

Opposites (ReVamped)

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Warnings: explicit sex, explicit violence

Summary: Kindred and Immortal should not mix; it is a volatile combination and when Richie is in the wrong place at the wrong time he finds out just how insane it can be.

Timeline: Sometime after MacLeod's dark quickening and after the end of the Kindred eps.

Author's Notes: I wrote a fic a long time ago in my (gasp ;)) het days called "Opposites" and it was a Highlander/Kindred: The Embraced crossover. I have often thought of revisiting it as a slash story and so here it is :). The basic story is the same, and the scenes are also mostly in the same order, but most of it has been rewritten. It used to be omnipotent PoV (sort of ;)), but now it is third person. Thanks to Soph for the beta and Laura for US-picking it.

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<http://beren-writes.livejournal.com/485699.html> My Fanfic Listings (LJ) | <http://beren-writes.dreamwidth.org/130047.html> My Fanfic Listings (DreamW)

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Chapter 1 Meetings

There was something about the two men who walked into the Haven that just made Kindred look at them. Two Toreadors, one Gangrel and three Brujah all found that they were watching the two walk towards the bar with more than just a passing glance.

"Mac, will you stop following me around," Richie said as he sat down at the bar and Mac took the seat beside him. "You know I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself, so what the hell's got into you this time."

When it came to challenges and taking heads, Mac was usually a rules man, but ever since Richie had been challenged by another Immortal called Damon, the Highlander had been on edge.

"You're hunting a man who used to be my friend, Richie," Mac said in an almost perfectly calm voice, "I know him better than you, and I want to know what changed him."

Sometimes Mac's bleeding heart was more trouble than it was worth. Richie understood that sometimes there were explanations for things, hell he'd gone off the deep end after Mac's dark quickening, but Damon's approach had been underhand and very direct. Richie had tried to talk to the other Immortal while scrabbling for his life and Damon had come across as out for everything he could get.

"He's mine, MacLeod," Richie said in a very firm tone; on this he was totally decided, "I was the one he tried to kill. It wasn't some game, Mac, this was like an attempt to permanently terminate me. Now my information says he comes here, and this is where I'm going to stay until I find the bastard."

He had almost lost his head because Damon was a cheat. Surviving the ambush had been more luck than judgement and he had no plans to let the son of a bitch try again. Damon had left Seacouver so fast that he had not hidden his trail well and Richie had tracked him easily. Richie did not like the idea of someone like Damon cheating his way to the prize and normally Mac could have been on the same page as he was. Mac had tried to convince him to just let it go several times, but he was long past that; he took people trying to kill him quite personally these days. He did not break the staring contest with his friend until finally Mac nodded.

"Okay," the Highlander said with a resigned expression, "I have no right to interfere; it's just hard for me to believe what he has become, he used to be such a good man."

"Sorry, Mac, but he's not anymore," Richie replied; he did feel sympathy for MacLeod, but things changed, Immortals especially.

He had learned his lesson with Mako about not judging everything on first impressions, but Damon had been very obvious about his contempt and his desire to take his head. Richie didn't forgive things like that, not anymore.

"Let's have a beer," he suggested, since they were both sitting at the bar and he knew that even if Damon did show up Mac would not try and stop him.

Mac might not like what was going to happen, but the Highlander's code of honour would mean that he would let Richie do what he needed to. There might be some awkward silences for a while as Mac came to terms with it, but it would work out. When you were friends with Duncan MacLeod of the Clan MacLeod there were just some things you accepted.

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When Frank walked into the Haven he knew something was off. His cop instincts fired as soon as he looked around even though, on the surface, everything looked normal. Not sure what it was, he made a beeline for the bar and sat on an empty stool a place away from a couple of men he hadn't seen before. Not that that was unusual in a place like the Haven. For some reason the taller of the men looked

over at him and he gave a nod of his head and then ordered a drink, hoping that he hadn't just gained some unwanted Kindred attention.

Kindred made him nervous and the fact he couldn't tell them from normal people made him even more nervous, which was why he had come down to Lillie's club. They were people, people with fangs that enjoyed drinking blood, but people nonetheless, or at least that was what he kept trying to tell himself. Their rules were weird and some of them liked to push the boundaries, but he had to admit Luna seemed to keep his people in line most of the time. It was the Brujah that made him really edgy, but that had a lot to do with him being a cop and them being the mob. He refused to be intimidated. His partner was one of them and he hadn't known any different for a hell of a long time, so he was damn well going to get as much information as he could. Being informed was the best defence as far as he was concerned.

"So you know this place," were the words that caught Frank's attention as he accepted his drink, "how come?"

It was the blond and apparently younger of the two men who had spoken and Frank kept his eyes forward, but his ears open.

"I was friends with the owner once," the second man with the ponytail replied and Frank's interest level went up.

He thought that Lillie had owned the club for a very long time and the odds on these two being Kindred were getting better. Neither of the strangers looked old enough to quite fit how the taller of the two had said 'once'. That was one thing Frank was getting used to; the odd way Kindred viewed time. The younger one of the pair had obviously picked up on the use of the word as well.

"Oh," he said and Frank caught the hint of a smile out the corner of his eye, "old, old friend or just old friend?"

"Just a passing acquaintance," Duncan told Richie with a smile, "and it was quite a while ago. This place is a lot different from the one I knew."

Frank was almost sure he was listening to two Kindred having a conversation, or at least one Kindred and a mortal who knew the truth, but what caught his attention was movement from a table just off the bar. He knew the faces of the couple sitting there; they were Lillie's people, both Toreadors, and from the looks of it he didn't think he was the only one to have been listening in. Something about what the taller man had said seemed to have rattled them and as he watched, one of them slipped out of her chair and headed up to Lillie's office. Frank couldn't help wondering what was going on, but he had no way of finding out without drawing attention to himself, so he just settled down to wait.

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Lillie was expecting Julian to turn up any time, so she was not pleased when there was a knock on the door and as she opened it she discovered it was not the Prince of the city. If there was one thing she did not like it was being kept waiting.

"Yes?" she said, hiding her annoyance, after all it was not Maxine's fault that Julian was late again.

"Apologies for the interruption, Primogen," her subordinate said with a bow of her head, "but there are two men in the club you should know about."

Not really what she had expected, but she motioned the other Toreador into the room.

"And why, pray tell," she asked, "should I be interested in mortals?"

If they had been Kindred, Maxine would have called them that, and she was not in the mood for mortals at the moment. What she was in the mood for was giving Julian a lesson in manners, but she made it a rule never to take such things out on her delicate Toreadors.

"There is something," Maxine paused, clearly searching for words, "different about them and one claims to have known you."

At least it was a diversion.

"Do you have a name for this mysterious man?" she asked; if she did know him it might be fun to let Julian wait for a change.

"The other one called him MacLeod," Maxine told her. "He is tall and has long black hair which he wears in a ponytail. He moves like a predator."

That sparked Lillie's curiosity and a long forgotten memory of a dark eyed Scott. It made her smile.

"I knew a MacLeod once," she said, half to herself, half to her companion, "but that was sixty years ago, and he was mortal."

The man she remembered had been so alive that even though she had found him intoxicating she had never considered embracing him. It would have been sacrilege.

She looked at her subordinate contemplatively for a few moments. The meeting with Julian was important, but this could turn out to be far more interesting. She was of course fighting the eternal Kindred curse: boredom. Playing with a man who claimed to know her might be fun, and she could always break off when Julian finally decided to make an appearance.

"I'll be down in a few minutes," she told her companion, "keep an eye on them 'til then."

"Of course," Maxine replied with a small smile and Lillie had no doubt her subordinate knew just what she had in mind. "Oh, and the Prince's cop is downstairs as well, he came in a few minutes after the other two."

Lillie's red covered lips drew into a smile to match her companion's, it was possible there was more fun to be had this evening than she had first thought.

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When Lillie came down the stairs and walked across the floor of her club, she was at her most devastating. She had made sure she looked every inch the head of her clan and when it came to Toreadors, that was saying something. Her ability to snare men was unequalled even among her peers, and she saw several mortals staring at her openly as she moved. Her Kindred minions smiled approvingly as she passed, and even those of other clans gave her a second look. It pleased her and almost distracted her from her target, but as she walked through the parting sea of bodies she finally laid eyes on the mystery man and almost faltered.

Memory was such a fragile thing, but the black hair and the square set of the shoulders struck a chord in her that she could not quite dismiss. The brief affair she had had with a dark eyed Scot so many years ago had made an impression on her, and something stirred within Lillie as she looked at the back of this new MacLeod. It was when she heard him speak to his companion in a deep voice with the slightest hint of an accent that her heart actually beat in her chest. Not a single Kindred in the club could have missed her reaction, but she was so focused on MacLeod that she did not remotely care.

This mortal stranger had her whole attention and she took another step forward. It was then that he stopped speaking in the middle of a sentence and stiffened as if he had felt something at well, and then he was turning. Lillie could not quite believe it as she saw his face; this was not some stranger, this was the same man.

"Duncan MacLeod?" Lillie said, unable to help herself as she took what her eyes were telling her.

He should have been old and grey, but he was just the same and she did not know what to do.

"Lillie?" the man replied, recognition clear in his features.

Being a Toreador, Lillie knew she could be impulsive and irrational, acting on emotions before thinking and she had worked hard to quell that side of her nature, but it was not enough for the reaction that ran through her at that moment. Duncan MacLeod was one of those men who were hard to forget and it

had been a short, but very intense affair between them; emotions that came back full force.

They stared at each other in motionless disbelief for long seconds and then Lillie acted as her nature took over. She stepped forward, reaching out to touch what she had thought long lost and she was met halfway. Winding her arms around the intoxicating man she pulled him close as he did the same to her and their lips met in a passionate kiss as if they had never been apart. It was at that moment that she knew he was the same man, that this MacLeod was her MacLeod and that was the point her thoughts kicked back in.

They drew apart by mutual agreement as if Duncan's thoughts were on exactly the same track as hers.

"But you're not..," she said at exactly the same time as her companion.

Neither of them chose to finish the sentence.

"A friend of yours, Mac?" was the sound that distracted her from staring at the impossibly young face in front of her and she glanced at the young man still sitting at the bar.

"Richie," MacLeod said almost formally, "this is Lillie."

"Pleased to meet you," Lillie said, gathering herself and remembering her clan responsibilities.

This was strange, but then many things in life were and she pulled the mantel of Primogen back around herself.

"We should go upstairs," she said, turning on her charm and facing Duncan again, "where we can talk."

It was clear that MacLeod was as curious as she was, but he turned to his friend almost straight away. The younger man appeared mortal and he could make things awkward, but then Duncan appeared mortal as well so for all she knew they could have been the same.

"Go, Mac," Richie said with a knowing grin, "I can drink alone."

It was almost as if the younger man expected MacLeod to be helpless before her, which was interesting in and of itself. She exerted her Kindred power just a little to make sure he did not hesitate and he offered her his arm in a very gentlemanly fashion. Touching him made her skin tingle and she had no idea why this man had such an effect on her, but it was intoxicating.

"Don't get into trouble," MacLeod threw over his shoulder to his friend as Lillie led him to her office and that was just greeted by laughter.

It made Lillie smile; she could see the humour in the statement as well.

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Frank was more than a little shocked to see Lillie acting so uncontrolled, but now he was even more interested. The guy who's name he had gathered was Richie, was still laughing as he turned back to the bar.

"Don't you just hate it when that happens," Richie said in a conversational tone before going back to his drink.

The smile was friendly, but the look in the other man's eyes warned Frank's cop instincts that all was not quite as it seemed. What he appeared to be looking at was a teenager drinking illegally in a night club, who had just lost his older companion. Frank already knew that Richie was older than he looked when the bartender had checked his ID, something to which he had seemed resigned. There was also something about the way Richie held himself, an air that would have told rivals that this man knew how to take care of himself. Frank was almost certain he was about to enter a conversation with a Kindred, especially after Lillie's reaction to MacLeod.

"Par for the course around here," Frank returned with a smile of his own when the other man looked back at him.

If he wanted to know about them, he was going to have to talk to more than Lillie and Julian, so Frank hoped he didn't look too keen.

"You from out of town?" he enquired in a vaguely friendly way.

"Yep," Richie replied, seemingly happy for a casual conversation, "just in the area looking for a business associate. San Francisco is a nice city, and it's warmer down here than up north."

"Nights are shorter though," Frank decided to see what sort of reaction he could get.

To his surprise the man sitting next to him just grinned and cast an eye around the room.

"Well you can't have everything," Richie said lightly.

Frank went from almost sure to just about positive after that and decided that he might as well pump the only Kindred in the place who didn't know who he was for as much information as possible.

"Frank," he said and stuck out his hand.

"Richie," his companion introduced himself and shook the offered limb.

The grip that took hold of his hand was very strong and Frank added another tick on his score sheet.

"Well since I seem to have lost the only person I know in this town," the Richie said amiably, "can I buy you a drink, Frank? Then you can tell where all the local hot spots are."

That was okay with Frank and so he settled in for what he hoped would be a very interesting exchange.

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Lillie planted a kiss on Duncan's smiling lips almost before the door of the office closed. She hadn't felt a need like the one cursing through her body at that moment for quite some time, and she almost let it consume her. The fact that her desire was more than mirrored in the eyes of her companion did not help her to be rational. She was at the mercy of her more basic urges and it was difficult to resist.

"Oh, Duncan," she said as his hands ran up the back of her dress, "it's been so long. You should be an old man, but you're still so ... alive."

It was partly a question, but her companion was too busy nibbling at her neck to be interested, or so it seemed. All logic had been thrown out the window the moment they had lain eyes on each other and neither of them were doing very well at pulling it back. Lillie, however, being Primogen of her clan, had not reached that position without a little self control and, fighting again her own nature, she pushed her companion away just for a moment.

"What are you?" she asked breathlessly.

Duncan smiled at that, and ran his fingers down the side of her face.

"I could ask the same thing," Duncan returned as if they weren't talking about something neither of them could understand, "but you're not going to tell me, are you? Does it matter, Lillie? I'm here, you're here, let's just forget the details."

It was dangerous, it was confusing, but Lillie did not know how to reply to that. She should have been questioning her motives and the influence that Duncan seemed to have over her. She might have, had it been just her, but she could feel he was just as out of control. They were interacting on a level she did not fully comprehend. When they had last met she had put it down to simple male/female chemistry, but with the new knowledge she now had she did not think it was that simple. There was only so much self control that she could exert, and, staring into Duncan's deep brown eyes, she found out where her limit was. With a smile of total abandon she pulled him close.

"You're right," she said seductively, "just don't tell my friends."

Several of Duncan's shirt buttons were not up to the test of her rather fast fingers and they bounced across the floor as she swiftly began to relieve him of some of his clothes. Just about then, Lillie couldn't have cared if the Prince himself had been about to walk in, she had thoughts only for getting into Duncan's pants.

It was like a crazy dance as they slowly moved across the floor relieving each other of items of clothing as they went. Lillie pulled off Duncan's shirt and threw it off to the side, heedless of where it landed and, in response, Duncan popped the fastening on the back of her dress. As he slowly pulled down the zipper, she waited, poised and then let it fall to the ground with only the slightest shrug of her shoulders. She was wearing very little underneath and smiled at the way Duncan's eyes ran over her body. For a little while she let him look and then pulled him close by the belt on his pants, while releasing the buckle so she could yank it free.

There was something of a battle to the whole thing as they both sought to make the other reach the point of complete undress first, but of course Lillie was at a disadvantage. She did not let Duncan have it all his own way though and she made sure he was fully naked before she allowed him to lower her onto the soft, sheepskin rug on the floor. At least it was warmer than the top of the desk would have been and a lot softer on the skin.

"You do things to me, I can't explain," she said with a feral smile. "I like that."

She was rewarded for that with a kiss and she arched up against him as he proceeded to kiss down her neck. All Duncan's attention was on her and she liked that; she liked that a lot. The world had narrowed down to this and Lillie did not care about anything else. For a while she let him explore, enjoying the touch of his lips and his hands, but she wanted more and soon she felt the need to take control.

When she used her Kindred strength to lift up and then flip them, so she came to rest straddling Duncan, he appeared rather surprised, but she licked her lips and gave him her most sultry expression and his worry did not last long.

"My turn to play," she said and ran her hands down his chest.

"Always happy to oblige," was the quick response, but Lillie soon made sure Duncan lost the ability to speak by bending forward and starting to nibble on his torso.

Her nails made little red streaks down his sides, and Duncan was nothing if not responsive. She had forgotten just how much. She was in the mood to make sure this was going to be an experience neither of them were going to forget for a very long time, especially as it seemed neither of them were likely to run out of years in the near future.

"Remember last time?" she enquired with a mischievous glint in her eye, and pulled away slightly.

"How could I forget?" was the instant reply, and a large smile filled Duncan's features.

Oh, they were definitely on the same page and Lillie let her passions rise. They had played long and hard the last time they had met and Lillie wanted to play just as hard this time. She remembered Duncan's almost supernatural stamina and, given what she knew now, it was possible it really was supernatural, but that was a detail she really didn't care about. All she was interested in was trying it out. She would worry about they whys and wherefores later.

End of Part 1

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Chapter 2 Confrontations

The conversation with Frank had petered out slowly, and finally Richie had been unable to find anything else to say without giving away that he was digging for information. He wanted to know more about the mysterious Lillie who had had such an amazing effect on Mac, but Frank either didn't know or wasn't willing to tell. It had been just over an hour since the cop had wandered away and found himself a quiet corner and Richie was beginning to wonder if Mac was ever coming back. Given the circumstances, he wouldn't blame his mentor for not doing so. He had chatted to a couple more people over that time, but he had not left the bar and he had not tried for anything deeper than a casual comment or two about the music, or some such subject. It was as a brown haired man who looked about twenty five sat down next to him and smiled, that knew he had gained some attention he didn't want.

He could tell by the way the man looked at him in an almost hungry fashion that there would be a pick up line coming very shortly. The two reasons this was bad were that, firstly, he didn't swing that way and, secondly, he was not looking for any entanglements in case Damon showed up.

"Good evening," the man all but purred with what had to be considered a very handsome smile even if Richie wasn't interested.

At least he seemed to have attracted someone good looking, but the last thing he needed was to upset one of the locals. From the way several people in the room were trying not to look as if they were looking, he had to assume the man now sitting next to him was a regular.

"Ah, hi," Richie replied with a nice a smile as he could manage, "excuse me, but I have to go find my friend."

The fact that Mac was probably in flagrante and would not want to be disturbed was neither here nor there; it was a good excuse. That just made the other man smile wider.

"Oh, you don't want to be doing that," the stranger said smoothly in a very captivating voice, "it's still early."

The dark green eyes looking at him seemed to grow almost and the gaze snared him, trapping him as if it was a physical thing. The muscles that had tensed to help him stand relaxed and suddenly his body had decided it didn't want to leave. It was the most bizarre sensation and he began to feel as if he'd had one too many and his thoughts were all jumbled. Thinking was suddenly very hard and he couldn't remember what he had been about to do. Most of his mind was completely confused, but, deep inside, there was a voice yelling that something really strange was going on here, and it would not quit.

"My name is Andre," the man said in an amiable tone. "Can I buy you a drink?"

The weirdness continued because Richie found himself smiling.

"Thanks," he returned and found that he couldn't recall what he had been thinking before, "I'll have the same again. I'm Richie."

Richie tried very hard to remember what he was doing, but every time he managed to form a thought Andre would say something and everything would become irrelevant again. He found himself talking to the other man animatedly about all sorts of things, but he didn't really follow what the conversation was about. It was as if he was disconnected from it in some way. The only time anything came into sharp focus was when Andre put his hand on his knee and then he reacted, but as soon as the hand was withdrawn he settled back down again. His higher brain seemed to have been disconnected from his reactions, but at the back of his mind there was a pressure building. He felt strangely like he did after a quickening; disorientated and not really with it, and his brain was trying to readjust, only it was as if the same force kept being reapplied.

At a less than surface level Richie's brain thought what was happening was not good, and slowly his mind was sorting out the mess. When he had enough brain power to notice it seemed as if Andre was having a little trouble with something, but Richie didn't have enough time to work out what. The fog around his thoughts just kept swirling making Andre the only thing he could really think about, and he could not escape. Part of him didn't even want to, but that part was slowly diminishing.

It was the familiar tingling behind his eyes that snapped him back to reality and when he felt that Andre was no longer important. His head shot up and he looked towards the door. The man sitting next to him stood up and moved to stand in front of him, snaring his gaze again.

"It's nothing," Andre said and Richie felt the fog trying to come back, but he fought back and something surged within him.

Adrenaline flooded through his system as he sensed danger on two fronts and then his mind was free. Things seemed surreal for a moment and he couldn't

quite remember what he had been doing, but he didn't care as his eyes looked across the room and found a very familiar face. Damon had just walked into the club and everything else was irrelevant. As far as Richie was concerned, the presence of another of his kind had impinged itself on his consciousness and wiped everything else into insignificance.

Damon spotted Richie at the same moment, and their eyes met, but surprisingly Damon just stood there. He was quite a tall man, and broad with it, but Damon had changed his appearance since Richie had last seen him. Damon had worn his hair slightly long when Richie had been confronted by him, but now it was short, almost all shaved. The folds of the other Immortal's long black overcoat hung with familiar heaviness, and, as the two looked at each other, Damon smiled.

The animosity was heavy in the air as Richie and Damon sized each other up and then, with a flick of his head, Damon indicated that they should take their discussion outside. Richie gave a slight nod back; it was only sensible and then he stood up.

"If my friend ask where I've gone," he said quickly, turning to the barman, "tell him I'll meet him at the hotel. Thanks."

His mind was a little fuzzy and he frowned as he turned back and found a man standing in front of him, but he didn't remember what they had been talking about, or even if they had been talking, so he just muttered an excuse me and walked towards the exit. He had business to attend to and he focused on it completely.

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Frank watched the whole exchange between Richie and Lillie's guest with interest. He knew Andre was visiting from Europe and was a high ranking Artiste, famed for his artistic ability. He'd met him once the previous week, more by bad luck than judgement and he had become painfully aware that Andre cared for little but art. The Kindred had gone on to him about his cheek bones for ten minutes and it had taken Lillie's intervention to save him from the conversation.

He wasn't quite sure how it worked between Kindred, but it had been clear that Richie was not comfortable the moment Andre sat down, but something had made Richie stay. Frank still wasn't sure what it was and he had been trying to work it out when Richie had seemingly completely lost interest.

It wasn't just his cop instincts telling him that Richie and the guy who had just walked in had history and the way they acknowledged each other suggested it was going to be dealt with. After thinking about it for a minute or so after Richie walked out, he decided he was curious enough to see if he could find out. Being friends, if you could call it that, with Luna meant that most other Kindred left him alone, so it wasn't a completely suicidal urge.

Standing up, he walked casually to the door and then stepped onto the sidewalk. However, outside Richie and his not-friend seemed to have vanished completely; there was no sign of them anywhere. He stood there listening to traffic noise for a long moment, and gazing down the street, but there appeared to be no indication of which way the pair had gone.

"Dammit," he said loudly and glared at a couple of Cash's Gangrel hangers on perched on a motorbike. "I don't suppose you saw which way they went?"

It was worth a try even though he doubted the pair would tell him anything. They favoured him with amused smiles and shrugs, before gunning the bike into life and speeding away. It was like watching a rerun of empty world, not a soul remained in sight. He was left with two choices, go back into the club, or just head home, it was after all his night off.

Five minutes later, Frank was still standing there trying to decide what to do; there was just something about this situation that nagged at his instincts. He was almost convinced that it was a Kindred thing going on, but it wouldn't let him just leave it alone. Being a cop wasn't just something he could stop being and his spider-sense was pricking. He was beginning to talk himself out of the need to investigate when he heard a faint clanging of metal. With the city noises it was almost masked, but he'd worked the city a long time and he quickly narrowed it down to an alley across the street. He didn't need urging twice, and with an 'I don't believe I'm doing this' shake of his head he jogged across the road.

The alley was long and dark and Frank wasn't stupid, so he pulled out his gun and began to slowly make his way forward. He almost fell over his own feet with what he found at the end under the only light down the whole stretch. Richie and the other man seemed to be doing a very skilful job of trying to carve each other into little pieces with swords, and Frank's twentieth century brain rebelled at the idea. Two men were actually hacking at each other with four foot long blades, well hacking probably wasn't the right word, but it was just about all Frank could come up with. It was only the thought that this might be Kindred business that kept him in the shadows.

He noted one of the Kindred he vaguely recognised, who had taken up a viewing position just behind a dumpster, as the woman grinned, seemingly excited by the battle going on, and he also spotted Andre. The thought of two pissed off Kindred going for him because he interrupted a private dispute kept him in place for a few more blows. Part of him admired the skill the two combatants showed, and he noted the way that both players had taken at least one chunk out of their opponent. Yet there was still something that seemed very wrong about two people fighting with swords in the current day and age. The fact that the cuts on both warriors seemed to have pissed them off more than hurt them, was unsettling.

Frank managed to control himself for a full five minutes, before finally his cop instincts took over. He lifted his gun just as Richie seemed to gain the upper

hand. He took a deep breath and stepped out of the shadows, levelling his weapon on the two men.

"Stop, police," he said loudly and managed to cause both men to look round.

Richie made a face, and if expressions could have killed, Frank would have been dead. The older man, on the other hand, looked slightly relieved, and smiled wickedly.

"Dammit," Richie said, thinking up a whole heap of swear words as he did so, "loose yourself, Frank; you really don't want to get involved in this."

The sensible thing might have been to back off, but Frank had never been overly sensible according to most people.

"Can't do that," he said and he felt a little apologetic, but not much.

People fighting with swords was just not something that was supposed to happen. He had absolutely no doubt that the two men had been very serious about doing their best to kill each other, and he couldn't allow that.

"Sorry, Ryan," the other man with a sword said coldly, and drew Frank;s attention, "but I've had enough of this. Maybe next time."

Then, before anyone could move, metal glinted in the air and a stunned look crossed Richie's face. Frank couldn't quite believe what he was seeing as Richie gazed down for a moment and just about had time to investigate the ornate dagger sticking out of his chest before he began to fall over. If Richie's opponent was anything, he was accurate, and, unless Frank missed his guess, the blade had found the Richie's heart.

"You bastard," was all the blond man had to say, and then he collapsed ungracefully.

Frank was so shocked by the move that Richie's opponent was already on his way past before reality kicked in. The truth of the matter became starkly obvious as he was sent reeling backwards by a hefty shove. He managed to level his gun just as the fleeing man disappeared, but that was all. By the time he glanced back at what was now a very still individual, Andre was gone, along with the other Kindred, and another, worried looking vampire jumped off the roof at the end of the alley and ran towards the Haven. A feeling that he would not be in control of the situation much longer settled squarely in Frank's mind.

Frank thought that MacLeod might have been able to spread some light on the situation and explain why Richie Ryan, as his wallet proclaimed his full name to be, had been going for someone else with a sword. He wasn't sure how long it took Kindred to recover from wounds, but it didn't look like anyone was planning on helping Richie any time soon. Sonnie had explained that Kindred could be paralysed by a stake and so Frank assumed Lillie, who had taken charge at first,

and then Luna who had shown up a few minutes later, were using the whole stake thing to control the situation better.

Given that he thought it was Kindred business Frank actually lent his help in clearing the whole thing up, which was why he ended up in Lillie's office about twenty minutes after the whole thing had begun looking at what looked very much like a corpse. It was unsettling the way Lillie and Julian just stood there with frowns on their faces, just like he seemed to be doing. Why one of the Kindred didn't remove the dagger which was keeping the young looking individual immobile was beyond him.

"Would someone mind telling me what exactly was going on in that alley," he finally asked, fed up of not knowing. "Is there some weird ritual that Kindred have for finishing each other off?"

For the first time, Luna seemed to actually take some notice of him. The Prince of the City raised one eyebrow and frowned thoughtfully some more.

"He's not Kindred, Frank," Luna concluded after a moment's thought, "and I'm afraid he's very dead. We're as much in the dark about this as you. It's just we'd rather not have such a peculiar crime on our doorstep. This I think may be more in your line of work."

Frank's mouth dropped open at that; he had been working under a false premise all evening and now he had just wrecked a crime scene. The number of rules he had just broken didn't even bear counting. If anyone ever found out what he had just done his career was more than just over. They'd put Richie on Lillie's desk with his sword next to him and Luna picked up the blade almost reverently.

"A truly beautiful antique," was the respectful comment, "and very well maintained."

Frank still hadn't decided what to say as he battled with outrage at the others for using him and himself for being so stupid. Luna looked at the dagger next and to Frank's growing horror just pulled it out of the body.

"So is this," the Ventrue said quietly, "but of an entirely different era."

Honestly, Frank didn't give a shit about antiques except for the fact that one of them was a murder weapon.

"But if he's not ..." he said slowly, just voicing his thoughts, "how come ... what was he doing in the Haven, and how is it his friend knows Lillie?"

It was the Primogen of the Toreadors' turn to look awkward.

"His friend?" Luna enquired evenly and Frank picked up on the fact that Lillie had not mentioned Duncan MacLeod to her Prince yet.

It was clear she was thinking about how to put what she had to say and Frank just gave up trying to fathom the whole situation.

"Duncan MacLeod," Lillie finally gave up the name, "I've known him ... a while."

It was clear Lillie was having difficulty explaining Duncan MacLeod and Frank had a feeling that not all his suppositions were off base. It was going to be interesting watching Lillie try to find the right words and Frank let himself enjoy it just for a few moments, but, as it turned out, Lillie became secondary very suddenly, because Richie's body chose that moment to regain life. One second he was lying flat on his back and the next he almost rolled onto the floor seemingly trying to defend himself from a threat that was no longer there. Richie wobbled precariously as he sat up way too fast and it looked as if he was in pain, but Frank did not move to help. When Richie groaned loudly and just lay back down again Frank decided that someone was messing with him, seriously. If it hadn't been for the fact that Lillie and Luna appeared as shocked as he felt he would have accused them of talking bullshit.

"Shit," Richie said seemingly as pleased by the situation as Frank was, "Mac's gonna kill me."

Luna recovered his composure first, even as Frank decided the Twilight Zone had decided to call in and make his life even more complicated.

"That would seem a somewhat difficult thing to accomplish," Luna said slowly.

Richie chose not to comment on that, and Frank didn't think the whatever the hell he was, felt like communicating. About then Frank was willing to go with anything from werewolf through alien if it would just explain what was happening. The fact that one of the three people looking at him was holding his sword, and the dagger that had killed him, seemed to be very unsettling to Richie and Frank almost sympathised. The young looking man sat up slowly and appeared to be assessing the situation. Whatever Richie saw had him looking at Luna, an annoying, but sensible assessment of the rank in the room in Frank's opinion.

"I don't suppose we could just forget you saw any of this, could we?" Richie said in a vaguely hopeful tone.

Frank almost laughed.

"No, I don't suppose," Luna returned evenly.

Someone coming back from the dead seemed to have all of Luna's attention and Frank couldn't fault him for that.

"Why don't you explain how it is that you are still alive," the Prince said with a smile that sent shivers up Frank's spine and he wondered what it was doing to Richie.

"And while you're at it," Frank put in, "why the hell you were trying to kill someone with a sword?"

It was an accusation and Frank was surprised by the indignation it caused on the other man's face.

"I was trying to kill him because he has been trying to kill me ... for quite a while," Richie said vehemently and he actually managed to go up a little in Frank's estimation.

It made him feel a little better as well, because maybe he hadn't misjudged Richie quite as badly as he had thought. Luna, however, didn't seem to care about that and the expression on Richie's face said he was not in the mood to talk. Frank had no doubt who would lose.

"I asked you nicely," the Ventrue said calmly, "now I'm insisting."

The Kindred pushed his face directly into the younger man's line of vision and Richie's eyes opened in shock as Luna's irises turned a violent yellow. Frank shivered; he still wasn't comfortable with all this Kindred stuff. It seemed that Luna was not pulling any punches, and Richie didn't stand a chance, gaze going glassy and vague almost instantly.

"What is your full name?" there was no holding back with the enquiry, and there didn't appear to be any resistance from Richie at all.

"Richard Ryan," he said dully.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty two."

"Why were you fighting?"

There was a slight hesitation before Richie replied that time, which Frank thought was interesting.

"There can be only one," Richie eventually responded, as if it was a familiar line he knew by heart.

"One what?" Luna was quick to jump on the information.

"Immortal," Richie responded with even more of a pause.

Frank didn't know much about Kindred mind powers, but it looked to him as if Richie was fighting back.

"How many of you are their?"

"Don't know," was the honest reply, with no resistance again.

It was beginning to dawn on Frank that Richie was choosing his battles and that Luna might just be up against more than he thought.

"Is Duncan MacLeod one of your kind?" Julian asked, seemingly oblivious to the fact that his control was slipping.

"Yes," the response was dragged out of the Immortal, and now his inquisitor noticed something wasn't quite right.

Frank was feeling even better about Richie as he realised that the self confessed Immortal was protecting his friends as well as his own secrets.

"If there can be only one," Luna tried a slightly different approach, "why are you travelling with one of your own?"

There was a long moment when it looked like Richie wasn't going to reply, but then he lost the battle.

"He's ... my friend," it was almost a look of pain that creased the Immortal's features.

"You're loosing him," Lillie commented and Frank had to agree, not that he was going to say so out loud.

Luna just glared at Lillie as if to say 'I know' and continued.

"How do you kill each other?"

That looked like a last ditch attempt to get answers before time ran out to Frank; he had seen cops do the same thing in the interview room and it rarely did any good. The battle being waged was slowly tipping in the Immortal's favour, and that, it seemed, was just the wrong question to ask. Frank felt his jaw go slack again and he saw Luna step back a little startled as blue lightening lanced across Richie's eyes and the man blinked. The trance like state was broken instantaneously and the Immortal was suddenly staring into the eyes of a Kindred unmasked.

"Jesus," Richie said breathlessly and moved backwards sharply. "What the hell?"

Frank knew the feeling and couldn't help but sympathise. He, however, wasn't an Immortal who seemed almost totally invulnerable, so the emotion lasted only a few seconds as he remembered what Richie was.

"Interesting," was all Luna said and let his eyes fade back to their normal dark shade.

The two kindred looked at each other and Frank knew they were coming to some decision that he wasn't allowed to have any part of and then Luna made a hand signal. Richie did not seem to like the smile Lillie gave him after that and Frank couldn't blame the other man, but he did nothing to interfere. He was very glad when he realised that the plan was not a violent one yet.

"You're tired," Lillie said in a gentle, hypnotic tone, "sleep."

This, it seemed, was not an attack Richie could defend against and as the Primogen of the Toreador clan waved her hand in front of his face, Richie literally relaxed into her arms.

"We have to know more," Luna said firmly, "but we're not going to find out anything by forcing it out of him. Have him taken back to the alley, and make sure he forgets all this."

Frank was feeling out of his depth and bemused, so he wasn't really ready when Luna turned his attention back to him.

"Frank," Luna said lightly, but Frank's internal alarms went off anyway, "how do you feel about keeping an eye on this young man for us?"

"Are you going to kill him?" he asked suspiciously.

Kindred did seem to have a tendency to terminate anything they perceived as a threat and Frank was having no part of that.

"The truth is, I'm not sure," Julian, it appeared, had learnt that he had to be honest with Frank and for that he was grateful. "At this point I don't think so. I have to speak to Daedelus."

The only mortal in the room reluctantly agreed to that; there wasn't exactly a lot else he could do.

End of Part 2

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Chapter 3 Transitions

The first thing that occurred to Richie when he opened his eyes was that there was no pain. This was odd since he definitely remembered a dagger protruding out of his chest in the recent past. The second thing that entered his head was that he was not alone and he forced his eyes to focus. Frank was staring down at him with said dagger in his hand and it was then he remembered that Frank was a cop.

"You're alive," Frank said, looking very shocked.

Not really an unusual reaction when someone was dead and then wasn't. Everything but the fact that he had been discovered fled from Richie's head.

"Ah, I can explain," were the words that came flooding out of his mouth.

Not that he had any idea how to explain, not when Frank was holding a bloody dagger, but he did his very best to try and come up with something. His brain was a bit fuzzy, something that seemed to be par for the course that evening, and unfortunately it was rather empty. A cop was possibly a worst case scenario, right next to film crew and he did consider coming clean, but he wasn't sure how that would end.

"Man, I don't want to know," Frank said, seemingly somewhere between fear and revulsion and shocked Richie out of his quandry. "What I don't need is having to explain you to anyone, just get out of my sight."

Richie couldn't believe his luck, and he scrambled to his feet quickly. He didn't quite know what to say, so he picked up his weapon and did as he was told. Sometimes the universe was on his side it seemed. The street was empty as he virtually fled round the corner. He had to disappear and disappear fast before Frank changed his mind.

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Andre was not sure if he was mourning or celebrating. He had just found and lost an Adonis, but the loss was epic. It was kind of perfect in an artistic, tragic sort of way and he was a Toreador, everything was about art. His Adonis was dead, but his muse was stirring as only such upheaval could achieve and he had all but forgotten that he had only met Richie earlier that evening. As far as his muse was concerned he had known Richie for years and now he had to create. He was trying to walk back to the apartment Lillie had arranged for him, but he kept finding himself standing still as he became distracted by thoughts of how he was going to use his inspiration. Once he even found himself back in the alley just looking down at the blood stains on the tarmac.

When he found himself sitting back at the bar in the Haven he decided it was time to concentrate and he walked back out, determined to make it back to the apartment. What he definitely did not expect when he wandered out of the club was the sight that met his eyes. Complete incomprehension washed through him, followed quickly by a wave of red hot desire as he watched *his* Adonis leave the alley opposite and jog down the street. When Richie had turned into a possession was unclear, but Andre did not argue with his own psyche. All that mattered was that his life was incomplete without the young man heading quickly in the wrong direction, and he *needed* him. He was not going to go through the same experience of earlier that evening, again, not even if it had sparked his muse, the real thing would be far better.

There was only one way forward and with half a smile he set off after his living work of art, the logical course of action clear in his mind. He was not going to loose "his" Adonis again, and so he was going to take him home. He took off down the street on the opposite side to his quarry and then ran across so that he

was directly in front of Richie. Richie had his head down and was not really looking where he was going and when the young man tried to step around him without realising who he was, Andre stepped into his path. Only then did his quarry look up.

"Oh, no, not you again," Richie said and seemed exasperated more than anything else.

Andre found this endearing and amusing and just smiled. He was honestly captivated now that he had a second chance.

"Look, I'm not interested, so would you mind just getting out of my way?" Richie sounded annoyed and pulled his jacket closed to hide what Andre knew was a blood stain on the shirt underneath.

He didn't understand what had happened or how his Adonis was still alive, but he really didn't care.

"I can't do that," Andre purred back, totally focused on his goal.

This time he was in no mood to play mind games, they had proved too unpredictable. Instead he went for the direct approach and threw a very hard, very fast punch at Richie's jaw. His quarry didn't stand a chance, and Richie folded into his arms without so much as a grunt. Andre wasted no time and lifted his burden onto one shoulder and then moved quickly into the nearest dark alley. No one was going to take his Adonis away again.

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Frank gave Richie thirty seconds head start and then ran to the end of the alley to see which way the Immortal had gone. The first thing he realised was that the street was empty. There weren't even any Kindred hanging around outside the Haven; there was no one, no a sign of a single person. Frank swore very loudly.

"Damn Immortal's as slippery as Kindred," he whispered to himself after he had calmed down, and tried to think of a way to break this to Luna. "Later," he concluded finally, "I'll tell him later."

There had to be something to indicate where Richie had gone; people didn't just vanish without a trace, so Frank began to look. It was better than facing a pissed of Prince of the City after the night they had all been having.

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He was annoyed, very annoyed and Richie began to spit curses the moment he opened his eyes. His evening was not going well and when he awoke to find himself tied to a chair in what appeared to be an art studio, he was very, very unhappy about it. What pleased him even less was that someone had relieved him of most of his clothes. On a quick inspection the only garments he retained

were his boxers and his jeans. He remembered the last time he had been the victim of a mad artist and realised with a sinking feeling that there would be no MacLeod to rescue him this time.

"Oh, you are so beautiful," a voice said from just beside him, "truly one of mother nature's finest."

"Wait 'til I get out of these ropes," Richie growled back, throwing all of his anger into the words, "then we'll see who's beautiful."

It really didn't surprise him when Andre laughed.

"I can't explain how you're alive," Andre said, walking around so that he could see his captor and smiling widely, "maybe it has something to do with Luna, but I'm not one to question such good fortune. Neither do I expect you to understand all of this."

The way Andre closed his eyes and breathed in deeply, as if smelling him, just crept Richie out. He was all but positive that Andre was not working with a full deck and, Immortal or not, that did not bode well for him. He really didn't want to know what Andre would do if he discovered that he had a virtually unbreakable toy.

"You're so perfect," Andre continued and ran his tongue over his lips, "so unmarked."

Richie never thought he'd regret his Immortality in quite the way he was doing so now. There was something very alluring about the man standing in front of him, but there was also something that made him draw back as the other took a step towards him. There were so many mixed messages in the room that Richie began praying very hard for a miracle.

"Tonight I'm going to change you," Andre said and much to Richie's growing horror, ran a finger down his cheek, "I'm going to give you forever."

"I already have forever," he replied almost instantly.

He couldn't help it; it was the only thing his desperate mind could throw up as a defence. That drew another laugh from his companion.

"Ah, the young," Andre said calmly, "always so thoughtless to the rigours of time."

Richie was beginning to think Andre was deluded in many, many ways, because there was no way the man was much older than he was. He stiffened when the prowling man wandered to the side of him and round behind where he could no longer see him. He did not like having Andre out of his sight and he tried to twist, but a hand rested on the side of his neck and stilled his movements. The fingers were gentle, but cold.

"You will understand soon," Andre purred into his ear, "and then we shall have eternity."

Long delicate nails stroked the side of his neck for a tantalising moment, and then suddenly there was the pain as one of the fingers dug in. He would have cried out, but the sound stopped in his throat as a mouth replaced the hand and the agony became ecstasy. It was like nothing he had ever felt before, as he literally experienced the life being sucked out of him.

Part of his mind screamed, but the rest of him revelled in the sensation. His consciousness soared away as his body submerged in the overwhelming stimulation that the sucking on his neck caused in him. His thoughts likened it to a Quickening, but this was all being taken from him, not given to him, and he surrendered to it like he never thought he could. A connection was being made, but it was not of his doing, and all he could do was let it happen.

As his mind gave in to Kindred dominance all the events of the night came flooding back: he remember waking in the Haven; he remembered Luna with glowing eyes; he remembered Mac's friend making him sleep and then making him forget; and he remembered Frank had been there too. He knew everything that had gone on, but he had no will to care.

The mouth at his neck was more tender than a lover's embrace, and yet more savage than a sword's bite, all at the same time. The moan that escaped his lips was involuntary, but totally revealing as he gave himself to the pleasure of dying.

When something wet and metallic was forced to his lips, he was barely aware, only instinct led him on. Instinct and a gentle voice that coaxed him to drink, like a mother to a babe. It was heady and amazing and he had no control over any of it and, even as he felt tendrils of power start to move through his body, it all began to fade. At the last instant he felt pain and he felt his Immortal physiology reacting to what was happening, trying to reject it, but even that slipped away as his mind gave up and shut down. Things were going on that he did not understand and that his psyche shied away from and unconsciousness was his only refuge.

When his Adonis slumped against the ropes that bound him, Andre was not surprised; the process of becoming Kindred was not an easy one and he had expected it. The taste of blood was still on his tongue, rich and sweet and he revelled in the essence of this human he had made his. Holding Richie with one arm, he reached for the knot in the rope with his free hand and quickly released it. His new childe all but fell into his arms and he slipped one under Richie's legs and the other round Richie's back and lifted him with ease.

There was a chaise by the far wall and he carried his burden to it, putting the new Kindred onto it gently and arranging him carefully so he would be comfortable.

"So beautiful," he whispered as he ran his hand gently over Richie's face, "like an angel. You're a fallen angel now, my Adonis," he continued quietly, "but you will be so for always."

With a smile he stood back and then picked up a paintbrush. With the joy of one who was doing what he loved most, he walked to his easel and began to paint, recording forever the last moments of his childe's mortal life.

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Andre knew it the moment Richie opened his eyes as a Kindred for the first time, but he did not rush to his childe's side. He wanted to, but he needed to know how Richie was reacting first to know exactly what to do, so he stood a few feet away and waited. He saw Richie frown and rub his neck, before slowly sitting up and looking around. There was something slightly off about the way Richie moved and then when Richie finally looked at him and Richie's eyes went large and round and, of all things, innocent, Andre realised what it was.

"Who are you?" Richie asked in a tone that only backed up Andre's assessment. "Where am I?"

Richie did not sound like an adult, in fact he sounded like a scared child.

"Don't you remember?" Andre asked, not really knowing what else to do.

Richie shook his head.

This had never happened to Andre before, in fact he was not sure he had heard of exactly this happening to anyone he knew either, but he had heard of some strange things occurring because of the embrace, so he did not panic.

"I feel funny," Richie said, sounding scared and that pushed Andre into motion.

"It's alright," he said, walking across to his childe and reaching out his hand, "there is no need to be afraid. I will not let anything hurt you."

Protective instincts weren't exactly what he had expected to be feeling first, but it seemed life was determined to surprise him. When Richie tentatively took his hand he found himself smiling.

"I'm Andre," he said, sitting down beside Richie, "and I will look after you until you are feeling better."

He gave his new childe his best smile and Richie smiled back; it was the most innocent thing Andre had seen in a long time. He was used to dealing with Kindred and to see into a Kindred's eyes was to see many things, but innocence was not one of them.

"Do you remember anything at all?" he asked gently, stroking the hand in his lightly with his fingers.

Richie frowned for a moment and just for a fraction of a second Andre glimpsed something other than the childlike persona he was seeing mostly, but it lasted only a moment and then the innocent gaze was back. Richie shook his head.

"Well don't worry," Andre said, rearranging all his plans in his head, "I am sure you will remember in time; you've been through a big change and it must have affected you."

This seemed to relax Richie somewhat and the smile came back.

"I'm hungry," was the next pronouncement and it was Andre's turn to smile.

"I'm sure you are," he replied and patted Richie's hand, "but before we eat we need to make sure you are presentable. Come on, you are taking a shower."

When he stood and tugged gently on Richie's hand, his child stood and followed him meekly and he led Richie through the bedroom to the bathroom. Then he leant into the shower cubicle and turned on the water before pulling back and looking Richie up and down.

"Now," he said with a small smile, "climb in and have a nice hot shower while I organise dinner."

Richie didn't appear to like that idea, in fact when Andre went to leave, he found his hand was clamped in a vicelike grip. It seemed Richie did not want him to leave.

"Please don't leave me," Richie said quietly and Andre had the feeling that he might have chosen an Adonis with more of a past than he had thought.

"I'll be right back, I promise," Andre said, feeling more like a real parent with every moment. "Look, you get undressed, I'll make a very quick phone call and then I'll be right back, how's that?"

From the expression on his face, Richie was clearly unsure, but Andre patted his child's hand and left him to it. He knew where he could call to have someone come up to the apartment and it would be quite easy to have Richie feed, make their visitor forget and then send them on their way. He had hoped to go out and find prey, but clearly Richie was not ready for that yet.

It took him a few minutes to make the call, but when he went back into the bathroom, Richie was not in the shower. What made him stop and catch his breath was that Richie was completely naked and beamed at him when he walked back in. He really, really wanted to reach out and touch and possibly taste and try what was right in front of him, but then he looked in Richie's eyes and the trust

there held him back. He thought possible the gods were punishing him just a little in offering him something so delectable which he could not touch.

"You're supposed to be in the shower," he said, trying to distract himself from the sudden throbbing in his groin.

"I wanted to make sure you were coming back," Richie said, as if that was a perfectly normal reaction.

Andre decided not to dwell on that.

"Well I'm here now, so in you get then," he said and did his best to think unsexy thoughts.

It occurred to him that very shortly Richie was going to be naked and wet and he almost whimpered.

Half an hour later Richie was clean, Andre was hornier than he had been in years and it was time for dinner. When Richie put on the pair of jeans Andre gave him and then seemed quite happy to wander around with nothing else, Andre thought he might die, but luckily the door bell rang to distract him and he went to let in their guest. He returned a few moments later with the young woman who said her name was Silkie, which was as likely as a Kindred wanting to sunbathe.

"Hello," Richie said with a bright smile as Andre brought her into the main room.

"Hello yourself," Silkie said and Andre felt a sudden shot of jealousy.

"I think that's enough," he said and stepped between her and Richie and then he let his power free.

Silkie was no match for his age and experience and her gaze soon glazed over and he carefully sat her down.

"What did you do?" Richie asked, sounding curious rather than anything else.

The whole shower experience might have been torture for Andre, but it seemed to have relaxed Richie almost completely.

"I've made it so Silkie will do anything we ask her to and not remember afterwards," Andre replied honestly; even if Richie was hiding behind a childhood persona he intended for his child to learn.

"Why?" Richie asked.

"Because you are hungry," Andre said and allowed his Kindred traits to rise to the surface fully, "and you need to feed, so I will show you how."

For a moment Richie looked worried.

"We will not hurt her," Andre said, smiling at his childe, "I promise. We are different from mortals, they feed us and they must never find out about us. Do you understand?"

Richie nodded, looking at the girl curiously.

"Let the hunger rise, Richie," Andre told his childe gently, "let it change you and then I will show you what to do."

When Richie's eyes glowed Kindred gold, Andre thought it was the most magnificent thing he had ever seen.

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Duncan wasn't quite sure what to do. When Richie hadn't returned to the hotel he'd been worried, when he'd scoured the city for him all day and found no sign, he had become anxious. When an Immortal didn't come back it usually meant that they weren't going to, but for some reason he just couldn't bring himself to believe that his friend and pupil was dead. Why he found himself outside the Haven he couldn't quite explain, but this was the last place he'd seen Richie.

The rock music flowed over him in one big wave as he walked into the club, but he barely heard it. All he was interested in was the woman sitting by the bar. He walked quickly between the various tables, heedless as to who was there, and came to a stop beside the owner of the establishment.

"Why, Duncan," Lillie said with a genuine smile, "this is a surprise."

Duncan really hadn't thought he would be seeing Lillie again; the way they reacted to each other was more than a little distracting and he was not a person who liked to be out of control. They had not done a great deal of talking the previous evening; it had been all animal need and sex and it was quite difficult to fight down those instincts again. The only thing that kept them at bay was his worry over Richie, especially when Lillie reached out and brushed her fingers over his hand.

"Is something wrong?" Lillie asked, clearly realising that he was agitated.

"Have you seen Richie, the young man I was with yesterday, since then?" he asked, letting his anxiety show more than he would have if he hadn't needed it to keep his mind on why he was there.

Lillie was too hypnotic for her own good.

"No," Lillie replied evenly, glancing around the club as she spoke, "why, have you lost him?"

Duncan wasn't sure if Lillie was uncomfortable with the topic or just disappointed that he wasn't there simply to see her.

"He's disappeared," he admitted slowly, figuring that he had nothing to lose either way. "He said he'd meet me at the hotel, but he never came back. Now with Richie, normally I'd say he found someone else he'd rather be with, but circumstances last night were ... well ... different."

Lillie gave him a long hard look at that and he was well aware that there were things they both weren't saying and they both knew it. He didn't bother hiding how serious he thought this was and Lillie nodded. Then she smiled and she patted him on the arm.

"You stay here, darling," Lillie told him, "I'll ask around."

"Thanks," Mac replied honestly.

He wasn't sure exactly where in the local hierarchy his friend was, but he was pretty sure it was quite high. It was obvious Lillie had her ear to the ground in most things around her club and he only hoped any news she came up with, was not bad. He ordered a drink and sat down, ready for a long wait if necessary. There was not a lot else to do, until he found out what Lillie knew and he hoped she could give him a lead.

He didn't spend his time idly drowning his sorrows, however, he took the opportunity to just watch. The number of people his sometimes lover spoke to who immediately hurried away to do her bidding, was surprisingly large. It was, however, when the man he had left sitting next to Richie the evening before, came in and walked straight up to the owner of the Haven that he became very interested. He just wished he could have heard what they were saying.

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"Ah, just the man I need to talk to," Lillie said as Frank walked up to her. "Where's our pet Immortal at the moment, Duncan's worried about him."

The scowl that crossed Frank's face at that was not what she had been hoping for; clearly the answer was not as straight forward as she had hoped. She had a real soft spot for Duncan and she had been hoping to give him an easy answer. The sooner he and his young friend were out of San Francisco the better for the whole community as far as she was concerned.

"I wish I knew," was Frank's eventual reply, "but I lost him almost as soon as he woke up last night. I have just had the pleasure of explaining this to your beloved prince. The guy just disappeared into thin air. He was more difficult to track than one of you guys."

"Do you make a habit of following us around, Frank?" the Toreador asked with a smile, unable to resist the little teasing.

When she had first met him she had not been overly impressed with Frank, but she rather liked him these days. He was a no nonsense kind of man and she could respect that. It was a pity he had such a low opinion of most Kindred. Pulling herself away from her thoughts she then dragged her mind back on track, and noted the information which had been passed on.

"Did he give any indication of where he was going before you lost him?" she enquired calmly.

The reply she received was a slow shake of the head. One thing she did recognise was that Frank was a good cop and if Frank had lost their quarry then it was unlikely he would be easily found.

"Look, I have to get to work," Frank said evenly, "I just called in to see if you'd heard anything. Since you're asking me questions, I assume we're as in the dark as each other. Luna has people out looking now, but no-one seems to know anything. If you find out any information, would you mind giving me a call?"

Even if Frank did claim to have a distaste for Kindred, it still amused Lillie how the cop was adjusting to working with them. She wondered if Frank realised how well he was adapting.

"For you, Frank," she responded with a smile, "anything."

Frank rolled his eyes at that, but did have the grace to smile before giving her a little salute and leaving the way he had entered.

Lillie sighed and then turned back to Duncan to give him the bad news. Things were just not running smoothly this week and she hoped that everything would settle back to normal soon.

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"I take it no one knows anything," Duncan said as Lillie walked back over to him.

He could tell by the expression on her face that she had had no luck.

"Unfortunately not," she replied and seemed genuinely sorry to not be able to help. "I have my people keeping an eye out and if you give me your hotel number I will contact you if I hear anything."

"Thank you," he replied, well aware that Lillie did not have to help him at all.

All he could do was take the news that nobody had any information calmly, and then go out to continue his search. There were things going on in San Francisco which he did not understand, and he was beginning to sense a bigger picture. As he took his leave and left, he began to look, not only for Richie, but for anything sinister that might also be going on as well.

End of Part 3

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Chapter 4 Repercussions

Andre put another stroke of paint on the canvas and admired his work. As was par for the course since his childe had woken up, he was painting Richie. There were many other, not so innocent, things he wished to do with Richie, but while the childlike persona remained in place he would not violate that trust. He had seen glimpses of the adult mind behind the protective shield several times and he thought Richie was beginning to return to a state of reality, but he was willing to wait. The three days they had spent together had been very fulfilling for him and he had no regrets about what he had done.

He was going to have to ask Lillie to smooth things over with the Prince, since technically he had broken the law, but he was sure there wouldn't be a problem, not with the beauty and talent he had ushered into being. That was one of the ways he knew that there was an adult under the childlike actions of his new childe; Richie's art was both skilled and not in the least childish. Richie had picked up a pencil of his own volition after only a few hours of his new life and Andre was certain he had done the right thing. His childe would be the perfect Toreador.

He looked up at his subject to find that Richie was no longer reclining on the chaise, but was standing up looking at him.

"You're not supposed to move when I'm painting," the older vampire said as if scolding a child, since that was how he was used to dealing with Richie, "go and sit back down."

Surprisingly, Richie did not do as he was told as he usually did, in fact he smiled a rather predatory smile and walked towards Andre instead. There was nothing childlike in the expression that looked at him now and Andre realised that the real Richie might actually be back.

"I don't want to sit down," Richie said, walking right up to him so that they were only inches apart; "I'm in the mood for more interesting things."

Andre felt the heat in his belly stir. He had been doing a very good job of ignoring it, but with Richie so close and so obviously making advances he let it grow.

"Welcome back," he said, allowing Richie to reach out and touch him.

Even the touch of Richie's fingers on his shirt was electric and he could feel the passion in his childe. New Toreador often found themselves at the mercy of their needs, so Andre was not really surprised and he had been waiting for this moment since his childe had awoken the first time so he was not about to argue. The hand that snaked behind his head was surprisingly strong, but he did not mind and enjoyed being drawn in for what was a very passionate kiss. Richie knew how to use his mouth, that was for sure and Andre allowed his childe to

take what he wanted. When Richie finally drew back he was flushed and his eyes were almost gleaming.

"I need," Richie said, seemingly lost in wants far greater than a mortal would have been used to.

"And you shall have," Andre told him and let his childe lead him across to the chaise.

He wanted to taste what was his, but he was willing to let Richie lead for a little while; he would show his childe who was the master soon enough and then they would both be satisfied. Richie pushed him down on the chaise, climbing on top of him and then there was a snap.

"Opps," Richie said, pulling the long, splintered end of one of Andre's larger brushes from under his knee, but it didn't stop the young Kindred from continuing what he had been doing.

Richie just put the shard of brush on the back of the chaise and returned to his previous focus. Andre purred in appreciation as Richie began to undo the buttons on his shirt, placing a small kiss on the revealed skin after each one gave in to his ministrations. This was what he had been greatly hoping for and Richie was not disappointing him at all. The embrace often lowered sexual inhibitions and Andre sensed none of those he had felt in Richie when he had first met him.

Everything was just about perfect, that was until Richie sat up straight and looked down at him. There was something in the gaze that was looking at him which was not right, something below the passion and lust and Andre felt the first moment of unease.

"The game's over," Richie said in a tone so cold it could have frozen water, "now it's my turn."

Before Andre could defend himself Richie had lifted the broken brush and was bringing it down on his chest. Andre felt the pain of the wood slicing into his chest and piercing his heart as his body completely froze. He was helpless, paralysed by the makeshift stake and Richie just leant over him, madness in his eyes. For the first time Andre realised he did not understand what he had made at all and he wondered how long he had left to live.

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Dawn was just beginning to colour the sky and Richie had absolutely no idea how he came to be wandering up to an all night cafe. The only item of clothing he was wearing that he recognised as his own was the brown leather jacket with his sword nestled in its usual place. The rest was nothing he remembered ever owning, including the black silk shirt and the new black jeans. The last thing he vaguely recalled was Frank standing over him and telling him to get out of his sight, the rest was hazy at best. There were vague recollections of men with

glowing eyes, and hypnotic words being whispered in his ear, but they couldn't be called real memories.

He honestly had no memory at all of where he was or what he was doing except walking. It was as if the light was somehow helping to clear his mind from where it had been completely fogged over, even though the brighter it became the more it hurt his eyes. Everything was too bright and too loud and he felt as if he was going slightly mad.

That was why, when he saw someone he knew sitting in one of the booths, he grasped at it and went straight to them. It seemed like quite a coincidence that he just happened to be walking into a place that one of the few people he knew in the area frequented, but there was nothing in his memory to tell him how he came to be there, so he had no idea how he could have known.

"Frank?" he said tentatively, since the cop didn't seem to have heard his silent entrance.

The man whirled in his seat and his eyes opened wide with shock. It appeared that the last person Frank had expected to meet here was Richie.

"Richie," Frank said with a surprised note to his voice, "we'd all but given you up for dead."

Richie frowned a little more at that, since the one thing he did remember was Frank finding out he was very hard to kill. A wave of fatigue stopped him thinking about it too hard, however, and he just sat down.

"What's going on in this city, Frank?" he asked pointedly, needing someone to help him find out what was going on. "Something's happened to me that I don't understand, and I want answers."

It was at that point that Frank looked at him very hard and then reached out and touched his hand. Something about that definitely struck a chord in the cop.

"Jesus, you're Kindred," Frank said almost too loudly.

Whatever that meant to Frank, it upset him, but Richie was no closer to understanding. The growing light was beginning to make his eyes ache and his head pound and he really didn't know what was happening.

"What are Kindred?" he asked, almost desperately and brought a halt to whatever Frank had been suspecting. "What's happened to me? Why can't I remember?"

As he became agitated, he felt the world brighten to painful levels and he shivered from head to foot. Frank's eyes opened wide in shock at something he saw then, but Richie was too busy rubbing his eyes and asking the world to settle down. He felt so lost and the closer the sun came to fully rising the worse he felt.

"I'll explain as much as I can," Frank said quickly, looking rather worried, "but not here. Let's get you somewhere a little more private and a lot darker, before you get a suntan you won't forget."

Richie still didn't understand, but when Frank stood and pulled him to his feet by the arm he went without argument. He was feeling less and less like he was in control of his own body, even though his thoughts were slowly beginning to make sense. Frank took him to his car and then drove them somewhere fast, but Richie was too busy hunkering down in the seat to care where they were going. When they reached what Richie assumed was Frank's apartment, Frank led him in and then closed all the curtains and locked the door, whilst leaving Richie sitting on the couch. Richie was suspicious of such odd behaviour, but he didn't really know what else to do.

"Are you going to tell me now?" he said as his companion finally stopped moving.

Frank appeared reluctant, but he did sit down on a chair slowly and looked as if he was thinking about it.

"I think you've been recently embraced," the cop finally said in a very careful tone, "you've been turned into a vampire."

Richie was pretty sure his face showed exactly what he thought of that.

"Not like you see on TV," Frank hurried on quickly, clearly having seen his expression, "but still blood drinking, night dwellers. I'm not really an expert, I'm more in this by accident. Embracing is when they drain all your blood and replace it with Kindred blood, then you become one of them."

The feeling of his life slipping away in slow blissful second caught Richie off guard, and as he remembered the world brightened again. At least with the curtains closed this didn't seem to hurt him anymore.

"Do you remember who did this to you?" Frank asked and Richie wondered how much he was giving away in his expression.

"No," Richie replied, snapping back to reality, "but they must have given me these clothes, only the jacket is mine."

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Frank had the feeling that something was very wrong and that Luna was not going to approve. Ever since he had seen Richie in the café, something had been off and there was something almost tangibly strange about the creature who was Immortal and Kindred, he could feel it. Richie seemed to have no clue what a Kindred was and yet he had to have been with one for several days. Luna had scoured the city looking for the missing Immortal and no one hid that well unless they were being hidden by like minds. Half the time Richie looked so lost and

helpless that Frank could almost overlook the fact that, some of the time, the Immortal was staring at him with orange eyes.

Frank had tried to explain all he knew about Kindred, which, he knew, wasn't the full picture, but it was a start. Then he had tried to convince Richie to go to Luna, after all this was definitely Kindred business now, but Richie had reacted badly to that idea. Considering the reservations Frank had about the way Kindred did business, he didn't blame Richie and had dropped the subject pretty quickly. Instead he had offered to make coffee and Richie had accepted, hence he was in the kitchen waiting for the machine to finish its cycle.

The fact was he knew he should take Richie straight to Luna, but he wasn't sure what Luna would do. There was something very not normal about Richie and he was clearly having mental issues after the embrace and Frank was slightly afraid that Luna would decide to find out how to kill Richie and be done with it. The one thing he was sure of was that Luna cared more about the Masquerade than anything else and if Richie threatened that he was toast.

He couldn't help wondering if Richie really was Kindred, or if his guest was something else entirely, given his unusual physiological peculiarities. The only thing he did know was that Richie had been dicked around by a vampire and he was going to help him.

The coffee machine finally made the familiar burble and he filled two mugs with the dark liquid before heading back into the other room. What he did not expect to find was the curtain partially open and Richie standing in the direct light. Richie was wearing the shades he had had sitting on the sideboard and didn't look as if he liked the brightness much, but Richie was still standing in full sunlight. Frank thought that when it came to Kindred, that should not have been possible and his suspicions began to solidify.

"I think," Richie said, turning and looking at him, "starting off Immortal has its advantages."

"I think," Frank replied in kind, "you might be right."

He walked over and handed Richie the mug of coffee.

"So," he said, glancing out the window at the clear blue sky, "did you just feel like spontaneously combusting, after what I just told you, or this a general suicidal tendency?"

For the first time since they had met in the café, Richie laughed and then pulled the curtains closed.

"Call it dangerous curiosity," Richie replied and pulled the shades off, putting them back on the table before sitting down. "Mac thinks I have a death wish half the time."

That reminded Frank of the other person who had been running around frantically for days trying to find his guest. He had been so wrapped up in Kindred affairs that he'd all but forgotten Duncan MacLeod.

"Maybe you should call MacLeod," he suggested, moving to sit down as well; "he's been looking for you as well."

Richie frowned at that and several different emotions skittered across his face. It was a little disconcerting because it almost looked as if Richie was having many different reactions to the same thing, and not in a good way.

"No," Richie said eventually, "I can't, not yet. I need to figure this out. I don't want Mac to end up in the middle of this as well; he's likely to go all hero on me and get himself killed."

Frank has a suspicion that that was not all that was going on in Richie's head, but he wasn't about to argue. If it was Kindred business it was better done at night anyway and he needed some sleep. Richie could have the couch and he hoped that by evening things would be looking more sensible.

"Drink up," he said, taking a large swig of his coffee.

With a salute of his mug, Richie followed suit and Frank began to think about more mundane things, like where the spare blankets were. There wasn't a lot left to talk about so Frank finished his coffee quickly and then climbed to his feet to find the things Richie would need. When he came back into the living room with an arm full of blankets, some towels and a few other things he had looked out, Richie was sitting at one end of the sofa doodling on the phone pad. Whatever he was doing had all of Richie's attention.

"I'll just leave these here," Frank said, putting his burden down on the sofa and the only response that came back was a distracted grunt.

Looking over Richie's shoulder he saw a rather abstract design that Richie seemed to be totally focused on creating. He began to think Richie's sire might be Toreador and had to wonder who out of Lillie's brethren was that stupid.

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Frank had a rather restless night's sleep, but he wasn't suddenly awakened by teeth on his jugular in the middle of the night, so he counted it as a win. When he eventually walked out of his bedroom he expected to find Richie still asleep or just waking up, but what he found was all the bedclothes stacked neatly on the end of the sofa and Richie standing next to the window, pristinely turned out, drinking a coffee and watching the sun go down.

"There's coffee in the pot," Richie said in a rather off hand tone.

It was a big change from the morning; Richie didn't seem lost at all anymore and Frank just went to find himself some caffeine without commenting. He felt much more alert with the coffee in his system and he paused, just watching Richie for a while. The first thing he noticed was that Richie had borrowed one of his shirts. Given how lightly he slept these days he wondered exactly when his guest had snuck into his room to the wardrobe without asking.

"I'm going to the Haven," Richie said, turning away from the window as the last rays of sun left the sky, "are you coming?"

The eyes that looked at him were ice blue, but they held a danger that could only come from a Kindred gaze. Frank didn't feel like arguing with that visage so he nodded without bothering to ask why.

"Give me five minutes," he said calmly, even as a small shot of adrenaline soaked his system as the sudden danger he felt.

This was not the same person he had invited into his home that morning, but he was not about to let Richie just walk off on his own. He moved quickly into his bedroom to retrieve the rest of his things and then he took one last look at himself in the mirror to make sure he was presentable before going back into the living room. He was almost surprised to see Richie still standing there waiting for him, he had kind of expected Richie to lose patience and leave.

"Let's go," he said and picked up his car keys.

They walked up to the outside of the Haven a little while later with the Immortal in the lead, and Frank had the feeling that little or nothing could have stopped Richie as he walked in. Kindred recognised Kindred immediately and there were several glances in Richie's direction. Frank was pretty sure those who had been in the club the other evening recognised the newly embraced individual and because of that were immediately underestimating him. Advance knowledge was sometimes a block to seeing the truth and Frank only spotted a couple of faces that took proper stock of Richie in the same way he had learned to.

They hadn't spoken much in the car and Frank wasn't exactly sure why they were here, but he wanted to keep an eye on Richie. The fact that he had the slight suspicion that the Prince of the city may just have something in Richie he couldn't deal with made Frank smile.

"I'm looking for Luna," Richie said to the barman as soon as they had covered the distance between the door and the counter, "is he here?"

Frank knew the Kindred behind the bar was one of Lillie's and he saw the vampire make the mistake of not actually *looking* at the Kindred to whom he was talking. The Toreador glanced at the Immortal, recognised him from his last time in the Haven and made the wrong assumption. It was almost fun to watch for Frank, if it hadn't been quite so dangerous.

"What's a fledgling like you want with the Prince," the barman responded with a slightly disdainful look.

That was not the right thing to say to Richie, as it turned out, it seemed the Immortal was in no mood to play games. Reaching one hand over the counter, Richie took hold of the other Kindred's waistcoat and pulled him off his feet. The glowing scowl Richie showed the other vampire was impressive in Frank's opinion, even if he didn't really appreciate things like that. Frank knew that Richie shouldn't have been able to do that and that the older Toreador should have been able to put him in his place, but the action appeared to make the barman reconsider his position.

"I didn't come here to answer questions," Richie said slowly and very precisely, "I came for answers. Now, is Julian Luna here?"

What was worrying Frank just a little was that Richie seemed to have picked up a faint Russian accent from somewhere.

"No," the other replied, clearly afraid of something he did not try and understand.

Richie dropped the other Kindred as if he was now irrelevant and then turned on his heel. Frank had to hurry to keep up as Richie strode across the club back towards the door. Unfortunately some of the patrons didn't seem to want to let them leave and six of Cameron's boys barred their way. Frank recognised them from their rap sheets. The fact that Richie smiled widely when he saw the challenge did not do anything to defuse this situation.

"Playing with the pet cop?" one of the Brujah asked snidely.

"Get out of my way," Richie said evenly without even responding to the jibe, "we're leaving."

Frank began to pray he wasn't about to end up in the middle of a Kindred bloodbath.

"Not until you apologise to our friend," the leader of the group shot back and gave a mock salute to the barman.

Frank knew for a fact that Kindred tended to stick to their own clan and that Brujah being friends with Toreador was not likely, but that didn't seem to be stopping those in front of them. From what Frank could see from his position, the half amused look never faltered on Richie's face and that really should have warned them.

"I'll ask once more," Richie said calmly, although he didn't really sound like he cared, "get out of my way or I'll make you."

The tension in the club went up a notch and, as Frank glanced around the room, he could see lots of people looking at them. This was going to be messy, he could tell.

The thugs laughed as if they were all connected up to the same voice box, and Frank saw Richie lose patience.

"Okay, times up," the new Kindred said loudly and deliberately stepped right up to his first adversary.

It couldn't even be called a fight really. The Brujah didn't even get a look in as Richie took hold of his jacket and almost casually threw him across the room. Now Kindred were strong, Frank had seen that, but the effortless way the throw was executed showed the deep rooted skill Richie possessed and Frank wondered how deadly Richie had been before being embraced. It didn't take the other assailants any more to realise that something was not quite right here, they seemed to be at least that bright. As far as Frank understood it, Kindred didn't get to be that fast until they were a lot older than a few days. Like a pack of animals the Brujah decide to attack on mass.

The first to reach Richie was met with a swift blow to the head and went reeling backwards. The second received a knee in the stomach and was bodily thrown into one of his accomplices. A little improvisation was required for the third Brujah, and a foot shot out with deadly accuracy hitting him squarely on the chin. The fourth seemed to think he'd blocked the arm coming at him, but quickly discovered that the elbow was far more painful.

This left one standing after he had disentangled himself from his companion who had been thrown at him. Frank enjoyed the look of shock and fear in the Brujah's when the Kindred was faced by Richie just standing there having barely ruffled his jacket.

It seemed that, although violent, not all Brujah were stupid because this one held up his hands as he surveyed his fallen comrades and actually got out of the way. It was all over in a matter of seconds.

"Coming Frank?" Richie asked calmly and slowly walked past the other Kindred.

It was rather a moot question, there was no way Frank was staying in the Haven. He didn't quite believe what he had seen, but he was not about to question it now. He could live without a pack of angry Brujah on his tail. They walked out the way they had come, and Frank didn't need to be told where they were going. He was sure phones had started ringing all over the city.

End of Part 4

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Chapter 5 Consequences

The mansion was impressive, but Richie, it appeared, wasn't there to admire the architecture. Several of Julian's security people tried to stop him outside the

house, and Frank just trailed on behind past the unconscious bodies. He wasn't quite sure what he was following, but now he was very sure Richie was no ordinary Kindred, and he also knew that Richie was not in a particularly good mood. The pair walked into the hallway unchallenged.

It was Cash who strolled out of one of the interior rooms, looked somewhat surprised and decided to take on his role as chief of security.

"The Prince is not available this evening," the Gangrel said in a very restrained tone; Frank was surprised since he had seen Cash overreact to threats to Luna. "How did you get in here?"

"Funny, that's what everyone's been trying to tell me," the Immortal shot back. "Thing is, I don't believe you anymore than I believed them."

Frank watched Cash's metaphorical hackles go up.

"I'm going to have to ask you to leave," Cash told them in a tone that suggested future violence if not obeyed.

If it had been up to Frank, he would have been leaving, pride or no pride. Richie on the other hand didn't look as if Cash was even worth his notice. Cash didn't seem to realise was that this was the man everyone had been looking for over the last few days. Frank would have been happy to explain, but he knew he wasn't going to have time. Short was not quite the word for Richie's fuse this evening and as Richie's mood became blacker, his Russian accent was becoming thicker; probably why Cash hadn't picked up on who he was looking at.

There was virtually no warning when Richie finally decided he'd had enough and no way for Cash to get out of the way. The far wall was very hard, and after colliding with it, Cash found that the floor became a very convenient place to go to sleep for a while.

"You know, just talking to them might get you somewhere," Frank commented as they proceeded further into the house.

"I'm not interested in lackeys," was the cold but calm reply. "If you want action, you go to the centre of power."

There was definitely a slightly patronising tone to the voice, but Frank chose not to comment. He figured he'd be better staying on Richie's good side since humans had a tendency to break a little more easily than Kindred. The two pushed opened the doors to the conference room and walked in as if they owned the place. They didn't find Luna, but they did meet Daedelus.

"Good evening, gentlemen," the Nosferatu said calmly, "you have a great number of people looking for you, Mr Ryan."

Daedelus was well ahead of the game as ever, it seemed.

"It's nice to be wanted," Richie responded evenly. "Where's Luna?"

The other Kindred smiled, and Frank suspected that Daedelus knew something out of the ordinary when he saw it, but he also thought that Daedelus found Richie interesting rather than threatening.

"Our Prince is in his study," the Nosferatu replied as if he was not bothered by Richie's presence in the slightest. "I'll tell him you're here if you wouldn't mind waiting."

"Don't bother, I'll go myself," patience was obviously not one of the Immortal's current virtues.

Richie moved off as if he knew exactly where he was going and Frank thought that possibly Richie did, but that did not mean Daedalus was going to let him. Richie found his way blocked by a very large, menacing vampire and Frank decided the night was going downhill. Daedalus could be very scary.

"I'm afraid I must insist that you wait here," Daedelus said in as pleasant tone as was possible given the circumstances, "I'm sure Mr Luna will not keep you waiting long."

Now Frank knew a little of the Nosferatu reputation and this was the Primogen of the clan, he didn't think going against him was a good idea. Taking on a pack of Brujah was one thing, but this was *the* Daedelus, taking him on was pure stupidity.

"Ah, Richie," he said, hoping that he could talk some sense into his companion, "let's just sit down, huh. The chairs look comfortable and I'm sure Julian won't be long."

"I'm not in the mood to sit down," the Immortal said coldly, Russian accent very heavy now.

Richie's eyes changed colour dangerously, but all Daedelus did was smile. The Nosferatu let his own Kindred face reveal itself and two vampires stared into each other's gaze and Frank wondered if backing away slowly would be better for his health. Richie scowled at the creature who blocked his way, scowled and stared down the Primogen of the Nosferatu clan and came out sane. Frank was vaguely impressed in a terrified, this is getting out of hand, kind of way.

"What are you?" Daedelus asked and seemed to be very surprised by what he was looking at.

From what he had seen, Frank thought it took a lot to shock a Nosferatu, but Richie appeared to have managed it. Daedelus, it seemed, decided that Richie was a real threat, because as Frank watched, the Kindred let all the traits of his clan appear, and fangs and claws became readily apparent.

"Wanna play?" Richie enquired, seemingly totally unafraid of the display of power.

The games were over, this was for real and Frank did step back as Nosferatu met Toreador. Deadelus threw out a clawed hand and grabbed Richie by the throat, as far as Frank could tell, intent on exposing the jugular and giving a clear strike to drain Richie. The only thing was, the grip didn't hold.

Daedelus found his arm being slowly pulled away from its target, and Richie reciprocated the gesture. Richie literally snarled at his opponent as unnatural strength battled with unnatural strength. By the looks of it, for the first time Daedelus doubted his own ability to force this anomaly into submission, and Frank stepped back further as Daedelus put all his power into one throw.

Richie went sideways a good five feet and collided with a chair, but he was still upright, and seemed to be actually enjoying himself. He used Toreador speed to very good effect, and Daedelus found himself at close quarters again almost instantly. Material ripped as both Kindred went for handholds on their opponent, and the roar of an angry Nosferatu filled the room. Frank wasn't sure who was winning.

The Immortal gained the upper hand this time and Daedelus went flying through the air just like Cash before him and the picture he landed against followed him to the floor, but the Nosferatu did not stay down. What climbed to his feet bore little resemblance to the calm, efficient Daedelus Frank vaguely knew. This was Daedelus at his most dangerous, and Frank thought it might be time to leave. Daedelus threw the wrecked canvas aside and growled his anger.

"Stop this," the command was loud and held the roar of authority, just as the two were ready to go for each other again.

Frank almost jumped out of his skin at the sound and turned to see Luna standing by an open door. When he glanced back at Richie and Deadelus the command actually seemed to have shocked the pair out of the rage that was quickly taking over both of them, but two sets of golden eyes were looking at the Prince of the city.

"Well, well," Richie said coldly, "the man himself."

Frank remained very still, just in case as Luna scanned the room slowly and took in the destruction that had occurred, however, most of Luna's attention seemed to be on the creature standing in the centre of the carpet. It was quite obvious that Luna recognised that the combination of Immortal and Kindred had produced something very unusual indeed.

"We've been looking for you," Luna said in what sounded to Frank like a completely calm tone. "You didn't have to assault every one between here and the gate; you are quite welcome in my house."

It seemed Luna had chosen the civil approach which made Frank relax a little, but he was sure that the claws would come out if necessary.

"They didn't seem to think so," Richie returned, also appearing to calm down.

It was at that moment Cash decided to stagger through the door and came to a rapid halt as he saw what had been going on. Frank almost felt sorry for the Kindred in the room; they clearly didn't know quite what was happening.

"Your friend, Duncan MacLeod, has been worried about you," Luna said in what Frank thought was meant to be a soothing way. "I can give him a call if you like."

The name brought an astounding change over Richie, so much so that Frank thought he was seeing things for a minute. Richie had not allowed his eyes to fade to their normal blue, but at the mention of MacLeod Richie blinked and they lost their supernatural colouring.

"Mac," Richie said slowly, seeming almost confused.

Now this was the person Frank remembered letting sleep on his couch. The accent was gone and so was most of the aggression. Something made all the Kindred look at each other as well and then Frank saw a blue spark lance across Richie's eyes and that seemed to settle it. It was as if all strength just leaked out of Richie, and he collapsed to his knees with his head in his hand.

Nobody moved and Frank wondered what would happen next as Luna watched the whole thing with a very calculating gaze. Daedelus' mask of logical reason was back in place as well and Cash appeared to want to do something, but was waiting for instructions. Frank just wanted someone to explain things.

It was confused, almost frightened eyes that looked around the room, and Frank had the feeling he was looking at the real Richie Ryan. The only person Richie appeared to recognise properly was him as he glanced at everyone else.

"Frank," Richie said quietly, "how did I get here?"

It was then Luna chose to take charge.

"Do you remember anything that's been happening," Luna asked almost kindly and walked towards the kneeling individual.

Frank had seen Luna be cold and ruthless, but the Prince seemed to be in a compassionate and kind mood. Luna helped Richie to his feet, much, it seemed, to Cash's growing concern, and sat him in a chair.

"Bits," Richie responded slowly, "I was at Frank's place, then I remember something at the Haven, but I don't know what I'm doing here."

An insane Kindred probably wasn't the best person to have around, and Frank was beginning to think Richie wasn't quite all there, but Luna seemed concerned rather than worried.

"That's not important now," Luna told Richie with half a smile, "you're newly embraced, and that takes some getting used to."

Frank didn't think it usually did this to people, but he was no expert, so he just kept his mouth shut.

"Do you know where you've been for the last couple of days?" Luna asked calmly as Lillie entered the room silently behind Richie.

The Immortal shook his head, and then frowned as if trying to bring back an elusive memory.

"Paints," Richie said slowly, "all I remember is, there were paints."

Given that there were a large population of Lillie's clan in the city, Frank wasn't sure that narrowed it down anymore than the fact Richie was Toreador did.

"How about who did this to you?" Luna didn't sound as if he expected a sensible answer.

Richie just looked blank.

"It has to have been Andre," Lillie chose then to enter the conversation and she walked round to get a better look at the man who had so recently wrecked part of her club. "I should have realised earlier. He hasn't been around since this one disappeared, I just assumed he was creating something, until I was informed what had walked into the Haven this evening. Andre took an interest at the club the other night, I didn't think he'd go this far."

Again a name caused a reaction in Richie and his eyes changed colour again for a moment, but quickly flashed back to their normal blue.

"Didn't want to lose me," was what Richie said in an almost dreamlike voice, as if he had no idea where the thought came from.

"Do you know where he is now?" Luna asked, apparently wanting as many answers as possible before Richie lost what lucidity he had.

There was real concentration on Richie's face as he tried to, but whatever was causing his confusion seemed to be too great.

"I don't know," Richie said finally, "there are just these big blanks."

The Prince looked up at Cash and the Gangrel disappeared, Frank assumed to go and check on Andre's known haunts. Frank didn't know what normal practice for

Kindred was, but he couldn't help wondering if Andre had had his just deserts at Richie's hand.

"Why don't you wait in the other room," the Prince suggested calmly, "we have some business to deal with, and it looks like you could do with some rest. There's a large couch in there and Daedelus will show you the way. If there's anything you need, just ask."

Richie didn't even try to protest, and Frank was reminded of the morning when he had run into Richie at the café. As Daedelus helped him to his feet, Richie just went, the aggression of earlier completely absent. It was almost eerie.

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Julian was not used to running into things he just fundamentally did not understand, but Richard Ryan was a shock. As Daedelus led the new Kindred away, he could hear the young man's heart beating in a slow, steady rhythm. It wasn't at normal human speed, but it was definitely beating. While they waited for the Nosferatu to return, he indicated that they should all take seats; this was going to take some discussing. Frank was the only one who didn't sit and took to pacing around nervously.

"He found a pencil and paper on the table," Daedelus observed calmly on his return, "and appears totally absorbed in drawing pictures of you."

Daedelus looked directly at Lillie, but she said nothing.

"He did that at my place," Frank commented and paused in his pacing. "He's been with me all day, and take it from me, he has no problem with daylight."

"Why didn't you bring him straight here, Frank?" Julian asked and managed to make it sound almost like it wasn't an accusation.

Frank looked unhappy by the tone of the question, but that was nothing new.

"I would have done, but he didn't want to come," Frank shot back, "and if you expected me to argue with him, you have to be mad. I like being alive."

It was a sensible argument and Julian decided that maybe Frank had had no choice. At least everything seemed to be going their way for now.

"Okay," he said calmly, "but what I want to know is what has Andre created with his meddling? There is power in our new associate that cannot come from any source I know."

There were ways that Kindred could increase their individual abilities other than just surviving, but not to the extent that they could take on a Nosferatu after just days. It was Daedelus to whom all eyes turned.

"I cannot explain the source of his prowess," Daedelus said evenly, "but I will say that I believe it is fading; in the few moments for which I was in contact with him, I believe I actually felt his abilities diminish. It was only marginal, but it was definitely there."

Daedelus looked at the other two Kindred thoughtfully.

"I had thought the stories I had heard of other eternal beings to be legend until proof of their existence was shown to me," the Nosferatu continued calmly. "Since they actually exist it is logical to assume that the tales I once heard are not all fiction either. If so it would seem that to combine an Immortal and a Kindred would be to try and pair direct opposites. *They* are fundamentally alive, *we* are fundamentally dead, I would hazard a guess that by his very nature, Mr Ryan cannot be one of us. I would therefore go as far as saying, I believe he is becoming human again. I cannot say how long it will take, but I would suggest we keep him here until the truth of the matter is revealed."

Daedelus never spoke unless he meant it, so Julian just accepted what his friend said. He nodded and arched his fingers, tapping his lips thoughtfully as he considered the situation.

"That leaves the mystery of how it is he feels like a Toreador of more than a few centuries," he said slowly. "Even if this problem finds its own solution, I would still like to know how it came about. This is something we do not want to happen again."

The others nodded in agreement, even Frank could see the sense in that. Unfortunately for him, his beeper chose just the wrong moment to go off.

"Damn," he said loudly and then looked at Julian. "Can I use your phone?"

The Ventrue half smiled, but nodded as well. It seemed like such a normal event amidst what had been complete chaos. There was a lot of talking to be done, and Julian expected trouble from Cameron's direction, thanks to what Richie had done to the Brujah. As the cop disappeared through the door, he called the meeting to order once more.

====

Cash was on edge, given that he had just met a, reportedly, three day old Kindred who had kicked his ass and he didn't like what he found at Andre's apartment. There were no signs of life as he and two of his most trusted clan mates walked up the stairs to the penthouse. It was only as they came through the last floor door, into what was almost a lobby that anything untoward became apparent. Lillie's money paid for private security and no nosy neighbours, but even so it was usually wise to shut the front door. The three Gangrel headed for the inner sanctum swiftly and silently with Cash in the lead.

They were met by an utter mess: there was furniture every where, and spots of paint over just about everything, almost as if someone had thought to create a work of art. There was a strange order in the chaos and even as Cash looked, he found his eyes dragged to the centre of the room where they immediately saw the major exhibit.

On a table in front of a very large canvas, Andre was lying, sprawled over the surface with a paintbrush sticking out of his heart. If it hadn't been quite so serious a matter it might actually have been funny: an Artiste, paralysed by his own tools. Ryan had not stopped there, however, at least Cash assumed it had to have been Ryan, and he thought that had been Toreador he might have admired the workmanship. Andre had had most of his blood drained via a slit in the side of his neck, but his child had not used it to bolster his own power. Instead, in his rage and, what Cash was pretty sure was madness, Ryan had used it to create, and on the canvas was a tonal study of Lillie and Andre in a less than innocent pose.

The blood painting was perfect, down to the finest detail, but that really wasn't what was on Cash's mind as he hurried to the side of the prone vampire. He didn't even hesitate as he gripped and pulled out the wooden shaft, releasing Andre from paralysis. He expected a show of anger, even though the Toreador would be weak from lack of blood, but that wasn't what happened.

"My god, he's magnificent," were the first words out of the Andre's mouth.

The helpless creature had been lying there all day, and his first sentence was in praise of the Kindred who had done this to him. Cash wondered if Toreadors were actually as mad as Malcavians, they just didn't show it as much.

"It was incredible," Andre insisted with all the strength he had left, "he was so powerful. And this," he turned to the canvas and actually smiled, "has so much creativity. It's breathtaking."

At that Cash decided he would never understand his Toreador cousins, and chose to just get on with things. He had a feeling Andre was lucky to be alive, but he wasn't going to comment.

"The Prince would like to see you," he said evenly, "we have a car downstairs."

The older vampire didn't seem to really hear him, he appeared entranced by the painting, but he had no strength to resist when he was politely herded towards the door.

"Stay here and make sure no-one disturbs anything," Cash told one of his companions, "I think Mr Luna will want to see this."

Then he took his charge out of the apartment, and left his associate with the somewhat disturbing painting.

====

There had been no measure of time as far as Richie was concerned as he sat by the window and drew on the pad that he had found. He had no understanding of his need to create, and before Andre, would have claimed no ability either. The pencil seemed to have a mind of its own, and he was actually quite content as he produced a miniature portrait of the Primogen of his clan. She was beautiful and he found he liked beautiful things.

As he drew he was completely focused on what he was creating. It was the only thing that seemed to matter as he strived to capture the beauty of his Primogen. Why he was doing it didn't matter, only that he was and he worked carefully on every detail. He had seen her only three times, each briefly, but her features were engrained into his memory as if his blood recognised her and wanted him to remember. The way her hair fell beside her face and the soft curve of her lips; it all had to be perfect.

It was only as he finished his creation that he found his outlook had changed once again.

He smiled to himself, once more in the grip of Kindred passions and gazed around with vampire senses. No heart beat sounded in his chest, and the night filled his mind.

It was not the angry want of power which drove him now, but it seemed to be a fusion of childlike wonder and a taste for freedom. He really had little idea what he was doing, but without hesitating, he put the picture aside. Standing he walked to the French doors that led out onto a small patio and opened them. The smell of the city drifted to his nose and the little sounds called to him. It never occurred to him that staying put might be a good idea. Walking onto the patio he flexed his powers of shape-changing for the first time and took to the wing. Nobody noticed the eagle which soared over the garden as if it had been born to the sky.

End of Part 5

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Chapter 6 Ideas

They had been talking for at least an hour, proposing theories and just trying to understand what had happened, but Julian realised they were going around in circles.

"We need more answers," he decided as silence once again descended, "Daedelus, if you would be so kind as to fetch our young friend; I believe it is time we asked some more detailed questions."

Daedelus nodded and stood up, just as Cash came into the room followed by a subdued looking Andre. Julian had only met Lillie's guest once when he had arrived in the city and he was not feeling overly hospitable now.

"Sorry for the delay," Cash said almost straight away, "we had to stop and get Andre a meal; he was rather low on blood."

"Richie drained him?" Lillie asked, sounding hopeful; that was one way to gain power.

"No," Cash returned and took his habitual place at the table, "Ryan drained his blood and used it to paint with."

Julian shook his head; Toreador could be so unpredictable.

"You have caused us a great deal of trouble," he said, looking at Andre, "and by rights I should have you punished."

Lillie looked worried; by Kindred law what Andre had done was tantamount to treason and Julian had the right to demand what he liked. Andre went to speak, most likely in his own defence, but Julian put up his hand; he didn't want to hear it.

"However," he said firmly, looking the other Kindred directly in the eyes, "if, and only if, we can settle this matter without further trouble I have no wish to quarrel with your sire or any of my Primogens, so I will let what Richie did to you serve as recompense. If you set one more foot out of line while in my city I will send you home in a crate with a stake through your heart, are we clear?"

Andre appeared a little shocked, but nodded and accepted the judgement. What Julian did not need was more trouble and Andre was too well known to deal with like one of his own, but he would carry out his threat if it became necessary. He was all too aware that Toreadors were at the mercy of their artistic whims.

As he sat down again Daedelus returned from the study, alone.

"Our guest is gone," Daedelus said in his usually unexcited tones.

"But the grounds are on alert," Cash pointed out.

That meant if a guard did not check in the others would know about it so Julian was as surprised as his head of security.

"I believe," Daedelus said, "he may have flown."

The Nosferatu placed a single feather on the table.

Julian rubbed the bridge of his nose; he was getting a headache, quite an achievement for a Kindred.

"He may become human again soon," he said with a cool anger, "but for now he is my problem. Get Duncan MacLeod over here, we need to know what we are up against."

Then he stood and stalked into his study, leaving the others to do his bidding.

====

The roof top was like hundreds of others all over the city, but something about it called to Richie and he swooped down as he saw a shape which caught his interest. Almost as soon as he touched down, Richie morphed back into his own shape, and stood staring at the back of the person who had attracted his attention. She was pale against the night sky, dressed in a long white dress with only a battered leather jacket against the chill of the air. Her hair fell in long blond, slightly messy strands around her shoulders and for a long moment Richie just stood there looking at her.

She was staring down at the road below the apartment building as if fascinated by the distance, and her sorrow was almost tangible to him. He was as silent as the moon, and she had no idea he was there, not until he spoke.

"Are you going to jump?" he asked in a voice that could have charmed the birds from the trees.

Her back tensed slightly, but she did not look round at him.

"What's it to you if I am?" she asked in a cold, deriding tone.

"Nothing really," Richie replied, honestly feeling nothing but curiosity, "I was just wondering. Do you live here, or did you just pick this building because it's high?"

She laughed at that, as if she hadn't expected him to be quite so remote about the whole thing.

"I live here," she replied, eyes still intent on the drop below her, "not that anyone cares. I'm going to fall past all those closed windows, let them see me jump to my death. Then they'll know my name, then they'll realise I exist. The mouse from number 46, finally done something with her life to warrant notice."

Richie moved, silent and swift until he was standing almost next to her, at which point she noticed his presence.

"Don't touch me," she warned, wobbling precariously on the edge; "you can't stop me."

"I wouldn't want to," Richie said, peering over the edge himself and wondering how far he would fall before he could change into the bird again if he stepped off the edge. "If you wish to die, that's your business."

He smiled a little when he saw her expression at that; she almost appeared put out.

"Of course," he said, letting a little of the vampire inside out, "there are alternatives."

The woman gasped quietly in shock and suddenly seemed to realise that they were on the roof and she had no idea how he came to be there.

"What are you?" she asked in little more than a whisper.

"Does it matter?" Richie replied, feeling hunger stir in his belly.

"What do you want?" was her next question.

"You blood," he said and gave her a fangy smile.

At that she almost wobbled off the ledge and he reached out to steady her.

"I want," he said, pulling her towards him, "to taste you. I want you to feel as your life slips away, drop by drop, and then, when you can see death as clearly as you see life; when you understand what it really is, I want to give you a choice. I find it's always better to make an informed decision."

Then he let her go again.

"Or you can just jump," he added and looked down.

====

The phone call had not really surprised Duncan, he had been waiting for them to get round to him. In the days he had spent nosing around he had come to the conclusion that Richie was not dead, and that the peculiar community around Lillie that was not quite the underworld, had something to do with his disappearance. Julian Luna was a man with a past which did not quite add up, and the Highlander recognised the signs. The fact that he was now invited to the man's mansion was not much of a shock.

He had been admitted by a young looking man with a slightly wild look about him, and he was shown into a room with a large table and several cold faced people. Lillie and Julian he recognised, most of the others he had seen around, but had no names for the faces. Only a stunning individual with long brown hair and classically good looking features gave him someone to look at he had not seen before.

"Good evening, Mr MacLeod," Luna greeted calmly, "please, have a seat."

There were chairs positioned at the end of the table which obviously did not usually belong there, and from the seating he quickly realised that he and the

new face were the only two who did not 'belong' in this room. There were five of the others and it did not take much to work out that they were used to their places.

"Thank you," he replied as he sat down, "your phone call said this has something to do with Richie."

There was no point in wasting time.

"That it does," Luna replied, seemingly quite happy with his wish for speed, "but first I think there are a few things you should know."

There was a sudden tension in the air, even greater than when he had first walked in and Duncan had the feeling he was about to be let in on a very well kept secret. It didn't take a lot to guess it was probably something to do with Lillie's longevity, which, he suspected, was shared by the rest of those in the room.

"You know that Lillie is not quite what she seems," Luna began after a moment, "anymore than you are. What you do not know is what she is, and therefore what we are."

A slight nod gave the indication that he was following this perfectly.

"We are known as Kindred, Mr MacLeod," Luna informed him slowly, "or more coarsely, vampires. We live among humans, just as you do, hiding what we are, and continuing with our lives. We need blood to survive, but we do not kill to get it, that would endanger the Masquerade. We create more of our own kind by embracing carefully chosen mortals, which is what brings me to the problem at hand."

Duncan's gaze did not falter as he looked directly into the self confessed vampire's eyes. He had seen enough in the city to believe that something like Luna's Masquerade was possible and it did rather explain the pale complexions and agelessness.

"We became aware of a battle that took place in an alley close to the Haven, and we found what we assumed was a dead body. Because of the unusual circumstances of the death we chose not to inform the police," Luna continued, "and shortly after discovered that the young man we had found did not stay dead. We questioned him, made him forget he had ever seen us and let him go. It was then that he disappeared."

The glare that Luna was sending in Andre's direction made it very clear to Duncan who was to blame. It didn't take much to read between the lines, and he reached a conclusion before he had to be told.

"Are you trying to say that *he* embraced, Richie?" he asked, definitely not happy about that.

If these people had hurt Richie heads were going to roll.

"It's all right, Duncan," Lillie put in rapidly, "we're almost sure he's returning to normal. We are completely incompatible with your physiology, and your friend seems to be fighting off the change."

That made him feel a little better, but he was still not best pleased.

"Why did you ask me to come here then?" he enquired pointedly. "You must have a very good reason."

If Richie was returning to normal he did not understand why they were telling him their secrets; there had to be more.

"We do," Luna returned with his seemingly ever calm visage, "we want to find out exactly what happened to Richard when he was embraced, and make sure it never happens again. You see, your companion did not become what could be considered a ... normal Kindred." The man paused as if to try and decide how to phrase what he was about to admit. "In the last twenty four hours he has, ... disabled his sire, taken on six males of another clan, at the same time, broken into my home, past my security, *and* held his own against the strongest of us all."

By the time, Luna had finished there was a low chuckle coming from the Duncan's mouth.

"Richie's kicking ass," he said, finding the whole thing quite amusing, "and you don't know what to do about it. I'm sure there's a motto in there somewhere."

There was a slightly unhappy look on Luna's face as he saw Duncan's reaction, but he did not choose to voice his feelings. Instead the Kindred sat forward and waited for the sombre mood to have its effect on Duncan.

"That is not the centre of the problem," Luna commented slowly as the Duncan became serious again. "What I wish to know, is how a twenty two year old man can transform into the equivalent of a Kindred many centuries his senior. What is it about your kind that gives you that sort of power?"

That stopped Duncan in mid thought, as he could not help but come to one conclusion. To give them the answer he would have to reveal part of his own secret, but he was sure they had already seen the idea in his face. He was a strong willed man, but he had taken in the underlying atmosphere and realised that he could probably not stand up to six vampires.

"We are not just what we were when we died for the first time," he finally said, choosing his words carefully, "and it isn't just age which makes us powerful. If you saw a fight and questioned Richie, you must have found out that we battle

our own kind, and attempt to kill each other. What you don't seem to realise is what happens when one of us wins."

He paused to make sure he had everyone's attention: he didn't want to have to repeat himself.

"The victor gains the essence of his dead opponent," Duncan wasn't quite sure how these people would react, but at one level he didn't really care. "Richie has fought and killed several old Immortals, and taken their Quickenings. The only thing I can think of to explain what you've been telling me is that the combined power of those who've challenged him, translated directly into whatever you perceive as ability in your race."

"Fascinating," said a very odd looking Kindred whose name Duncan didn't know. "Could these ... Quickenings, explain the rapid personality changes that Mr Ryan appeared to go through?" the kindred enquired politely.

Those words caused Duncan to go cold all over, although he did his best to hide his reaction. His mind flicked unbidden to his own battered soul when the dark Quickening had taken him. Without letting himself dwell in the memory he prayed that his protégé was not in as much turmoil as he himself had been.

"Yes, they could," he said, once again afraid for Richie. "It's not unknown for an Immortal to suffer from multiple personalities, although there was no sign of any such thing in Richie *before* you got your hands on him."

It was a direct accusation that he could not help, but he pushed it aside quickly. All he could hope now was that with these people's assistance he would be able to bring Richie back.

"We'd better find him, soon," was all he said.

====

The apartment was small and full of nondescript furniture and Richie could tell why Jessica felt like she wanted to end her life. There was no joy in the place at all. That was all that had passed between them since the roof, a swap of names, there had been nothing else to say. Richie suspected that Jessica still thought she was going to die, just in a different way.

He threw his coat on the couch as the white panel door clicked shut and blocked out the outside world. It fell open as it landed and the hilt of the sword it contained became obvious. With a fascinated little stare Jessica just looked at it for a while. There was just a little fear at the sight of such a weapon and Richie decided that was better than the nothing he had been picking up from her so far.

"A sword?" Jessica said quietly, still not turning.

"Yes," he whispered in her ear, "does it matter?"

"No," Jessica replied after a moment, and finally turned to face him.

Her eyes were so empty and her gaze so lost that Richie found himself stepping forward before he thought about what he was doing. He cupped the side of her face with his hand and searched her features for some glimmer of hope.

"Are you going to rape me before you kill me?" she asked, as if she no longer believed what he had told her on the roof top and had just decided the worst.

"No," he said, running his fingers through her long hair, "I only want to feed one hunger."

Her head fell at that.

"Not pretty enough," she said, as if she was disappointed.

At that he lifted his chin and made her look at him.

"You don't want me," he said, looking her directly in the eyes, "no more no less. I am hungry and your blood will be sweet. You think you wish to die and if you choose it, I will let you, but you cannot truly know until you see death as it really is. If you have changed your mind I will leave, but I will not be a fiend just because you want me to be."

Jessica seemed quite shocked by his tone and blinked at him, all big eyes and wild hair. She was not the most attractive girl he had ever met, but most of that was her demeanour and he sensed what was inside; becoming Kindred would not trap her, it would release her, if only she could see it.

"You're a vampire," she said simply.

"That's not what those who made me call themselves," Richie said, releasing her and giving a small smile, "but yes, that is what I am."

She looked at him then, long and hard and seemed to be thinking about it, which he took as a positive sign. When he had landed on the roof he had been curious, but there were feelings stirring under the remote detachment that had come over him that were making it harder to stay aloof.

"Okay," Jessica said eventually, "then kill me."

Richie did not give her a chance to change her mind and he moved forward fast, taking her in his arms and making her cry out just a little. It wasn't that he wanted to frighten her, it was just that he wanted to see some sort of proper reaction out of her. She had turned off her emotions and he wanted her to turn them back on again.

"You can be free without dying," he told her, whispering in her ear as she breathed hard. "Maybe you will see that soon."

He pulled her hair aside, revealing what was a long, slender neck and then before she could struggle he bared his fangs and bit her. The only sounds she made were a tiny cry and then a deep gasp as her blood hit his tongue. As he drank he remembered the life leaving him, the wonderful feeling of surrender as his blood was taken from his body and wondered if it was the same for Jessica. She did not moan and she did not cry out, she just panted and made little gasping sounds as he sank into the pleasure of feeding, taking her with him.

It was strangely unisexual; he remembered it feeling somewhat sexual to him, but, although there was need and desire in this, it was not for sex. It was still primal, but not in that way and the blood consumed him. He almost drank too much, but at the last moment he forced himself to pull away. Jessica was limp in his arms, but she was still alive. Taking her chin in one hand he turned her face up so that they were looking at each other.

"Now you see," he said, voice heavy with Kindred power and he shook her when her eyes fell closed. "There is life, there is death," he said as she blearily gazed up at him; "there is power, there is darkness. You must choose."

For long moments Jessica just blinked up at him and he could feel her fading until finally her lips moved, but he did not hear what she said.

"Tell me," he demanded, refusing to let her slip away.

"Life," was the tiniest whisper, but this time it was clear and he did not hesitate.

Running one sharp nail over his neck, he dug it in deep and then he lifted Jessica to the wound. It was not dignified and it was messy, but he knew the moment she latched on and began to drink. For once he felt no conflict with the Kindred power inside of him, no battle of wills or physiology; it just felt right as he passed on what had been given to him. For a moment everything was right and then Jessica passed out and the moment was over.

For a little while Richie just stood there, holding the limp woman in his arms as the power of blood ran through him. He felt a little better, maybe a little saner and he carefully picked Jessica up in his arms. Now he had one thing he needed, but as that hunger passed, there were other ones building.

====

They'd told him that they were scouring the city for Richie, but Frank was pretty sure they wouldn't find him. He'd spoken to the peculiar half breed long enough to know that if he did not want to be found, no-one would stand a chance. Of course it wasn't his problem anymore and he walked into his apartment, threw his keys on the sideboard and walked towards his bedroom. It had been a long

night and all he wanted was a shower to get the kinks out of his back and then to fall into bed to sleep the day away.

It was still mostly dark, with the sky just beginning to show signs that dawn was on the way, but it was light enough that he didn't bother flicking the switch on the wall as he entered his room. The thought of a nice hot shower was the only thing in his mind and he began to strip off his clothes, throwing first his jacket then everything else onto the bed one by one. He was down to his pants when he had the sudden impression that he wasn't alone.

Turning, he saw a dark shape in the corner and he immediately went for his gun where he had put it on the bed, only it wasn't there. There was a chuckle and then the sidelight flicked on and Frank realised Richie was standing in his bedroom.

"Looking for this?" Richie asked, holding his gun on one finger. "You could shoot me if you like, but I think you might just piss me off."

Frank felt a little bit better when Richie handed him the weapon.

"How long have you been here?" he asked, not pleased to have a visitor.

"About an hour," Richie replied, totally unrepentant. "In another life I used to be a burglar; you really should change your locks, they're terrible."

Richie's eyes were looking him up and down in a rather obvious way and Frank didn't like it.

"Do you make it a habit of watching people undress?" he demanded, and reached for his shirt again.

"No," Richie replied with another smile, "but I liked what I saw; don't stop on my account."

Frank just stood there and looked at his uninvited guest.

"Have you flipped again?" he finally asked, because he had been damn sure Richie was straight given their conversation of a few days previously.

They had discussed the local talent in quite a lot of details and he had seen Richie's reaction to Andre; things just didn't add up.

"Nope," Richie said, sounding almost normal, "in fact I'm feeling saner than I've felt in days. Not quite there yet, but almost. Still dealing with the whole Kindred needs thing though and right about now I'm in the mood for sex and I know you're not exclusively into the female of the species because I saw you checking out the barman at the Haven last night."

Frank didn't actively pursue men often because, given his job, it was just simpler not to, but he wasn't about to deny it.

"I might not be completely heterosexual," he said without any dancing around the subject, "but I was almost positive you were."

Richie gave him a grin at that.

"I was," Richie replied and wandered a little closer, being even less subtle about checking Frank out, "but I don't seem to be anymore. I was with a woman earlier tonight, Frank, held her helpless in my arms, yet here I am."

"You left a woman to come here?" Frank really didn't get that at all.

"She didn't interest me like that," Richie said with a small shrug, "you on the other hand do. Believe me, I was surprised, but this week seems to be all about new experiences. So what do you say, Frank?"

It wasn't as if Richie was being anything but upfront and Frank felt the first stirrings of interest at the proposition, but he wasn't stupid.

"What's to stop you waking up later and deciding I've led you astray? I'll break if you have a snit fit," he pointed out.

Given he had seen Richie's mood change at the drop of a hat he was not overly confident that there wouldn't be another huge mood swing that was bad for his health.

"Oh you'd be surprised how difficult it would be to break you, Frank," Richie said, smiling even more, "but, I don't think I'll be having any more major changes of attitude. I'm much more me again, just with added extras. I also think I know what will end this for good, but I don't think it's a good idea to go into a fight as distracted as I am. I can smell that you're attracted to me, Frank, just give in to it."

That was the problem with Kindred; they were often one step ahead and Frank was attracted to Richie. It had been a while since he'd had the time for sex and Frank couldn't say that his libido wasn't interested, but there was still the question of being eaten.

"I promise I won't bite," Richie said, as if reading his mind, and took another step towards him.

It was predator and prey and Frank knew he was the prey, but he couldn't help the fact that he liked it. When Richie reached out, took hold of the top of his pants and tugged, Frank went and then they were all but nose to nose.

"Come on, Frank," Richie said in little more than a whisper, "you know you want to."

Frank's resistance crumbled and Richie had to have seen it, because the next thing Frank knew he was being pushed against the wall and Richie was nibbling over his ear and down his neck. He was greeted by a chuckle when he tensed as Richie passed his jugular and he might have been annoyed except that Richie just went on kissing his neck and it felt really good. Alexandra had been fond of his neck; he wondered if it was a Kindred thing or if it just happened to be a very kissable part of his body.

Frank still thought he had to be slightly insane to be letting this happen, but the way Richie rubbed against him had his thoughts scattering to the four winds. He knew Toreadors were supposed to be good lovers; Lillie teased him about it at every opportunity, but he'd forgotten how intoxicating Kindred could be. His affair with Alexandra seemed like so long ago, but he remembered the passion and he could feel it between him and Richie as well. Maybe he was addicted, maybe when you had had Kindred you just didn't want to go back, but he gave up arguing with his psyche and decided to see just how well Richie kissed.

He knew that Richie was stronger than he was, but that didn't mean he was going to allow the Kindred hybrid all his own way and he pushed off the wall, slamming Richie into wardrobe and asserting his will. That made Richie grin and Frank definitely saw a flash of gold in the Immortal's eyes, but Richie did not shove back when Frank moved in for the kiss he wanted. Frank was pretty sure that if passion had been directly proportional to heat they would both have been smoking, as it was Richie sucked on his tongue and then grazed teeth over his lips.

"Have you ... ever done ... this before?" Frank asked between searing kisses and he pulled Richie's shirt from his jeans, seeking skin.

"Never," Richie replied, but didn't sound overly bothered and was doing his best to help with the whole clothes removal; "you're just going to have to show me how."

For just a moment Frank pulled back and Richie held still under his scrutiny.

"I won't break," Richie said with a grin, "promise."

That was the point at which Frank decided that if Richie was offering, he was taking and to hell with thinking.

"Yeah well I do," he replied grinning as well, "so I get to top."

"Whatever you want, Frank," Richie said, eyes hot with lust, "just get on with it."

That was easier than he had expected, but he wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth and he went back to kissing and stripping in equal measure.

"Screw it," Richie said as Frank had a little trouble with the belt on his jeans and then Frank was treated to the delight of watching Richie strip off the rest of his clothes in double time.

It was clear that Richie was as desperate as he claimed to be and the ample erection that Frank found his eyes drawn to was a very clear pointer.

"Frank, clothes," Richie said in a less than patient tone.

That was when he realised he'd just been standing there and looking and he was still in his pants.

"Patience," he said with a grin and couldn't help noticing the way Richie was all but bouncing on the spot.

"Sex, now," was the only reply and there was a hint of golden eyes again.

Frank stepped back when Richie went to help him with pants; he wanted to keep them in one piece and he had a feeling Richie was out of patience.

"Okay," he said as Richie gave a little growl, "I get the message. Get on the bed on your front, I'll be back in a moment."

It looked like Richie might object, but Frank just glared and Richie did as he was told. Frank headed into the bathroom quickly and retrieved the supplies he kept in the cupboard under the sink just in case before returning to the bedroom. Richie was half lying, half sitting pushed up on his arms and Frank liked what he saw. It was obvious that Richie led a very active life and Frank drank in the view of toned muscles.

"Are you going to stand there all day?" Richie asked and Frank grinned and moved in.

He threw the supplies on the bed and then stripped out of the last of his clothes before climbing on beside Richie. It was the Immortal's turn to stare hungrily and Frank rather enjoyed the scrutiny. There was something very honest in the wanton abandon in his soon to be lover and Frank didn't need to worry that Richie wasn't really into this. He had the feeling that he would know right away if Richie didn't like what he was doing and it gave him an excited, fluttery feeling in his stomach.

"Just hang on for the ride," he said and then set about making sure Richie was not only ready for him, but just about begging for it.

The way Richie responded as he touched him would have told Frank that Richie was not used to this even if he hadn't known, but Richie seemed to be as good as his word and was letting Frank show him how things were done. There was a twitch of muscles when he first touched the other man, but that was it. He began

by massaging slowly at the base of Richie's spine and gradually making his way onto the firm, round buttocks.

"Okay," Richie said, head falling forward, "that's good."

Frank smiled to himself; he was going to enjoy this. He had never actually been someone's first time; when he was younger his partners had been older and more experienced than him and the couple he had had later on had definitely not been new at it. The idea rather appealed to him and he carefully drizzled his fingers with lube.

Richie hummed low in his throat as Frank carefully spread him and slowly swiped his slicked fingers down the crack of Richie's ass. Since Richie seemed to want him to get to it, that's exactly what he did and pushed firmly, sliding one finger into his new lover. There were many other things they could have done first, but he didn't think Richie was going to let him get away with less.

"Still good?" he asked, just to make sure; he did not want a pissed of Kindred/Immortal hybrid on his hands.

What came back was a rather non-committal reply, so Frank moved his finger experimentally. As Richie began to relax, the hum was back and he took that as a good sign. Since this was Richie's first time he gave the other man a little while to get used to the whole idea, then he decided to add a little spice. There was a good deal of swearing when Frank used his fingers to find Richie's prostate and Frank grinned in triumph.

"Like that?" he asked in a bland tone.

"Bastard," was the only reply and he laughed.

From there it was not much effort to loosen Richie up. The Immortal was a very fast learner and soon had Frank catering to his every whim, at least when it came to finger fucking him.

"Lift up," Frank finally said when he decided that Richie was as ready as he was ever going to be.

Then as Richie climbed eagerly to his knees, Frank reached for where he had put the condoms. Richie immediately batted his hand away from them.

"Immortal, remember," Richie said, heat in his eyes, "no diseases."

That was something Frank really hadn't considered and he didn't really know how to process that for a moment.

"I want you just as you are," Richie told him and there weren't really a lot of ways to argue with that.

Frank had never slept with a man without protection; he wasn't stupid, but it began to dawn on him that Richie had a point. He was surprised by quite how much the idea made his cock throb and he smiled.

"Before you die of old age, Frank," Richie added in a very demanding tone.

"Just remember who's in charge," he replied, but reached to slick himself with lube anyway.

Richie gave him a rebellious look for that, but didn't say anything as Frank knelt up and moved into position. It seemed his lover was not going to argue as long as he got what he wanted. Richie was tight as Frank pushed in as slowly as he could manage and he felt it the moment Richie's muscles decided to object so he stilled.

"Relax," he said, running his hands over Richie's back.

All he received in reply was a mumbled acknowledgement and he waited. Richie was Kindred and Immortal; he'd heal fast, but Frank did not want to hurt his new lover. Only when Richie pushed back against him a little did he take that as permission to move again. He began rocking, hoping that the gentle movements would encourage Richie's tight muscles to give and each movement sent wonderful shocks through his body.

"I said I won't break," Richie all but growled at him after a little while of that.

"Yes, but..." was as far as Frank got before Richie mercilessly shoved back onto him.

They both swore very loudly and Richie's arms half gave out as Frank saw stars. He was in, he was all the way in and Richie was tight and all his nerves were overloading and for a few moments he couldn't think. That had to have hurt and hurt quite a lot, but Richie was gasping and it didn't sound like the Immortal was in pain, or at least not a bad kind.

"You okay?" he asked, doing his best to make himself think.

"Fine," was the breathless response; "think Kindred may have a thing for pain too."

Frank didn't question that, he just went with it. The tight heat was just too much for his self control and he had to move, dragging a long low groan out of Richie that became a wanton moan. That was the end of any thought he had left and he pushed back in, needing the friction. It had been a long while since he had done this; his last male lover had been a good while back and none of his female companions had been into such things. Now he remembered why he liked this and he let his own desires take him where they wanted to go.

He found out very quickly that Richie really did like it hard and fast and that even attempting to be gentle was pointless because Richie would then force the issue. It was so very good and Frank took everything that was on offer, the arousal building and building in him as he moved closer and closer to the edge. Richie responded to every thrust, panting and letting Frank know exactly what he wanted in words and sounds and Frank was just glad his place had thick walls.

"Want to see you," Richie said as he pushed in deeply yet again.

It was a somewhat surprising request, but one that Frank was happy to oblige and he pulled out quickly. Richie rolled onto his back and lifted his legs and Frank moved back in as fast as he could without rushing. He wanted this to be good for both of them and to be able to see that almost innocent looking, youthful face made him want it all the more. In all honestly they barely knew each other, but there was something there, something more than just sex and Frank chased it. It would probably evaporate soon enough, he wasn't a fool, but he liked the feeling anyway.

He slid back home easily and the move was worth every moment as he saw the pleasure on Richie's face. There was something incredibly erotic about that expression on those features and Frank enjoyed it as he made it happen again. His mind and body were in harmony and it wasn't long before he was so close he was trembling. Reaching out he took Richie's neglected cock in his hand and pumped it, rubbing his thumb over the underside of the head finding it slick with pre-come. Richie all but purred at that and the sounds seemed to send vibrations all through the Immortal's body that transferred right into Frank's cock.

Part of him wanted to slow down and hold off to see how long he could keep Richie on the edge, but another part of him wanted the payoff. He could feel the power in the man on his bed and he wanted to see it released and so he chased it down. The fire in his own veins was building and he pushed Richie on, knowing that it wouldn't take much more to get him off either. As Richie's breathing began to come in short, sharp gasps he knew his lover was close. It was intoxicating and he thought he could sense Kindred power very close to the surface. Alexandra had been careful and experienced and he had never felt this with her; there was a wildness that he could sense just under Richie's skin. This was what Kindred hid behind their human facades and Frank realised this was probably the closest he was every going to get to pure Kindred.

As Richie finally came Frank felt the most incredible rush of energy and it made his body tingle from head to foot. He saw the flash of fangs and the glow of gold before he was coming as well and he didn't have any ability to think anymore as white hot heat flooded his system. Most Kindred were practiced as playing at being human, but Richie wasn't and Frank felt every bit of the supernatural creature in his lover. It just made the shots of wonderful sensation in his body all the harder and it was only as he was coming down that Frank realised he liked the danger.

As he carefully pulled out and collapsed on the bed next to Richie he realised he actually was insane and quite probably addicted to Kindred. He was so screwed and, when he looked over to see Richie's blessed out, but still hungry smile, he thought that might be literally as well as figuratively.

End of Part 6

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Chapter 7 Conclusions

The room was in total darkness as Jessica woke, and even before she opened her eyes, she could feel she was different. She was also alone; Richie was gone and she realised she was unlikely to see him again. On the table next to the bed there was a hand written note with her name on the front. Turning on the light as she picked it up, she began to read.

Jessica,

Welcome to the world of the Kindred. Sorry I cannot help you through this, but I was made only a few days ago and the Kindred part of me is dying. I was not made to be a vampire. My sire is a Kindred called Andre and I think I am beginning to understand why he did what he did. I think he was drawn to my pain as I was to yours. There has been a hole in my soul for a while now, but I think it is finally beginning to heal. This experience has taught me a great deal about myself if nothing else.

I give you to him and him to you; I think you will enjoy each other. You will find him at the Haven, I have written the address at the bottom. When it is dark go to him; he will know that I sent you and he will help you to become a true Toreador.

Goodbye,
Richie

Curling up in the covers, away from the world she thought of the night before. Her life up until then had been empty, and, without knowing how, she realised that there was a family waiting out there for her. Richie had given her that. It was a family of blood, and she went back to sleep with an image of a man she had never met in her thoughts.

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It was day, he should have been sleeping, but Andre could not put aside the thoughts of what he had done. Ever since Richie had attacked him and left, the bond of sire to childe had been somehow broken. He had no sense of the Kindred he had made, as if the raw power cancelled out all hold he had over his own creation. It saddened him, and with the other ideas which plagued him he could not sleep.

He was lying on the bed in one of Julian's spare rooms, but he could only close his eyes for a minute. It was as he focused on the ceiling for the hundredth time

that he felt his soul touched. It was like the bond being made all over again, and for a moment he thought that his child may have come back to him. As the initial feeling wore off, however, he knew that the spirit which touched his was not Richie's. His mind filled with the idea of a young woman, and suddenly he understood.

Tears ran down his cheeks as he realised that what everyone had been saying was true: he would never regain his creation; his Adonis was beyond his reach forever. Yet it was not only sorrow that caused the red streaks on his face, because he also realised that his gift had not been rejected completely. Andre knew that the new Kindred in his thoughts was a gift from Richie, the power had been passed on and this woman would come to him.

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Richie had stayed with Frank for a couple of sex filled, very enjoyable hours after which Frank had fallen into a deep and restful sleep. Richie's last request was that Frank pass on a message to MacLeod about seeing him later and he had passed on the message as requested as soon as he had woken again. He had also called Luna and he had been politely asked to turn up at the Haven when evening came around again. He hadn't mentioned anything about what he and Richie had been doing before he was asked to deliver the message and he was still wondering about that. It wasn't the fact he had slept with a man that was bothering him; he didn't advertise it, but it wasn't like it was the first time, it was that he'd slept with Richie. It could have been very dangerous, even if Richie had seemed much saner than the previous night, but he'd done it anyway. He was beginning to think that hanging around Kindred was bad for his sense of preservation.

What's more, all Frank's instincts told him that, after the previous night, the Haven would be a very bad place for him to be at the moment, but he was still going. Since Frank hadn't seen hide nor hair of Richie since their earlier encounter, and he really wanted to know what was going on, despite his reservations, he found himself walking towards the familiar night spot.

Back to normal Richie might want to forget the morning had ever happened and Frank could live with that, but he found he needed some resolution. It was bothering him more than he cared to admit, for reasons he couldn't fathom and he just needed to understand what he had gotten himself into.

He was walking along the sidewalk towards the entrance of the club when a car pulled up beside him. He should have been on edge given where he was, but he was so preoccupied that its presence barely registered on his mind. He really did not need more complications in his life, but his life didn't seem to realise this. When he felt himself grabbed from behind and bundled into the vehicle, it was more than a shock and he barely had time to think. Somebody threw a coat over his head and a grip like iron pinned him to the floor. He didn't need much more to realise that he'd been snatched by Kindred. The only questions remaining were: by whom, and for what purpose. After a few moments he gave up struggling: the

hands that held him would not give, and he was just hurting himself. He was just going to have to hope that someone noticed he was missing.

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From across the other side of the study, Lillie watched Duncan as he paced back and forwards. They were waiting for Julian to appear, and then they would be going to the Haven to liaise with other members of the clans. The Highlander hadn't spoken to her much since the previous evening, and he seemed very edgy as he wore a groove in the carpet.

"I'm sorry this happened," she said, seemingly much to her companion's surprise. "Andre is my guest, this is my fault."

The look she received from Duncan said he wasn't quite sure whether to let her condemn herself or not. Eventually, however, he shook his head as if he did not agree.

"You couldn't control his actions anymore than I could have controlled Richie's," Duncan said. "I know I'm standing here blaming you, but that's just me, I'm blaming everyone including myself. The moment I realised that you were still the same I should have turned around and walked out, taking Richie with me. I'm always reminding Richie that his libido will get him into trouble, and what did I do, but go and follow my hormones like a kid."

Lillie had to smile at that, she could have been a little more careful herself. There was an animal attraction between them, and both of them had followed it quite happily. There was a fair amount of affection there, on both parts as well, but as they looked at each other across the room, Lillie knew that they would not be sharing a bed again. An Immortal would make an interesting life partner for a Kindred, but she was well aware they would not be exploring the possibilities. There was too much water under the bridge now, too much trouble.

"You have managed to get under my skin, Duncan MacLeod," she said with a sweet grin, "and that is very hard to do. I think perhaps I will be glad when you choose to leave."

Duncan smiled back and appeared to share the sentiment.

"As soon as we find Richie I would be most happy to accommodate your wishes," he replied honestly.

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Richie was, at that moment, walking down an empty street towards an old apartment block. It had taken him all day, but with a little street smarts, a touch of Kindred dominance, and a lot of leg work he had tracked down his prey. He didn't think Damon would run, and he was proved right as he strolled up to the entrance and felt the approach of the man in question.

"I thought you'd left the city," the other Immortal said as he emerged from the doorway, "and then what do I see out of my window, but you approaching. Isn't it a little dangerous wandering around after you died in front of an officer of the law?"

"Oh, he was an understanding cop," Richie replied with the slightest of smiles, "we came to an understanding. The information about my demise is quite safe from the authorities."

The anticipation of the fight was running through Richie's veins and the adrenaline was beginning to pump. He didn't usually look forward to combat, but the Kindred part of him seemed to be relishing the idea.

"Well it's your life," Damon returned with a shrug, "and it's **our** battle. I know this quiet little spot just down the road. Shall we?"

Damon motioned in a vague direction and began walking, Richie followed. There was the possibility that Damon had things set up to trap him, but Richie was pretty sure he could spot anything in time. He was slowly getting back to normal, but he wanted his sanity back sooner rather than later and Damon's head was going to give him that.

"So what have you been doing with yourself for the last few days?" Damon enquired conversationally. "I noticed MacLeod poking his nose in all over the place, so I assumed you'd high tailed it out of here without leaving a forwarding address."

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," Richie replied and said no more.

His opponent's choice of battle ground was an old abandoned lot, with a high, wooden fence around it. The two Immortal's had no trouble forcing their way through the slats where many a school child had been before them. The ground was quite uneven, but Richie wasn't really bothered, he'd trained on worse.

"I can't promise I won't cheat," Damon said as he discarded his coat and pulled out his sword. "My survival instinct is very strong these days, and honour seems such a handicap."

"Oh don't worry," was Richie's even reply, "I'm not quite the same person you left dead in the alley either. I'll cope."

They saluted each other in a vaguely gentleman-like way, and then they started manoeuvring for position. The lot was relatively well lit by a couple of street lamps, but it was much easier for Richie than it was for Damon. Senses still heightened by Kindred blood found it easy to pick out every hole that could cause a fall, and every stone that could trip a person. Even as the first blow was struck, it was obvious to Richie he had a major advantage over his opponent.

What was left of the Toreador speed and agility gave Richie more than just an edge, and as the clash of steel rang out, the look on Damon's face said he realised that something had changed. Strike, followed parry, followed lunge, and Damon couldn't land a cut on Richie no matter how hard the older Immortal tried. Every opening turned out to be a feint and every feint was a way for Richie to do more damage. As Damon went for each one, Richie would dance out of the way and bring down a carefully aimed blow somewhere else.

Damon was not a bad fighter, but he was not as good as Richie. There was no luck to be had on the vacant lot and Damon was losing. The Immortal's white shirt was slit in several places and blood oozed from some relatively deep cuts in various positions. There was continual healing going on, and occasionally a bright spark of energy would become visible, sealing an abrasion in an ever present cycle. Richie never let it distract him from his purpose.

He made no flippant comments as he fought, no snide words for his adversary, as he continued to carve up Damon's defence with an almost effortless ease. This was a battle that had been fought before, and one he should have won, he had no intention of letting it go again. Move flowed into move as his mind worked and his instincts led him to small victory after small victory. It was only a matter of time before Damon would tire and loose what concentration he had left.

Richie had just landed a particularly vicious cut on Damon's leg when the opening appeared for final conquest. By lunging forward and going for his opponent's thigh, Richie had appeared to leave a weakness to his right side. By now his adversary was desperate, and although Damon had been fooled before, Richie left him no choice but to try for at least a damaging blow. As Damon moved in for a slice to his side, Richie spun and locked his own sword under that of his opponent. With a quick flick of his wrist and a little turn of the blade, the other Immortal's weapon went spiralling into the air.

Defeat was written in Damon's stance, the man knew he was going to die, and yet the emotion wasn't quite complete in his eyes. Once Richie would not have seen it, but he did now and he was ready when there was the smallest click and Damon flicked his hand back. There was no way human senses could have picked up the small projectile, but with the Kindred edge, Richie saw it fly through the air. His free hand lanced out, and with the dexterity of a swallow picking flies from the air, he plucked it from its flight path. He could smell poison on the tiny blade even from a distance; Damon had clearly prepared for a possible defeat.

"You've cheated me of your head twice, Damon," Richie said, throwing the little dart away almost contemptuously, "but not this time."

Damon's face was glazed with shock as Richie moved in for the killing blow and Richie made sure the last thing Damon saw was the golden eyed gaze of the man who was about to kill him. The body slumped to one side as the sharp blade of Richie's sword separated it from the head and the fight was done. Damon would not cheat his way to anymore victories; his game was over.

The first mists of the Quickening appeared immediately and twisted slowly into the air like snakes crawling out of a pit. Richie just stared at them with vampire eyes as they wound round him, not quite touching him, as if they were exploring first. There was a tentative touch that sent a shiver up his spine, almost as if the Quickening was making sure of what he was. Then it hit him all at once. One second there was deathly hush and the next the lightening took away all thought.

The pain was different at first, it lanced right to the very heart of him and found the changes the embrace had made. It destroyed them like a red hot poker removing infection in a wound, and fought to reclaim this body. Then, satisfied that this was a vessel suitable for its gifts, it entered him with full force. Bits of stone exploded around him, and one of the street lamps fused as stray energy lanced into them.

Damon was not a young Immortal, and he had taken many heads in his time meaning the Quickening lasted a long time. Richie felt every spark of power that wormed its way into his body and his nerves became numb with it.

As the final tendrils left him, he fell to his knees, totally exhausted, and feeling somewhat strange. He looked around him slowly, and realised that he was scarred. It was not anything that would show on the outside, but his Immortality had found something it could not totally wipe away. Although not as keen as before, his surroundings did not appear to be in quite as much darkness as they should have been, indicating that his eyesight had retained some of its sensitivity. With little effort he found that his hearing was in a similar state, as well as his sense of smell. It appeared that there were still hints of Kindred about him, although as he stood up he was feeling a great deal saner than he had been for the last few days.

The world had nearly returned to the perspective he expected of it, and there were absolutely no signs of any other personalities in his head. For all intents and purposes he was back to normal, and he gazed around, a small smile appearing on his face. The extra sensitive senses might fade with time, or they might not, for now he decided they were probably useful.

He could say that he was almost happy as he dragged Damon's body under some rubbish, removed all items that could be used to identify it immediately, including all weapons, and set off to find Mac. It had been an enlightening few days, but now all he wanted was someone normal to talk to. When he realised he had thought of Mac as normal he chuckled to himself; normality, it seemed, really was relative.

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Cash was sat at one of the side tables, watching everything with his habitual vigilance, but tonight he did have something to distract him from time to time. They'd broken it off, they'd yelled at each other, they'd decided that clan loyalties had driven them apart, but whenever anyone decided it was finally over they'd turn around and find Sasha and Cash together. The Brujah in question was sitting

opposite Cash, sipping on a cocktail and smiling at him in the way only a lover could. Both sets of their clan members were watching them with disgust, but tonight they weren't arguing and so Cash didn't much care.

He had one eye on Andre, just in case, but otherwise it was quiet. Not many people were speaking to the Toreador at the moment, and he seemed to have chosen to stay away from the trio of Lillie, Julian and MacLeod who sat in a booth. The Toreador looked as if he was waiting for something and Cash had to assume it was to do with Ryan, but he didn't know what.

It was Sasha who spotted the entrance of the willowy-looking girl first.

"Now, what do we have here?" she said lightly, and indicated to show him the source of her question.

There were lots of eyes on the newcomer, and Cash made a quick scan just in case of trouble, but most faces were interested rather than hostile. The girl seemed kind of nervous and it was obvious to any with senses that she was new. Whoever she was, her clothes seemed to fit her demeanour: a white dress, a velvet jacket and silky pumps, with her hair flowing about her shoulders, demure and yet alluring. It didn't take more than a second glance to figure out she was Toreador clan.

Cash began paying attention as a suspicion began to enter his head and when he saw the stranger spot Andre and smile, he was pretty sure he knew what was going on. Andre, it seemed, had seen her the moment she had come in, and was already on the move. No one had been granted leave to embrace another recently, Cash would have known, and that meant this was another unapproved Kindred, but he had a feeling he knew who had broken the rules. Everyone was walking on egg shells at the moment with what had been going on and there was only one person who would have done it. This newcomer was young, only just made and not fully through the change, but there was an air about her that warned all to stay away. This was heartily backed up when, as Andre slipped his hand under her elbow to guide her across the room, he glared at his compatriots in warning. Cash was almost sure this was Ryan's doing.

"Let's go somewhere a little more private," he heard Andre say in a welcoming warm tone, and the girl just nodded.

Cash watched as Andre looked to Lillie, who gave a little nod and indicated upstairs. From the looks of things this girl was as big a shock to Lillie as she was to everyone else, which only backed up Cash's theory. It was turning out to be an even more interesting evening than he had expected.

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The ground was hard, that much Frank found out when he was dumped out of the car directly onto it. The first thing he saw was a pair of feet, and he slowly worked his way up. The face that met his gaze did not bode well for his future.

One of the Brujah that Richie had so cheerfully beaten the crap out of the previous night was leering down at him, and as he slowly climbed to his feet he became aware of the others as well.

"Not so brave without your friend, little man?" the leader of the pack sneered loudly.

A cold feeling started in the pit of Frank's stomach.

"Hey, look," he said slowly, "last night had nothing to do with me, I was just with the guy. I have no quarrel with you."

"Wrong," another of the group said from behind, "you laughed at us."

That wasn't true, but then talking a Brujah out of something they had decided were the facts could be like chiselling granite with a bobby pin. There was only one route left open to Frank, even though he hated to admit it.

"Um, look I was supposed to meet Julian Luna at the Haven, he's not going to be pleased if I don't show," the implicit warning was there, but it fell on deaf ears.

"Oh, don't worry Franky," the leader started, "we're not going to kill you. We thought we just have a little fun and rough you up a bit. Now Mr Luna might be a little annoyed at us for a while, but he's not going to go against Cameron over some bruises."

Frank had a sinking feeling that the brute might actually be telling the truth. All safe ground just crumbled away from him.

"Can't we just talk about this?" he tried, a little desperately.

His reply was a fist in the face. Now that hurt like hell, but not as much as the one which followed and did something nasty to his kidneys. Now Frank could handle himself pretty well, and he even managed to land a couple of punches, but he was not Kindred and he really didn't stand a chance. Every time he turned to try and block a blow, one of the other Brujah would attack from behind, or beside him.

He really had no idea what he was doing by the time he flailed out desperately and managed to sink his nails into flesh. His legs weren't under his control, he'd taken so many hits that he didn't know which way was up, and the Brujah were passing him around like a toy, but somehow he fell in just the right way to actually do some damage. There was an angry yell from whoever he had managed to hurt and then strong hands grabbed him and literally threw him through the air. His head found the car, and there was a nasty snapping sound: Frank knew no more.

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What brought Richie to the docks he would never know, but on his way to the Haven he had been unable to resist the urge to see the water. The sight that met his eyes made him very angry, and he moved forward before his better judgement could get in the way. Frank was lying in a crumpled heap surrounded by Brujah and it was clear Frank was dead. He barely realised he had a sword in each hand as he ran.

"Which one of you killed him," he yelled at the top of his lungs.

To say that the sight of him scared the hell out of the Kindred gathered around the body was probably putting it lightly given the expressions on their faces. It seemed he was still vampire enough to fool them. These Brujah knew death when they saw it coming towards them and they ran.

The question had brought the look of guilt to one face and it was this Kindred whom Richie pursued. He dumped one sword by the side of Frank's lifeless body and then charged after his prey. These thugs had dared to touch someone he cared about and he was going to take revenge. A dagger he had lifted from Damon was very useful in bringing down the vampire before the creature could change shape or escape. A knife in the leg wouldn't hurt a Kindred too much, but it did cause the Brujah to fall.

With an incoherent cry, Richie ran at his victim, sword at the ready and swung it for the killing blow. It was the look of pure terror on the fallen Kindred's face that drew the slice up short. Millimetres from the Brujah's neck Richie stopped the blade, and he glared at his prey. He was not a murderer and although he wanted to kill, he knew something the Brujah did not.

"This time you live," he said slowly, quite surprised by the sentiment himself. "Frank's dead now, but he won't be for long. This time you escape with your life and this time only. We are something you do not understand, we are something you should fear. Remember that and you might not end up in a gutter with bits of your body missing."

The vampire seemed to be too scared to do anything but nod and Richie knew that his message had been understood.

"Run home, dog," he said in a dangerously quiet tone, "and next time you see Frank, remember to be afraid."

He turned on his heel and just walked back to the car, in a few seconds he heard the Brujah scrabbling to his feet and disappearing into the night.

The keys were in the ignition and the doors were open so it didn't take Richie long to load Frank and the sword onto the back seat. There was a chance the clan members would come back for their vehicle, and without the help of surprise, he could live without facing them. He drove away quickly, and rapidly decided to head for his hotel.

The journey was half over when Frank opened his eyes again for the first time. The low, heartfelt groan was what gave it away and made Richie glance over quickly

"Welcome back," he greeted and returned his eyes on the road, "I wouldn't move for a while if I were you, those Brujah really did a number on you."

He remembered the couple of hours they had spent together very clearly and it made him happier than it probably should have to see Frank back with the living.

"You're telling me," was Frank's slow reply, "my head feels like someone's hitting it with a baseball bat."

"Lie still and it'll pass," Richie said and sent his friend a smile, "dying's hard on the body."

There was silence from the back seat for a while, and then Frank's brain seemed to catch up with what he had said.

"Dying, what do you mean dying?" the tone was a little anxious.

Glancing back again Richie saw Frank giving himself a once over and even checking his teeth, which made him smile a bit more. Kindred would, of course, be the first thing Frank considered.

"The beating ended with you breaking your neck," Richie supplied helpfully. "At least that's what I suppose killed you, since your head was at a very funny angle. You're Immortal, Frank, like me and Mac, you just didn't know about it before. Now you've died for the first time, you'll heal fast, never get sick, and lots of junk like that."

He glanced round and grinned before turning back to the road.

"A shock, yeah I know," he said cheerfully, "at least I had a little longer to get used to the idea of Immortals."

Frank just mumbled something in reply that Richie was pretty sure didn't actually mean anything. He remembered the shock of waking up from dying the first time, so Richie did not blame the other man at all. He decided to get to the point.

"Let me guess," he said, hoping to give Frank something else to think about, "you're the type of guy who must have weeks of vacation time backed up at work, right?"

Frank was clearly too bemused to answer anything but the truth.

"Ah, yeah," Frank replied blankly; "the Captain's always trying to get me to take some time off."

"Great," Richie said and turned into the street which contained his hotel, "then I suggest you take it now. You have a lot to learn and not a lot of choice about it. You're lucky, only Kindred saw you die and they're not likely to blab, so you won't have to move on. Mac taught me how to be Immortal, and you're going to have to learn as well. There's this nice dojo up north, where we can both give you the crash course if you like."

He pulled over and looked at the startled cop.

"There's a lot you don't know, but to stay alive you'll need help," he continued sincerely, and he really did want Frank to stay alive. "Mac and I can give you that help until we can sort something out down here. Take the sword you're lying next to and go hole up in my hotel room for now. I've got to go find MacLeod, and then we'll explain everything. Room 228. If you need to change, just borrow some of my stuff."

Frank didn't seem to be thinking very clearly, but he did take the key Richie gave him and the sword and climbed out of the car. Richie was pretty sure Frank was shell shocked, but he had to deal with other things first. Frank would take things in better when he'd had a chance to settle down a bit anyway. Hopefully Frank would be right where he left him when he got back.

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Several conversations just stopped as Richie walked into the Haven, and he grinned at the shocked expression on Mac's face. The slightly opened mouth visage dissolved into one of relief as Mac seemed to realise he was no longer insane.

"I think he's back to normal," he heard Mac say as he began to walk across the room.

There was a quizzical look on Lillie's face as she watched him approach.

"Not quite," was her quiet response, and she looked to Luna for confirmation.

Richie quite liked the fact that they seemed to still be off balance.

"Mr Ryan still feels somewhat like one of us," the Prince offered slowly, "but his heart is beating, and he appears human on the outside."

It was then that Richie saw one of the guys he had flattened at Luna's the previous night, if his confused recollections were right the Kindred's name was Cash. There was a beautiful woman next to him and when Richie made it a little closer he picked up the signs of another Kindred; he made a guess at Brujah.

"Look, sorry about yesterday," he apologised calmly, pausing momentarily in front of the couple; "I wasn't quite myself."

Then he walked on without waiting for a reply.

"So, what happened yesterday," he heard the woman enquire curiously, "and I take it that's the guy everyone had been so wound up about?"

Richie smiled to himself; he wasn't overly fond of being the centre of attention, but at least he knew no one would be likely to mess with him after what had been going on.

"I'll tell you later," was all Cash replied and Richie wondered how edited Cash's version would be for what was clearly his girlfriend.

Richie slid into the booth on the opposite side to Mac, and just smiled at the Lillie and Luna.

"I thought we'd go home now," he said lightly.

Nobody was quite sure what to say to that.

"Are you okay, Richie?" Mac finally asked slowly.

"Fine," he replied, knowing just what Mac was worrying about, "a good Quickening will do wonders for a guy."

That was all the explanation Mac really needed if his expression was anything to go by, but Richie went on anyway to make sure all was clear.

"Damon's dead and I'm as close to normal as I think I'm going to get," he said with a small shrug. "Oh and Frank will be coming with us, he discovered death as well, but he'll get used to the idea. I've really had enough of this town, and I'd like to go home, where nothing more exciting happens than the odd Immortal trying to kill me."

It took a while for everyone to catch up.

"What happened to Frank?" it was Luna who asked, and he was clearly not happy.

"Some Kindred decided to use him as a punch bag," Richie said quickly, doing his best to hide the anger that was still there at that, "and he broke his neck. Since he's Immortal it didn't bother him for long, and I have him stashed somewhere where no-one can find him until he feels like being found."

Righteous anger flared in the Prince's eyes, and Richie had the next question figured before Luna asked it.

"Who were they?" he demanded hotly.

Now Richie had no intention of giving the brutes up to the slaughter, he thought they'd probably learned their lessons and he wanted that lesson spread.

"It doesn't matter," he said, making sure to be taken seriously. "Take it from me, they will not be trying it again."

The two men locked gazes for a moment Luna appeared to consider pushing the issue. It was very obvious that the Prince didn't like to be told what to do, even in situations like this, but Richie was not going to back down. The Ventrue looked angry for a moment, but slowly the expression changed into a smile.

"Have it your way," Luna finally said and, apparently, much to Lillie's surprise, gave in.

It was the Toreador Primogen who spoke next.

"Well gentlemen," she said with a smile, "I hope you don't mind, but I'd like to steal Richard for just a little while. I'd like to have a few words in private."

Now it was Richie's turn to look surprised, but he did not object as the dark haired siren led him to a quiet corner. She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment and then kissed him on the cheek.

"Thank you for what you did for Andre," she said warmly, quite different from every other interaction they had had, "your gift arrived here a while ago. After what he did to you, your actions surprise me."

Now Richie understood why she had wanted to talk to him, and he smiled. Most of the past few days were coming back to him, but it was all very mixed up and why he had done things were a little vague, but that one was more than clear.

"I got rid of all my anger when I staked him," he explained openly, "and my more rational side came into play. I saw Jessica as she was about to throw herself off a roof, and I suddenly knew that they would be good for each other. He needs someone, that's why he tried to take me. She has never seen how life can be good, and he can give that to her. I just followed my heart, which, for once, doesn't seem to have landed me in trouble."

Lillie ran her hand down one side of his face and just smiled at him for a while.

"You're very kind," she said slowly, "I wouldn't have expected that in someone who has to kill like you do. Don't ever let go of your soul, Richard, it makes you a wonderful person."

Then she kissed him again and walked back to Julian, leaving him to contemplate what she had said.

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Frank, it appeared, had been through a good half of the mini-bar in Richie's room, not that Richie blamed the other man at all. If it hadn't been for the fact that

Richie had had Tessa's death to deal with as well he thought he might have had a similar reaction when he died for the first time. Helping keep Mac together had actually given him something to focus on besides his own predicament.

"Feeling any better?" Richie asked as he walked into the room.

"Except for the feeling of ants inside my head I feel fine," Frank replied, rubbing his head. "I'll be glad when the ants go away for good."

"They won't," Richie said, walking over and sitting down on the bed; "but you do get used to it. That's how you can tell you're about to meet another Immortal."

Frank looked surprised at that.

"We have an early warning system?" he asked and then seemed to consider it. "Makes sense I suppose."

At least Frank did not seem to be panicking about the whole thing.

"Makes a quick exit much easier," Richie replied, looking over Frank carefully to make sure his friend wasn't just hiding a freak out in waiting.

Frank actually laughed at that and Richie could see the first crack.

"A quick exit in case one of you wants to kill me?" Frank said, sounding just a little bitter.

"One of us, Frank," he said as gently as it was possible to say it; "you're Immortal now."

There was no reply and then Frank was standing up.

"Yeah, well, I'm going home," Frank said as if he didn't know why he hadn't thought of it before; "I can cope with Kindred so I can cope with this."

"Frank," Richie began and Mac stepped in front of the cop before he could leave.

"That would be a very bad idea," Mac said with his usual serious tone.

Richie had seen Mac in new Immortal mode from Frank's position so he could understand the scowl that ended up on Frank's features.

"What, so I'm easier to find when you get fed up of me and decide to kill me?"

Frank's words were uncalled for, but Richie could understand why Frank was so upset.

"I want to help you," Mac said, clearly offended by Frank's suggestion and Richie could see the discussion going down hill; he didn't think Frank was in the mood to be helped.

"Look, Mac," he said, stepping in, "let me deal with this. Frank talked me down from freaking out when I woke up Kindred, I think it's my turn."

The Highlander didn't look as if he liked it, but the agitated way Frank began pacing must have made him think about it, because Mac finally nodded.

"Okay," Mac said and gave him the 'I'll leave it to you, but call if you need me look' that Richie was very familiar with; "I'll be down the hall."

Richie nodded and patted his friend on the arm in thanks, before turning back to Frank.

"You knew," were the accusatory words out of Frank's mouth as soon as the door closed.

It was not an unexpected accusation, he had felt the same way when he had found out that Mac had withheld the information from him as well.

"From the moment you sat down next to us at the bar," he replied, knowing that the complete truth was the only way to go with Frank. "It doesn't feel like another Immortal when you meet a pre-Immortal, but it's still there."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Frank demanded.

"Because it's not done," Richie told his friend, "because everyone deserves a normal life. I only found out about Immortals by accident; I tried to burgle Mac's shop and ended up in the middle of an Immortal showdown. Mac took me under his wing, but he never told me; I didn't know until one day I didn't die. I know you don't think so now because I've been there, but innocence is bliss."

It was all too clear that Frank didn't like that, but at least the other man was not trying to storm out.

"Is that why you were attracted to me?" Frank finally asked and Richie suddenly realised that this was not just about the whole Immortal thing. "Did you come to me because you knew you couldn't really kill me even if you lost control?"

If it hadn't been a sensible theory Richie would have laughed.

"No," he said and he didn't need to think about it to know it was true; "I came to you because I like you and because you're the only damn person in this city that I actually trust. When you found me you could have taken me straight to Luna or Lillie and washed your hands of me, but you didn't; you tried to help me, and to me that means a lot. Now I want to help you."

Richie was a little surprised by how much of the anger seemed to flow out of Frank at those words and he began to understand that maybe Frank had felt used. It made sense and it also explained why Frank had been so annoyed with him; Richie didn't like being used either.

"I need a drink," he decided and went to the mini-bar; "that's if you left anything in here."

He found a small bottle of vodka and poured it into the nearest glass before downing it in one.

"Right," he said, turning back to Frank, "now I can do the long explanations. Let's sit down and I'll tell you everything."

Frank still didn't appear too happy, but when Richie indicated the sofa, the other Immortal did sit down.

"The most important thing to know is the only way we can die is decapitation," he started with the number one piece of information, but he had the feeling he was going to be talking for quite a while.

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It had taken them another day to get out of the city, what with explaining everything to Frank and getting him to organise his vacation, along with the formal farewells. Luna had wanted more information, but all leverage had been gone and so there had been no pushing. They were all aware that both sides could be incredibly dangerous and that seemed to settle things. After all the hassle in San Francisco, the days of rigorous training that Mac decided to put Frank through, using Richie as an example, seemed almost restful.

Frank was technically staying at the loft, but after a week he'd actually slept there one night. The first night Frank had stayed over at his place Richie had told Mac that they had been drinking and talking, but after the second he'd given up pretending and Mac's eyebrows might have hit his hairline, but that had been about it. He wasn't really sure what he and Frank were involved in, but he liked having a warm body to sleep next to and he was really getting to like Frank, a lot. The fact that he was wondering if San Francisco might be a nice place to spend a few months gave him a clue that he might be a little more serious about the whole thing than he was used to.

Going from completely straight to possibly having a boyfriend was quite a step, but Richie had given up arguing with the changes the embrace had made in him. He didn't know if he'd always had a thing for men and had repressed it or if he'd integrated the tendency from one of the buried psyches in his head just like the painting, but it didn't really make a lot of difference. He knew Mac was working up to having a little talk to make sure he knew what he was up to, but he was prepared for that and it was only the Highlander's way of making sure he was okay.

He now had some paints, a couple of canvases and other art equipment in his apartment, but he hadn't had much chance to use them. What with the training and alternative physical pursuits with Frank, he'd only had one chance to get them out, but he was well aware that he enjoyed it. He found himself doodling on anything and everything so much that Mac had taken to leaving little notepads around so he didn't doodle on the furniture. The most bizarre moment over the last week had been when Mac had caught him making patterns on the counter with the salt.

He was trying to keep the urge under control, he really was, but occasionally it got the better of him; that and the fact that he suddenly seemed to have a touchy feely streak when it came to Frank. How Mac had not figured out the truth the first day was beyond Richie; it had to be written up there in neon. Frank didn't seem to mind, though, which was handy. Like he had invaded Frank's personal space a little more than necessary to show him a move and Frank let him get away with it.

"So why don't you just shoot them and then take their heads?" Frank asked as Richie stepped back a little to let his lover try the move he had just demonstrated.

Frank was looking at Mac for the answer, but the Highlander just huffed and walked into the office. When Frank turned to Richie for help Richie couldn't help laughing.

"Those kind of questions are best left unthought," he said lightly, "especially with Mac around. He has this big honour streak in him, and ideas like yours tend to tick him off."

Frank didn't look like he quite believed in the whole honour thing, but then Richie knew Frank was nothing if not practical.

"Okay," Frank said with a little smile, "it was only a thought. So can you show me that move again, I don't quite remember the end of it?"

"Well, if you insist," Richie said, ever willing to get close to Frank, but he didn't have a chance to follow through.

A familiar feeling lanced through his head and he saw Frank make a face of annoyance and they both looked towards the door. Richie held the wooden sword he had, defensively, until Adam Pierson strolled through the door with a broad smile on his face.

"Expecting someone else I see," Adam said, a little too brightly. "So who's the new recruit?"

Mac walked out of the office with a broad smile on his face, bad mood gone it seemed.

"Phone, Adam," the Highlander said jovially, "I know it's a modern invention, but it's useful. Prevents heart attacks, and misunderstandings."

"One day I will call," the other Immortal said unrepentantly, "then you'll get worried."

Richie wouldn't have said that he and Adam were good friends, but he was happy enough to relax and he lowered his wooden sword as Adam walked further into the room. It took a few seconds, but a feeling slowly began to crawl up his spine, one he recognised and he was suddenly staring at Adam in shock and he found the other Immortal doing the same to him.

"Gangrel," he said rapidly.

"Toreador," was what Adam replied.

"You were embraced," they both said in unison.

After a second or so of shock Adam seemed to find this very funny and Richie saw Frank and Duncan just looked at each other.

"You must have made one strange Kindred," Adam said with a laugh, "I'd only taken one head when they tried the number on me, and I had a split personality for weeks."

Richie didn't bother trying to hide his shock.

"When, how long ago?" he all but demanded.

It was a surprise and a relief to find out he was not the only one who had been in contact with the wrong vampire.

"A while," Adam returned with a smile. "I'll tell you exactly after we've had a long talk about ages."

Some Immortals were touchy about how long they'd been wandering around, Richie accepted this and moved onto his next question.

"So do the after effects wear off?" he inquired directly, since he really wanted to know.

Being able to see quite well in the dark was useful, but he didn't want to become reliant on it if it was going to vanish again.

"You mean the hearing and things," Adam asked, as if this was the most normal conversation in the world. "No. They might fade a little over the next hundred years or so, but you're stuck with them. I have also been reliably informed that, from time to time, in the throws of passion, my eyes change colour."

Richie was a little dubious about that claim.

"Ever had any complaints?" he finally asked.

"Not so far," was the cheerful reply.

The End