

## Vengeance and Nightmares

Touchy. Some people are just plain touchy. No sense of humor. In this particular case, no real personality at all. I could hear the asshole talking with Gilch just on the other side of the window... well, where the window had been anyway. The two vampires were discussing security for a meeting that the prince would be holding with the Nosferatu primogen. Making arrangements. Planning. That sort of thing.

From my place out in the alley I had a good view of the wall behind which they were speaking. The touchy one's name was Stain. It suited him well. I had a number of other names for him, but none suitable for sharing. Evidently, the prince would have a meeting with the Nosferatu primogen in a warehouse next to a certain marina. The primogen being the highest ranking member of a given bloodline at court. Speaking of marinas, a little water would have done Stain a world of good...he was filthy. I supposed this was just a case of the outside mimicking the inside. Of course, Stain himself wouldn't be meeting with the prince. He was going to be providing security below ground for the meeting. The tunnels under the city were well known to certain circles and both the prince and the chief Nosferatu of the prince's court both had plenty of enemies.

Reflected on a piece of broken glass, I could see a line of blood working its way down the brick wall behind me.

Inside, the discussion continued. They were getting down to the details now. Who would be watching where and when and in what numbers. Gilch had been briefed earlier by Incubo, the prince's head of security. Now, what my mentor and Stain had to do was make sure that their part of the security fit in seamlessly with what Incubo was setting up. They would do it, too. I had faith in Gilch. Stain I wasn't so sure about, but Gilch would see it done.

They continued to discuss details for the next ten minutes. During this time, two more blood trails slowly joined the first on the wall behind me as reflected by the shard of glass I kept looking at. Oddly enough, I found it distracted me from my problems. Rather pretty in a certain way.

Eventually, Stain left.

"You still alive down there?" Gilch asked, sticking his head out of the busted window.

I made a noise which was about all I could do at the moment. He sighed - always the drama queen - and hopped out the shattered window to join me in the alley.

"Embrace the pain," he said with another sigh. I could practically hear him shaking his head but couldn't see it. My own eyes were currently pointed in the wrong direction and I couldn't move my neck. "It lets you know you're still alive. And right now, you don't have much else going for you."

"I feel certain," he continued, "that someday you are going to learn when to shut up and when to mouth off. Furthermore, I believe that one day you'll quit getting the two so very badly mixed up." Shaking his head (this time where I could see it), he picked me up by the front of my armored vest and carried me around to the side door. I hadn't really thought the pain could get any worse but him moving me proved me wrong yet again. This was a Nosferatu meeting house. As Gilch was the one who had set it up, we used it every so often as a base for our north side activities. He took me around to an old bathtub and gently set me into it. He then left me for a moment. This repositioning hadn't been any more pleasant than being moving had. Or the sudden stop after flying through the window that had spawned all my current agonies.

Gilch returned a while later with a number of plastic packages containing blood. After quickly opening the first one, he began pouring the contents into my mouth. It tasted oh-so-wonderful, the blood a welcome relief that my body needed ever so badly. Closing my eyes, I concentrated on healing myself.

Soon I heard him open another one and was quite pleased when he began pouring its contents after the first. There came a loud popping noise as one of my ribs snapped back into place. Oh, crap that hurt. And it felt really good at the same time. This all-too-familiar process repeated itself several times over the next couple of packets of blood. Bones all over my body moved back where they belonged and slowly knitted together.

“You know,” I said some time later when I could finally draw breath to talk. “Had this been the movies, he would have thrown me through that wall.” Lord but I say the dumbest things sometimes. Still, it kept me from railing against Stain or whining about the pain I was still in. Or, worse yet, thanking Gilch so much he got disgusted and left.

“Yep,” he agreed, knowing how I felt and obviously being pleased with the choice of conversational topics. “And that probably would have hurt a lot less too. But this isn’t the movies. It’s California. And California has to build walls that stand up to earthquakes. By the way, I was very impressed with the way you destroyed that window. The work of a real pro.” I was too tired and sore to flip him off properly so a dirty look had to suffice. He just smiled, handed me another blood pack, and left me to my healing.

Two weeks later I returned to the hole we lived in after a relatively short night out. The gloves I’d worn had gone into a fire barrel that the bums a few blocks over used to keep warm. The pens I had used for writing the notes had gone into the drink - one into a canal, and one off a pier. The clothes I had worn meeting my only contact were now on a rack in a thrift store in Stain’s territory. The clothes I now wore had been carried in a dufflebag that was now a permanent part of the foundations of the new civic center. Walking over to the couch, I sat down and relaxed. Gilch wouldn’t be back for a few hours yet. The big meeting wasn’t until four and according to my watch it was only two now.

Stain had made a fairly obvious mistake. Or maybe two of them. One: he hadn’t killed me. Two: if he hadn’t intended to kill me, he should have made sure I wasn’t going to seek vengeance against him for his attack. Hell, for all I know he might not consider a puny little Caitiff like myself a threat. Anyway you looked at it, he had screwed up.

Vengeance. It’s not something that I give into very often. I supposed I still carried with me some of that ‘turn the other cheek stuff’ from my mortal days. But there was something about the way he had just absently grabbed me by the front of my armored vest and thrown me out the window and into that wall. Something about the way he had so indifferently... so callously come so close to putting an end to my immortality.

And that something had demanded that he be punished.

Gilch had long ago made it clear that any problems I caused for myself, I would have to deal with. There was no question that Gilch could have done unto Stain as the sorry bastard had done to me. While he didn’t show it off often, my mentor had developed the discipline of Potence to a high level. This gave him super strength even for a vampire. And that wasn’t even mentioning the other powers he’d mastered. And he had chosen to do nothing other than help me with my recovery. As

he'd said, I should have kept my mouth shut. The fact that Stain had way overreacted hadn't really mattered at that point.

However, now it did. Gilch had know I was up to something in the time since my recovery. He'd had no doubt and had avoided asking me what I was up to as had become a habit of his. Don't ask, don't tell. And this told me quite clearly that if I did something to pay Stain back for his ill treatment of me, Gilch wouldn't interfere. For me, that was as green a go-ahead signal as I could have ever asked for.

My path to vengeance was clear.

Walking that path led me to leave a note at the drop point that was being used for a Nosferatu guard named Mouser. A note that told him his assigned position had been moved and that he was to keep watch at another location. A place other than the one Stain had originally specified for him. I knew all about Stain's plan because I had heard the entirety of it while lying in the ally on broken panes of glass. From experience I also knew that Nosferatu considered their drop system infallible. There was no question that at this very moment Mouser was a good half mile from where he had been assigned and that he was now keeping watch for any signs of trouble well away from where the trouble would be.

My second note had been delivered by a mortal child to Incubo. It was a very simple note done in simple capital letters. All it did was ask a single question: Why has Stain left the south-central underpassage unguarded?

Incubo means 'nightmare' in Latin and the man who bore it as a name had chosen to bear it for a good reason.

Sweet dreams Stain.