

In at the Deep end

You arrive back at your house to see number of impressively expensive vehicles pulled up the the drive way; the first is a slate grey Austin martin V8 Vantage with the number plate PRINCE, the second is a black 1968 Jaguar XJ6 with the number plate MYC171E, the final one is a White Ducati racing bike with no visible licence plate. Also propped up by the front door is a dark blue and ageing push bike with a broken chain which, whilst not of the same scale of wealth as the others, you know is in its own way even more exclusive.

You have the horrible feeling you may be in trouble.

Inside, the small front room is occupied by the owners of the vehicles.

Collapsed in the easy chair, his legs stretched out so they take up much of the remaining space, is a man with fine features and long blond hair which cascades over the shoulders of his White biker leathers. Resting against his legs is a large broad sword which, despite it's depth in the gloom of the room, seems to be reflecting the sunlight. His eyes are closed, his expression almost blissful.

Leaning on the back of chair, practically backed into the corner, is a tall almost emaciated man wearing a long black morning suit over a White frock shirt; his skin is pale, which is further emphasised by the black lipstick and kohl around his eyes. He looks up and smiles, obviously relieved that your arrival means things may soon be underway, and he will be free to escape the presence of the other men.

The bay window has been claimed by a man who looks too normal for this company. He is dressed in a lounge suite, shirt and tie. His wavy blond hair is streaked through with grey, as is the neatly trimmed beard. He fixes you with cold blue eyes and his mouth is deliberate held without expression.

Some how the remaining man manages to dominates the room, despite the presence of the others. He is standing at the fire place, checking his dark hair in the mirror as you enter. He looks up and stares at you through the reflection with dark, nearly black, eyes. He turns, every movement is control, almost as if he is on a cat walk. The silk shirt is open to his waist revealing a rack of washboard abs and a smooth hairless chest. A silver pendant reminiscent of a cannabis leaf rests against the tanned skin. The trousers, a tight black leather with lacing at the hip, leave nothing to the imagination and reveal the tan to be natural and all the way down.

"Come in." he says. He gestures to the sofa that has obviously been left clear for you. "Settle down." His eyes run over you all, evaluating carefully.

He waits long enough for you to all sit.

"Now, just in case you are all clueless, let's do some introductions." He says. He gestures to the man in the bay. "Sheriff Ream is the law in this town." His hand swings to the man in White leather. "Sir Longarm is here in his role as representative of the Royal Court of the Faerie."

The man opens his eyes, revealing them to be amber in colour, and leans forward, pushing his hair behind the characteristic point of his ears. "Greetings."

"Behind him is Fidel." The man says. "Who is here on behalf of the Mages Council because..?" He

prompts

"Callum is tied up with a ritual at the moment." He shrugs. "You know how it is."

"Frankly no," the man dismisses, "I leave that sort of things to the lesser beings." He looks at you. His head twists slightly. "And I am Elijah Zander of the White Court." His mouth moves revealing perfect teeth. "But you will call me Prince."

He pauses letting his words impact and then says.

"So Gentlemen, and ladies. What could you possibly have done that requires four representatives of the High Council of the Covenant to come to this..." He looks round at the decor "... Truly amazing example of interior design?"

He stops his eyes fixing on you, slowly one eyebrow raises. Silence descends as they wait for you to reply.

After a few moments he adds. "Any ideas at all? Want to go for a wild stab in the dark?" His eyes settle on you. "Anything you feel the need to confess?"

There is a long pause.

He claps his hands once and straightens up. "Excellent. Ream. I suggest you brief them. I'm going to see if this places excuse for a kitchen has anything like a kettle and a tea pot."

He strides out from the room.

Fidel clearly relaxes. He comes out from behind Longarm's chair with a deep sigh. The Faerie shifts his sword and props it next to the fire. He sits up and stretches. "Yes Ream couldn't you wait until after he had fed?"

"No." Ream says. "This was too important." He looks at you. "You are being deputised. We have need of your skills."

"Which may give you some indication as to how desperate we are." Fidel says.

"Please Arch-Mage-apparent you are not inspiring them with confidence." Longarm teases looking up at him. "Where is Callum? Really?"

"Ritual." Fidel responds firmly. "A counter spell that is required in Speak. He said that if any one should ask, I should say Evil wizard did it."

"I just bet he did." Ream says darkly.

"Could we not have done this without the prince?" Fidel asks.

"Not where it concerns Clubland." Ream says. He looks at you. "Which is why we require you. Our people are known. You are not, or at least you are not known as minions of the Council. So..." his blue eyes fix on you. "We want you to go into Clubland, have a snoop round and let us know what is going on. Because I have been hearing rumours and what I have been hearing concerns me."

Longarm twists in his seat looking up at the sheriff in confusion.

"And they should concern you too." Ream says pointedly to the fae.

Elijah returns holding a tea bag up by one corner, extended from his finger as if it were a rat. "What is this?" he demands staring at you.

"It's a tea bag Prince." Fidel says flatly.

Elijah glares at Fidel then he throws his car keys at him. "You, baby-Mage, go to my car and get me my hamper. I will not use this." He shakes the teabag as if to kill it. "This is what brought down the Empire."

"Funny, that is just what we were discussing," Ream interrupts.

Elijah looks at him, his expression challenging him to explain.

"If there is any truth to what I have heard some one is planning a coup." Ream continues.

Longarm raises an eyebrow, "Against the Prince, the Fisher King or the Arch-Mage?"

"All." Ream says firmly. "Some one seeks to destroy to The Covenant."

"Ah." Longarm responds. He leans forward, looking more concerned. Then he looks up at Fidel still standing holding the keys. "Fidel, if you would be so kind, I recall the prince has a whiskey cask in that hamper, and," He glances up at Elijah pointedly, "I find myself in need of a stiff drink."

Fidel nods and slides out of the door, taking care to keep as far from the Prince as possible. Elijah watches him go, licking his lips suggestively. His eyes hood slightly as the Mage hurries away. The prince breathes in as if scenting the air where then man walked. He emits a soft low hum.

"Prince Elijah." Ream says firmly.

Elijah blinks and looks at him, a half smile on his lips.

"If we could just have your attention for a few moments more." Ream states.

"Of course." He says, "You need me to sign the authority of action." He holds out his hand. "Pen. Paper."

Ream reaches inside his jacket and pulls out a scroll of velum and an aged ink pen. Elijah takes it and leans on the fire place. He fills the lower quarter with an ornate signature of 'E. Zander, Prince'. He holds out the paper and pen to Ream. "There you can fill in the blanks."

"Do you do cheques too?" Longarm asks hopefully.

The Prince looks down at him and smiles. "Only the morning after darling." He pouts a kiss. "And even then only if you are L'Oréal."

He turns as Fidel reappears carrying a wicker picnic basket. The wizard lays it down on the floor and opens it. Then steps back and gasps at the contents. "Bloody hell I could get high just carrying that in!" He rubs his hands on his trouser legs as if to remove any contamination.

Inside is a vast array of tablets, vials, powders, blotters, herbs, flasks and bottle. Each is held in place by miniature leather straps. Elijah bends down and reaches beneath to a second layer, drawing out a couple of paper wraps. He looks from one to the other for a moment and then declares "Assam I think." He drops the remaining wraps into the hamper then he takes a small metal tea pot from the corner and

vanishes once more in the direction of the kitchen.

Longarm pushes the hamper towards you with his foot. "See anything you fancy?"

"Are you sure that is wise?" Ream says. "They do belong to the Prince."

"He would probably appreciate the snack at the moment." Longarm responds darkly. Then he sighs.

"Some one has to do the honours, we need him and he is useless as he is." He reaches down and with draws a small flask. As he opens them a strong scent of whiskey fills the room. Longarm helps himself to a sip and coughs at the strength. "Highland Park cask. Excellent. Mind you with the Prince I'd expect nothing less." He takes another longer sip before resealing it.

Elijah returns with the tea pot. He looks at the flask in the Faerie knight's hand and then moves closer to him.

Longarm looks up and smiles, his face twisted with inebriation from the strong drink.

"My prince." he whispers, his eyes slightly defocused.

Elijah breathes in deeply, as if inhaling the man's exhaled breath. His eyes flash silver. "Tasty." He says, a purr in his voice. Longarm arches his back, almost as if to expose his neck to the vampire's caress. Elijah reaches down with a delicate finger nail but before he can make more than the lightest of contacts Ream coughs. The Vampire shudders and pulls back, leaning on the fireplace to balance himself.

His fae almost victim sags back into the seat, the hair falling forward over his face. Longarm shakes his head slightly and blinks to clear his vision. Very deliberately he puts the flask down on the floor next to his feet.

"Most potent Sir Knight, Thank you." Elijah whispers as his eyes clear. The black iris return as he turns to Ream. "So Sheriff. This coup." Suddenly he seems so much more focused and serious. He pours the tea from the small pot into a matching cup. "How do we dissuade them?" He asks.

"First we have to find them." Ream responds. He turns and looks pointedly at you. "Of course when I say we...."

And suddenly the eyes of the four representatives of the High Council are on you.

What are you going to do?

Can't blame a girl for asking.

For a prison it is a remarkably nice cage, Angela reflects as she settles back into the arm chair and sips at the glass of wine. She had been warned in Manchester that it could be risky visiting Covenant grounds, but she needed to see the place for herself. The Cathedral had been amazing; a castle to god in red sandstone and ornate marble. She felt like an intruder walking through its high arched vaults. At any moment she felt the sleeping lords and ladies on their mausoleums might rise up and demand the peasant leave.

Leaving she had intended to head for the river, but made a rapid right turn when she spotted the Fou dogs across street. It was all too clear they were a lot more than statues. She could feel the spirits in them glaring at her threateningly as they marked the boundary to their lands. So she had not been surprised when her amble down the narrow alley called Wood Street had been interrupted by four men waiting for her outside an old inn. As being arrested went it had at least benefited from a nice view. Her captors were all good-looking, athletic, young men in tight biker leathers with a shoulder patch reading "Rare Breed". The exchange had been low key as they established her 'not exactly human then' status. The shortest one, with dark hair and a hint of an oriental fold to his eyes, had even given her his helmet so she could ride safely on the back of the bike. However she was sure that the calmness of the approach was mostly dictated by the passing tourists and, if she had chosen to put up a fight, it would have been very short.

She looks through the bars to the small office space on the other side. Two of the men who brought her in are still there. The man who donated his helmet - Cale - is clearly completing some paper work on her arrest. The other (tall, muscular, with mousy brown hair that flops over his forehead in an untidy fringe) is just looking at her curiously.

She returns his gaze for a moment and he smiles.

"Can I get you anything?" he asks. His accent is softer than she expected, but still clearly scouse.

She gestures to the finished lasagne and half empty glass of wine beside her and shakes her head. "No. No I'm fine. It was very nice thank you."

He nods. "So what are you doing in Scally land?"

She smiles. "Would you believe I'm just a tourist?" She asks, leaning forward slightly, to emphasis her cleavage.

He laughs. "Well we do get them. But..." He looks at her curiously. "You don't seem the type."

"I'm researching a book." She decides to come clean.

"Really? What on?"

"The supernatural." She says.

"There is a lot of those on the market, you sure it will sell?"

"It's not that type of book." She says.

"What type do you mean then?" He asks.

She nods. "Supernatural communities around the world. A guide for a Role Paying game."

"Accurate?" He asks.

She nods.

"And you want to include us." He states

"Well I'd like to." She says.

"You know." He twitches his head. "Can't see the council going for that. They don't like people remembering we are here."

"That's a shame." She says. "People do." She warns him. "Cheng Tze in Manchester was most informative."

His crosses his arms. "Really?" He says suspiciously. "And what did he have to say."

She can feel him calling her bluff. She grimaces. "That brother Tu Di Gong does not like visitors." She confesses.

"But you came anyway." He says.

"Yes." She nods, shifting her position slightly again, pushing the flirt. "I usually get what I want when I ask nicely."

To her surprise he leans back instead, his face fixed on her eyes and ignoring the 'delights' she is trying to tempt him with.

"You're wasting your time." Cale says, his comment almost dismissive. "Jake bats for the other team." He glances over from the paper work and then puts down his pen and leans back. "I however..." He smiles. "You can flirt with me all you want." He stares blatantly at her breasts, grinning.

"Tart." Jake says, the accent suddenly very sharp.

Cale looks up at him and beams. "Just doing my bit to continue to line, Bro. Given you're not, some one has to take up the slack."

She stands up, moving to the bars. "So what do I have to do to get out of here?" She asks.

The door at the top of the steps behind them opens and another man in leathers enters. There is enough of a similarity between the new arrival and Jake that she is sure they must be related. The two look at each other for a moment, a flick of confusion then Jake says "Simon, what are you doing here?"

"Your shift's over mate. Boss wants you back home." Simon responds. "Date night or something?"

Jake grins. He grabs his helmet.

"What about me?" Cale protests.

Jake nods to Angela. "There's your date pal." He winks and takes the steps two at a time.

Cale sags into the seat and glares at Simon. The man shrugs. "Hey I'm stuck here with you too." He points out. Then he looks over to their prisoner. There is a long pause as he studies her then he asks. "Can I get you anything?"

She gestures to the Lasagne and wine on the table behind her. "No I'm fine."

He nods. "So what are you doing in Scally land?"

She is hit with a horrible sense of De'Ja Vu and Cale says. "Yeah we did all that already." In a bored expression.

"Oh. Well if you are briefed." Simon says. He moves closer. "So what do you want to know?"

"Rare Breed?" Angela says. Nodding to the old crest on the wall behind him; its image identical to the patch on his shoulder. "What's that about?"

"Mortals bred and trained to take down supernaturals." He responds.

His honesty almost shocks her. All she can manage is "What?"

"When the covenant was first set up it was realised that they needed an independent group to enforce things and keep order. That was the Breed. I guess they wanted mortals because we die off fairly quickly, so we can never gain too much power." Simon explains.

It takes her a few moments to gather her thoughts. Obviously the rumours she had heard in Manchester were true, but to hear the 'confession' so quickly and from the lips of one of their own surprises her. She expected them to be more circumspect about such a thing. Not so blatant, and frankly proud of what they were doing.

"Why Rare Breed?" She manages, desperate to keep the conversation going.

He shrugs. "Because they breed us I guess. We come from the old families. The Pymys, The Stanleys, The Molyneux, The Cavendish. Families like that. For a long time the Covenant have been keeping track of those blood lines. Ream has books and books of our lineages in his office. Occasionally there is a bit of match making or arranged marriages going on, but its all to making sure the people that come out of them are competent and capable and ready for the task at hand. We are the best Humanity has to offer." He grins, a pride in his voice.

"Well best you can get out of scousers." Cale responds.

Simon looks at him grimacing. Cale holds up his hands in defence, "Hey I'm a scouser too."

"Yeah, half breed." Simon teases back.

Angela looks at them confused.

"My dads out of China, well technically Hong Kong, got out before they handed the place back." Cale explains.

"But," She nods to his jacket on the back of the chair, "you are Rare breed?" She asks, slightly confused.

"Mum was from the Stanley line." Cale nods. "And Tu Di Gong put in a word for my dad." He explains dismissively.

Angela looks impressed, knowing just what a compliment is hidden in the throw away line. She

knows from her conversations with the Community who protected her in Manchester that the leader of Liverpool's chinatown rarely speaks on any subject, let alone to recommend a mortal's suitability. She starts wondering what Cales father could have done to earn such an honour.

"They like to bring in out side blood occasionally." Simon says. He grins ruefully. "I mean we have a canoes and the river would be a bit embarrassing if we all took up the banjo."

She frowns at him.

"Deliverance." He hints, Then he shrugs. "Doesn't matter."

"The famous Scally whit is just lost on some people." Cale comments darkly.

"So what happens now?" Angela asks.

"You get to be our guest," Simon says. "And we answer what ever questions you have on the Covenant."

"And then?" She asks.

He looks at her, his face suddenly serious. He sniffs "Then you go before the court and depending on what you say to them..." He shrugs.

"You stay, you leave, or you die." Cale intones.

"Die?" Angela asks, shocked at the suggestion.

Cale nods. "If you are a danger to us." He stands up slowly. Even through the leathers she gets a sense of the strong precision in the muscles. Simons comments about the Breed being there to take down supernaturals haunts her thoughts. Cale looks at her, his dark eyes looking some how deadly; all trace of the jovial flirting she was enjoying earlier gone. He moves closer to her, standing just behind Simon.

She feels the blood drain from her face. "Oh."

"So you might want to have a serious reconsider about what you want write in that book for yours." Cale warns. "Casue that sounds pretty threatish to me."

"Book?" Simon asks, twisting to look at him.

"Yeah Pal." Cale says. "Way to go briefing the enemy." He pats Simon's shoulder sarcastically.

Simon openly grimaces at his mistake. "I thought you were just a tourist." He says.

"Watch ALL the tape next time." Cale says. "I need a piss, I'm sure you can finish the rest of the chapter for her whilst I'm gone." He heads for a small door at the far end of the room. Simon glares at Angela.

She shrugs. "You can't blame a girl for asking." She defends.

He shakes his head and stalks over to the desk, clearly annoyed with himself. Then he picks up his pen and carries on with the Paper work in silence.

Izzy Wizzy, let's get ... Paranoid mostly.

She is napping when the door opens again. It's Cale's voice that awakens her. A respectful "Sir." that carries into her 'cage.' She sits up, pulling her jacket around herself as the foot steps come down the short light of stairs from the door. The voice is cultured, a soft Irish accent, the figure that moves into view is short and portly, dressed in an old style three piece suit in a pale grey pin stripe. The shirt is a high collar, just the slightest triangle at the neck above the white tie. His hair is dark but greying, and cut to a classic short back and sides. His eyes are a soft grey and framed by metal rimmed spectacles which he pushes firmly up his nose as he peers at her. Then he smiles.

"The Sheriff asked me to pop in and say hello." He says, she guesses he is talking to Cale but he is looking at her. "A cup of tea would be nice."

Cale sighs and stands up. "Wouldn't it just?"

He walks over to her. His gaze moving up and down her body, as if studying every cell of her being. "And you would be Miss Hughes." He says.

She nods. "And you are?"

"Callum Doyle. Arch Mage to the High Council." He says. His face almost looks amused as he confesses to the title.

She looks at him cautiously, all to aware of Cale's earlier comments. "Are you here to interrogate me Mr Doyle."

"Well..." He smile fades as he responds. "That's not a word I like."

She nods knowingly.

"Tea." He says.

The comment confuses her.

"Have you had tea yet?"

"I've eaten." She says. She turns to gesture to the small table, but at some point whilst she was sleeping some one removed the tray.

"No." He says. "I meant the drink. Really you should try some Tea whilst you are here. I know the... stuff... they serve in your homeland is not worthy of the title. You owe it to yourself whilst you are in these shores to taste the best."

"I had green Tea in Manchester." She replies.

"Not the same." He says.

Cale arrives with a small pot and two china cups and places it on the corner of the desk.

"Ah thank you young man." Callum responds. He pours a splash of milk into each and then runs his finger around the saucer of the one nearest to her. His fingers move over it, a subtle shift in the way he is holding his hand but one that seems strangely familiar. He pours in the tea, it is a rich brown colour and fills the air with a surprisingly fragrant smell. "Ceann do na taephota agus ceann do-éirí leat." He whispers. He turns the cup and brushes his fingers

over the edge of the saucer. Then carries it over to her and holds the cup out, reaching through the bars so she can take it.

She stares at it.

He looks at her. "Please, it would be impolite to refuse hospitality." He prompts.

She takes it carefully and sniffs at it. He takes his own cup and sips it. "Yes." He places his cup down and carries over the chair from behind the desk. Cale glares at him behind his back and then moves over to the bottom step of the stair case, dropping on to it resentfully, like some school child sent to the naughty step for something he didn't do.

The Mage sits down close to the bars. She is struck by the fact that she could reach through the bars and grab him. Unbothered he lifts the drink and sips it again.

She sniff the tea suspiciously but there is no taint in it.

"Please my dear. You get your time in Court. It is one of the rules." He says. "You are under the protection of the Breed. I am hardly likely to poison a stranger under the nose of the sheriff, am I?"

She sips the fluid. The taste is stronger than the Green tea she was given in Manchester, less flowery and with a bitter tinge to the sides of her tongue. But it is very refreshing, more so than she expected.

He drains his own cup and puts it down.

"Now then." He says. "Formalities over." He titles his head on one side. "Explain to me what you are doing here."

She tells him. To her surprise he has heard of Role Playing Games, though he dismisses them as "those things the Apprentices do when they should be researching". He asks carefully about the other cities she has visited and her plans for recording them and what persuaded her to visit "This site of madness" as he refers to Liverpool. He presses her gently for what little she already knows. It is only when she talks of the Chinese in Manchester than his expression turns darker and he leans back.

"They told you of Tu Di Gong?" He says, there is an edge to his voice, the merest hint of anger.

She nods.

"I see." He stands. "Not Shen Jun Meng." He asks carefully.

"No. My contact was Tu Di Gong." She replies, confused about why so little a detail means so much to him. "I was told he was the man in charged."

"You are not of oriental descent though?" He asks.

She shakes her head. Then realises from his expression it had been intended as a rhetorical question.

"I am afraid dear Lady, you will need to be taken before the King." He says. He reaches up and removes his glasses. It is only as he does so that she realises there is no glass in the metal

frames. He folds them, his faces caught in an expression of deep thought and then slides them into the top pocket of his jacket, hooking the eat over the flap so they do not fall completely inside.

She frowns confused.

"I had hoped that in talking to you, I could unravel this, but your insistence on a connection to the Grandfather complicates matters.

"But I answered all your questions!" She objects. "I took your truth potion."

"Truth potion?" He looks at her confused, then a smile creeps to his lips and he only just suppress the laugh.

She gestures to the Tea Cup. "The Magic...." She states firmly.

"Just a little charm to guarantee the taste, My dear. One can never be sure that Thomas has not put the tea fund on a three legged horse again and forced the Breed to go shopping at Liddl." He says.

There is a snort of disgust from Cale. "That's Whitards finest mate." then a mumble of "We took the cash box key off him after last time."

She stops, her shoulders sagging. Suddenly feeling caught out. She was so sure he had cast some magic upon her to get her to answer his questions so completely. Now she realises she had just opened up of her own volition. That she had been flattered some one outside the group, had shown and interest in her project.

"Oh." She says.

He smiles at her, an almost fatherly expression. "It may be nothing, just some one in Manchester trying to cause trouble and using you are their bullet. Still we need to be sure."

"And me meeting this king will sort that." She asks.

"He has a way about him." Callum says carefully.

"OK then, bring him here."

Cale snorts again.

"Ah no. It does not work like that. We would need to take you to him. And for that we need to be sure of... things." The Arch Mage says. The smile fades into thought.

She swallows. The same subtle threat she felt earlier rising in her.

Cale stands checking his watch. "Have to make it quick Mr Doyle. Only an hour left till sunrise. You don't want to be trapped in the court all day."

Callum holds out a set of Keys, but his eyes are still firmly fixed on Angela. "Well then Mr Tien, if you could just bring round my car." He sighs. "And, young lady, we will see what Royalty makes of you."

Caught of the Faerie King.

Angela remembers the darkness, Callum's hand on her hand as she gripped his arm. The sensation of her feet moving. She is sure she walked up steps. After that... sitting may be? The sensation of a soft comfortable vibration against her legs and back. Then a coolness of night air around her arms and on her face as she walked again. More stairs and then....

Light. Bright light. A spot light shining on her and she has to shield her eyes from it. She is on a stage. Wooden boards, the noise of her foot steps echoing off distant walls. Callum's standing just at the edge of the light looking at her with concern.

"Are you alright? The Veil should be faded by now." He asks.

She blinks at him. The confusion clearing, "Veil?"

"Just a little illusion to keep your senses busy during the journey. After all we can not be too careful, can we?"

"I..." She looks round. "Where am I?"

He smiles.

A man walks into view, though she realises quickly he is not merely 'a man'. Tall, beautiful, ethereal almost, his long fair hair flicked back to reveal pointed ears. The eyes that fix her briefly appear as cat like slits before taking on a more 'normal' human roundness, though they remain a cat like amber. His clothes in white biker leathers, though these appear to be a far higher quality than those worn by the Breed. At his hip is a sword that glows softly in the darkness of the theatre. Captivated by the man, if Callum replies to her question, she does not hear it.

"So you are the visitor that has been causing such a stir." He says.

She hears herself stammer an apology of "I'm sorry." Before she realises she is speaking. She feels an over whelming desire to drop to her knees before him. She manages to contain it to simple lowering her gaze; unworthy of the blessing of looking upon his beauty.

"I did my best Longarm. But if she has a truth concealed in her, it is deeper than I can manage." Callum says.

"Even with soul gaze!" He challenges.

Callum coughs. "Yeah I didn't go that far." He admits.

"May be you should have done." Longarm chastises.

"I doubt it would show up." He defends. "Besides they would know it would be the first thing we would try."

"And so you didn't even bother." Longarm snaps.

"It is a two way street, Longarm." Callum points out. "Reveals as much of me to her as I would learn from it. I judged that too big a risk."

"But you seek to risk My Lord." Longarm retaliates.

“She is of no risk to Him.” Callum says pointedly. “It’s her sanity I’d fear for.”

“Well.” Longarm responds, his voice softer, the fury draining out of him. “I suppose that may be true. But you have fears...”

“She was with the Chinese in Manchester. They sent her to se Tu Di Gong.” Callum says, The elegant eyebrow of the Fairie lord raises. “Ah, and you think they may have planted something in her that may be of risk to The Grandfather.”

“Given what is going on.” Callum says. “It would be unfortunate if the Chinese delegation became distracted with their own internal problems.” His voice sounds hard. “And it is the Mancs. They have tried things before.”

“And we sent them packing.” Longarm dismisses

“Last time it was just the mortals, could be they have aid from other sources this time.” Callum councils

Longarm stops for a second as if shocked by the implications. The he nods. “I see your concern Arch Mage. And I agree.” He steps forward. Angela feels his hand on her chin, lifting her gaze to meet his own.

She blushes under his close attention.

“She would be a very distracting bomb.” He says.

“Bomb” Angela stammers. “I’m not...” She looks to Callum confused. “A bomb?”

The Arch Mage shrugs.

“You think I’m a Bomb?” She stresses.

“Well the Magical equivalent may be.” Longarm tells her. “I mean, If you were sent here openly, why did the Chinese of Manchester not tell us you were coming?”

“We can not afford to be too cautious. Especially at the moment.” Callum says. “So. You will take her to him?”

“I’ll take here. I am not sure if he is awake. Or even will show any interest.” Long arm says, Then he smiles. “Still its a pretty enough face for her kind. May be you will amuse him.”

“Him?” She asks.

“My Liege the Fisher King.” Long arm says.

“I thought You were the king.” She says.

He laughs, “No, child. I am just a Knight of the Court.” He offers his arm and she finds herself taking it, almost as if compelled.

He leads her out of the spot light, and whilst her eyes are still adjusting through the back of the stage. She stumbles in the darkness and has to grab his arm to stop herself falling. He pauses briefly.

“Of course I forget your kind do not have the sight in this shape do you?”

“You know what I am?” She says.

“Of course.” He says. “But there is no need for shame. We have many pets of many shape in the court. I am sure there is one here who will take you in if it is decided you should stay.”

“Stay!” She exclaims. “NO You don’t understand. I need to get home. There are people waiting for me.”

“My dear, if those in Manchester who seek us harm have used you they you can not leave. You would always be a danger to some one. But do not concern yourself. The Court has taken in many waif and strays over its time. You will find companionship here.”

She pulls her arm away from him, Stumbling back wards. It is all to clear they intend to imprison her here. She turns to run but only succeeds in colliding into soft cloth. It smells strongly of cheep perfume. She claws at it, her fear rising. Then suddenly there is sun light. She turns slowly, confused by the sharpness of her silhouette. The source is not some open door as she had prayed but the blade in the hand of the faerie Knight. He holds it high above his head, casting illumination into the small space. Around her she can see the cloth painted sheets, hard scenery flats and discarded props of the theatre. Behind him is a painted scene of a grassy hill topped by a fairy tale castle and for a fraction of a moment in the strange glow it seems all too real. In the moving shadows it almost looks as if the drawbridge is lowering.

He extends his other hand, his voice soft and welcoming. “Please Angela.” For a moment it sounds all to human and she has to remind herself of the eyes and the danger his kind represent.

She moves back away from him, trying to sink deeper into the scented cloth.

He signs, his drops his gaze for a moment and then slowly looks up at her, his body relaxes, his grip on the sword holding it more as a torch than the weapons of destruction it so clearly is. “Wolf-kin.” He says, his voice little more than a purr. “if we judged you only for for death you would never had made the Caverns cage. The breed are well trained and well briefed.” He pauses, it is less than a heart beat but it gives time for his words to sink into her mind. “As hard as it may seem to be to believe, we are trying to help you.” His wrist flicks as he offers his hand again.

She swallows.

There is a movement in the debris beside her, and despite herself she shrieks. As it shifts she realises that what she took for a manikin dressed in a discarded robe surrounded by years of accumulated rubbish is a man. Then as he looks at her she realises that she was wrong.

The Fisher King stands. His movement heralded by the sound of cascading aluminium cans and the chink of bottles. The air fills with the scent of stale beer and urine. She wrinkles her nose at the all too familiar scent of any city alley after closing time. He turns to her and she can see a fragment of a sweet wrapper adhering to the whiskers near his cheek. The blue

eyes glitter like sapphire.

"Take yer jacket off to nancy there and he'll hand yer yer arm ." The voice is old, rich, and shot through with a scouse accent. "Yer not playin tic in 'ere."

Angela blinks at him. Her mind trying to arrange the noises he has made into words that might mean something.

His brows drop as he stares at her. "Yer no mine."

"No my Liege. Ream and Callum sent her here. There is a problem with the Chinese."

"Then let chinky deal wi' it." The Fisher King dismisses.

Longarm coughs gentle. "But that is the problem Sire, If..."

The King moves, spinning on his spot. The cloak swings out, sending a cloud of fag ash and dirt into the air around them. The fragments glitter for a moment in the shafts of light from the sword. Then it slowly falls. There is the sound of a zipper being unzipped and the unmistakable sound of fluid flowing into a bottle.

Longarm grimaces. His eyes close in clear embarrassment at his Lords actions but he waits in silence until the king has dealt with his needs.

The king hands him a sealed bottle of dark brown glass which the knight takes with clear reluctance. "Bin on yer way out." The king commands.

"Yes Sir." Longarm says. The figure settles back into the pile of trash then he looks at Angela again.

"You mine?" He asks,

"No Sir." Long arm sighs again. "That is what I was explaining. Ream and Callum wish your advice as to whether she is a threat to Grandfather."

"Why would she be?" The King asks, still studying Angela. "Just a Bizzy Blouse this one. Not even a Jack."

"She came from Manchester."

"Traitor land. Stealer of ships." He grunts. "Gud Nutmeggin."

"Yes sir but we think she might be..." Longarm says,

"She's no muriel or mule, or blinder for that." The King declares, There is the sound of crunching cans as he settles back into his 'throne'. He looks at Longarm and eyes the bottle suspiciously. Then wrinkles his nose. "Dirty sod. Git rid of that."

Longarm grimaces clearly irritated at the kings accusation that the bottle is his. He turns to Angela. "Come on."

"But..." She turns to indicate to the Fisher king, but already the old man is snuggling down and his eyes are closing.

"Unless you want to be in here with him all day, we need to leave now." Longarm says. He strides up the stairs, dropping the bottle into a waste bin at the top.

Hoping some one will explain, Angela follows.

The Morning After Pill

Longarm pushes open the fire door and leads her out into a dirty alley. He stands for a moment, a shiver in his shoulder as if trying to throw off the dust and stench from the basement. He turns to her and smiles. "So?" He prompts.

She glares at him. "So?" She demands.

"You heard what he said, no muriel or mule, or blinder for that." Longarm says.

"But what does that mean?" She stresses.

Longarm sighs.

"It means you are not in charge of anything, nor are you carrying anything for another." The voice comes from to her right, towards the street. It purrs softly but still somehow manages to carry to her ears. He walks towards her, every step deliberate and precise. As he passes into the light above the fire door she can see him. Short dark hair, slightly spiked, his skin naturally tanned. Black eyes twinkling at her. The Black silk shirt and Leather trousers looks as if they are off next years catwalk. Nestling against his bare chest is a silver pendant in the shape of a Cannabis leaf. He looks her up and down. "Nor it seems are you one of mine, which is a pity, because..." He licks his lips.

"Angela, May I present Elijah Zander, Vampiric prince of our fair city." Long arm says. His tone warning.

Elijah pouts at him. "Oh spoil sport. And I was so looking forward to the chase."

"I'm not interested in Vampire." Angela says, crossing her arms and stepping back. "And I'm not running so there is nothing to chase."

Elijah's face twists into a more natural smile, the predator falling away. "So faerie boy, what did daddy have to say?"

Longarm growls back. "He is not my Father."

"Yeah right, thats not what he says." Elijah dismisses. He looks at Angela again. Studying her for a moment. "You are not his type." He states nodding to Longarm. He sniffs at her. "Too..."

"He stops. "He wont lower himself to anything less than a Changeling." His gaze turns back to Longarm teasingly. "So if she is not a fling, why are you taking her to see the old man."

Longarm sighs. "Elijah..." He warns

"If it's not Fae, it's Council." Elijah states. "As a council leader, I could command you to tell me."

Longarm looks up at the lightening sky. "Please..."

Elijah shrugs. Then he half turns. "Fine then pretty boy, keep your secrets and I'll keep mine." He snaps his fingers and two shapes move from the shadows nearer the road. As they

get closer Angela can see they are two stunning women; One a white blonds and the other whose hair is a midnight black. They are dressed high heels and almost transparent drifts of fabric that match the colour of their hair. He reaches over and pulls the blond over. As she leans in closer she looks up, exposing her neck. He licks along it, his tongue flicking at her chin. The brunette giggles almost as if she is the one being caressed. He turns his face back to Angela, his black eyes now silver. As they fade back to normal, he nods to the woman. "A Blinder." He says.

She frowns.

"It is what we call mortals who have given themselves to the addiction of serving the White Court." Longarm says. There is an edge in his voice, a hint of disgust.

The brunette looks at him. "You say that like it's a bad life." She moves over to Elijah, caressing his shoulder and nuzzling his hair. She moves round him so there flank him.

"We all have to die some time. That is why we are called Mortals." The Blond says. Her voice is almost identical to the Brunette's Now they are closer together Angela realises their faces are also close enough to be twins, the only difference is colour of the hair and the 'clothing'.

"But, if you are not going to play nicely Faerie boy." Elijah runs his hand over the white lace hip. "And after I went to all the trouble of bringing two." He muses. "Ohh well, I guess I'll just have to play with them both. Oh the hardship of being the prince!" He kisses the brunette forcefully. She laughs.

"Callum and Ream wanted her brought here." Longarm says. He almost spits out the words.

"They wanted to make sure she was not dangerous to Ti Du Gong."

"There. Was that so hard?" Elijah says. He lets go of the blond and pats her bottom, pushing her towards Longarm. She pouts at him but walks down the alley to join them. Angela watches confused as the woman leans against Longarm. She looks up at him and smiles.

"Hello daddy."

He sighs "How many have I told you not to play with aunty Wenn?" He says. From his tone he has said it many times before.

The Brunette blows him a kiss.

"But Daddy they are so much fun!" The blond pouts.

Elijah laughs and takes Wenn's hand. "Come on sister. We have work to do anyway, and they are boring." He turns and leads her off down the alley "Later Longarm." He waves without looking behind him.

Longarm sighs and shakes his head slightly as he watches Elijah and 'Aunty Wenn' leave. He looks at Angela. "I am sorry about that." He says. "The problem of such a close knit

community." He looks down at the blond still hanging onto his waist. "You end up related to the most unfortunate of people."

The Blond grins at him and then belches. Her eyes bleary. Suddenly it is all to clear she is very drunk.

"It seem I have to get this... young lady home to bed."

"What about me?" Angela asks, from the light in the sky she is sure she will have lost her hotel reservation.

"I'll take you back to Ream." Longarm says. "You are his problem now." He sighs as the blond slips on her high heels. "This one is mine and more than enough. I would wash my hands of her but..." He looks down and she can see a tenderness in his gaze that surprises her.

The girl giggles at her own inability to stand.

"My liege dictates otherwise." Longarm excuses. "In my past I abandoned my changelings who rejected the blood, but this city makes for strange bed fellows and sometimes politics dictate another course of action." He looks at Angela for a moment and she is sure he is going to say more, but something makes him hold his tongue. Instead he grimaces, and lifting the girl with a string grip under her arm, all but carries her out towards the city streets.

The Other Country Through The Gate

The small group stop at the top of Duke Street before the massive oriental Gate.

Cale looks at Ream and frowns. "I thought you said we were in a hurry?"

"Yes but I have no wish to be eaten either." He responds. He nods to the Foo Dog at the base of the gate. The statue has clearly shifted its head to gaze at them, its mouth caught in a half snarl.

Cale pales. "Oh Ok." He glances over to Angela. "You sure this is a good idea?"

"It is her defence, we would do a disservice to the court in not checking it out." Ream responds.

"But if she is a spy?" Cale whispers.

"Tu Di Gong will let us know." Ream responds firmly. He nods as a figure in red silks emerges from one of the narrow stone buildings inside the gate and walks up the street towards him.

"I'm not sure I'm the right person for this Boss." Cale hisses, "I mean I've not had much to do with that side of my family. What if..?"

"It is unlikely they will talk openly in front of one not of their blood." Ream snaps back under his breath. "Be still boy. Treat this as an opportunity. It is about time you learnt more of where you came from."

The Oriental pulls his coat straight and studies them all carefully before speaking. "Venerable Ream."

"Lord Shen." Ream responds.

"Tien Cale." Shen greets nodding at Cale.

The breed member manages a strangled "Sir" as he bows.

Shen turns his attention to the last member of the party "And Miss Hughes." His forehead shifts in a slight puzzlement. "You confused us when our guardians said you turned away from the gate. We were expecting you earlier."

"Oh." Angela says. She looks over to Ream and Cale.

"I hope the Sheriffs people were polite during your stay with them. It was unfortunate, but once you rejected our territories there was little we could do directly to guide you back."

"So You do know this woman then?" Ream asks.

"Of course. Grandfather has been in discussions with his counterpart in the port at the end of the river. We were asked to provide her with safe passage during her stay here, and to assist her research in so far as we are able."

Ream nods. "It may have been more expedient if you had informed the Council of this in advance." He chastises gently.

"Alas the communication arrived too late to take to the court, and it seemed such a little trifle to call an extraordinary meeting over." Shen apologises. He looks at Angela and smiles. "Still a pretty trifle none the less."

Ream watches him impassively. "The Council have rules that she be watched whilst she is in the city. I have assigned that duty to Cale here. Where She goes, He goes."

Shen laughs. "Of course. I expect nothing less. She is a delicate flower and an ambassador from a distant shore. You need to assure yourselves that no harm befalls her. The arrangement is acceptable." He looks between the two of them, his smile twists slightly. "And I foresee other benefits."

"Quite." Ream responds sharply, cutting down the speculation.

"Excellent. Well then." Shen offers his arm to Angela. "If you will come this way, The community have put on a welcoming party. It is so rare we get visitors and we do like to be hospitable."

Angela takes his arm nervously, and allows herself to be lead through the gate. She glances over her shoulder to Ream as he watched them go, trying to work out if he is hiding his concern well, or if he really does not care.

Cale zips up his biker leathers, for once glad of the armour. His hand drops to the pouch of materials on his hip and the short knife, the longest he can legally carry.

"They are your people Cale." Ream says gentle.

"Yeah boss, but right now," He glances at the still snarling Foo dog. "I'm not feeling the love."

The Ferry Across

The water laps at the side of the ferry as it pulls away from the dock. Angela looks back at the Pier head, taking a photo of the famous view of the waterfront buildings known as the Three Graces. As the shutter snaps Cale looks up, concerned she may be photographing him. It's the first positive response he has made since they left China town and An Bao helped him onto the boat.

"Are you alright?" She asks.

He manages a nod. Then he leans back. "Just trying to take it all in." He confesses. "I guess..." He stops and blinks up at her in the sunlight.

She sits down next to him and pats his leg. "I am glad you came with me." She assures him. "I don't know if I could have got through that on my own. They are very intense."

"Ditto." He manages. He looks back towards the city as the Ferry swings round and starts to chug across the current. "I'd guessed dad was important, but no one ever said how." He shudders for a second. "I guess outside china town they might not even know." He looks down at his knees. "I just wish I'd had chance to know him." She sits in silence not sure what to say. To her surprise he continues. "It's not all that uncommon in the Breed. Nature of the job. There are a lot of us who grew up orphans or missing a parent. Like me and Rick. But there is always some one to take you in. Ream is very careful about that. May be if it hadn't been so common I would have realised sooner. Asked some one about him." He looks over his shoulder at the receding city. "Gone there sooner."

"Will you go back?" She asks.

"Yeah, probably." Then he adds with a sigh. "If I'm allowed."

"Shen said he would see you later." She reminds him. Given the way they reacted, she is sure China town would be all too keen to welcome him 'home'.

He looks at her, and she can see a sadness in his eyes. "Might not be his choice." He says. "Breed are meant to be independent so..." He turns his eyes to the other side of the river and she can feel him turning his back on China town mentally as well as physically. "That might not go down too well."

She looks at him and the expression on his face as he buries his anticipated pain. It doesn't seem fair. She turns to look at the low grey buildings across the shining ribbon of silver. "So." She prompts, hoping to distract him from his dark thoughts. "Where next?"

"Your lot." He says.

"My lot?" She responds confused.

"Wolf-kin." He replies. He looks at her surprised face. "Sorry, am I not meant to know?"

She shrugs.

"Breed." He excuses. "Sorry but... well even under the perfume and soap... you smell of dog."

She glares at him. "What?"

"Well not smell as such." He responds as he tries to dig himself out of the hole, "It's more like a taste, but through the skin." He struggles to explain a sense he knows she does not have.

"I'm not racist." He says quickly. "I mean you can't help being born... that way... It's not your fault."

Her glare turns harder. "I wasn't born this way. I chose to be what I am." She says firmly.

He frowns at her, clearly confused. "What?"

"I leant to be..." She looks round the boat lowering her voice. "What I am."

He stares at her whilst she tries to give him the cold shoulder to make it clear how angry he has made her. Eventually he whispers "Weird. Why would you do that?"

She looks at him, her eyes flashing. "Because I wanted to make a difference. It was something I believed in." She hisses.

"What? Running around sniffing each others arses and peeing on lampposts?" He taunts.

She slaps him hard on the shoulder, her hand glancing off the patch on his leathers. It stings the back of her hand and she withdraws it sharply.

"Ow!" he protests. Rubbing his own arm.

She glares at him as she unconsciously licks the back of her hand to reduce the smarting feeling. "No protecting the planet." She growls. "You wouldn't understand."

He looks at her incredulously. "I wouldn't understand. Listen miss I put my life on the line every day for this city. When was the last time you took down a Ghoul!"

"Two years ago." She responds truthfully.

He stops looking at her. His expression changes, a look of begrudging respect. "Really?"

"Really." She says. "My pack and I, back where I live. It was attacking a friend of ours. We distracted it so he could kill it with his magic."

"Oh." He says.

The ferry turns lining up with the Birkenhead dock. It gives them another view across the river and towards the city. The sky line of buildings a silhouette against the white sky. The river is a dirty brown and no longer shining. She looks at him as he studies the sky line then he looks at her. "Chose it?" He echoes almost as if he is trying to grasp the concept.

She nods.

He sighs. "The only people who get a choice in this city are the changelings, and then its an all or nothing so most of them avoid making it. You are born wolf. Born Breed. Born Vampire. If you have some magical talent then Callum or one of the others will find you and teach you. Often whether you like it or not given how dangerous those skills can be without a focus." He looks towards the city, nodding to the two distinctive shapes that make up the Cathedrals; one an inverted funnel the other a finger to the sky, "Or God chooses you." He muses. "No one really gets a say in anything, you just do it."

He stands up as the boat bumps against the shore. He offers her his hand. She looks at it for a moment before taking it and standing. He leads her towards the off ramp.

"I'm sorry I took the piss." He says softly as they step onto dry land.

"It's ok. I guess I didn't understand how big the cultural difference is." She says.

He laughs, the tone almost bitter. "Yeah well, you guys are the land of the free not us." She nods.

There is a rumbling voice beside them. "Mr Tien. If you have quite finished with your propaganda."

Angela turns. The speaker is massive; approaching seven foot. He is a mass of muscle which quite literally blocks out the sun coming through the transparent curved roof. His face is all but obscured by a thick blond beard and nest of blond curls.

"Master Gunnar." Cale says, bowing his head slightly. His tone is remarkably respectful given his earlier reference to sniffing and lamp posts.

The man turns his gaze on Angela for a second, his expression flinching into the slightest of smiles. "Well met sister." He greets her.

"Hello." She replies nervously.

"I would have though a Pym would have been a more fitting escort." Gunnar complains looking at Cale. "Sending a Stanley is almost a declaration of war."

"Jake's busy." Cale responds pointedly.

The grunt from the man is only just short of a growl. "I do not acknowledge him." He steps forward towards Cale. His movement threatening but Cale stands his ground.

"Cale came with me to China Town." Angela defends quickly. "Tu Di Gong asked him to keep me safe during the rest of my stay."

Gunner looks at her. "Really." He inhales sharply. "Well they say the old man is almost as mad as the king."

Cale's eyes narrow at the insult. His hand drifts closer to the pouch on his hip.

"But we all know how much wisdom there is in the madness." Gunnar follows up quickly. He looks down at Cale. "Well then Stanley. Keep the peace and laws of hospitality and you can have safe passage whilst you guard my sister. But don't come this side of the river again with out a deed of action from the council."

"Sir." Cale almost spits out the word.

"This way sister. Let us show you the wolves of the old country, so you may have pride in the person you are." He leads them up the ramp to a waiting van.

And The Ferry Back

The ferry takes them back again. This time the sun is on the Three Graces and the place they are leaving seems clouded. Angela sits deep in though as the boat bounces over the waves. Eventually Cale can stand the silence no longer.

"Are you alright?" He asks. Echoing her own question on the way over.

"I don't know." She confesses. She looks over her shoulder at the small army that had escorted them back to the ferry terminal. "I expected something different." She confesses. She looks at Cale.

"Choice?" He suggests.

"I think its more than that." She says. "They seem so..." She shudders.

"Bigoted?" He offers.

"They are nothing like my pack at home." She says. Then he frowns. "No thats not true. They are but only in some very basic ways. We support each other like they do, but after that." Her shoulders shake, a shudder. "What they said about the Lycanthropes and Loups. Calling them throwbacks and saying if he had his way he would have them all killed at birth. It was barbaric." She glares back at the men on the dock. "I've know a Loup. It was a curse. He was a good man despite of it. He never deserved that."

"Its not just them they hate." Cale says softly.

She nods. "Jake Pym. He was with you when you picked me up. The man who talked to me first."

Cale nods. "Jake and his bro Simon."

"They are your friends." She says.

He nods. "And more. You get close in the Breed you have to. Survival depends on it."

"Why do they hate him so much?"

"He is gay." Cale says

"Must be more than that." She responds.

He shakes his head. "No thats enough." He leans forward. "The way they see it. you have a responsibility to have kids, to carry on the lines. Being gay gets in the way of that so." He shrugs. "To them Jake is failing in his duty. And for the wolves that is a crime worse than..." He stops trying to think of something relevant. "Genocide?" He guesses. "All those offspring that will never exist."

"But you don't think that?" She asks.

"Gods no." He responds. "Like I said, leaves more women for me." He smiles at her teasingly. "Besides Breed are more high tech than wolves, and Ream is carefully with the blood lines. We all get to wank into a bottle before we first see active service, just in case."

"EWWW." She recalls, "TMI Cale."

He laughs. "Seriously one way or another their will be little Jakes one day. May already be some, seeing as Ream doesn't need to wait to see if he manages on their own, given how impossible that would be! Bottom line, he doesn't have to bother about it. The only time it annoys me is when his boyfriend lets him off duty when the rest of us have to work late just because he fancies a shag."

"Like last night?" She asks, recalling how Simon relieved Jake which the words 'date night'.

Cale nods. "Upside of bonking the boss I guess."

Angela frowns. "Jake is sleeping with Ream?"

Cale laughs out loud, obviously amused at the idea. "No." He says. "Jake is with Bri. Brian is our dispatcher. He decided what jobs we go to."

"Like the police." She says.

"Just like the police." He confirms. "That's what we are, the fifth emergency service."

"Fourth." She corrects him.

He shakes his head. "Fourth is a the coast guard. We're a port remember." He pauses, his eyes cast down to the water. A frown drifts across his face.

Confused she follows his gaze. "What?"

Then she sees it, a body in the water. A woman in a long grey dress floating on the surface as if being dragged along by the wake of the ship. She turns to yell but his hand reaches up to her and pulls her down. "Quiet." He commands.

"But." She looks back down, the body has rolled over and is looking up at them.

"She could drown." She says, even though it is clearly not the case.

The woman moves, her body arching and then she sinks deep into the mirk of the river. As her legs touch the surface she flicks them, causing a splash in the river that arches up and catches Cale on the side of the face.

"What was that?" She asks

"River witch." He says. He almost sounds scared. "I guess I should have anticipated this. You spoke to the wolves, they will want to get their edge in."

"I don't understand." She says.

He looks at her for a moment. "I think I should let Shannon explain." He says.

"Anything I say will just be horribly misogynistic." He responds bitterly.

She frowns at him. "What do you mean Cale?"

"Well if you though I was uncomfortable with the Wolves, you've not seen nothing yet."

The boat docks and as they come off a short rotund woman, her grey hair done up in a tight bun, all but blocks their way. She smiles at Angela and then glares at Cale.

"Young Man. Why did you expose this poor girl to Gunnar's goons?"

He sighs. "I was told to take her their by grandfather."

"No excuse. She should have come to us." The woman snaps. "I suppose you would have left us out completely if my girls had not been so observant."

"No Miss Shannon, I am sure Ream would have..."

"Ream, what would he know." She grumbles. "He is the worst of the lot."

She offers her arm to Angela and her smile reappears. "Come on my dear. Let me show you real scouse hospitality."

"Well actually Cale is meant to stay with me." Angela says.

Cale looks at her, his eyes widening almost with fear. He tries to shake is head in protest.

"Really." Shannon responds. "Well if He Must He Must." She commands.

Cales shoulders sag; an air of defeat about him.

"Come then Breed. If you are Bulldog for the day, keep to heal." Shannon instructs as she leads Angela towards a waiting minibus with "River-view Day Care" plastered along the side in large colourful letters.

The building Angela is taken to is a large newly built brick construction on the water front. They drive through a security gate and a large female guard glares at Cale until Shannon assures her that he is with them.

Inside the complex appears to be a collection of flats with a large communal garden and play area. Looking round it takes her a few moments to realise that all the adults are female. Even amongst the children there are few male older than ten. Everywhere there is the sound of children playing and women gossiping. That is until Cale gets out of the mini bus. Suddenly the space is silent, the adults staring at him with expressions of disgust and the children edging closer to their mothers.

"Bloody marvellous." Cale mumbles.

"Do not cuss." Shannon chastise. "I will not have the children learning violent tongue from you Breed member."

Shannon leads them both over to a small office in one corner, as Cale moves inside Angela can hear the noise of play and chat starting up again. She looks at him curiously.

"Its the y chromosome." He says pointedly.

"A curse of birth, you can not blame him." Shannon says. Her comment is so reminiscent of Cales previous statement on the boat that Angela laughs.

"Something funny my dear?" Shannon asks.

"No. Not really." Angela admits. She nod through the window to the action in the garden. "Why did they behave that way?"

"Men are not trusted here. Most of my girls have escaped violent partners or fathers."

We offer them a safe haven. When it is breached it can be unsettling.” Angela looks at Cale. He just shrugs. “I guess when all is said and done I am a man of violence.”

“All men are violent.” Shannon says. “It is their nature and their curse. We can pity them, but we can not cure them of it. No matter how hard we try.”

“And what are you?” Angela asks.

“Selkie.” Cale says.

Shannon slaps him. The blow comes from nowhere and catches him across the face. Despite all his training he does not have chance to react it is so sudden and unexpected. He sits in shock for a moment before slowly starting to move his jaw. Eventually he remembers to say “Ow.”

“You do not use that term in front of me.” Shannon glares, her accent suddenly strongly Irish. “I am no whore who drowns her husband for his wealth.”

Cale reaches for his jaw, feeling it almost as if he is checking it has not been dislocated. “Ok. Point taken. Sorry.” He says.

Shannon looks at Angela. “We are the river witches.” She glares at Cale as if her look itself can impress the term into his mind. “And we are the guardians of the river and the mothers who depend on its waters.” She snaps at Cale. “And don’t you ever forget it Hu-Man.”

Have Some Faith.

“That is a cathedral?” Angela asks, staring up at the strangely conical concrete structure. “I thought it was a night club.” She looks behind her down Hope street to the Sandstone castle she toured when she firsts arrived in the city. She cannot think of two buildings more opposite.

“Oh yeah.” Cale lifts his face to the sky and starts to sing. “In my Liverpool Home, In my Liverpool Home, We speak with an accent exceedingly rare, Meet under a statue exceedingly bare, And if you want a Cathedral, we’ve got one that looks like the atmosphere re-processor from Aliens...”

“I don’t want to be a critic Pal, but I think the original scanned better.” The priest says as he strides across the flat white concrete towards them. He is a stocky man, almost a mass of muscle, and it is clear his nose has been broken more than once. The eyes are a soft green and twinkle with hidden mischief that Angela is sure is not appropriate in the expression of a ‘man of god’ as his clothing so clearly marks him out to be.

Cale looks at him and smiles, he offers his hand “Father Mackenzie. Good to see you again.”

“The Father MacKenzie?” Angela asks. “Like in the song?”

“Aye lass. We come in six packs.” The Priest dead pans back as he shakes. “Come on in and tell me your troubles. Because, like cathedrals, we’ve got plenty to share in this town.”

Slightly to Angela’s disappointment, the priest leads them down a small set of steps away from the cathedral and towards a square white building.

“The good sheriff said you needed some where to hold up for the day. A chance to rest?” The Priest asks.

“For Angela yes.” Cale responds. “It’s not like I can take her back to my digs.”

The Priest nods. “I’m sure the sisters will make her most welcome. Though I should warn you. Worship starts at 10.” He turns to Angel and grins. “Early kick off.”

She frowns.

“A local derby today.” Cale says.

Father MacKenzie pushes open the door. The noise coming from the room beyond is not what Angela expected of a convent. Inside the lounge has been covered in red and blue scarfs. A large flat screen TV dragged into the middle of the room. Before it, almost like an altar is a coffee table groaning with ‘chips and dips’ and cans of beer. The women in the room are all dressed in the classic black and white ‘penguin’ costumes of Catholic nuns. Only their habits have been adorned with rosettes and scarfs declaring their allegiance to ‘Everton’ or ‘Liverpool’. The conversation is buzzing with excitement as they discuss the players and tactics and anticipate the sport to come.

Angela stands in the door way caught in confusion. “Erm...” She manages.

Father Mackenzie leads her in. “Sisters, You’ll be having room for one more I hope?”

A portly looking nun places a bowl of snacks on the table and walks over to them. As she speaks her accent is shot through with a strong taint of Belfast. “Of course Alan, more

than happy." She holds out her hand. "I am sister Immaculate Conception. But you can call me Immy, every one else does." She laughs.

Angela takes her hand "Thank you, I'm Angela..."

"Ah what a nice name. And you're from the states." Immy says as she drags Angela into the room by her hand. "Let me guess, Michigan? Am I right? Close enough from your face. I was in retreat with a nice young girl from Illinois for three years so I know that part of the world quite well. She was a lovely girl, lovely girl. So dedicated to Our lord. And played a mean ukulele too. Now come on in and we'll explain it all to you. This is not that rubbish with the pads and grunting you play over there. This is the real thing..."

Cale and Father Mackenzie retreat and leave Angela in the safe care of the nuns and to be illuminated on the mysteries of the offside rule.

Welcome to Clubland, leave your sanity at the door
and we'll all get on just fine.

The sun is setting by the time she leaves the safety of the convent. Angela blinks at the sky the days sleep leaving her feeling disorientated and jet lagged. She smiles as she spots Cale leaning against his motorbike, clearly waiting for her. He holds out a spare helmet.

"So what does my white knight have planned for me tonight then?" She teases him.

"Please, I'm no Longarm and wouldn't want to be." He grimaces back. Then he takes a deep breath in and looks at her. "There is some where." He says, his voice is almost reluctant.

She challenges him to go on.

"We're party city." He says, again he does not sound thrilled. "Ravers, stuff like that."

"Supernatural?" She asks.

He laughs, "Well we've got more than our fair share of White court changelings and sorcerers who like to party; you work it out." He responds sarcastically.

"So something that should be in my guide then." She points out.

He shrugs. "I guess."

She looks at him pointedly. "So."

"Its not safe." He says.

She crosses her arms.

"Look, the rest of the guys are part of our scene." He taps the badge on his shoulder, "This demands respect, But the clubs, they are full of boxed mortals, out of their tits on Bombers and E. It could turn nasty real quick and..."

"You're scared." She interrupts.

His face turns dark. "No!" He refutes.

She tilts her head in a soft challenge to his denial.

"I cant be sure of the back up. I don't have any authority there. It's not like taking you to the wolves, or even the Sel... River witches. They wouldn't try anything because they know there would be repercussions. You can't trust mortals, they don't know the rules."

She laughs. It is a loud and honest laugh. She doesn't mean to but she is sure he has missed the irony inherent in what he has just said.

He looks at her, confused and hurt by her reaction.

She slaps his shoulder with the back of her hand. "Stop being a wuss Cale. You owe me a night on the town."

He sags.

She steps closer. "If it would make you feel better you can tell every one you are my date."
He looks up a grins. As he pulls on his helmet she is sure there is a twinkle in his eye.

The club is heaving. She didn't manage to catch the name on the way in to the converted warehouse, and when she tried to asks Cale he said it didn't matter because it changes so often anyway. The dance floor is packed with a seething mass of flesh gyrating to the steady thump of the music which threatens to embed itself in her brain. Cale grabs her wrist and drags her forward. Under any other circumstance she would object but she know it is the only way they can make it through the crowd without loosing each other.

The dancers rub against her. She can smell their arousal in their sweat and the intoxication on their breaths. Some of them seem barely conscious of their surroundings they are so lost in the sound and rhythm. One girl reaches for her, laughing, her eyes defocused, She tries to pull her into the knot of bodies as she calls her Trace and demands to know "where yer bin love?"

Cale moves between them, pushing the woman back into the throng, his mouth in a twisted grimace as he states. "Wrong woman." Then he drags Angela on.

They find the closest thing they can to a quiet corner; a space near the toilets where the walls disrupt the sound of the music and give it strange after echoes. As he gives her time to catch her breath she can hear some on in the toilets being violently sick.

She looks at him, suddenly understanding his reluctance.

"Hey you were the one who insisted." He defends.

The crowd on the dance floor parts. Cale frowns and turns as if sensing it. A figure strides through the gap that appears to have come about by some random chance in the dancers gyrations and closes up behind her after wards. The woman is a stunning red head; long loose plaits seem to inter weave into the string dress draped over her in a mockery of decency. She stops looking at them both for a second, a wry smile on her face. Then she focuses on Cale.

"You better not be here to cause trouble Bull dog."

"Cassandra." He greets her.

She turns her face on Angela. Then she smiles as if in recognition. "Ahh the tourist."

"You know about me?" Angela asks.

Cassandra laughs. "Darlin, yer famous." She responds in a forced version of the accent. She swings her arm round pointing up to an upper level half concealed by a white drape. "Come

on," He voice drops to much more refined tones. "Let me rise you above the plebeians." She turns to look at Cale. "You can even bring the Bull dog." She says. "As long as you promise to popper scoop him."

Cale grunts in protest at the insult but follows her as she leads Angela back through the dancers and into the V.I.P zone.

"Interesting you should come here tonight." Cassandra says as she pulls back the drapes.

Inside is a brightly lit area covered in colourful swathes of cotton and latex. It is hard to see which of the undulations are cushions for sitting and which are more solid tables. In the centre is a deep bowl jacuzzi bubbling with warm water, changing colours as the lights beneath the surface strobe. Relaxing amongst the bubbles is a young man. Angela would put him at barely more than nineteen. His hand is playing in a bowl of brightly coloured tablets, spinning them round with his finger tips.

Cassandra waves to him as she heads for a small but well stocked mini-bar. "Don't mind G-Man, he's just finishing up."

Finishing what?" Angela asks

"His ritual." Cassandra replies. She turns holding out a cocktail of pink froth. She presents it to Angela.

"Ritual?" Angela presses.

Cassandra offers the drink again "Surely you wont refuse my hospitality?"

"I'm not sure I'm not in fairy land." Angela retorts nodding round at the decor.

G-Man laughs loudly at her comment. He rises from the jacuzzi, taking Cassandra drink himself. "Looks like she has you well peg Cas." He sips the drink. "Ohh, that hits the spot."

Cassandra glares at him. "Have you finished?" She says nodding to the tablet.

"Yeah hours ago, I was just chillin'" He replies. He reaches out and lifts a swathe of dark blue cotton, revealing it to be a bath robe. He pulls it on and ties the belt. Then he nods to Cale.

"Tien."

"Massen."

"Want a drink?" G-Man offers.

"Can I fix it myself?" Cale asks.

The Sorcerer smiles. "Why don't you trust me?"

Cale nods to the bowl of tables. "If I said yes you wouldn't believe me."

"Play nicely boys or I will make you take it outside." Cassandra says.

"Yeah help yourself." G-Man replies, gesturing to the drinks cabinet, Cale goes to

investigate. The Sorcerer moves away and drops into the cushions. He looks up at Angela curiously. "So come for Trials night then? Take a pew."

She frowns at him. "Trials night?"

Cassandra bends down and lifts the bowl of tablets. "Yes darling. Like I said this is a fortuitous day for your visit." She holds up the bowl, lifting it to the light almost as if in an act of worship.

"It's why we're so busy." G-Man continues nodding to the window and the club beyond. "The gangs all here."

"What for?" Angel asks

G-Man laughs. "A chance to be the first, the freebie, the bragging rights." He shrugs pointing to the party outside. "Ask them."

Cassandra lowers the bowl, clutching it to her chest. Her eyes flash, a hint of skirting on the edge of sanity. "For this." She says, looking down at the tablets with the tenderness of a mother looking at her child.

"So what's so special about this one?" Cale asks.

Angela glances over, he has dug out a can of soft drink and is clearly checking the seal suspiciously.

"Ah." G-Man respond. "This one we are calling Unity."

"Yeah Nice. Now for the real answer Massen. What's it do?" Cale presses.

Cassandra lifts out one of the blue shiny disks. "A demonstration would be better than words." She lifts it, letting it spin between her finger nails. Her eyes focus past it on Angela. "Don't worry darling. Its completely safe." She says. "We have thoroughly tested it. Even on your kind."

"Can't imagine you would find any one in the wolves interested in drug trails." Angela responds, recalling Gunnar's attitude to 'the Gomorra across the water.'

"Wolves no. Of course not. But they are far from the only game in town." G-Man replies. He stands slowly then moves over and dips his hand into the bowl. Carefully he draws out one tablet and hold it up. Then with a swift snapping movement he flicks it in the air and tilts his head back to catch it in his mouth. He chews it grinning, giving them a full view of the fragments adhering to his teeth before he licks them off.

Cassandra holds out the tablet to Angela "It needs at least two for its full effect."

"You take it." Cale says.

"But then who would be left to explain." She responds.

"Fuck it," G-Man declares. "Lets get the show rolling." He grabs the bowl and walks out onto

the balcony above the dance floor. The music fades away leaving an silence of anticipation.

"My peps." He announces. "Welcome to Emyren. By now I guess you all know the score..."

He leans forward grinning down to the crowd. "But in case we have any Virgins in to night."

The club erupts into screams of pleasure and cat calls. "Lets make it clear." He points to the far end. "Dominic. Lock the doors!"

A cheer goes up as there is a sound of slamming locks all over the building.

"Excellent, so we are already." He turns and grins at Cassandra, but she manages only a sly sneer back at him. "Rules are as usual. One Tab each. Enjoy and indulge. Any problems or you see some one else struggling..." He waves his hand over to the right hand side. "Straight to the chill out. No heroics here." He waves his hand to the left. "Your way out is through customer feedback." He holds out the bowl briefly and then grabs it back. "And people. It should go with out saying. But eat what you take. Any one trying anything clever will have to answer to Da Boyz. And we didn't have time to feed them tonight so..." He shrugs. Then he holds up the bowl again. "We all clear."

The Yes echoes off the walls, bounding around in the enclosed space.

There is a clanking noise, a large shallow disk rolls towards him at his head level. The excitement runs through the crowd as they watch it approach the bowl. The thrumming beat of feet and the call of "G. Man. G. Man. G. Man" fills the darkness. He pours the bowl in, the tablet rattling like rain as the roll down into the disk.

"Enjoy." He commands as the disk slides away from him, and then drops to the head height of the crowd.

As the hands reach in to grab the delights it contains G-Man returns to the VIP booth and drops into the cushions again. He sighs deeply. "Oh yeah there it goes."

"So." Cale stresses. "What does it do Cassandra?"

She hold out the remaining table in her hand. "Find out first hand."

"How dumb do you think I am?" He responds.

"Very Tien. Other wise you would have thrown your lot in with us years ago when we first offered. Instead you are a Bulldog whilst we have..." She gestures to the surroundings

"Wow exclusive access to M&S bedding seconds department, yeah you are right, what a mistake that was." Cale responds flatly.

She glares at him.

"I've asked three times, you owe me an answer." He stresses.

"Unity." G-Man sighs. "You should feel what I feel, take what I take." He sings

"What?" Cale presses.

"The potion provides a sensory link between the users of the same batch." Cassandra says. She grins. "Make sex amazing." She turns to the club where the music has started again. "And of course gives you the ability to be one with the crowd."

"E plus." G-Man giggles. Then he sighs "This is shite. I gotta dance." He leaps to his feet and heads out onto the balcony.

"And you give it away free?" Angela says.

Cassandra laughs. "No. This is trials night, every one gets a sample. We get to make sure its safe for public consumption, make sure there is no group out there that react badly to it, and then they tell their friend about it and then... Well marketing isn't it." She sighs looking at Cale. "I mean its not like we can advertise on Radio city is it."

"Not again." Cale agrees darkly.

Cassandra smiles at him. "They are all mortal and all willing. Its not like we are breaking any laws, but I guess you will have to run back to chief piggy Ream and tell him what the naughty Drug mages are up to wont you Bull dog."

"Not necessarily." Cale responds. There is a hint of amusement in his voice now. Then to Angela's amazement he walks past her and takes the tablet out of Cassandra hand. He throws it to the back of his throat and washes it down before handing the can of drink to Cassandra.

"But..." Angela starts confused.

"Thats the thing about the Breed." Cassandra says, still looking at Cale. "Best humanity has to offer, but at the end of the day they are still fucking Scousers." She grabs Cales head and kisses him forcefully. He puts up no resistance. As their lips part she laughs. "Jesus Pretty boy, you are so fucking lucky I'm not White Court."

Cale just smirks. "I know you too well Cas." He darts another kiss again and then pulls away from her, dropping on to the cushions. He looks out onto the balcony at the Sorcerer gyrating before his worshipers. There is admiration in Cales eyes. "You know Massen, I think you have excelled yourself with this one." He shouts.

The drug mage yells back "We aim to please Caley boy, We aim to please."

Knock Knock

Angela settles on the cushion next to Cale and looks at him in disbelief. Cassandra has abandoned them in response to a phone call and G-Man jumped off the balcony into the embrace of his fans around half an hour earlier. They are alone, but the noise of the club is all too loud.

He look over at her and smiles, his eyes swimming from the effects of the drug he has taken.

"I can't believe you did that!" She hisses.

"Did what?" He frowns.

"Got off your head." She snaps. "What happened to looking after me?"

He sits up frowning. "What do you mean. Were in a lock in, Massen's security is better than the breeds. We are safer here than in the lock up."

She glares at him. "You took the drug."

"Yeah. And?" He responds.

She shakes her head and turns away for him. He rolls towards her, wrapping his arms round her shoulder and thrown is leg over hers.

"Lighten up princess." He purrs.

"Let go of me." She snaps.

"Ahh, our first lovers tiff." He giggles. "Come here and we'll kiss and make up."

She pushes him away, to her surprise it take most of her strength. "I am not your girlfriend."

"Oh come on, you said you would be my date if I brought you here." He points out, spreading his arms wide to beg her to come back to the hug.

She stands and moves away from him. Crossing her arms and glaring at him. He sits up and leans forward. She sees him shake his head "Fine your no fucking fun anyway." Suddenly his eyes are clear, all trace of the intoxication vanishing.

She frowns at him as he stands. "How?"

He just tilts his head and points at his own chest. "Best humanity has to offer." He reminds her. "Improved liver and kidney systems. I can clear most things out of my system in a couple of minutes if I have to." He lifts his hand to his mouth and belches loudly "Squse me." There is a strong smell in the air, vaguely chemical.

Angela steps back, her nose wrinkling at the stink.

"Has its down side." He apologises. He sighs and looks at her for a moment before stating,

"Massen's on to a winner with that one. My guess is he will be a very wealthy man by the summer term, if he takes things easy and doesn't annoy the wrong people."

"You know him?" She says

Cale nods. "Grew up on the same street as kids, ran as the same gang. But I was breed and him and Cas aren't so." He shrugs.

"That is why you turned down the offer she talked about?"

He nods. "Cassandra and I" he starts, then he stops and just says, "It would never have lasted. She's Wyldfae. Kind of lies outside the job specs."

"What kind of street has a Wizard, a changeling and what ever you are living in it?" She says.

He laughs. "Elswick." He shrugs. "It's this city Angela, you not got it yet? I don't know what the proportion is out there in the big wide world but this place is a magnet for the weirdo." He gestures to the balcony. "I mean take a look at that lot, most of them ain't local, they are students, drawn here by... I don't know, what ever it is this city does to pull them in. Like my dad. You are the lot that say 'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.' We just have 'Your'll never walk alone so welcome to the pleasure dome'." He looks over to the balcony, looking down into the club, his face twisted into a smile of satisfaction. "This is the 'pool, love. You want to see us for all we are, this is what you should be looking at."

She steps towards him, intrigued but before she can take a second step there is a loud crash. The sound system fails and the house lights snaps up. A voice speaking through a mega phone yells

"This is a raid. You are all under arrest."

"Ah bollocks." Cale swears. Suddenly he is beside her, his hand on her wrist and gripping it firmly again, He heads towards the back of the room, pushing the mini bar our of the way, His hand grab the sheets and pulls them down. Behind the fabric is a metal fire door which gives way as he kicks the bar. She start to follow him into the narrow stairway beyond but stops as she collides with his back. Slowly his hands raise.

"Well, well well, Cale Tien." A voice says in the darkness. "These days, I thought you had more sense."

Cale places his hands on his head and turns round. He grimaces apologetically at Angela. Some one behind him snaps on a pair of a hand cuffs, and then drags him backwards by the shoulder.

The torch light shines in her eyes briefly. "You I don't know. Do I need to cuff you or will you come along quietly?"

"She'll come quietly Naseby." Cale says.

"That's Sargent Naseby to you." The voice spits. "You're mushed Kid."

They are pushed down the steps and into the back of a small van. After a few moments more of the club's clients are added and once the van is declares clear it pulls away. Angela looks round the collection of humanity. Most of them are still under the influence of the drug and their collective fear is almost palpable. Cale just leans back as far as he can, staring up at the roof.

"So this a typical end to a night out in liverpool then?" Angela asks.

He looks at her and grins. "If I said no, you'd think I was lying." He says. He glances over to the people packed in the van with them, nodding to a small man at the end.

"How you doing Skeller?"

"Tien. Been better." The man responds.

Cale looks round the mortals, shivering and leaning against each other for support.

"Sickening thing is I'd only just got in." The man continues. "I was hoping for a top up."

Cales gaze snaps back to him. "This is not the place." He says firmly.

The man shudders. "Yeah. Not sure I have much control over that."

"Crap." Cale says. He looks at Angela, his gaze almost accusative. "And you had to get me to clear my system."

"Why whats wrong?" She asks,

"I'm hungry." Skeller says, there is a growl in his voice.

"I've got a bar of chocolate in my pocket." Angela offers.

"Not that kind of hungry." Cale and Skeller respond simultaneously.

Angela looks at the man. His eyes flash silver and he shudders.

"Bloody hell." Cale exclaims. He throws himself down the narrow gap in the van, hampered by his hands will cuffed behind him. His shoulder impacts against the vampire.

The man hisses at him, his skin turning pale.

Cale swears again and then head butts the vampire, the impact throwing Skeller's head back against the side of the van. The girl next to him screams and there is a shout from the front of the van. Cale slumps over the unconscious vampire, dizzy from the impact.

As the Van pulls to a halt Angela grabs him and some how managed to manhandle him back into his place opposite her.

The police man opens the van door. "What are you lot playing at?"

Skeller slumps against him, falling out onto the road. "Ah fuckinell sarge." The copper protests. "Looks like we've got an OD." He pulls Skeller clear and locks up the van They sit listening to the sound of the call to the ambulance and the traffic as Cale slowly recovers.

The bruise on Cales head is examined by the desk Sargent as he eyes the police that brought him in suspiciously. He makes a point of asking if Sargent Neseby was involved and seems surprised when Cale shakes his head. To Angela's surprise they are both shown into the same interview room rather than down to the cells, where the rest of the clubgoers are heading. After ten minutes the door opens and she is shocked to see Sheriff Ream standing in the door way. He looks over them both with a professional air all to fitting to the location and then asks. "You ok?"

"Bit of a headache sir." Cale responds as Ream enters the room and the door closes behind him. "You might want to check A&E for Adam Skellerton."

"Got him already, Rufus was on the dispatch desk and called me as soon as the copper gave over the symptoms. That's how we knew to look for you." He says, walking into the room and lifting Cales fringe so he can get a good look at the bruise. "Could you not have found something better than your head to hit him with?"

"I was improvising." Cale excuses.

Ream drops the fringe. "You'll live." He declares. He looks at Angela. "But you and me young lady need to have a talk."

"Talk?" She says, the tone sounded all too ominous

"Yes." Ream says. He sits down opposite her, checking the recording device is turned off before continuing. "About your book." He says.

"My book." She echoes. "You can't stop me writing it." She says defensively. "People are expecting me back." She adds quickly.

Ream smiles. "Ahh. I think you mis understand. We want you to write the book. We just want to be very specific about what we want you to say in it."

She frowns at him.

He looks over to Cale. "I am afraid Mr Tien I need your services for another week or so." He nods to Angela. "Just whilst we help Miss Hughes get her notes straight."

Cale smiles Angela. "My pleasure sir." He says.

Ream stands. "Good then, lets get you out of here and some where more comfortable."

"Just like that?" Angela says. She looks round. "But we are under arrest."

Ream smiles at her, his expression is almost condescending. "Please Miss Hughes, Who do you think is The Law in this town?"

End games

Angela stands in the V.I.P. Departure lounge of John Lennon Airport, staring out over the concrete as the plane is loaded.

A figure joins her, his cool blue eyes checking the scene himself. "So Miss Hughes, we have an understanding." Ream states.

She moves closer to him, lowering her voice. "Why did you show me all of that?" She asks softly. "You could have just put me on the next plane home. I mean, if I didn't know it I couldn't write it at all."

"Consider it a calculated risk Miss Hughes. I am not stupid. You will write your book. People will read it. People will come here. If they come here it is better if they come knowing that on our turf, you play by our rules." He fixes her with a penetrating stare. "You see Miss Hughes, this is our city. I know there are factions out there who would be all too interested in us, and want to interfere, but it is not so simple. Should that tiresome group of wardens think they can come here and tackle our mages for their past indiscretions, they will discover they are facing more than just a wizard and his few apprentices; that there may be a whole load of faerie that might just have a say. And should the white court wish to dispute Elijah's right to rule, well he may be a devil, but he the devil we know and he is our devil."

"And the fisher King?" Angela asks.

Ream smiles, it is wry and teasing. "Is just a sad man old man, who would want to hurt him?" He says.

She nods. "I'm not sure what I am going to tell my publishers. I don't think this is what they were expecting."

"Tell them whatever you want." He says. His eyes sparkles and there is a touch of a smile on his lips as he adds "Just be fastidious."

"And if I don't?" she asks.

He looks her up and down. "We have our ways." He assures her. "But I trust you."

"Really?" she asks, almost surprised.

He looks past her to Cale, discussing something with the steward, a brief smile touches his lips, then he says "Yes." He looks back at her, his eyes turning cold again. "Let me tell you a tale by way of illustration Miss Hughes. It's a true tale, so rather sad. On the 15th of a april 1989 there was an important football match, FA cup semi-final. I think by now you will have gather that is a religion in this town. It was in Sheffield, there were road works on the motorway, unexpected delays. Many of the supporters arrived late. As the start of the game approached there were a lot of people still out side. The authorities feared a riot. So they

opened the gate to let the supporters into the ground. Back then, because of trouble between supporters, the standing area were surrounded by cages. Desperate not to miss the start of the game the crowd surged forward into the central enclosure rather than spreading out to the ones on the side, as they would have done if time was not so pressed. It was a disaster Miss Hughes. People caught between the mass of the crowd and the cage and it's concrete wall. Crushed. Trampled. Suffocated. 94 people died at the scene. Another died a few days later and the final victim had his life-support turned off 3 years later. 96 dead. 766 injured."

Angela looks at him, despite the coolness of the man she can see the pain recalling this is causing him.

"The city went into mourning. I have never known it so quiet. I recall strangers comforting each other at bus stops. The crowds at the memorial shedding collective tears. The mortals pulled together. The people of my city but all their differences aside for the greater good, and I have never been more proud. But that is not the point I wish to make." He says. his voice takes a darker tone. "There was a highly successful newspaper. Claimed to be the biggest seller in the country. They printed lies Miss Hughes. They said that our people attacked the emergency services and robbed from the dying and dead. They thought it would sell more papers that way so they did not talk of the bravery; of people sacrificing themselves to push children over the barriers; Of people pulling apart the advertising hoardings with their bare hands to make stretches; of people tearing down the cages to help people out. They thought to show us in a bad light was more profitable. It used to sell 200,000 copies a day in this city, but after that story, it's circulation collapsed. All this happened before you were born, and yet to this day you can not buy that lying rag in this city. If any one sees you reading it you will be met with anger and you will be humiliation. I have seen people put a lighter to it to make the point." He leans forward. "And that is just what the mortals can do." He leans back.

"Got it." She nods. "Like it says on the scarf, You'll never walk alone."

He smiles. "Exactly. Together we stand, an attack against one is an attack against all."

"Your stuff is onboard." Cale announces as he joins them. "Couple of minutes and they'll call you too."

She looks at him and nods. Her tongue touches her lips as she picks up the courage to say what she is thinking. "Come with me." She asks.

He shakes his head. "I can't." he looks at her for a moment and then risks, "Stay."

"I can't do that either." she responds.

They both turn to look at the plane.

The air steward walks towards them, pausing at a discrete distance and coughing softly.

"They are ready for you." Ream says.

She turns and nods then with a sigh says "Yes I guess this is it then." she looks back at them both. "Well thank you. It's been.... enlightening."

Ream nods at her, almost a bow. "For me too."

Angela glances at Cale but all he can manage is a nod. She sighs and follows the steward to through the door.

Cale and Ream lean on the metal railing watching the plane pulls away from the gate.

"So." Cale coughs. "That's it then."

"That, indeed, is it." Ream confirms.

Cale pauses for a moment, watching the plane starting to taxi along the runway. "Do you think she will be ok?"

"She strikes me as a resourceful young woman." Ream says. "I would be surprised if the skills she showed here deserted her on the rest of her travels." He looks at the young Breed member next to him. "Did she say where she was going next?"

Cale only turns to him once the planes wheels have lift clear of the tarmac. "The states. Chicago I think."

"Ahh." Ream says pointedly

"Ahh?" The concern is all to clear in Cale's voice.

"Yes." Ream says. "Let me recall the words of the Arch Mage correctly..." He mimics the arch mages accent perfectly as he says, " Now that place really is a bucket of monkeys."

Cale grimaces.

"Come. Mrs Doyle has promised Tea and cake to cheer you up. I know it is a poor substitute for the arms of a pretty woman, but it is strawberry and cream and I am some what peckish."

Several years earlier...

The rain patters down on the plastic of the tent, rippling the blue and white stripes with the rivers it is creating. In the the mud beneath it two wizard crouch nervously over a large stone disk, around the size of an old cart wheel. They are treating it with all the caution of an unexploded bomb. The younger of the men, Fidel Marino, dressed in a long victorian frock coat over a white ruffled dress shirt straightens up. His eyes flicking between the stone and the shorter more portly man in a grey edwardian waist coat and trousers; his mentor Callum Doyle.

The older man picks up a bucket of water and throws it over the stone, washing the mud away. Fidel flinches back as the water hits the stone, bracing himself for any reaction. Callum smiles at him when there is nothing. He moves over to his jacket, carefully hung on a spade standing near them in the mud, and pulls out a cloth to clean off his hands.

Fidel moves closer, looking down at what the water has revealed. The stone has a ring carved into its surface, the line crossed with groups of deep grooves.

"Ogham then?" He says staring at the script.

Callum removes a pair of wire rimmed glasses, without any actual glass in them, from his top pocket. He pulls them on blinking at the stone. "Yes." He confirms. "And quite a potent little artefact."

The flap in the tent behind them opens briefly as they are joined by a fair haired man in official looking water proof coat. The left breast emblazoned with cities coat of arms. He steps into the cover of tent, and despite the rain outside is almost instantly dry.

"Sheriff." Callum nods in his direction, taking care to peer over the spectacle frames.

"The Mortal authorities have cleared the site. That chap from the museum is being a pain. He is demanding that the bomb is removed and not destroyed in situ. Rather concerned for the historical remains."

Callum nods and then with more than a hint of sarcasm says "Ahh Bless." He looks to Fidel. "Read it yet."

The young mage looks up at him and grimaces. "Not really my field Callum." He admits.

Callum puts down the cloth and moves over. "Some times I don't know why I set you those exercises." He mutters. He leans over the stone and sighs. "Hmm yes.."

The Sheriff moves closer, watching as Callum works his way round the stone, occasionally popping back to check some detail, then he stands. "Well It is a gate way into some where deep in the Never-Never. Summer I think." He announces. "And the inscription on it serves two purposes. One way its a warning, explaining why you should under no account open the gate."

"And the other?" Fidel asks.

"Is the spell to open it." He says.

"So what happens if we do open it?" Fidel asks nervously.

"Oh the usual I guess. Plagues, rains of blood, end of the world. Shite like that. Summers powers unbound on earth basically." Callum dismisses. He looks up with a mischievous grin. "I say we crack it."

"Do it." Ream says.

Callum looks at him sharply and clearly surprised. "No. Ream you are the sensible one. You are the one that says don't be so fucking stupid Callum, you can not risk destroying the world just to satisfy your cat like curiosity." He reminds the Sheriff.

"My analysis leads me to conclude there is no alternative." Ream responds. "This is the key the Fisher King spoke of. It can not be allowed to fall into the hands of the mortals."

"Well allow me to be the voice of reason." Fidel says. He turns to his mentor grabbing his lapels and shaking him gently to emphasis his fear. "Callum, for the good of the city, and the rest of the world I guess, you can not do this."

The three men look at each other, suddenly caught in the moment of the exchange.

Fidel shudders and lets go of his mentor. "Oh gods we really are through the looking glass on this one, aren't we?"

Ream looks down at the stone. "Yes. But then is that not always the way with things of the Fae."

He looks up to see the two wizards staring at him.

"Poetry? That'll work." Fidel dead pans back at the sheriff.

Ream grunts at him and heads back into the rain. "Find me an alternative Arch Mage, that is what you are here for."

Callum glares at Fidel.

His apprentice crouches down over the stone. "I don't work well with an audience." He 'apologises'. Then he grins. "But I think I have a cunning plan."