that Adin hardly knew what was happening until it was over. He craned his neck to see the man behind him and was appalled to see a gleam of amusement in his eyes. That's when the truth clanged into place as irrevocably as if it were the vault in a bank crashing to a close. He was a toy. They were out there, everywhere; he was a pretty bauble for them to play with, and it amused them.

Adin tried to shove the men surrounding him away, but they held him, and it seemed so easy for them it made him sick inside. He could no sooner free a limb or pull a small distance away than one of them would catch it again and pull him closer. He fought, but it was like a rip current: the more he struggled, the stronger their holds on him became.

The three men continued to bite and lick, tormenting him with pricks of their teeth so sharp they slid into his skin like hot knives through ice cream. In the shifting anonymity of the

crowd, it looked like they were just dancing. When they licked his wounds closed, *dear heaven*, he couldn't help the pleasure that gave him, the feeling that they weren't licking the tiny punctures they put into his exposed skin, but that they swirled those exquisite, slick tongues right over the head of his cock, up and down under the crown, along the vein... He thought he'd die of ecstasy.

One second the pain would sear his skin; the next pleasure would engulf him. He still fought to break free, fought their holds on him, but they were much stronger, and fighting only brought him a different kind of pain, as they weren't above ruthlessly jabbing him with their bony elbows, hard enough to bruise or even crack a rib, or pulling his head down below the sightline of the sea of bobbing people and giving it a sharp, shocking pop with a fist that he was sure would show up as a black eye the following day. In the end, they bit, licked, and beat him until, just as suddenly, they left, throwing him to the ground and delivering a few vicious kicks to his hips and thighs, making him weak and dizzy. He was crawling to the side of the dance floor when several pairs of hands lifted him up, patting him and pushing him away.

More than once he heard what sounded like, "Fucking drunk, ought to know better."

Adin made it as far as a wall against the patio, where he leaned hard, catching his breath, and called Boaz on his cell phone. The noise was impossible, and he didn't know whether Boaz even heard him before he hung up. He stumbled his way to the exit, to Castro Street, and into even more people who took his staggering and the torn and dirty state of his clothing as one more example of simple inebriation and shockingly bad taste.

Eventually Boaz arrived with the car, his dark eyes unreadable as he opened the door. Adin crawled into the backseat. Boaz didn't meet his eyes after that, which didn't surprise him. Adin's humiliation was complete. Men like Donte could use him. They could play with him; they could eat him or fuck him or tear him apart like fresh bread. He *had* known it but



hadn't let it sink into the part of his consciousness that knew without thinking that fire was hot and would burn you if you touched it.

Now he knew.

They drove through the night in silence. Adin tried to read his watch, cursing that he'd chosen to wear only the one, his father's. By the illumination of a reading light, he saw the crystal had been cracked during the scuffle. He turned the light off and slumped in his seat, trying hard to comprehend what had happened. Every part of his body hurt, and he was so exhausted he'd begun to drift.

Only a week before, Adin considered himself a capable man, good at his job, certain of his life. Only a week before, the things he dreamed about were just that; he'd known his nightmares were an illusion, and he'd always known he'd wake up sooner or later.

Only a week before, Adin had dared to believe that *he* was the top of the food chain.

## CHAPTER TEN

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Adin's mind drifted lazily away from his body as Boaz drove. It began to occur to him that the trip back to the hotel was taking a great deal longer than the trip to the bar. He opened his eyes to look around and realized they'd been driving for some time, probably over the bridge into Sausalito. He knew he'd probably slept; that soon the sun would begin to glow on the horizon, but nothing he saw was familiar to him.

"Boaz?" he asked, suddenly startled out of his dreamlike state. "Where are we? Where are you taking me?"

"I'm not allowed to say, sir," Boaz replied. "I'm very sorry for the inconvenience."

"This is more than inconvenient, Boaz. It's kidnapping. It's a criminal offense. Please take me back to the hotel. I believe I've quite learned whatever lesson you wanted to teach me." Adin felt his throat tighten.

Boaz looked at him in the rearview mirror, and Adin caught the sadness in his voice. "You can't imagine that I wanted you to experience that, Dr. Tredeger."

Adin looked out the window. "No, I don't suppose you did." He fidgeted with his watch. "What was that about, Boaz? I thought you said that Donte marked me in some way as his property. That no one would challenge him."

"That would usually be the case, sir." Boaz hesitated, as if choosing his words very carefully. "It's been my experience that no one in this area would ever consider challenging Donte Fedeltà."

"So I'm special? I'm vampire crack?"

"No, sir, I doubt that. Well...I don't think so. It appears someone has decided to move on Donte, and you were in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"Ah." Adin sighed. "My lucky day."

"I'm sorry, sir. I should have stayed closer. I didn't see any of this coming. I don't know what Donte will say when he sees—"

"Is that where we're going? To Donte? What if I were to say that I want to go back to the hotel, right now, Boaz? I don't want to see Donte."

"I wouldn't necessarily believe you."

"I don't want him to see me." Adin held his shaking hands out where he could see them. "Not like this." He gingerly probed a particularly painful place near his eye and imagined he had a spectacular bruise. "Do I look as bad as I feel?"

"Probably."

"Take me to the Kabuki, Boaz. There's no point in Donte seeing me when I look like—"

"We're here, sir." Boaz turned into the gate of what could only be described as an estate. There was no sign or name at the entrance, but the gates opened automatically, and Boaz negotiated the long car through the narrow entry. He continued along a tree-lined driveway until a spectacular house came into view. It had the charm of a Tuscan holiday villa, a stone structure with climbing vines of all shapes and colors covering the walls on the outside, carefully pruned back around the windows and doors. In the distance, lit with landscape lighting, Adin could see the land, what seemed to be an orchard on the right, and a garden on the left with a fountain and large, shady trees. When Boaz stopped the limousine, the front door opened and Donte swept out. He wore suit trousers and a white shirt, and some sort of immensely luxurious, golden-colored robe that hung open as he walked, whipping out behind him. Adin looked immediately to the sky, but although he could see the first blush of dawn, the sun wasn't yet visible.

"Dear heaven, Adin," Donte murmured as he opened the car door. Adin all but fell out into his arms. "What have they done to you?" He shot Boaz a speaking glance and helped Adin to the entrance of the house. Boaz followed.

“Here,” Donte said, turning from the hallway to a large room with a lit fireplace. “This place is always damp and cold, no matter how Tuscan the architecture may appear.”

Donte deposited Adin in a large leather chair and left with Boaz. He could hear their heated discussion, although it was mostly hissed in whispers of Italian and what sounded like Arabic. If Adin had felt better, he would have intervened. As it was, he was unable to keep Donte from giving Boaz a dressing down he didn’t deserve. When Donte returned, he was alone.

“Donte,” Adin said as Donte placed a heavy quilt over him. “It wasn’t his fault. I gave him no choice in the matter.”

Donte’s eyes were hard. “Neither did I. But it appears that he chose to placate you rather than follow my orders.”

“That’s not fair.”

“Isn’t it? What if they’d killed you?”

“I hardly think it likely they’d murder me on a dance floor full of—”

“You know less than nothing,” Donte spat. “Boaz, however, is fully cognizant of what could have happened to you.” He seemed to look around for something. “Never mind. It is finished. Where are my manners? May I get you something to eat or drink?”

“No, thank you. I find I’m very tired.” Adin sighed. He sensed the barest movement in the room, yet suddenly Donte was kneeling next to his chair. He took one of Adin’s arms in his hand, studying the tiny bite marks there. He rubbed a delicate thumb over one shallow set.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Yes.” Donte waited.

“Why is it that sometimes I hear a noise in my head when the undead are near, and sometimes I’m taken completely by surprise.”

Donte considered this. “It’s like a rattlesnake...you understand? A signal. Sometimes I hunt by stealth, and

sometimes I use noise, like beaters, to warn or flush out my prey. We all do this, in varying degrees.”

“I see. I thought...if I could tell when the undead were around, I could protect myself. When I was attacked at the club, I didn’t sense it coming. I didn’t know who they were until they bit me.” Adin pressed his lips together in a white line. He’d despised being a chew toy.

“I’m sorry about that,” Donte whispered. “I was vain. I thought no one would harm you if you were under my protection. I was wrong, caro, and you paid for that.” Donte stroked Adin’s cheek, and he leaned into it a little.

“Is there anything I could do? Crucifixes?”

Donte shook his head.

“Holy water? Garlic is out, you already told me that.”

“Here,” said Donte, reaching into his pocket. He pressed what looked to be a laser pointer into Adin’s hand. “I bought this for you. I was going to give it to Boaz to pass along.”

Adin examined it and noticed it had a small oval-shaped silver button on the side. He pressed it, and light illuminated the room like an exploding star, beginning at the pen itself, and radiating outward, filling the entire space with a brilliant flash.

“*Fuck*, Adin!” Donte stepped heavily onto Adin’s foot. “By all the gods! Are you *insane*? You just push any button you find?”

Adin’s eyes were tearing, and he hunched over and placed his palm over them. His foot hurt like the devil. “What the hell *was* that?”

“It’s a personal safety device. I cannot defend myself against it, even if I know it’s coming. It will give you time to run.”

“Am I going to need to run?” Adin asked quietly through the black clouds in his field of vision. “From you?”

Donte didn’t answer; instead he found Adin’s mouth and pressed their lips together. He pulled Adin close and leaned in, rubbing his face against Adin’s throat.

Donte stroked Adin’s hair. “They—”

“*Snacked* on me.” Adin cut him off. “Yes, I quite understood. An amuse-bouche.”

“Oh, *Adin*.” Donte held him in a way Adin was certain he could get used to all too quickly. “On a lighter note, it will be fully five minutes before I can see again, but will be no time at all before your eyes are back to normal.” He felt for Adin’s hand and took it. “Are you all right?”

“I’m fine, Donte, really.” Adin shifted in his chair, drawing the quilt more tightly around him. Donte drew back. They stayed like that in silence for a time.

Adin finally spoke. “I’m cold. Perhaps I could take a shower? Then a few hours’ sleep, and I’ll be perfectly all right.”

“Yes, of course. I’ll have Boaz...” He turned back to Adin. “I really am very sorry. This is something most unexpected. I have never been challenged like that.”

“I see.”

“No, you don’t.” Donte’s eyes were soft and full of mockery. “How could you?”

“I see that you didn’t mean for me to be hurt. That’s all I need to know, Donte.” Adin’s throat hurt, and he looked away. Adin could feel the tension leave his body as he enjoyed the brief, unexpected moment of quiet companionship.

“Come.” Donte got up abruptly. “I’ll show you where you can shower. Or would you prefer a bath?”

“No, a shower. I’d fall asleep in a bath and drown.”

“Not on my watch, Adin,” said Donte as he tugged on Adin’s hand to lead him up a flight of stairs. Adin followed him, noting the natural grace with which he moved, the sway of the robe around his calves, and the breadth of his shoulders.

Adin followed. “Who says I’d let you watch?”

Donte stopped on the landing and turned to face him, an amused smile playing about his mouth. He simply leaned over and kissed Adin lightly before he led him the rest of the way. Adin thought he heard him mutter “*παζζο*.”

“Who are you calling a—” Donte turned again, and his mouth descended on Adin’s, this time a strong brush of tender lips, more, Adin thought, to shut him up than to incite any kind of amorous feelings in him.

“The bathroom is through there,” Donte said. “One nice thing about the nouveau-authentic Tuscan villa is the hot water that comes from fifteen jets in the wall. Enjoy.” Donte opened the door for him and ushered him in, but closed it again behind him with a firm *snap* as he left.

Adin found himself alone in the modern, luxurious bath. He walked to the sink to get a glimpse of his face in the mirror and was shocked by what he saw. No wonder Donte had been concerned. He appeared bloodless and ill. He carefully folded the quilt and laid it on a cabinet top next to some towels.

The bruises around Adin’s left eye stood out in hideous relief on his pale face. There were purple swellings on his jaw and smudges under both eyes from lack of sleep. As he peeled off the clothing he’d worn to the club, he laid it out carefully as it was all he had until he returned to the hotel. He placed his phone and his hotel key card along with his watch and wallet on a small shelf.

It took Adin a moment of study to ascertain how to turn on the water, but once he did, he could well understand Donte’s comment about it being a very pleasant thing. As soon as he stepped into the marble-tiled shower, he was caressed by jets of pulsing hot water. He adjusted the temperature and the force of the spray, and then just put his hands on the wall and enjoyed it. He let it swirl away the tension from his body and rinse his anxiety down the drain. It soothed sore muscles, removed the crusted, dried blood, and generally made him feel better than he had in days. He sighed when he left the luxurious enclosure. While he showered, someone had removed his clothing and placed an impossibly large white terry robe in its place. It felt soft and warm against his tingling skin. He emerged from the shower to find Donte waiting patiently against the wall opposite the bathroom door along the hall.

“Hello,” Donte said. “I trust you feel better?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve had Boaz make up a room. He’ll go into town and retrieve your things later. In the meantime, he’s left a small tray of food and some kind of pain tablets, ibuprofen maybe, for you to take. He said you would no doubt be sore when you wake.” Donte led him to a small bedroom with large windows overlooking the orchard. Avoiding the direct light, he drew the drapes. “Shall I turn on the light?”

“Yes, please.” Adin thought that darkness was the last thing he wanted right at that moment.

“You’re frightened?” Adin sat on the side of the modestly sized bed. It was large but not a master suite. The room, in fact, looked as though it had been created for a teenage boy. The hint of a nautical theme played in the colors and the linens, and the spare furnishings stood in contrast to large, robustly lovely seascapes on the wall.

“Frightened? No, not really.” Adin lay on top of the covers. Donte turned to the dresser and picked up a tray, which he deposited on the side of the bed opposite the one Adin occupied. He picked a grape off a cluster and held it out to Adin, who shook his head.

Donte ate the grape himself, then spit the skin and the seeds into his hand and wrapped them in the napkin. “At least the tea,” he said, handing Adin the mug. “And perhaps the pain reliever? You’ll thank Boaz later.”

“Yes,” said Adin, taking the pills and the mug. “Are we not still on opposite sides of a quest? Isn’t this considered aid and comfort to the enemy?”

Donte’s dark eyes held accusation. “You can’t still think I’m the enemy.”

“No, I don’t.” Adin slipped the tablets into his mouth and then sipped his tea to swallow them. “I really don’t. How goes the search?” He replaced the mug on the tray and put it on the nightstand.



Donte cuffed him lightly on the shoulder, and Adin held his wince inside. “As if I would tell my archrival,” Donte said in that deep, rich voice.

“I have a confession to make.”

“What?” Donte went still.

“I began a translation of the journal in Los Angeles. I photographed it. I have it stored on my laptop. It’s not lost—”

“How could you do such a thing?” Donte’s anger wasn’t entirely unexpected.

“It was just standard—”

“No.” Donte rose from the bed and twitched the drapes so he could see into the garden from the safety of the shadows. “I don’t want to hear it.”

“Donte—” began Adin.

Donte turned suddenly. “It’s bad enough that it’s out there. It feels to me like...” He seemed to search for a word. “Like the corpse of my lover. I’ve tried to keep it safe; I’ve carried that journal for almost five centuries. Now you tell me you’ve made an electronic copy. That tells me it can be propagated all over the Internet like a...like a joke! I thought you might understand. I thought you might see...”

“I do understand. I do!” Adin got to his feet. “Damn you, stop yelling at me! My head hurts...” Adin wavered and fell backward, but Donte caught him even before he could hit the bed. “I’m sorry, Donte,” Adin murmured. He clung to Donte as the man settled him on the bed. “I didn’t understand any of it.”

Donte sighed as he helped Adin with the covers. “I know, più amato. I’m sorry I was cross.”

“How could I have known?” asked Adin. “How could I have foreseen any of this?”

“Shh,” said Donte. He smoothed the hair back from Adin’s face. “This will all still be there when you’ve slept.”

“How reassuring.”

“*Duro*,” whispered Donte, and Adin thought he heard a smile in the voice. “Tough guy.”

“Duro e sciocco.” *Tough and foolish.*

Donte shifted to rise from the bed, but Adin caught his hand. “Stay.”

“Adin?”

“Stay with me.” Adin pulled Donte down to the bed next to him. He held on to the large, elegant hand, interlacing his fingers with Donte’s. “Will you? At least until I fall asleep.”

“Yes. Better the monster you know, eh?” said Donte, sinking into the soft bedding and lifting his head onto an arm. “This is a very small bed, Adin.”

“I noticed,” said Adin, turning on his side. He couldn’t contain a grimace when he rolled onto a hip that had been bruised by a booted foot.

“I promise anyone who touched you will answer to me.”

“That’s not necessary.”

“We can agree to disagree when you feel better, caro.” Donte lifted his free hand to sweep a lock of Adin’s hair from his eyes. “I am at war with myself, Adin. Part of me wants to touch you, and part of me holds back because you need your sleep.”

Adin’s lips formed a smile.

“What?” Donte asked.

“It’s official. I’m vampire catnip.”

When Adin opened his eyes, he thought Donte’s smile was genuine. “Catnip. Yes. That’s it exactly, Adin.” Donte pulled Adin into his arms and stroked his hair. “Go to sleep before you say anything even more silly than that.”

Adin let out a deep breath. “I will.” He fell asleep, clutching one of Donte’s hands in his, with the fingers of Donte’s other hand combing lightly through his hair.

When Adin woke hours later, the drapes were open again and the very last of the late-afternoon sun slanted through the window. He could see the sunset bursting with brilliant hues of every shade of red and gold. He rose and looked out the window, and realized that he’d slept the entire day away. When

he looked at the bureau, there were fresh jeans and shirts folded neatly, along with a jacket, socks, underwear, and shoes. Boaz was nothing if not thorough. His laptop case sat on the nightstand where Adin left the tray earlier. He went stiffly through the motions of dressing, knowing how much worse it would have been without the shower and the medication, and went to find his host.

Adin found Boaz in the kitchen, humming while he whisked something together in a large bowl. Adin looked curiously over the rim, saying nothing.

“Frittata,” said Boaz.

“I’m sorry my actions got you in trouble with your boss.”

“I should have known better. He’s admitted you might be considered a handful.” Boaz grinned.

Adin shrugged. “Where is he?”

Boaz jerked his head toward a pair of French doors. “Kitchen garden.”

“Ah,” said Adin, taking off in that direction. “I’ll find him.”

“Please remind him I need herbs if he’s planning to eat dinner tonight.”

“I’ll remind him.” Adin exited the French doors and found Donte right away, seated on a bench reading a book. He was wearing the same robe but also had on a fairly large straw hat and work gloves. There was a small basket and a pair of pruners abandoned next to him. Adin walked over to him and sat, enjoying the early-evening air. “Boaz said not to forget he needs herbs.”

“Oh,” said Donte, closing his book with a snap. “Did he send you to find me?”

“I was coming anyway.” Adin looked around. “This is a lovely home.”

“Yes, it is, although it’s not mine. I borrow it when I’m in town. The man who owns it spends very little time here. He prefers Toronto, Canada. Can you imagine? Of course he’s Russian and used to the cold.”

“Is he—”

“Like me? Yes, although not as old. Few vampires are as old as I am, at least, here in America.”

“I see.”

“Shall we find Boaz his herbs?”

“He said only if you plan to eat.”

Donte gave him a pointed look. “Only if I plan for you to eat.”

“Oh.” Adin looked back the way he had come. “Of course. Well. Thank you. I am hungry.”

“You snap off a bit of that,” Donte said, pointing to a rosemary bush. “And I’ll just get some of this basil and some thyme.” He snipped them triumphantly. “I take it he’s making eggs. That’s all he knows how to cook, but by all accounts he makes them rather tasty.”

“He said frittata,” said Adin, following Donte back into the house.

“Eggs, by any other name.” Donte dropped the herbs on the worktop for Boaz, who was frying potatoes. Boaz nodded his thanks. “Come, and we’ll find a wine to drink with this.”

Adin’s cell phone rang. “Tredeger.”

“Adin.” Tuan’s voice. He waved Donte on without him and walked back to the French doors, exiting out into the garden.

“Tuan? Did you find *Notturmo*?”

“Not yet, Adin. I’m calling about something else.”

“Edward?”

“No, he’s fine. He’d kill me if he knew I called you without him knowing. I’m holding the sketch you did of the guy from the restaurant. Good job, by the way.”

“Thanks. Listen, I was thinking that maybe I could pose as a prospective buyer. Even really buy *Notturmo*, if necessary.”

For a moment there was silence on the other end of the line. “Adin, you need to give up on that manuscript.”

“What?” Adin couldn’t believe he heard Tuan right.

“Right now. This minute.” Tuan paused. “I know more about this than you think. I’m still trying to find it. But you need to leave it alone. Not another word. Whatever you do, don’t try an end run around me, because you’re going to get hurt.”

“Tuan, what the fuck?” Adin felt tears sting his eyes again. “You know I can’t just—”

“Adin!” Tuan snapped. “Look. I’m telling you for your own safety. Let me handle the manuscript, stick with Boaz and don’t invite *anyone* into your hotel room.”

Adin processed this. “Don’t invite... Tuan, are you telling me you know what I’ve...?”

“I have to go. You *know* what I’m talking about. Just remember it and don’t screw up.”

“Tuan!” Adin heard the click on the line. *Shit.* Tuan knew.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

---

Having gotten a plate of food and a glass of wine from Boaz, Adin followed Donte into the dining room, numbly going over the phone conversation with Tuan in his head. Tuan knew. *He had to know. Why else would he...?* Donte stopped abruptly, and Adin walked into his strong back.

“What?” Adin asked. He looked around the impersonal room. The long mahogany table glistened and reflected the light from a chandelier. It must seat twenty-four, thought Adin, looking around. The room was magnificent, stately. Perfect for power dining.

“I hate this room,” said Donte, turning. “Do you mind if we dine elsewhere?”

“Not at all.”

“Come. I like the garden best.” Donte led them back the way they came. When they arrived in the kitchen, Boaz was no longer in evidence and the dishwasher was running almost soundlessly.

Donte pulled his straw hat off a hook near the door and seated it back on his head. He opened the French doors and indicated that Adin should go ahead of him. They walked together to the stone bench where Donte had been reading and sat side by side. Adin set his plate in his lap and placed his wine on the bench beside him.

“Perfect day,” Donte murmured. “Overcast enough to venture out during the day, shady, not too cool. The sky... What a sunset.”

Adin said nothing.

“Do you garden, Adin?”

“Not much, really,” Adin replied. He took a morsel of egg onto his fork and tasted it. Donte was right, Boaz knew his way

around an egg dish. "I have a garden in Washington, where I live, but I'm gone so much of the time..."

"I think of all things...I miss the sun on my skin the most. Lying naked and warm, stretched out on the earth in the spring."

Adin swallowed hard. He covered by taking a sip of wine. "It must be hard."

"I liked to garden. The irony is that I could have been a monk, charged with tending the herb garden, drying and storing plants for medicinal uses. Then my older brothers died, making me the heir, which was a dreadful stroke of bad luck, although you cannot know how many people congratulated me as though I'd poisoned them myself. As if I would have chosen to go back to San Sepolcro."

Adin was silent, eating slowly and waiting for Donte to continue. Donte did no more than sip his wine, refilling their glasses as necessary.

"I did busy myself about the estate," Donte continued. "I cared about my father's land and wanted to pass it intact or better to my sons. Now it is as if that was the brief introduction to an interminable passion play."

Adin put his hand on Donte's knee.

"I've told you more about myself than I've told anyone in centuries. I don't really know why. You have a stillness about you that makes me confide."

"Oh, I doubt that." Adin laughed. "I don't believe I've ever been called still."

"Perhaps it's because you've been pounded into submission." Donte grinned. "Are you very sore?"

"No." Adin shook his head. "I just feel foolish. It occurs to me that the world is full of frightening things, and I'm the last to know."

"Oh, caro," Donte said indulgently. "Surely not the *very* last."

"How reassuring. Donte?"

“Yes?”

“Can you do that thing again? Make me see things the way I did in the cemetery?”

“Ah,” said Donte with a genuine smile, putting his plate aside. “You liked my little gift?”

“I did.” Adin wanted to share how much he’d liked it, but didn’t have the words.

“Yes, caro.” Donte swirled the wine in his glass. Adin put his plate down on the bench beside him as well and waited. “Nothing would give me more pleasure than to amuse you again.”

Adin held his wine and looked around as the subtle yet significant changes began to take place within him. The first thing he noticed was birdsong, notes of music he could pick out, coming from everywhere around him. He could smell the earth, mossy and cool beneath his feet, and the herbs, a hundred, maybe more, different types of plant material and flowers close all around him. Donte reached over and ran a curious finger down the side of his neck, and Adin almost moaned with the contact. He could feel his heart beating, feel the slow, steady rush of his blood through his veins. He began to sense Donte’s arousal, and although there was no answering heartbeat, his own sped up, and he knew Donte could hear it. He took Donte’s hand and placed it over his heart.

“I know, caro,” Donte whispered. “I can feel it. I can see the pulse in your throat.”

Adin was suddenly aware of the smell of Donte’s skin, faintly salty, faintly herbal. Adin could smell the coppery, metallic scent of blood, and the faint traces of soap and shampoo. Everything hummed and surged and teemed with life, and Adin wanted to taste it on his tongue, to bite into it and savor it.

“Donte—” he said, agitated, afraid of the vastness of the space around him, the depth and breadth of the feelings he was experiencing.



“Shh,” soothed Donte, catching his hand. He pulled Adin to standing and led him to a small private section of the garden, pulling him to the soft, mossy ground. “Adin.” He pushed Adin to lie back and shrugged out of his robe.

Adin lifted his hands and worked the buttons of Donte’s shirt, helping him to open it and slide it down off his back and arms, freeing his hands, which were stuck in the cuffs until they were laughing as Donte shook it off. Adin’s hands went to Donte’s buckle and loosened it, making short work of the fastenings of his trousers. Donte’s cock spilled hard and heavy into his hands. Its velvety length, the loose foreskin, and the way it throbbed under his sensitive fingertips all felt wholly new to Adin, even though he’d explored plenty of uncircumcised men. It seemed to him the slick glide of Donte’s penis in and out of its delicate sheath, the way the darkly engorged head glistened when it emerged, was exotic and thrilling yet familiar all at once.

They wriggled and pushed, loosening Adin’s clothes, easing Donte out of his trousers, sliding and rolling until they were both naked. All the while, Adin’s senses assaulted him with sights and sounds and scents he’d never experienced before, and he was arching and gasping into Donte’s mouth, begging him, “Please, Donte...please.”

“Yes, Adin?” Donte asked, rocking on him, creating little wildfires all along his skin.

“Can you make me sick?”

Donte stopped, and Adin moaned at the loss of momentum. “What? You mean with diseases? No, they cannot live inside the undead.”

Adin rolled them both and came up over Donte, kissing him and holding his hands. He inched his way down Donte’s body until he could bury his face in the dark thatch of hair behind Donte’s erect cock. Adin teased Donte with his tongue, he licked and sucked at the fragile skin and the rigid shaft beneath it until it was slick and juicy with spit and precum. Adin slid up Donte’s long, cool length and looked down into his face.

The thousand things Adin's senses were telling him narrowed in focus to the one impossibly erotic sensation of a thick cock as he straddled Donte and held himself still. His breath left him as he let himself down and down, stretching and opening himself consciously, gathering Donte's upper body into his arms. He pressed his forehead to Donte's and allowed himself to feel the vampire's powerful muscles ripple and shift as Donte rose to sitting and drove himself deeper still.

"Oh, *fuck*, Donte," Adin murmured and went boneless in his arms. He could smell the earth, see in the encroaching darkness, but most of all, every molecule of his body was alive to the nearness of his lover, and his blood sang Donte's song in his veins.

"Adin," Donte murmured as his lips brushed Adin's hair. He crushed Adin to him. "Più amato..."

Donte's breathless whisper stirred Adin, who rocked and squeezed and slid against him, reaching for the kind of pleasure only Donte could give. He couldn't think beyond being close to Donte, devouring him. Before he knew it, he'd bitten down on the thick muscle of Donte's shoulder while wrapping around him like a living pretzel.

"Caro." Donte sighed against his skin. "Caro, I need you..."

Adin pressed Donte's face against his throat and let his head fall back in total surrender. The second Donte's teeth sank into the tender flesh, Adin shuddered into his climax. He cried out and jerked in Donte's arms until Donte rolled them over and pressed him hard into the ground beneath them, surging into Adin one final time. Donte continued to lap and suck at Adin's neck, and pleasure crept through Adin's body like frost as he continued to quiver and tremble violently beneath the larger man.

"Ah," Adin cried out... "Ah...ah...Donte," he moaned, clinging, crying. "Mother of G—"

"*Adin*." Donte lifted his hand and smoothed the hair back from Adin's sweat- and tear-streaked face.

"Ah, Donte," said Adin, trembling as he slipped further into a whispering blackness that began in his blood, then coursed

through his body and worked its way to his brain. “Donte, what’s happening to me?”

“Shh,” soothed Donte. “Shh, più amato, *fidati ti me.*” *Trust me.*

“Donte...I feel...” Adin trailed off as the blackness swelled and claimed him.

When Adin awoke, he realized he was back in the small bedroom he’d slept in during the day. When he shifted, he felt the bed dip beside him. Donte’s face came into view, and he lifted Adin’s head and held a bottle of water to his lips. Adin still felt fuzzy-headed and limp.

“Forgive me, Adin. I was thoughtless. Please drink.”

Adin weakly pushed himself to sitting and took the bottle Donte offered him. “Don’t be an idiot, Donte. I’ll be fine.”

“Yes, tough guy, you will be fine,” Donte mocked. “You have been beaten, drained, and fucked senseless, but heaven forbid you allow me to take care of your delicate human ass.”

“Donte!” Adin laughed, and Donte shrugged.

“Sometimes you are like a child.”

“What about you?” Adin gasped with outrage. “I am Donte, the apex of the—”

Donte’s mouth came down on Adin’s to claim it, and Adin’s pulse quickened.

Donte sat back and shook his head. He put his hand on Adin’s chest. “Your heart always dances for me. That is a very enticing thing, Adin.”

“Come here.” Adin caught Donte’s face between both his hands and drew him in for a kiss. Donte’s phone rang, and he broke free with an effort, smiling at Adin in a way that made the smaller man’s toes curl. He held up a hand and took the phone to the doorway.

“Fedeltà,” he said, slipping outside the door. Adin could hear him speaking Italian in hushed tones. Adin couldn’t hear

exactly what they were saying, and when Donte returned, he couldn't read what was in Donte's eyes either.

"Bad news?" Adin asked, concerned when Donte remained silent and still beside him, all teasing and play gone from him as though it had never existed.

"Nothing you need worry about, caro. Finish your water, please," he said, slipping back into the bed and sliding down until his head rested on Adin's thighs. Adin, still sitting upright with his back against the headboard, took the opportunity to run a hand through Donte's thick, dark hair.

"So soft," Adin murmured and drank the bottled water dutifully. "Who was on the phone, Donte?" Adin put his empty bottle on the nightstand. "Has something changed?"

Donte drew him closer. "Just sleep, Adin. The world will be a different place tomorrow."

Adin slid down and nestled into Donte's shoulder. They lay side by side, staring at one another for a long time. Adin slipped a hand down to the small of Donte's back to draw him closer. Donte sighed against his lips.

"Adin?" he whispered, his lips slipping past Adin's ear as he sought out his throat.

"Hm," Adin murmured sleepily.

"Forgive me, caro," Donte said and struck, his teeth sinking once again into the tender flesh at the base of Adin's throat. Adin struggled to push Donte off him. Donte's sudden attack shocked him. His hand slapped against the nightstand as he felt frantically for the light device Donte had given him. Donte reached for his arm and pinned it to the bed.

"Donte... Stop. Wait!" He gasped as he felt his skin tear lightly. Donte growled, a feral snarl that froze Adin in place even as Donte increased the pressure against him and held him fast. It was only a moment more before Adin lost consciousness again.

Adin pulled on a shirt and jeans and staggered to the bathroom when the first rays of light slanted across his bed

from the east window of the room. He caught sight of himself in the mirror and for a half a second failed to recognize his pale and discolored face.

“Dontel!” he called, rushing to the hall, which made his head spin. He walked along leaning against the wall, propping himself up, his bare feet hardly registering the cold of the tile floor.

Boaz was in the kitchen grinding coffee. “Boaz, where is Dontel?” Boaz didn’t meet his eyes. “Boaz, answer me!”

“He’s gone, sir.”

“What?” Adin fell into one of the chairs at the small rustic kitchen table, trembling slightly.

Boaz sat across from him. For a time he was quiet, his dark eyes gazing sadly at Adin, whose hands gripped the edge of the chair he sat on as if it would throw him if he let go.

“I believe he got a call last night indicating where he could retrieve the manuscript, and he’s gone after it.”

Adin took a quiet moment to reflect that betrayal felt cold. “I see.”

“I don’t think he felt—”

“I quite understand, Boaz. He did mention that he wouldn’t let anything stand in his way.”

“I don’t believe it gave him any pleasure.”

“Ah, yes,” Adin said, rising. “Of course. The *pleasure* was all mine.” He began walking back the way he’d come, determined to get to his room, throw his things in a bag, and quit this place as soon as possible.

“Dr. Tredeger,” Boaz called after him.

“Get ready to take me back to the hotel, Boaz.”

“But Mr. Fedeltà—”

Adin closed the bedroom door in the smaller man’s face and locked it. Leaning against it, he found he was dizzy and short of breath, and equally determined not to let Boaz see him like that.

“Just get ready. I’m packing. I won’t interfere with Mr. Fedeltà’s pursuit of his prize.”

Boaz didn't answer right away. Then he said grimly, "Yes, sir."

"And Boaz!"

"Yes, sir?"

Adin steadied himself against the door, his heart pounding and his eyes strangely wet-feeling against the back of his clammy hand as he wiped them. "Call me 'sir' one more time, and I will kick your tiny Lebanese *fucking* ass."

Adin lurched away from the door and began shoving his belongings into one of Donte's large, high-thread-count pillowcases.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

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“You’re sure about this,” Boaz said as he took Adin’s Pullman out of the trunk. Adin thought the smaller man looked more tired somehow than when he’d dropped him off at the Kabuki the day before. It had taken Adin most of the rest of the day to make arrangements, and then he’d taken the time to get in touch with Edward and Tuan to say good-bye. They’d suggested meeting for dinner, but he’d demurred, knowing there was no way he could explain his current physical state.

Exhausted and ready to leave, he held his case close to his side as Boaz closed the trunk. They stood in the passenger drop-off zone. “There’s nothing for me to do here,” Adin replied. “I’ve filed the insurance claim on *Notturmo*, and the university president wants to see me in person.” He pursed his lips. “I imagine I’ll enjoy a brief period of self-pity, after which I’ll start teaching classes again. Who knows? Maybe the next time I find something interesting, only leprechauns will get pissed off. Surely I can take a leprechaun.”

“I see the self-pity has begun early,” Boaz remarked as he slapped a garment bag at Adin.

“Why are you so angry at me?” Adin picked up his things. “Everyone is telling me that at least three of the horsemen of the apocalypse are after that book, and I have no business anywhere near it. I’m taking their advice. I’m taking my fragile fucking *human* ass home where I can lick my wounds in private.”

“Mr. Fedeltà—”

“Mr. Fedeltà will be relieved.” He looked into Boaz’s warm brown eyes. “Tell him I hope he gets the manuscript. Tell him—” He shook his head. “Just tell him I *really* want him to get it back, okay?”

“Okay, Dr. Tredeger. I’ll tell him.” Adin turned and left Boaz in the loading zone with the limo.



Adin checked his luggage and went through security. It was early for his flight, but he'd had to check out of the hotel room, so he'd brought his laptop and planned a large liquid meal before boarding. He gathered his belongings from the gray rubber tub where he'd placed them, then walked the short distance to some chairs so he could put on his shoes. While he was rearranging his things and putting on his jacket, he firmly reminded himself that he loved his cottage on Bainbridge Island and nearly convinced himself what pure pleasure it would be to return home again.

Adin found an airport bar where he ordered a nondescript whiskey; then he spread out and retrieved his laptop, setting it up to work. When his phone rang, he assumed it was probably his sister returning his call.

"Tredeger."

"Caro." Donte's voice was grim. "I understand you're leaving San Francisco?"

"Yes," Adin replied. "I'm going home."

"Was it true? What you told Boaz?"

"What?"

"That you hoped I would retrieve my journal." Donte hesitated. "Did you mean that, *più amato*?"

"Yes." Adin's voice cracked. There was a silence on the other side while Donte digested this.

"I have it. I took it from the man who stole it from you. He will not be stealing from anyone again."

Adin closed his eyes, trying not to think what that might mean. "I'm glad you have it." He cleared his throat. "I guess the end justifies the means."

"I'm not sorry for my actions. I had to render you unable to interfere."

"You scared me."

"You should have *always* been scared." Donte sounded angry. "I can't comprehend why your ignorance persists."

"My ignorance."

“You know we exist. There are more monsters in the world than you can imagine, and you must know there are those who would see you dead because of your connection with me. You can no longer claim ignorance. You must abandon its false security.”

“I don’t claim to *be* ignorant, Donte.” Adin rubbed at his temple with a finger while he tried to make sense of his feelings. “I have faith, which I am certain is misplaced entirely, in my ability to continue my life even given this new knowledge. And I have faith, Donte, in you. Even—it seems—after your many attempts to eradicate it.”

“*Adin*,” Donte growled in his ear through the phone. “What the *hell* do you use for brains?”

A plane took off beyond the glass windows of the busy airport, and the noise sounded shocking and loud to Adin’s ears. “Sorry. I’m very happy for you. I hope you know...” Adin idly opened the images of the diary on his computer. “I hope you know that.”

“Perhaps I’ve been harsh—”

“Look. Spare me any further lectures, all right? Thank you for letting me know about the journal. I really am very glad you have it.”

“I see. You’re welcome.” Donte hesitated. “Take care of yourself, Adin.”

“Thank you.” Adin sighed. “Don’t eat any wooden Indians.” He hung up, savoring the rich timbre of Donte’s laughter.

Adin ordered a double of whatever he was drinking. *Notturmo* was out of reach, and with it, Donte. He knew he should feel, if not good, at least philosophical about his loss. No one would be happy at the university, but the manuscript was insured. He was going home. Soon, he thought, the sucking blackness in his heart would be just a dim memory. He continued to read and drink.



*Renata has somehow ferreted out our secret, my love, yet you are far away and I am here. I keep this journal where she cannot find it as she has*

*destroyed the others. I don't care what she thinks, and I'm certain she cares not at all what we do, as long as we are discreet. She has the children, both boys, and if she chooses she can take a legion of lovers and have more or none at all. It is not a hardship to be Renata. That she was angry surprised me more than I can tell you, though, because she has been willfully unkind since the day we married and I thought she liked me not at all. I should have thought she'd be pleased to be rid of my unwanted attentions and glad to have my protection. Who can tell with women?*

*Now I am free to spend all my time in dreams of you. I hear your wife has given you a son! My beloved, congratulations, I know how you will love him. My own sons are growing strong, the eldest once again is on a reign of terror with the animals, taking his passion out now by chasing after the horses. He will be a fine horseman, as he shows no fear whatsoever. It fills me with pride to ride with him before me and to teach him to sit a horse. Something you can look forward to teaching your Cristiano.*

*I look forward only to gazing on your beautiful face and giving you all the love I've held within me. As Renata refuses my company, I am entirely at your service and ready to fly at you like a harlot. When shall I see you? I have control over much, but you are the master of my heart.*



*My darling, I dream of you and pray this means you are well. I sent a letter to you last full moon, yet I wonder if it arrived. Renata plans something. I do not understand her. She has been secretive and spying, and has brought foreigners into our home that I cannot like. They feast all night and lie about stupid with wine in the daytime. They dance and drink and put on indescribably terrible plays. The last contained a veiled reference to us, my love, and it has made me cautious. I worry that she is unbinged. It is late summer, and I wish I could sit with you and savor the scents of the garden where I know you spend your time.*

*There has been so little time, has there not? It is not what I promised you at all. I hope that because you are an angel from heaven you will forgive me. The time of year makes me feel so empty without you. Far better when the land reflects my sorrow, as it does in the icy depths of winter when I do not expect to be happy. But in the late summer evenings, with the scent of the sweet blossoms in the air, I cannot tell you how completely dead I feel inside. My boys are the only joy of my life, and I love them fiercely. It is for*

*this reason alone that I have not killed their mother. Are you shocked? You shouldn't be.*

*You know that I am only a man, perhaps less than that if you look at me in the light. You are the angel, and I should never have aspired to bring you to the earth with me when I did, that first time. Once you lay with me, we were both damned. I'm sorry. I love you. Forgive me. I fear that you have been my very soul, without which, I am no more than an animal.*



*My beloved Auselmo, Tonight I have the privilege once again of watching you as you sleep. Forgive me for coming to your home, but I could not bear for one more day to wait and watch and wonder how you fare, while Renata and her foul friends take over my home and strip it of every comfort I have left.*

*How beautiful you are! You are made even more magnificent when you hold your son. He is fine and strong, and I'm sure he'll believe that you are the very god who holds the sun in the sky, as I do. I pray for him daily as I do my own sons, and hope his life is a charmed and happy one.*

*While you lie next to me in tangled linen, I plot how I will take you next, and what I will do, and I find I have only to run a finger down your cheek and you turn, ready for me. Tomorrow, I think I shall blindfold you and put a cloth about your ears so that you feel only what I give you to feel, and think only of me. Perhaps I shall bind your hands and touch you everywhere, so that you shiver with anticipation and anxiety and need. I am truly a monster, a devourer of innocence, and you, my love, my sustenance.*

*If you were not the very purest sweetness of my life, I could probably let you go, but all my life I will hold only you sacred, and be damned for it.*



When the buzzing began, at first Adin didn't know what to make of it. To him, it was an annoyance, like a gnat or a bee that continued to circle his head even though he had brushed it off. Adin blinked as the sound came nearer and looked around to see if anyone else was bothered by it. No one seemed to notice it. Then he realized it was whispering inside his head with the Spanish words that had so caressed and then assaulted him before at the nightclub. Before he even knew what he was doing, he was shutting down his laptop and shoving it into his

case. His keys fell to the floor, and when he went to retrieve them, he saw an exquisite pair of Italian leather loafers peeking out from under trousers tailored to a perfect break and creased to a knife-edge.

“Well, hello,” said a deeply masculine and richly cultured voice. “I must say I’m rather surprised.”

“I beg your pardon.” Adin rose to his full height.

“I thought you would be more...”

“More?” Adin’s eyebrows rose.

“Just more.” The man sighed. He smoothed his flawlessly white shirt collar and shot his cuffs. “I need to discuss the *Notturmo* manuscript with you.”

“I’m sorry. I no longer have it,” Adin replied. He turned to leave, anxious to get away from this man, anxious to find his gate and maybe hide until he could board his plane and return home.

“Yes, I know.” He caught Adin by the elbow and propelled him out into the terminal. Adin attempted to pull his arm away, but the man who held it in a viselike grip looked no more inconvenienced than if Adin had been a child. “Donte Fedeltà has it. Unfortunately that was the worst possible outcome, and I am now forced to make other plans.” The man looked around him and pulled Adin into a break in the wall near a drinking fountain and a pay phone. He smiled. Adin tried to push his way around the man, who had him trapped between his body and the wall.

“I can’t see how that could possibly have anything to do with me... Mr...”

“Santos.” He looked distracted. “I’m Cristobel Santos, and I’m afraid it has everything to do with you...”

“What?” asked Adin as Santos smiled a convivial smile and leaned in as if to speak with him privately. The next thing Adin knew, Santos pulled him close and clamped down on his neck with razor-sharp teeth, sinking so deep he gasped. Adin struggled, but it was no use. Santos held him in an iron grip and fed from him. There was no pleasure with Santos. He could feel

the life draining out of him; the effort to keep his eyes open became almost impossible.

“Hear me,” said Santos in his face, his mouth glistening with drops of Adin’s blood. “Do as I say or die.” He snapped his fingers and several men came up from behind him suddenly, surrounding Adin as his knees buckled and he began to slip to the ground.

Loudly, Santos remarked, “Adin, I told you not to drink on the plane... The altitude makes the alcohol that much stronger.” To everyone around, Santos and his friends appeared to be retrieving a drunken companion from the airport. Adin stumbled along, his head dangling, unable to lift it or to utter a single word to help himself. Someone took hold of his case, which dropped from his numb fingers. They continued until Adin felt the crisp outdoor air, and he was unceremoniously dumped into the back of a large car. He put his head down on the seat back behind him and held his tongue.

“That was good, Adin,” said Santos, catching the front of his hair and yanking his head up. “Now. Let’s see if you’re worth all this.” To the driver he said, “Go.”



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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The car came to rest and Adin felt himself dragged from the backseat, where he was wedged between two large men. His head felt heavy and at the same time detached, as if it were floating like a balloon. He could hardly keep it from flopping over onto one shoulder or the other, and he was unbearably thirsty. He was pulled none-too-gently to standing and led up a long walkway to a massive neo-colonial home. He had no idea where he was, no clue how long they'd been on the road. He smelled the ocean but couldn't see or hear it. It crossed his mind that he'd missed his plane, and he almost laughed at how insignificant that ought to seem to him. Men dragged him by each arm, and one carried his case.

Once inside, he was taken down a hallway and dropped into a chair in a room that looked like an office or a library. Someone went through his pockets and then his briefcase, tossing his papers and personal effects onto a large ebony desk and handing his laptop to the man named Santos. Santos toyed with Adin's light-emitting safety device before shoving it into a drawer in his desk. He then casually yanked the flash drive from Adin's laptop and tossed it to him. Adin made a grab for it and failed, then reached over to pick it up off the floor.

Adin almost succumbed then, to the dizziness he felt, but someone said, "Mortal trash. Don't quit your day job," and it made him so angry he sat up, the adrenaline clearing his head.

"Is anyone going to tell me why I'm here?" Adin looked at each man in turn. They were similar in height and build and could have passed for brothers. They had dark hair and eyes and light skin. One was heavily pockmarked, but the others were smooth and pale. The suits they wore made them look like bad mob stereotypes or Vegas rat-pack wannabes. The room itself was large but closed in, walled on three sides with books, and stank of cigars. Adin recognized one of the men as the businessman who had smiled up at his hotel window.



“You are here,” said Santos, “because for several hundred years I’ve been trying to track down and kill the man responsible for the death of my father. I thought the *Notturmo* manuscript would at last bring him within striking distance.” He shook his head.

Santos picked up Adin’s laptop and smashed it on the side of the desk like a toy, breaking it open and shattering the screen. Pieces of white plastic, which Adin saw were keyboard letter tiles, flew like confetti. Adin put his head in his hands.

“Donte Fedeltà showed you a more-than-passing interest,” said Santos, sweeping debris off his desk with a casual hand. “And as I can no longer entice him with the journal, which I understand is now in his possession, I believe I have little choice but to change my strategy and offer him something else he values.”

“Me?” asked Adin incredulously. “I’m like a McDonald’s hamburger to him. What’s to stop him from just going to the drive-through and ordering another?”

Santos looked at the man standing to his right, who appeared to be his second in command, and raised his eyebrows. Some unspoken communication passed between them. “Gio will show you to a room,” said Santos. “We will speak more of this later. May I say, though, for an intelligent man you show a remarkable inability to recommend yourself as a valuable hostage, and if you think about it, that shows a lack of insight that could get you killed.”

Gio pulled Adin to his feet. Adin stumbled a little, still weak and banged up from before, although he was trying to muster as much dignity as he could.

“Can’t argue with that,” he murmured as they led him from the room. He was a hostage? Adin was led to a small room with a twin-size bed and bars on the windows. It was serviceable, as if for a maid, completely devoid of any personality. He went straight to the bed and lay down, giving his host a nod of his head.

“Food will be provided later,” said Gio, with his arms crossed over his chest. “There’s no way to escape this room, so don’t waste your time.”

“Thank you.”

“You won’t be harmed tonight.” Adin looked up then to see the man’s face. It was implacable, a blend of skin and oblivion.

“I see. But tomorrow?”

“You would have to ask Mr. Santos that,” said Gio. “But I wouldn’t, if I were you.” He left the room.

“Hey!” Adin called after him. “Can I get some water?” But he didn’t know if Gio heard him. He lay on the tiny bed, thinking, mostly of Deana, who probably thought he was home on Bainbridge Island by now. It wasn’t fair. She’d had so much loss already and now she’d have to suffer another. No matter what kind of spin Santos put on it, Adin knew Donte would never risk himself for a human, and now that he had the manuscript, there was nothing that could lure him into a confrontation.

Adin made up his mind, however, to be a more valuable hostage and keep that information to himself. He already regretted the words he’d blurted out in Santos’s office. He tried to find sleep but succeeded for only a few brief moments at a time, dreaming deeply, waking sweaty from disturbing and erotic dreams. The shame Adin felt was compounded by the fact that, even in his current situation, he found these dark, amoral predators compelling. He awoke, hard and hungry, from a particularly vivid dream of the five men downstairs using him by turns and all at once, to find a young man, almost still a boy, standing over him, a pitcher of water and a tumbler in his hands.

“Oh shit.” Adin jumped. “You scared me.”

The boy looked down and laughed, a shy kind of laugh. Adin regarded him closely. He placed the water on the nightstand. “You asked for water?”

“Thank you. What is your name?” Adin asked.

“My name?” The boy seemed surprised. “Elian.” Elian still wouldn’t look at him, and Adin realized it was because he’d thrown off the sheet and was visibly hard, even leaking, under his lightweight trousers. He sat up and rearranged himself as discreetly as he could.

“Sorry.” Adin sighed. “It wasn’t a conscious thing.”

“No, I know.” Elian finally looked up, and Adin saw that despite his youth he was tall and appeared very strong. “Boss doesn’t like us to...”

“Surely you’ve been around the block a few times, Elian. How old are you? How do you say it? Something like, ‘I’m having the four hundredth anniversary of my nineteenth birthday?’”

Thick lashes lifted to reveal eyes as dark as black coffee. “I’m nineteen and I’ve only been with Santos for two years. He said I was a blood relation and convinced my parents to let me go with him. He told them I would be educated.”

“Didn’t you want...what happened?”

“No. I didn’t know about that. None of us did.” Unreasoning anger built within Adin on the boy’s behalf.

“But being the top of the food chain can’t suck, can it?” Adin tried the joke, but it fell flat.

“I didn’t want that. Wouldn’t have...if I’d been asked.”

“I’m sorry.”

Elian shrugged. He was still looking down unless he had to answer a specific question. “Is there something else?” Adin asked, wondering why Elian didn’t just leave.

“What were you dreaming?” the boy asked him, his eyes going once again to Adin’s crotch.

Adin flushed. “Oh, well, dreams. You can hardly remember them, and once they’re over they don’t make sense, do they?”

“Boss doesn’t like it... Men who like men.”

“Then why is he trying to get that manuscript? That makes no sense.”

“He wants it destroyed.”

Adin frowned. "He can't. It's..."

Abruptly, Elian sat next to him on the bed. "He's going to destroy it. Nothing you say can stop him." He placed a timid hand over Adin's erection. "You're... It's like you're on fire."

"Elian, I'm hardly in a position to..."

"What better position could you be in?" Elian asked. "You're probably going to be dead tomorrow."

Adin pushed his hand away. "While that thought is truly a lot less than comforting, it doesn't mean I'm giving up."

Elian sank into a slump. "You're beautiful when you sleep."

"Thank you," said Adin sincerely. Elian put a hand out and caressed his collarbone, brushing a thumb over the ridge and slipping it down to palm Adin's nipple.

"Oh, hey," said Adin, catching his hand again. "Imminent death? Not the biggest aphrodisiac for me. I'm sorry."

"Your body makes you a liar."

"That was just a dream, Elian. Awake I could never..."

"Elian!" someone called from downstairs, and Elian gave a guilty start.

Adin smiled. "Go on."

Elian got up and crossed quickly to the door. He turned back. Fear and something else, something like longing, were in his eyes. Then he left, locking the door behind him.

Darkness was coming gradually to wherever Adin was. The shadows on the floor lengthened into the long-fingered, early-evening ones he remembered noticing for the first time when he was a child confined to his room for some infraction. He couldn't smell anything cooking at all, even though it was dinnertime, and then remembered that the men who held him wouldn't be likely to need food, per se. Finally, in a pique of self-pity the likes of which he was rarely guilty, he wondered what it was going to be like to be eaten, *drained*, by the vampires downstairs, and if anyone besides Deana would notice he was gone.

A key turned in the lock on his door, and Gio came inside. He motioned for Adin to get up and took his arm to lead him back to the office.

Santos held up Adin's cell phone. "You are going to call Donte Fedeltà. He demands proof of life."

"Am I?" asked Adin, and one of the guards, not Gio, backhanded him across the face, knocking him down. He picked himself up. "I don't have his number."

"As it happens, I do," said Santos, handing him a piece of paper with a phone number written on it. "Please don't waste any more time. I've sent Elian to get you something to eat, and I should think you'd want to get this over with so you can enjoy it." Santos smiled, and Adin felt a frisson of fear.

Adin took the phone and walked to a chair situated by a small table and lamp, presumably for reading. If he called this number, he could speak to Donte and one of them, or both, would die.

"Put it on speaker and place it on the table, Tredeger."

After dialing, Adin did as he was told. The telephone rang, and Adin thought of a thousand ways that Donte might answer.

"Adin?" Donte's velvet voice came from the tiny phone. "Adin, is that you?" That Donte would answer with his name never occurred to Adin. All at once he was incapable of speech. He looked at Santos, shaking his head.

"Speak," Santos commanded, but a burning pain blocked Adin's throat to prevent him.

"Adin?" asked Donte again.

"Tredeger, speak," Santos snapped. Gio caught Adin by the back of the head, twisting his hair. Adin shook his head again minutely because of the man holding him so tightly.

"Donte Fedeltà," Santos began in a grim voice. "I have something that belongs to you."

"I doubt that," came the sardonic reply, almost amused. Adin would have lifted the corner of his lips in a half smile, but Gio tugged harder at his hair, and the pain drew him up short.

“Speak or die, Tredeger. This is your last chance,” growled Santos, as Gio pushed Adin’s head back to expose his neck. Adin looked into Gio’s hungry eyes.

“Adin,” came Donte’s compelling voice. “Speak to me. Surely you can’t think I’d want to hear you die over the phone.”

Adin gave a strangled laugh. “No, Donte. I’m sure you wouldn’t want that.” He sighed.

“What do you want, Santos?” asked Donte.

“I want you to bring me the manuscript, by midnight, so you may retrieve your...snack food item.” He rolled his eyes at Gio, who smirked.

“I see,” said Donte quietly.

In the depth of his heart, Adin felt a tiny glimmer of hope and ruthlessly crushed it. “Donte,” he said calmly. “They don’t want the manuscript. Santos is after revenge.”

Santos stood, and Gio hurled him to the ground.

“Is this true, Santos?” asked Donte, as if he were discussing the weather. “Are you still trying to make me pay?”

“I want the manuscript,” Santos said firmly.

“And what will you do should you suffer a disappointment?” asked Donte.

“I would probably console myself by having your pretty toy for a midnight snack and then planning a new campaign tomorrow,” Santos ground out. “By midnight, Fedeltà!” He indicated to Gio that he should hang up the phone.

“What did you hope to gain by that?” Santos asked Adin.

“What do you hope to gain by killing Donte? He may have killed your father, but vampires kill. You ought to know that you can’t blame a shark for being a shark.”

“While you might be the only human I’ve ever met who held this view, you are making an improper assumption. Donte did not kill my father. His wife, Renata, did. And because of Donte Fedeltà, my father died unshriven and lies nameless in unconsecrated ground. Things are more complex here,

Tredeger, than you imagine them to be. I am truly sorry that you became involved.”

Adin had a wild thought. Cristiano...Cristobel. “You are Auselmo’s son? Cristiano?”

“I am.” Santos’s eyes narrowed. “Although I go by Cristobel Santos now. Therefore any impassioned plea you make on Fedeltà’s behalf will fall on the deafest of ears. Donte Fedeltà, the illustrious Niccolo Pietro di Sciarrello, ruined my father as completely as if he had burned him alive. He has played hide-and-seek with me for nearly five centuries. You are one small piece of equipment in a game between giants. I’m sorry for you, but your life matters little to me.”

“Donte Fedeltà loved your father,” said Adin, “and you.”

“Donte Fedeltà *made* me what I am,” spat Santos. “And by heaven he *will* pay for destroying my family with his vile perversions. And since he is the one who makes it possible for me to spend immortality in the quest for vengeance? As the fairy story is told, ‘All the better to *eat* you with, my dear.’” He grinned again, and Adin turned away.

Gio tossed the phone to Santos, who crushed it in one hand and jerked his head toward the door. Adin allowed himself to be hauled to his feet and followed Gio back to the tiny, airless room he’d waited in before. He lay back down on the bed, contemplating the grim possibility that he had six or fewer hours to live.

Adin’s own watch, the Rolex he peered at now in the darkness while he awaited his fate, was still set to Frankfurt time. Adin lit the small reading lamp by his bed. His father’s watch read 11:15, and he knew, just as he had known at nine, that Donte would never come. He rolled over, sorry now that he hadn’t taken Elian up on his sweet offer. Physical comfort would probably be a welcome distraction. He went to the barred window and looked out on the landscaped yard. Exquisitely pruned hedges and walkways lit with mushroom-shaped lights close to the ground led to two large spotlighted trees. The parklike setting had furniture scattered about, benches for sitting and reading and enjoying the garden’s

beauty, which were probably lost on the undead, who couldn't enjoy them in the light of day.

Adin heard a sound outside the door, and the lock turned. Elian stepped hesitantly inside. "Soon they're going to want you to come downstairs," he said. "They sent me to tell you, if you were sleeping."

Adin smiled. "Not much chance of that, though, was there?"

"Probably not," Elian agreed. "I—"

"Look—" They spoke at the same time.

"You first," said Adin.

Elian looked at the floor. "I wanted to help you, but it's impossible."

"I understand," murmured Adin.

"No, you don't!" Elian hissed. He moved forward, speaking in hushed tones. "I wouldn't even care if they knew it was me, if they staked me for it. I just... It's impossible. I hope Donte comes for you, because I can't help you."

"Thank you." Adin took Elian's hand. "Would you sit with me? I'd like your company."

"You would?" The boy was sweetly hesitant but pleased.

"Sure. No one wants to be alone when they're scared." They sat on the bed side by side like nervous middle schoolers.

"Unless your only choice is a bloodsucking predator." Elian hid a smile. Adin leaned on Elian's large, young body and put his head on the boy's broad shoulder.

"My options lately have been severely limited."

"You trust too easily," said Elian, putting an arm around Adin to pull him into a tight hug. "I won't hurt you, but you should know that you're easy."

"It's been said."

"You have a less-than-zero chance of getting out of this alive," said Elian pragmatically. "Want me to suck you off?"



“Nah.” Adin was a little surprised, but he couldn’t take the very young-looking Elian up on his offer. He put his arms around Elian’s waist. “This is fine. It’s nice, just like this.”

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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At midnight, Gio came to the door. He looked at Elian, who sat holding Adin, with some distaste, but simply motioned them to follow him. When they were down the stairs and on the landing, Adin's heart began to pound, and he felt sick to his stomach. His hands shook a little, and he caught one of Elian's, but the boy just stared mutely ahead, saying nothing. Adin let go. He couldn't blame him. Elian was looking forward to immortality with these men, and Adin likely only had to endure a few more minutes.

"He didn't come," Adin said grimly when he at last faced Santos. It wasn't a question.

"No, he did not." Santos was toying with a letter opener and looking at him.

"He only loved when he was human, Santos. The only person he ever cared about was your father. I never expected he would come." *Was that true?*

Santos nodded to Gio, and Adin sucked in a sharp breath. He heard fragments of sound. Mocking laughter and jeering, like people at a cockfight. Hissing. Voices speaking so low that he couldn't understand them, but that rumbled into his mind like waves breaking on sand. He looked around the room, and in the men's smug faces, he recognized the arctic light of cruelty. It reminded him of the start of a gay bashing where everyone makes eye contact and the mob mentality takes over. He prepared to defend himself as best he could, but even now hopelessness echoed in the empty spaces of his heart.

The telephone rang, and Santos picked up the receiver as Gio came around the desk to collect him. When Gio grabbed his arm, Santos held a hand up, and silence fell on the room. Santos turned the phone on speaker.

"Did you hear me, Santos? I asked if you had killed my toy yet."

“No.” Santos clenched his teeth. “He’s still here.”

“May I speak to him?” Donte inquired, his voice polite. He gave nothing away, Adin thought, because he had nothing to give.

“That would be up to him. He can hear you.” Adin closed his eyes.

“Caro, are you disappointed?” Donte asked.

“To be disappointed one has to have expectations, so I would have to say, no, I’m not disappointed.” He opened his eyes and focused on the phone, staring at it and ignoring the men in the room.

“Your heart reproaches me, if your words do not.”

Adin clenched his fists. “*Say it isn’t so, Joe.*”

Donte was silent for what seemed like an eternity. “Another lesson from baseball. Innocence is always defiled in some way, Adin. Some would say that’s its purpose. I’m sorry, più amato.”

“You don’t get to call me that.” Adin hardened his heart against the bitter pain of those words, not so very long ago spoken in passion. “Not even if only the living qualify. You do *not get* to call me that!”

“Fair enough,” Donte admitted. All Adin heard was his own breathing, but there was a palpable escalation of the tension in the room. A thrumming excitement he could feel through his skin.

“Do you remember when I asked you about ghosts, Donte? When I asked if they walked among us?” Adin was afraid his voice would crack, that it would shatter into a million pieces as his heart had elected to do.

“Yes, caro, I remember.”

Adin no longer cared if anyone thought him weak or lacking in pride. “I would have liked to walk some more with you.” There was a faint *click* on the line, and it made a metallic static sound like the inside of a shell before Santos hit the Disconnect button. All eyes were on Adin, and they were hungry. Adin shot

one last look at Elian, who acknowledged him briefly and turned away.

Just as suddenly they were on him, pulling him harshly and tearing at his clothing. Adin saw that Elian and Santos stayed well back as the three other vampire henchmen began to drag him from the room. He writhed, twisting and bucking as they caught each of his limbs in turn, and still he fought, practically convulsing in their hands, straining against the inevitable outcome of a single mortal's struggle with three hungry vampires. He saw Elian then, out of the corner of his eye, racing forward, whether to help him or subdue him he didn't know. Someone used a brutal elbow to knock all the air out of his lungs.

Adin wasn't even in control any longer; he thrashed and spit and hissed on wild instinct alone. Gio wrenched his arm hard, and from the blinding explosion of pain, he knew his shoulder had dislocated. They were almost to the doorway of the office, and that became his new goal. He would not go through that door—no matter what—alive. His eyes closed and his body kept fighting.

The sound of glass breaking preceded a blinding light that tore through the room like a firebomb. Even though Adin had his eyes closed, when he opened them again all he saw were huge purple clouds. He squinted and tried to peer through them, but it was no use. The hands holding him let go, dropping him onto the hardwood floor beneath him. All around him he heard running feet, the sounds of fighting, with a harshly barked word or command from Santos breaking the silence at odd intervals. Someone kicked him hard in the head as they ran past, and he flung up his uninjured arm to protect himself as the fight raged on above him. Something fell with a wet *thud* about three feet away, and he looked to find Gio's sightless eyes staring back from his severed head. Adin couldn't look away, and in only a matter of moments, it dissolved into gritty nothingness. Adin's eyes rolled back in his head.

Mist coated Adin like a white sauce; the damp and chilly air reminded him of walking across the Golden Gate Bridge in the morning before the fog burned off. It was eerily quiet, though,

unlike the city, where he would ordinarily have heard at least a few seabirds and the drone of the foghorn at intervals. The silence in his head was crushing and unnatural until a sound broke it.

*"Più amato."* Adin heard Donte's thick, mellifluous voice.

"Donte?" he answered. "Are you here? Did you come after all?"

*"No,"* said Donte patiently. *"I didn't come."*

"Oh. Aren't you a shit, then?" Adin tried to ascertain how he was feeling, but everything was fuzzy. "Thanks."

*"You assume I care nothing for you if I did not ride to the rescue like a cowboy in an American movie?"*

"They were going to kill me."

*"I know. Death is only a door, Adin. One of many, many..."*

"My death is *my* door. *Piss off,*" snapped Adin. "And get the fuck out of my head."

Donte made an irritated sound. *"Adin, I cannot engage my lover's child. Surely you see that? Surely you see that I must do everything in my power to avoid conflict with him?"*

"You should have thought about that before you made him what he is."

Donte growled. *"I made him what he is because I could not bear to see him die. That was a foolish and sentimental mistake, and I have regretted it for almost five centuries. You will not see me make it again. Not even..."*

"What?" Adin asked, his breath catching in his throat. "Donte, what? *Not even what?*"

"Adin?" a new voice pushed Donte's away. "Adin, can you hear me?"

Adin opened his eyes. Warm, inky black eyes looked at him from above. "Tuan?" Nothing made sense to Adin, and he assumed he was dead or dreaming. "What the *hell?*"

Tuan grinned. He took Adin's hand in his and gave it a squeeze. "You're going to be all right. EMS is on its way."

“What are *you* doing here?” Adin asked.

“I’m doing my job. Undead management. They only get to stay if they play nice.” He stood, and Adin had trouble taking it in. He was all in black, wearing fatigue-style pants and a long-sleeved shirt with a utility vest over it. He wore a watch cap that hid his glossy hair, and was at that moment placing a razor-sharp sword into the scabbard that hung at his hip.

Adin got to his knees, his arm hanging limply by his side, and Tuan assisted him gently to his feet. “Santos?” Why the hell did he care? He thought he knew the answer. Donte didn’t want Santos harmed. But privately Adin thought it would probably be better all round if Santos were nothing more than a gritty pile of debris.

“He slipped away during the fight.” Tuan looked away, and Adin thought there was more to the story than he was telling.

“And the young one? Elian?” asked Adin. He wasn’t sure he wanted to know, but he had to ask anyway.

“Gone,” Tuan said. Adin felt a pang of real regret. Tuan turned away when two other men, also dressed all in black and carrying swords, came into the office to confer. “Adin, these men will take you outside to wait for medical help. We have work to do in here.”

“All right.” Adin didn’t ask what they had to do. If it went beyond the cleanup and removal of evidence that vampires existed, Adin didn’t want to know. He turned back to Tuan. “Does everyone know about this? Does Edward?”

Tuan turned to him. “Not everyone, no. Only a very few people would ever find out that they walk among us. Edward knows. That’s how we met.” Tuan gave Adin an enigmatic smile. Adin stared at him without the first clue how it made him feel that his best friend had been keeping a secret of that magnitude from him.

One of Tuan’s men took Adin gently by his uninjured arm and helped him out the door to the front of the house. There was an ambulance waiting there, and Adin allowed himself to be treated. Adin thought his arm was the most pressing of his problem, but as soon as they had him lying on the gurney, they

started an IV and took precautions for shock. Adin had to admit shock was a pretty likely scenario when he started to shake as though he would fly apart.

Just before they loaded him into the ambulance, Tuan loomed over him. “I’ve already called Edward. He’ll phone your sister in L.A. and meet you at the hospital.”

Adin grimaced as he was jostled. “Tuan, did Donte Fedeltà contact you? Did he send you?”

“Who?”

“Donte Fedeltà...” Adin tried again. “Tuan, tell me if he sent you.”

Something uneasy flickered in Tuan’s eyes. “We’ve been following Santos for undead border and customs violations and had a hunch he was dealing in stolen art. No one was more surprised than I was that he picked you up at the airport. We thought he already had your stolen manuscript. It’s a good thing you’re safe. Edward would have killed me.”

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

---

When Adin awoke, hazy, late-afternoon sunshine filtered through plastic miniblinds. His first thought when he looked around was that he'd have to reexamine the Kabuki as an adequate hotel, but then he remembered everything that he'd been through the previous day, and he closed his eyes again, sighing. He heard movement next to him and felt a delicate touch on his hand.

"Hey," said Edward, whose usually mischievous eyes showed only concern.

"Hey." Adin tried a smile and failed.

"I guess you had a little adventure with the bite club. Welcome to my world." Warm eyes gazed into his. "Isn't Tuan just the hottest?"

"I...yeah. Thanks fucking loads for keeping that a secret." Adin tried to glare but didn't have it in him.

"You wouldn't have believed me." Edward sighed. "Tuan says you should take up kendo. Once you know they're there, and once one's marked you..."

"No one's marked me."

"Yes, someone definitely has."

"Edward, nothing's changed. It's over; life goes on. Santos thought he could use me to get to Donte. He found out now that he can't. End of story. I was fast food."

Edward almost sizzled with indignation. "You have no idea what you're talking about. And you need to listen, at least keep an open mind. Everything has changed for you. Talk to Tuan."

"All right." Adin sighed. "All right, I'll talk to Tuan, but I think you're overreacting. Did you call Deana?"

"Yes, and she thinks you were mugged. So does the hospital staff."



“When can I leave?”

“Deana wants you to come back to L.A., and unofficially, I’m supposed to see to it that you aren’t released until you agree to do that.”

“I see.” Adin raised his bed.

“She promised me cosmeceuticals.”

“You are such a slut.”

“Gotta keep the eye candy sweet.” He grinned. “You’ve seen my man in action. Think I’d jeopardize that with crow’s feet?”

“That man will love you when you’re a hundred, even if you look it.”

“Your lips to...” Edward pointed up. “Look.” He picked up his messenger bag and got out his keys. “I’ve got to get you something to wear, and maybe some decent grub, and then I’ll come back and see if we can’t spring you. You can stay at our place tonight, and then you can make arrangements to go back to L.A. in the morning. Did I mention how glad I am that you’re okay?”

“You can mention it again.”

Edward came over to the bed and kissed Adin almost reverently on the forehead. “So glad.” He sighed. “Best friends...yeah?”

“You know it,” said Adin. “Get me something that makes me look hot.”

Edward smiled and sailed out the door.

Later that evening, Adin was watching with particular interest the way light from the television illuminated the dust motes that probably shouldn’t have been floating in hospital air, when the door opened again and Santos walked in, followed by Boaz.

“*Shit!*” Adin muttered, trying to sit up, to prepare himself to fight. Boaz’s hand came down gently on his chest.

“Relax, Adin,” Boaz said. “It’s all right.”

Adin didn't waste time listening to him but struggled to get away.

"Adin," commanded Santos in the compelling voice Donte sometimes used.

"That doesn't work on me, Santos," said Adin through gritted teeth. Boaz pushed him down harder. He was hopelessly trapped. He would have to clamber over the metal bed railings and run past the two men to get to the door anyway, so he quit fighting.

"Well?" He reserved his frostiest expression for Boaz, who seemed to have changed sides. Boaz looked back at Adin blankly as he sagged back onto the pillow.

"Don't thrash, Adin. I came to say good-bye."

"Thank you. Don't bother lingering over that."

Santos popped Adin gently on the forehead with his index finger. "Spicy food." He adjusted Adin's sheets a little, completely creeping Adin out in the process. "It was never personal with you. I just wanted you to know that."

"I told you Donte cared nothing for me. You could have let me go."

"Ah." Santos seemed to consider this. "I rarely confide in anyone, Adin. You should know this is almost a first. So pay attention. I like you."

"Oh, holy crap—"

"I said *pay attention*. First, I am sorry that you were almost eaten. That sort of thing is a regrettable fact of life when you are required to keep up appearances with underlings. In truth, I'm actually glad you remain unharmed. Second, I am certain that Donte Fedeltà cares about you, and that this was a most difficult thing for him. He is, above all, a man who will not allow himself to be ruled by his passions. A good general, if you will, willing to sacrifice a soldier to win a war."

"Okay, will someone just unenlist me? Because I couldn't care less, except I want my manuscript back." Adin slapped Santos's hand away when he realized it was stroking his hair like a pet.

“That is unlikely. Now that Fedeltà has it, it will never be returned to you.”

“Have you seen it?” Adin asked.

“No.” Santos closed his eyes. “I don’t wish to. My father’s shame isn’t something I would wish to...”

“You should,” Adin insisted. “You should see it. It’s beautiful.”

“It’s an abomination.”

“He talks about you,” Adin whispered. “And your father. And how your father loved you.”

Santos’s eyes opened to his. “You read this?”

“I did.” Adin paused. “Whatever you think of Donte Fedeltà, he loved your father. He treasured him. He cherished every moment they had, and he lives in those memories five hundred years after the fact. He told me Renata deliberately killed your father and then had him ‘turned’ to separate them for all eternity. He suffers.”

“My father died unshriven, thrown into a hole in unhallowed ground.”

“Knowing what you know now, having lived five hundred years...do you think that’s the worst thing that could have happened to him?” Adin asked.

“You know nothing.”

“You can know everything,” Adin offered. “I can give you the manuscript, and you can read it for yourself.”

“What?” Santos was interested, although Adin could tell he hated himself for it. “Fedeltà has the manuscript.”

“Boaz?” Adin turned to the smaller man. “If you can find out what they did with my trousers, there’s a flash drive in the pocket.” He turned back to Santos. “I photographed the manuscript. The file is on that memory stick.”

Boaz rummaged through a plastic shopping bag with the hospital logo on it that he found hanging over a doorknob. He returned to Adin’s side with a slim red plastic jump drive in his hand. “This is it?” he asked.

“Yes. If it still works.” He looked at Santos pointedly. “Somebody broke my laptop.”

“I returned your memory device,” Santos pointed out. Adin rolled his eyes.

“I will give you this on two conditions,” Adin told him.

“You really are a piece of work.” Santos shook his head. “They are?”

“One, that you send me a copy of the file, and two, that you read it with an open mind.”

“Why would you do this? I almost had you killed.” Santos met his eyes, regarding him closely.

“*For Donte.*” Brown eyes seemed to peer into Adin’s soul as he met Santos’s gaze without flinching.

“I see.” Santos took the drive. “I will do as you ask. However, five hundred years of enmity...”

“I understand.”

“Actually, I believe you do. That must be what Donte sees in you.” Adin made a *tch* noise. “Don’t be a fool, Adin. For a man like Donte, ordinary rules of human behavior do not apply. Don’t imagine your moral code can withstand the pressure of a life lived almost half a millennium. I make no excuses for him. I can see that he had a difficult decision to make, and I actually rather admired his choice.”

“You would. You weren’t about to be eaten.”

“Technically, you weren’t either. You would probably have been...played with and turned.” At this, Santos walked to the doorway. “Recycling, you know? When you finish with your drink, you redeem the container. Very PC. Very green.” He grinned, and Adin felt a chill wash through him. “Coming, Boaz?”

“A minute, please.” Boaz looked at Adin.

Adin glared.

“I did say, when we met, that there were more things...”

“You lied to me. You said you were working for Donte.”

“I was.” Boaz shrugged.

“What are you? Some kind of double agent for the mortally impaired?”

“I’m complicated,” snapped Boaz. “I took care of you for Donte, and now I’m taking care of Santos for Donte. Santos knows that my loyalties lie with Fedeltà. He just finds it convenient to keep me around for now.”

“I’m going to be glad to get home and forget any of this ever happened.”

“Yes, well. Good luck with *that*. I wanted to say good-bye.” Boaz peered down at him. Adin thought he looked sincere and perhaps a little younger than he’d first appeared. “Really, good luck, Adin.”

“Good luck to you too,” Adin replied.

“Awkward.” Boaz turned and walked to the door.

“See if you can get Santos to send my jump drive back.”

“I will. Or I’ll copy the files and send them. I’ll think of something.”

“I don’t doubt that.”

Boaz grinned and gripped the door handle. “See you around.”

The rejoinder “not if I see you first” came to Adin’s lips, but he didn’t say it. “Bye.”

When the door closed behind Boaz, Adin relaxed. A man in scrubs entered the room with a phlebotomy tray and pulled down the guardrail. He had a kind face and an unnatural enthusiasm for his work.

“I’ll just need to get some of your blood,” he chirped, catching Adin’s good arm by the elbow and thumping the veins.

“Just take a fucking number,” said Adin, laughing in spite of himself until he found he was crying so hard he could hardly catch a breath.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

---

A loud knock on the door of Deana's bungalow shook Adin awake. He was jumping at shadows, he noted with disgust as he gingerly swung his legs over the side of the couch. Still sore, damn it. He pulled himself up to standing, annoyed that he still needed his formerly dislocated arm in a sling. Deana came sleepily from the hallway but deferred to him immediately when he held up his hand. Two in the morning was no time for civilized humans to visit.

"Didn't you go to bed yet?" she whispered as they approached the door warily. Leave it to Deana to nag him when they were being woken in the middle of the night by—Adin looked through the peephole—a stranger. He backed away, allowing her to look.

"Anyone you recognize?" he asked, but already knew the answer. He could hear the noise inside his head that vampires used when they chose to make their presence known. What had Donte called that? Using beaters to flush out prey? He looked at Deana carefully to see if she could hear it and decided that no, she probably didn't. He didn't have time to think about that because the pounding started up again.

"No," she said, drawing her robe more closely about her. Adin stood indecisively, waiting. He knew their visitor couldn't come in unless invited, and he was reluctant to expose Deana to the frightening new reality he himself still felt unprepared to face.

"Go back to your bedroom, Deana. I'll take care of this. I think I know what it's about," Adin told her quietly, knowing full well that whoever was on the other side of that door could hear him.

That loud knock blasted through the silence again.

A voice came from the other side of the door. "Open up, puny earthling." Adin looked through the peephole and found a

man who had an engaging smile and clear blue eyes that sparkled. Not very foreboding. Probably a trick. "I come in peace. Take me to your leader. Klaatu-Barada-Nicto, Adin. I'm here because Boaz asked me to deliver a package. That's all." The voice was a full-bodied tenor that spoke to Adin of Ireland.

"Why should I believe that?" He motioned for Deana, who was still staring at him, clearly questioning his behavior, to go to her room. *I'll tell you later. Go!* he mouthed. She left, scooting down the hall until he heard the click of her door as she closed it.

Adin took a deep breath and opened the front door.

"Ah, that's better," said the man, who was, in Adin's experience, the most out-of-character vampire he'd met so far. No black, no leather, not Goth, neither dark nor frightening. Adin's own comment about pissing off leprechauns was coming back to haunt him. He wondered if Boaz appreciated, and therefore brought about, this particular irony.

The man who stood before Adin was small in stature, about Adin's own size, although he thought his visitor was much thinner, and he seemed to have the reddest hair Adin had ever seen. He had on a pair of well-worn, faded jeans and a bright green T-shirt. Over that he wore a battered denim jacket.

"Yes?" Adin stood his ground.

"Not going to invite me in?" The ginger-haired man folded his arms across his chest.

"Nope."

"I see." There went that charm again.

"You said you had a package from Boaz?" Adin tensed. The fact that these creatures both attracted and frightened him was something he was still working out.

"You have nothing to fear from me, Adin."

"Nevertheless..." Adin groped for the right thing to say. He gave up. "You really aren't what I've come to expect."

"Yes, well. Some of us..." He tilted his head so his red hair flopped over one eye as he lifted his lips in an engaging grin.

“Some of us are a little more Tolkien than Stoker, if you take my meaning.”

Adin raised his eyebrows at that.

“At any rate, I’m going to invite you to walk with me, as it’s a lovely late-summer night and I have much to tell you.”

“Can’t you just give me the thing and be done with it?” Adin could admit to a reluctant curiosity about the red-haired creature on his sister’s doorstep.

“I’m sorry, Adin. I have a story to tell. I was ordered to give you a goodly dose of my personal charm with it, and I can’t deliver that in good conscience without bringing you away with me into the moonlight. Taking you dancing on the misty green grass of whatever you have that resembles a park around here. You know. Like the fair folk.”

“Is there not *one* among you capable of simply saying, ‘Let’s go out for coffee?’” Adin snapped.

The man tilted his head back and laughed until security lights snapped on down Deana’s whole block. “When you live forever, Adin, you learn to find your fun where you can.”

“*Crap*. Wait here.”

Adin found his shoes next to the couch and slipped them on. He saw Deana peeking from behind her door and gave her a smile he thought probably looked as sketchy as it felt. “Go back to bed... It’s just a friend. A prank.” He walked to the door, hesitating for a minute, and then set one foot out.

“Now,” said the man, taking his arm and leading him out into the night. “Let’s walk, and I’ll tell you why I came, starting with my name, which is Sean.”

Adin closed and locked the door behind him, still wary of whatever this appealing creature had planned. “Sean,” Adin repeated. “Got it.”

“Boaz asked me to give you this.” He pulled a tiny, battered brown parcel out of the pocket of his jacket. “And to tell you that Santos has experienced an evolution of sorts, although perhaps not the sea change you had hoped for. Boaz’s exact words.”



“How do you know Boaz?”

“Boaz is...an extremely useful man to know. To answer your question, I know him through Donte.”

Adin felt a faint pulse of something he worried was jealousy. “Through Donte?”

“Yes,” Sean said. “I must say you have certainly mucked up things there.”

“I beg your pardon?” Adin stopped walking and noticed for the first time that the back of Sean’s jacket said, *Kiss Me, I’m Irish*.

“Well, Donte particularly doesn’t like complications. So getting yourself kidnapped by Santos—”

“Not exactly my idea!”

“Of course it wasn’t. But then, humans can make things so spectacularly difficult for us.” Sean gave a long and wheezy Irish sigh that showed in the air as a cloud of vapor. Adin knew it wasn’t that cold. Kind of a neat trick. “At any rate, Donte has the manuscript. All’s well that ends well.”

“Yes.” Adin bit his tongue to keep from reminding this perky little man that he’d very nearly been *eaten*. Adin looked down at the parcel and saw that some of the tape had been pulled off and restuck. “Will I like the contents of that, do you think?”

Sean blushed becomingly, even though it was hard to tell under the lights of the mercury vapor lamps. Adin smiled to himself. Redheads just seemed to blush out loud. “I was a tiny bit curious; it’s a failing of mine.”

Adin fumbled with the wrapping, and his flash drive slid out into his palm. “Thank *fuck*,” he said. “I’m glad to have this back.”

“Boaz said to tell you that Santos was very touched by your determination to show him a different side of the situation. He was most grateful for the insight into how his father felt about him, and also into the reasons behind Donte’s actions.”

“Where is Boaz?” asked Adin. “Why didn’t he come himself?”

“Boaz is currently in Morocco with Santos. He sends his regrets.”

“I see,” Adin said. “I wonder to whom I should send mine.” He stopped walking and dropped onto a bus bench with an ad on it for one of the local churches. *Ask yourself why!* Adin thought it was rather fitting. His shoulder, in its sling, still ached a little.

“Do you have many?” asked Sean, dropping onto the bench beside him. “Regrets?”

“No. Besides losing the *Notturmo* manuscript? No.”

“That was inevitable. It didn’t really belong to you.”

“I know.”

A very white hand came up to brush the hair off Adin’s face. “There’s something else.” He handed Adin a small, brown cardboard package, inside which was a wooden box. It looked very old and had at one time been gaily painted with carnival colors. Adin’s hands trembled slightly as he slid off the string that held it together. When he lifted the lid and looked at the contents, his heart squeezed so painfully within his chest that he gasped.

“That’s a really fine piece, isn’t it?” Sean lifted the contents of the tiny box into his hands as if it were a living thing. “It was painted by Richard Cosway, and anyone will tell you he was one of the most notable miniaturists of the eighteenth century. That particular painting has never been seen by any modern collector. Boaz told me to let you know Donte gives this to you in return for the manuscript. Its value as a collector’s piece is far greater.”

Adin took the tiny treasure from Sean and opened it, revealing a working music box, not, as he had originally suspected, a snuff box. “It’s exquisite.” He sighed, listening.

“It’s Mozart, of course. ‘Eine kleine Nachtmusik.’”

Words failed Adin. He closed the lid to study the miniature. Donte was rendered in his customary black, a snowy white fall

of lace at his throat. He was shown in profile, his high cheekbone and hooded eye mysterious and beautiful. He wore no wig. His dark hair may have been long and caught back, but it looked very much as he wore it today, slightly longer in the front maybe. Adin felt tears sting his eyes and was angry for it.

“He is a very beautiful man,” said Sean, gazing at the portrait.

“He is that. Not bad for—what is he here—two hundred years old?”

“Yes. He will remain attractive forever in a way that only the completely unobtainable seem to be, won’t he?” Sean put a gentle hand on Adin’s shoulder. “I’m sorry.”

Adin smiled the barest of smiles. “It’s funny how when you are about to be eaten your priorities change... Donte is someone I care for very much. I’m not sorry that he has the manuscript back. I have the flash drive. Unless Boaz is yanking my chain—”

Sean laughed. “He said you’d be suspicious. It’s there, Adin. The whole file is there. He just copied it for Santos and sent me on my way.”

“Then my life, such as it is, will be going on as normal.”

“No it won’t, Adin. Boaz was most adamant that I remind you of that.” He pressed another of the light devices like the one Donte had given him into Adin’s hand. He tilted his head again and peered anxiously through that thick fringe of rust-colored hair. “I’m sorry. Your innocence is gone. Probably some of your pride. Don’t lie to yourself.”

“I don’t, Sean. I’m just tired. Still recovering. I’m sure you know I was attacked.”

“Yes.” Sean leaned in and lowered his voice. “You know, I envy Donte.”

“What?”

“You love him, don’t you?” Sean asked, looking at him speculatively. “Don’t bother to deny it. It’s obvious. There are many men and women who love the undead in general, and

Donte in particular. Like rock stars, we have groupies who follow us, begging for the privilege of being our food.”

Adin got up and turned away. “I know all this. Thank you for the warning.” He began to head for Deana’s house and the comfort and safety of what was left of his family.

“You misunderstand.” Sean followed him. “I drove here from New York to find you. The world is full of people who are like so much insect splatter on my windshield from the trip. If I look closely, I can see that each of the bugs came from its own species, each was a different individual, each met its demise when the wind carried it into my car, and yet every one left behind a remarkably similar pattern of relatively analogous goo.”

“Good to know.” Adin quickened his pace. “I hope you’re finished trying to cheer me up.”

“I haven’t even begun.” Sean caught the hand of Adin’s good arm in his and pulled him to a stop. “Everything I’ve heard about you, everything I’ve seen, everything Boaz told me, makes me think you’re different.”

“Different how? Do I get more Michelin stars in the Vampire’s Good Eats Guide to Bainbridge Island? When in town you must have the Adin Tredeger? Bland but with an edgy finish, slightly bitter but delicious, as Donte and Hannibal Lecter would say, with a nice red wine?”

“You—”

“Listen to me!” Adin couldn’t help raising his voice. “I’m tired, hurt, and angry. I’ve had a professional disappointment and a profound shock with regard to the world I thought I knew. Not to mention my very first broken heart.”

“I’m so sorry,” said Sean quietly, still holding Adin’s hand and giving it a kind press with his own.

Adin shook his head. “It’s just...” Adin looked down at the hand in the sling, which still held the miniature of Donte. “Donte is little more than a highly evolved predator. He can’t love; he isn’t human. That’s gone forever.”

“Did he tell you that?”

“Yes,” Adin replied. “He did.”

Sean smiled an enigmatic smile. Together they walked silently back to Deana’s house. When they reached the door, Sean leaned over and kissed Adin warmly on the lips, shocking and embarrassing him a little.

“What was that for?” Adin asked.

“I like you. I’d like you to think about getting in touch with me sometime.” He backed down the steps. “When Donte’s glamour fades.”

Adin didn’t bother telling him that Donte’s glamour had never really been all that successful where he was concerned.

“Call me!” Sean flicked him a jaunty wave as he got into a convertible parked at the curb.

Adin thought he might actually want to do just that someday. And how sick was that? “How?”

“Call my name into the wind!”

Adin pursed his lips. He muttered, “You’ve got to be  *fucking*  kidding me!”

Sean laughed his musical laugh. “I am,” he said, starting up the engine. “My number is written on the bottom of the box I gave you!” He roared off, and Adin turned the cardboard box over. Sure enough, there was a phone number written there next to a tiny little smiley face with fangs.

Adin found he was laughing as he used his keys to enter Deana’s small house. He toed off his shoes and fell back onto the couch. Immediately he took out his tiny treasure and looked at it.

*Donte.*

Adin knew he wasn’t likely to find much rest before morning, but he listened quietly to see if his sister was still up or if she’d gone back to sleep. He thought perhaps that, as she had done when she was a child, she’d gotten out of bed and come to the door in a state that was not quite awake, and when she’d gone back to bed, she’d just sunk in and slept. They’d had some of the most fascinating conversations of their childhood when

Deana was in that state—somewhere between sleeping and waking.

Adin opened the tiny box and played the music again, discovering on further investigation that it wound with a tiny removable key. If he wore a pocket watch, it would be fun to put the key on the fob. As it was, he knew it would be best to keep the piece in a safe deposit box. It was definitely a nearly priceless, museum-quality piece if what little he knew of miniatures was anything to go by. Knowing that he was sitting there in the middle of the night winding it with his bare hands and listening to it over and over would give Edward apoplexy. Finally Adin put the box on the coffee table and closed his eyes.

Call my name into the wind, indeed. He began to drift into a dreamless void, so tired, yet not quite ready to let go. He could hear the rustling susurrations of Sean's voice whispering to him. *"Say my name...speak my name...call me..."*

He was relaxing into the regular rhythm of the sound of Sean's tenor voice and his own breathing when, abruptly, he heard a harsh baritone, which snapped him back to reality.

*"Adin!"*

Adin sat up painfully, his shoulder pulling a little from the force of it. He looked around, uncertain for a moment what could have caused him to start like that. Then he remembered. That deep sound—his name practically cracked like a whip—interrupted the other, slightly higher-pitched intonation that had been calling him into what he was sure would have been a lovely dream.

Before he could explore Sean's invitation, Donte's voice had called him back, and he'd obeyed it like a faithful dog. He closed his eyes.

*Not my finest hour.*



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

---

*Auselmo, see how I've drawn you today. I cannot beg your forgiveness; I have no words for my shame. It was with a kind of horror that I greeted the dawn this morning, and with it, the news that Renata has followed me and dragged along her circle of dreadful actors and artists. At last, my love, you will know what I live with daily and what I've tried to escape. Renata is quite, quite mad.*

*Only a month before I came to visit you, I began to notice a change in her behavior, as if with the passage of time she was also changing into another person. In fact, I did think that perhaps dementia was creeping up along with age to steal what little beauty she possessed. As she never exhibited a shred of kindness or compassion, it seemed to me that I hardly noticed when she began to hate. And at the core of that hatred, I fear, is her disappointment in me.*

*Perhaps she truly loved my brother after all and resents that I have received what should have been his. I hesitate to even speculate on one whose motives are so clearly driven by insanity. Most recently, she and her lover, the actor Bonamico Delporrino, have taken to sighing and lounging indolently around during the day and practicing what can only be described as unholy rites and witchcraft at night. She grows thin and pale, and now refuses even the slightest request from me. I love my sons, Auselmo, and have no wish to see their mother branded a heretic or a witch.*

*My beloved Auselmo, all this I have kept from you so you would not worry for me, nor be tainted by my ill fortune, and yet, when I wasn't vigilant enough, it still found its way to your door. Mea culpa, my love. Mea culpa. We must call the priests at once and do all we can to shield your wife and son from her. I will take her from here as soon as I can persuade her to come with me.*



*I write this, Auselmo, a shaken man. Never have I seen you so furious. I have begged for your forgiveness and have no wish to see you angry, but I did what I did for love of you. That you cannot understand this renders me heartsick.*



*Auselmo, what good could come from sharing my misfortunes with you? How should I have confided that my wife is mad? To what purpose is the agony of two men, when one can bear the load himself?*

*You say you are angry because the love we share precludes secrets and lies and the willful deception that I have practiced on you. You say you wish to understand and share my pain. Never! By all the saints I would keep you free from the taint of Renata's insane malice even if I have to leave you forever to do it. You may not scold. You may not rail at me or beg me or weep. I will take her home and consider what I must do, but know this: I will not let her madness touch one corner of what you have created here. Not one stone, not one blade of grass, not one hair on the head of anyone in your small family. I love you more than my own life. Whether you like it or not, I will leave on the morrow.*

*Please, please, forgive me now! I am trapped, Auselmo, neatly caught between the shadow of my father and my love for my sons. All the while I act out this drama, my heart is held safely in your hands. Can you not see that your anger is likely to break me as nothing else might? Please. I take my wife tomorrow and leave. I know not what awaits me, and I care not. Come to me, Auselmo. I beg you. I hold my breath and await you. Relent for me. Come to me.*



*Ah, Auselmo. How many times have I drawn a robe about your shoulders as I sit sketching while you sleep? Your head is now at rest in my lap, your arms tighten about my hips if you feel me move. How perfect this seems to me. How very like the still moment before a terrible storm, when the sky is sinister with rain and the air crackles around one's head. This is that moment, I know, Auselmo, and I am terribly, terribly afraid.*

*Renata plots. It is clear her hatred has gone beyond madness. Tomorrow we leave, but I fear—for the first time—that these might be our last moments together.*

*How I love you. I am both weak from it and strengthened by it. I am prepared to kill Renata or be killed by her, as I think that is her aim. There have been whispers among the staff of animals dying mysteriously. There has been talk of spells by some, and poison by others. I have only hinted at this to you, still determined to protect you. I can see by the way you sleep that it is working, for I will probably never sleep again. I can*

*never turn my back on her or anyone in her little group for fear of finding a blade sticking out of it.*

*I saw you playing with Cristiano today. He has your smile and your stillness, but also exhibits a spark of playful mischief that I suspect you have in you but ruthlessly subdue. It was a great comfort to me that you do not seem willing to subdue it in him. He is a fine son. I promise my unquestioning love and loyalty to you both, and your kind wife, as long as I live. That may be all I have to give, but I give it with all my heart, my love.*



*Now that I'm mired in it, madness fascinates me. It is very like the enclosed conveyance in which they transported me from your home, beloved, in that it has holes, and light streams from them in long, slanting beams, like swords, and I must not let them touch me or I will burn and die.*



Adin heard the jingle and scrape of keys in the lock and looked up. Sometime, although he didn't quite remember when, darkness had fallen. His sister's cozy bungalow windows were still wide open, but none of the lights were on. Adin had been lounging on the living room sofa working on his brand-new and inexplicably foreign and uncomfortable-feeling laptop, unaware even that he hadn't been reading from it for who knew how long. He sat up, and the throw he'd had draped over his legs slid to the floor. He was just picking it up when Deana entered.

"Oh, Adin." Dismay was evident in her voice. She switched on a light. "Didn't you go out at all today? You're exactly where you were when I left!"

Adin put the computer on the coffee table and rubbed his face, stubbled now with several days' growth of beard. "I am not."

"You are. Did you even eat?"

Adin looked around. He couldn't remember eating, but that didn't mean he hadn't done it. "Sure I did." He didn't think she bought it. "I'm sure I must have. I'm not hungry in the least."

"Oh, oddball." She sighed, and he felt ashamed. "Maybe you should talk to someone."

Adin smiled wanly. It had been little over a month, and Deana still believed he was the victim of a violent mugging. Privately, he wondered if she thought he'd been raped or violated in some other way and found it difficult to talk about. She never spoke of it if she did.

"I could find you someone local, maybe through the GLBT community, and they could..."

"Deana, I'm really fine." Adin stood. "Do you have plans for dinner? Maybe we could go out to eat. Canter's?"

"You're changing the subject again. I will not be distracted by food."

"What about jewelry?" he asked without emotion.

Deana snarled at him; playfully, he hoped. "I'm going to change clothes." Deana walked past him to her room, calling out behind her, "If you want to go out to eat, then let's do that. At least you'll get out."

Adin showered quickly and made himself presentable. He pulled on a pair of jeans and a white button-down shirt he'd purchased since arriving in Los Angeles. He had nothing with him when he'd arrived, only the clothes that Edward brought him in the hospital and what he'd been wearing when he was kidnapped. His luggage was in Washington, and his laptop case had been lost in Sausalito, at Santos's place. He'd finally purchased a new computer and the necessities, and Deana, who always loved to shop, brought him something new every night. Today she presented him with a bag containing aftershave from Barneys, where she'd apparently shopped at lunch.

"Oh," he'd said, smelling the delicate fragrance. It was nice, but not what he usually wore. "This is nice, Deana Beana. I feel like a refugee."

"Refugees don't wear Hierbas de Ibiza," said his sister dryly.

"No, they don't." He grinned, but his heart wasn't in it, and she knew it. He scented himself to make her happy, and they left in her BMW to Fairfax.

"Adin, you'd tell me if anything happened to you...that night... I mean..."

Adin squeezed her hand. “Deana, I was mugged, and someone beat the unholy crap out of me. That’s hard to take.” He looked away. “But what you’re sensing from me has nothing to do with that. Your sisterly intuition is sniffing out a broken heart.”

Deana stared at him with her mouth open when the light turned green. Several horns honked.

“All *right*.” She cursed. “I’m going.” She began to drive again. Negotiating the crowded streets, she darted through traffic, dodging slower-moving and double-parked cars. “Adin, are you telling me you’re in love?”

“Yes,” Adin replied quietly.

“Since the last time you were here? You were only gone for what...a week?”

“It was sudden, and I’m not even sure I knew it was happening at the time.” He caught the handle on the ceiling as she sped around a tight corner. “Anyway, it didn’t work out. He wasn’t over someone he lost, and it was impossible.” Canter’s came into view.

“Oh, Adin.” Deana pulled into the parking lot and parked neatly. “I’m so sorry.”

“Yeah, well...”

She didn’t move from her seat. “This is your first time, isn’t it?”

“Are you kidding?” He tried for a joke.

Deana rolled her eyes. “In love. This is the first time you’ve ever been in love?”

“Yeah.” The darkness absorbed him. “We met on the plane. He was...” Adin shook his head.

“Oh, baby.” She pushed her door open, and light flooded the compartment. Adin hoped he didn’t have that expression on his face, the one he’d seen lately in the mirror that reeked of hopelessness and self-pity.

Deana studied him in a soft way that reminded him of his mother so abruptly that he caught his breath. “You know that means an extra dessert, don’t you? A broken heart?”

He pushed his own door open. “Yeah, let’s do it. At least until it makes me fat and no one wants me at all.”

Deana threw him a look that spoke volumes about his attitude.

They walked through the deli together and were seated in the middle of the huge and bustling restaurant at a table. By the time they were finished with the matzo ball soup, Deana had outlined a five-year plan of romantic disappointment recovery that even Adin approved of. Adin wondered if he and Edward had been switched at birth. Clearly Edward would have enthused more than Adin did over her plans for spa vacations and shopping extravaganzas and rich dark chocolate.

As if she could read his mind, she said, “I sent Edward his package of beauty products today. He told me to be gentle with you.”

“Ah,” said Adin.

“Do you want what he and Tuan have?” She sighed. “I mean, I know, who wouldn’t, right? But...I thought you weren’t that into the idea of finding love. I thought it was all about the treasure hunt for you, the quest. Both for manuscripts and men.”

Adin drank his Bloody Mary, not unaware of the irony. “It was—it is... But maybe lately it’s grown a little mechanical. You know what I mean?”

“Mechanical,” Deana said. “Read: boring?”

“Oh hell no.” Adin thought about Tariq and almost shivered. “No. More like pointless.”

“But, Adin, you’re not likely to want to assemble bicycles for the kids on Christmas Eve. You have a life a lot of men dream of. You can pursue your career; you don’t need money. You certainly don’t lack physical companionship.”

“To *whom* have you been talking?” he teased.

“I don’t need to talk to anyone, Adin. Anyone with eyes can see you’d do fine at a club. People like you; you’re genuinely nice. Can you see that if a committed relationship is what you want, you can probably make that happen, despite what you’re feeling right now?”

“I know, Deana,” he said. “Give me a minute to catch my breath, will you? I thought I was immune to even the basic concept of love.”

“Brought low at last.” Deana picked up her own glass. “Oh, what fools these mortals be.” He touched his glass to hers. The waitress brought his food, and as he scanned the crowded restaurant, preparing to eat it, he realized he was looking for the undead.

“You don’t know the half of it,” he muttered before taking a big bite out of a kosher dill pickle.

Later that night, Adin drove Deana’s car down Santa Monica Boulevard, taking in the lights, the scenery, and the sheer exuberant excess that was West Hollywood. He’d dropped Deana at home and asked to borrow the Beemer, giving himself the excuse that he needed some fresh air. She asked if he remembered he was in Los Angeles and he’d have an awfully long drive to find any. He’d been down to the beach already, driven up and down Coast Highway, and stopped for a while near the Santa Monica Pier to people watch.

It was late enough that the traffic was light by L.A. standards, and he found himself parking the car near the Hollywood Forever Cemetery with very little in the way of a plan in mind, just an imperfect memory of what had been, for him, a perfect night. He walked to the entrance, assuming he’d be turned away or at least locked out if there were no guards on duty. But when he got there, he saw the tiny golf cart coming toward him with the same security guard in it he’d seen talking to Donte. Adin racked his brain trying to remember the man’s name.

“Michael?” he asked, as the security guard approached him on foot. “Was that your name?”

The man squinted at him. “Do I know you?”

“I came here with Donte Fedeltà,” said Adin. “I’m Dr. Adin Tredeger. I’m a researcher, specializing in antique manuscripts.” That sounded impressive, even to Adin’s mind.

“Oh, yeah, now I remember. The last time Mr. Fedeltà was here you were with him, right?” The man tipped his visored hat back on his head. He had a contagious smile. “How is Mr. Fedeltà?”

“He’s fine,” prevaricated Adin. “Last time I heard from him I was in the Bay Area, but he seemed fine.”

“Good. Mr. Fedeltà is nice. Always polite. Respectful of the dead.” He looked around. “Did he send you here? He didn’t call me or anything.”

“No,” said Adin quickly. “No, he didn’t. I was visiting my sister, who lives here. Well. Not here, here,” he said, referring to the cemetery, “but in L.A., and she gave me her car for the evening. I was driving around, and I thought I’d see if I could come visit the cemetery again. It’s peaceful here at night.”

“That it is.” The guard considered him for a minute. “I don’t think that would be a problem, since you’re a friend of Mr. Fedeltà. Come with me. Just let me know when you want me to let you back out,” he said, letting Adin through the gate.

“Thank you very much, Michael.”

“You’re welcome. Watch your step on the grass.”

Adin began walking at a leisurely pace. He headed carefully for the mausoleum, wishing he had Donte’s night vision to guide him. At the same time he felt like a fool, like some teenage emo kid with a crush, cruising the cemetery with a broken heart. He could hear the water and smell it, and when he got to the mausoleum, he sat on the steps, just as he had with Donte. He closed his eyes and concentrated on the sound of the night around him, the breeze whispering through the trees, the fountain trickling, the water lapping at the edges of the little lake. He could hear rustling in the bushes close by, and cars on Santa Monica Boulevard farther away. He tried to remember

what it felt like to see all this as Donte saw it, crisp and clear and with all his senses enhanced.

Restless, he got up and began to walk again, stopping here and there to look at monuments. On one, a pot of rosemary tortured into a topiary in the shape of a heart caught his attention, and he ran his fingers over it experimentally. He continued to walk, wondering, at first in his mind and then aloud, if Donte would join him.

“Donte,” he said aloud, thinking of Sean saying, “*call my name into the wind.*” “If I were to call you, would you come to me here?” He closed his eyes as he said this, and even through the impossibility of such a thing, it didn’t surprise him when an amused voice punctured the quiet of the evening next to his ear.

“You’ve changed your cologne, caro.” Donte fell into step with him as he neared the water. He handed Adin his *borrowed* tie, the one he had taken when they first met on the airplane. Adin took it as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

“My luggage left without me. It’s in Washington, and my scent went with it. My sister purchased this one. Like it?”

“Yes.” Donte picked up Adin’s hand and held it to his lips. “But there’s something else. Rosemary?”

“I touched a topiary on a grave. Rosemary for remembrance, I guess. Very Ophelia-esque.” Adin felt Donte’s smile on the back of his fingers. Donte let his hand down but didn’t relinquish it. They walked for a time, hand in hand.

“I find it impossible to believe that you’ve forgiven me,” Donte said finally. “I’m not sure I have forgiven myself.”

“It was a difficult choice. I’m still alive, or I’d have very different feelings about it.”

“How magnanimous you are in the face of a terrible betrayal.”

Adin thought about it. “Betrayal requires trust, Donte. I had admiration, interest, healthy respect, even fear, but trust?” He shook his head. “You told me not to trust you. You didn’t betray me.”



“I have spent a long time requiring myself to be wherever Santos is not, if you understand my meaning. I’ve dodged confrontations with him for centuries.”

“He told me.”

“Did he?” Donte considered this. “I’m surprised. I would have thought he’d keep his business with me a secret. He’s so ashamed of us. Ashamed of his father.”

Adin squeezed his hand. “I think he loved his father very much, and his feelings for you are mixed up with jealousy, anger, betrayal, and superstition. He repeatedly spoke about his father dying unshriven and buried in unconsecrated ground.”

“I guess you can take the man out of the church, but you can’t take the church out of the man, caro.” The corners of Donte’s mouth lifted slightly.

“At any rate, when last I saw him, he told me his willingness to kill me wasn’t personal.” Adin led Donte to a memorial bench and sat on it.

Donte sat next to him, fastidiously fussing with the crease in his trousers and making Adin laugh in the process. “Wasn’t personal,” Donte muttered. He looked over at Adin. “What are you laughing at?”

“Behold, it is I, Donte, remorseless predator of the night.” Adin mimicked. “Wait whilst I fix my trousers so they remain creased properly, and I shall show you...” Adin bent over laughing.

“I cannot help but feel that you mock me at your peril, Adin Tredeger.” Donte regarded him coolly.

Adin shook his head. “It’s no good anymore, you know? I’ve been inches away from dying at the hands of conscienceless predators, and I can spot a big undead lapdog when I see one.”

“You dare?” asked Donte, appalled.

“I dare,” said Adin, turning toward the vampire and throwing a leg over to straddle his lap.

“Adin”—Donte sputtered—“I cannot help you in the world in which you find yourself if you refuse to acknowledge...”

Adin kissed Donte soundly, on the mouth, dragging his tongue across Donte's lower lip slowly and deliberately for effect. He caught it between his teeth and drew it out, letting it go with a *snap*.

"Donte, you mistake," he purred, using Donte's own accent, playing. "You cannot be expected to know this, but I am the apex of the academic food chain, and the scourge of students and nontenured professors alike." Donte kissed him back for a while, then pushed him away. Even then Adin didn't think he'd quite absorbed his shock.

"Adin, you have become unhinged."

Adin smiled. "I have." He took Donte's face between his hands, cupping it gently, framing it, and stroking Donte's cheeks with his thumbs. He felt such an impossible tenderness he was unable to speak. Donte's hands were on his back, under his jacket, caressing him, and suddenly he couldn't decide where he wanted his own hands to be first. Adin pushed Donte's suit jacket off and put his hands to the buttons of his shirt, as Donte's elegant fingers went to his belt buckle.

"Donte," whispered Adin, rising to his knees. This position forced Donte to look up into his eyes, as Adin cupped his face in both hands. "No vampire tricks. Tonight you're just a man."

"Yes," Donte agreed, sliding the leather of Adin's belt through the loops on his jeans. Adin took it from him. "What?"

"Just a man, Donte," said Adin, as he pushed Donte's hands behind him and wrapped the leather around his wrists. He wrapped the belt around three times and buckled it shut, knowing that if Donte didn't choose to be bound, he couldn't be. He undid Donte's own belt and then his trousers, freeing his cock in the process and holding it in both hands. Adin felt Donte's eyes on him, hot with need.

Adin slid down until he was kneeling before Donte. His head descended, and he licked his way up the throbbing shaft and put his mouth around it. Donte hissed, and a number of startled birds flew out of a tree.

"Donte, no vampire tricks," warned Adin.

“Wasn’t me.” Donte panted. “I pledge it... A cat, I think.”

Adin smiled and returned to his task. He licked Donte’s cock with the flat of his tongue and then teased his way past its defenses to the tiny slit on the tip. He wrapped his lips around it and bobbed down, taking Donte’s entire cool length until his nose was in the thick patch of hair at its base, and then changed to suction, drawing off with such protracted precision that Donte cursed his name and thrashed under him. Adin used his left hand to cup Donte’s balls and stroke the sensitive skin behind them, eventually teasing at Donte’s hole. Donte shivered in anticipation. He slicked Donte’s cock, then rose and kissed the man, absorbing his shocked gasp. Adin toed off his shoes, rid himself of his jeans, and then straddled Donte and watched his eyes closely as he lowered himself.

“*Adin.*” Adin felt Donte’s cock slip past the tight ring of muscle guarding his ass.

“*Yes...*” Adin whispered, his head tipping back. “Wanted this. *Wanted you.*” He rocked his hips and shifted, beginning to move.

“Yes, Adin,” Donte whispered. “*Yes.*”

Adin closed his eyes. This was for him. His moment to savor being alive when not so very long ago that seemed like an impossible outcome. He sought Donte’s mouth in a desperate kiss.

“Feel me?” Adin asked against Donte’s lips. He squeezed his ass tight and hard around Donte’s cock. He caught Donte’s head in his hands. His heart was slamming against his rib cage as he quickened the movement of his hips. Donte was rocking up into him, his hips coming off the bench to meet Adin’s ass as their coupling turned quick and dirty. Donte gritted his teeth and slammed so hard into Adin that Adin lost his breath in shocked gasps, air shoved out of his body by the impact, the force of Donte’s hips against his.

“Yes,” cried Adin between gasps. “Donte... *Fuck...yes!*” He was coming then, ribboning onto Donte’s belly, his own, and their clothes as his ass tightened hot and fierce around Donte’s dick, carrying Donte over the edge with him, until they both

shook and jerked. He rocked against Donte slowly, milking any sensation he could get from their bodies, and then slowly came down, breathing hard against Donte's neck, his face pressing in for kisses and tiny licks of Donte's salt-tinged skin.

"Mm, good...good vampire."

Donte smiled as Adin got up to slip his jeans back on, but remained silent and thoughtful while Adin tucked him back into his trousers, pulling him close, loath to lose contact. He continued to kiss Donte, licking, tasting, and teasing. He unbuckled his belt from Donte's wrists and released his hands, then rubbed them briskly, although he could hardly imagine why, except it felt good to share his warmth and breath and skin. Bumping his hips against Donte's aggressively, he helped Donte back into his jacket.

"Behold, the power of the Amorous Academic; see me and tremble." Adin licked at Donte's ear, still teasing, "You must not be afraid, caro. You must see you are helpless against my superior intellect." He grinned and took a long, slow kiss from Donte, who shook his head when he finally let him go.

"What are you?" breathed Donte.

"Just a man," said Adin. "Just a flesh-and-blood, heart-still-beating human. Someone who loves you." Adin dared a look into Donte's eyes at that moment and was sorry for it. He'd no sooner said the words than he was dumped unceremoniously onto the ground by Donte's sudden rise to standing.

"What?" Donte demanded.

Adin froze, looking up at Donte, who seemed enraged. "I love..."

"Don't," Donte spat. "Just stop it. You may mock me, but not with talk of love. I have no place for this. I want no part of this. Don't you *dare* come to me with herb-scented hands and think for one moment...for one second... Just—" Donte raked a hand through his hair. "Just don't, Adin. I don't regret that you live. I'm sorry if you think that there can ever be anything between us, but..." He gestured helplessly around him. "Don't imagine you could ever take Auselmo's place. His shoes cannot be filled."

Adin stared blankly at Donte as his words poured around them both like a bloodred rain. Adin felt Donte's anger but didn't fear it. It had nothing to do with him. He watched Donte depart at a dead run, vampire-style. One minute he was there, and then the next Adin was as alone as though Donte had never existed. Adin picked himself up off the ground, then slipped on his belt and shoes and readjusted his jacket. He took a turn around the memorial park in a numb sort of way, noting the different types of markers and the small tributes left by mourners, indifferently revisiting the pain and panic of what had become, arguably, the worst few weeks of his life.

Eventually he found his way to the gate and murmured a polite good-bye to Michael, who let him out. If the guard guessed at his mood, he didn't show it. Adin returned to Deana's car and drove it to her small home, then parked it carefully in the driveway just adjacent. By the time he found his bed, he was convinced that everything his life had become was merely a dream, and that in the morning he'd wake up and hardly remember it at all.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

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*From the quiet of the cellar I can hear everything that goes on here. Somewhere above my head Renata still lives, and my sons. No light can reach me here, and yet still I can see every creature, cobweb, and mote of dust in the air. I care not. I try, time and again, to go over the things I remember of the last day we had together, Auselmo, but the muddle in my brain begins to simmer, and events either seem too real or not real at all.*

*I remember supper. It was a caustic affair in which Renata's friends engaged in their favorite sport, making all others at the gathering feel beneath their contempt. They were, I saw, taking particular delight in baiting your sweet wife. I felt your tension, saw her relief when you sent her away with her women. I saw that you appeared heroic in her eyes, and that she dreaded the evening to come. Numbly, I watched all of this as if it were a play unfolding before me, holding out hope that in the end I could find some way to save us all.*

*After the wine was served, you began to look distracted. That much I remember. And then it gets confusing, for my wine as well, I think, had been tampered with, and I sat stupefied as you began to sweat. Your face seemed pale to me, and I thought, I must get him to his family, and then I caught you by the hand and pulled you away from Renata and her friends, but... Now when I think upon it, all I see are faces that are twisted and shapeless. Gaping mouths and hard eyes and jeering laughter.*

*By the time we arrived at my private rooms, you were ill. Gasping for breath. I called for the physician, and then the priest, but nothing could be done for you. Nothing helped. I would not let them near you after that. I was like an animal. I would have torn them apart with my teeth had they touched you, so they eventually withdrew.*

*I said everything, did I not? I never stopped speaking to you, beloved. Never stopped telling you what was in my heart. Dearest Auselmo, if you can haunt me...walk with me now. I slip alone into the darkness without you. I care for nothing. I held your body as it gave a last shuddering, gasping jerk, and then...nothing. Your life, and mine, done, in a fraction of a moment's time.*

*I refused to let you go. I prayed for my own death, and when Renata and her lover Delporrino entered the room, I thought, yes! Here is the answer; let them kill me. Let it be done forever. I begged them for it, for I was completely unaware that there was something far worse than death awaiting me at their hands. Renata's cold eyes fixed on me as I held you in my arms, and their cruelty only reassured me.*

*What a fool I was.*

*I welcomed death but imagined it could not be at my own hand, or I should never have the faintest hope of seeing you again, my beloved. When Delporrino came after me... He tore at me with his teeth, and... I hardly recall what he did... I hardly cared as long as I could continue to hold you in my arms. Eventually, I was unable to stay conscious, and when I awoke...dear heaven...when I awoke, I understood where earthly man receives his notions of hell.*



Outside the window of Adin's tiny yellow cottage, the blackness of night and storm swallowed everything except for brief, brightly illuminated snapshots of his front yard, impressed on him by flashes of lightning. The trees were bare and skeletal against the sky. Adin let the white lace curtain drop back into place. He picked up his drink and padded back to his overstuffed club chair, back to the work he'd disappeared into when it became clear he wouldn't even be able to run or bike today, much less walk to the grocery store for supplies. His inability to return to the university for the fall term cost him some respect with the dean. That he cared very little hadn't begun to worry him yet.

Time had passed slowly as he'd spent his days on the bike trails and his nights translating the remainder of Donte's journal. He'd managed a routine of sorts, accomplishing the purchase of food, cooking, and caring for his home on automatic pilot. On days like this one, it felt warm and cozy, a haven against the things he knew were outside waiting that he'd never really seen before.

The fire popped beyond the ottoman where he rested his feet, the only sound besides the terrible storm.



*It was months before I understood the truth of what I was. In that time I was truly and completely mad. I drifted between our world, Auselmo, and the new world without you in an agony of despair. Sometimes I forgot for minutes, hours even, that you were gone. I busied myself with drawing when I could get hold of something to draw on. I discovered the stone walls of my cellar prison could be marked with pebbles and begged these from my keepers, a terrified husband and wife whose family had served ours for generations. They would bring me things they thought might work sometimes. They were very kind and only kept me chained when I tried to harm someone.*

*There would be no harming myself. I was, it seemed, indestructible. Slowly, carefully, over time I began to see what I had become, and the grief it brought me as they procured people for me on whom to feed... I cannot tell you. It was in those first few months that I still killed by accident. Over time, I learned to feed without harming a human; indeed, I learned to give them pleasure. I didn't apply myself in any way, I only...became...inevitably, inexorably, far from human. As far from the human man you loved as can be conceived.*

*As time passed, I learned to live in darkness, feed without prejudice, and disconnect myself from everything and everyone that made me Niccolo. It was as if someone reached into my chest and removed my heart. Every single thing about me changed, except my love for you.*

*Renata put it about that I was ill, a polite euphemism for mad, and she was able to play queen of the castle for years without needing to sacrifice herself or my holdings on the altar of enforced marriage to yet another man. But I was learning what I was capable of, and Renata, for all her cunning, was completely ignorant of the conflagration of hatred I had buried within me, or the fact that my own confusion was fast evolving into a keen intelligence and feral, predatory instinct.*

*I began to leave the castle at night to hunt. There was very little else to do, and my keepers now were far more like friends and caretakers than jailers. One night, I saw how much time had passed—something I'd never considered. I was moving stealthily in the garden on an evening when Renata was holding a masked ball. Several people were coming and going from the stifling hall for fresh air, and I saw my son, now almost fully*



*gown, dressed as Apollo. He caught a pretty girl to him for a kiss in the moonlight, and I thought, All this has been stolen from me.*

*I found Renata that night and killed her. I felt nothing when I left her lifeless body discarded like an empty skin of wine on the damp grass beneath my feet.*



The outpouring of frantic phone calls Adin had received when he first arrived home in early autumn had trickled to a slow and steady once or twice a week from dear friends. Concern had turned to a judicious silence, broken by upbeat, friendly inquiries about the upcoming holidays. Deana continued to call every few days, letting him know subtly that she was certain other people had survived broken hearts and he would too. Invitations were still coming from friends who asked him to spend time in other parts of the world. Blind dates had even been mentioned, which had placed Adin firmly on the defensive.

As predicted, vampires were everywhere. Even on his beloved island, he seldom went out without meeting the searching eyes of someone who understood and acknowledged the difference between the man Adin had been and the one he was now. Adin knew he was marked, and even if he never saw Donte again, that would be apparent to any of the undead forever. He didn't know or care how it worked. Like innocence lost, he was without the ignorance that protected most men and women from the predators that walked among them.

For all that, however, Adin had few problems. He enjoyed the time off work, claiming health reasons backed up by his hospital stay in San Francisco, and even after that excuse wore out he didn't choose to return. He was on unpaid leave currently, until after the Christmas holidays, and he wasn't all that anxious to go back even then. He had nestled into the couch cushions earlier to read a book, but read the same paragraph over and over until he finally gave it up and picked up the remote control to turn on music. Lately, he was listening to a lot of Italian opera.



*It is widely rumored that my madness has resulted in Renata's violent death. After I killed his mother, my son ordered my jailers to keep me chained. He looks at me with different eyes, and his younger brother fears me too much to see me at all. As I write this, I wait for darkness. When Renata first brought me here and installed me in the cellar, I was weak, half-starved, and suffered from periods of delusion brought about by grief. Now, I know these chains are toys that I could break, and my jailers more fragile than butterfly wings should I choose to harm them.*

*I am leaving this night. My decision pains me, for I have longed to see my son take up the seal I held, and that my father held before me. He is fine and worthy, and may be considered as safe as any man now that Renata lies in her grave, although I am sure that Delporrino plans vengeance and might possibly target him. I have vowed on my son's life to hunt Delporrino down like the animal he is and see that he ruins no further lives.*

*Auselmo, best loved in all the worlds, I will travel to your home and see your family once more, and then I depart Italy for the East. The world is now the smallest place, it seems. I have always longed to travel; yet in those dreams I was never alone.*

*I carry you in my heart, Auselmo, and in that way you shall share immortality with me. As I imagine the future, it stretches out before me unending, and I move through it with no more conscious thought than a body jerking convulsively at the end of the hangman's rope. I move. I exist. I am. And yet, I do not live. Tonight I slip the final bonds of mortal life. The only thing I choose to carry with me besides you, beloved Auselmo, is this journal.*

*Kyrie eleison; Christe eleison; Kyrie eleison. Lord, have mercy.*



Adin closed his eyes, refusing, even in his mind, to name the reason for his malaise. Christmas was only three days away, and with it, the realization that he was spending it alone, by choice. He was giving himself this one last hurrah of self-pity, and after New Year's, he would return to the world of the living. He picked at a scone he'd made that morning for breakfast,

admiring the way he'd rolled and cut it into a bell shape for the holidays, when the phone rang.

"Tredeger," he said, after locating the cordless phone deep in the soft innards of his chair.

"Adin?" Boaz.

"Boaz, what's up? What part of the world are you calling from?"

"London. Mr. Santos is enjoying a very Dickens Christmas." Boaz hesitated. "What's going on up there in Washington? I hear you're having some weather."

"Yes, it's raining hard. Little cold. Nothing we can't handle." That could be the understatement of the year.

"Did you get the package I sent you?" Boaz asked.

"Yes."

"And the miniature? Donte wanted you to have that. He thought—"

"Did Donte really send that to me? Or was that you?"

"Well, it certainly wasn't mine to give," said Boaz uncertainly. "Did you read the rest of the journal?"

Adin pressed his lips together into a tight line. "Yes. I did." The pain and rage he'd felt as he read of Donte holding his dying lover haunted Adin's dreams. "Thank you."

"Good. When I didn't hear from you..."

"I'm sorry; I should have acknowledged it." Adin held the phone to his ear with one hand and sipped a whiskey with the other. "Look, did Santos...? What exactly did Santos say when he read *Notturmo*?"

"He was very contemplative. He didn't say much of anything."

"I see."

"I sensed that he sees his father in a different light now. He hasn't made a move on Donte yet. I can't tell if he plans anything in the future, but so far—"

“Why are you still with Santos?” asked Adin irritably. “Do you sell your loyalty to the highest bidder? I thought you were the quintessential family retainer. Santos nearly had me killed. I know in the grand scheme of—”

“The best way to work for Donte is to see to it that he doesn’t come into contact with Santos. I’m in an excellent position to assure that.” Boaz hesitated. “Have you seen him?”

“No. I haven’t.”

“Who?”

“Him, and don’t think you’ll trick me into saying his name,” replied Adin. He was *not* going to do it.

“You think you can’t say it, don’t you? It doesn’t work that way, Adin. Saying his name isn’t what brings him.”

“It’s brought him in the past.”

“Coincidence. You mustn’t be afraid of Donte, Adin.”

Adin was annoyed. “What do you know about it? I’m not afraid.”

“Refusing to say his name? Like he’s Lord Voldemort or something? Adin, you are *so* afraid to say his name.”

“I am not afraid to say it. Donte Fedeltà, Boaz, *Donte*. It’s not as if seeing him is my worst-case scenario. Are you satisfied? Niccolo Pietro di Sciarello.”

“Oh yes.” Boaz laughed. “I’m satisfied. Quite. Merry Christmas, Adin.”

“Merry Christmas.” Adin hung up the phone, cursing. His bell-shaped scone seemed to have lost some of its charm, and he picked up the plate to take it into the kitchen. Once there, he got down one of his finer china teacups. Edward was fond of saying, “A pricey teacup always means a better cup of tea,” or something shallow like that.

Outside, the weather was foul, the tree branches slashing the air and rattling like bones. No time went by without flashes of lightning illuminating his drenched and stripped garden, and the thunder was giving him a headache. He watched as a particularly immense fork of lightning cracked the blackness of

the sky, and caught sight of Donte standing in the shadow of a winter-barren maple tree.

The cup and saucer Adin held so carefully a moment before clattered to the tiles as he ran for the porch door, heedless of the shards of broken porcelain as they pierced his bare feet. He exploded through the back door and was down the steps, running through rain now falling in sheets that made it hard to see.

“Aw. Crap, *Boaz*.” The little shit. “Donte!” Adin called out to the figure, although by then it had disappeared into the darkness behind the tree.

Adin rounded the tree, slipping a little in the muck of slimy, wet leaves and debris from the storm. He skidded to a halt in front of Donte, who stood dripping and still as the trunk of the tree itself.

“Donte!” Adin repeated, reaching out for him. “You’re wet.”

“So perceptive.” Donte looked irritated but didn’t look away.

“Are you in the habit of lurking in people’s gardens during inclement weather?”

Donte rolled his eyes. “Yes, of course I am. Do you never go to the cinema? It’s in the vampire handbook to skulk about the homes of chosen victims, looking morose before we—”

Adin crossed his arms over his chest. “I suspect I should get a copy of that handbook, now that I’m a favored snack food among your kind.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Donte whispered.

Adin held up an arm to keep the rain from falling directly into his eyes. Donte shook his head, and water droplets flew everywhere. Adin put a hand on the side of Donte’s face, but Donte flinched away.

“What?” Adin tried again, this time catching and cupping Donte’s jaw in his hand and following up that small victory by leaning into his body.

“Adin.” Donte almost sighed. “I am trying to understand your behavior toward me. I cannot comprehend you at all!”

“What?” Adin shouted over a particularly loud clap of thunder. He couldn’t take his eyes off Donte, who looked like a god, he imagined, elemental and fierce, backlit by the lightning silhouetting the tree behind him. Even so, he registered that lightning and trees were not a happy combination.

“How can you not hate me?” Donte asked. “Do you imagine I would have come for you if your friends had not? I could not have saved you, Adin. I was fully and completely prepared to allow you to *die*, and still you call me to your side. You gave yourself to me and told me you love me. Are you insane?”

“I don’t know, all right? It’s *complicated*,” Adin snapped as he wiped the water from his face. “I accepted the inevitable. That’s all.”

“So if I were to place my hand around your throat or over your mouth and nose, you would allow me to end your life because it’s *inevitable*?”

“You wouldn’t do that, Donte.” Rain continued to pound them.

“You cannot know that,” Donte shouted. “I don’t even know that! You’re only human. I could catch your face between my palms and crush you like a berry, Adin.”

“Now there’s a fun and spanky image,” Adin murmured.

Donte put a hand through his wet hair. “I need to understand why you continue to place yourself in my hands. What can you possibly be thinking? I’m nothing less than a monster.”

“Perhaps.” Adin reached out a hand and snaked it around Donte’s neck until he could feel Donte’s cool skin beneath his fingertips.

“Stop!” Donte cried, spinning Adin and covering his mouth and nose with the palm of one large hand. Adin felt an initial surge of panic and fought Donte’s hold on him for a moment. Donte fought back, pressing harder, giving no quarter, cutting

off all Adin's air as surely as if his hands were wrapped around Adin's throat. He hissed in Adin's ear. "You're a fool to trust me."

Adin willed himself to be still, to allow his body to relax into Donte's. He closed his eyes and rested his head against Donte's strong chest. He felt the hand gripping his face tighten further.

"I'm a monster, Adin," Donte said softly, his lips spraying the falling raindrops onto Adin's cheek. "Not human. I cannot love you."

Adin listened, and still he couldn't make himself believe. Donte might consider himself a monster. Certainly what he was doing was monstrous, but Adin continued to submit, even though his lungs burned and his heart clenched inside his chest. Even though his body screamed at him to fight. This was Donte, not Santos or his men. This was Donte, and Adin *chose* not to fight. As the pain of not breathing began to give way to a dizzy euphoria, he became aware that perhaps he really didn't care. Maybe the answer was just that simple.

Abruptly, Adin felt a hard shove and landed on his knees in the squelching mud.

"What gives you this blind faith in me?" Donte snapped, standing over him. Rain dripped into Adin's face until he shook his head to clear it. He tried to lurch to his feet but slipped twice before he made it.

Adin turned to face Donte again. "I don't know."

"Look at yourself, caro! If I hadn't stopped, you would be dead."

"But you stopped."

"But if I hadn't—"

"I know that! Don't you think I know that?" Adin grabbed the lapels of Donte's jacket and pulled him close. "Life is full of things that can kill me, you vampire motherfucker, and you sure as shit can just *get in line!*" Adin put his lips to Donte's in a fierce, quick kiss.

"Adin." Donte laughed a low, rusty laugh. He pulled Adin up into his arms as the smaller man wrapped around him.

“Shut up, Donte.”

Donte carried Adin to the porch. “Oh, caro. I always seem to end up wearing you somehow.”

Donte laid him down on the wooden surface, under the eaves, sliding in to sit next to him. Adin laughed and snorted water through his nose.

“Always so elegant. There is a saying about certain people not having the sense to come in out of the rain.” He drew his hand down Adin’s soggy T-shirt. Adin’s head was half-hidden by pots of fuchsias.

Adin reached up and caught Donte’s hand. “Rain is the least of my problems.”

“Adin.” Donte’s voice held a warning.

“No.” Adin shook his head. “You were hiding behind a tree in my garden like a wet raccoon during what is arguably the worst storm of the season.” Adin reached for Donte’s belt buckle and undid it, then carefully unzipped his trousers with one hand.

“That is not a very dignified image,” said Donte, fumbling with Adin’s soggy jeans. Adin helped by unbuttoning the fly. Donte coaxed Adin over onto his stomach and pulled Adin’s jeans and shorts down. He leaned in, placing his face at the crest of one of Adin’s ass cheeks, playfully nipping the skin there.

“Oh,” Adin breathed, as Donte found the cleft of his buttocks and used his face to part the folds of flesh there. Adin relaxed, giving him the access he sought.

“That’s right, Adin,” Donte murmured, making the sensitive skin around his hole vibrate. “Open for me.” Adin arched and slid, putting his head down and bracing his arms against one of the larger pots on his porch.

Donte’s tongue slithered around Adin’s hole and entered him, and Adin’s body quivered and tightened in response. He could feel Donte, slicking his entrance and teasing at him, getting him ready. This wasn’t their usual hurried, frantic coupling. This was tender and sensuous.



“Donte,” Adin begged.

Donte kissed his way leisurely up Adin’s back, then tugged up and pulled on Adin’s T-shirt until he could get it off one shoulder and then over Adin’s head. Adin shook it off his other arm. Donte nibbled and sucked at Adin’s neck as he knelt between Adin’s legs. “Adin?” He put a hand on Adin’s hip, making sure that he was ready.

“Yes,” answered Adin. Donte positioned himself and nudged at Adin’s hole. “*Yes!*”

Adin pushed back against Donte impatiently. Donte clamped his hands on Adin’s hips. “Caro.” He leaned over and whispered in the smaller man’s ear as he inched his way forward into his body. “Ah, Adin,” he murmured against the skin of Adin’s back.

Adin was silent as they found their rhythm together. He pushed against the planter and allowed Donte to meet him hard and fast. When Donte reached a hand beneath him to grasp his cock, he slid helplessly into his climax while Donte pounded him, slipping on his wet and sweaty back and gripping his hip hard. He heard Donte growl low in his throat and felt the cum slick his ass as it flooded him.

The storm was moving further east, but occasional slashes of lightning marked the sky, trailing loud concussions of thunder in their wake. Adin felt his own breathing slow to an almost normal cadence as Donte quietly stroked the skin on the outsides of his thighs.

Adin lay on his stomach, with Donte draped on his back and still inside him. He laced the fingers of their right hands together by his hip.

Donte suddenly became still. “Adin?”

“Mm?”

“Have I harmed you?” Donte pulled out gently and slid away, allowing Adin to turn over and face him. Adin read real concern in his eyes.

“No,” said Adin. “You were—”

“You’re bleeding.”

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

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"I'm what?" Adin sat up, examining himself in the porch light.

"I smell it," said Donte. "Are you hurt?"

"My feet." Adin lifted the leg that didn't still have his jeans on it. "See anything?"

Donte shifted in place, grasping Adin's foot and looking at it carefully. He cupped it gently in his large hand and cursed. "You have shards of broken glass in your foot."

"I dropped a teacup," Adin explained.

Donte was already picking him up and putting his hand on the handle of the porch door. "Will you invite me in?"

"That depends." Adin leaned his head against Donte's chest. "Is this a social call or are you keeping a dinner reservation?"

"Adin," warned Donte.

"Oh, *all right*, welcome. Please come in."

"Where is the bathroom?" Donte stood in the middle of the kitchen, dripping on the tiles.

"Down the hall and to the left. Look, you don't have to—"

"Caro, look at the floor." Donte spun around so Adin could see the bloody, smeared footprints on the kitchen tiles. "You were saying?"

"Nothing." The blood made him a little sick. How could he have failed to notice that?

"I will need tweezers to remove the glass," said Donte, placing Adin carefully on the closed toilet seat. "And a first aid kit, if you have one."

"In the drawer." Adin indicated the drawer by the sink. He hissed as Donte leaned over to look at his bloody foot, prodding it with a gentle finger. Donte lifted the other and found that it, too, was cut up.

“Truly,” Donte murmured as he began to remove shards of crockery from Adin’s foot. “Humans are like toy balloons, and I never cease to be amazed by the fact that they run along, heedlessly wreaking havoc, harming themselves and everyone around them—”

“Are you through?” Adin ground out. The event was becoming more and more painful as Donte forgot himself while delivering his tirade.

“No, I am not through.” Donte lifted a foot to his lips and carefully slid his thick, slick tongue across the sole.

“Oh, hoh, hoh...hah.” Adin sighed, arching his back and allowing his knees to fall open.

Donte applied his tongue to the area under the toes, and with each lick as he slipped and slid his tongue across the sensitive skin on the bottom of Adin’s foot, it felt to Adin as though he were swirling it around the head of his cock.

“That can’t be too clean,” said Adin on a shaky breath.

“It isn’t.”

“Then—”

Donte gripped his foot harder and gazed at Adin from between his toes. “I’m cleaning and closing the wounds.”

“Oh.” Adin gazed at him through heavy-lidded eyes. “Good, *good* vampire.”

“I’m going to shower, Adin,” Donte said, getting up and turning on the water. “Would you like to stay here, or would you like me to carry you to your bed?”

Adin put his feet, which felt 100 percent better, onto the lip of the tub as Donte drew the curtain inside it. “I’ll stay here.”

“I don’t suppose you have anything large enough for me to wear?” asked Donte.

Adin shook his head.

“It’s like that Swift story. I’ve landed in Lilliput.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“*Travels into Several Remote Nations—*”

“I know the book. Just who are you calling a Lilliputian?” Adin watched as Donte stripped and stepped into the shower.”

“Certainly, I am not referring to myself.” They both looked down at Donte’s now-flaccid cock.

“I see,” Adin remarked, and Donte disappeared into the shower. Under his breath, he said, “Truly.”

“I heard that.” Donte’s head poked out from between the curtains. “This is a very small shower, Adin.”

Adin sighed and enjoyed the sight of Donte’s form as it shifted and twisted behind the translucent fabric. Donte shut off the water and stepped out. Adin reached up to the towel rack and handed him a towel.

“I suppose,” said Donte, placing the towel on the work surface and pulling at Adin’s remaining clothing, “that rinsing the mud off you would be prudent.”

“I can—” Adin began to speak as Donte lifted him and stepped back into the shower, holding him under the spray to get the worst of the mud and debris off him. Donte shifted Adin briefly to one arm to pick a fuchsia blossom from his hair. Once they were done, Donte seated Adin on the counter next to the sink and dried him.

“I have a change of clothing in the car, along with my toiletries. Until then, I suppose I could wear a towel.” He was frowning at the towel, which didn’t want to stay closed as he moved.

“You brought a car?”

“How else should I get here? In a bubble of light?”

Adin processed this. “But—”

Donte paused and looked at him with amused eyes. “Vampires are predators,” he said patiently. “One gains a certain satisfaction from the hunt. You could call it stalking...”

Adin was disappointed. “Stalking? You’ve been stalking me?”

Donte huffed a small laugh. “It’s not as glamorous as simply appearing whenever you speak my name, is it?” He nudged

Adin's knees apart and stepped between them. "I can feel you, Adin, if that's what you're worried about." He took Adin's hand and placed it on his chest. "I feel you when you want me. When you need me."

"Do you?" Adin's mouth was suddenly dry.

"Yes. You call to me and I feel it in my...heart, for lack of a better term. It's quite surprising, really." Donte leaned forward.

"Is it?"

"Yes." Donte seemed to shake himself. "But as for coming to you, I'm afraid I can't arrive in a puff of smoke, and I don't turn into a bat."

"No?"

"No." Donte pulled Adin's hips into his, rubbing their cocks together. "It seems a terrible waste of time, but I must come to you through ordinary time and space. I drive a car."

"What, like the Batmobile?"

"Like a rented Volvo."

"A Volvo?" Adin's head tipped back as he laughed. "Oh my G—"

"Adin!" Donte barked, his lips on Adin's throat.

"I am Donte, the apex of the food chain in your world, allow me to lure you into my very safe Swedish automobile with its side curtain airbags and fasten your—" Donte nipped lightly, and Adin hissed in response, catching him by the back of the neck and holding him there. "Go ahead, love," he said softly.

Donte tried to pull his head back, but Adin held him there.

"No." Adin whispered in Donte's ear. "Please...let me do this for you." Desire fueled his declaration. "I love you, Donte..."

Donte groaned and slid his mouth along Adin's neck until he found Adin's vein. His fangs slid, razor-sharp, into Adin's flesh, and he fed. Adin's head fell back against the mirror, and his hips snapped against Donte's. He surrendered to his climax and groaned weakly against Donte's hair.

“Ah, Donte.” He sighed, and Donte reacted by pressing harder against him, grinding and nuzzling. Adin thought he’d die with the pleasure of it. Donte found his own release moments later, and Adin heard their bloodsong in his heart.

Donte rested his forehead against Adin’s chest. Adin cradled him, crooning soft words. Eventually, Adin cupped Donte’s face in his hands and kissed him deeply. Idly, Donte picked up his towel to clean them up.

“Donte,” Adin whispered. “Why are you here?” He couldn’t stop himself from moving his hands over Donte’s face and neck.

“It seems all I do is apologize,” Donte said against Adin’s neck. “I’m sorry.”

“Oh, *fuck*, don’t be sorry, Donte. *Please*. Not about this.” Adin held him fast.

“Listen.” Donte peeled himself from Adin, who stilled. “I have to tell you. I thought if another man came into my life, it would take something away from Auselmo. Strip him of my loyalty, my love, and my protection. Eradicate my vows. Cheapen what we had. Do you understand?”

Adin nodded.

“These are sacred things to me,” Donte continued. “It’s not without consideration that I could even begin to imagine a life with someone else.”

“I understand.” Adin brushed a strand of wet hair away from Donte’s face.

“I know you do. *I know*. Thank you, caro.”

Adin was stepping carefully down when Donte picked him up again. “Where can I put you?”

“To the right, my bedroom.” Adin felt a little dizzy. “I’m so exhausted all of a sudden.

“I shouldn’t have—”

“In here.” Adin pointed to the door of his bedroom. Donte backed carefully into the room with Adin in his arms, protecting his feet from the doorjamb.

“All right.” Donte lifted the covers with one hand and placed Adin gently on the bed. He crawled into the bed beside Adin and pulled him into an embrace.

Adin felt the cool touch on his skin and curled into it. “So tired,” he murmured, kissing Donte’s shoulder.

“I know, caro. Rest.” Donte stroked his hair. “Just rest.”

When Adin opened his eyes, the barest winter light filtered in from the windows. The worst of the storm had apparently passed, but a steady patter of rain could still be heard falling on the roof. His mouth was dry, and for a moment he wondered why his feet hurt. He shot up, looking around. *Crap.*

Adin swung out of bed and pulled on a pair of jeans. He didn’t take the time to button them as he raced out of his bedroom and down the hall. He saw no sign of Donte as he rounded the corner into the kitchen and automatically turned to the front door. He flung it open and ran out of the house, letting loose a shriek as momentum carried him into and over a bulky shape on his doorstep. He fell down three wooden steps into a substantial puddle of mud on the path and felt a dark shape loom over him.

“Adin?” asked Donte, blocking some of the rain coming down. He was wearing Adin’s bathrobe, which was about four sizes too small, and looked at Adin as though he were inspecting a new species of insect. “Are you all right?”

“Of course,” snapped Adin. “I’m simply trying to decide whether I should put in a pool here.”

“There is no need for sarcasm.” Donte held his hand out. Adin grabbed it and yanked him down to the ground and jumped him. They thrashed in the mud until they were both covered.

“Caro!” Donte said. “I hesitate to remind you of this, but it’s daylight, and even though the sun is behind clouds—”

“*Crap.*” Adin shot up and pulled Donte under the eaves. He ran his hands over Donte’s face to reassure himself that no skin had been damaged. “Why were you sitting on my front porch?”

Donte nodded at two suitcases, which were stacked neatly next to Adin's porch swing. "I went to get my things and discovered your door locks automatically."

Adin's eyebrows disappeared under the hair on his forehead, and he snorted. "I am Donte, master of darkness—"

"Shut up, Adin." Donte kissed his forehead. "I could have broken it."

"Yes. You could have squeezed my house like a—"

Donte sighed. "Am I never to have any respect from you at all, you little *shit*?"

"I love you," Adin said quietly. "You can have anything you want from me, Donte. Anything."

Donte leaned over and kissed Adin's lips softly.

Adin tried the door and found it locked. Donte made a face, but Adin showed him where he kept the spare key under a particularly ugly plant.

Donte lifted a brow. "I see you take security seriously."

"The things that are important to me can't be obtained with a key."

"I know." Donte shifted, reaching for the smaller carry-on-style bag. "That's why..." He retrieved the *Notturmo* manuscript from it—in its protective carrying case—and handed it to Adin. "That's *how* I know that the things that are sacred to me are safe in your hands, più amato."

After a moment, Adin realized what Donte was saying. "Donte. I swear I'll take care of it; I promise you that. I'll see that it's protected and cherished." He held it to his chest as Donte keyed the lock and went in first. He placed the manuscript on a table near the door and turned to see Donte looking at him with solemn, serious eyes.

"And if I were to give my heart into your safekeeping as well, caro? Would you also protect and cherish that?"

"If it's yours to give." Adin reached out and cupped the back of Donte's head, bringing him in close for a kiss.



Donte looked uncertain. “I carry Auselmo in my heart. His heart and mine are one. I don’t know how to separate them.”

“Ah.” Adin sighed, urging the still-dripping and muddy Donte into the bathroom. He opened the tap and diverted the water to the shower, pulling the curtain closed. “Well. I think my heart has room enough for both of you.” He turned and smiled tentatively.

Donte smiled back, looking around. “This is a very small house, *più amato*.” He removed his clothes, dropping them in a heap on the floor by the bathroom door.

“It’s cozy,” Adin offered, hanging Donte’s clothing on a wooden wall peg as each piece came off.

“It’s was built for the mayor of Munchkin City.” Donte raised his eyebrows.

“But on the not very bright side, there’s hardly any sun. That will mean less wear and tear on that delicate vampire complexion. Lowered sunscreen costs.”

“Ah, yes. Well...” Donte removed Adin’s jeans, then tossed those on the floor as well, thwarting Adin, who ran out of pegs. He ran a hand across the muscles he found on Adin’s chest and abdomen. “You are so beautiful, *caro*.”

“And you as well, *più amato*, are beautiful. And I, as the apex of the academic...”

“I will teach you to mock *me*, Adin.”

“I’m afraid you already have, love.” Adin grinned.

“Adin!” Donte cried out as Adin bit him hard, just above his nipple.

“That will teach you to eat something spicy before bedtime.”

“You shit!” Donte joined Adin’s laughter as they stepped into the shower together.

“Maybe tomorrow, for laughs, you’ll stay in bed with me. Just *once*, I’d like to wake up and not find myself abandoned.”

“Oh, Adin.” Donte pulled the smaller man to him and generously let him languish under the spray of hot water. “I am so sorry.”

“It’s all right.” Adin laid his head on Donte’s silent chest.

“Will you let me draw you while you sleep?” Donte asked almost shyly.

Adin suddenly remembered the journal entries Donte wrote while watching Auselmo sleep, and a wave of tenderness washed over him. “You don’t sleep?”

Donte shook his head. “I hardly slept before I was turned, and now, I don’t sleep at all.”

“Then yes. Of course. My home is yours. You can do whatever you like.”

“I have a villa in Spain, and your *home* would fit in the bathroom,” Donte said sourly.

“Nevertheless.” Adin distracted him with a passionate kiss.

“Adin?”

“Yes, love?”

Donte tightened his arms around Adin and sighed against his ear.

“I brought a new blank journal.”



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Z. A. MAXFIELD is a fifth generation native of Los Angeles, although she now lives in Orange County, CA. She started writing in 2007 on a dare from her children and never looked back. Pathologically disorganized, and perennially optimistic, she writes as much as she can, reads as much as she dares, and enjoys her time with family and friends. If anyone asks her how a wife and mother of four manages to find time for a writing career, she'll answer, "It's amazing what you can do if you completely give up housework." Check out her website at: <http://www.zamaxfield.com>.

## **THE TREVOR PROJECT**

The Trevor Project operates the only nationwide, around-the-clock crisis and suicide prevention helpline for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. Every day, The Trevor Project saves lives through its free and confidential helpline, its website and its educational services. If you or a friend are feeling lost or alone call The Trevor Helpline. If you or a friend are feeling lost, alone, confused or in crisis, please call The Trevor Helpline. You'll be able to speak confidentially with a trained counselor 24/7.

The Trevor Helpline: 866-488-7386

On the Web: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

## **THE GAY MEN'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROJECT**

Founded in 1994, The Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project is a grassroots, non-profit organization founded by a gay male survivor of domestic violence and developed through the strength, contributions and participation of the community. The Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project supports victims and survivors through education, advocacy and direct services. Understanding that the serious public health issue of domestic violence is not gender specific, we serve men in relationships with men, regardless of how they identify, and stand ready to assist them in navigating through abusive relationships.

GMDVP Helpline: 800.832.1901

On the Web: <http://gmdvp.org/>

## **THE GAY & LESBIAN ALLIANCE AGAINST DEFAMATION/GLAAD EN ESPAÑOL**

The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) is dedicated to promoting and ensuring fair, accurate and inclusive representation of people and events in the media as a means of eliminating homophobia and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

On the Web: <http://www.glaad.org/>

GLAAD en español:

<http://www.glaad.org/espanol/bienvenido.php>

If you're a GLBT and questioning student heading off to university, should know that there are resources on campus for you. Here's just a sample:

US Local GLBT college campus organizations

<http://dv-8.com/resources/us/local/campus.html>

GLBT Scholarship Resources

<http://tinyurl.com/6fx9v6>

Syracuse University

<http://lgbt.syr.edu/>

Texas A&M

<http://glbt.tamu.edu/>

Tulane University

<http://www.oma.tulane.edu/LGBT/Default.htm>

University of Alaska

<http://www.uaf.edu/agla/>

University of California, Davis

<http://lgbtrc.ucdavis.edu/>

University of California, San Francisco

<http://lgbt.ucsf.edu/>

University of Colorado

<http://www.colorado.edu/glbtrc/>

University of Florida

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/multicultural/lgbt/>

University of Hawai'i, Mānoa

<http://manoa.hawaii.edu/lgbt/>

University of Utah

<http://www.sa.utah.edu/lgbt/>

University of Virginia

<http://www.virginia.edu/deanofstudents/lgbt/>

Vanderbilt University

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/>

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