

Untitled
By Allison Walker

The sky was spattered with stars, endless depths of space above me. If I stared long enough, would the cold crushing weight of infinity reach into me, lift me away?

The muffled bleat of a goat drew my eyes back to the clearing, firmly settling me into my body and the tight horror gripping my chest. Shadows from the wide ring of candles wavered over the surrounding trees in a hypnotic dance. It would have been beautiful if not for what was happening in the center of the sacred clearing.

My mother, tall and dark, knelt next to the trembling goat. She was naked and her bronzed skin glowed, drawing all attention to her. Her fingers slid through the goat's wiry white hair, tracing up to the brown blaze over its face. Its eyes rolled toward her as she cooed to it, barely moving her lips as she whispered soft nothings. Silently the blade found the goat's soft throat and slid neatly across in a quick metal kiss. A thin line of crimson appeared as the knees buckled and kicked. My mother held it, hands suddenly firm as she skillfully controlled its death spasms. Blood flowed into the golden basin at my mother's knees and slowly the goat's eyes clouded.

She discarded the carcass to the grass and picked up the large bowl, balancing it deftly in one hand. The other held the long sharp dagger that'd so cleanly spilled the goat's lifeblood. Carefully, she dipped the blade into the blood and stirred in time with the way of her sultry walk. Her bare feet traced a circle just inside the candles. The flickering light and shadows slithered over her skin and played around her naked curves as she walked. Her sway of her hips slowly raised the pressure in the air in a hypnotic trance. Magic came to her call, creeping through the trees like insects close to the ground with millions of prickling legs.

As she completed her first circuit, my mother drew the knife from the blood and dribbled it on the ground. When the first drop hit the grass, magic jumped. It flowed to her as she walked the circle and created the binding for the spell. When the last drop of lifeblood fell it completed the circle of power. The spell surged to life, drawing Magic from everything like a drawn in breath. There was a moment of stillness and pressure then the Magic of the spell burst forth. It leached into me, soaking through my skin and finding its way through my veins into the spark of life burning in me. A shudder coursed through my body in its wake.

My mother turned. Her intensity and the Magic riding her drew my attention with her to the man. He waited for her at the center point. His body was Magic ridden. She stalked toward him, her movements tense with the possibility of power and danger. Holding the bowl between them, my mother stopped. Deliberately, her eyes never leaving his, she dipped her fingers into the cooling blood. His skin jumped under her fingers as she smeared the blood over his eyes, lips and heart. He then marked her in the same way. After each stain of blood on their skin, the Magic pulsed stronger. The pressure was suffocating in my throat. I wanted to flee and wash away the wicked feeling of a hundred spiders' feet crawling over my body. Yet I could not. The

Magic held me as my mother wrought her spell in the light of the streaming candles.

The pressure in my chest woke me choking. A warm purring presence on my ribs slowly drew me back out of the trembling child at the edge of a midnight clearing and back to myself, alone in a dark apartment. I coughed, clearing my throat of any residual panic. The cat, a small calico I called Em, gave an indignant and sleepy reprimand. She got to her feet with a stretch and jumped off the bed to seek less offensive sleeping arrangements. Once freed, I sat up, hooking my arms around my knees and hanging my head. I was drenched in sweat and my body felt tight with fear and the desire to flee. It took several minutes and many long deep breaths to chase the dream from my mind. Once I was relaxed and breathing normally, I lifted my head.

I live in a studio apartment in the South Carondelet area in St Louis. The bedroom space was sectioned off from the rest of the apartment with several plain folding screens. Walls were red brick and decorations were simple and functional. I'd lived here for nearly a year now and was just starting to make the space my own by inches. Framed skyline pictures hung on the walls, owl coffee mugs dangled from a mug rack in the small kitchen and the reinforced steal door had several hidden deadbolts. That had been the first thing I'd updated. My living room furniture faced a working wood burning fireplace that took up most of the west wall instead of the small television perched on an end table in the corner. The fireplace had been the main reason I'd chosen the apartment. I loved the smell of charred wood and the crackle pop of a small fire. It was also convenient when I needed to work with an open flame.

Outside, the city street was quiet and still. Sleep would elude me for the rest of the night so I slid from the bed and went to the window. The street lights glowed like orange orbs as mist crept through the air. I pulled the window up and let the crisp autumn air in. Kneeling I took a long breath of it, drawing it into my lungs and clearing away any lingering dregs of sleep. Tonight was a night for hunting.

I went to the bathroom. After taking care of business, I stood in front of the mirror braiding my hair back from my face. It was light nonchalant brown and hung thick and straight past my shoulders. My eyes were hazel, an inner ring of warm brown and an outer ring of brilliant green. The face reflected back to me looked a little tired around the edges of the eyes and mouth but the gaze was resilient. It wasn't the type of face that would turn heads or strike me dumb but it was pleasant with high cheekbones and well framed eyes. It was a face that could blend into a crowd and go unnoticed when needed. My body was slim with just the right amount of curve around my hips and waist to earn me my fair share of compliments. Except that wasn't why I worked out daily and practiced martial arts. Speed and survival were more important than fitting into the latest beauty trend and designer clothes.

I dressed in dark cargo pants, strong boots, and long sleeve black shirt with the words "I do not have puppet cancer" printed over the chest. Over that went my holster and the black chrome glock I favored. Although I had a license to carry, even late at night people tended to stare at a loaded gun holster. I covered it with a leather biker jacket, not wanting to draw attention to

myself.

Em watched me cross the room from her curled position on the loveseat. I knelt by the bed and pushed up the discarded sheets. Two brass handles were screwed to the mattress frame. I grasped them, pulling out the large compartment that was fitted under the bed. It rolled forward easily; revealing an arsenal of weapons and odd things a normal person would associate with the occult. No one paused to think that the artifacts used by the evil beings in the world might look frighteningly similar to those used to kill them. Not that I invited everyday citizens from the streets into my home to snoop under my bed. I selected two knives. One was smallish and flat, perfect for a concealed carry. The other had a blade slightly longer than my hand with a thick leather sheath carved with dark roses. Both knives had been made to my specifications with the highest possible silver content in the steel blades.

A faded leather journal was the lone item in my nightstand. It smelled like worn hide, was tied with a leather thong and bulged with scraps of paper. Tucking the journal under my arm and balancing the knives in my hand, I retreated to the kitchen nook. The cabinets above and to the left of my sink were not full of mundane baking ingredients and utensils but the many odd materials collected here and there for hunting. A large silver hip flask with rosebuds etched on the sides joined the knives and journal on the counter. In the fridge, I selected a mason jar of dark red liquid. Freshly spilled blood is the startling bright red they replicated in the movies. If it isn't a fresh kill, blood is a darker red, almost the shade of dark chocolate. Most people don't know that any part of an animal can be purchased at smaller family owned butcher shops. For an extra twenty, I'd secured the lamb's blood needed for just this hunt.

I'd first noticed the signs several months ago. Several women, all wispy and dark haired, had gone missing from several square blocks down by the waterfront. It was one of those cases that the police would put together and think "serial killer." It was the kind of case I watched and thought of a different kind of predator.

Every year, thousands of people go missing in the United States alone. Most are never heard from again. Voluntary disappearances, accidents and human perpetrators account for some of that number but there are other predators out there that would take a human. Ninety-nine percent of the population live unaware of the true dangers in the world, the dark side that lurks on the corners of human society preying on the innocents that steadfastly refuse to believe in the Supernatural. The creatures of the Supernatural prefer that cloak of disbelief. Anyone who knows the truth is marked for death. Although powerful beings are out there, if the human population became aware and fought back, any Supernatural would be overrun by sheer numbers. Does the Spanish Inquisition mean anything to you? Survival often depends on secrecy. For humans, it largely depends on ignorance. Nonetheless, ignorance will not keep everyone safe.

Three months ago a delicate brunette with a pixy cut and a day job answering phones for a moving company went missing. Debra Bell had been at a Old North St. Louis Bar with friends

before cutting her night short and walking to her car parked two blocks away. She never made it. Two weeks ago, her emancipated body was found floating in the Mississippi. She was bruised with the markings of binding, hanging and torture. "One sick bastard," one of the officers at the scene had commented, to keep her alive so long. One sick bastard indeed.

By the time the fourth woman went missing and the third body was discovered, I'd found the pattern. It was replacing each victim with another and keeping the women alive for weeks at a time. Each had gone missing near the waterfront and, judging by the injuries to their bodies, had been restrained in damp, cold conditions. A Djinn was active in St. Louis.

*It had taken me awhile to come to that conclusion. As far as I had known, Djinn were rare. I untied the leather thong and flipped through my journal carefully so that the stray papers didn't scatter to the floor. The marker I stopped at was a scrap of paper with a pencil sketching on it I'd inherited from an old friend. I'd been eighteen when I'd first met Marcus and he'd been instrumental in setting the path I now found myself taking in life. Marcus was tall and thin through the shoulders and chest. His eyes were a delicate blue and his hands were thickly calloused. He could work magic with a silver blade or a pencil. Most of the drawings I'd collected were his doing. Supernatural creatures were notoriously wary of cameras, if it was possible for their images to be captured at all, but a drawing from Marcus could do so much more than a photo.

The sketch I'd opened to was a pencil drawing of a man. His eyes were wide-set under a large forehead and bald scalp. In all he was average and unassuming if you could ignore the glowing blue tattoos pouring over his skin. They wove in intricate oriental patterns from his bald head, over his ears, down his neck and disappeared beneath his shirt. Appearing again on his long arm, the markings finished in a flourish over his hand which seemed to radiate blue. The same chilling energy reflected in his eyes.

I'd never faced a Djinn but Marcus' drawing was enough to prick the hairs on the back of my neck. This was a creature that fed its power on the life force of humans. I chewed absently on my lip and shifted the drawing aside to read my cramped handwriting underneath. The Djinn were an ancient and immortal race of beings born from smokeless fire. Immortal unless stabbed with a silver blade coated with lamb's blood. If I was right, this Djinn had already claimed the lives of four women that I was aware of. Marcus had assured me that there were probably more victims I hadn't found. A strong Djinn would feed off of more than one victim at a time and normally would have been more careful about acquiring and disposing of them. Either this Djinn wasn't concerned with its own secrecy and survival, or it wasn't aware that there was an active hunter in St. Louis. Most hunters operated with just as much secrecy as the monsters did. Secrecy meant the monsters didn't come after you and the humans didn't lock you away in a padded room. The battles of the Supernatural were rarely noticed among the Normals. When your average run of the mill person felt uneasy, we were all in deep shit.

After several minutes studying my notes, I flipped the journal shut and returned it to my

nightstand. The night wouldn't wait for me. Carefully, I sheathed the smaller knife into my boot, flexing my ankle several times for a comfortable fit. Next, I unscrewed the mason jar of blood. I emptied half of it into a Tupperware then filled two small sandwich bags. I took a sturdy backpack from a peg by the door and packed my tools carefully before slinging it over my back. Em made a perfunctory sound from the loveseat as I filled her water and food bowls. I always left her with enough food for several days when I was on a job, just in case. After sending several kissy sounds her way, I tucked a sleek motorcycle helmet under my arm and locked the apartment behind me.

I owned a Ducati Monster 696. It was parked in the small lot behind the apartment building looking sleek, black and sexy next to my other vehicle, a Jeep Grand Cherokee. I threw a leg over the bike, securing the helmet over my head. There were many things in my life that would probably kill me, but my head hitting the pavement at high speed wouldn't be one of them if I could help it. The bike came to life beneath me. I pulled out onto the quiet streets and pointed it in the direction of the river front.

After determining that my quarry was a Djinn, I'd scouted out the blocks surrounding each abduction zone and mapped the flowcharts of the river to the likely body dump sites. For a while, my apartment had resembled a police task force's room with maps, pictures and diagrams tacked to my walls indicating my search pattern. I'd narrowed down the location of the Djinn's lair to a likely corner of the Eastern edge of North City. Before I-70 cut through the city and when the need for living close to work was a reality, the industrial riverfront intermingled with residential communities. Now the old brickwork houses stand largely empty in the shadows of warehouses, factories and junkyards. Djinns favored dark caves to hide their food source, captive humans. As far as modern caves, abandoned warehouses and factories were as good as it got.

I took the Mark Twain Expressway and got off at Salisbury, heading for the McKinley St. Bridge. Right off the highway, train tracks crisscross with old rail stations, junkyards and small factories. I cut the engine of the bike and stopped in the crossroads of a small street and overgrown train tracks. Sitting back and balancing, I unsnapped the helmet and removed it. The air was cool against my face and I closed my eyes. Rolling my neck, I let the feel of the night brush over me. By closing my eyes and easing the stiff muscles of my mind, I could get a taste of the air, the existence of energies, around me. It was like unclenching a fist and stretching my fingers, letting water flow between them and away again. I could take a piece of the energy around me and roll it around in my head like a child with candy to get the feel of it. It was a small talent, but one I cultivated on a regular basis.

Sitting on my bike, I opened the small door in my mind and let myself relax into what the night had to offer. Any one of the surrounding buildings in the area could be the Djinn's shelter and it would take too many hours to search them all. I let my mind open for a moment before a small thread of something... other caught at me. Taking another deep breath I drew it in, feeling the wrongness of it. It was sour and dank and it drew me toward a building with a wooden

overhang and windows blocked with plywood. I stared for a moment then sighed and swung myself off the bike. I rolled it across the street next to a tin sided building and secured my helmet. On task, I drew the backpack off and unzipped my jacket so my gun was accessible. It wasn't the most deadly weapon I carried tonight but I had faith that the high silver content Hydra-Shok rounds would make even a Djinn sit up and take notice. Besides, it made me feel better knowing I could get to it. The flask hooked to my belt within easy reach as well. I took out the container of lamb's blood and coated the blade of the large knife with it. A small baggie of lamb's blood went in each of my cargo pockets.

The night was silent as I crossed to the boarded up building and calmly took the stairs. I strained my senses for any indication of danger as I scouted the perimeter of the building. The feeling of wrongness was definitely emanating from its boarded up walls. To my annoyance, there was no clear entry I could find and the Djinn was bound to hear if I forced my way in. I paused, eyeing a plywood doorway and let out a long breath. Well, I was here to kill the damn thing. Might as well alert it too. There was no way around it.

I put my shoulder to a plywood slab and it crumpled inward. Immediately, I moved to the side of the doorway in case the Djinn was lurking nearby. I always made an effort not to stand in open doorways blinking in the darkness like a cowboy entering a saloon. If the bad guys knew anything, they'd have shot John Wayne in the chest right there and been done with it. Since I wasn't as indispensable as the Duke, I spent my spare time practicing ghosting through doorways and rolling my back to the wall.

With my back to the doorframe, I slid my hand into my pocket and pulled out a flashlight. I went without light as much as possible but my human eyes saw nothing but darkness inside the boarded building. The flashlight was tinted red so the beam of light did not ruin my night vision and get me killed. I held the dagger with the blade flat to my wrist and close to my body as I moved into the darkness. The building was an old railway depot with offices and what looked like a large loading room. Dust hung in the air, coated every surface and swirled in my wake as I moved. It smelled of old wood and axle grease with a lingering layer of rot. As I moved further in, the rotted smell crawled into my nostrils and curled there like great cats. I fought the urge to gag and lifted the hand with the knife to stifle my nose with my sleeve.

It was the smell that led me to them. In a back room, two women were suspended from the ceiling; their wrists tied with a braided rope and each looped over a hook and chain. Both hung completely still, heads slumped forward. The first woman had long stringy hair that fell over her face as her thin nose and chin poked through. Beside her, the second woman's curls had massed together, completely obscuring her face. Their arms looked painful and out of place in their shoulders as each hung nearly half a foot above the ground. Dirt and excrement coated their skin where it was clear of open sores. The woman with the stringy hair drew rasping breaths, shallow enough that I could barely see her chest move. I couldn't tell if the other was breathing.

Crumpled below and several feet behind the first women, there was the emancipated body of a third. She'd fallen where she'd been cut from her own hook. The joints in her body stood out like swollen apples against the rest of her wasted body. She was dead and the rats had gotten to her. The smell was gut wrenching.

Breathing shallowly, I tore my eyes away from her, hating this evil with every piece of my soul. Lowering the flashlight, I quietly moved toward the woman with matted hair. "I'll get you out of here," I promised, speaking low to the other breathing girl.

I'd reached up to feel for her pulse when the Djinn hit me. It sideswiped me like a wrecking ball. This was why I spent three nights a week practicing Aikido. Many people join the class thinking it was about how to hit your opponent. We lost a lot of them when they found out it was just as important to learn how to take a hit as to score one. You practiced how to take a hit or a fall and be well enough to get to your feet and keep defending yourself. If you couldn't, it only took one hit to beat you.

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I took the jarring hit to my left side and fell as I turned my body with the impact instead of resisting. It sent me airborne several feet before I crashed to the floor, rolling over and ending up with my feet underneath me and back against the wall. My knife clattered to the floorboards out of sight and my left arm went numb. Lifting my head, I locked eyes with the Djinn as I slowly rotated my shoulder. He was crouched in a lineman's stance between me and the hanging women, who now swung painfully from side to side by the force of the hit.

Finding nothing broken in my shoulder and as the tingling faded, I shifted my body forward onto the balls of my feet. Carefully, I braced my hands on the floor for balance. The Djinn snarled at me gutturally and in a blaze of static energy, the blue patterns on his skin flared to life. They poured down his face, over his left eye and tangled in knot designs on his neck. Ice blue embers glowed in his eyes, catching my gaze. I felt vulnerable with my empty hands but I didn't dare glance away from the Djinn to find my knife. We stared at each other. The tension stretched the second into several long hours to my mind. The Djinn was still in a crouch but my instincts screamed danger.

Just as suddenly as he'd blindsided me, the Djinn was in motion again. In a blur of snapping blue energy, he rushed me but I was already moving. I threw myself to the side with a yell. Fuelled by years of practice, my hand found my gun and drew as I rolled clear. The glock came free and I fired into the Djinn. Screeching like a wounded bear, the Djinn rebounded off the wall and lurched toward the center of the room. Automatically the gun barrel tracked him but my trigger finger stilled. The women hung behind the Djinn in danger of being hit with a through and through round.

The Djinn's screams continued to cut the air as he clutched his wounded shoulder. With each

ear splitting shriek, the blue prints on his skin pulsed. Even as he screeched, the skin beneath the tattered shirt was knitting together and the flow of grisly, black blood waned.

“Hell’s fire!” I spit, lumbering to my feet. Unwilling to give up the gun, I transferred it to my left hand but looked for my killing weapon, the bloody dagger. It lay uselessly in the dust at the side of the door. Before I could take more than a few steps toward it, the Djinn was on me again.

Tackling my back, we careened away and stumbled in the open doorway. I threw my elbow back and cracked the Djinn in the face. Bellowing, he jerked me so sharply I stumbled. The Djinn lost his grip on my shoulders but held onto my jacket. I let it go, sliding my arms free and bobbling my gun. When I was free, I lunged for the knife. My fingertips brushed the hilt, sliding it in the dust.

In another second, the Djinn had me by the waist and threw me into the far wall. I hit with a oof of expressed breath. As I coughed and blinked dust from my eyes, I felt the Djinn’s fingers on my neck like the bands of a tightening vice. He leaned into me, propping me against the wall by my neck. His breath smelled of stale blood and I gagged, struggling for air.

The shoulder seam had ripped out of my shirt in the struggle and slowly, the Djinn slid its hand under the material and against my exposed skin. His rotted mouth split into a decaying grin. “Sleeeeeeep,” he hissed into my face.

The blue markings burned like fire flowing from his eyes down the curls over his arm. Instead of pooling in his hand, I felt the blistering Magic of the Djinn freeze into my shoulder. Pain burst through me in a rush from his icy hand. Just as suddenly as it appeared, in the next second it was gone. Lights burst behind my eyes. As each faded, I felt my mind being dragged from the Djinn, from the dusty, dark room and from the fight for my life. After each rupture of light faded, I could almost make out another image, another room just out of sight as if my eyes were blurry and unfocused. It grew like a indistinct photograph printed over another. It was... warm, so warm and inviting.

I felt my will slip. It would be so easy to give in, let go and slide away into that warm feeling of comfort. There is a reason the Djinn legend is linked to a lamp and three wishes for your heart’s greatest desires. One brush of the Djinn’s Magic and your mind was poisoned. The Djinn’s victims would slide quietly into a cursed sleep, trapped in their minds and sweet lies of whatever their hearts most desire. A lover’s embrace, bathed in wealth or riches or safe in the fold of a true home, a family...

I could feel myself crumbling away. Panicked, I grasped for something to drive the lie of the Djinn’s magic from me. The pain of the stranglehold was like a chain to the present. I clutched the scorching pain close to my mind, keeping the magic at bay. Struggling feebly, I wedged the glock into the Djinn’s stomach and fired once.

Blood sprayed and the Djinn shrieked as his hold slackened. The poisonous magic still dragging at my mind, I slumped. Shaking, I dropped the gun and yanked the hip flask free. Panting, I managed to unscrew the cap and splashed the blessed water over my shoulder, soaking the skin and ripped cloth. The water felt like acid and I cried out. The peaceful illusion forming in my mind broke apart and fell in pieces as the holy water drew the Djinn's magic like poison from a wound.

Cradling my wounded arm against my body, I shoved away from the wall and deluged the Djinn with the remaining holy water. The Djinn crumpled in a writhing heap as the water boiled over his exposed flesh. I felt his pain.

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As the Djinn writhed, I fumbled for my boot and drew the small concealed knife. I turned it in my hand and slashed at one of my cargo pockets. It cut into the sandwich bag of blood, coating the blade. Panting, I lurched to my feet and kicked the Djinn to his back. He screeched at me as I straddled his chest, pinning his arms down with my knees. "You sleep," I spat at him and plunged the knife through his eye and into deep his brain with the heel of my palm. The Djinn's shrieks choked and faded into convulsions. As death took him, the blue light of the tattoos receded with his last breath.

The body didn't poof into smoke or melt into the floor. It lay there, looking no different than a grubby man with rotted teeth. I yanked the knife free and grimaced at the spray of gore. Wiping the blade on the Djinn's soiled shirt I reluctantly sheathed it in my boot. Breathing hard, I rested my back painfully against the wall and stretched my legs out in front of me. Absently, I rubbed my shoulder. The burn from the holy water faded and I realized just how banged up my body was. Tomorrow was going to be a bitch.

Still, the monster was dead and I was alive. No more girls would waste away for months before their bodies succumbed to the elements or the Djinn finally drained their lives away. Slowly, I got to my feet and walked over to the Djinn's last victims. The matted woman was dead. Her skin felt like plastic under my fingertips. Swallowing, I turned to the woman with stringy hair. She'd been breathing moments ago but now... Her chest was still. I brushed her dirty hair aside and looked at her sunken face. She was dead. Lives, dreams, hopes... gone.

I felt emptiness in my chest. Damnit. Turning away, I took several deep breaths. She'd been alive just moments ago. If I'd been an hour sooner...

"Damnit," I groaned and rubbed a hand over my dusty face. I didn't want to see any more death. Gathering my weapons I left the room, left the building and left the grisly scene behind me. Once outside, I stopped. Letting my head fall back, I stared up at the sky. The city lights veiled so much beauty up there. Sometimes, I hated the cities and longed for a piece of the country. Still, even the clear country skies covered so much evil.

Shaking my head, I shuffled across the street to my bike. Unzipping the backpack, I pulled out a disposable cellphone. Dialing, I hung my head and waited for the call to connect.

Gabriel picked up on the third ring. "Hola," he chortled over blaring dive bar music in the background. He was twenty something and Hispanic with a quick grin and a rowdy lifestyle.

"Gabriel," I said, rubbing my neck. "It's me."

"Char!" he crowed. "Man, how long has it been mi belleza? When are you going to come out with your luciérnaga?"

I coughed to clear my throat. "I know, Gabriel, I know. I've been busy. Look, can you meet me?"

He was silent. The music faded and I heard him moving. I heard a door shut and he came back on the line. "You looking to get a few drinks or did you have something... more specific for me in mind?" He'd dropped the teasing tone but I could hear his excitement just under the surface.

"I need your specific skills," I answered him.

I could hear his grin in his answer. "Give me the address."

I was sitting on the edge of my bike with my head hanging when I heard tires approaching. Lifting my head, I waited as a red two door rolled to a stop in front of me with its headlights off. Gabriel swung out and surveyed me.

He shoved his hands in his jean pockets and gave me a once over. "Mierda," he commented. "Char, I hate to break this to you but you do not look good."

"Nothing a little stretching won't take care of," I said, standing. I offered my hand and he took it. We did the manly shoulder bump hug. "Thanks for coming."

"Hey, I go where I'm needed," he said. Although the only light came from the city, there was a slight glow to his pupils.

I surveyed him for a moment. Although I liked Gabriel, it was always best to proceed with caution. Gabriel was a Firebug, a pyrokinetic. Like the element they controlled, pyrokinetics had a reputation of being excitable. Eventually, the power went to their minds and they became uncontrollable. Gabriel was young and hard willed. Although his power was at the surface, he held onto his control. Every so often, I got a glimpse of the possible inferno inside of him and it made me uneasy.

We stared at each other. "Can you handle this?" I asked him after a moment. "It's a building."

"A whole building?" he asked. "Santa mierda Char, you always bring the fun." I waited for a moment and he shrugged, his eyes fading back to black. "You wouldn't have called me if you didn't think I could handle it," he told me. He rolled his shoulders. "Let me worry about the rest."

I leaned back on the bike and nodded toward the Djinn's lair. "That one."

Gabriel turned. "Ah," he said, walking over. His eyes scanned the building and he nodded. "Si, I can raise it. What's in there?"

I trailed up next to him, staring at the building too. I didn't turn to him as I answered. "You don't need to know. Just burn it."

He looked at me, taking note of my sore shoulder. "What have you been up to tonight?" I stayed silent as he surveyed me. When I didn't answer he sighed. "So secretive. Alright, how do you want it done?"

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My mind flashed back to the still forms hanging from hooks in the ceiling like chattel for slaughter. Once they'd been women but the Djinn had sapped the life out of them, reducing them to nothing but rotting flesh. I could smell the filth and disease again and had to take several deep breathes through my mouth to avoid gagging.