

Allied Information

“Why did I call you here?” Walter asked with a quiet smile.

“We were just about to ask you that same question,” Danni replied with a quick glance at the others who sat around the living room of Walter’s modest house.

“I know. I thought I’d beat you to the proverbial punch and ask it for you. The answer is that I want to make sure you all have some basic information. In this case, I want you to understand something that’s at least as important as the basic tenet that one should know your enemies: know thy friends.”

“Which friends would those be?” Misty asked, absently running a hand over the long braid of dark hair draped over her shoulder.

“I believe for this discussion, we’ll start at the top. None other than the ruler of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex area, Selina Dupree.

“Now, I believe everyone but Keith has seen our leader in person. Carla? Oh good. Show Keith the picture. I’d hate for him to ask her out.”

“That’s not funny,” Keith frowned. “So I asked the wrong woman out once. Let it go.”

“Eventually,” Virgil chimed in good naturedly. “When we’ve wrung every last little drop of humor and aggravation from it, it will finally die.”

“But don’t hold your breath,” Danni added with a grin for Virge.

“Selina Dupree calls herself a lady,” Walter interrupted with a smile that slowly turned serious. “That’s the only official title she claims. Why? Because some time ago she was queen of Paris and lost that city. Since then, she has laid claim to no other titles. Which makes her the most powerful ‘lady’ in the world. She passes out titles of lord, lady, and knight to those she feels deserve them. Considering the influence this carries, it is more pertinent than any title passed along by mortals.”

“I heard she’s a control freak,” Misty said quietly. “And that she can hear the thoughts of her entire bloodline.”

“The first is certainly true,” Walter agreed easily. “The second... I don’t know. She *can* communicate with her people over long distances. This I do know for a fact. Beyond that, I’m not so sure.”

Virge coughed into his hand before saying, “I heard she’s got a wall in one of her estates with people who’ve offended her chained to it. She keeps them alive with just a drop or two of blood and has them hanging in frames, like living pictures. Barely living pictures.”

“That is also true,” Walter nodded. “The rumor is a bit deceptive though. The people are there because they offended the Lady Dupree by committing crimes. Each frame is labeled with the offense and the length of the sentence. Some of her punishments are harsh, but so far as I can see, they are fair. She actually understands the word ‘justice’ and ensures it is carried out within her realm.”

“Her justice sounds kinda harsh,” Misty stated with a frown.

“By the standards of most modern court systems, I suppose it does,” Walter nodded. “However, you must remember that she’s lived through some very dark times indeed. She could have chosen punishments from any of those times. Many of those would have been *much* worse. If you don’t believe me, go read some history books.”

“Anything else about her powers we should know about?” Jules asked from her seat near the

hearth. "Before we completely lose track of the original topic and start following tangents."

"Yes," Walter replied with a smile. "Remember, she's an old vampire. Six hundred years old if she's a day. As most of you know, age equals power... at least to some extent. The Lady Selina's reflexes and physical strength are much greater than yours or mine. I've spoken with her recently and she's just as smart as she ever was. As you all probably know, her personal charisma is legendary and for a good reason. She keeps in touch with the modern world via her contacts and people. And after we discuss her magical abilities, that will be the next topic: the people closest to her."

"Been a lot of rumors circulating about her first soulless companion, Miranda," Virge said quietly. "As I hear it, some of those rumors are centuries old."

"Wait a minute," Keith said, holding up a hand. "That's the next topic. I want to hear about the magic part."

"Yeah," Misty nodded. "I'm with Keith. Let's hear about the magic."

"Well, I'm glad the you're interested because you were going to hear about it whether you were or not," Walter informed them with a sly grin. "I'll digress briefly. There are three forms of magic which vampires can become good at. Of those forms of magic, only one is socially acceptable: hemomancy. The magic of blood. Vampires seem to have a natural affiliation for it for some peculiar reason."

Keith sighed. "I still can't tell when you're joking or not."

"Very well, Keith. I'll try to rein in my humor a bit. Now, to continue. There are two other forms of magic vampires can reliably and fairly easily learn. I mean this in a relative sense. No magic is easy to learn. However, these forms of magic come easiest to vampires. The other two magics being necromancy and tenebromancy. The magics of death and darkness respectively. These two are outlawed in most areas. Being a necromancer carries a death sentence in practically any vampire controlled area. Tenebromancy looks an awful lot like necromancy to most uneducated people. Therefore, practicing tenebromancy frequently carries a death sentence as well. Which leaves us with hemomancy as our only viable magical venue."

"So there are other forms of magic other than these three?" Danni asked as she sprawled across Virge on the couch.

"Many," Walter confirmed. "However, those are off topic for this discussion."

"So tell us about hemomancy," Misty urged.

"To be honest, I don't know a great deal," Walter admitted. "Hemomancy blends in with a great number of vampiric talents. It can aid, enhance, and mimic a number of powers that are conveyed by different bloodlines. There's almost certainly a great deal more it can do. If you want to learn more, you're going to have to gain access to someone's library and read. And even then you're most likely going to have to learn a new language in order to do so. Better yet would be if you could find someone to apprentice to. However, chances of you finding someone are slim."

"Except for the Lady Selina," Virge stated with narrowed eyes.

"Virge has deduced the correct answer. Mostly. She could indeed teach you. However, we are not of her bloodline. Chances of her teaching any of you are slim. Still, it might be worth the risk if one of you were interested enough to ask. There are other members of her high court who are also hemomancers. If any or all of you are interested in pursuing this avenue of learning, I will do my utmost to aid and support your efforts." The comfortable room filled with a thoughtful silence as each of them considered the possibility.

"You mentioned risks," Keith said after a while. "What are they?"

"I'll answer your question and then get back to the original discussion. You can think about

the possibility of becoming a hemomancer later,” Walter stated, walking around to stand in front of the empty fireplace. “The risks involved are the same risks you run when dealing with any elder vampire. Personal injury, enslavement, and death. The last two are unlikely to happen in the Lady Selina’s territory. As I mentioned earlier, she is fair and for the most part a good vampire to have ruling the city you live in. However, vampires can be temperamental creatures as I’m sure you’re all finding out. So long as the damage isn’t permanent, most elder vampires cut other elder vampires a great deal of slack in how they deal with everyone else. If any of you are truly interested, see me later and we’ll look into inquiring through channels for potential interviews.”

Thoughtful looks had barely crossed their faces again when Walter walked from the fireplace to stand in front of the television set. “Now, the point I wanted to make about hemomancy and the Lady Selina is two-fold. One, she is a powerful hemomancer. I’ve heard this from multiple sources and two of them are extremely reliable. Two, I don’t honestly know what it means that she is a powerful hemomancer. I hope to find out one day... so long as I find out in a good manner.”

“Amen to that,” Virge declared.

“And this brings our discussion about magic to a close,” Walter declared with a quick smile for the lanky fellow on the couch. “Now we move on to the Lady Selina’s companions. And the rumors Virge mentioned.”

“Keith,” Walter stated with a wicked grin. “Why don’t you tell us about some of the lady’s companions?”

“Okay,” Keith agreed seriously. “Not counting the high court?” At Walter’s nod, he continued. “The obvious one is her soulless bodyguard, Miranda. I don’t think I ever heard her last name. There’s also her human affairs coordinator, Claudia. Heard she’s uptight enough to be soulless. No offense, Carla.”

“None taken,” the soulless woman standing in the doorway to the hall replied evenly.

“Uhh. To be honest, I can’t think of anyone else,” he frowned.

“And there’s a good reason for that,” Walter stated quietly. “There really is not anyone else close to her so far as her day-to-day activities are concerned. Miranda Cassell has been Selina Dupree’s companion for longer than any of us has been alive. In fact, if you added all our ages together, you still would not match the number of years the two of them have been together. There have been a lot of rumors about the two of them. I won’t repeat any of them for the simple fact that I don’t know the veracity of any of them and I am not a rumormonger.

“What I do know is that Miranda acts as a friend, confidant, bodyguard, second in command, secretary, and maid to Selina. She is a very old soulless and is more dangerous than most vampires under two hundred years old based on that fact alone. With a sword in her hand you can add another hundred or so years to that number. Miranda has survived multiple assassination attempts and has foiled a number of such attempts on her mistress. Her loyalty to the Lady Selina is absolute.”

“What about that other woman?” Jules asked, leaning forward a bit as her interest grew. “Claudia? I’m a bit embarrassed to admit it, but I’ve never heard of her.”

“Claudia Reynolds,” Walter elaborated as he walked back to the fireplace, delivering a fond smile for Jules, who still sat there. “She’s a woman Selina bit back in the 1950’s. Vampirically speaking, she’s not very strong. However, she has a strong bond to the Lady Selina and has developed excellent connections throughout the various police departments, city governments, and news organizations of the metropolex. Due in large part to these connections, she is very useful. And apparently, Selina simply likes her.”

“I hate to be the obviously devious one,” Danni began, “But if she’s so important... and so

young... why hasn't someone killed her to piss off Selina? I mean, that's what other elder vampires do isn't it? Do everything they can to annoy one another and otherwise piss each other off?"

"The Lady Selina has enough enemies for that to be a good possibility. However, having only two close friends, Selina can afford to be generous with her protection. Claudia has her own bodyguards as well as a detachment of elite guards at her disposal. And with her ties to Selina, Claudia has the political power to make even the most powerful vampires think twice. It is said that to offend Claudia is to offend Selina herself. And to offend the lady carries the risk of war."

"What about her brother?" Virge asked after the last statement had a little time to sink in.

"Alexander Wilde? I think we'll leave him for another evening. He's an interesting fellow and all, but he doesn't live around here."

"What or who does that leave then?" Virge asked. "Are we done already?"

"Not quite. There's a rumor. One that's now been confirmed for me by a... fairly reliable source."

"Fairly reliable?" Misty asked with a little frown, absently running her hand along her braid again.

"The fellow in question is honest, but honestly not too bright. However, this rumor was one that should have been easily confirmed. And to my surprise, he did indeed confirm it."

"Alright," Keith declared with a smile. "I'll ask. What rumor are you talking about?"

"Why thank you for asking, Keith," Walter replied with a grin. The grin slipped away quickly. "During the Houston battle, the Lady Selina created a telum. I'm only going to discuss telum enough to say that a telum is a vampire with artificially empowered blood. It makes them very powerful for short spans of time and then they die. They are universally marked by all black eyes. Unfortunately, that's their only distinguishing mark. I suppose we should be glad to have that much warning."

Virge sat up straighter. "Randy and Mando told me that there were telum created during the war. 'Black-eyed devils' they called them. Said that the one the Lady Selina created literally left hundreds if not thousands dead in his wake."

"Thousands would probably be a bit generous," Walter disagreed. "However, I believe hundreds to certainly be correct. I'm not saying that he bit hundreds or anything. Simply that they died as a result of his actions."

"So the telum was a male?" Danni asked.

"Duh?" Keith declared with a smile.

"Sexist dumbass," Danni grinned back, throwing a pillow at the younger vampire.

"Easy on the furnishings," Walter told them distractedly. "And now we get to the rumor itself."

"Gee Walter," Misty began with a rather disingenuous look on her face, "What rumor might that be?"

"Why thank you for asking Misty. That rumor would be that the telum... is still alive."

"Umm, why would that be so odd?" Keith asked.

"The whole short-lifespan-due-to-their-artificially-powerful-blood-burning-out thing," Virgil told him absently. "Walter, are you sure about this?"

"It's only been three months since Walter, Randy, and Mando got back from Houston," Keith frowned. "Are you saying that their short life span...?"

"Is *really* short," Virge interrupted. "As in measured in days versus weeks. I heard about telum when I was talking to de Vartis a while back. That man's a virtual gold mine of information. Unfortunately, he's so eccentric and unfocused, it's hard to direct said information in a useful

direction.”

“We may spend some time talking about him later as well,” Walter nodded. “He’s another interesting fellow to be sure. However, Virge is right. Telum typically die out before they’ve seen their first week. And yet as Keith pointed out, it’s now been three months since Houston.”

“Is it the same guy?” Danni asked, sitting up now as well.

“It certainly seems to be,” Walter nodded seriously. “He matches the physical description and has a telum’s black eyes. He usually wears sunglasses now, but it would appear that he’s one and the same man.”

“What does that mean?” Keith asked. “That he’s still alive, I mean?”

“That’s a good question, my boy. I suspect that at the very least it means trouble,” Walter replied with a wry smile. “As in all these sessions that are to follow, keep this information to yourselves. You find anything contradictory or something that might be a useful addendum, let me know. We need every edge we can get.”

“So where are Randy and Mando?” Misty asked. “Why weren’t they here for this discussion?”

“They’ve already heard it. Seen most of it in fact. So, they’ve got the night off. And as of now, so do the rest of you. You don’t have to go home, just go away. Carla’s tired of hosting you bums.”

“Carla?!” Misty called on her way to the front door, sounding falsely scandalized. “Is that true? Are you tired of hosting us?”

“No,” the soulless woman replied with a quiet smile that almost reached her eyes. “But the evening is young and there is a lot left to do.”

“Need any help?” she asked, pausing at the open front door as Keith kissed Carla’s cheek on the way out and he was immediately followed by Jules and then Virge and Danni who similarly blessed the soulless woman.

“Thank you, no. Enjoy your evening. Think about what you’ve learned.”

“I will. You have a good night as well.”

Carla’s eyes turned to Walter briefly. “I believe I will at that.” A grinning Misty closed the door behind her.

“Do you think she has the talent?” Carla asked Walter as he sat down in his recliner for the first time that evening.

“For hemomancy? Maybe. I understand it can be learned by even someone without a great deal of innate talent. Takes a patient teacher though. I suppose we’ll see... if she decides she’s interested enough to find out.”

“She will,” Walter’s soulless companion declared.

“So sure?”

“Yes.”

“What do you think about the telum? Assuming he is indeed still alive?” Walter asked, changing topics.

“You chose your word well earlier. In particular the word ‘trouble,’” Carla stated, sitting down on the arm of Walter’s recliner and laying an arm across his shoulders.

“Isn’t that what telum are all about?” the vampire asked, leaning his head against her side.

“It certainly seems that way. Do you think he’ll stay in Atlanta?”

“If he continues to live? No. I think she’ll call him back.”

“Bringing the trouble he represents home to roost,” Carla nodded.

“Yes,” Walter agreed, looking a bit distracted. “He was described to me as being healthy looking. I think he’s going to continue living and that she will indeed bring him back here. Oh yes, my dear, I believe trouble looms darkly upon the horizon.”