

Bloodhound

“These cameras are new,” Samuel stated, staring up at the third camera we’d spotted so far.

“Yeah,” I agreed, looking around the scene of our recent fight. Both the Assamite and the Sabbat Nosferatu remained where we’d left them after searching their corpses. Sunlight would see to their final disposition.

“These two were in the field against us. Had to be someone else hidden away to watch whatever monitors these cameras are hooked up to,” Robert told us, keeping a wary watch on our surroundings. “Speaking of which, I think it’s high time we found just where these cameras lead to.”

“Together this time,” I told them. “We’ve already reached my nightly limit of blundering half-prepared into ambushes. Two would just be an extravagance.”

“Are you actually that ignorant of proper English or is that another attempt at humor?” Samuel asked, leading the way towards one of the four closest warehouses. The fact that he was serious about his question made me laugh despite myself.

Shaking his head, he opened the door and stepped into the first of the nearby rundown buildings. We performed a quick search, being as careful as we could under the circumstances.

While searching the third old building, we found that some new wiring had been added to this one. Seemed like our search was suddenly getting warmer. Tracing the wires, we found that the old security center in this building had been recently modified. Four of the monitors in the bank of ten looked new. Powering them up showed them to be functional and in color. All three of the cameras we’d found plus one we hadn’t. Someone had hooked them into some sort of dvd burner system. A burner without a dvd in it. This was where our extra person... or people... had watched us from.

“Where did they go?” Robert asked under his breath, apparently to himself.

Neither Samuel nor I answered, we simply began slowly spreading out as we searched for signs of the enemy. An hour later we were still looking. Other than the new equipment, there’d been few enough signs that anyone had ever been there in the first place. Our own tracks in the dew-laden grass outside the building were the only tracks we could find coming in or going back out. Which rather strongly suggested that either the bad guys were still here or they’d used another exit.

“Let’s start searching the crates in the center area,” Samuel said.

With only two hours remaining until sunrise, we found a covered manhole inside a big crate that it turned out was missing the bottom side. After checking the end of the crate we hadn’t destroyed, we found that the opposing side would open easily despite looking as though it had been nailed shut. It was starting to appear as though someone had put real effort into making this place useful to themselves.

“I don’t trust this,” I told them. “This would be too easy to trap from below. I think I saw another manhole cover a couple of blocks up. I’ll circle around, go in there, and try to work my way around to this entrance.”

“Sounds better than triggering a bomb or something,” Robert agreed. Samuel just nodded curtly. Without further ado, I began obfuscating and headed off.

The entrance I sought ended up being three blocks away instead of two. Close enough for my needs. As I lifted the cover off the manhole, I noticed an odd mark on the nearby remains of the sidewalk. It wasn't fresh by any means but it was still clearly visible. I rather strongly suspected it wasn't graffiti. It reminded me of the Nosferatu marking signs but not quite. With a frown I climbed down into the hole and pulled the cover back over me. If it wasn't Nosferatu, then who'd left the mark? The sewers were the Nosferatu's highway. Few others dared use them.

Walking back through the dry sewer, I eventually found the turnoff leading under the building. While I'd already been keeping a wary eye out for traps, I now redoubled my efforts and halved my speed. Radio communication wasn't good but we could get through to one another after two or three tries. And I found nothing. No traps here. Rather than relaxing, this made me just that much more cautious as I lifted the manhole cover inside the building up for the other two.

“There's not enough time to continue,” Samuel stated. “The sun's going to be up shortly. As is, we won't make it home tonight. Fortunately, the back of my car was altered with just such events in mind.”

“Go ahead,” I told him. “I'm going to stay down here. No chance of sunlight getting to me and I'll make sure there's no possibility of another vampire sneaking by.”

“Yes,” Samuel agreed. “That sounds like a good arrangement. Robert? Do you have somewhere to stay?”

“The Astin-Martin won't do much for protecting me from the sunlight. Too small.”

“I have room in my car for another. It won't be comfortable, but in all too short a time, that's not going to matter. Let's hurry.”

“We'll contact you right after sundown,” Robert called back on his way out of the building. The two of them weren't running, but they were certainly walking fast. For myself, I pulled the heavy cover back over the hole and climbed back down the metal rungs of the ladder. The ladder was located at the end of a fairly short tunnel connecting to a slightly larger tunnel. Not the greatest of places to be when the sun rose but I'd certainly spent the day in worse.

From one of my pockets I removed a small wooden figure of a Japanese samurai. This I placed in the middle of the tunnel I would be spending the day in. I then did something I don't normally do. I cast a ritual spell.

Rituals suck. They take a long time to cast and they usually don't offer much in return. This was a warning spell that would be centered on my little wooden friend. If anyone came within twenty feet of him, the spell would wake me instantly. So, for the next thirty minutes I sat chanting the spell and activated it with a drop of my blood onto the figurine. The blood soaked in as though he had been made of sponge and not wood.

As safe as I was likely to be, I laid down in the dark tunnel and went to sleep for the day.

I awoke groggily at sundown. A bit uncomfortable from sleeping on the cement to be sure but otherwise alright. Standing, I took a long swig from my emergency blood flask. The contents wouldn't last more than another day. Blood only stayed good for so long and alchemy could only extend that time so far. At least my current knowledge of it. When I got the spare

time, I intended to give a go at extending the storage duration. Had a few things in mind I thought might do well for just that purpose. Didn't seem likely to happen anytime soon though.

Wincing a bit, I brushed gravel away that had become semi-imbedded into the backs of my arms. Could it be that all this time sleeping in beds had made me soft? Perhaps. Or maybe it just allowed me the opportunity to shift my strengths and energy into more useful directions.

The latter sounded good which is why I strongly suspected I was getting soft.

"Anyone else awake who can hear me?" I asked into the radio, putting my little wooden buddy away again.

"Yeah," Robert mumbled. "Just barely though. Everything good there?"

"Hunky dory," I replied with an evil grin. "Just glad that my first sight of the evening wasn't Samuel."

I got a good laugh at the string of curses that followed. Walking back down the little side tunnel to the main line, I pulled out the hammer and checked around. I was now fully loaded and ready for anything.

The time was ten minutes after sundown. This vampire was now open for business.

An hour later I remained ready but the others were still not. Randal and Kegger were finally on their way here. Randal had evidently decided that Kegger's injuries were worse than he'd previously thought. As a result, both of them had spent the day in a nice underground facility hooked up to IVs. A nice, constant inflow of new blood. Pretty good way to spend a day actually. Anyway, both were much better as a result and were now on their way here with an ice chest full of fresh blood for the rest of us.

Robert had reported finding two nice places where blood fires had burned shortly after sunrise. And a final good riddance to the two vampires we'd killed. Rather wished I could have seen them burn... but then I'd likely have been burning as well. And then it occurred to me, I *could* have watched it. If we had put a replacement disk in that damned dvd recorder.

This put me in a foul mood until Robert finally decided that I should go ahead and start following the tunnels while they followed as best they could above ground. They'd feed Randal directions on how we were progressing as it became necessary.

Feeling better about the night, I started down the tunnel at a jog. A little less than half a mile later I found a Nosferatu marking on one of the side corridors. It basically read 'Dallas this way'. Which way had our boy or girl gone? Frowning, I reported what I'd found to the two vampires following along topside.

"This could be how Rabid has apparent free access to all of Dallas," Samuel surmised. "The Nosferatu are lax in their security and this opens the entire city up to the Malkavian. It makes sense."

"The Nosferatu are about as lax as everyone else," I replied sarcastically. "Do you think he's hiding somewhere along the underground path to Dallas or further out?"

Robert said, "Samuel's trying to pull up the layout of the storm drains you're in. However, just from eyeballing the path we've been driving along, I'd say you're going to be out in the country before too much longer. Maybe a few miles further at the most. Follow that line further along. The Camarilla has had people scouring the city for weeks... including the city underground. Don't know that anyone's made it all the way out here though. So watch your back."

“Sounds like as good a plan as any,” I replied as I returned to walking along the dark tunnel again.

Eventually, I came to another ladder leading up. And next to it was another of those peculiar signs.

“Hey guys. I’m close to a manhole cover. Can you tell me what area we’re in?” The sign was just as odd and yet familiar as the other had been.

“Yeah, you’re in the edge of the suburb of Southfield.”

“What’s around here? Someone drew a strange sign here and I’m trying to decipher it. Anything you can tell me about the surface might be handy.”

“Any idea who drew it?” Robert asked.

“No.”

“If you really believe it’s worth wasting our time over, we’re driving along Stonegate Road,” Samuel stated. “The service entrance to the storm drains is located at the corner of Stonegate Road and Donaldine Street.”

“I’m not really familiar with either,” I replied with a frown neither could see. “Where’s that?”

“We’re close to the southern edge of vampire territory,” Samuel all but snapped. “We’re in the southmost edge of the hunting grounds of a moderately powerful Brujah by the name of Wilson Carter. He goes by the nickname of Slammer. Does that clarify your position enough for you to get on with our search?”

“Actually, it does,” I agreed distractedly as I stared at the markings. The bisecting line was a territory marker. This side had a pair of short, sharply curved lines coming off it that could be fangs. The other had... an odd jumble of lines. And if you looked at them just right, it sorta resembled a... stylized wolf head. Oh dear.

“What’d you find Dmetri?” Robert asked into the silence.

“I think we’re entering werewolf territory,” I replied quietly.

“That’s ridiculous,” Samuel definitely snapped this time. “We’re miles and miles away from where their territory begins.”

“Do you think the werewolves use the same maps you do?” I asked as sarcastically as possible as I once more began walking down the drain. This seemed to shut him up which meant my smart ass remark had succeeded in its intended purpose.

Pompous asshole.

“Hold up a minute,” Robert called. “Kegger and Randal are only just now joining us.” A few minutes later he said, “Alright, we’re ready when you are.”

Roughly a quarter mile further, I found an old Nosferatu marker. It basically said ‘Here there be wolves’. Just terrific.

A great deal of walking after that brought me to an interesting place. It seemed to be where the old storm drain met in with the new. I’d figured out for myself that vampires had evidently had these drains put in. There hadn’t been an actual place for water to enter the tunnels for quite some time now. And now I found where an old project met a new project.

Ahead of me the cement had become cracked with age, shifting ground, and tree roots. Behind me all was nice and new. Well, it had been built in the last ten or fifteen years anyway. Where the two met there were a lot of tree roots, a pile of dirt, and a little light. Investigating, I found an entrance into the drain coming in from the base of a tree. Beneath that entrance, in the dirt that had collected on the floor of the drain, I found footprints. Or rather pawprints. Looked like this was indeed where the werewolves came in. Searching around, I found another of the

strange markers just inside the old section. There was a swirl that crossed this marker. One end of the swirl pointed further into the old storm drain. The other behind me. It seemed to me that coming off the part of the swirl pointing behind me were fangs, and possibly what might have been a crude depiction of a skyline. Made sense if that was the case. Ahead of me was what might have been a skull and a barn or house.

That sure looked like the right direction.

Dammit.

“Hey guys,” I began, keeping careful watch around me. “You up there?”

“Yeah, we’re here,” Robert answered. “We’re picking you up much more clearly and cleanly now. You in the open?”

“No, I’m near an entrance though. A werewolf entrance. One that probably wasn’t used all that long ago judging by the footprints. So everyone be mindful that we are definitely in werewolf territory now. I found a marker that indicates that death and some sort of house or maybe barn are up ahead. Now I’m pretty sure that this marker was made by werewolves. Could be that we’re finally closing in on Rabid’s lair.”

“Wait a minute,” Robert said. “Samuel’s looking up information on property listings and Randal’s pulling up a satellite picture of the area.”

While they did that, I pulled out my cell phone and called Gloria.

“Hello?” she answered on the second ring.

“Hey, it’s me. Looks like I’m going to be tied up at work for a while.”

“There’s an odd echo. Where are you?” she asked, followed immediately by, “Don’t expect me to wait around for you and this *will* count as a forfeiture on your part.”

“I’m underground somewhere below the west side of downtown Fort Worth,” I lied. “And I know it counts as a forfeiture on my part. I thought you might want to know rather than driving across town and waiting for me in vain.”

“Yes. You’re right,” she conceded. “I do appreciate the courtesy. In that case, I’m going to my physical therapy a little earlier than usual. You be careful. Fort Worth is a dangerous place for us.”

“Isn’t that for damned sure?” I asked rhetorically. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Alright. Good night,” she replied.

“Good night,” I said, hanging up the phone. Crap. So much for the sex portion of my evening.

Almost fifteen minutes later, Randal came on over the headset, “We think we’ve got something. There was an old sanitarium about three miles south of your position... which is pretty much in the direction you’ve been going for most of the evening. I’ve got a picture of what we think is the building. Hard to tell for sure from a satellite shot. Place has suffered some roof damage and appears to be two stories tall. Good sized building. Samuel’s found some history of the place that fits,” he said excitedly.

Samuel then came on. “This is a story about that nearby sanitarium from the local newspaper. Happened thirty years ago. Dr. Raymond Bihd, noted doctor of psychiatry, was killed when a fire ravaged the east wing of the Stonehurst Institute of Mental Health. The fire is reported to have been deliberately set by one of the patients being treated at the facility. Doctor Bihd’s body was burned beyond recognition in the fire that very nearly consumed the entire mental health facility.”

Randal cut in, “The fire damage in the story seems to coincide with the roof damage from the satellite picture we’re looking at as well.”

“There’s some related stuff about Dr. Bihd,” Samuel said, almost sounding excited. “Seems he was an extremely talented and insightful man when it came to solving other people’s mental health issues. Won numerous awards and commendations.”

“Yeah,” Kegger burst in, “And the name fits. Raymond Bihd. Ray Bihd. Rabid. We’ve got him now!”

“What about the sanitarium?” I asked. “Surely it was repaired after the fire?”

“No, it was not,” Samuel countered. “Turned out the hospital administration failed to keep their fire insurance up to date. They couldn’t afford repairs and it lost its accreditation. The facility went bankrupt within the week. The building and land were sold at auction to an anonymous bidder shortly thereafter. It has remained abandoned since.”

“Or apparently abandoned,” I said, nodding to myself. “It all fits. Now all we have to do is find out if the doctor’s home or not.”

“And not let this turn into another debacle like the damned vampire-hunters mess,” Robert growled.

“Teamwork,” I told them seriously. “Teamwork and confidence versus overconfidence. We work together and we expect the worst at every turn.”

“Yes,” Samuel agreed, which surprised me. “We work together and we take him down. Dmetri, you follow the tunnel and make sure that while we’re going into the place, he’s not sneaking out. We’ll drive closer to the sanitarium and then approach on foot. Planning much beyond that would be an exercise in futility. We all know what has to be done. Let’s do it.”

And so I started walking down a tunnel that was almost guaranteed to lead me to Rabid. With a savage grin, I began obfuscating.

Payback time approached on swift feet.