

Atlanta by Night

Session VII



The Riddle:

"A Beast I am, lest a Beast I become." The Riddle encapsulates the perpetual struggle between the Beast and the Man: one must commit monstrous deeds — drinking blood being the first among them — in order to hold rein on the ravening Beast Within.



Session 7: Eve's Journey

The Coterie rose that Evening in their rooms at the Mansion on Forsyth Park. Eve was in her room, drained from her harrowing trip to the Underworld, unsure what was real and what wasn't... she laid in bed a long time after rousing, she and the beast seemingly both spent... she laid there, staring up at the ghostly bracelet on her wrist, it was either real... or she was going mad. She felt compelled to write and forced herself up, ignoring the gnawing hunger of the beast, she dug through her bag. She Pushed the blood bags aside, and pulled out her journal and pen and sat on the floor next to her bed, frantically scribbling and sketching all she had learned of the Shadowlands and beyond.

Gertrude and Gabe roused together, a naked tangled mess in the hotel bed. Waking like this used to be jarring, as their inner beasts were alarmed at waking so near another predator, but even they seemed to be getting used to each other. There was only a brief tension between the two beasts as they both felt out the other's intentions. Seeing there was no ill intent, fight or flight drives were replaced by the need to feed. Gertrude's beast was more easily brought to heel; Gabe's was more insistent however, as burning thirst gripped him as his beast paced in its cage restlessly. Butch had been waiting by their bed side, and seeing them stir he huffed in excitement and spun in a circle. He ran to the door and turned around, his front paws prancing excitedly before he sat down and stared, expectantly. Gertrude started to get up, but Gabe playfully tackled her back down in the bed. She looked at him with a look that said "really?" he smiles a crooked smile, kissed her, then turned her loose to find his own clothes before Butch had a heart attack or his bladder exploded, which ever came first.

As Gabe struggled to gather all his things to take Butch downstairs, Gertrude could tell he was irritated. She knew he usually woke up starving, and could always tell it was bad when he'd walk back and forth aimlessly, unable to find things in plain sight and cursing under his breath to himself. Gertrude offered to take Butch down to the park so Gabe could focus on getting ready, so he could hurry up and find someone to feed on. Gabe nodded and thanked her, but was thinking how difficult it would be... He hated traveling, being a consentualist and away from his "normal clientele" made feeding more complicated and risky. He Showered, "scraped his fangs," and combed out his

beard. He was just toweling off his hair from his shower when Gertrude came back in the room with Butch. She told him she had her beast in check, so instead of heading down with him, she was going to call and check in on Jamie. He told her to tell him “hey” for him, as he pulled on his T-shirt and jeans then headed out in the hall. Butch started to slip out with him, and Gabe told him “no, you stay with Gertrude.” This solicited much angst and drama from the black hound as clearly whatever Gabe was doing was going to be more interesting than listening to nuggets lady talk into that little box. Besides... he’d been in that room all day... There were plenty of smells just waiting to be discovered outside! “Alright... come on boy, but behave.”

Kat was just exiting her room as well, Gabe did a double take. She wasn’t in her usual “comfortable college girl heading to the library” wear, and was instead in pencil skirt, button up blouse, with a cardigan and heels... not that he knew any of those words, to his dude brain it was just skirt, shirt, and sweater...coat...thing, but she looked great! Seeing his surprised look, Kat explained as she patted Butch’s head, that she figured since she was going to be stepping back into her academic professional role at the Port, she’d better look the part. He explained he was going downstairs to try and find “something to eat”, and she could tell he was nervous... it was obvious he wasn’t used to hunting. “*You want me to be your wingman?*” she asked. He seemed relieved, “*I’d appreciate that... It’s always awkward, the whole ‘hey! Got any emotional baggage? I can mystically help you with, all it costs is a bit of your blood!’ deal, you know?*” She assured the big guy she had his back, and decided she’d find herself a meal while they were at it.

They went downstairs to the lobby bar/restaurant where a lot of the guests were pregaming and grabbing a bite to eat before they headed out on the town. Gabe eyed the hungover aftermath of an on going bachelorette party, one of the group looked dour and unhappy to be there. “*Always the bridesmaids, never the bride.*” he thought. He wasn’t sure how to approach her though... he heard Butch panting at his side. Then whispered, “*you know what to do, boy.*” Butch’s eyes filled with excitement, his hair started to stand up on his neck, and he emitted a low growl.. He was about to DECIMATE this lobby! “Not THAT! The OTHER thing..” Gabe corrected and pointed to Mopey Mindy. Butch some what less enthusiastically, panted over to her, sat down next to her. He nudged her hand with his nose, and she was startled at first, unsure where this huge dog had come

from. The hopeful tail wags and big puppy eyes immediately won her over however, and she began to pet him and coo at him with baby talk.

“Got her!” Gabe thought as he went over and knelt down next Butch, making sure to subtly pull back his broad shoulders as he approached. “Butch! No sir!” he looked up at the young woman, with a feigned look of apology. “I’m so sorry, he’s usually really well behaved.” She assured Gabe it was quite alright, that she didn’t mind. “Wow he usually doesn’t like strangers!” Gabe lied, “You must really be a good person for him to come up to you like this.” She was obviously flattered by the compliment and attention. Kat’s jaw dropped as she watched the scene unfold... “Awkward my ass... he’s pulling out the oldest trick in the book, and has her eating out of his hand.” She thought. Gabe made small talk, then observed she looked like something was bothering her. He listened patiently as she talked vaguely about not being where she wanted to be in life. He then explained he practiced a form of alternative medicine called Reiki, and asked if she was familiar. She was not... “swing and a miss.” he thought. He tried his best to explain it, but he could tell if she didn’t have OTHER interests towards him, she’d have ended the conversation already... she wasn’t buying his new age crap. Finally, he said... it would be easier to show you, and asked if he could touch her... she hesitantly agreed, and he cupped her cheek and hit her with his Anesthetic Touch.

The rush of the narcotic like euphoria surged through her, now she was a believer. She eagerly led him up to her room. Kat put a hand on her hip and shook her head as Gabe, his victim, and Butch passed by her. She returned her attention to the lobby bar. There was a guy sitting alone at the bar, young and below average in the looks department. He was deep in his drink, and had glassy eyes and a vacant expression. Kat approached him, dialing up the sex appeal, and broke the ice with a sledge hammer. “Hey, look...i’m just going to be honest with you, I’ve been watching you from across the bar, and i’ve been here a couple of days alone, and I’m looking for some company.” The man...blinked stupidly, then looked around, as if he couldn’t believe she was talking to him. “You interested?” she asked, as she touched his arm. He nodded dumbly, mouth hanging open. “Y.yeah! Definitely!” He began to lead her to his room, then releasing he forgot to pay, rushed back and dropped several bills on the bar, before nearly sprinting back to her, as if he made her wait just a second she would vanish into thin air.

Back in their room, Gertrude grabbed her phone to call Jamie when it went off in her hands. She had a new text from a blocked number. "Birch..." she thought. She hesitated a moment, fearful of what it might say, then she steeled herself and opened it.

"You have done well... The news bears witness to your faithfulness. I hold your sins forgiven, your debts repaid. The man you killed however, was Persephone Maxwell's brother. She is furious, and will no doubt be hunting his killers. Only the Sanctified can offer you sanctuary from her wrath. We should meet upon your return from Savannah, we have much to discuss. Jeremiah 3:4"

She thought for a moment, then recalled the verse he had cited:

"Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?"

She wasn't going to deal with this right now she decided, she left him on read, and dialed up Jamie. She'd figure out what to do about Birch later with the rest of the Coterie.

Elsewhere, both Kat and Gabe had fed on their unwitting victims, and left them alone... stupefied by the intoxicating effects of the Kiss. They met back up in the hallway, and started planning their next steps. Gabe told her Gertrude was on the phone with Jamie, and asked if She had heard from Eve. Kat said she hadn't, so they went to her door and knocked gently. After a few moments, a very tired and disheveled Eve came to the door. She looked awful, like she had been to hell and back. Sensing something was wrong, and assuming it was another rough nightmare, Gabe stepped into her room with Kat and placed his fingers on her temples, and asked with a bit of levity: *"You alright, soldier?"* He opened his 3rd eye and used the Salubri discipline, Obeah, to soothe and calm her mind. She seemed a bit more at ease, but would only say she had a hard day and didn't seem interested in sharing more, saying *"They wouldn't believe her anyway."* With a tone of defeat in her voice. Gabe and Kat reassured her, and Gabe called in Gertrude so she could hear as well. Eve steadied herself and explained she had been shown a way to destroy Lasombra's malevolent soul.

Eve began to give them a broken recap of her trip to the underworld. Leaving out personal details about her mother, and instead sticking to the parts

about the Soul Forge and Lasombra. They didn't fully know what to make of it all, It was one hell of a story... Even just the cliff notes. They understood now why Eve had been initially hesitant to speak about it, and why she had assumed they wouldn't believe her. They all assured her they trusted her, and believed what she was saying was true, she hadn't led them astray yet after all. The information she had provided was no doubt important, but wasn't something they could immediately take action on... before they could worry about destroying the soul of Lasombra, or how they might get it to the underworld, they had to first get the sarcophagus. The first order of business was safely opening it, and using the ritually enchanted stake Kat had made, to neutralize it. They all agreed to take things a step at a time, and made their way downstairs to Gabe's car.

They were stopped in the lobby by the front desk clerk, the young man said a delivery had come from Mr. Sutherland. He handed her a large manilla envelope. They all exchanged glances, they hadn't been expecting a delivery. She opened it and there were three smaller envelopes inside. One for Gabe, Eve, and Gertrude... She noticed there wasn't one for her. She handed the thick envelopes to each of them, who opened them to find fake credentials, IDs, Pistol permits, and notes as to their roles pertaining to the Ankaran Sarcophagus.

Gertrude

SisterShannon Masters of Arts in Theological Studies, M.A. Cornell University. Fake NY drivers license. And Georgia pistol permit. "Team theology expert"

Eve

Caitlin Fairchild, BA in Art History, MFA Creative writing from Hollins University. Fake Virginia drivers license, and Georgia pistol permit. "Expert in symbolism in ancient art, and does the write up for the peer review papers."

Gabe

Maj Thaddeus Ross, BA in Geospatial information Science, with a minor in International affairs from West Point Academy. US Army retired. "Expert on topographical analysis and technology for ruins location."

Kat saw their IDs and fake degrees they'd been given and was a little jealous... they had all these impressive degrees handed to them, but the Tremere had embraced her before she could earn her Master's Degree. She knew she had famously made the discovery though so she was stuck playing the part of herself

with her current education level, and didn't get a forged Grad degree and alias. She vowed to finish out her masters while she still could, before it would become suspicious that she wasn't aging. While they were together, Gertrude shared Birch's text with the rest of the Coterie, and asked what she should do. Upon hearing Birch's name, Gabe's entire demeanor changed. He got a serious and stern look on his face as he read the text. *"Sounds like he's been watching the news. He must think his plan went off without a hitch... now he's subtly blackmailing you."* *"Is there some way I can like, send a picture of this to Persephone?"* Gabe showed her how to take a screenshot, and how to text it to Persephone. The seneschal immediately responded:

"I'm rusty on my scripture, had to look it up... what a creep. We'll deal with him once you get back. Play along for the meantime."

Yeah he's an ass hat for sure. I'll play along for now, even though I wanted to send him a picture of my middle finger

"He has that effect on people. We have to play the long game, but we'll make him pay."

She pulled up the Solomon Birch text thread and replied:

"Look I did what you wanted and I don't want any more trouble, please keep me out of this."

"Ah young one, if only it were that simple. We are bound together in this plot... only the Sanctified can offer you protection. Whether you want it or not, trouble is what you have. I do not fear the princess' wrath, can you say the same?"

Gertrude decided she wasn't going to deal with him at the moment, and left him on Read. She'd form a plan with Persephone when she got back. One thing was certain, she was looking forward to ridding herself of this monster once and for all.

They decided not to check out, in case their plans fell through and they needed to stay another night. They made their way to Gabe's car, then across

town, weaving through the narrow streets of Savannah to the river. They crossed a large suspension bridge, and Eve's eyes locked on to the area where she knew the Sarcophagus was, the area under the farside of the bridge. She had passed that spot while on the boat in the Shadowlands, just hours before... She remembered the all consuming black inky cloud of gloom and felt a chill wash over her. On the far side of the bridge was the Port of Savannah, an enormous complex with miles and miles of ships, cranes, and stacks upon stacks of cargo containers as far as the eye could see. They turned on to the access road to the port, on the far end was a guard shack, with a drop arm style barrier blocking the way into the government facility. There was a small parking area off to the side before the checkpoint, and Gabe pulled in one of the spaces and killed the engine.

They exited the vehicle and approached the shack. Kat used her phone to pull up the email from Dr. Prude with all the paperwork they needed. A young security guard stepped out of the shack as they approached with a metal clipboard in his hands. As they took in their surroundings they took note of several surveillance cameras overlooking the area. Eve thought there was something odd about them. She knew cameras... These were large and bulky, far more so than any modern cameras should be. Their housings were also new, and lacked the weathering of the surrounding mounting hardware. They had been changed out recently. Why would newer cameras be so bulky? Then it hit her... a few years earlier the government had become aware of Kindred. They may have technology designed to spot them... cameras that detect heat, or breathing...maybe even a pulse. She warned the others and they all activated the Blush of Life, forcing vitae through their veins... gifting them with a semblance of life. Their skin brightened, their eyes took on a more natural hue.. They were warm to the touch and even breathed and blinked.



They checked in with the guard and handed him their fake IDs. Satisfied, the Guard had them fill out a visitor's pass and a vehicle pass. He gave them their copies and a hang tag to display from their rear view mirror. He then directed them to the Georgia Port Authority office, just past the gate to get access to their cargo. They entered the lobby which typified bland government buildings. There were multiple "informative posters" about regulations, safety, and policy changes. Black pleather and stainless steel chairs were along the wall, along with a fake potted plant. There was a counter with a middle aged woman behind the counter. Her name plate identified her as Kelly. They also took note of another oversized camera hanging in the corner, surveilling the entire room.

Kelly was clearly a soulless bureaucrat and with everything else weighing on their mind, her "by the



books” government drone routine, was excruciatingly painful.

“Good Evening, welcome to port savannah...can I have you please sign in and have a seat, we’ll call you to the desk on a first come, first serve basis. They looked around, confused as there was no one else in the waiting room. They shuffled up to the counter and signed in as instructed. They stood around awkwardly as she ignored them and continued to type on her computer for a few minutes more, before robotically greeting them: “Good Evening, My name is Kelly, If you’re here to inquire about shipping delays, the GPA apologies for any inconvenience you’ve experienced, but asked for your understanding as Port Savannah, like the rest of the nation, has been greatly impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. Our port is currently experiencing unprecedented congestion as we are currently 50% over our normal capacity. The GPA assures you we are working round the clock to process, inspect, and release the over 80,000 shipping containers we are currently housing. If you wish to expedite the release of your cargo Please fill out the US customs and border protection form 1302a and we will process your request in the order it was received. Valid reasons for filing a USCBP form 1302 are: imminent commercial shutdown, Storage concerns with perishable refrigerated or unrefrigerated goods, and veterinary and/or housing needs for live cargo. Please be advised, if you’re attempting to secure the release of any cargo contractually tied to United states federal government contracts, you’ll also need to file the accompanying Department of Transportation form i93-D, and provide a notarized copy of the pertinent contract. Now that I’ve explained the required documentation needed to process an expedited release of imported cargo, would you like to file an US CBP form 1302 at this time?”

Kat, who was speaking for the group, just blinked back awestruck for a moment. *“No, we are actually representatives of Emory University, and we have all the documentation already completed here to secure the release of our cargo.”* Kat pulled up the email from Dr. Prude, with the attached PDF documents and showed them to Kelly. Kelly, without missing a beat retorted. *“I’m sorry ma’am, but the GPA only accepts hard copies filled out in blue or black ink, I cannot accept any digital documents.”* Kat’s jaw muscles tensed. *“Can I just email them to you, and you print them off?”* Kelly held her gaze in unwavering eye contact. *“No ma’am, I apologize, but our printers are for GPA internal use only.”* Kat turned back to the group, at a loss for what to do next. She suggested maybe going to find a kinkos or somewhere similar to print copies. Kelly chimed in again, *“If you are going to leave at this time, I’m going to have to ask you to surrender your GPA form 214a visitor*

passes and the 214b for your vehicle. You'll have to check back in with the check point out front, and have it reissued to you when you return." Gabe rolled his eyes, and whispered *"we don't have time to go on a wild goose chase across town and get bogged down in red tape, can't one of you guys just Jedi mind trick her or something?"* Kat nodded and turned back to Kelly. *"Look, we are short on time, and you're going to **Accept**, these digital forms and print them for us."* Kat focused on the word "Accept" and forced her way into Kelly's mind, searching for the weak part of her mind that wanted to be commanded, that longed to submit. It was tough to find, as the insect-like... soulless government worker's psyche squared off with the ancient curse of the blood of Caine. The ancient power won out in the end, and a hesitant Kelly agreed to print their documents for them, adding she'd have to write herself up for this however.

Kelly finished their paperwork, then handed them a map of the port and a piece of paper with the location of their cargo written on it. *"The listed items on your USCBP form 1302 are located in bay R12 of the Ocean Terminal Warehouse."* Kelly said as she handed them their copies of their paperwork. The coterie nearly tripped over themselves, trying to get out of the office and back to Gabe's car. They followed Kelly's directions and found their way to the warehouse where the Sarcophagus was waiting for them.



They slowly pulled on to the Ocean Terminal Warehouse road, and counted down the different bays until they drew near R12. In the road in front of, or at least next to the bay they were looking for however was a large white delivery

van. The back doors were open, and there were several people moving about it. Three were wearing GPA jumpsuits and reflective vests, another was wearing a black suit. “*The university made arrangements to have the Sarcophagus transported, maybe this is our van?*” Kat mused aloud. Gabe parallel parked the car riverside and the Coterie got out of the car and began walking up to the warehouse. The man in the suit had slicked back hair, and reeked of too much cheap cologne. He had his shirt unbuttoned to the point his hair chest and gold medallion were clearly visible. He turned to face them as they approached, eyeing them suspiciously, rolling a toothpick across his bottom teeth with his tongue. One of the dock workers stayed near him, the other two headed into the warehouse, one on a large propane forklift.

As they approached the dog worker pulled his shoulder back around to the front of his body. Gabe raised an eyebrow and moved his hand near his pistol. Seeing him tense, Gertrude asked him what was going on. “I’m pretty sure that guy is armed. Security details use bags like that so covertly carry SMGs, be ready.” Kat and Eve noticed something else. The Medallion around the man in the suit’s neck, along with his large gaudy ring both displayed an old English “G”. He was also clearly another kindred. They assumed correctly, that this man was a member of The Family, one of Clan Giovanni who Prince Habersham had told them had a presence in the city. Fortunately Gertrude was too busy eyeing the man Gabe had indicated was armed to notice.



As they closed the last few yards, the large forklift began to exit the warehouse carrying a huge wooden box, covered in Turkish writing. “*They’re trying to steal my sarcophagus!*” Kat thought to herself. She played it cool however, and pretended as if they were the team Emory had sent to move the Sarcophagus, and thanked them for coming out so late. The man in the suit narrowed his eyes at the group, and used his tongue to move the toothpick from one side of his mouth to the other. They could tell the people posing as dock workers were humans, maybe ghouls they figured. The man didn’t answer Kat, but fixed his stair on Gertrude.

He was a soldier of the Giovanni family, a made man, embraced and brought into the Cosa Nostra proper. Part of that process was memorizing a list of persons of interest the family had a score to settle with. It wasn't as hard as it sounds, it was a short list, as most people didn't stay on the list... which made Gertrude stand out all the more. That and her stunning good looks made her hard to forget. Still... Stefano Giovanni, couldn't believe his luck... would she really just be walking up to him, in Georgia, after all these years of eluding the family?

"Hey.. doll face, do I know you?" he squinted and took a step closer. *"Yeah... no way I'd forget a dish like you, The Family put the word out, the New York outfit's gotta score to settle with you. Man... you've been on that list for a long time... I'm really gonna make my bones bringing you in!"* He had a thick Italian American accent and made dramatic gestures with his hands as he spoke. There was an awkward silence. *"Alright, what say we drops the act, I know you clowns are kindred. And I know you're here for the sarcophagus. Thing is, it belongs to the family now. I'll give you one chance to leave the girl and walk away."* The man next to him tugged hard on a strap attached to his bag's zippers, which peeled back a flap and exposed a Beretta PMX with a folding stock. Gabe reached under his jacket, finding the grip of his FNX .45 and drew it at the same time the goon pulled his gun. Both men stopped, fingers on the trigger, drawing down on each other.



Stefano Giovanni wasn't going to just back down for some nobodies. *"Like I said...the box, and the braud, are going with us, you got one chance to walk away."* Gertrude's heart would have stopped if it was still beating, she knew the family... she knew what horrible things they'd do to her. She'd die slowly and painfully... who knows how long they'd drag it out, and in what terrible ways.

The other goon who had accompanied the forklift in the warehouse was back now with his own gun. Eve's mind was working in overdrive, this was about to get loud and messy, and the last thing she wanted was a disturbance near the

sarcophagus, she could already feel an oppressive darkness growing from within that wooden crate. Not to mention Gertrude, their other heavy hitter, was obviously terrified of this man. She recalled her encounter with Dorian, how she could affect his mind so strongly just by speaking, “Dementation” was what Hope called it. She remembered Hope’s explanation of how it worked, and decided it was their best option to get out of this without a blood bath. She began speaking calmly and quietly to Stefano. *“Why do you want the box? It’s incredibly dangerous.”* She felt the lines of the cobweb, and found a thread that touched Stefano... she felt the connection between them and probed the corners of his mind, searching for the madness he locked away from his conscious self. It wasn’t hard to find... Life in the family must be grim indeed, Stefano had seen things... But Eve had seen worse. She found the threads of sanity he used to hold shut the door of his latent madness... with her seemingly benign words she snipped several of them, causing the door to open a crack.

Stefano became visibly nervous... he dropped his tooth pick, and began to look around, as if he felt countless unseen eyes watching him from the dark shadows of the port. *“D-dangerous or not, the Don wants it, and I mean to bring it back to him... the Family is no stranger to dangerous artifacts.”*

He was having trouble keeping to his goal, but he had orders and a bonus prize of untold reward in front of him. Gertrude knew she had a shot now though with whatever Eve was doing to him. She looked Stefano in the eyes. *“Look Forget you ever saw me.”* She pushed deep into his mind, finding and stealing the memories of her from him with the Cloud Memory power. She then got behind Gabe, shielding her face from him. Stefano stared blankly for a moment unsure what interest he had had with the woman hiding behind the big guy, but quickly lost interest.

Eve continued to speak. *“You feel it already though don’t you? The darkness in the box... your boss can’t possibly know what he’s dealing with, but you do... leave the box, and get out of here, while you still can.”* with those words she snipped his remaining few threads of sanity, the madness came rushing out of its hiding place to the surface. Stefano was in a full blown panic now... every shadow held a monster, the image of the box represented an insurmountable malevolent force to him, one that carried with it the promise of death. The coterie in front of him seemed to menacingly loom over him, their eyes were the eyes of cold callous killers, they

looked at him like a snake looked at a rat. His beast howled and tugged hard at it's chain. "DANGER!!! FLEE!!!" is screamed in his mind. "Y..yeah..you're right, you can have the damn box, just...just k-keep it away from me! All of yous!! Stay away from me!" He grabbed his pistol with trembling hands, and told his men. "Forget the box, we're leaving!" His men looked at him dumbfounded, "But boss... if we come back without that box, the Don is.." "I said fuggedaboutit!!" The men looked at each other with wide eye'd glances... What choice did they have? The man on the lift, put it in reverse and backed it into the warehouse once more.

They started to get in the van, but Gabe knew if they went back and told the Family what happened, Gertrude would be in danger. She had erased Stefano's memory, but not the others. Gabe made eye contact with the two gun men. "He's right... we all just need to **forget** this happened...Right, lets just all **forget** this little run in." The rest of the coterie with cloud memory began to follow suit... clearing out the past ten minutes or so of their memories. It was more than Stefano's fragile mind could take... Now there was no reason for his paranoia, only a nameless, faceless dread... he wasn't sure who these people were, or what was going on anymore, he just knew he was in mortal danger. The beast broke it's chain and man and beast lost all remaining semblance of reason and fled screaming up the road. The Confused and disoriented gunmen were at a loss.. They had just lost a large track of time and all they knew was there were four kindred in front of them, and their kindred boss was running away like he'd seen the devil himself. They jumped in the van, and drove after him, pleading with him to stop screaming and get in the van.

The coast was clear, Gabe holstered his pistol and everyone turned to Eve for an explanation. She didn't go into great detail, but she explained it was something she had done once before, and she was still learning to control it. Somewhat satisfied with her explanation, they turned their attention to the box. They walked in the warehouse, and stood next to each other...the large crate before them, still resting on the forks of the lift. Eve felt it drawing her in... felt it calling to her, and it touched her mind. Like a bolt of lighting she was flooded with horrible imagery of winter and war, a black sun, and a red moon. There was a crone, and a young woman... she was drowning in darkness... and all around here was death and destruction. She saw the earth in ruins... She saw the end of everything. At the same time the minds of thousands of Malkavans around the world cried out to her... for years many of them had been having visions of

Gehenna... now that a mind in the Cobweb was so near the source, they began flooding it with information, ever premonition they shared, reverbing and echoing from her through the web, then back to her, it was deafening, more than any one mind could handle.

Eve's Vision

She grabbed her head and screamed, then collapsed and fell to the warehouse floor in a heap. The rest of the coterie was stunned... unsure what was happening, they rushed to her side. Gabe once again used Obeah, draining his own will to help, this was the second time in a single night and he felt the drain on his own mental fortitude... but it worked, Eve regained consciousness in Gabe's arms. Kat pulled a blood bag from Eve's bag and handed it to her. Gertrude was on the other side of her, holding her hand. Eve couldn't speak...not in lucid, coherent sentences anyway. She muttered dark and prophetic things, all while she eyes the box with a look of dread. They had to deal with this thing... and fast. Kat pulled out her willow branch, and chanted a quick phrase in Latin, then tossed the branch in the air and it became a bright ball of whitish blue light. She motioned with her hand, and it floated through the air and came to rest, hovering directly over the box. Gabe handed Eve, to Gertrude, and went and jumped on the forklift. He turned the key and flicked on the flood lights, then stood up on the side and bent the lights down towards the box.

He looked around, and found a crowbar. He walked up to the box, and jabbed the end of the crowbar in between the lid and the side, then stopped to look at each one of the coterie members. Kat and Gertrude both nodded resolutely, so he pulled, the nails groaned and the wood popped and cracked, but in a few moments the lid was off. He then moved to the front, and once again jammed the crowbar in between the sections of wood and pulled. The front of the crate crashed to the floor. Now the front and top were loose and they could see the Sarcophagus itself. It was enormous, and made of black angular stone. Inky black fog began to flow out from under the lid... Lasombra, even deep in torpor, was able to reach out subconsciously... his hunger manifesting itself through his Obtenebration, was reaching out...desperate to feed on the potent vitae of kindred that was finally, after millennia, within his grasp. The Vitae of kindred which,

unlike the blood of kine, possessed enough power to reanimate him and release him from his torpor.

Eve saw the inky blackness started to pour out from under the lid. Her eyes grew wide and she pointed... “The shadows mean death!” Gertrude, not understanding, tried to comfort her. “Yes Eve, the box bad! Don’t worry Gabe and Kat are taking care of it, just rest now.” Eve, more frantically repeated... “The shadows mean death!!” Fortunately, Kat’s globe of light and the spotlights of the forklift seemed to burn away the black life stealing mist, slowly it retreated back into the sarcophagus, unable to endure anymore. Gabe and Kat positioned themselves outside the Sarcophagus, Gabe called on the power of the blood, pushing Vitae to his muscles, and placed his hands on the lid of the sarcophagus, he strained and pushed, but eventually the lid began to move. Shadow started to pour out to engulf him, but kat pulled down her light to shine directly in the Gap, causing the tendrils of shadow to retreat back from Gabe, and into the deepest parts of the Sarcophagus. Gabe continued to heave, until the lid slid off and crashed on the far side of the Ankaran Sarcophagus. Gertrude, had laid Eve down resting her head on her bag, and joined Kat and Gabe by Lasombra’s ancient resting place.

They peered inside carefully... Lasombra’s skin was solid black, the body itself a surprisingly well preserved mummy with a mesopotamian mask of black stone. He was adorned with golden jewelry, studded with obsidian and jade. The inside of the coffin was charred and black...it still smelled of smoke and ash. In his chest there was still a gaping hole over his heart, his broken ribs were visible... under them a black shriveled heart. Crumbling, fragile splinters were all that was left of an ancient spear shaft sticking up from the wound, decayed to near dust by the ravages of time. The green patinated bronze spearhead was still in the sarcophagus, the same that was discarded by the priest who opted instead to stab the sharp broken wood shaft in Lasombra’s chest. There was also a bronze khopesh fit for a king, the sword of Lasombra himself.





In the bottom of the sarcophagus was a black mist, lazily drifting about like fog over a river, but when light touched it, for the first time in millennia, it burned away... the skin of the mummy even seemed to shrivel at the light's touch, so steeped was it in the blackness of Oblivion.

The three of them peered inside in silence, and Kat pulled out the stake she had enchanted with blood magic. Gabe, his muscles still surging with vitae, held out his hand. He leaned over the side and squeezed the stake in his fist, he stared into the black eyes of the mask... a rush of emotion came over him, His beast was in full fight or flight mode. This... man.. This thing has caused so much pain and suffering just in its sleep! Just by existing! Eve had been plagued by nightmares for

weeks, and was laying in a heap on the ground now tormented by this thing... Kat was riddled with guilt, a ship full of people were dead, and the fate of the whole world hung in the balance, all just from the threat of this dried up husk of the purest evil. He couldn't imagine what he could do if he was ever allowed to wake up. His fangs extended involuntarily and he dove directly into the Sarcophagus with a roar, having taken full leave of his senses. He plunged the enchanted stake deep in the ancient wound in Lasombra's heart. The stake, and the bound nature spirit inside it, tasted Lasombra's trace vitae, and dozens of snaking thorny vines exploded out it, and begin to wrap and squeeze the mummy, shifting and contorting it slightly as the vines cracked the ancient bones, and the long needle like thorns hungrily pierced the dry papery flesh.



Gabe was still in a blind rage however, and raised a fist intent on smashing it down on the black mask. Gertrude and Kat, seeing he

was out of control, reached over the side and restrained the big man, Gertrude yelled for him to calm down, and the tug of the blood bond brought him back to his senses. He looked up at her, still a little out of it, "Thanks Gertie, Thanks Kat..." They helped pull him out of the deep stone box, and they all watched as the vines slowly wrapped him like linens around a mummy.

Satisfied the stake had done its job, Gabe leaned over the sarcophagus and pulled the stone lid back on, once again sealing Lasombra inside. He then hammered the panels back on the wooden crate, while Kat called the delivery truck that was contracted by Emory to transport and told them the cargo was ready for pick up. The driver was on standby, local, and had his paperwork already handled so it only took him 45 minutes or so to get past Kelly at the front desk and meet the coterie. By then Eve had partially recovered, but still wasn't well. She managed short, somewhat broken sentences, and was able to stand. She explained the sarcophagus had touched her mind, and she was overwhelmed with images of Gehenna, horrible scenes of the end of days.

Joel arrived in a large delivery truck, he was morbidly obese and unkept. He had cut off sweatpants, a stained plain white T Shirt, and crocs. He loaded the sarcophagus up, while Gabe loaded the smaller crates with the other artifacts from the dig site. In little time they had the truck fully loaded, Kat rode with Joel in the truck, while everyone else followed behind in Gabe's Challenger. They checked out of their hotel room, and began the four hour drive to Atlanta. They had been driving for hours, and were in no man's land between the two cities, when Eve spotted something in the woods off the side of the road. It was enormous! Bigger than a grizzly bear, but had Canine features. She couldn't believe her eyes, but her beast instinctively knew what it was... the Great Enemy... a Lupine... werewolf. Eve told Gabe and Gertrude she was something following them in the wood line, then called Kat in the other vehicle to warn her. Just then however, it ran with a supernatural burst of speed, then took a soaring leap onto the side of the truck, sinking its enormous claws into the metal side like it was a tin can. Kat felt the impact, and could see something furry



clinging to the passenger side of the rear of the truck.

The lupine swung its claw across the rear tires, rending the rubber with ease and causing a blow out. Joel barely managed to keep the truck on the road, and quickly pulled over to the shoulder. The werewolf hopped down, intent on tearing open the back door. Gabe saw the writing on the wall, and yelled for everyone to hold on. He pulled off the road behind the truck and steered for the enormous Lupine. The werewolf sensed the danger and turned around just in time to get rammed in the thighs and pelvis and pinned to the back of the truck with a bone crushing crash. The kindred in the car didn't get away scot free however... The impact was brutal. Airbags deployed then deflated, the windshield was shattered, and the sudden impact would have severely injured if not killed them if they were kine... seeing how none of their organs actually worked, they were only slightly injured in the crash. Butch however slammed into the back of the seats and was pretty banged up. When Eve saw what Gabe intended to do, she grabbed the Hellhound and tried her best to hold him, but the G forces were too great and he slipped from her grasp. Kat and Joel felt the impact, Joel heard the commotion outside, and grabbed a collapsible baton from under his seat. He told Kat to stay put while he went to check it out... Kat knew he'd end up hamburger meat, so she used Dominate to compel him to stay put, while she pulled on her enchanted gloves and jumped out of the cab.

Gabe, Gertrude, and Eve meanwhile, were just starting to regain their senses, when they heard the scream of rending metal... to their horror, through the shattered windshield and cloud of airbag dust, that the werewolf was still very much alive... and was furiously tearing into the hood of the car, trying to claw its way to them. Gertrude pulled her Hardballer pistol and fired several rounds through the broken windshield into the huge lupine... Her eyes grew wide as she observed her .45 ACP rounds didn't phase the monster, not only that... the gaping holes left by her pistol started to heal immediately. Unable to reach them, the werewolf started pushing the car backwards, off of itself. Their collective beasts began to panic in the face of such an insurmountable, apex predator... Gertrude's beast managed to wrestle control from her and took over. She lost all reason and sense of self, becoming a feral animal. She forced open the damaged door with primal strength born of fear and fled as fast as her vitae fueled legs could carry her.

Gabe knew if it managed to free itself they were all doomed. He tossed his FNX .45 to Eve in the backseat. He then drew his Kabar knife, activated his fortitude discipline, and forced his way out of the crumpled car. He ran to the front of the car, and leaped on the exposed back of the lupine, who at the time was watching Gertrude as she fled into the woods. He stabbed his knife into the right side of the beast's chest from behind with a reverse grip, then sank his fangs in the wolf's neck on the left side. The beast roared in a berserk rage and thrashed, trying to dislodge the kindred that dared attack it. Kat called on her knowledge of Thaumaturgy and used Scorpion's Touch to transform her vitae into a caustic venom. She pooled the Vitae in her arm, extended the razor sharp claws of her gloves and drew them across her flesh, coating the finger blades in the venomous Vitae. She lunged at the werewolf and sank her claws into it, causing it to reel in pain as its flesh began to corrode away, bubble, and smoke from her blood magic's wicked effects. She leaped back, creating some distance between it and its thrashing claws.

Gabe continued to stab with his knife, and gnash with his fangs... draining torrent of blood as he did. The werewolf's supernatural blood was potent, but burned in his veins with primal fury and nearly caused him to take leave of his senses. The werewolf realized it was in trouble...It reached back and tried to sink its claws in Gabe's back, and snatch him off it's back. Gabe's rock hard skin won out however, as the lupine squeezed and pulled with all his might and desperation, its fingers snapped and a claws were torn loose from its hand. Taking the chance to help Gabe, Eve drank the telekinesis potion in her backpack that Grey had given her for Newnan. She concentrated as hard as she could to pick up the shards of glass of the shattered windshield and threw them into the werewolf's eyes. It howled in pain, its cry hanging in the air of the desolate road.

All the thrashing about had managed to push Gabe's car back enough that it was now free however. its lower half had regenerated almost entirely, from the impact of Gabe's car as well. Seeing the odds were against it, it made a break for the woods with Gabe still clinging to its back. Kat knew if it got Gabe alone, he

wouldn't stand a chance, so she heroically came at the charging beast head on... She attempted to claw out its heart with her glove, but without more venom, the blades didn't bite as deeply this time. The nearly 10 foot tall, 500lb force of nature didn't even slow down... it's right claw was still damaged from Gabe's fortitude power, so it slammed its left claw into Kat's face and shoulder with a bone crushing backhand. The enormous force of the blow, caused her to turn a flip, and slam hard on the asphalt. She was mangled and near torpor from the juggernaut's blow.



Eve was horrified... Gabe's gun felt heavy and awkwardly oversized in her hands. Gertrude was gone, Kat was down, and in another second or two, Gabe would be out of sight, carried off by an unimaginable monster. She steadied herself and raised the gun, remembering what Gertrude taught her, she lined up the sights and squeezed the trigger... The bullet hit its mark, blood and fur splattered from the hollow point's entry wound. The recoil was heavy, but not as bad as she expected... The weight of the slide seemed to absorb much of it. She then continued to fire, stacking rounds into the back of the lupine as Gabe held on with knife and fang. The slide locked back, the barrel

smoked, and as the last few bullets tore through the werewolf, it dropped to a knee, holding itself up with a one claw, before collapsing forward on the side of the road.

The nightmarishly huge werewolf slowly began to shrink and change until it was only a fraction of its previous size. It was actually a she, a young woman that was dressed like a homeless drifter, with long dreadlocks. She lay face down on the asphalt, riddled with bullet holes, knife and fang wounds, and melted flesh from Kat venom. Gabe stood up, a bloody mess and ran over to Kat... she was in rough shape, but the fortitude of her undead flesh allowed her to survive

what would have killed a kine. Gabe placed his hands on her broken body and used his Valeren power to start healing the worst of the damage, while she used her vitae to start healing the lesser ones. Eve and Butch got out of the car and ran over to Kat as well, as did a very confused Joel. With the threat gone, Gertrude managed to wrestle control from her beast, and after getting her bearings, she began to make her way back to the road. She emerged from the woodline, as Eve was getting off the phone with Grey. Gabe's car was totaled, and the delivery truck had been disabled as well, so Grey was on his way along with a heavy tow truck.

Gertrude felt awful... she felt like she abandoned her friends when they needed her most. None of them seemed upset with her, they all had beasts of their own, they had all lost control to it in the past...but somehow no amount of reassurance from them seemed to alleviate her guilt. She looked at Kat's and Gabe's injuries and couldn't help but feel responsible. Between the power of her own blood and Gabe's healing however, Kat was now back on her feet... although her shoes had been flung to Caine knows where... she patted Gabe and thanked him for his help. As she did so she felt something sticking out of his back. She pulled it out and discovered it was a gigantic werewolf claw. Kat handed it to Gabe then limped over to his Challenger and sat down next to it, resting her back and head against the tire. She then called Draven to let him know she was going to be a bit "Delayed" returning home. She told them about the werewolf they managed to kill, and they were as stunned as Grey and Devin had been when Eve called them. After ensuring she was okay, he asked her to obtain as much werewolf blood as she could. It was apparently a rare ingredient. She had a vial for rituals in her purse, as well as a large ibuprofen bottle. She dumped out the pills and used both vessels to collect the free flowing lupine blood from it's many wounds. Then she unceremoniously ripped out the woman's canines, she wouldn't be needing them anymore. Gabe was feeling the effects of the blood himself, and could understand why Draven wanted it. He felt strong, but was extremely angry and aggressive feeling... he also couldn't take his eyes off Gertrude, nor shake off the effects of her intoxicating scent.

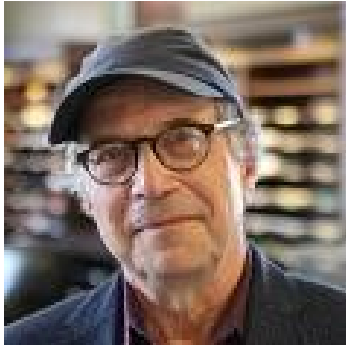
Grey apologized to Eve for being distant, he explained the prince and sheriff had all the deputies and hounds on high alert around Atlanta exactly because of situations like this. They expected a lot of kindred interest in the Sarcophagus... Giovanni, Sabbat, and the like, but after examining the damage to

the delivery truck he was convinced that was the lupine's target as well. He didn't have much personal experience with werewolves of course, but the few stories he had heard never involved a lupine attacking a moving vehicle. It was usually only kindred like the Gangrel and Ravnos that travel far from city lights that get attacked by werewolves. He looked down at the very human looking woman on the side of the road, and wondered if perhaps they weren't closer to the cities than they suspected. Either way... in a lot of the stories, werewolves travel in packs, so it was best not to linger. Gabe picked up the woman's body and tossed it in the woods just off the roadway. It would be a long while before anyone found her, when they checked her pockets she had no ID, no possessions... it would look like a very brutal attack on a nameless vagrant. Grey would monitor law enforcement chatter about it, and make sure the investigation into the Jane Doe didn't take a supernatural turn.

The tow truck arrived and replaced the damaged tires on the delivery truck and loaded up what was left of Gabe's Challenger. Joel had been hidden in the cab of the car and turns out didn't see much. He wasn't a bright man, and assumed they hit something in the road, then Gabe's bad driving caused him to rear end them, then maybe a homeless woman attacked? The police were there and weren't giving him another DUI, or checking him for active warrants so he really wasn't too concerned with the details. He was getting paid by the hour anyway. The kindred piled into the tow truck, repaired delivery truck, and Grey's car and made their way the rest of the way back to Atlanta. The Familiar city skyline gave them mixed feelings as it came into view. On some level it was good to be home, but it didn't convey a sense of safety and sanctuary like they hoped it would. It was only a comfortable sort of dange, old familiar threats rather than unknown ones in new places. There were their touchstones, their loved ones... but there was also the sarcophagus they had in their possession. Whatever this homecoming was, it wasn't joyous.

Mentally tired, physically beat up, and emotionally worn down they went through the oddly normal routine of wreck reports with Grey, Insurance claims, and rental car paperwork. Joel, the truck, and their "new" 2007 Toyota Corolla rental all pulled into Emory university. Kat called Dr. Prude to announce their arrival and university staff, mostly eager Grad students began unloading the truck. Kat explained they had been in a car accident, and they were tired and

banged up. Dr. Prude was an eccentric, and excitable old man he talked quickly and enthusiastically.

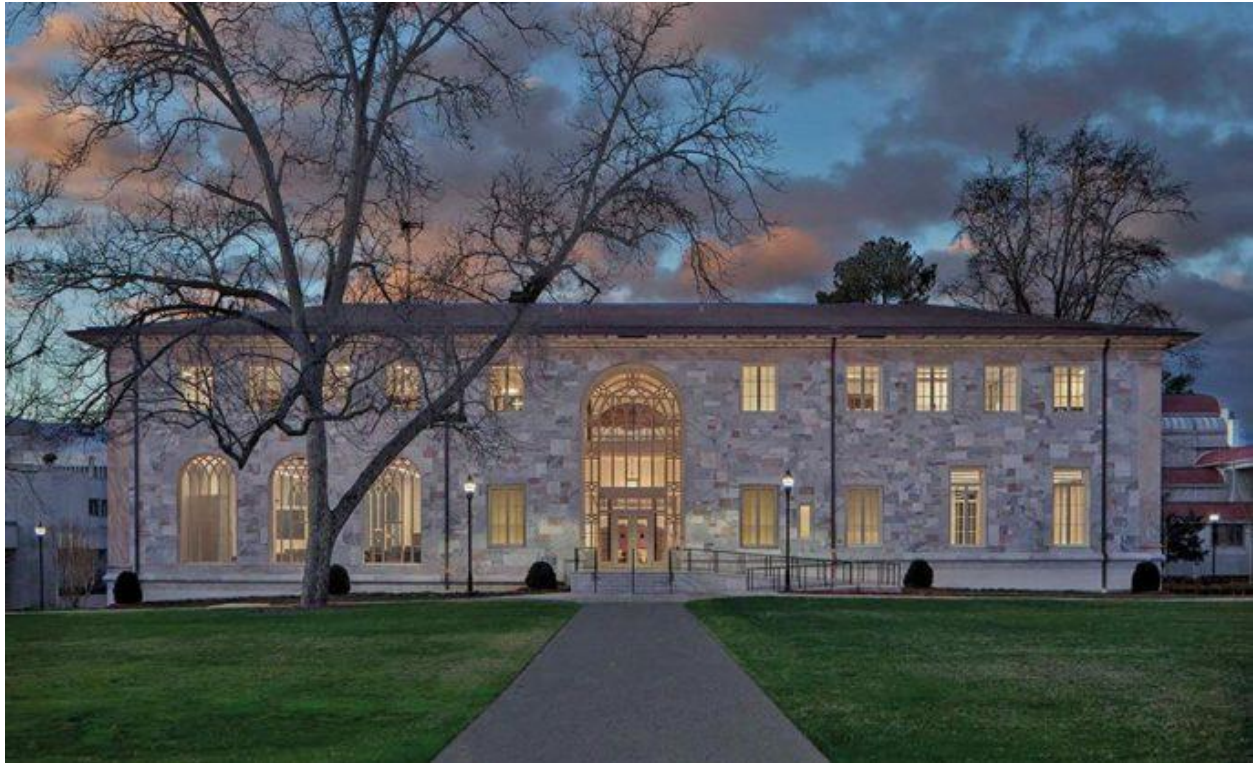


"At last! We meet in person the famous Ms. Sutherland! The rockstar of archeology! What an amazing discovery... My colleagues and I sincerely think this will rewrite the textbooks on early human civilizations, I mean...it throws our entire timeline for human civilization into question, don't you agree? I mean such an advanced civilization dating back to the Holocene period, we never could have imagined that level of engineering over 5000 years before the Egyptians were laying the first blocks of the Giza pyramids...I'm

honored to meet your acquaintance. We simply must have brunch, the faculty are dying to hear the details of your discovery... oh.. I'm so.. Sorry... Here I am prattling on about the discovery, when you've just suffered a great loss on the Dane, And have been through a terrible ordeal tonight. I'm so sorry to hear about your team, there's been nothing else in the media about it, has the government given you any news on your team?"

Kat said there had been no new information as of yet, and politely declined brunch and suggested instead they have dinner sometime. She wasn't an early riser. She also gave very specific instructions, not to begin work on the sarcophagus without her. She also told them to keep the room the sarcophagus was in well lit. She gave an explanation about pests stowing away in boxes, strange molds that might grow, and was convincing enough that Dr. Prude didn't seem suspicious about the request. He just assured her, they'd follow her instructions to the letter, and thanked her for allowing them to take part in her discovery. He also mentioned the Briarcliff estate, aka Chandler Mansion, had been purchased on their behalf.





Bowden Hall, Emory University

“Now..i heard a rumor, a very sizable donation had been made to the history department in your name, and that a benefactor of yours has purchased Chandler mansion, with the intent to renovate it for you? I can’t tell you how happy I am to hear that... It’s a tragedy that such a piece of history in our car has been allowed to linger in such a sorry state of neglect. I have quite a collection of photographs and writings about it’s early days if you’d like to meet one day and go over them...for the restoration I mean. You know... as part of the Atlanta historical society, we’ve been petitioning the city for years to restore the mansion. Can you BELIEVE the amount of money we’ve spent on sports stadiums and the like, while the history all around us is being allowed to rot!”

Kat assured him she was just as appalled as he was, and said she’d take him up on his generous offer. She then excused herself and the coterie, who Dr. Prude believed to be experts as well given their alias the Prince had arranged for them. Dr. Prude said he understood, they had all been through alot, and they would have plenty of time to talk later. Gabe... had started to display strange behavior during this time... he seemed more irritable than usual. He sniffed plants in the

building, and Gertrudes hair a lot, and glared at her lewdly. He and Butch both honed in on a cat roaming the campus grounds, and for a second they feared they might both go running after it. It appeared Lupine blood had some side effects for kindred, chief among them a stronger connection to their inner beast.

Kat called Persephone to report they had made it back to Atlanta with the Ankaran Sarcophagus, as previously instructed. She hoped that just a phone call would suffice. Much to the coteries' dismay the matter apparently was important enough to the Prince that he wanted an in person briefing about their trip. Kat thought *"great! I'm barefoot, scratched to hell and back, and have werewolf induced scoliosis...but sure... we'll be right there!"* They once again got in the Corolla and made their way across the City to PeachTree tower. Gabe pulled into the parking garage after being cleared by security, it was noticeably heavier than it had been in during their other visits. There were additional guards, ghouls, as well as bomb sniffing hellhounds.

They made their way into the building and then the elevator. They were met at the executive level by the Prince's security detail, who escorted them to the Prince's opulent office. Persephone was there as usual in one of the chairs in front of the prince's enormous wooden desk. He sat behind it, in his throne-like chair and greeted them as they entered.

"Ah there you are, Welcome back. I've received word that the Sarcophagus was delivered safely to Emory under your care. I'm sure, circumstances being what they were, you've had little time to conduct any proper research into the sarcophagus as of yet, but tell me has your initial assessment changed after seeing it again through Kindred eyes? In your brief time with it, has it shown any signs of the supernatural, anything at all that links it directly to the disaster of the Dane?"

Kat didn't know why, but she didn't trust the Prince. She was nervous for reasons she couldn't place her finger on about discussing the sarcophagus with him. Maybe it was because at the end of the day, despite his charm, he was not only a bureaucratic politician, he was a kindred... In her mind he was less interested in preventing Gehenna, and more interested in using the Sarcophagus for personal gain. She tried to dodge the question, but the prince seemed to see right through her. She felt his scrutinizing eyes examining her, and feared she had made a potentially fatal mistake. To her surprise he didn't press the issue

further, he didn't even seem angry. What he did do however, was make it clear he knew she was hiding something from him and Persephone's eyes quick glance and raised eyebrow indicated she caught it too:

Prince Monet looked thoughtful before he spoke again, "I...understand the position you're in. You no doubt feel a degree of personal responsibility for the sarcophagus, and perhaps even a bit of ownership considering the toil and sacrifice spent in discovering it. You also don't know who, if anyone you can trust, with something so very dangerous. While it might be tempting to shoulder this burden alone, such a move would be very, very foolish. No one trusts the man that lives in the tower, especially not with more power... but I assure you, I'm not so blinded by ambition that I'd risk my Requiem trying to capture lightning in a bottle. My only interest in whatever lies in that black box, is to make sure it doesn't bring Gehenna down on our heads. Bear that in mind neonate, next time you're tempted to withhold information from me."

With that... he dropped the matter. He didn't even repeat his question. Kat realized he didn't really need to. He had seen right through her, and had gleaned much from her lie of omission. She was also not only a little scared, but honestly felt bad for hiding things from him, and was relieved he had handled her so gently at the same time. The Ventrue had this head of state thing down, she realized. In a short exchange of words, he had gotten the information he wanted, enough of it anyway, and sent her on a roller coaster of emotions that left her feeling more endeared and indebted to him... this man was dangerous.

He then changed the subject, *"Emory's security was practically non-existent, so I've spared no expense on discreet, but effective private security detail to safeguard the sarcophagus. I've justified such measures to the administration as a necessity given the artifacts value, the press around the find, and the insistence of the Turkish government. Seeing how they weren't footing the bill, and that I assured them such measures wouldn't be overly burdensome to the faculty, that had no reason to object. In addition to Kine security, Chara and her deputies are watching the campus closely... in short, it's as safe as we can make it for the time being... I've also enlisted a small army of attorneys to keep the federal government at arms length for as long as possible. Hopefully this will buy us time to find some way to preserve the masquerade before the Inquisition gets a chance to sniff around."*

Ah! While we're on the subject of losing fortunes, I've acquired the Briarcliff mansion on your behalf." He pulled a dark leather document holder from an expensive looking briefcase, he also retrieved a set of keys. *"You have also already received the documentation regarding the Masks I had made for each of you. These new public Identities will provide you with a cover while on campus, and will hold up under routine scrutiny from local law enforcement. I felt having a cover story to explain your presence on campus was a necessary precaution. You'll also find a small historical preservation non-profit organization has been set up in your names to lend legitimacy to your finances and restoration efforts of the mansion. It's all there for you."* He said as he handed Kat the document holder.

"Now! I trust this serves as not only sufficient payment for the services you've rendered thus far, but also a demonstrative perk of being in my good graces. I look forward to seeing the fruits of our continued business relationship. Now, I'm sure you're eager to get settled and begin your work on the sarcophagus, so unless you've any questions..." Seeing there were more than ready to leave, he concluded, *"very well, Good evening neonates, Please keep me updated on your progress."* The coterie limped out, emotionally and mentally drained. They dropped Eve off at the haven, then dropped Kat off at the Chantry. Gabe and Gertrude then went and picked up Jamie from the Changelings of the Autumn Court. Eve walked the halls of the empty and dusty mansion, finding a room that was to her liking and began feverishly writing, the voices were growing louder and more insistent, and she felt compelled to write down their thoughts.

Apparently the whole Chantry was expecting Kat. Trent was looking out the window like a dog waiting on it's master. When she entered the lobby both Draven and Dr. Stanhope were standing in the foyer pretending to be studying a painting they had always been there and they'd seen a thousand times. She dismissed Trent, and told Stanhope and Draven they were as transparent as transparent could be... and assured them she was fine. They told her they were happy she was home and no worse for wear and led her to the library where they had a bottle of blood wine and several glasses already waiting... she opted to skip the glass and just drink from the bottle. She regaled them with her tale and gave them the werewolf trophy's right before Majorie tumbled in the room, as the door she was leaning against to eavesdrop came open. She was mortified, stumbled through an excuse of wanting to use the library, but not realizing it was occupied before backpedaling out of the room in a near run. On that oddly

satisfying note, she excused herself for what little remained of the night, to take advantage of Draven's claw foot bathtub, and his doting attention.

Gertrude and Jamie had a warm reunion in Six Flags parking lot. Butch was thrilled when he saw dirt child, and pranced about him eager to play. Jamie sprinted straight for Gertrude, and Gabe ruffled the boy's hair playfully. Jenessa smiled a cool sincere smile at the scene of the reunion, and assured Gertrude it was a delight having him stay with them, and that he was welcome anytime. Jamie began telling Gertrude all he had learned in a rapid rambling fashion. He explained that *"being a changeling meant being part of two worlds, but belonging to neither"* It was obvious he was quoting Jenessa, he even sounds like her a bit. He said I have to have SOME Glamour.. Or he'd be "Undone" and die... that's if the Huntsmen don't find him first, when his powers fade leaving him vulnerable. He said too much Glamour on the other hand, would cause him to lose touch with reality, and he'd go crazy... They called it "Bedlam." He also began prattling on about the different people in the Autumn court and how they operated. Gertrude listened intently, proud of all he had learned... She also noticed he was far more open and at ease than he had been. Coming to terms with what he was and meeting others like him had done wonders for him. When he finally took a breath, Gertrude asked if he was ready to go get something to eat then go see their new home. She thanked Jenessa again, and they headed back to the Mansion.

As they walked near the old Toyota Jamie looked confused and turned to Gabe. *"Hey Gabe! Where's your car?"* Gabe winced from the reminder of the loss, then smiled. *"Werewolf chewed it up."* he said casually. *"NUH UH!!"* Jamie exclaimed with wide eyes. *"It's true."* Gertrude assured him. *"Whoooooaa!"* he said with wonder in his eyes, *"was it bigger than Butch?"*, *"way bigger."* Gabe said... and used his arm to show how much taller it was than himself, reaching high over his head. Then Gabe handed him the claw, which looked gigantic in his little hands. *"What happened to it!?"* Gertrude leaned down and extended her fangs. *"We beat it up!"* she said with a mock monster face. Jamie shifted his eyes between her and Gabe, as if they were gods. *"Wooooow!"* he said to himself in a whisper, feeling how sharp the point of the claw was.

The coterie soon fell into torpor as the sun rose that morning. They had accomplished much between Auburn and Savannah, and could rest somewhat

easier now, knowing Lasombra's dark Obtenebration would no longer reach out with it's hungry shadows... seeking the blood that would awaken him. They knew they'd have to deal with his sleeping body soon; however, there were too many greedy eyes on it, seeking to use it for their own game and hidden agendas. For now though, they had earned themselves some breathing room. It would take Kat another two nights and a lot of blood to heal the damage done to her body. It took about as long for Gabe to get the werewolf blood out of his system... Gertrude was okay with helping him with that. Jamie and Butch ran through the yard and massive mansion having the time of their life. All while Eve sat alone in her room... neglecting her thirst, neglecting sleep, as she descended deeper and deeper in madness born of her face to face contact with Lasombra.

Malkavian Madness



