## *Blood on the Plane*

## *Also by Gaston D Sanders*

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## Blood on the Plane

## Gaston D Sanders

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## Author’s Note

I should note right at the beginning that the original idea for this novella is sort of, not “original.” Stephen King, in my opinion one of the best horror/paranormal writers whom I have had the distinct pleasure of reading, did a story about a vampire who flew a plane from place to place in order to get his victims; feed and get the hell out of Dodge before he was discovered and, of course, summarily executed. This excellent piece of artistry is called “Night Flyer.”

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# Blood on the Plane

## *Lin Sung*

**The Singapore Airlines Airbus A-380** taxied down therunway, swinging into position for takeoff, with a vampire onboard. La Touche had made sure to get a “Red-Eye” flight to Tokyo, where he would meet with representatives of the Japanese Division of La Touche Enterprises when the plane arrived. From Security Division, La Touche expected a full report on the conspirator. The timing was a little tricky, but it was manageable. There was a traitor to the Singapore Coven and to La Touche Enterprises in his midst, and he would root him out. He could feel the renegade from two thousand miles away and it made his pure, vampire blood boil. Though La Touche’s senses could not give him a name, he felt drawn to the renegade through psychic bonds of coven brotherhood. The creature was one of his own, that much La Touche knew of a certainty.

The mild rumbling of his stomach gave him pause to think that maybe he should have fed before the trip, to prevent any mid-flight discomfort. But, he was two hundred eighty six years dead and could do with a missed meal or two. His control of his appetite was considered phenomenal among his peers on the Singapore vampire scene and he always lived up to his reputation, laughing and teasing the newly turned night-walkers.

His blue-black, wavy hair settled on his shoulders as he leaned back in the first class seat, signaling to the flight attendant for a travel pillow. Perfect teeth, with retracted canines, smiled at the pretty attendant as she swayed down the aisle to aid him. She was instantly taken by his roguish good looks and cerulean blue eyes, hesitating ever so slightly in her stride. Captivating in their intensity, his eyes hinted at promised sexual pleasures that had her libido awhirl. That was the way of David La Touche—mesmerizing good looks, coupled with one inch fangs, equaled unparalleled sexual experience followed closely thereafter by death due to over-indulgence. But Leslie Renee Thompson, “Les,” fell into those eyes and immediately felt a strong attraction to this handsome passenger… and after all, it was her job to see to the comfort and pleasure of the first class section.

“Good evening sir,” said Les. “I’ll be your flight attendant this evening. How may I help you?” Her emerald eyes were transfixed on his gorgeous face.

“Just a travel pillow, if I may. I feel a nap might be in order.” Smiling his approval of the blonde attendant, he leaned forward lazily to close the small gap between them. Les felt the intensity of his gaze enfold her in a cocoon of pleasurable feelings. Turning to the overhead compartment, she produced a small, rectangular pillow and with slow grace placed it behind his dark head. Then, seemingly coming out of a dream, she shook her head slightly, smiled with confusion, and turned with a “your welcome,” back to the front of the plane.

Though sleep had never visited David La Touche in all his two hundred eighty six years, he still enjoyed the respite of a few moments from time to time. Being one of the undead could be tiresome at times, and sustenance aside, one needed to recharge one’s psychic batteries occasionally in order to be on top of the game—and a game it was to one such as La Touche. Being virtually immortal, handsome, irresistible, and incorrigible made La Touche rather a sadist at heart; and thus his penchant for “playing with his food.” The pretty young flight attendant didn’t know it yet, but La Touche had already decided that she just might make a delicious midnight snack. Thinking thus, he drifted off into a somnolent state of limbo from which he would draw a mental charge of refreshment.

“Les, are you okay, dear?” asked Marie at the front of the first class section. “I saw you wobbling down the aisle like you’ve had one too many. If I didn’t know you better, I’d say you had been drinking before a flight. What’s wrong, sweetie?”

“Oh, sorry, Marie,” said Les. “I just got a little dizzy for a moment. Guess I got up too fast from where I was talking to that gentleman in 15E.”

“Yes dear, I noticed that eye-candy in 15E. Don’t get too carried away with the passengers now. You know your training.”

“Oh, I know, of course. I just think he’s really nice and handsome in the bargain. Don’t worry, ‘mother,’ I know how to treat the customers.”

“Don’t you go getting cute with me missy,” said Marie with a grin. “You better show some respect for your elders. Now, it’s time for pre-flight instructions on oxygen masks and emergency exits. Take your station.”

Passengers were politely harangued by the P.A. System’s squawking volume as the attendant, Marie, began her spiel about the exits and oxygen masks with Les demonstrating at the front of the first class section. They would then move to the business section to repeat the routine. Gravity asserted itself upon the plane as the big airbus left the earth, pushing the passengers almost politely back into their seats. Grey runway concrete sped by as the huge airplane ponderously rose into the late night sky.

La Touche was flying in style in the Airbus A-380—a 525 passenger plane in the three class configuration that was the wonder of the modern aviation world. Sporting a huge lounge on the upper level with a wet bar and twenty sleep lounges on the same level, the plane was a rich man’s luxury haven. It also had numerous dark, isolated places that would suit his needs, *should his needs arise.* But his restless mind was not on “food,” but rather, seething with thoughts of the renegade traitor who had stolen from his beloved coven.

Les Thompson scooted into her attendant’s seat and buckled up just as the plane cleared the cumulous clouds—she was a little late, but still forgivable for a first-class section flight attendant. Smiling a guilty smirk at Marie, she straightened her posture in her seat and looked down the aisle towards the people, making sure no one was out of place.

In listless, day-dream fugue, Marie glanced out the windows, wishing for the hundredth time that she could get a Houston to Boston gig, so that she could be close to her daughter and granddaughter in Houston and still have her home base in Boston. The overseas flights paid well, but she longed for more stability since her granddaughter had been born last May. Still, past events proved to her that the Singapore run was by far the most entertaining. Short of a suicide bomber, they had had almost every kind of nut that had ever crawled out of the woodwork onboard this Singapore to Boston flight. She couldn’t imagine anything any crazier than what she had seen in her twelve years on this run…

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Five hours had expired in orderly fashion onboard the Airbus A-380, when David La Touche submerged from his nocturnal sojourn. Letting his enhanced hearing tell him the current situation onboard as his acute sense of smell told him of the attendant Les Thompson’s whereabouts, he leisurely opened his shocking blue eyes and looked about the huge cabin. The humans were reading, chatting, or watching the inflight movies, the miracle of flying in a metal structure at 35,000 feet above *Terra Firma* completely ignored. *This,* he thought, *is like vacationing at one’s favorite restaurant, carte blanche… and everything on the menu is delicious.*

Noticing that the seat belt sign was extinguished, La Touche unbuckled and stood to stretch his six foot three frame extravagantly in front of the lady attendants as they took the second round of drink orders. Each girl turned to stare at the vision of male endowment on show for their pleasure and edification. Mai Lin, one of the forward flight attendants in first class, busied herself rearranging an overhead compartment while surreptitiously stealing glances at him, nostrils flaring as she smelled the male-animal scent of La Touche. Nonchalantly gliding by him on her way to the galley, she smiled at his display of masculine charms, wondering what that would be like in her bed. She and the other girls had access to the first class sleeping quarters on the upper deck, and this flight there were three suites that had not been reserved. In first class, the booze would flow as long as there were customers, and drunks would be politely taken care of with a smile. Mai Lin and the other girls knew how to spot a problem drinker better than an AA meeting supervisor at his monthly meeting and each of them was well trained in how to deal with a happy drunk. As an added security measure, an air marshal was ensconced in the first class section at 21E due to the airline’s new policy on terrorism and hijacking.

Keeping his eye on the four luscious attendants in front of his seating area, La Touche maneuvered his way to the lift and entered the small elevator. The new smell of stainless steel and polymer plastics assaulted his keen nose as he punched the third floor button. Jiggling slightly with a sideways movement, the lift crept upwards. La Touche knew that the upper level held sleeping quarters for twenty, and the nightclub bar would seat 35 comfortably. Letting his mind imagine suitable punishment for the renegade vampire he pursued, La Touche’s canines began to unconsciously extend below his upper lip. *But I must put this from my mind for now…there will be time for action when we arrive.*

Stepping from the airbus’ elevator, his eyes were greeted with utter, decadent luxury.

*My, my, these new airbuses are the Cadillac’s of the aerospace industry. I simply must look into purchasing one of these for my corporation in Singapore. It could be a tax write-off for the company—no one would need to know what I would use it for, but it would make a wonderful slave-hunt vehicle…*

Laughter and low conversation buzzed throughout the nightclub and a relaxed atmosphere predominated the scene, allowing La Touche to ease drop on conversations easily. Seating himself at the rear wall, he smiled at the approaching waitress and evaluated her beauty as he scanned the drink menu. She smelled of youth and vitality, making him salivate in pleasure, thinking of the lure of a quick love tryst later.

“Good evening, sir. My name is Lin Sung. May I take your drink order?” asked the stunning Asian beauty.

“Forgive me…your loveliness gives me pause. I couldn’t concentrate for a moment. You are a vision of beauty, my dear.”

“Thank you, sai. I would take your order please,” said Lin Sung. She drifted into his mesmerizing gaze and could not look away. She was captured by his hypnotic eyes. Softly falling into those sky blue eyes, she smiled like a school girl with a crush.

“Yes, my dear,” said La Touche. “I will have a Bloody Bull, please. That’s beef bouillon, tomato juice and vodka.”

*Ordinarily, that would be with an eight ounce portion of blood added, but alas these humans don’t know the pleasure of a really good drink.*

“Yes sir,” said Ling Sun. “Would you like anything for a snack to go with that. We have an assortment of snack items such as chips, nuts, crackers, gourmet cheeses…”

“Oh no, thank you. I fed before the flight, and will not be needing anything soon.”

Tilting her head in amused consternation at his strange turn of phrase, Ling Sun smiled and headed for the galley to prepare his drink.

With his eyes closed in relaxation, David made mental notes of how he was going to handle the renegade when he reached Boston. Vermin like that deserved nothing better than a free sun-tanning session in the noon day sun, courtesy of the corporation…or possibly, a slow torture with silver and White Oak stakes.

*Apparently this creature has been making deliveries of blood to some unknown destination, so I need to find out who the recipient is before dealing with the bastard. He might even be dealing in slaves for all I know at this point. I have to find out.*

The La Touche Enterprises in Singapore dealt in flesh and blood—literally. Girls and young men *(and boys)* were obtained in the poorer parts of Malaysia and brought to the corporation’s facilities for indoctrination, obedience training, and etiquette classes—not to mention some severe brainwashing and psychological manipulation. Rich, powerful vampires from all parts of the civilized world paid handsomely for exotic entertainment as well as a constant, dependable supply of fresh, pure virgin blood. Over five thousand human slaves provided continuous blood for his operation on sixty farms being run throughout Asia. Other vampires of questionable morals would consume a diluted mixture of human and animal blood, because it was cheap, readily available and passable as a staple food supply. But David didn’t do that type of business. His retail blood was pure, fresh and one hundred per cent human.

The slaves he sold were expensive toys because they had all been trained in the exotic arts of dance, love and servitude—just what the decadent, rich, old vampires of the world desired. His girls were not sources of food, although some vampires would sample from time to time; the value of the girls lay in the fact that they were so beautiful and servile to their masters. Sexy, exotic trophies was what they really were, and the owners almost invariably displayed them with justifiable pride, to the envy of their covens.

Somewhere in the neighborhood of two thousand girls went through his facilities in the course of one year, and had already made David La Touche a very rich, influential vampire in the Circle of Dark Lords; the international ruling class of the vampire community. His was a lucrative business and he would not tolerate any traitorous thieving of his blood trade or his girls.

The sweet, ambrosial scent of jasmine and wildflowers informed his senses that Lin Sung was approaching with his Bloody Bull. He let her get close to him before opening his eyes in mock sleepiness, yawning profusely to make her think he had been napping; just like any tired executive businessman would. She smiled with a lovely innocence as he gazed at her exotic, Asian face, and placed the drink on the glass lounge table in front of him.

“I hope this is to your liking. I made it myself, Mr. La Touche.”

“Oh please, sweet thing, you must call me David. It’s a very long and wearying flight to Boston and I hope we will become best of friends. It looks delicious, as do you, my dear. You hair is such a beautiful, deep black that it has blue highlights to it. Quite amazing. You are a true vision of loveliness.”

“My mother was a model in Malaysia. She has hair like this—I got it from her.”

“I’m familiar with Malaysia. My company has holdings in Kuala Lumpur. Where are you from, Lin Sung?”

“We are from George Town on Penang Island. It’s really a big city for it to be situated there. It is a very great fishing port. But when my mother started modeling we moved to Kuala Lumpur and I love it there. There’s so much to do and all the modern conveniences of a large city,” said Lin Sung.

“Ah, I can see how your mother could have been a model. Just as you could have been with those mesmerizing jade eyes of yours. They are indeed a marvel. Listen, I have an idea…since it’s slow for you right now, why don’t you show me the sleeping quarters above? I’m interested in upgrading to the sleeping suites. That would be a much more comfortable place to relax while we wile away the hours, don’t you think?”

“Of course, Mr. La Touche… I mean, David, if that’s what you would prefer. I know that there are three unreserved suites available right now. Come with me and I would be glad to show them to you.”

Her curvaceous hips swayed enticingly in the side-slit, oriental skirt as she escorted La Touche to the rear of the nightclub and through the double-door entryway to the executive sleeping suites. Luxury was the immediate thought that came to David as Lin Sung opened the accordion double doors to the sleeping suite. A twin bed greeted him with a lush, mattress in a stainless-steel accented, sky-blue-walled cubicle about 8 feet by 9 feet. He was astounded by the sight of the expensive, Givenchy blanket, pillows, and comforter, with a set of Givenchy pajamas and slippers at the foot of the bed. Next to the bed, was a soft leather armchair for viewing the wall mounted 40 inch television, that *(he had no doubt)*, was equipped with satellite reception.

“Very nice, young one. Close the doors for me and let’s push this “Do Not Disturb” button here on the wall console. I think we need a little more privacy, don’t you?”

Lin Sung’s eyes glazed over as she glanced up into his suddenly blood-red eyes. His stare was hypnotizing, completely compelling, and she immediately fell under his mental command. A vampire of David’s advanced age could mesmerize with just a casual glance, and David made sure that Lin Sung was completely under his control.

## *Sexual Tryst*

**The warmth of her moist lips** made La Touche’s desire soar as he kissed the lovely oriental girl. Her lips tasted of mint and lemon from the tea she had been drinking, and David’s mind automatically associated her beauty and youth with the aroma. Holding the back of her head as he kissed her, David felt the long, silky black hair flow through his fingers. He leaned her back towards the bed and eased her body onto the coverlet, never once breaking his passionate explorations of the inside of her luscious mouth. Her tongue had taken on a life of its own and was swirling around David’s tongue with fierce determination and desire. She felt the power and strength in his masculine embrace as his hands began to explore her body.

*Now, my dear,* he thought. *It’s time to teach you a little bit about the art of making love. You have never known the pleasure that I am about to give to you, nor shall you ever again. You will lie awake at night longing for this feeling once more before you die.*

Lying next to her full length on the bed, he smoothed the stray hair from her brow as he kissed her tender earlobes and blew soft, warm wisps of breath into her ears. She shivered with anticipation and excitement, gasping in sharp intakes of breath. The silken coverlet caressed her back as she undulated to his touch. David lifted his head and planted soft kisses on her eyelids—just a feather’s touch on each eye, making her sigh with pleasure and urge him on to more. She couldn’t believe the heights of her desire for him at that moment. Her whole mind was absorbed with thoughts of making love to this god of a man. His every movement sent chills of delight through her already heightened nervous system, and she shivered as she moved closer to his body, wanting to make as much contact as she could to that sexually charged hunk of a man. She returned his ardent kisses with a youthful fervor all her own, showing him that she wanted him right then—she couldn’t make herself wait any longer. The desire to make love to him was making her crazy with lust. Shivers of passion racked her young body.

His strong hand slid up her torso to her breast, holding it cupped in his palm, massaging the breast and nipple until his fingertips could feel through the silk blouse, the bud of the nipple harden into a nub. She sighed with pleasure and closed her eyes as she lay enjoying his administrations. David slid his hand into her blouse and gripped the flesh of her luscious breasts, moving from one breast to the other, heightening her desire by the moment. She squealed softly as he pinched her nipples, his hands bringing pleasure/pain to her already overloaded nerves. The pain was pleasure and the pleasure was pain... She loved it, she wanted more—she needed more. He noticed with a smile her reaction to his manipulations and increased the pressure on her nipples, making her squirm on the bed beneath him. Tears slid from the corners of her eyes as she shoved her chest up to meet his punishing fingertips. The pain was making her light-headed as she moved around to give him better access to her pert breasts. Releasing her breasts, he bent his head to each nipple in turn, sucking the hardened bud of the nipple, swirling his tongue around it and eliciting another sigh of pure pleasure from the conquered girl. David knew that he was now her master, totally and completely. She would at that point do anything he desired of her.

His hands slid down to the skirt that she wore, shoving the hem of the dress all the way up to her hips, allowing him access to her silken, pink panties underneath. Finding her swollen clitoris with his middle finger, he slowly rotated the digit around the sensitive bud, eliciting snarls of pleasure from the little Asian beauty. He slipped his two middle fingers past the panty leg and slid them inch by inch into her moist love tunnel. This act produced another moan of exquisite pleasure from the beautiful creature beneath him. He slowly moved the two fingers in and out of her as she shoved her hips into the air with each withdrawal. She grabbed him around the shoulders and tried desperately to pull him closer to her so she could get more of those wonderful fingers deeper inside. The sensitivity of her clitoris was heightened to such an extent that she had small orgasms one after another. All her mind could relay to her was that she needed more of that pleasure, more of that tingling, exciting ecstasy that flooded her body at that moment. His fingers began to twirl in small circles inside of her, eliciting a shocked gasp of intense pleasure and agitated grasping of his shoulders once again. She couldn’t think—just *experience* that sheer, mounting feeling of ecstatic pleasure as those fingers gyrated in circles inside of her muff.

*God, I’m going to explode. It feels so goddam good, don’t stop… oh please don’t stop. Damn…yes…do it, do it… shit!*

She was quickly reaching the point of no return now, and the impending climax was making her squeal softly once again as she felt the pleasure mount between her legs. Her muff tried to milk his fingers as they continued to swirl faster and faster inside of her. She could feel the muscles inside of her contract against his fingers as she felt waves of pleasure begin to sweep up from her toes to the center of her being. She grasped his rotating fingers in a silken glove of flesh, milking the sensations of ecstasy. Her mind was spiraling towards a crescendo of joyous climax and she felt herself begin to shoot over the top, screaming into the pillows at her head as she squirted juices from her center against his still-furiously-working fingers.

“Oh goddam, oh damn, oh goddam,” she intoned into the pillows as the waves of pleasure began to diminish with each surge of feeling. Slowly, her racing heart rate receded to a normal pace, the spots before her eyes gradually dissolved…

“Oh my God, you do that so well—oh so well! How did you ever learn to do that? You’re amazing. I can’t move... My legs are just shivering. I don’t think I could stand up if I had to. Goddam, you are absolutely amazing. Oh, thank you, that was just indescribable.”

“My love, I have been doing this for my lady friends for quite a few years now, and I can assure you that I know exactly how you feel.”

“Ah, you’re so mature for such a handsome young man. I find that hard to believe.”

Lin Sung moved onto her side so she could see David better and gaze into those captivating azure eyes. Flashes of the previous moments’ sexual escapade kept banging into her brain and all she could think about was how she didn’t want this one to get away anytime soon. His eyes engulfed her, their powerful gaze now azure instead of blood-red*…(were they red before?)* sending vibrations through her loins once again.

“Turn over on your stomach; I’m not through with you, yet, my sweet,” David said.

“Anything you say, love.”

She swept her legs over his torso and slid down his side to lay out flat on her stomach beside him. Running her hands up over her head and under the pillows into which she had just recently screamed, she turned her head, looking at him, and smiled her sexiest smile.

“How’s this?”

“That should do just fine. Now, turn your head back, facing front and close your eyes. I have another little surprise for you.

Doing his bidding and turning to face the head of the bed, her thoughts immediately began to imagine what new pleasures he might have in store for her. At that point, she trusted him completely, eager to receive more of his expert sexual attentions.

His hands crept up her legs and tugged the silk bikini panties down and off her feet. Then she felt the insistent push of his hands opening her thighs. Before her mind could register this new sensation, she felt her hips jerked upwards into the traditional “doggie position” and he mounted her from behind, thrusting himself fully into her. His burning girth filled her straining love canal. A gasp of pleasurable surprise erupted from her as he began to rock slowly back and forth, thrusting deep with each stroke. Lin Sung’s eyes misted as her mind took her away to distant planes of ecstasy and delight. She rode a cloud of sensations through veils of pleasure and pain, exalting in the sexual feelings he had awakened in her.

“Oh yes, yes,” she moaned.

The firm grip of his hands on either hips gave her support as his tempo and thrusts increased in both speed and force, driving Lin Sung to even higher heights of titillation. She was pushed down on the mattress as she felt his full weight move over her, his hips violently thrusting her towards what would be a mind-shattering climax.

Just as she reached a nerve-jolting, hip-jittering crescendo, David’s fangs found her carotid artery, piercing it so quickly and smoothly, that, in her ecstasy, Lin Sung did not even notice the slight prick of pain. Her hips thrashed violently in climax as she screamed once again into the down-filled pillows, effectively stifling any loud noise in the cabin. She shivered and shook with extreme satiation, her mouth open in gasping breaths.

He sucked only a small amount of her youthful, delicious blood from her, not wanting to do her bodily damage. It was just a “Small Sip.” He had used this technique many times to get just a quick taste of his human companions. He had no desire to kill the young Asian, but rather, he had decided that she would make a fitting companion for his continuing journey to Boston and back to the Corporation Coven in Singapore. Making sure to leave his infectious saliva in the puncture wound, he licked the wound with his healing tongue and held Lin Sung as she shivered in the golden glow of post coitus. Giving him a last, lingering look, she turned her head and noted the time on her expensive Lady Rolex; which had been a present of yet another admirer of her oriental charms.

Smiling with a ridiculous grin, Lin Sung snaked out from underneath David and began putting on her flight attendant’s uniform, zipping the form-fitting skirt on and buttoning the silk blouse. She had a far-away look in her dusky eyes as she made final reparations to her make-up in the wall mirror at the head of the bed. Her thoughts were lost in the dream just experienced, once again reliving the unbelievable ecstasy of the vampire’s love-making.

“I really have to get back, David, but if you want to see me later, you can ask for me by name. Just use the courtesy phone at the end table. I would like very much to see you again before we arrive. That’s in about two hours from now.”

“Lin, my dear,” said David. “I will definitely want to see you again. As a matter of fact, I want you to be my companion for the rest of my journey. I will make all the arrangements at the Tokyo terminal. The Singapore Airlines knows my company well, and I’m sure that there will be no problem getting you a relief for the rest of your tour. Would you like to be my dinner companion in Boston? I would love having you for dinner, now that I know how delicious you truly are.”

Laughter bubbled up from her surprised throat, as she visualized his unorthodox reference to their recent love making and wondered if she would be the *main course* in the dinner to come.

“Of course I would love to go with you—if you think you can swing it to where I’ll still be employed at the end of our little date. I can’t afford to lose this job. I’m going to flight school to be a pilot someday. I just got a new apartment with a college friend of mine and I’d really like to keep it. It’s such a great place, right downtown in Singapore near the airport and it’s on the 22nd floor. The view is to die for.”

“I will show you my penthouse in Tokyo at the Hilton on the 31st floor. *That* you will be able to appreciate with a candle-lit, midnight dinner for two. Just come to my hotel after the plane lands…I will take care of everything else. Good night my dear. Don’t bother to come back this evening. I have some business that will be occupying me for the rest of the flight. You are a delight and treasure amongst the desolate boredom and despair of a harried businessman. I will see you in just a few hours.”

Mentally dismissing her, David picked up the phone from the end table beside the bed and began dialing. Lin Sung unobtrusively let herself out of the private suite and disappeared down the passageway aft.

## *The Landing*

**Making her way down to the first class** seating area, Lin caught Marie’s eye as she entered the preparation area and smiled with a wistful look on her face. Marie smiled back with a shake of her head. She had a damned good idea of what had been going on for the last thirty minutes or so. When one of the attendants disappeared like Lin had just done, it was pretty obvious what was taking place. The girls all covered for one another when those type of things happened. It was part of being a member of the “Mile-High Club” and Marie had been one for years now. One of the perks of being a good looking flight attendant was the spontaneous sex available on almost any flight, if the girls wanted. Marie was more mature than Lin, being a little on the “30ish” side of youth, but she still maintained an active sex life.

Lin came up beside Marie as she moved the trays out of the microwave ovens and began to prepare the meals from the individual menus of the passengers, and leaned her chin on her sister flight attendant’s shoulder.

“Hello lady-girl, what did I miss?” asked Lin.

“Not much sweetie, unless you count the drunken groping from the British tourists in 1A and 1B. I swear, those little guys can move their hands at the speed of light.”

Stifling a giggle, Lin Sung began removing frozen vegetables from the freezer and placing them on trays for the microwave oven. Twenty three meals for executive first class would be prepared and served for the affluently rich fliers tonight.

Les Thompson came into the flight attendants’ kitchen and graced the other two girls with her energetic, exuberant smile as she made her way to the beverage cart and began to fill the compartments with soft drinks and liquor bottles. Almost every one of the passengers would have some sort of mixed drink. It seemed that they all believed that they should be pampered and served the very best in liquor from the airline. Les would make sure that their egos were kept intact by her immaculate service.

“I’ve got the cart all stocked, girls. I’ll get started with the drinks and see you two out there. We’ve got a lively crowd out there tonight, don’t we? The British guys in the A and B sections are some nice looking hunks, huh? Asked Les as she moved the cart out of the kitchen.

“Yeah,” snorted Marie. “I’ve already had the privilege of dodging their hands once tonight. We’ll have to watch out with them. They’re oversexed and arrogant to boot. But you go ahead on out—you know how to handle them.”

Marie followed Les with the serving cart full of food trays and plastered on her “sparkling,” flight attendant’s smile as she emerged into the cabin aisle. Both of the aisles were roomy enough for the carts to move unencumbered throughout the cabin and the girls began to fill the passengers’ dinner orders. Lin Sung followed the other two girls, pushing another flight cart full of meals, and soon the passengers were making polite comments on the quality of the cuisine. The meals were engaged with enthusiasm and aloof acknowledgement of the girls’ excellent service.

Looking up from her customer in aisle 21, Lin Sung spotted David coming in from the elevator section and seating himself in his first class seat near her station. He looked satisfied with himself, and she couldn’t help but wonder if it was because of her or the business calls he had been making upon her exit. His blue eyes held a depth of mysterious shadows that made her dizzy, and she had to shake herself from her reverie and move on down the aisle with the last of her meals. With a smile her way, he turned and looked out of the window, admiring the beautiful white clouds in the night sky slowly drifting past the airplane’s wings. Preoccupied with the view, he nevertheless felt her presence as she came up behind him in the aisle with the fine quail dinner he had ordered for his meal. She bent and placed the meal on his serving tray, adjusting the lock on the arm of the seat-back, giving him a whiff of the expensive, Singapore perfume she wore. He closed his eyes as he smelled her exotic, jasmine aroma, visualizing her body as it was moments ago, bent over on the bed, receiving his arduous ministrations.

“Thank you, my dear,” he said. “That looks to be a fine meal you have there, but I’m afraid I have no appetite this evening. Perhaps, you should just return this and bring me a Bloody Bull instead. I think I would prefer that.”

“Oh, okay David,” she said. Her smile was all for him as she lost herself in the deep, mysterious eyes that stared back at her. “We’ll be landing in about thirty minutes, so there’s plenty of time for a few drinks if you want.”

“Yes, that would be wonderful. Thank you.”

Lin Sung returned the cart to the kitchen and prepared a Bloody Bull on the beverage counter, all the while dreaming of her upcoming meeting with David when they landed in Tokyo.

She stirred the drink with the green celery stalk and made her way back down the aisle to his seat. Just as she arrived, he diverted his attention from the window and gave her an intense look of hypnotic force, causing her to stop half-way to placing his drink, and becoming almost paralyzed, she looked at those commanding eyes of his. He accepted his drink, stirred the blood red mixture, smiling with contentment, and gave Lin Sung a look of proud satisfaction. His eyes bored into her mind, searching for control over her will power. His hypnotic gaze held her immobile.

“You, my dear, will indeed be my charming companion here in Tokyo for the lay-over. I have business to attend to with one of my employees and I will require your assistance in the matter. You will do my bidding and remember only that you are released from your duties with the airlines and are to accompany me.”

She smiled adoration at him and made to answer, but the PA speaker interrupted before she could, with, “Ladies and Gentlemen, please return your seats to the up-right position and fasten your safety belts in preparation for landing at Narita International Airport. Return all trays to their up-right position. We will be landing in approximately ten minutes. The current weather is a chilly 28 degrees Fahrenheit, snow flurries with a mild, gusty wind of 15 miles per hour. We hope you have enjoyed flying with Singapore International and look forward to serving you again in the future.”

“I have to assist Marie with the passengers, but I will see you when we land,” she said to David as she turned and hurried to the attendants’ station.

Marie and Les were both at their assigned posts, awaiting the descent of the aircraft before they made their pre-rehearsed announcements about the airport amenities. Lin Sung took her place and buckled in. Minor vibrations shook the plane’s structure as the pilots lowered the plane into the clouds. Wispy, white cumulous drifted lazily by the windows as the behemoth lowered itself through the night air, descending to the airport below. The grey of snow storm clouds overlapped the white as the airbus drew closer to the airport runway, slipping on the airstream like a huge, majestic bird of prey. Descending lower by the second, the grand airbus almost arrogantly announced her arrival to the civilians below, show-casing her glorious stature for all to see; sliding on the wind, smoothly gliding down towards the tarmac below.

Then, almost imperceptibly, the great bird touched down on the landing strip, tires screeching as the rubber grabbed pavement, a slight puff of white smoke billowing from the wheels. Reverse thrusters pushed the passengers forward in their seats as the pilots slowed the big machine down, growls coming from the engines in reverse. The big plane slowed and coasted down the last part of the runway, entering Loading Dock 345AB area, and getting picked up by the guide tractors, which brought it slowly to a stop.

Passengers arose even before the flight attendants gave the all clear, busily reaching for overhead luggage and misplaced carry-ons. The young blonde woman across the aisle from David dropped her over-large purse on the aisle floor and swore with color as she bent to pick up her itinerant items. Smiling an indulgent smile, David stood and leaned down to assist, all the while taking in the delicious smell of her vibrant blood as it pumped through her young body. Placing a comb and lip gloss case in her outstretched hands, David gave her his most winning smile and nodded his appreciation of her beauty. When the blonde woman met his eyes, she immediately changed from the distraught commuter that she was to a worshiping acolyte trying to appease a magnificent god. Her eyes were glued to his gaze, her mind was completely blank except for the vision of those sky blue eyes, and she remained completely entranced by his stare.

David broke eye contact and the woman shook her head as if to clear her thoughts and stammered, “Oh, my, thank you sir, I just don’t know how I can be so clumsy sometimes. Thank you, very much—my fault entirely.”

“It was my pleasure, madam,” David said.

The line of passengers began to creep towards the front of the plane, and David reached under the seat in front of him and withdrew his black, leather valise with the gold initials DAL on it. The glossy, black valise was a present to him from his concubine in Singapore, the lovely Felecia—mother to the two heirs of the La Touche corporate throne. Allowing the line to move slowly past as he stood in front of his seat, David thumbed his cell phone, making calls to the Japanese headquarters. The phone buzzed as the call was answered.

“La Touche Enterprises…how may I direct your call?” answered a perky female voice.

“This is David La Touche. I just flew in from Singapore and I’ll need a suite reserved at the Tokyo Hilton, thirty-first floor. I want a meeting tomorrow night with Jason Dennings, Baron Volev, and the Japanese representatives at my hotel. Tell them I expect to get a full quarterly report.”

“Yes sir, Mr. La Touche. I’ll call them right away. Will that be all sir?”

“I don’t want to be disturbed until the meeting. I have other business that I need to take care of, first.”

“Yes sir, I’ll make the calls. Welcome to Tokyo, sir. Good bye.”

The cell phone made a soft, chiming sound as David disconnected and slipped it into his inside jacket pocket. Seeing an opening in the line, he stepped into the aisle and joined the parade of departing passengers. Exiting the plane, he nodded politely to the attendants and the captain, entering the umbilical tunnel to the huge terminal building. Forty feet of accordion-type, tunnel-connecting, umbilical deposited him at the Singapore Airbus A380 front desk, along with a milling crowd of first class travelers. The mall type architecture of the terminal impressed the human passengers emerging from the plane arrival tunnel, and David had to maneuver around gawking groups of tourists as he made his way through the airport proper. Its three story design allowed multitudes of businesses and tourist shops to flourish with the constant flow of human traffic in the gargantuan structure. Bright lights and vivid colors abounded on the tourist shop marquees, restaurant windows, fast food booths, and souvenir shop awnings running along the length of each of the outer walls of the coliseum-type building.

A Japanese porter, dressed in gold-striped, black-satin breeches with a silly, pill-box hat, magically appeared at David’s side, wheeling his three suitcases on a shiny, stainless-steel dolly.

“Mr. La Touche, I have all of your luggage sir. We have arranged for your rental limo and driver. He should be right out front,” said the porter.

*Well, well…Singapore Airlines really knows how to treat their prestigious clients, now, don’t they? I really must congratulate the airline president when I have the time to chat. That reminds me, I have to make that phone call and relieve Lin Sung of her stewardess duties for the next few days. I want that little beauty at my side.*

Downy drifts of snow greeted David as he emerged from the airport, with angry, black clouds scowling down on him, as he waited for his limo driver to show up. One family of arriving passengers jostled David’s elbow as they hurried passed on their way to the underground garage, oblivious of their rudeness. He looked at them in disdain as they trudged across the avenue to the elevators beyond.

*You are most fortunate today, my human cattle, that I am in a forgiving mood. Otherwise, I might have had you and your pathetic family for dinner. One never knows how close to termination one can be, does one?*

A midnight-black stretch limo cruised up to the sidewalk beside David and sat idling as a young human driver emerged from the front and began to gather David’s luggage up and place it into the trunk of the car. The porter, short as he was, couldn’t even reach across the yawning trunk to help with the baggage, so he handed the driver each piece in turn as if he were supervising the whole operation. David figuratively bit his tongue to keep from ranting at the slow moving Jap. His tolerance for ineptitude was running on low-meter since he discovered his associate’s traitorous maneuvers to distribute blood and human slaves in Boston without his consent.

Slamming the trunk of the limo and handing the porter a generous tip, the driver turned to David with a servile smile and said, “Good evening. Mr. La Touche. The home office called ahead and made arrangements for you to stay at the Tokyo Hilton. I trust that will be to your liking, sir.”

“That sounds marvelous, actually. I will need several hours of rest and then I will need to have a meeting with some of my colleagues, tomorrow night. Do you know if the office made those calls for me?”

“Yes sir,” said the driver, opening the passenger door for David as he spoke. “The secretary told me that the gentlemen had already been contacted and acknowledged the desired time and place for the meeting; your suite at the hotel, right?”

“Yes, yes, that’s wonderful,” David said.

Warm, dehumidified air enveloped him as he got into the rear seat of the limo, stretching his muscular legs out across the spacious compartment of the limo. David only traveled first class when he flew and the limo was the top of the line for corporate executives, this year. Opening the small wet bar against the center console as the driver pulled into traffic and began slipping into departing traffic, David withdrew a crystal decanter of fresh blood, placed there only moments ago, for his thirst, and poured a small libation into the awaiting goblet on the console.. He eyes rolled back in appreciation as he sipped from the gold-rimmed, goblet.

Downtown traffic was snarled, as was usual in Tokyo, but the expert driver slipped in and out of the passing lanes, circumventing the slower cars and commercial vehicles on the highway. Tokyo’s population, exceeding thirteen million souls, all seemed to be on the freeway going to the Tokyo Hilton ahead of David. He grimaced in aggravation as his limo was constantly delayed by the slow, creeping traffic. Snow continued to fall like fairy dust as they drove towards downtown.

Finally, up ahead, the towering hotel loomed with all its garish lights and oriental signs aglow in the morning’s murky darkness. He opened his briefcase on the seat beside him and withdrew his business cell phone, speed-dialing his head of security in the Tokyo office. Rol Skanek, Security Manager for La Touche Enterprises in Tokyo, answered on the first ring.

“La Touche Enterprises, Security Manager. How may I be of service?”

“Chief Skanek, this is David La Touche. It’s good to speak to you again, Rol. I want you to meet me at the Tokyo Hilton in thirty minutes. Ask at the desk for my room number. Bring me any surveillance that you have up to the present on Rasmin Delaval. I want any hard-copy paperwork you might have on him, too.”

“Uh, yes sir. I’ll meet you there in thirty.”

La Touche disconnected just as the limo pulled up in front of the hotel and he went into the luxurious interior, trailed by the driver with his luggage. A sweet looking young girl at the reception desk was overly attentive and helpful, once she got a good gaze of his hypnotic eyes and demeanor.

“Good evening, Mr. La Touche. I have your suite ready for you. Room 3112, 31st floor.” Her manager had alerted her to the VIP client’s identity and eminent arrival. Only the best service was reserved for clients like Mr. La Touche.

The penthouse suite awaited him as he disembarked from the elevator on the 31st floor, the hotel a magnificent tribute to the engineering prowess of Japanese construction, with tasteful lithographs and panoramic photos framed along the way. Taking a few moments to peruse the framed photos, David smiled in appreciation. One of the reasons why he had chosen Tokyo for an intermediate office was because of the efficiency of the Japanese people when dealing in business matters. Their grasp of time’s importance in business, made them the ideal associates for his operations.

He expected to extend his business operations to the Middle East within the next few years, if the many tribal factions’ mini-wars should ever be quelled and suppressed. But those were expansion maneuvers still in the planning stages at present. His main concern at the moment was to regain control of the slave market and blood distribution that Rasmin seemed to have infiltrated and disrupted.

The plush, beige carpet cushioned his quick steps as he made his way down the corridor to his suite, the valet pushing the luggage carrier along behind. He glanced behind him and gave the attendant a perfunctory smile, seeing that his luggage was being handled properly. Arriving at Room 3112, the valet produced two electronic keys, opened the door and stepped back to allow David entry. Clean, filtered, and conditioned, the air in the room was a pleasant encounter after the horridly offending smells of the automobiles and smog down blow. His heightened sense of smell was at times an offensive and irritating albatross around his handsome neck. He could smell ten times better than the average human, the blind-from-birth humans not even approaching his equal.

The sight of the crisp, green fifty dollar bills made the valet’s eyes light up as David handed him three of them with a smile.

“Thank you, young man,” said David.

“Oh, my pleasure, sir,” said the mesmerized valet. “If you need anything, I mean just anything, be sure to call for me. My name’s Yo Tong. I’m almost always available, sir. Just ask for me.”

“Thank you, Yo Tong. I shall do that very thing. Good bye.”

Opening the door and moving to the hallway, still staring at his windfall tip, Yo Tong muttered, “Thank you very much, Mr. La Touche.”

David closed the door quietly and perused the suite’s living area. Filling the center of the suite was a plush, sectional sofa, love seat, and armchair, surrounding an ornately carved, mahogany coffee table large enough to service twelve people easily. The beautiful piece of furniture made David smile as he remembered his own collection of fine furniture in his Boston office. A full bar was situated along the side of the room, with all the popular liquors and liqueurs for the discriminating guest. Against the other wall was a huge sixty inch HD TV. It looked like a live wall, with the talking head of the local news silently mouthing the words of his report. The hallway to the left led to two bedrooms complete with California king sized beds, a small, plush love seat, and mini-bar, with wall mounted, forty-two-inch televisions. A doorway on the other side of the spacious room let on to the conference room, complete with seating for twelve.

Outside the sliding glass door of the balcony, the brilliant cityscape of downtown buildings was a beautiful and forceful backdrop. Through the white curtain of snow below, David could easily make out individual faces with his preternatural eye sight.

*Oh, what a lovely city. It literally takes one’s breath away. Lin Sung should be here directly, and I must call room service for cognac, champagne, and strawberries. Maybe a good brandy as well—and also, a call to my security to see what’s keeping Skanek.*

Just as he was disconnecting from the front desk with his drink orders, a knock sounded at the door. After looking through the viewport to ascertain the identity of the guest, he opened the heavy, oak door to admit Rol Skanek, Security Manager for La Touche Japan Enterprises.

“Good evening Mr. La Touche. “I’ve brought all the information that I could find on Rasmin Delaval, as well as some security footage from our cameras. There’s not much here. Either he didn’t have much business to take care of here, or he was really careful not to sign too many documents. The video footage is pretty skimpy, also.”

“Thanks Rol, and call me David. We’ve known each other for ages…actually for decades, so please call me David. This is rather an informal request on my part, anyway, and I’d rather this not get back to Mr. Delaval’s notice; if you know what I mean.”

“Of course sir, uh, David. Everything is classified information… for your eyes only.”

“Very good, now let’s have a look. Make yourself comfortable, Rol. I have a supply of fresh blood, if you would like. Just there at the bar in the wine cooler. I always travel with refreshments. One never knows when one might become parched.”

“Thank you, David, but I’m fine. I fed just before you contacted me, and spent the last few minutes putting this info together.”

The overstuffed armchair engulfed Rol Skanek’s compact body in its luxury as he sank into its folds. His small, stocky frame was disarming to people he met, but underneath his mild exterior lay the toned body of a trained assassin. Swiveling around in the armchair, his eyes took in the exorbitant surroundings, from the full bar against the wall to the large balcony overlooking the city below. The suite was the finest in which he’d ever been, and in his business, he had seen a lot of them. There were fresh roses on the coffee table, their aroma filling the air of the room. Rol’s keen sense of smell was almost overwhelmed by the fragrant bouquet of the flowers. There was a tension in the air that told Rol some heads were going to roll in the near future—literally. La Touche was incensed about something and Rol was glad he wasn’t going to be on the receiving end of that wrath.

La Touche scanned the report print-outs with a super speed that amazed Rol. His hands hardly turned one page when he immediately reached for another. His reading skill and speed was phenomenal. Then he stopped and turned a page to Rol, awaiting a response.

“That, David,” said a rather nervous Rol, “is the quarterly read-out of the acquisitions of new women trainees for the etiquette school. As you can see, we started with a hundred and fifty and the actual enrollment number was one hundred twenty one. The only explanation to be found was in Rasmin’s appendage of explanation where he claimed an escape of the other twenty nine. No real explanation was given, that’s why I red-flagged it—pretty suspicious, but then again, that’s what you’re thinking, anyway. Right?”

“Indeed,” said La Touche. “Why was this not investigated further?”

“He told the clerks, it was unavoidable and that he was handling it personally. Since he out-ranks everyone but you in the Boston Headquarters, it wasn’t ever questioned and was almost buried in the other computer spreadsheets.”

La Touche made a note on the page, his small, neat hand writing filling the bottom of the report, and then picked up the next page from the pile.

Time crept by with tortoise-like slowness, as La Touche’s eyes burned into each page in turn. Finally, he reached the end and leaned back in the loveseat. A small stack of perhaps fifteen pages lay in a pile beside the report. Then, digging into the prints of the surveillance cameras, he noticed five shots of Rasmin entering and leaving the blood storage warehouse at the Boston industrial park in Southtown. Rasmin neither brought anything into, nor took anything from the storage area. La Touche laid hard copies of those shots on top of the reports already set aside.

His head slowly rose, and with a grim smile on his face, he looked Rol straight in the eyes.

“These instances are the ones I want to question Rasmin about. I want you to call in six experienced Black Guards from this Japanese Subsidiary and tell them to be ready to fly out for Boston the day after tomorrow. I have a meeting with some of the corporate managers here in our Japan Operation, and then we will be heading for Boston on the day-after-tomorrow’s red-eye flight. Do you understand these orders, my friend?”

“Yes David,” remarked a sober Rol. “I understand the situation perfectly. I’ll have the men ready for the red-eye flight. Shall I have the headquarters here make the flight arrangements?”

“Yes, please do so. Book your flight with mine through this regional office. I want adjoining seats for your men in first class with my own. And now, if you will excuse me, I have some more work that needs my attention. There’s never any relaxation, it seems, anymore.”

The security chief rose and turned to La Touche. Rol had known David for many years and their friendship had grown through several dangerous operations and deadly encounters with other vampire lairs, the latter of which were no longer in existence. David La Touche could be a lethal opponent when the situation called for it.

“Yes David,” said Rol. “I will see you day after tomorrow. You can check on our flight arrangements through either me or the headquarters secretary. Good night, sir.”

“Good night, old friend. May your years see no end. It’s been good meeting with you again.”

“And you, sir…as always, a pleasure.”

With the door softly closing behind him, Rol left the suite to La Touche, intent on gathering more information on the traitor, Delaval.

As the security manager strode down the carpeted hallway, his thoughts were rambling.

*I wonder what kind of shit-storm is coming our way. I know that look. Somebody’s gonna lose their heads over this…literally.*

## *Delaval’s Lair*

**The warehouse was abuzz with activity** as Delaval entered the building, crewmen herding the last groups of girls into the 10 X 10, hurricane-fenced cages. Sounds reverberated in the huge, metal structure, giving it the feel of a convention hall, rather than the detention center that it was. Voices bounced around the large structure’s walls as vampire guards and human thralls went about their harried duties. Large white-plastic containers of virgin blood was stacked like building blocks along one wall and several human thralls were taking meticulous inventory. The fog from outside lay languidly across the floor at the huge roll-up doors. At ankle height, the slowly swirling mist gave the whole warehouse a surreal atmosphere. Fifteen armed guards patrolled inside and out of the old granary warehouse.

Delaval waddled like a lame pigeon across the warehouse floor, pointing to his crew managers, shouting orders as he went. A small, crystal vial of cocaine appeared from his front coat pocket and he gave himself a generous snort. His rumpled suit coat hung from him like an afterthought, creased and dirty from three day’s wear. He had been one of the unfortunate ones who had been turned while possessing a physically afflicted human body and had never obtained the physical beauty of his blood-brothers. Something in his deformed DNA did not transform upon his turning. Because of this luckless deformity, he had developed a tremendous hatred of other, more beautiful creatures. Abruptly he turned to the three henchmen following and roared his disappointment at them.

“Where the hell are the rest of the girls? Dammit, I told Wan Chang I wanted them here tonight!”

“Sir, I don’t have any information on Mr. Chang. He’s failed to contact us for the last two nights. I can’t get him on the phone, and he’s not in residence. We’re still looking for him, but with no success,” said the nearest of his guards—one Lynch Monroe to be exact.

Running his pudgy fingers through his wavy brown hair, Delaval scrutinized Monroe. With weary, red eyes, and a sickly, pale pallor to his face, Delaval looked like he’d been fighting a losing battle for rest.

“That’s about par for the coarse here this week. I want him found and I want my girls back here ASAP. Keep the men looking for him and let me know as soon as he’s found. Now, you there,” he said, pointing to one of the guards at the cages, “get these girls fed and watered. I’ll be needing them ready for tomorrow night.”

His bloated, ugly face was intimidating enough, but his tyrannical attitude in the face of his current delays made everyone around him tread lightly in his presence.

Everything had been going smoothly up until yesterday morning at about 4am. The virgin blood had been shipped from Tokyo yesterday and would arrive in Hong Kong on the ninth. There had been no problems getting the shipment from the La Touche Blood Holding Unit in Singapore—which was disguised as a charity blood bank—and it was moved discreetly to Tokyo with no mishaps.

Then, his spies in La Touche Enterprises had relayed to him the bad news of La Touche’s suspicions and his subsequent actions.

The twenty one virgins that Chang was supposed to deliver had never arrived yesterday as expected. Something was going wrong and that had given Delaval a monstrous headache and had kept him up all day trying to locate his shipment. *Trouble always comes in bunches, like bananas…what the fuck is gonna happen next?*

His hands fidgeted with the diamond-encrusted, gold ring on his hand as he jerked his head from one area of the warehouse to another, mentally calculating their time schedule. Everything looked to be going as planned, except for the Chang delivery. He just hoped that there would be no big surprises before he concluded the operation. In just a few more months, he would have his power-base completed in Boston and a complete company of rogue, street vampires in his employ; thereby becoming self-sufficient and able to take on the combined strength of the La Touche Enterprises with confidence—or at least be able to compete with confidence.

“There’s a call for you from Ja Jang, sir,” said Monroe, holding the cell phone out. “He says it’s urgent.”

Grabbing the phone from the guard’s grasp, Delaval’s face flushed with exasperation. His voice, already coarsened by yelling, growled into the phone.

“Ja Jang, tell me you have good news.”

Several kilometers away, at the other end of the phone line, Ja Jang’s small, yellow face contorted into a mask of dread. He knew that giving the boss bad news could become hazardous to one’s health, but it was left to him to deliver the information. He just hoped that Delaval would take it well, and not *“kill the messenger.”*

“Mr. Delaval, I’ve located Chang in Tochigi Prefecture, about seventy five kilometers from you. Do you want me to bring him in? We are only monitoring his movements at this time.”

“Does he still have the women with him?”

“Yes sir, he’s got them in a motor home and it appears that he’s got a couple of guards with him.”

“What does it look like he’s doing with them? Is he trying to get them out of the country?”

“He’s made no movements of any kind since about midnight…just sitting in a hotel parking lot. He appears to be waiting for something, sir...or someone.”

“Good,” said Delaval. “He’s waiting on his contact to get the girls out of the country, I’m sure. I want you men to apprehend him and get the girls back. He’s a thief and a low-life and I want you to deal with him. Terminate him, decapitate the corpse, dump his body in the bay, and bring my girls back here. Is that clear?”

“Yes sir, of course,” said Ja Jang. “Consider it done. We should be there in a few hours.”

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Wiping a sheen of sweat from his forehead and face, Ja Jang turned to the five men seated at the café table. His oriental appearance belied the fact that he had actually been born and raised in Old Boston’s “chink-village,” and had learned his trade as a muscle man in the drug-infested streets there-of. Small in stature though he was, his reputation demanded the other vampires’ respect. Dark, slanted eyes surveyed the young vampires seated around the table.

“We seemed to have slipped the noose for the time being, boys. He’s pissed, but not murderously so…yet. Let’s make sure we don’t fuck this up now, and get those girls back into the fold, before he goes ballistic. We’re to end Chang and cut off his head.”

Across the small canal beside the café, a large recreational vehicle stood almost invisible in the shadows of the warehouse district. Ja Jang’s crew had been watching the camper since it pulled into the lot, late last night.

A tall, wiry blonde sporting pierced nose, ears, and lips, seated at the table of vampires turned his youthful head to Ja Jang.

“I really get tired of worryin’ about that son-of-a-bitch’s mood swings…I’m tellin’ you, he’s *Butt-fuck Nuts!* When I get a chance, I’m gettin’ the hell out of Dodge and I’d advise all of y’all to do likewise.”

That was the latest addition to the crew: Jessie “Tex” Collingsworth, from Dallas, Texas—late of the Boston underworld of drugs and prostitution. Tex had been turned and recruited to the Delaval coven because of his usefulness with firearms and munitions, having been a black-ops Ranger in the Army. Little did the new recruit know, Delaval had spies everywhere, and there was virtually no way to disappear once one “hired-on.”

“Don’t let it get your panties in a bunch, Tex,” said Ja Jang. “He’ll be fine once we get back on schedule. Besides, there’s going to be some righteous fringe benefits to being on his crew, when the money and power start flowing his way. It’s best to stay on the bandwagon, and keep your comments to yourself.”

“Yeah well, that old bag of guts just creeps me out, ya’ know? It’s like workin’ for Dracula’s fat step-son, ‘cept this asshole’s not near as purty.”

“Everyone just hang tight,” said Ja Jang. “We’re the New World Order, just like Delaval says, and we’ve got respect coming to us all soon.”

With a deep sigh of relief at their crew-chief’s encouraging words, the five men stood and moved to their vehicles to carry out their orders to kill Chang…after all, death was just a way of life, *to a vampire…*

## *A Meeting of Minds*

**The westering sun had almost dipped** below the horizon, reddening the white window drapes, as La Touche opened his eyes, becoming instantly alert to all the sounds and smells of the suite. Rising from the huge, king size bed, he stretched his arms over his head and did a few leg stretches to limber up. It seemed to him that his body took longer, each decade that went by, to attain maximum efficiency.

*I must need more fresh blood; perhaps a regimen of virgin blood might be in order. I suppose it’s time to seek the services of one of our physicians. I’ll have to make a note of it when I get back.*

Though vampires lived extremely long lives and some believed themselves immortal, La Touche wasn’t completely convinced. At his two hundred eighty six years, he was feeling ancient—though most of these feelings were weariness of the soul. He wasn’t afraid of death; indeed sometimes he had welcomed it. But the facts of the matter were that there existed many Pure Bloods, like himself, who were thousands of years old. There was an enclave in Romania that sheltered some Ancients, believed to have been born in the times of Jesus Christ himself. There were even stories of Judas Iscariot being the first Pure Blood. If one were a religious man, he would see the parallel of Judas’ betrayal of Christ and the advent of the Pure Bloods.

The sun had made its final departure and the room had blended into darkness. Lights weren’t necessary for La Touche since his night vision was nearly perfect, having the acuity ten times as strong as the owls of the night. Night predator that he was, his vision had always led him to his intended prey, no matter how dismal and dark the allies and parks had been. La Touche possessed the strength of ten men, eyes that could penetrate any darkness, speed that surpassed humans’ abilities to track him, and mental capacities that were beyond human understanding.

A scalding-hot shower just barely registered on his skin, it being impervious to anything except direct sunlight or fire. He luxuriated in the faint feel of the warmth. It seemed that he was always slightly cold and at times he even felt he could feel the coldness in his soul. Just his imagination, he was sure. He didn’t believe in souls; not really—spirits, yes, those he had encountered himself, but not souls.

He stepped out of the shower feeling refreshed and rejuvenated and toweled himself off briskly, his golden skin glistening in the brilliance of the overhead vanity lights. Because of his recent feed, his body had the look of a bronze Adonis, his muscles smoothly bristling with his movements.

Selecting a burgundy jacket and striped burgundy and black tie from his wardrobe, he began to dress himself for the evening. The Japanese Division Representatives should arrive shortly and he wanted to review his intended proposals. Being the ruling head of the La Touche Corporation meant he had to act decisively and firmly in all matters. If he showed the slightest weakness around the others, he would be in for a challenge to his position. That was the way of the vampire world. They would all act civilized until a hesitation or blunder showed that the vampire above them in the hierarchy was not in control of the situation, then they would challenge.

The challenge could be resolved peacefully, which sometimes happened, but most times there was bloodshed and the hapless loser usually ended up beheaded or staked. There were ways of putting a vampire into a coma, a sort of limbo, from which he could not readily escape. The convicted vampire was staked with a silver dagger, which, though not fatal, would render the blood-sucker entranced and comatose. Many vampires, defeated in a challenge, had found themselves in such dire straits.

Silver bullets would not kill La Touche’s kind either, but they were excruciating and debilitating, and would disable a vampire until his body could repair itself. That took time, so any vampire shot with silver bullets, would be easy prey while in that weakened state.

La Touche’s black, twill slacks looked regal with the burgundy jacket, and as he admired his reflection in the mirror, he wove the perfect knot in his tie. He donned his family crest ring—a golden lion embossed on the face of it—and again adjusted his already perfect tie.

He was feeling anxious and cornered, his nerves on edge and his thoughts veering off on tangents about the traitor in their midst. The one thing La Touche could not abide was unfaithful cult members. He dutifully intended to flush this vermin out of his organization and deal with him with extreme prejudice.

A soft knock at the door of his suite brought him back to the here and now. He smiled when he caught the scent of jasmine and wildflowers. That had to be Lin Sung arriving as she had been hypnotically directed. He strode to the suite’s door with a pleasant, satisfied smile on his face. Opening the huge, ornate oak door, his eyes beheld a true Asian goddess. Ling Sung was dressed in a black silk evening gown that draped from her left shoulder down her sexy little frame to just above her patent leather high heels. It was split up the right side, almost to the hip, allowing her curvy, tanned thigh to peek out seductively. Around her sleek neck she wore a single strand of perfectly matched pearls with pearl earrings completing her attire. His smile broadened as he ushered her into his suite.

“You truly are a bright, shining star in my rather dreary universe, my dear. Those pearls look perfect on that beautiful neck. Come in, come in. The representatives will be here soon, but let’s have a small drink while we wait, shall we?” La Touche moved to the elaborate bar near the balcony across the room and began to mix a drink in the blender.

“Thank you so much, David. I would very much like a drink—anything that you have is fine. I hope I dressed appropriately. You said to dress for an evening of dinner and nightclubbing,” said Lin Sung. She dropped her delicate, black purse on the sectional couch and seated herself on the end, demurely crossing her legs at the ankles. Her mesmerizing, slightly slanted, jade eyes, were made up with a touch of emerald eye-shadow. The moist, glistening lipstick gave her mouth a sexy, desirable look that La Touche had already appreciated upon her entry.

Another knock at the door announced the arrival of the first of the representatives.

“Here’s a little something I call “A Midnight Madness,” my dear. Hope you enjoy it. Now, just sit here and enjoy your drink. I have some business with these gentlemen to attend to, and then we’ll be off on the town.”

La Touche admitted the six representatives at the door with a slight bow of respect, and ushered them into the adjoining conference room of the suite. He seated the gentlemen and began speaking to them in his halting Japanese, telling them that he was honored by their attendance and that he would try to conduct the meeting with speedy efficiency.

As he stood at the head of the table smiling at the six men, who were intent on setting up their laptops and logging into the corporate accounts, Lin Sung entered quietly and stood at the door.

“My Lords,” she said in perfect high-caste Japanese, “May I offer you esteemed gentlemen some refreshment?”

La Touche was surprised and slightly startled by her quiet entrance, but he smiled at her quick thinking and nodded his assent to her.

*She is quite the resourceful young lady. I’m glad I decided to bring her along. She’s making the perfect hostess for these stodgy, old vampires. They’re eating up the attention. So be it, my sweet. Do your thing.*

After getting the drink orders for the six representatives, Lin Sung quickly and gracefully exited the conference room and began making drinks at the suite’s elegant bar.

La Touche took the opportunity during the lull in conversations to step up to the chairman’s seat at the head of the table and smiling, began his prepared presentation.

“Esteemed gentlemen,” he said, “I only have a few things that I’d like to bring to light at today’s meeting. The quarterly figures are available in your handouts, which you can study at your leisure, but I have a subject of high sensitivity that I would like to address. It has come to my attention that the earnings from the last three quarters has shown a downslope in the areas of Blood Distribution and Escort Services. There have appeared several unexplained losses in blood inventory and escort recruitments. I have prepared dossiers on the revenue versus the outlay, recruitment, and blood reserves. To me, and I’m sure to yourselves, it became obvious, that there is a corporate thief in our house who’s draining away a percentage of profits and material resources.”

He waited a few moments to let the information sink in. The room was solemnly quiet as the representatives looked up from their tablets and laptops. Some were merely quizzical in their expressions, but two of the reps had looks of iron determination on their oriental faces that bespoke of deadly intentions.

“I am, as we speak, implementing actions to discover the source of this loss, and rectify the situation. Please be assured that this is just a minor irritation to our otherwise smooth operation in Boston. My security staff are taking care of the problem. I did, however, want to make the information available to your esteemed selves so that you could track our progress in this matter. The figures are in the handouts that I’ve distributed to you. Please read these and get an idea of the financial situation this problem causes and I’m sure that you will understand my concern.”

Lin Sung came through the double doors of the conference room with a laden tray of drinks and began to distribute them to the council members, smiling her professional *flight-attendant smile,* as she unerringly placed each drink to the correct owner.

The representatives perused the handouts as La Touche studied their faces, and quiet murmurs spread as the reps began to understand the problem. The lead representative, Wong Cho, stood and spoke.

“Chairman La Touche,” he said, “I think I speak for all of us when I say that this financial disturbance and imbalance is of great concern. I am glad that you are dealing with this and extend our full support and the complete cooperation of the Tokyo Division. This sort of thievery should be dealt with immediately and with extreme prejudice. I’m sure you agree.”

“Exactly Mr. Cho.” La Touche smiled back at the diminutive rep as he spoke. “I knew that the board would understand the situation we find ourselves in. I expect this problem to be resolved very soon. You all will get notices of the progress and the ultimate solution. Thank you all for your time and support on this matter.”

Smoothly, if not so interestingly, the meeting proceeded as the representatives reported on their individual departments, espousing their efficiencies and boastingly declaring their accomplishments. Pride in their departments was evident in their narcissist, self-congratulatory speeches. Finally, the reps each had their say, and the meeting began to wind down to conclusion.

“Well, gentlemen, if that is all the business that we need to address, I move that this session be concluded.”

“Very well,” said Cho, closing his laptop. “I second the motion.”

The voting was, of course, unanimous.

“Then I officially declare this meeting at an end. Thank you gentlemen, for being here. My associate has refreshed drinks awaiting us and now, we can adjourn to the living room suite.”

The six reps shuffled around as they closed their laptops, stuffed notebooks and pens into their satchels, and began moving towards the living room and their awaiting refreshments. Bloody Bulls were in predominance as the gentlemen converged on the lavish in-suite bar—Lin Sung awaiting them. La Touche circulated as the reps sipped their drinks at the bar and enjoyed the spectacular view from the balcony. He made sure that he spoke with each man and complimented him on something or other. The Japanese were a prideful people, but La Touche knew how to smooth their feathers and keep them all happy. A happy regional office was an efficient one *and a quiet one.* That’s the way La Touche liked it.

Drinks finished, conversations concluded with assurances and compliments, the reps individually and in pairs, thanked Lin Sung for being a perfect hostess and began to exit the suite, on to their daily meetings and corporate duties. La Touche personally bid each member good bye at the door, closing it quietly upon the departure of the last rep, Wong Cho.

Turning to the beauty behind the bar, La Touche took in her loveliness again, noting the fine oriental lines in her face, the perfect curve of her slightly pouting lips that twinkled in her enticing, emerald eyes. She smiled broadly as La Touche walked over to the bar and seated himself, taking the proffered Bloody Bull from her hands. He sipped the bloody mixture as he watched her.

“I think that went quite well, my dear…with your elegant handling of the representatives, we seemed to have settled any misgivings they may have had. Thank you for your timely assistance.”

La Touche got up from the bar stool and walked around the end of the bar, taking the oriental sweetheart into his arms, smiling into those luscious, green orbs. Her twinkling, mischievous eyes smiled back at him.

“It was my pleasure, lord, to be of assistance. I saw that the esteemed gentlemen were feeling a little edgy, and I knew that offering refreshments would give them something to focus on besides business. They seemed quite appreciative.”

“Oh yes, they were appreciative. However, I believe it was your stunning beauty and not the excellent drinks that they appreciated the most. You are truly a shining gem in this world of blackest coal, Lin Sung. You’re a testament to the pricelessness of the female form,” La Touche said.

“But let’s get on with our night on the town, my love. We have many places of entertainment yet to visit, and the evening has just begun. Come, let’s go out into the night…

## *Underground Nightlife*

**The Lotus corporate car was waiting** for the couple as they exited the hotel’s luxurious lobby. Nothing but the best for the visiting corporate head, the silver Lotus Evora had a 356 horsepower engine, red, leather interior, a Sirius GPS system, state-of-the-art sound system, and all the little bells and whistles that the car company could pack on to it. Lin Sung, in her slinky, black evening gown, just stood, mesmerized by the sparkling spors car. Under the glaring lights of the hotel marquee, the vehicle shone like an oversized gem, drawing admiring glances from the passersby on the sidewalk.

David escorted the lovely Lin Sung to her door, and with the graceful gestures only a vampire could pull off, delivered her to her seat with a flourish and a slight bow. Pulling out into the maze of downtown traffic as easily as if it were a game, David turned to his entrancing “date.”

“Now, we’ll see if we can’t have some fun with this thing—meaning the car, of course. Have you ever ridden in a sports car like this one?” asked David.

“No, David, I have never been in one of these. My girlfriend in Singapore has a Corvette, but it’s nothing at all like this.”

“Yes, the Corvette is a very nice car, but this one is not only built for speed, but also for luxury and dependability. I have to know that I can maneuver effectively if the situation calls for it.”

Slipping from the mainstream traffic with ease, onto the Sotoboridori thoroughfare, David changed lanes into the high speed lane and accelerated into what could only be called a dangerous momentum. Lin Sung grasped her armrest with whitened knuckles as she watched the cityscape blur by her window. Her eyes were huge orbs of disbelief as she saw David weave in and out of traffic with the speed and agility of the best race car drivers. His smile, while it should have put her nervous state-of-mind at ease, only confirmed her impression that he was a stark, raving-mad lunatic.

Laughing at her expression, David said, “Don’t look like that, love. You know that I can handle this simple machine. I have the heightened senses and reflexes of the vampire; ten times as fast and agile as any human. Please, be at ease.”

She looked at him thoughtfully, searching his face, and suddenly an epitome of understanding spread across her surprised countenance.

“I know David…somehow I know many things about you that it seems I shouldn’t. I can’t explain it, but I do. I don’t understand how I can know so much.”

“It’s because you are bonded to me by the little drops of blood that I fed you on the plane when we made love. You know my heart and my desires, just as I know yours. We are kindred spirits, if you will. I wanted your complete and utter faithfulness, and the best way to accomplish that was to give you a small amount of my blood. It doesn’t turn you, but it gives you some heightened senses and abilities that humans don’t normally possess. I’ve found myself enjoying your company immensely, and I wanted to continue our relationship.”

“I don’t know if mind-control qualifies as a relationship or not, but I find that I’m not at all offended. I honestly do enjoy your company, and I suppose it’s because of the blood that I’m not frightened of you. But, whatever it is, I intend to enjoy the ride *so to speak,* so…lead on, master.”

“Ha-ha, that’s the spirit, my love.”

The Lotus made exhilarating maneuvers across three lanes of traffic as David unerringly guided the leashed monster onward.

“David, where are we going?”

“We’re going to visit a little nightclub called The Aisotope, first. It’s in the Haracawa District. It’s sort of a garbage heap of humanity that caters to the gay crowd in Japan. It’s not strictly for locals, though, because most tourists with that particular bent usually wind up there. The music is cacophonously loud, and the service is abominable, but I thought I’d stop to feed, while you enjoy the music…very *Avant Guard*.

The Sotoboridori thoroughfare gave way to a main expressway about ten miles from downtown and that led them to a small side street with a huge parking lot, more suitable for an airport than a nightclub. From the entrance David could see, about a quarter of a mile ahead, a garish insult to architecture that was made up primarily of stainless steel, concrete, and plate-glass. The basic structure reminded David of the Sydney Opera House in Australia, with its sweeping, curved, concrete roof and large glass walls. The interior was hidden behind multitudes of divider panels, neon-lit and flashing with the rock music. Guessing that the place probably held two or three thousand screaming fans, David just shook his head with amused tolerance as he maneuvered to the front parking area.

“David, it’s amazing. I’ve never seen anything so vibrant and alive,” said Lin Sung, as David parked in a front-row, reserved parking spot.

“It’s an eye-sore, is what it is…built with the exclusive purpose of relieving the morally decadent of their money. As ridiculous as it is, it actually does a booming business, with all the tourists who flock here each year. It’s become one of the “must see” places in Tokyo.”

David got out of the car and went around to assist Lin Sung with a graceful, gentlemanly gesture of elegance, offering his arm to her as she swung her shapely legs around the seat to get out.

“Why, thank you, kind sir,” said a smiling Lin Sung. “You are such the gentleman.”

“It’s my pleasure, lady.”

The two night clubbers headed into the front entrance, assisted by doormen in white, silken uniforms that looked vaguely Ninja in design.

Inside the boisterous club, the loud cacophony of music and screaming patrons deafened Lin Sung. Towards the back of the hugely expansive room was a semi-circular stage containing a screaming band, singing the latest in metal-head music. The three singers resembled anime comic characters, with orange, Mohawk hairdos; sequined, gold, skin-tight pants, and sporting gold vests.

Many-colored, flashing strobe-lights made the crowds’ dancing movements into stinted, zombie-like gyrations, as they jumped and humped to the music. Two girls, probably too young to be at a club that served alcohol, were kissing and gyrating to the music, their hips locked in a savage, sexual clutch. The older of the two, probably the one who got them in, was dressed in a white, t-shirt and black mini-skirt with a slit up to her hips. Their sexual movements left no doubt that they were lovers.

Bunches of dancers mixed together to form a crowd of jumping, squirming, twisting maniacs, howling and screaming to the bone-vibrating music. Everywhere was frenzy and abandonment as the crowd celebrated their individual statements of freedom and denial towards the established society in which they found themselves. Denial, accusations, and demands were personified in each dancers’ movements and gestures. Defiance was paramount; disdain was the order of the day.

David had not explained to Lin Sung that one of the reasons he had wanted to go to this club was that it was frequented by the city’s vampire cult members on a regular basis. He had been to the club many times on his previous business trips. There was a predominant gay clientele, and the loose nightclub security allowed the vampires to unobtrusively feed on young people in the darkness outside the club. The vampires almost always left their victims alive after just a quick feed, and the disoriented, groggy victims always thought that they had had one too many drinks and had passed out in the parking lot. The few unfortunates who did not live were left in the adjacent woods and were declared by the police to be victims of the animals which inhabited the woods thereby.

David negotiated the undulating crowd with Lin Sung in tow and found a booth near the band, empty because of its closeness to all the loud music. Just as he had extremely heightened hearing, David also had the control to be able to filter out the music and hear only the conversations of the humans around them. Lin Sung, on the other hand, was not so lucky. She held her hands to her ears and screwed up her face in a grimace as the music assaulted her. She laughed as she looked at David, grimacing comically at the band and their deafening music.

David leaned in to Lin Sung so she could hear him above the din and said, “Don’t worry, we won’t be here long. I wanted you to see this place for future reference, in case I ever asked you to meet someone here for me. I’m going to go and feed right now. I want you to remain here and just watch the crowd. I want to see if you can pick out the vampires here. With your increased abilities that I gave you with my blood, you should be able to spot them. We’ll see when I get back. Just stay here and enjoy.”

David stood and began to move through the dancing crowd, seemingly unaffected by the close quarters and the constant bumping into gyrating young people on the floor. His goal was the other side of the room amongst the tables and the circular bar that lined that side of the room. When they had first entered the club, David had instantly spotted one of the underground’s most notorious outlaw vampires. A member of the local cult and head chief of the street dope distributors, he leaned against the wall, surveying the crowded dance floor.

The vampire was lean, almost to the point of anorexic, wearing a pair of tight, black jeans and a black t-shirt with a local band logo pictured on its front, all of which matched his wiry, black hair. The spiked hairdo was plastered in place with some sort of greasy wax, making the night-walker’s hair stick straight up on his head. Around his scrawny neck the blood-sucker wore a necklace of what appeared to be, sharks’ teeth. His nose and ears were pierced and sported small diamonds in their holes, and another piercing above each eye on the brow, held small, onyx crosses. David moved in close before the vampire became aware of him and shoved the creature’s hand up against the wall, effectively negating the vamp’s retreat.

As the frightened punk looked up into David’s eyes, his knees almost gave out on him. He knew instinctively that La Touche was a powerful vampire and the kid was in instant, mortal fear for his life. His scared, petrified expression made David smile wickedly. Bringing his face within inches of the young vampire, searching his panicked eyes, David read his thoughts. There was nothing in his mind that was of particular value to David, so he broke his empathic hold on the kid and smiled congenially at him.

“Hello, my young friend. Calm down, I won’t harm you. I just want some information. I know you work the dope trade on the streets here in Tokyo. I know you’re a member of some local gang, and I hope with your street smarts, that you can help me with some information. Alright?”

“Y…yes sir,” stammered the frightened vamp. “Anything you need, I can help you with it. I’m on the streets every day—just don’t hurt me, please.”

“I have no intention of hurting you, young man. What I want to know is: have you seen any movement or shipments of blood, or any rumors of human girl trafficking going on, maybe some shipments from the docks lately. Any information about that?”

“There’s some talk on the streets about black market blood distribution, but I hear its quality stuff and expensive as hell; nothing that my guys can afford.” His Adam’s apple did a quick jig up and down his throat as he swallowed.

“It’s supposed to be pure, virgin blood. About the girls, there’s always some of that human slave trade through here, maybe it’s gotten more active lately, I guess. I don’t have nothing to do with that shit; too hard to move slaves without a lot of money and contacts. I don’t know those kind of vamps. But I hear it has been busy lately.”

David considered what the young vampire had disclosed to him, as he lowered his arm and studied the little dope dealer. The information was interesting and confirmed what David already suspected. There was an increase in slave trade through Tokyo and the black market blood trade sounded to him like the clandestine ventures that he already suspected Rasmin Delaval of conducting. All he had to do was confirm this new information with someone who knew names. That would confirm his suspicions.

“You’ve got a boss here in town. Who is he? I need to have a friendly talk with whomever controls the street trade,” said David.

“It’s not a he, it’s a she…Laling Sumora. She controls almost all of Tokyo. I’m surprised you don’t know her. She’s the big shit here.”

“Okay,” said David, smiling again with his friendly, persuasive face. “Tell her I need a meeting tonight. Got it. Hilton Hotel, Suite 3112, have her be there at midnight. Tell her to not make me come after her, or there will be bloodshed, and I don’t want that. I just need to have a sit-down with her and get some vital information about this blood distribution and the human slave trade. She has no reason to fear me if she cooperates.”

“Yes sir,” said the intimidated little night-walker. “I’ll tell her what you said. I’m sure she’ll be there.”

“Good…now get out of here and get it done. If you don’t do as I say, rest assured that I can find you and you won’t like what I’ll do for your betrayal or failure. You wouldn’t like me when I’m angry.”

Yes sir,” the vamp said and immediately disappeared into the crowd of dancers, moving towards the exit.

David watched as the kid vampire disappeared, leaning against the bar and surveying the riotous crowd.

Now, it was time to find a suitable repast to slake his itching thirst. He hadn’t fed for a full day’s cycle and his urge to drink was becoming hard to contain. He needed blood, preferably young and healthy. Several of the gay crowd in the club had already noticed his handsome presence and he could see quite a few admiring stares in the gang of dancers on the floor and at the tables.

Picking a pretty, effeminate young human sitting by himself at the bar, who had been watching him as he talked to the little dope peddler, David walked to the center of the bar and sat down next to the striking creature. Dressed in a neon green, fish-net muscle shirt, lime green jeans, and wearing a bright yellow pompadour hairdo, the young man smiled at David and gave him an obviously enticing look. He liked what he saw in David and made it abundantly clear that he was interested. The diamonds in the boy’s pierced ears sparkled as he turned towards David with an appraising look, bringing his martini to his lips.

“Hello,” said David. “I couldn’t help but notice you from across the dance floor. You’re a very striking young man. Handsomeness is a scarce commodity around here, it seems, and you’ve appeared to corner the market. May I buy you a drink?”

“Thank you,” said the boy in a sweet, high voice. “I would like that very much.”

To David it sounded like he was just getting his adult voice and it alternated between high tenor and a soft baritone. He smiled at his prey with alluring eyes and held up his hand to the busy bartender.

“A Bloody Mary for me and whatever my friend is having…thank you.”

“Yes sir,” said the bartender, “Coming right up.”

“My name is Alexander,” said the handsome morsel. “But all my real friends call me Alex. Would you like to call me Alex?”

“Yes, Alex. I’d like that very much. My name is David La Touche. I’m laying over on a flight to Boston tomorrow and I thought I’d come and see what all the gossip about this place is all about. Quite a busy club, it seems. Are you a regular here?”

“Oh yes. This is the place where anybody who’s anybody goes. It’s a little lame sometimes—pretentious, I guess, but the music’s loud and the bands are generally good. This one is the new rage in Tokyo, and I just had to see it. They’re called The Mournful Dead. Tonight’s the second night…they’re only here for a week. How do you like them so far?”

The bartender sat David’s drink in front of him and placed Alex’s next to his half-finished martini, swiped at the bar with his clean bar towel, and disappeared like a true professional. David admired his studiously indifferent demeanor. He turned back to the young Adonis at his side and gave him his most alluring gaze.

“Alex, I’m here with a lady friend, and I’m afraid I’ve left her all alone at our booth. Would you like to join us for a drink? We’re both here to have a good time, as I’m sure you are, too. She would welcome the addition of another free spirit. Come join us.”

“I’d like that,” said the grinning Alex. “Lead the way.”

David immersed himself in the crowd of dancers with Alex trailing, and wove his way through the squirming young adults to the other side of the dance floor, where Lin Sung sat, lost in the frantic beat of the music. She sat with a new drink, sipping it as she watched the dance floor. She looked hypnotized as she gazed fixedly at the writhing crowd. Looking up, she saw David and Alex arrive, and her face lit up with joy at David’s presence.

“Hi…I missed you. This place is the best. It really rocks. Who’s this?”

“Lin Sung, please meet Alexander…Alex to his friends…and among whom, I’m sure he counts us. Isn’t that right, Alex?”

“Sure, you bet,” said the pretty boy as he scooted into the circular booth, followed by David.

“Nice to meet you.”

“I’m honored young sir,” said Lin Sung. “I stop over here in Tokyo often with my job. I’m a flight attendant with Singapore Airlines. I just love Tokyo.”

“Yes,” agreed Alex. “It’s a great city. I’ve lived here all my life. If you can excuse the traffic jams and the slum districts on the city’s underbelly, it’s not a bad place really. I go to Kyoto University, studying biological sciences, and on the weekends we come here to Tokyo to go night clubbing.”

The conversation lapsed; defeated by the boisterous competition from the loud music and laughing, screaming dancers. David admired the dancing teens and young adults, smiling benignly at the wriggling dancers.

“Lin Sung,” said David, “Why don’t you go and dance for a while. I’m afraid we must be going soon. I have business elsewhere, tonight. Go on, have some fun.”

“I think I will. Thank you, master…uh, David.” Lin Sung scooted out of the circular booth seat and scampered out onto the dance floor and began to dance by herself, immersed in the tribal beat of the current song.

“Now, Alex,” said David, turning the full force of his entrancing gaze upon the young man. “I think you and I should go out to my car. I have something very interesting that I want you to see. Come with me.”

David already had the young man completely mesmerized by his hypnotic gaze. There was nothing the boy could do to refuse the mental demand that David had laid upon him. The intensity of the vampire’s stare was overwhelming, owning Alex’s will to disobey.

Yes, that’d be real nice,” Alex murmured, following David out of the booth. “Hey, why did she call you *‘Master’*,” he asked as they maneuvered through the crowd to the exit door.

“Just a figure of speech. She works for me and it is an honor for her, since she’s Japanese, to work for a corporate head like me. Something like that.”

“Huh, never heard of that—but, okay.”

They exited by the side door, which led around the corner to the parking lot and David’s Lotus. David directed the sleepy Alex to get in and locked the doors upon their settling into their seats. The lot was disserted and David wasted no time in taking the dazed boy into his arms and kissing his sweet, bow-shaped lips. Caressing his smooth chest, David snuggled into his warm neck and extending his formidable fangs, bit into the carotid artery in the boy’s neck.

The blood flow was immediate and strong. David gulped the steady flow of life-giving nectar, as Alex made soft mewling sounds while squirming lazily in ecstasy. The bite of a vampire created sensations in the human victim that were closely kin to sexual orgasm, making the victim both willing and physically cooperative. The only trouble the vampire had with such a situation was holding on to the wriggling subject.

David drank until the blood quenched his thirst, feeling like he was drowning in that glorious taste of life. His tongue tasted the elixir as it filled his mouth and he fully immersed himself in the ecstatic feeling. After several, long moments of drinking, he withdrew his fangs, and gave the wound a salivating lick, which sealed the wounds with surprising speed. The saliva of a vampire held healing properties that accounted for many vampires being able to withstand wounds which would kill a normal human being. The only thing the weak boy would remember was that he had such a good time this night that he must have completely worn himself out—he was so damned tired.

Smiling at the goofy grin on the boy’s face, David smoothed his shirt and swept back his disarrayed hair.

“This was a fortuitous meeting, Alex. I am indebted to you. Now, you’ll get out of the car and go back into the club. You will not remember me or Lin Sung from this evening. All you will remember is that you had some great sex in the parking lot with a stranger whom you can’t remember, and you feel really dragged out. Is that understood?”

“Um…yes…I had a great time, great sex with someone I don’t remember, and I’m really tired and worn out from the evening.”

“Good, now go on…and Alex, thank you.”

“Sure,” the dazed young man said, as he floated back through the parking lot to the front entrance. His steps were slow and methodical, just like someone who had had one too many for the night.

Waiting a respectable interval while admiring the majestic display of stars in the cloudless night sky, David was filled with the post coitus-like flush of blood teeming through his body. At times like this, a vampire looked almost completely human, with a pink glow to his appearance. Blood surged through La Touche’s body, integrating into his whole being, giving him a surge of energy and strength that only blood could give. He felt rejuvenated and alive, bursting with nervous delight at the feel of a good feed.

It was this feeling that every vampire could not live without, not discounting the fact that the blood was necessary for his continued existence—the feeling of the blood made every vampire a totally consumed addict.

With a smile and a soft shake of his head, David’s thoughts returned to him to the present and he got out of the Lotus and went in search of Lin Sung. It was time to leave this place.

## *Madam Sumora*

**Bustling and busy, the traffic** began to snarl up just as the Lotus delivered the two night-clubbers to the hotel underground parking. The dark, ominous shadows in the parking garage accentuated the vibrating rumble of the sports car as David swung into a slot. Lin Sung had had many questions on the trip back and David’s patience had been tested to its limits. But stoically, he had answered all of her myriad questions about the vampire’s life style. He wanted her to go into the *Turning* with her eyes wide open. If he turned her, it would be with her voluntary permission. David wanted a life-mate in her—he was just beginning to realize how special she had become.

He escorted her from the vehicle, giving her his arm, and ushered her, tenderly and gentlemanly, to the underground elevator. Her midnight black hair shone in the fluorescent lights of the elevator, and he admired her stunning beauty and girlish poise, showcased in the shining, brass-trimmed mirror on the wall, as they rose upwards to their suite. She was beginning to infatuate him with her loveliness and innocent pleasure in living life. Her intensity of desire for new experiences was giving him a natural pleasure in participating in her small adventures and relishing her pleasures. These last few hours with her had shown David a new outlook on life, one which included an exaltation of living and loving these human creatures as sentient beings. It had never occurred to David that each of these creatures has a soul and feelings. They love with an abandonment that he could never expect to know; going about their short lives living for the moment, and dying a little more with each breath they take. David had always just considered them to be food or pleasurable distractions. Their desperate grasping for sensual experiences was what made them so different from the vampire. The staid and stale life of a vampire had a dull edge compared to the sharpness of the humans’ lives and their experiences in living.

Lin Sung swept into the suite’s living room, dancing on her tip toes to an inner music, her gown swirling around her, smiling back at David as he followed her into the room.

“Oh David,” she said. “I’ve had such a wonderful evening. To get to dance tonight was divine. I didn’t know what to expect at first…the club was so loud and boisterous that I couldn’t hear myself think. But then I sort of got into the whole nightclub thing, and it was exciting and gaudy and fun. Thank you for taking me.”

“I had fun, too, little one,” David said, taking her in his arms. He kissed her cheek, and kissed her eyelids softly and with great tenderness. Then he kissed those pouting red lips, exploring her mouth with his tongue, tasting her youth and beauty with each probing kiss.

But before he could show her how much he desired her, there came a sharp rapping at the door. Stepping reluctantly back from their embrace, he strode to the immense oaken door where the spy hole gave him a view of the visitor.

It was none other than the exalted Madam Sumora, the controlling element of the Tokyo underground dope world. She would have some answers if there were any to be had. He fingers were on the pulse of the underworld itself, and if anything was unusual on the dope trade and smuggling scene, she would know.

David opened the door to a small, stooped and wizened old Japanese grandmother type with grey hair done up in a bun, affixed with pearl-encrusted hair pins, wearing a red, satin, collared dress with gold piping on the hem and long sleeves. Almost regal in her appearance, Madam Sumora looked at David with sharp, eagle eyes the color of smoky, emerald gems. The slightly wrinkled face lit up with a mischievous smile as she entered the suite and sat on the plush living room couch. Her piercing eyes told David that he was dealing with an individual who had power and was accustomed to giving orders.

“Good morning, Madam Sumora,” said David, seating himself in the adjacent armchair, facing the madam. “I appreciate your prompt answering of my request for an audience. I apologize for my crude method of contacting you. I had no other recourse, since I am not familiar with your underworld. I do deal in blood and escort thralls, but I have never had the pleasure of entering your world of business. Thank you for seeing me.”

“Mr. La Touche,” said Sumora, smoothing her long satin dress with quick emphatic sweeps of her hands, “I came here because I was curious as to the nature of your interest in my business—not because I have any fear of you. I am a business woman and have dealt with the vampire element in Tokyo for years. I am an asset to these nightwalkers, and as such I am beyond reproach. Now, tell me what I can help you with, so that I may go about my business. It does not run itself, unfortunately, and I must keep a close watch on my operations.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” said David receiving a drink of pure blood from Lin Sung, who once again had anticipated the need for refreshments to ease the nervous anxiety of the moment. She served a Manhattan to the madam, who graciously received it, giving Lin Sung a calculating smile.

“I have questions about some recent activity in Tokyo, on which I had hoped you would be able to shed some light. I need to know if you have seen any slave trade other than the usual, here, lately. And also I would like to know if you are aware of any unusually large shipments of blood through the ports-of-entry at the docks. I have reason to believe that I have a renegade in my organization who is smuggling my merchandise through Tokyo to the United States by way of Boston. I realize that this sort of commerce does not normally intersect with yours, but I’m sure you hear the latest news from the streets, each day, in your normal course of business.”

“Can you give me any information about this?” David asked. “Your help in this matter would be greatly appreciated. My organization is prepared to send some very lucrative business your way…that is, with my endorsement.”

Madam Sumora raised herself up with a stiff dignity, straightening her posture to one of a commanding air, and smiled at David with tolerance.

“Mr. La Touche,” she said, “I am well aware of who you are and what organization you represent. It is my business to know what other transactions go on in my city, whether they involve my operations or not. I am always aware of the climate and atmosphere on the streets of Tokyo. That being said, let me tell you what I know.”

Lin Sung had settled on the arm of David’s chair with her arm draped casually over David’s back, listening discreetly to the conversation. She wanted the madam to know that she was more than just a pretty ornament to David and was savvy to business dealings (even though she actually didn’t have a clue as to what all of David’s business dealings were). She listened nonetheless, hoping to understand David better through understanding of his business and to symbolically stake her claim to David.

“First of all,” Madame Sumora said, tasting the alcohol burn as it went down her throat, “I’m aware of a rise in the blood trade market. It is a high grade, virgin blood that is selling for very high prices. Its customers are among the power brokers of the vampire community in Tokyo but I don’t have any dealings in this area. What I can tell you is that it is originating in the Hiracawa District near the Imperial Plaza East Garden in the Saineikan Dojo, the housing of the Imperial guards. There you will find the dealer of this elite and exotic product.”

She took another sip of the Manhattan and smiled as the strong alcohol spread a familiar warmth through her stomach, filling her with its pleasurable heat.

“As for the condition of the slave trade in Tokyo, I really have no information for you. This area of business does not intersect my drug trade often, but I can give you this much: Pier fifteen, Akihiro Transport Company and Junichi International Transport Company on pier nineteen, I think…you’d have to verify that. If slave trade was going through Tokyo, it would have to be through those companies. Those are the only ones I know of that would deal in human slaves.

“Now, I’m afraid that is all the help I can be on these matters. For the sake of good business relations, I hope this information will be somewhat of use to you.”

Madame Sumora rose and crossed her thin arms over her breasts, her body language letting David know that the interview was at an end. David rose also and extended his hand for shaking, his smile showing his respect and admiration for the diminutive madam. She shook his hand firmly, then slowly made her way to the door, followed closely by an attentive Lin Sung and David.

As David opened the door for her, she turned and said, “Mr. La Touche, if I can be of any further assistance, please feel free to visit me in my office downtown. I’m at 6616 Miro in the casino district near the Imperial Palace. Next time feel free to visit me, as I will not be summoned again. Good night to you both.”

She graced Lin Sung with a gentle smile and disappeared down the carpeted hallway. David watched her as she went around the corner in the hall, trying to divine her internal mood. It was obvious that she was offended by his method of getting her to the suite, but something else was prying on her mind. There was a mental itch that plagued David about the woman; some feeling that told him he was being lied to and her apparent help was misleading. She was probably just afraid that he would in some way hinder her drug business or otherwise disrupt her smooth running world. He couldn’t be concerned about her business, however, because he had other fish to fry—quite literally, if he could catch Delaval in action.

## *To Be or Not to Be*

**Sunset, with its lazy demise,** had nearly completed its cycle,when David awoke on the luxurious king size bed, Lin Sung sleeping peacefully at his side. He saw a crimson sheen on the window curtains that was giving the room a fiery, muted light. The red rays of the sun lit up the passing clouds, throwing a glow over the whole city below. He looked over at her beautiful dreaming form and considered his reticence in turning her into a vampire so that he might have a mate. It wasn’t that he felt any qualms about it, he just had a feeling that she needed to be fully aware of what she was getting into, and then he would ask her if she still desired to be turned. Right now she stridently insisted that she was ready, but David thought that maybe it was just the excitement and glamour of the situation that had her infatuated with it all. There would be plenty of time to turn her when the opportunity was right.

Over on the night stand the tiny, black cell phone began to vibrate and sound off with a harmonic wail. Its insistence drove David from his peace, and he answered it in a rather surly voice.

“I have asked to be allowed privacy while on vacation. Whoever this is had better have a very good reason for disturbing me.”

“Sir, it’s Rol Skanek. I know that you said we would meet tomorrow evening, but some facts have been brought to my attention and I think that we should have a meeting tonight. It’s imperative that you be made aware of the situation.”

“Well, what is it, Rol? Spit it out.”

“Sir, it’s very confidential, and I don’t think you want to discuss it on the phone. I am worried at this point about wire taps. Your cell phone may be cyber-hacked, and the land line phone in your room may very well be tapped right at this moment. I think that we must meet in person to discuss the matter.”

“Well, be that the case Rol…come to my hotel right now and let’s get this thing out in the open. I can’t wait to hear what you’ve uncovered.”

“Yes David, I think that you’ll want to hear this right away. I’ll be there in thirty.”

Rol hung up and David disconnected the call with an angry jab of his finger. The air in the room felt stagnant and oppressive all of a sudden. David was getting some bad feelings about all of this. Something ugly was about to happen, he could just tell. Every instinct he had told him right then that all the espionage and traitorous dealings were about to come to a head.

Lying back down next to the sleeping Asian beauty, he leaned over and smelled her heady, womanly smell, and slowly licked her curvaceous neck. He bit into her shoulder muscle, holding her down when she struggled awake, allowing her to feel the erotic embrace and relax before sucking the life-giving blood into his mouth. He savored the taste of the youthful, invigorating blood, appreciating the sudden flow of energy and strength as his senses became overloaded with pleasure.

Lin Sung moaned in ecstasy and rolled onto her side to better embrace her demonic lover. A long sigh of erotic pleasure issued from her luscious lips as David sucked the Asian’s blood voraciously—swallowing her life’s energy and strength. Her heart’s beat began to slow, thumping sluggishly as her lover drained her life away with each swallow of blood.

Sensing her weakness growing, David pulled his fangs from her throat and licked the wound closed with his healing saliva. His head was spinning with gluttonous pleasure; he floated in a cloud of contentment and nearly erotic climax. Blood engorged his body, giving his face a flushed look and molding it to an almost human like appearance.

Lin Sung sleepily opened her eyes and smiled weakly at David, taking in his refreshed demeanor and energetic movements as he rushed around the clothes closet, selecting a wardrobe for the evening. His manner was one of healthy grace, his every move a dance, and his handsome beauty took her breath away as she watched with loving eyes. This was her lover and love. She was truly in love with this creature; be he demon or demonic lover and rescuer, she did not care. She was weak from loss of blood, but her adoration remained as she watched his movements.

His burgundy suit jacket swished through the air as he swirled in onto his shoulders, slipping his arms in and adjusting the fit. Glancing at himself in the full length mirror on the closet door, David nodded in satisfaction and turned to the young human lying seductively on the bed, still.

“I have my security man coming up in just a few moments for a meeting. You are welcome to stay and listen or you may use the time as you please. I will desire your presence this night after midnight, but until then, your time is your own.”

“Thank you David, but I would like to stay and hear your plans. I want to be a part of your business dealings and make myself useful to your world. That would be my greatest pleasure—just to help.”

“Ah, you are a jewel amongst stones, sweet Lin Sung. Yes, stay if you wish and learn what my world is like and what you’ll inherit someday soon.”

David repaired to the suite’s bar and poured an aromatic blend of virgin blood and vodka, with just a twist of lemon; savoring the sublime nectar as he seated himself at the sofa. Evening stars were making themselves present through the plate glass doors of the balcony and David sat with Lin Sung by his side, enjoying the perfection of the evening. The loneliness of the cosmos was apparent in the vastness of the stars which shone down on the puny world of men and vampires, alike. But in that vastness, a majestic, regal beauty existed, stunning the viewer’s perceptions, which made David feel at peace, if only for a while. Business would wait its turn, while he relished his good fortune in meeting this young Asian beauty…

Lin Sung reached for David, cupping his face in her smooth, delicate hands. Turning his face towards hers, she looked into those fathomless eyes and searched for truth and honesty. Maybe his eyes would reveal to her what her future held. She was more afraid of his leaving her alone than being turned. She wanted his life and all that it entailed, even unto the death of her human existence.

“David,” she said, “What will you do with me? Am I to be your servant, your mistress…your mate? Am I to serve you without having your love? I don’t think that I could bear that. Please, tell me now, what you will do...Please.”

“Lin Sung,” answered David, smiling, gazing into her eyes. “I would have you by my side as my mate—my other half; the part of me that is good—my conscience. I would have you make my life have some meaning to it. I would treasure your love and companionship above all others. If you wish for me to turn you and you are sure of your decision, I will turn you this very night. But you must be absolutely sure that that is what you want…because I will only do it, if it is your conscious decision. I have a glamour on you that requires you stay with me, but it does not affect your desires in any other way. I will release you from the glamour and then we’ll see if you still want to stay.”

The air in the room grew still and quiet. Nothing moved. It was if the individual molecules of the air were in stasis. David held her by her soft shoulders and looked directly into her eyes. Her breathing slowed, (as it seemed did time itself), and her eyes grew heavy with lethargy. Gazing into David’s eternal, blue eyes, she felt herself drifting downward into a bottomless well, down, down—with no end to the fall. Her body felt weightless, floating as if on an invisible cloud. Nothing supported her and there was nothing around her except a nothing…a void of nullification, a non-existence. Then she heard David’s voice in her mind.

*Lin Sung, listen and obey my wishes. You are no longer bound to me in any fashion. Your thoughts and desires are yours and yours alone. You are no longer subject to my commands. I RELEASE YOU…*

Reality rushed back into her mind with a *whoosh* of clarity and feeling. She was once again seated on the sofa next to David. Her heart skipped, then thudded, racing with a break neck rush of adrenaline. Taking deep breaths, she felt her heartbeat gradually slow to a more normal pace, once again beating in a relaxed rhythm. She didn’t feel any different from before, except she knew her thoughts were her own. There had been a barely detectable *push* from inside her mind, before, that was no longer present. She felt the truth of it. Still, she felt a desire to be near David, a need to be with him. The urgency of the mental desire was palpable, driving her to grasp at any anchor for her emotions. She needed and wanted David, no matter what he was or what he did…she was possessed by an ironclad urgency to be with him, to be by his side.

“I feel the freedom from your commands, now. It was only a slight, mental push before and it is no longer there. David, I still want to be with you. I still want to be a part of your world. Let me in. Please don’t shut me out…I want to be one with you.”

“Very well, Lin Sung,” said David. “If you are of a mind to enter into my world, so be it. I will give to you the gift of eternal life, but also I will give the savage curse of desire and need for human blood that goes with it. You will fear the sunlight from this night forward and cringe in shadows when in its presence; no longer will you walk in sunshine. You will heal from wounds with amazing speed and you will possess a strength unattainable by any human. Silver, introduced into your system, will kill you slowly and agonizingly. You eyesight will be enhanced tenfold, as will your sense of smell. Aging will be stopped for all time. You might possibly receive the gift of mental telepathy and telekinesis. Some vampires have that ability. I have a strong telepathic ability, but possess no telekinesis powers at all. You may receive the capability of teleportation, though there are very few vampires who have that…and possibly, you may receive the power of prediction; clairvoyance. Are you ready for these gifts as well as these albatrosses to bear on your soul?”

“Yes David,” she said. “I’m ready.”

Holding her suddenly trembling shoulders, David leaned her back on the sofa, placing her grasping arms to her side. He gently turned her head, exposing her swan-like neck to his fangs. Biting into her shoulder at the neck, he found her carotid artery; felt its throbbing, enticing beat. He began to drink her blood, sucking long draughts of the heady fluid with his hungry mouth. Euphoria engulfed his senses as he drank the sweet, soul-quenching elixir, tasting the exotic, pleasurable fluid with all his senses. Once again he felt her heartbeat begin to slow, becoming fainter with each mouthful of her life’s blood that flooded into his voracious mouth. This time, he did not desist. The beat became slower…and slower…until David felt her heart stop.

He knew from experiences past that the timing had to be precise. Once the heart beat its last throb, he immediately opened the vein at his wrist and fed his life-giving blood to her, directing the sluggish, dark red liquid into her mouth.

At first there were no results, no movements in her limbs, but as the vampire’s blood entered her throat and body, she began to respond. Slow, twitching movements in her fingertips showed that the blood was reanimating her dead corpse. David’s pure, vampire blood was giving the dead body of Lin Sung a miraculous, life-giving gift. She would live again as a vampire, his sire—his mate. Her eyelids fluttered weakly and suddenly opened; her previously vacant eyes took on a fierce, terrorized glare, darting around the room anxiously in confusion…and landed on David’s wary countenance…and her fear dissolved. Her disorientation began to subside. With her gaze boring into his eyes, seemingly boring into his very soul, Lin Sung’s taut body gradually relaxed and her gaze softened. She sighed.

“Welcome back, Princess,” he said. “How does it feel to be among the *Undead?*”

Her somewhat bland expression took on a beatific smile, her cupid lips curling at the corners. Her eyes darted around the room with inquisitive fervor, taking in all the vibrant colors, smells, textures of her new world.

“It feels as if I have spent my whole life just going through the motions of living…saying the proper things at the precise time, with predictable results; each day a repetition of the one before it. A dull, smooth edge seemed to be on everything I experienced.

But now because of you, I can truly see. The colors are more vivid, infusing me with a clarity of vision. The smells are so much more aromatic and delicious than before. My mind feels like it’s working at full capacity now and that before I was just almost idling, waiting to understand. I think I’m much closer to understanding it all, closer but not there. Does all that make me certifiable, or what?”

“No, my dear, sweet Lin Sung,” said David. “It makes you one of the most powerful beings in the world—it means that you are now a *vampire…*”

## *Strategy*

A determined, short knock at the elaborate door to the suite brought David to his feet, releasing the smiling Lin Sung. She sat, gazing with new eyes out of the balcony at the depths of the evening’s sparkling night sky. The twinkling stars shone so much brighter and with much more clarity than before. She was captivated by their grandeur and awesome beauty.

David opened the door to a scowling Rol Skanek, flanked by six solid looking security officers. They each held an expression of business-like sobriety—somber, serious, and deadly.

“Rol, good of you to come,” said David. “Come in gentlemen, come in. Let’s have a seat in the dining area. It’s just big enough for our group. Rol, did you bring any data on our current situation?”

As the men began to file into the suite and move through the living area, Lin Sung rose from the couch and, almost as if in a light daze, wandered into the suite’s large bedroom. Her eyes drifting from one object to another, the fledgling vampire viewed the decorations with new eyes that saw complete layers of existence in each object, appreciating its complexity and entirety. Her eyes shone with wonder as she closed the suite’s bedroom door, shutting herself off from the men’s business.

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Pointing to each of his men as he spoke, Skanek said, “David, this is Movado Hasheem, my second in command. This is Wayne Cull, over here is William Winston, here is Joe Tillison, this Indian is Daniel Strongbow, and the little guy is Win Tong Tse, our Tokyo operative.”

Rol and the six security men followed David into the dining nook and proceeded to shuffle the chairs out from the table and seat themselves. The briefcase that Rol was carrying was answer enough for David and he sat down at the head of the beveled, glass table.

Movado moved about the room with a hand-held scanning device, searching for any bugs in the room or miniature spy cameras. Movado’s black hair and olive complexion gave away his Middle-Eastern heritage, as did his walnut brown eyes. The seated men watched with anxious silence, waiting for his conclusions. Satisfied with his initial sweep, Movado seated himself beside Skanek at the table and nodded to the security chief, signaling that the room was clean.

With his eyebrows scrunched up in a scowl, Rol withdrew several pages of typed memos and a small stack of photographs which crackled softly in the quiet room. Wearing an air of somber expectation, he slid them across to David.

His stocky, two hundred pound frame put a burden on the dainty dining chair, as he leaned back in his seat. David looked at his square-jawed face and waited for him to speak.

“Here’s what we have so far, David,” said Skanek. “Most of this, you and I have already gone over, but there are a few new items. I’ll summarize while you go through the pictures and memos. We’ve seen activity in both the slave trade and the blood trade to date; with Delaval making substantial changes in our official records, balancing the losses with excuses and often down right falsifying records. I know that just last week there were two hundred quarts of blood unaccounted for and he balanced the shortage with fake withdrawal receipts. The slave girls were shown at one hundred fifty last month, but this month only one hundred twenty one are physically accounted for. That means that Delaval has twenty nine with him or he knows where they are right now.

“The memos show that all the girls were moved around from schools to training centers to etiquette classes, and then twenty nine just disappeared off the books. He justifies the loss due to deaths and a few escapes. I know we expect some deaths, because some of them just don’t take to mind control. Also every once in a while, one or two will escape. But this hasn’t happened in a long time…until just recently, as a matter of fact. Again, Delaval has written excuses into the records, claiming a laxity in security measures, some excuses seemingly legitimate, others down right fanciful.”

The pages of the memos whispered in David’s hands as he speed read each one and moved on swiftly to the next. His hands were almost a blur as he shuffled and laid out the pictures on the smoked-glass tabletop.

“Well, it just proves what we saw and talked about before,” said La Touche. “Now we have irrefutable evidence of the losses and false record entries. Where do we stand with locating Delaval? Any luck tracking him down?”

“Not as of yet,” said Skanek. “He was last recorded in Boston at the corporate headquarters there, but has since seemed to have dropped off our radar. I would conjecture that his spies in the company have let him know that we’re on to him. My guess is, he’s in hiding somewhere in Boston. He seemed to conduct all his illicit trade business from there. David, we’ve got to purge the entire corporation of his cronies and spies. There’s more to his operation than we first believed. There seem to be many more people involved.

“If he knows we’re looking for him and have evidence against him, I’d bet a gallon of virgin blood that he’s making arrangements to strike out at you before you get to him. A pre-emptive strike, if you will.”

“Yes, that would seem reasonable, considering his circumstances,” said a thoughtful David. “What would you suggest as a prudent course of action? Bear in mind…I’m not in the least afraid of him. As a matter of fact, I look forward to tearing his throat out.”

Skanek’s chair protested mildly as he rose from his seat. He walked over to the bar and began to pour himself a Bloody Bull from David’s decanter, all the while with a thoughtful look on his face. Deep thought seemed almost alien to his dull countenance. Half of the large goblet of blood disappeared down his undulating gullet before he put the glass down and turned to David.

“I’d like to make arrangements for my men and me to get the suite next to yours, so we can keep an eye on the situation. I wouldn’t put it past Delaval to try to hit you while you’re here, before you even get to Boston. If the suite is already taken, I’ll convince the hotel management that you need it for corporate business meetings. That shouldn’t be a problem. They love you here almost as much as they love the money you throw around *while* you’re here. That way we can be here to protect you.”

David laughed a short derisive bark, then stood also and went to the bar with Skanek. Pouring his own drink, La Touche turned to the other guards at the table and raised his glass high.

“Gentlemen, I salute you each and every one. We are about to embark on a dangerous mission; one which may well prove fatal to one or more of you before we’re done. I want each of you to know that if you refuse this little cleansing of mine, no harm will come to you, nor will you be in any way looked down upon. I want your complete loyalty and dedication to this job. If any of you feel that you cannot give me that, I urge you to leave now with my blessing.”

The room was uncomfortably silent as the five men at the table looked at each other, wondering if any would get up and leave. No one did.

Hasheem was the first to speak, seeming to echo the thoughts of the others at the table.

“Sir, we know what the job will entail. I speak for the whole group when I say you have our complete loyalty and trust. We’ll take care of this Delaval for you. Don’t worry.”

“Good to hear,” said David. “Rol, go ahead and book the suite next door and the one on the other side of me as well. I know you won’t have any trouble with the management. They’re always extremely cooperative with my little eccentricities.”

“Consider it done,” said Skanek. “I’m going to have Movado install cameras in the hall, the stairways and here in your suite and I’ll monitor them from next door. If anyone approaches you here in the hotel, I or one of the men will know about it. If you’re expecting someone, all you have to do is let us know next door so we won’t be concerned. If you don’t okay someone we will neutralize their threat before it ever gets anywhere near you. That sound about right?”

“Sounds excellent,” said David, drinking his bloody cocktail. “Our biggest danger, though, will arise when we go out looking for Delaval. I want to catch him in one of those warehouses or on the docks, if possible. I’d still like to have proof of his traitorous acts to present to the board. Even though I’m acting on verifiable facts, I’ll still need more. So if you and the men can help me challenge him on one of his moves that would be the best case scenario.”

“Okay,” said Skanek. “Win Tong, you and Movado get out there and find Delaval. We only want to observe his movements without being discovered. Record all his dealings and actions, and shadow him when he moves from place to place. Stay in touch with me with the *burn* phones and I’ll direct things from right here. Remember, when you find him, just tail him, and don’t get seen.”

Turning to David, Skanek said, “I have a clean *burn* phone for you also, Boss.”

He passed the new phone to David and smiled. “Use it only to contact me or the men.”

“Alright boss, we’re on the prowl,” said Movado, gathering up his equipment. He rose from the chair, unfolding his arms and legs like a limber sapling blowing in the breeze, his 185 pound, six foot frame fairly rippling with restrained power. Running his hands through his blue-black, shoulder length hair, he moved to the door with purposeful strides, followed closely by the diminutive Win Tong. He turned at the door, looking back at his superior.

“We’ll stay in touch. Come on, Win Tong. We get to play *Peeping Tom…”*

Win Tong smiled at Movado. “You will be the *‘Peeping Tom’.* I will be the *‘Charging Dragon.’”*

The two guards left the apartment with its anxious occupants still deciding the next course of action. Skanek was making notes on his tablet while David remained seated, lost in thought. The other four guards waited expectantly.

“Rol,” said David, “I just thought of another duty for one of your men. I want a 24/7 watch on Lin Sung. She’s a fledgling now, one of us, but I think that Delaval would try to kidnap her if he knew of her closeness to me. Have your man watch her every movement when she’s out of my sight. She’s a very valuable commodity to me.”

“Sure, you got it, boss. No problem. Uh, Winston, you got the job. Congratulations.”

“Oh yeah, thanks. I get to babysit,” the big guard said with a sigh.

David smiled at the guard’s disgruntled face. All the guards were trained in the most advanced martial arts and hand to hand combat. With their vampire speed and reflexes, they were a most formidable Black Guard unit. As a result of their backgrounds of service and training, they naturally didn’t want to remain idle or feel like they were treading water, when there were enemies about.

“William, isn’t it?” asked David, trying to remember the guard’s name. “I know you want to be of better use here, but please believe me when I say that she is of great importance to me and you would be doing me a great favor if you would make sure she stays safe throughout these next few weeks…until we take care of this Delaval business. If Delaval gets wind of her importance to me, she will be in tremendous danger. I’ll see to it that you are properly rewarded for you diligence. Just stay close to her…in the shadows, so to speak.”

“Yes sir, of course. I’m sorry,” said Winston, slightly abashed by David’s remark. “I’m sure she is very valuable to you. I didn’t mean any disrespect. It’s just that I think I would be better used to hunt down this vermin you’re having trouble with. But, if this is my charge, I will do my utmost to be sure the lady is not harmed or molested in any way…I promise.”

“That’s all I ask,” said David. “And trust me when I say, she *is* extremely valuable to me.”

Skanek contacted the desk and found that both suites, the ones on either side of David’s, were available and he booked them immediately. The management was more than delighted to reserve the rooms for David.

*“Oh, how money greases the ponderous wheels of expediency…”* he thought.

“Okay,” said Skanek as he laid the phone on the table. “We now have two adjoining suites. Cull, you and Tillison take Suite 3110 and Strongbow and I will take 3114. Strongbow, you set up the spy-cam monitors in our room, while I install the spy cams. There’ll be two in the main lobby, one on each elevator, four for the hallway, and one above Mr. La Touche’s door. That should give us a running view of anyone approaching.”

“Okay, Rol,” said Strongbow, rising from his seat at the table and moving to the door. “I’ve got the equipment in our van. I’ll get on it.”

As Strongbow turned back to the door and began to exit the room, Skanek had a new thought.

“Hey, while you’re at it, go to headquarters and get us all several boxes of silver-nitrate, 357 and 45 caliber ammo for our handguns; say 250 rounds for each man. Regular ammunition won’t be effective on Delaval or any of his vamps. I want all the firepower we have on hand to deal with this situation.”

David leaned back in his chair, his thoughts swirling with plans and strategy. Delaval would not go down easily, nor would his camp. Lethal force would be required now for David to maintain his power structure within the corporation. It was going to give him great pleasure to deal the blow of death to Delaval, first hand.

## *Shipboard Blood*

**“Don’t worry about the captain,”** Delaval said from his personal Learjet over Hong Kong, en route to Tokyo. “I’ve taken care of that. He’s being substantially compensated to allow us to store our *merchandise* in a lower hold of the ship. Just inventory everything and sign off for him. That’s all you have to do.”

The comforting drone of the sleek, Learjet 85 soothed his jangling nerves as he spoke. Streaking through the upper atmosphere at Mach 0.82, a speed approaching the sound barrier, had actually calmed his over-excited condition. Purchasing the Learjet 85 had been a bit of extravagance, but Delaval wanted the three thousand mile range of the beast, so that he could make a trip without refueling and the five hundred forty one miles-per-hour speed of the jet made his transit by night safe and comfortable. And besides, the power image that the thing projected made him feel much more domineering than without it—almost erasing the pitiful public image of the slovenly, portly, under-belly vermin that he was.

“Yes sir, Boss,” said Ja Jang. “I’ve got the men started right now.”

Ja Jang and crew were at Pier Nineteen, Tokyo Harbor, loading the blood shipments (designated as Contaminated Biological Wastes) onboard the SS Wintango, the transport ship to Hong Kong. Looking out of the warehouse window into the night, he could see the crew below filing to and from the ship with the blood containers, resembling worker ants scurrying up and into an ant hill as they trudged up the gang-plank. The high-intensity flood-lights on the pier threw moving shadows across the face of the warehouse opposite. The corners of his mouth twitched into a smile as he mentally puffed out his rather effeminate chest.

*Yeah, things are rolling along like clock-work. That’s the way to do business. This operation will be “a piece of cake.”*

Ja Jang had arrived in Tokyo just the night before and was busily managing the transfer of the blood shipment. Transport from the secret stronghold tonight had been uneventful and since then his worries had been slightly alleviated. His exceptional expertise in planning and crew management had made him an irreplaceable asset to Delaval…just the way the little oriental wanted it.

Delaval was his ticket to the power and wealth that he so coveted. All he need do is make himself irreplaceable and ride the coat tails of the conspirator to achieve his own personal goals.

“We’ll be able to wind this up in another three hours, tops. The ship leaves tomorrow and arrives in Hong Kong on the evening of the ninth, at Berth Twenty-One. I’ll make sure we have a team there to meet it and accept delivery.”

“Very good,” said Delaval. “Keep me posted on any unusual developments. I may meet you for the delivery at the pier, if I can get away. I’ll let you know.”

“Yes sir. See you then,” said a relieved Ja Jang. It seemed that the Boss was happy for a change.

Glancing down from his view of the warehouse window opposite the transport ship, Ja Jang clicked the small, cell phone shut with a sigh. There was probably upwards of one million dollars’ worth of virgin blood in those containers. All the elite and ancient vampires of the world would pay exorbitant prices for that gourmet delight.

Sai Kung buzzed Ja Jang on his cell phone from the pier below. Ja Jang’s eyes swiveled in the vampire’s direction, searching the pier for the squatty, Japanese crewman as he answered. Finally spotting the vampire, Ja Jang’s eyes squinted almost closed, trying to discern the vamp’s expression. He didn’t need any last minute headaches, wouldn’t put up with any human impediments to his schedule.

“What is it, Sai?” said Ja Jang.

“Everything’s moving on schedule, boss. Seventy five cases of virgin blood loaded and labeled for Port of Call, Hong Kong. The last lot is being loaded as we speak. All the paperwork is in order and we’ll leave tomorrow. Are you coming along with us, or are you meeting the ship?”

“Oh, I’ll be onboard with you…wouldn’t miss it. I don’t want any fuck-ups, now that we’re this close.”

“Okay boss. You want all the crew to accompany the shipment?”

“No, not necessary…just you and four guards. Let everyone else loose for now. I’ll have an unloading crew meet us in Hong Kong, upon arrival. Make sure that everything is battened down tightly and the men are settled in berthing. I want a guard in the hold compartment with the shipment at all times. Make up a watch roster and have the men notified. The captain knows who we are and has been sufficiently compensated so that he will cooperate and give any and all help we need.”

“Okay boss, you got it. You coming onboard now?”

“No, not right now. I have some other errands to attend to, but I will be onboard tomorrow night for departure.”

“Yes sir, acknowledged...”

The whole operation had been a nervous undertaking, what with the rumors of La Touche having gotten wind of Delaval’s schemes. Nothing concrete had come to Ja Jang’s notice yet, but he kept feeling that the hammer was going to fall any moment, and he didn’t want his neck beneath the blow. La Touche was one vindictive vampire.

Leaving the old warehouse behind, he crawled into his SUV and drove down to the Haracawa District in search of food and entertainment. He owed it to himself and the last few nights’ work had given him a powerful thirst, which he intended to slake with one of the night-clubbers’ fresh blood. Nothing like a full, satiated stomach to make a vampire smile. His coal-black eyes gleamed in the moonlight as he drove the last few miles to the notorious tourist trap.

Luck was with him, it seemed, because no sooner had he pulled into the parking lot at the club, when a small group of young tourists, laughing and drinking right from the liquor bottles in their cars, yelled and waved at him, luring him to their party.

*Oh yes, ladies…I smell your sweet, young blood. Its aroma and delicious taste are nectar to my palate. I’ll be glad to join your little party, but I’m not sure which of you will live out the night to regret your invitation. Still, youthful exuberance is my favorite snack.*

As he parked his SUV and got out, he once more had fleeting worries over the blood shipment on the following night. Something niggled his mind with barely realized warnings—nothing that he could put his mental finger on—just enough to worry.

He’d thrown in his lot with Delaval and did not kid himself now—if La Touche ever caught up to him, his demise would be excruciatingly painful and unbelievably slow.

*But tonight is for sustenance and fun. So, let the games begin…*

## *The Hunt*

**Traversing the downtown underworld** of Tokyo inconspicuously was tricky for Movado Hasheem and Win Tong with their shiny, black Humvee sticking out like Christmas ornament. Rain beat at the Hummer’s windshield as the duo wound through the traffic. It wasn’t to their advantage at this juncture to make the denizens of Tokyo’s underworld of drugs and sex aware of their movements and activities. But Movado had plans to remedy that situation. Pulling into an underground parking garage in the Hibiya Park district, he moved the Humvee to the back of the lot. There, idling in the next parking space, was a discreet, thundercloud grey Chevrolet Impala with two Black Guard vampires sitting inside.

“Here’s where we change rides,” said Movado, parking beside the Camaro and cutting the engine. “These are two of our Black Guards from the Tokyo office. They’ll be giving us a hand with the search.”

Movado got out of the Humvee with Win Tong climbing down from the other side and both vampires walked cautiously over to the Impala, their hands in plain sight for the other men to see. The door of the car swung open and the two Black Guard got out, facing the approaching duo. Tension almost crackled like electricity in air as the vampires eyed each other, assessing each other’s capabilities. After a moment’s visual inspection of the two vamps, Movado smiled and shoved out his hand.

“Glad to have you guys onboard. We can use your familiarity of the city to help us with our search. I take it that Rol Skanek filled you two in on what our job is and our objective.”

The bigger of the two vampires took Movado’s extended hand and pumped it vigorously as he cautiously eyed Win Tong. He was a huge, bear of a man—a Caucasian of apparent Irish blood, standing a full six feet three and probably weighing in at 200 pounds or more. He had buzz-cut, crew-cut-looking, red hair, what looked like a broken pug-nose, and evil looking yellow/gold eyes. Around his trunk of a neck hung a silver skull on a thick silver chain, just outside of the collar of his collared shirt. The black shirt and black jeans he wore made him look like some wrestler out for the night, looking for trouble. Movado wondered at his bravado in wearing silver. If it ever touched his skin directly, the vamp was in for some hellacious skin burn. He looked like he didn’t care for Movado, this job he’d been given, or anything else in the world. He was a hardened assassin in the employ of the corporation, working as a Black Guard for the coven.

“I’m Amberstand and this is Hewey. We were told you needed guards who know the streets here. What is it you need from us?”

Hewey was an average-built, young kid with small, gold-hoop earrings in both ears. He was also dressed in a faded, black, sleeveless, t-shirt and blue jeans with holes in the knees. His wiry, green-and-yellow, Mohawk hair wobbled as he jerked his neck from side to side. His fidgeting manner was irritating right from the start and Movado did his best to ignore the boy’s constant, twerking body language. Movado guessed he was on PCP or some street speed of generic origin.

“My name’s Movado and this is Win Tong. I’ll need your assistance in locating a man of interest here in Tokyo. I’ve got photos of him in my briefcase. I’ll show them to you. But first, what do you know about any smuggling trade at the docks; any movement of girls, or any exporting of virgin blood?”

Amberstand thought for a second and said, “I don’t know of anything unusual out there. I get out that way at least once a week to receive shipments of guns and other imports for the corporation, but I haven’t heard of any unusual activity in girls or blood. I can make a couple of calls to some contacts out there and find out for sure. You want me to make the calls?”

“Yeah, do that, and find out about any *undocumented* shipments through there, too. I need all the info you can get for me. And I need names where ever you can get them. The main character we’re looking for is a business man named Delaval. He’s high-end business; a fat fucker, always dressed impeccably, and probably has a vamp *goon-squad* around him at all times. Any of that ring a bell?”

“As a matter of fact, yes. There was a guy like that out there a couple of weeks in a row about a month ago...sounds like that could be him. I’ll make these calls and find out some more, if I can.”

Movado reached into the Humvee and retrieved his briefcase, then got in the front passenger seat of the Impala while Amberstand got back behind the wheel and started dialing his cell phone. The other Black Guard, Hewey, got in the back of the vehicle with Win Tong.

The rain had grudgingly abated for the time being and the air outside was heavy with humidity and heat, the rain run-off dripping from the eaves of the garage. Movado leaned back in the cool, leather seat of the vehicle and relished the air conditioned interior as he waited for Amberstand to get his information.

Dark shadows lurked about the deserted parking lot, giving rise to a slightly paranoid atmosphere within its bowels. Movado was not one to flights of fancy, but he was still on high alert to any dangers that might be about. His deep, crimson eyes darted about the parking garage, seeking any other vampires in the area. With his heightened senses, he would be able to detect any other vampires within the immediate area, but none were there.

Glancing at the back seat he saw Win Tong seated comfortably with his eyes closed. Movado knew that the little Asian was in a trance, searching for their adversaries in his psychic, netherworld realm.

Win Tong had come to the La Touche Enterprises from mystic Japan. He had become a vampire in 1736, while serving in the royal guard for the emperor himself: the Divine Emperor Sakuramachi. Ascending the throne in 1735 upon his father’s abdication, Sakuramachi was a young man, but wily enough to understand the inner workings of the Japanese royal court, and knew full well of the vampires in his father’s royal guard. Win Tong had used his vampiric abilities to his advantage when protecting the emperor with uncanny foresight and dedicated devotion. While in the court guard, Win Tong had developed his skills in all the ancient Japanese fighting arts and today, he had no mortal equal. The razor edges of his twin katanas (Japanese dueling swords) had severed the lives of many enemies to the throne.

In the Impala’s back seat, Win Tong’s eyeballs shifted frantically behind his closed lids as he delved through his shadow-world images. He was the best psychic that the corporation had and if any activity was anywhere around close, he would feel it. Considering his acumen with the martial arts and his psychic ability, he was one of the company’s best assets.

Movado didn’t want to interrupt the Asian’s thoughts, so he turned back to Amberstand with an impatient stare, silently urging the vamp to hurry. The Black Guard was still listening to his contact, grunting affirmatively every so often. He finally thanked whoever he had on the phone and disconnected the call with a jab of his gorilla-like thumb, smiling.

“Well,” said Movado, when the Black Guard didn’t immediately speak, “What did you find out? Any news of the trafficking on the docks?”

“Yeah, I was right. A fancy dresser has been making shipments of what’s labeled as bio-hazard material in medical containers with armed guards as deliverymen. Let me see that photograph of this Delaval and I’ll send a picture to my contact at the docks.”

Movado produced the 5x7 photo of Delaval and after snapping a picture with his cell phone, Amberstand sent the reproduction off to his contact.

“Okay,” said Movado, when the photo had been received, “Now, let’s head over there for a look. I want to personally set up surveillance of the transport ships at Pier 19. According to my information, that’s where the blood will likely be shipped.”

A frantic rustling came from the back seat area. Movado turned to look at the skinny kid, swiveling his head around like a dashboard *bobbing-head* toy.

“I gotta get a *Hit*, man,” said the jerking Hewey. “Stop by the Samurai Club and let me hook up…please, Amberstand, I’ll be good-to-go after that.”

“Fuckin’ junkie,” snarled Amberstand, looking at the vamp in the rear view mirror. “If you weren’t related to one of the headquarters big shots, I’d dump your sorry ass out in the streets…let the street vamps eat you alive.”

“Who’s he connected to?” said Movado, glancing in disgust at the twitching kid.

“I don’t know for sure,” said Amberstand. “Some dipshit official in the corporate office headquarters. They send him out on small jobs like this surveillance shit. Word’s out that he isn’t to be touched.”

“Well, let me clue you in, kid,” said Movado, turning again to the back seat. His voice had a soft, deadly tone. Crimson eyes nailed the kid in place. “We work for Mr. David La Touche, the corporate president and major stock holder. In other words, he owns this company, and therefore—he owns you. If you don’t do this job exactly right, or we have any trouble from you, you won’t live long enough to regret it. Do you get my meaning, kid?”

A pale sheen slowly covered the boy’s face as the words sunk in. His sunken, bruised eyes flitted back and forth from Movado to Amberstand and back. His tongue flicked out and wiped his dry, cracked lips. The twitching increased and his eyes popped out in fright, making him surrealistically comical. He began to stutter and spit as he tried to speak.

“M…m-mister, I…I…can do my job just f-f-fine. I promise. You d-don’t have to worry about me. I was jus’ jokin’…I don’t need a fix…”

“Good,” said Movado, dismissing the kid from his thoughts. He knew that the warning would override the kid’s desire for his dope. After this job was over, Movado intended to discuss the kid’s future with Mr. La Touche. If the boss gave him the go-ahead, Movado would take permanent care of the little bastard, regardless of who he was connected to in the office downtown.

*Besides,* thought Movado, *him being a twitching junkie will be good cover for surveillance at the docks. He can watch what’s going on down below and no one would even give him a second thought. He’ll fit right in.*

Amberstand pulled the Impala out into traffic and headed for the docks, about five miles away at the Sodegaura Port Transit Authority in Tokyo Bay. Port Minamiboso was just across the bay from Sodegaura and if nothing panned out in one, Movado was prepared to canvas the other port also. One way or another, he would find Delaval.

Taking Tokyo Highway Number 15, Amberstand blended into the steady flow of traffic in the busy city, heading south to Highway 413 which would take them to the port. Outside, the Japanese commuters were busy with their daily lives; very few of them aware of the underworld of vampires that inhabited their island. Small economy cars whizzed past the Impala like disturbed wasps searching for their hives. Amberstand followed the flow towards Highway 413, weaving in and out of the traffic flow with expertise. Though time was of essence and the quicker they got there the easier it would be to set up surveillance, Amberstand stayed within the speed limit, not wanting any unnecessary interactions with the local police.

Win Tong awoke from his trance with a gasp for air and frantically swinging arms, connecting with the kid’s nose in the process.

“Ow, dammit,” shouted Hewey. “I think you broke my nose, ya damned chink!”

“Shut your fuckin’ pie-hole kid, before I shut it for you,” said Movado, turning to the back. “Win Tong, did you sense anything…make any contact?”

Hewey grasped his aching, bloody nose in both hands, moaning in bereavement of his nasal appendage, and stuck a decidedly unclean handkerchief to his face. He eyed Win Tong with hatred, but wisely, remained silent.

Win Tong shook his head trying to clear his thoughts and claim his spiritual essence back. His journeys to the shadow world were becoming progressively harder to culminate each time he entered. It was getting more and more difficult to discern this reality from the seeming reality of his trances. Someday, he feared, he would be unable to return from the spirit world and would be lost there in that abyss of nothing. His dazed eyes gradually focused on Movado, sitting in the front seat staring at him with concern.

“Yes,” said Win Tong, still shaking his head slightly from side to side. “Most assuredly, there are some strange transactions taking place at Pier 19. I sensed six vampire auras moving about the pier and much human activity as well. The transport ship is their point of contact and the movements are on and within the ship itself. Quite a bit of activity, really—one group of dockworkers and one group of vampires moving containers.”

“Ah, just as we expected,” said Movado, turning back to Amberstand, who had been listening intently to the exchange between the two.

“Go straight to Pier 19, my friend. That’s our target for surveillance for right now. I’m pretty sure that’s the answer to all our questions.”

“You got it—exit coming up,” said Amberstand.

The grey Impala shifted over into the exit lane and Amberstand left the highway. At the next light, he turned right onto the entrance ramp for Highway 413. The busy, commercial port was just a few moments away, and Pier 19 was about midway down the docks.

Each vampire in the car was feeling the tension mount, shifting in their seats, (fidgeting as in the case of the junkie kid, Hewey), and mentally collecting themselves—preparing for lethal action. Movado checked his 45, and chambered one of the silver-nitrate loaded shells, which had been specifically developed to take down other vampires. The silver nitrate would not kill, but would incapacitate a vampire long enough to capture and/or kill him. Decapitation, as messy as it was, would end a vampire, just as sunlight would kill him…and a stake through the heart was also final. Accurately piercing the heart was the problem for novices like that Hewey and probably Amberstand too, but it was the *most* final solution.

Win Tong was armed with silver throwing-daggers as well as a small, but lethal, crossbow that sported silver-tipped wooden arrows. He was a trained marksman with the device and could hit any target from 50 yards.

Both Amberstand and Hewey would be armed with 45s, also. That was standard equipment for the Black Guard and Movado was sure that they had AK-47s in the trunk of the car. Plenty of firepower, even if the six vamps they were up against were professionals, as Movado naturally assumed.

The trick was going to be surprise. Movado wanted surveillance first, then appropriate action to follow. These traitorous vampires had to be treated as the dangerous threat that they were.

## *Surveillance*

**Hewey jittered, shook, and flinched** his way down the pier from the head of the dock. The whitish pall that encompassed his face made him look like a Meth-head with DTs and his nervous, jerking walk gave his junkie appearance credence to the long shoremen on the pier. His disheveled clothing and homeless appearance made him look just like a wasted, human compost-pile looking for his next connection.

*Which actually, comes pretty close to the mark,* thought Movado from his vantage point on the top floor of the warehouse across from the pier.

The three vampires; Movado, Amberstand and Win Tong, watched Hewey meander down the dock and settle on a distribution warehouse loading dock, just a little ways past the ship. He jumped up on the dock, walked to the building’s back wall, collapsed down to a sitting position and scooted his boney butt up against the wall of the warehouse, smoking a slimly rolled joint.

The huge, blue and white, container ship, S.A.R. Wintango, was a transport ship out of Hong Kong, China. The tremendous bulk of the cargo ship dwarfed the dock workers going back and forth from the warehouse opposite it. There was a two story, white with blue trim, wheel house on the aft end of the ship from which the captain piloted the transport. From Movado’s position, the dock workers looked like a line of worker-ants, diligently forklifting metal drums of HAWs, (Highly Active Wastes), across the aft gangway. HAWs were irradiated wastes from a nuclear plant in Nagasaki, being returned to their country of origin. In this case, the ship would transport from Tokyo to Hong Kong. The ship displayed the ensign of Honk Kong on its bulky, fantail flagpole, confirming Movado’s intelligence information as to its origin.

The call had been made to La Touche, telling him that the surveillance was established and all activity was being constantly monitored.

The midnight sky was filled with stars and portents of potential violence to come. A still, flat atmosphere pervaded the dark pier and its surrounding offices and buildings. Black shadows moved within shadows as the team monitored the activity below.

Hewey had been sent down to the docks to get a first-hand look at the activities and Movado, Amberstand and Win Tong were doing long-range surveillance from the warehouse. La Touche was in route to their locations and had ordered no action until his arrival.

“Okay Hewey,” whispered Movado into the boy’s microphone ear-piece. “Just hang out on the loading platform there where you are and pretend to be nodding off, like you’re coming down from a good high and you’re just trying to sleep it off. They shouldn’t pay any attention to you, ‘cause you’ll look like most of those other useless fucks I see down there on the docks right now.”

Movado was normally a patient, meticulous person who crossed all his *T’s* and dotted all his *I’s*. The unpredictability that Hewey personified, irritated him to an unearthly degree, and raised a scary uncertainty within him.

“Yeah, okay man,” said Hewey into his collar mike. “I see ‘em on the gangplank from here. They’re loading big plastic containers with a radiation sign on ‘em. Shit, I could be doing this a whole lot better, if you’d just let me get a fix before I came down here, dude. I just can’t stop these shakes, man. Feels like my eyeballs got sand in ‘em and my guts are rollin’ like I’m gonna puke. Shit man!”

“That’s okay, you pussball. You had better not fucking puke. Just keep an eye on those workers and let me know if you see anything out of the ordinary. We’re looking for Delaval. All of us have seen a picture of him and we know what he looks like. That’s who we’re mainly interested in and anything else that might look suspicious. Keep your shit together and I’ll see to it that you get your fix when we’re done. Got it?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” mumbled Hewey into his mike.

“Win Tong, could you do your trance thing again and verify how many vampires are in that loading crew? We need to know exactly how many we’ll be dealing with and how powerful they may be.”

“Yes, that is no problem,” said the small Asian, drawing back from the window. Taking a lotus position with his legs crossed, he began to draw full, slow breaths, taking his consciousness down into his psychic realm. His eyes moved inside the eyelids from side to side, delving deeper into the misty world of the mind. Drifting slowly further down into the wispy dimension, Win Tong turned his psychic vision in search of the vampires below.

Using his mind to navigate the mists of the ghost world in which he found himself, Win Tong’s psychic sight moved through the smoke and mist finally focusing on the vampire crew. His first impression was that they were fledgling vampires, being used for grunt work alone and of no particular danger. The little Asian knew that if La Touche desired it, he could destroy their individual minds with a psychic surge of mental energies. Win Tong had the power to dissolve their minds into jabbering psychos, rendering them useless to Delaval or any of his co-harts.

Slowly, he withdrew from that misty plane of existence, drifting upwards, back to his bodily awareness, slipping slowly out of the trance. With a shudder, his eyes opened and frantically searched all the corners of the room in confusion until his disorientation dissolved and he began to recognize his surroundings.

“It’s okay, Win Tong,” said Movado, reassuring the panicked Asian. “You’re safe…you’re here with us. It’s okay.”

Movado’s cell phone buzzed softly and he looked to see that it was La Touche calling.

“Yes sir…we’re on the top floor of the warehouse across from the ship…we’ve got them under surveillance. Do you see the warehouse?”

“Yes Movado,” came La Touche’s voice from the phone. “I’m downstairs right now, on my way up. Just wanted to let you know, so that one of those trigger-happy Black Guards don’t shoot me when I enter.”

Movado snorted laughter. “Don’t worry Boss. These guys are pretty professional. They’re alright…except for that sissy-junkie.”

“Good to hear. Rol felt that someone local would know the terrain better than we would. Hope they’re not getting in the way.”

Movado’s attention shifted to the opening door at the back of the empty room and acknowledged La Touche and Rol Skanek as they entered. He saw with relief that La Touche and Skanek both were in good moods, smiling slightly at the three binoculars, two AK-47s, and sniper rifle lying beside the prone trio at the far window. Eight, floor-to-ceiling, dusty windows were centered at the back wall and Movado had set up his surveillance position there. Spider webs hung from every corner and window ledge in the space, testifying to its abandoned state. A feeling of graveyard quiet pervaded the old room. Settling down beside Movado, La Touche picked up the binoculars and began a slow sweep of the cargo ship.

“Have we any sighting of Delaval, yet?”

“No sir. Win Tong, tell Mr. La Touche what you saw when you tranced out.”

“Mr. La Touche, I felt six vampire presences in one loading party, going into the depths of the cargo hold aft and stacking plastic containers in one corner of the hold. These are only fledgling vampires with no particular strengths or abilities. There are twelve humans in that loading party, and another party of regular dock crewmen loading forward. The one group does not talk to or interfere with the other,” said Win Tong.

“Good, that’s what we needed to know. Since one group is separate from the other, we can assume that Delaval has set up this cargo transfer with the captain and the ship’s crew was notified that there would be another loading party. Excellent, Win Tong. Thank you.” Turning to Movado, La Touche asked, “Anything else?”

“That’s where we stand so far, sir. The regular ship’s crew is loading nuclear waste drums that go to Hong Kong. We just have to deduce that the shipment from Delaval will be delivered to Hong Kong also. I have the junkie kid down on the next loading dock over, keeping an eye on the activities.”

La Touche nodded slightly and returned to his scoping out of the ship’s loading operation. Vampire workers filed into the warehouse, then emerged with three-foot, cubed containers made of white plastic. A red medical sign on the side of each container declared the contents to be contaminated medical specimens; a perfect camouflage for the blood. The smile on La Touche’s face spread to a full grin as he drew back from the window and stood.

“That’s our missing virgin blood,” said La Touche. Movado and Skanek turned to look at the boss. La Touche’s eyes burned red with vengeance.

His first inclination was to take his team down to the pier and regardless of public scrutiny, tear the six vampire fledglings into small, bloody pieces with his bare hands. Saner thoughts, however, prevailed in his blood-lusted mind and he took the time to consider.

If he took out the vampires and human thralls who were loading the blood on the ship, he would only stop this one, insignificant shipment and very probably alert Rasmin Delaval to his intentions. Delaval, then, would just fade into the background and disappear from view. However, if he followed the shipment to Hong Kong, surreptitiously watching it and its handlers, he would eventually find Delaval when the traitor took possession of the shipment. While the back-stabbing demon was making his sale to his contacts in Hong Kong, that would be the time to confront him and his cohorts.

“Here’s what we do,” said La Touche. His smile was confident and demonic. “When the loading operations are finished and the activity dies down on the dock, I want you, Amberstand, and your teammate, that Hewey, to sneak aboard under the cover of this darkness and ride to Hong Kong with the shipment. Conceal yourselves somewhere below and don’t get discovered. I want you both ready for action when the ship reaches port. My Black Guards and I will meet the ship there. I want to catch Delaval in the act of receiving the shipment. We’ll deal with him there.”

“You got it, boss,” said Amberstand. He returned to the window and took one last look at the activities down on the pier. His dark visage in the lightless room, somber and concentrating, looked like a stone statue in the meager light from the window. Breaking away from his scrutiny, he gathered his pistol up and left through the back stairway to reconnoiter with Hewey down below. La Touche listened to his fading footsteps in the stairwell for a few moments and then turned to Win Tong and Movado, who had been waiting attentively for him to speak.

“Okay,” he said to the two vampires. “Let’s get back to the Hotel. Rol, make arrangements for us all to head to Hong Kong ahead of the transport ship. We want to be there and be ready when the ship arrives. Come on, let’s call this a productive night…and everyone needs to feed before the night is done. The dawn approaches and we don’t want to be outside to greet it, do we?”

## *Revised Strategy*

**Lin Sung greeted the three vampires** as they walked into the suite, smiling and effervescently giddy at her master’s return. She had changed into a black, silk blouse with long sleeves and smoky grey slacks. A single strand of perfectly matched, white pearls adorned her neck. Jade eyes sparkled with pleasure at the sight of their return. She had eyes only for her dark-haired master.

Wayne Cull, William Winston, Joe Tillison, and Strongbow were seated at the suite’s coffee table, having been summoned by La Touche for the meeting. The Black Guards all had drinks in front of them, suggesting they had been waiting for a while.

Lace, see-through curtains fluttered in the pre-dawn breeze from the balcony as the three vampires seated themselves on the couch and in the armchairs with the other guards. The dark, morning wind, a cool, soothing current of freshness, gave the room a relaxed feel. The pale, leather couch rustled slightly as the two Black Guards settled into its luxurious comfort and awaited their leader’s assessment of their current situation. Movado’s face was stern concentration as he watched La Touche, who was lost in his own thought strategies. Win Tong, as always the case with the diminutive Asian, was as serene and calm as the ethereal wind from the balcony; traveling through the world with a slightly bemused deference for the mortal coils of humanity. The dual, katana samurai-blades sheathed on his back drew the attention of the seated guards as he sat on the end of the couch. Their acid-etched blades, encased in elaborately worked black-leather sheaths, stood ready for instant use. His olive complexion glowed in the candlelight of the room.

Lin Sung had lit dozens of aromatic candles and dimmed the room’s overhead lights to produce a warm, welcoming atmosphere in the suite.

“I will fix you gentlemen a refreshment,” said the beautiful Japanese fledgling, moving to the wet bar against the wall. “Perhaps a Bloody Bull for you, David?”

“That would be delicious, my dear,” said La Touche with a gentle smile on his face for his new bride. “Please, do so, and please fix one for these other two diligent men while you’re there. We have some business to discuss about the evenings newest developments and some strategies to plan…you are welcome to join us.”

“Thank you David,” said Lin Sung. “I’ll just be a moment.” Glasses tinkled in the quiet room as she deftly composed the bloody drinks from La Touche’s endless supply of fresh, virgin blood. A twist of lime and two shots of Russian vodka went into each of the four glasses as she concocted the drinks, her movements confident and precise.

With the arrival of La Touche, Movado, and Win Tong, the assembly had swelled to seven in number. The soft shuffling of feet, the shifting of bodies for a more comfortable position, and soft murmuring from the men, were the only sounds in the quiet room. Everyone there knew by now that the situation had escalated into a fighting mode and war was looming on the horizon.

Skanek, sensing La Touche’s mood and priorities said, “We have to be ready for violence when we confront Delaval in Hong Kong. He’ll be prepared for impediments to his operation, just as a matter of course. But I’m sure that he won’t know of our discovery just yet, so we can make this a surprise attack. The surprise element will be our biggest trump card. We need to capitalize on that.”

“Yes,” said the pensive La Touche. “I want ten of your best men, Rol, along with Movado and yourself for the operation. There can’t be any slip-ups. If Delaval gets away from us this time, he will disappear into the underground and our chances of locating him again will be just about zip.”

His smoldering eyes gazed off into a scene of his own imagining, fantasizing the final, agonizing death of the traitor to the La Touche coven. Hatred was written on his face and Skanek was glad that that demonic revenge was not directed at him. That look of smiling anticipation on La Touche’s face made him shiver in anxious fear.

Lin Sung approached the coffee table around which the team was grouped, balancing four tumblers of the sparkling, red drinks on a gold-plated serving tray. She bent to distribute the drinks around the table and La Touche got a delicious hint of her expensive, jasmine perfume. His irritated mood lightened slightly at the sight of her beauty. Having served the vampires their sustenance and noting that the other Black Guard had fresh drinks, Lin Sung sat on the plush arm of David’s chair and draped her slim arm across the back, listening quietly and attentively.

Strongbow, studying Win Tong on the end of the couch, said, “Win Tong, are you really going to fight these guys with those swords? They look like more of a hindrance than a help.”

Drawing one of the double katanas from its sheath on his back, the little Asian said, “These are the traditional weapons of the samurai warrior in Japan.”

Standing and flourishing the sword in a swift, figure-eight movement, he said, “As a Tae-Kwon-Do, Karate, Kendo, Jujutsu master and samurai warrior, I decided on these as my weapons of choice. Each of these blades is made from the finest steel in the world, tempered in clay, honed to razor sharpness by master sword craftsmen in Japan. With them I can behead a vampire with one stroke. Do not disregard the lethal potential of these blades in an experienced hand, my friend.”

Strongbow nodded in respect to the short Asian and smiled. “Forgive an ignorant fool, Win Tong. No disrespect whatsoever was intended. I take it back. They are indeed formidable weapons.”

Basking silently in the gazes of respect and admiration from the men seated around the coffee table, Win Tong sheathed his katana and resumed his seat.

Wayne Cull, one of the Black Guard from the Japan division, stared in awe of the little Japanese master. Having been raised in lower Louisiana and recently turned while on vacation in Japan, he had never experienced such a show of killing proficiency.

“You all sure know how to handle those thangs,” said a grinning Cull. “We don’t normally use knives in a fight where I come from, when a gun lets you kill ‘em from a distance. There ain’t no rules in killin’, you know…you just make ‘em stop livin’ any way you can and as quick as you can. That’s how you stay alive. I’m happy with my 1911 automatic, myself. Now, that’s some stoppin’ power, right there.”

Pulling out his chrome plated, ivory handled 45, he held it up to show it off to the others assembled around the coffee table. The shining chrome barrel and hand grip flashed light back and forth as Cull rotated his wrist to the admiration of the others.

“Yes sir, “said Cull, “that’s my baby.”

Movado’s small IPad tablet clicked softly as he entered search priorities into it. The device brought up a list of active Black Guards in the Tokyo branch of La Touche Enterprises and Movado highlighted the vampire guards that he knew he would need in addition to his current team of five men. The IPad displayed the satellite information about their location and cell phone numbers.

“Rol, find out when that ship sails and book us a red-eye flight to Hong Kong for the day before its arrival. We’ll be there waiting. Also, make hotel reservations for us all at the Hong Kong Hilton, adjoining suites.”

“Okay Boss,” said Skanek. “I’d suggest we arrive at the Hotel in staggered groups, just in case Delaval has someone watching the hotels and airports. It may sound a little bit paranoid, but at this point, I imagine that he’s a little paranoid, himself.”

“Ha,” snorted La Touche. “Well said, Rol. Very well said. Yes, we’ll do that. See to it, will you? And I’ll leave it to you to map out the Guards’ duties and actions.”

“Does Delaval have stronger, older vampires on his little conspiracy team, David?” asked Lin Sung at his shoulder. “We need to know his strengths before confronting him. It would be a very unfortunate surprise to find that he had superior numbers and abilities, don’t you think?”

Everyone in the room knew that the older a vampire became, the more strength he gradually acquired. It was a fact exemplified by the ancient vampires of Europe and Asia. La Touche, himself, was quite strong for his 286 years age—probably stronger than any vampire in his whole company.

“Yes Lin,” said La Touche. “We’ll find out what information we can on his strengths before we confront him. You’re very right in that regard. Thank you, my love, for that very insightful observation.”

Lin Sung basked and glowed in his generous praise and raised her head with pride. She turned, a smile of contentment settling on her exotic face, and listened as the group’s discussion continued.

“Alright, Rol,” said La Touche, “Ten Black Guard in our company, with you, Movado and I and the two Guards onboard that ship, makes fifteen. That sound like a large enough force for you, considering what we know so far of his strength?”

“Yes, I think so, David,” said the sober-faced Black Guard. “That satisfies me right now, with what information we have about his strength in numbers. If I find out differently, I can call up another dozen Black Guard from the company here in Japan. It would take an additional two days to get them there in Hong Kong with us though, so I’ll stay on top of things and let you know if there are any further developments.”

“Great…what about armament? Make sure we’re packing *hard.*”

“I’ll make sure we each have 45s with silver-nitrate shells, AR-15s with silver-nitrate loaded clips for every one of us and two, M40 equipped snipers for coverage from above, if needed. Will you require anything else?”

“I want one bazooka emplacement when we decide on a location, and flash grenades for each man, also. That should sufficiently empower us for the festivities ahead.”

“Alright, I’ll see to it.”

“Okay then…Gentlemen, this meeting is adjourned for the night. I will see you all when we fly out. Rol, you keep everyone on a moment’s notice, and I’ll talk with you again…good night, gentlemen.”

“Alright,” said a smiling Strongbow, rising from the couch. “Rock and Roll!”

The others rose and began filing out of the room, softly talking to each other as they left. Skanek was the last to leave and he paused at the door of the suite, turning back to La Touche.

“David, you know…it would be greatly to our advantage if you knew of a clairvoyant in the company. We could predict Delaval’s movements and have a heads-up on what to expect when we confront them. Win Tong isn’t a clairvoyant, just a seer. Do you know of anyone who could help?”

“Clairvoyants, as you well know, are a rare commodity in the vampire community. I think there’s one in our Singapore operation headquarters, but the board of directors keeps him busy and I doubt if they would turn loose of him for an operation as small as this. To me, this trouble with Delaval is very important and personal, but I don’t think that they would consider it so. Still, I’ll see what I can do. *I am* the CEO of La Touche Enterprises.”

“Thanks my friend,” said Skanek.

A concentrated furrow of his brows gave away La Touche’s thoughts as he closed the door to the suite. He turned to his new bride with a far-away look in his eyes. Skanek’s parting words were prying on his mind. He did need a clairvoyant to swing the odds in his favor in the coming confrontation with Delaval. The more he knew of Delaval’s movements and intentions, the better advantage he had in the coming battle.

“David, my love,” said the beautiful little Asian. “I have discovered some small talent in prognostication since my turning. I’ve noticed it this past night while you were gone and I’ve been experimenting with it. I don’t know if it’s strong enough to help you, but I would like to try. If I can be of any assistance to you, I will be glad to help.”

“That very interesting, my sweet. We can test your abilities in the next few nights before we leave for Hong Kong. If you can do anything with it, we’ll definitely use your abilities when we get there. That could very well be our *Ace-in-the-Hole*. But for now, I see the sun is coming into the world and I fear we must retire. Come, my bride—and we’ll make love to the early dawn.”

## *Clairvoyant*

**“No, no, no,” said a frustrated La Touche.** “You’re not concentrating, Lin. You’ve got to hold the image that you’re seeking in your mind. Don’t let outside activities intrude on your concentration.”

The city lights and bustling traffic had seeped into her timid vision of the future, disrupting the last hour’s efforts. She had held the vision for a murky, fleeting moment. Within a foggy, swirling mist, a crowd of vampires around a warehouse and some water, seemed to be unloading shipments…and then it was gone—not even enough of an image to discern what and when she was seeing.

With a disgusted shrug of her slim shoulders, Lin Sung flopped down on the leather couch, her eyes squinted shut. Her tan, leather pants rustled on the couch as she leaned her head back, the sheer, white-lace blouse she wore displayed her small breasts enticingly, the long sleeves fluttering with her movements. Her training sessions with David had become more of a chore than she had foreseen. She guessed her fortune-telling abilities weren’t as gifted as she originally believed.

“David, I’m sorry,” she said through her hands over her face. With disgust, she threw her hands down into her lap. “I saw something, but it was like looking through a foggy curtain. I couldn’t see enough to tell where it was or when it was. And then, I started hearing the traffic below and felt the wind from the balcony, and lost the whole image. I can’t seem to hold onto a vision and clarify what I’m seeing.”

“As I said, it’s a matter of concentration, Lin,” intoned La Touche as he walked over to the balcony, slid the sliding glass door shut and closed the dark curtains. His black, silk shirt shone in the light of the candles from the coffee table and fireplace mantle as he walked back to the couch. He went to her and sat down beside her, their knees touching. His pallid, handsome face moved close to hers and he kissed her lips softly, smoothing a disarrayed strand of raven tresses. Taking her hands, he smiled at her with patience and encouragement. Something as new and strange to her as this ability to tap into the future was extremely sensitive and unpredictable. She was frightened and unsure of her talent. Mastery of the talent took time and perseverance and David knew that she could be scared off from it if she experienced continued failure. Having that sort of talent was like balancing on the window ledge of a tall building. It could be done, but it had to be done precisely and with sober conviction. Therein lay her problem. She needed to take the sessions more seriously and develop a total, controlled concentration.

“Now, close your eyes and do some breathing exercises, like we practiced earlier. Deep, slow breath in, exhale slowly while you visualize outside distractions going out of you with that breath…slow and easy…in with the clean air, out with the muddy distractions…all you see and feel are your inner visions. That’s it… deep, relaxing breaths.”

The soft, slow droning of La Touche’s voice lulled her into a state of trance-like accessibility, placing her in a receptive state of mind. Her shoulders relaxed as her breathing slowed to a smooth, receptive rhythm. A half smile graced her lovely lips as she listened to La Touche’s whispers. She was floating in a misty, soothing fog.

“You’re feeling relaxed and peaceful now, relaxed and receptive to your vision. Let it come to you, don’t chase it. Let it drift into your line of vision, into your world, and welcome it to you—let it come.”

Lin Sung’s eyes behind her eyelids began to move from side to side, a good indication that she was entering a Rem state. Silent and smiling, La Touche watched as she slipped slowly into a vision. If she could hold onto the vision and get control of what she was seeing, she would then be able to guide the vision itself, towards her own goal…

Lin Sung floated in a misty fog, swirling eddies of white enveloping a scene of some kind being conducted on a pier. She was an incorporeal visitor to the scene, riding behind her own phantom body’s eyes, observing. The little Asian smiled still, mentally pushing away the mists and fog that enveloped her vision. Wispy lengths of white mist separated and dissolved, slowly undulating under her concentration, drifting away to the periphery of her mental vision and disappearing. Gradually, the scene in which she found herself began to clarify and become substantial…

A warehouse on a dock came into her mind and she saw ten or more vampires working at loading containers off a large, blue-and-white cargo ship. The square, white-plastic containers with medical insignias on them were being loaded into two black vans on the dock. The busy to-and-fro activity reminded her of drone ants on an anthill, busily marching to and from the mound. The busy speed at which they worked gave her the impression that an urgent shipment was being handled.

It was dark night. Shadows of the workers danced on the pier under the utility-sized pole lights, jerking and shifting to their own shadow-music, floating along the pier beside their masters. Somehow she knew that it was early morning… just after midnight. She didn’t know how she could be so sure of it, but she was. It was sometime around two o’clock in the morning.

The scurrying activities continued on the pier, shadows erratically following their owners as they moved back and forth from the ship to the van, the van to the ship, delivering the suspicious cargo.

There was a utility pole on the dock, a ways down, almost at the limit of her vision. She could just make out what the sign read:

***Port of Hong Kong***

***Sing Yi Container Terminal***

***Berth 21***

Lin Sung diverted her attention to two workers sitting on a mooring bollard at the gangplank to the ship, smoking cigarettes and talking as they took their break. Apparently they were not part of the loading party, but some kind of dock supervisors, overseeing the loading process. One supervisor, a short man even for an Asian, smiled at his companion and laughed. Lin Sung focused her attention and directed it at the little man. His voice carried out over the water as he expounded on his coming celebration.

He was to visit his ancestors’ graves tomorrow during the Chung Yeung Festival, when all of Hong Kong would be celebrating. It was one of the festivals held yearly to honor their ancient family ghosts. The citizens of Hong Kong visited their relatives’ graves and laid out food for the spirits. After the relatives’ ghosts consumed the spiritual element of the food, then the family would celebrate and eat the food, drinking to the good luck that the spirits would afford them. He explained to his companion that he would have the day off tomorrow because he had volunteered for this unloading procedure and after a short nap, his entire family would visit their grandfathers’ and fathers’ graves to honor their memories and ask for their spiritual blessings. The other dock worker expressed his envy of his companion’s good luck to be off for the festival and remarked that he would have to be on the docks.

Their talk drifted to other, mundane issues of their lives as their cigarette smoke swirled up through the morning mist, dissipating out over the water.

Lin Sung floated her mental “eye” back to the loading activities and watched as the procedures ended with the last of the containers. She moved her mental focus to the rough, gangster-looking vampire on the ship’s gangway, holding an IPad and making entries with his stylus. His black coveralls strained as his huge shoulders moved with his pecking entry on the instrument. His bulbous, cretin head swiveled back and forth from the docks to his entries reviewing his numbers. Marking the last of the shipment into his device, he scanned the entries for mistakes. Moving around to his back, Lin Sung could “see” over his shoulder and read the entries he was tapping into the device. The medical supplies were all accounted for it seemed; seventy five, three-foot, plastic containers, belonging to Dr. Rasmin Delaval, authorized and signed for by same.

Below on the pier, the vampire company was scattering and drifting down towards the dock entrance as the last container was loaded into the van and the back doors secured for travel. Their vacant, hungry stares moved to the air, searching for human sustenance. It had been a long night and they were all ready to feed.

Lin Sung’s view of the image drifted away, back into a misty, shadowed scene as she turned her attention to the suite in the hotel, concentrating on returning to her present form, searching for her body on the leather couch beside La Touche. It was like she was floating on an ethereal airstream, swimming down through the smoky mist, focusing on her familiar form. She sensed her body’s presence through the mist and mentally reached out for it, pushing herself towards the corporal form, pulling herself forward. It felt like she had hold of a thin ethereal rope, pulling herself forward and down, through mists of white, swirling clouds of time, towards a distant point of reference—her body.

In the real world of the hotel suite, La Touche monitored her breathing as it began to speed up from the trance’s slow, steady susurration. Her eyes under her closed eyelids began to swivel back and forth, pronouncing her searching, grasping reach; her desperate entrance to the real world.

She inhaled deeply, her eyelids fluttered and opened. A disoriented, feverish expression invaded her countenance as she tried to understand where she was. Fear gripped her in its cold, intense hands and she shook violently, desperately hunting. Her eyes darted around the room, searching for an anchor to reason, her hands desperately flailing about. Comprehension gradually spread across her features when she saw La Touche beside her, capturing her hands.

“Welcome back Princess,” he said with a smirking grin. “I thought you’d gotten lost there for a moment. You did an excellent job though, and next time will be much easier for you. You’ve discovered the proper procedure and now you’ll understand the dangers and how to avoid getting lost there. I didn’t want to tell you until you experienced the trance, but if you lose yourself in there, you might not be able to return. You have to maintain an anchor to your body. Some seers who didn’t have the control that you have, were lost in there.”

La Touche handed her a large crystal tumbler filled with a blood-vodka, lime mixture and leaned back in the cushions of the leather couch, watching her return to her senses.

The girl smiled meekly at La Touche, sipping the blood cocktail with relish. Rejuvenating elixir filled her stomach, replenishing some of the energy that she had lost. Color was returning to her former pallid complexion and her breathing had slowed to a normal rate as she relaxed her tense body and moved her neck from side to side, flexing the tense muscles and tendons. Looking around the room as if to satisfy herself that she had actually returned to reality, her face held a thoughtful expression, as if she were replaying the events in her mind.

“Well my dear,” said La Touche. “What were you able to find out on your little field trip?” His eyes were intense and smoldering in their avid eagerness to know what she had seen.

“I saw the blue and white cargo ship, being unloaded by ten or twelve vampire workers. They had large, white plastic containers with biological waste signs on them. I could see over the head man’s shoulders and read on the manifest that there were seventy five containers in all being unloaded, and they were all there. The workers were loading them into two, unmarked, black vans on the pier. And I heard the conversations of two dock supervisors who were talking about the Chung Yeung Festival which was to be the next day. I couldn’t tell what day it was, but it was at least two o’clock in the morning. I felt that very strongly…I don’t know why.”

“You did well, my dear,” said a smiling La Touche. He leaned over to her and kissed her ardently, moving his hands to her beautiful, raven hair and running his fingers through the silken tresses. “You have been invaluable to us tonight. I can find out when the Chung Yeung Festival easily enough, and then we’ll know what day the shipment arrives at the port. Did you see where it was?”

“Oh yes,” said a flummoxed Lin Sung. “I forgot to tell you, I saw a sign on the utility pole on the docks that said ‘Port of Hong Kong, Sing Yi Container Terminal, Berth 21.’ The berth where they were was almost at the end of the pier, I remember that. I looked for Delaval. I know him by sight even though I have no spiritual connection to him…I’ve never met him. He wasn’t there.”

“That’s quite alright, love,” said La Touche. “We can follow the cargo ship to the port and I’m sure Mr. Delaval would not miss the arrival of his expensive merchandise. I see no problem there.” As he spoke, La Touche was searching the internet on his lap top, which had been sitting on the coffee table. Googling Hong Kong festivals revealed that the Chung Yeung Festival was on October 9th, three days from then…plenty of time to prepare and make flight arrangements. He would have to contact Rol Skanek and let him know of the developments and have him ready his team for travel. They would be there right on time to give Delaval a little surprise party.

Yes, things were turning out nicely. He turned to the exotic little Asian beauty, looked deeply into those enticing jade eyes, and smiled his best smile. It seemed his attachment to the tiny vixen was growing. It felt unnatural to him to be feeling this way about anyone. It had been a long, lonely time for him and this sort of feeling was almost alien—alien, but somehow, right.

“Come to bed, my sweet. The dawn approaches. Let me show you how much I appreciate your help…”

## *Vampire Spies*

**Onboard the SS Wintango, Ja Jang brooded.** His plans were moving along well enough, but there was a prickling of the hairs at the nap of his neck that made him uneasy. Something told him that things were not as they seemed to be. Since his arrival onboard the ship at midnight, preparations had been proceeding with expected results and the ship was finally underway, headed out to sea, but he was still waiting *for the other shoe to drop.*

It was one o’clock in the morning, time to check on his men and the shipment. Maybe that would ease his troubled mind. He tipped his hat to the quartermaster as he left his stateroom and moved across the amidships passageway, his smile the carnivorous smile of the successful businessman. Aft, on the starboard side, was the ladder leading to lower level and compartment, A16-A cargo hold, just above the bilge compartment itself. Ja Jang’s wary eyes glanced around checking for curious observers, then he ducked into the hatch to the stairway.

Down below Sai Kung motioned to a couple of the men who were restraining two vampires, guns trained on their temples. His henchmen shoved the two men up the steps and over to Sai Kung, standing them to the side. Blood ran down the temple of one of them, staining his white t-shirt a crimson red. Both vampire captives’ eyes spoke fear and defeat.

“We found these two down in the hold on lower level,” said Sai Kung. “Looks like we got ourselves a couple of spies. La Touche’s, boys don’t you figure?”

“Take them to the lower level of the compartment and hold them there. If they try to escape, kill them and remove their heads. Is the shipment accounted for and safe?”

“We’ve got the lower hold completely full. All seventy five containers secure. I’ve made sure everything is buttoned up tight…we’re looking good,” said Sai Kung.

That was good news. Ja Jang was afraid that the shipment might have been broken up, making it a lot harder to keep safe and secure. Their last minute reservations for shipping space was approved but location was unspecified at the time. With it all in one compartment of the hold, a couple of his men could keep an eye on it. Now, he needed to question these two captives and find out if they’re La Touche’s men. They almost had to be, who else could know of his movements but the big man, himself.

The bulkhead of the stairway echoed with his loud footsteps as he hastened down the metal ladder, hurrying to get this latest mess resolved before he drew the attention of the quartermaster or worse.

Sai Kung stood beside the two prisoners below, gun in hand, waiting for him. Ja Jang groaned slightly as he lowered his athletic body to a sitting position on an angle-iron strut, favoring a bad knee that he had been nursing since his encounter with Chang’s men and the abducted virgins. The two vampire prisoners were trussed up with nylon rope in the corner with two gunmen guarding their every movement. Cloth gags made from dirty white towels were tied around each of their mouths. Fear and angst written on their faces, the two captives squirmed nervously on the deck, their knees biting into the iron grating.

Ja Jang stared at the two men for a lingering moment, letting their predicament soak into their fear-paralyzed brains. He needed information from them and fast. He had to determine how much damage may have been done to the operation. If this was La Touche’s doing, he had to find out how much the corporate boss knew.

“Take the gag out of their mouths,” said Ja Jang, pointing to the two vamps.

Jerking the vamps forward, the guard untied the gags and trained his gun on the prisoners, the muzzle of the pistol poking the nervous one hard to let him know that it was there.

“Now my friend,” began Ja Jang, speaking to the skinny kid. “You know you have no choice but to cooperate with me. You’re caught, you’re not getting away, and if you don’t tell me what I need to know, you will die slowly and horribly…trust me. I’ll ask the questions; you provide the answers…who sent you and what were your orders?”

Looking down at the cold, metal grating, shivering with fear and apprehension, the captive mumbled incoherently.

Ja Jang took out a spring-assisted stiletto knife and jammed it into the meaty portion of the vamp’s thigh. When the spy opened his mouth to scream, Ja Jang throat punched him just enough to prevent it, but not enough to ruin his larynx. Ja Jang’s hands had moved so fast that they appeared not to move at all. One moment he had his hands to his side and the next, jabbing the prisoner in the voice-box.

Tears of pain rose in the kid’s eyes as he shivered from the agony of the wound. Choking, gurgitation noises rose from his throat, shivers of fear rolled across his shoulders, his head fell forward in capitulation.

“As I said, my friend, I’ll ask; you’ll provide. Now, you will answer, if you want to get out of this alive. I don’t give a shit about you or your partner. All I want is your employer’s name and then you two will be free to go. Trust me.”

With no other avenue of recourse, the prisoner raised his head and with eyes flicking from the grey deck to Ja Jang’s face, he began to speak.

“We were supposed to hide and watch the loading operation and then report back to our boss when the ship reached Hong Kong. That’s all, just watch,” said the nervous captive.

“Hewey, shut the fuck up,” growled the bigger vampire captive. “They’re gonna kill us anyway. At least show some back bone.”

“What’s your name, friend?” asked Ja Jang, diverting his attention to the big guy.

“My name is Amberstand. We were hired by a detective agency to watch the loading processes last night. Not just you, but everyone. The port authorities believe that drugs are being smuggled onboard for Hong Kong. We know that your stuff is legal, that’s not what we were looking for…we were just hiding down here ‘til we could get off the ship. That’s all...”

“Interesting story, but unfortunately for you, I don’t buy it. The port authorities are about as honest as politicians during election time. They don’t give a flying fuck what gets smuggled through there, as long as they get their cut. Now I’ll give *you* one more chance than your nervous little friend here. Who do you work for?”

The seconds ticked excruciatingly by with Ja Jang staring fixedly into Amberstand’s amber eyes. Time seemed to blur to a gelatinous pace. The big prisoner’s forehead broke out in a sheen of sweat, drops began to run from his red, crew-cut hair down the sides of his face. He held Ja Jang’s intimidating stare with a look of hatred on his own face. *Tick…tick…tick…*and still their eyes locked, trying to face the other down.

Releasing a resigned, sad sigh, Ja Jang raised his knife to eye level of the other, nervous prisoner. Hewey’s eyes bulged from of his head and he began to erratically shake his head back and forth, mouthing “No…No…No, please, no…”

The guard grabbed Hewey’s head from behind, pinning it in place. Ja Jang sliced into the boy’s eye, the squishing sound of ruptured membrane issued from a suddenly deflated eyeball, and blood began to gush from the wound in a slow, steady stream. Hewey tried to scream, but the guard wrapped his hand around the boy’s mouth to stifle it. Ja Jang poked the point of the knife into the other eye, slicing downward and drawing more blood from that eye. Now the boy was whimpering and trashing about as much as he could manage in the guard’s firm hold, blood oozing out of both of his mutilated eye sockets. Moving the knife to the boy’s throat, Ja Jang’s face writhed with a wicked grin, his fangs protruding below his lower lip. It was time to end this vermin’s existence once and for all.

Amberstand launched himself across Hewey’s legs towards Ja Jang, knocking the guard to the side as he flew by. Even with his hands tied behind his back, he still snarled and showed his deadly fangs as he sought to bite into Ja Jang’s neck. He got a bite hold on Ja Jang’s shoulder at his subclavian artery and ripped with all his might. His teeth and fangs met with a mouthful of flesh, just as a knife blade found his heart. The blade belonged to the guard sitting behind Amberstand*…and it was sheathed in silver.*

Silver, while not a mortal element to a vampire, would disable one to the point that his body would not function, allowing his adversary to dispatch him at leisure.

Amberstand’s heart gave several desperate beats as the silver flooded his system; the deadly poison began to course through his veins. His limbs seemed to lose all cohesion and he started to collapse in a heap, but not before ripping a large chunk of Ja Jang’s shoulder and throat as he fell.

The other guard blasted a silver, 45 caliber slug into Hewey’s temple and swirled around to Ja Jang with the discarded gag. Putting pressure on the wound, he attempted to block the flow of blood from the two inch hole in the little Asian’s neck. Blood jetted from the artery, spewing across the dead kid’s body as the guard tried desperately to staunch the eruption from his boss’ throat. The white gag turned crimson with clotting blood. The guard’s professional training and swift actions saved the little Asian from bleeding out and the wound was bandaged with another strip of the towel used for making the gags.

Ja Jang’s whole shirt front was a scarlet flag, blood dripping from the bottom edge and splattering on the deck. Blood from the kid, Amberstand and Ja Jang coated the bulkhead and deck, giving the space the charnel look of a slaughter house.

Given just a little time, the wound would heal itself with the preternatural healing powers of the vampire, leaving Ja Jang totally frail and weak. But he would live…with generous amounts of whole blood…he would live on.

Ja Jang’s second-in-command, Sai Kung, stood in shock, eyes bulging at the sight of all the carnage. Immediately understanding the situation, he called for the guards to take the boss to the sick bay onboard. The ship’s doctors were well aware of the nature of their nocturnal passengers, and just like the captain had been monetarily compensated for their discretion.

*Okay, temporary set-back,* thought Sai Kung. *Ja Jang’s been wounded, but he’ll survive…we’ve dealt with two spies, but still don’t know who they belonged to. It has to be La Touche, and we have to proceed with the assumption that he knows about our shipment, and possibly it’s arrival in Hong Kong.*

*Delaval has to be notified and new procedures implemented. One thing’s for sure…the stakes have just doubled and the outcome is no longer certain.*

“Take these two pieces of shit, remove their heads, and throw the bodies over the side,” said Sai Kung as he turned to leave. “I want the guard doubled down here…no one comes near this hold without my express permission. Got it?”

“Okay boss,” said the guard.

“And get this mess cleaned up. Can’t have the crew asking awkward questions,” said Sai Kung as he exited the compartment.

On the main deck, as he stepped though the hatch from below, he nodded at a passing ship’s crewmember, smiling his best, *everything’s just dandy* smile.

*Maybe it’s time I considered a career change—maybe something in ladies underwear…*

## *Preparation*

**“Yes, that’s right, Destina,”** said Skanek to the corporate secretary. “I want the five Black Guard that I emailed you about to meet me at the hotel tomorrow evening…dark thirty. I expect them to come outfitted with a field-packs and be ready for transport and at least two weeks duty to Mr. La Touche. No, I won’t need that…just need them to be outfitted. Also, I want two, utility Humvees and an armored limousine waiting for us at the Hong Kong International Airport when we arrive. That’s Flight 367 from Tokyo to Hong Kong on October 8th. Yes, thank you, Destina. You’re a sweetheart. Okay, I’ll get with you sometime for an evening out. How’s that? Okay then, good bye and thank you again.”

As he disconnected the call and stowed his cell phone in his inside jacket pocket, Skanek saw the sneaky smile on Movado’s face. The sturdy vampire had taken in all of Skanek’s conversation and was sure to have some *smarthy* remark. *Oh well, goes with the territory, I guess.*

Movado *“harrumphed”* into the palm of his hand, unable to hide the increasing smile.

“Don’t even go there, Movado.”

Skanek dropped down into the armchair beside the couch and breathed an exhausted breath. Mustering the needed men from the Japan Division of La Touche Enterprises had been like coaxing free pussy from a whore. The bastards in Security were convinced that their Black Guard were too busy to lend a hand, even to La Touche himself. Luckily, Skanek knew Destina in the Security Placement Division and she was more than happy to juggle the books a little in order to help him out.

“I’m just wondering if you’re gonna make good on your promise to that little vamp you were talking to. Seems like a long way to go just to acquire the needed five men. Do you and her have something on the side?” said Movado.

“Well, yes,” answered Skanek with a slight blush. “We’ve been friends for a long time now, and she does have a sort of crush on me. We go feeding a lot when I’m over here on business. She’s a real demon when it comes to feeding. The supplements that the company provide seem to leave her wanting. She craves human blood live from the source, if you know what I mean. She likes the chase itself and the thrill of the kill I think, too—never leaves her victims alive. That’s why I go with her…to make her take a homeless person or some degenerate for her sport, who wouldn’t be missed by anyone. The last thing we need is for the humans to start looking at suspicious deaths and investigating. That’s why the company promotes using the supplement with our diets. It keeps us from feeding so often and recklessly.”

Skanek shook his head slowly in exasperation.

“I know La Touche would *end* anyone in the organization who put the company at risk of exposure, and she’s just not responsible for her actions. It won’t be long before she fucks up and gets herself *ended*.”

Movado thought about that and his expression sobered to one of understanding.

“Yeah, I know what you mean. There’s a bunch of ‘em out there who don’t have any sense when it comes to feeding. They’re putting us all at risk. There’s only one way we’ll ever survive and thrive…and that’s if the humans refuse to believe in us.”

“You’re right, but she’s a great girl and an even greater lay. I try to drill some sense into her when I’m here and “drilling” her other receptacles.” His laugh was only slightly wistful. “One day, she’s gonna go too far and expose herself. When she does, La Touche is gonna have her put down. That’s all there is to it.” He shook his burly head with reluctant sadness…

“Oh well, it’s just too bad—but, on to business. Have you got all of our men here outfitted for our ‘Delaval Surprise Party’ in Hong Kong? We wouldn’t want to disappoint the conniving bastard.”

“Oh hell yeah,” said the enthused Movado. “Everybody is issued a 45, AR-15, and night vision goggles. That’s standard issue for this type of Op. I’ve got M-40 sniper rifles for me and you, and night goggles too. I know you’ll have your 1911, and I’ve got my Glock. Of course, Win Tong has his katanas, like always, but you know that’s fine for him. He can kill better with those blades than most of us can with a full auto rifle. The man’s just amazing to me. I don’t know how he learned all that martial arts stuff that he uses, but when he gets going, he’s just a blur…and when he quits, there’s dead bodies all over the place.”

“He’s something, alright,” said Skanek. “He’s taught me some of his Karate, and I’ll tell you, once you get to using it, it’s like second nature. It’ll save your ass sometime when you least expect it. I’m training with him about twice a week now between assignments, and I gotta say, it’s an empowering feeling.”

Movado had moved to the in-suite bar along the back wall of the room and stood making Skanek and himself drinks from the overstocked bar. Tumblers and goblets glistened and shone in the overhead rack. The polished, cut-crystal bar with its chrome trim gave a modern, sophisticated air to the surroundings, and virgin blood decanters sparkled in the small wine cooler, awaiting their pleasure. Movado really liked the way La Touche supplied such luxuries for his staff and bodyguards. It was some sweet duty, serving the Boss.

“I’ve got reservations for us at the InterContinental Hong Kong…eight suites on the 14th floor,” said Movado. “We almost took up the whole floor…two men to a room, with a suite for La Touche in the middle.”

Coming around the end of the bar, Movado gave Skanek his Bloody Bull and seated himself on the overstuffed, leather couch. This suite was a duplicate of the one next door, where La Touche held court. Luxurious, modern furnishings and ocean grey carpet gave the room a feel of exorbitant, stolen pleasures. Movado knew that the suites went for nine hundred eighteen dollars a night, but the La Touche Enterprises could easily afford it. La Touche’s worth was somewhere in the 60 million dollar range at the moment, and there seemed to be no end in sight. He, (La Touche), was a sharp businessman and his blood and virgin-slave trade was deftly covered up by his legal warehousing ventures and transport companies in the United States, Japan, and Singapore.

“Well, that looks to be it, then,” said Skanek. “I think I’ll call Destina back and get her to go to The Aisotope for some dancing and a little feeding after I get the new men settled. It’s a good club to find fresh blood and relax. You want to come along?”

Movado knew of the nightclub, like all the vampires in Tokyo. It, with its fringe of underworld denizens and derelicts, was a favorite place to go to feed, buy drugs or sex, or make confidential contracts (otherwise known as *hits* in the trade). The place was run by the Japanese mafia and all the local police were on its payroll, so heads were turned in the case of an unfortunate demise, which happened with shocking regularity around there.

Movado’s big grin wavered a bit at the thought of the Japanese mafia. Though most of the street crew were human, there was a rough element consisting of vampires and shape-shifters, with whom he had no desire to make contact. He was more than capable of handling those cretins, just as any Black Guard was, but he still showed caution when it came to interacting with them.

“No, but thanks,” said Movado. “I’m going to make sure all the men are prepared. I’ll see you at the airport, tomorrow night. You be careful out there. You know that place’s reputation.”

“Yeah sure…not to worry,” said Skanek. He lifted his glass in toast to Movado. “Here’s to the successful elimination of the infestation of Delaval and Company!”

“Here, here,” said Movado…

## *Party in Hong Kong*

**Destina was a vision of dangerous beauty,** standing in the center of the oval dance floor as Skanek entered the foyer. Her light brown, bobbed hair framed her strong face and eyes the dark brown of chestnuts bore into his. A smile of familiarity shone on her face as she waved to Skanek and walked the length of the strobe-flashed crowd. The sequined, silver tank-top moved over her breasts like silk as she strode through the crowded dance floor towards Skanek, her hips undulating to the beat of the steady, Metallica music. Silver eye shadow enhanced her devilish expression and she smiled a knowing smile at Skanek’s uncomfortable fidgeting. There was a history between the two of them. Destina did desperately want there to be much more history, but the handsome, stocky Black Guard had been hard to tie down. He was his Boss’ man and no amount of feminine wiles could sway his allegiance; no amount of whining would win his agreement on any issue if it happened to conflict with La Touche’s plans.

But she didn’t want his allegiance; just his love and the security that he could offer a female with his position as the Head Security Officer for La Touche Enterprises. She didn’t feel that that was too much for a girl to ask, considering the sex and fun she could bring to his otherwise staid, Spartan existence.

*The guy is the right hand man of one of the most powerful and rich vampires in America; he’s paid better than some CEO’s of large companies; he’s a gorgeous hunk of vampire—what the hell’s the matter with him? Can’t he see what a catch I’d be? Shit…just have to try harder, that’s all.*

Skanek held out open arms as Destina sauntered up, bumping his hips suggestively with hers as his arms enfolded her. He kissed her neck and blew a warm breath into her ear.

“It’s been too long, sister. We’ve got to get together more often and rekindle some of those dormant flames. How have things been going your way? Corporate gossip got you all wound up?”

“Why Rol, my love, what ever could you mean? I’m just a small piece on a rather large playing board. Truly, I know little of the inner workings of that place,” she said, as she molded her body up against his blue polo shirt.

She held her cards close to her chest, as the saying went. Her inside knowledge of what went on within the company had been her “Get-Out-of-Jail-Free card” on more than one occasion, and she guarded her information and sources of such, with greedy consideration of her life—literally.

“I know that you know all the latest dirt. It’s ingrained in you to stick your pretty little nose into anything that smells of unauthorized dealings. So, come on over here to one of these booths and let’s get some drinks. I want to hear all the latest *poop*.”

They slid across the slick, red-vinyl seat of the horseshoe booth to the center, Skanek waving to the passing waitress for drinks. After their order was taken and the waitress had slunk away through the crowd, Skanek hugged Destina to his side, taking in the aroma of her exotically perfumed hair. She smelled of orchids and sunshine, making him appreciate her youth and healthy vitality all the more.

“It’s so good to see you again,” said Destina, glancing around the crowded dance floor, people-watching and window-shopping for a future feed. “I’m pissed at you, too. I happen to know for a fact that you’ve been in town for several days and not once thought to call me…that is, until you need something. You’re a bastard, you know that?”

“Well, I suppose you could say that I am, looking at it from your stand-point. But what you’re not realizing is that I work for the head man, and my duties to him preclude any personal attachments that I may have made here in Dear Ole Tokyo. Besides, I always get in touch with you before I leave town, don’t I?”

That was very true, she had to admit to herself. He was always good for one roll in the hay per visit, at least. Her problem was that she wasn’t sinking her claws into him as deep and securely as she would have liked. It was damned hard to control him (as much as she’d like) when he had this boy-scout faithfulness towards Mr. La Touche.

“Well, I just can’t stay mad at you, anyway, love,” said Destina, glancing around at the gyrating dancers. “You’re just too cute to be angry with…I forgive you.”

“Thanks for forgiveness that wasn’t solicited, sweet cheeks. Now, tell me what’s going on over here. I need a little information, if you’ve got it. Have you been hearing any rumors about Rasmin Delaval, lately? Has he been—oh I don’t know—maybe dipping into the corporate merchandise, by any chance?”

“I don’t know anything about that…I don’t hear much about him, most of the time. There’s been some office talk about him using the corporate Learjet a little more than it seems necessary. Word has it that he’s been taking some extended vacations away from work in Boston…traveling all over the world on pleasure jaunts and such. Of course, we don’t know *his* business, any more than I know *yours*, so it’s just idle gossip; except that he has been using the Learjet a lot lately…that’s all.”

The bikini-clad waitress arrived and began placing drinks in front of them, being sure to give Skanek a generous view of cleavage down her top. Skanek smiled his thanks for his drink and waited for her to leave. With a seductive, promising gaze and smile, the pert little blonde strode away like a high-priced model walking the midway at a fashion show, rolling her hips erotically.

After a short, appreciative glance her way, Skanek sipped his drink and turned to Destina.

“That helps a little bit, sweetie. Thanks.”

“What’s the interest in Delaval?” asked Destina, sipping her White Russian. “What’s that cretin been up to? I hope he’s in trouble…I hate that little slug. He makes my skin crawl.”

“Yeah, darling,” said Skanek. His lips curved up in a sardonic smile. “That’s the general consensus of everyone who knows him. But he’s a shrewd little rodent too, which makes him an asset to La Touche Enterprises. He’s brutal in business transactions, immaculate in his book-keeping, and he apparently knows all the right asses to kiss on the board of directors. He’s friends with all the right vampires, so to speak. Mr. La Touche was just interested in his latest business dealings, that’s all.”

They sat a while, watching the crowd undulate to the nerve-wracking Metallica music; (not Skanek’s favorite), and sipped their drinks in silence. It was a good-sized crowd for a week night, and the nervous energy in the place transferred itself to Skanek’s agitated brain. He surveyed the room like the professional assassin that he was, looking for anything out of the ordinary or anything menacing in the crowd. His dark eyes flitted from one face to another, cataloguing the individuals as either non-interest or slight-interest. Nothing got his alarm bells ringing. If he was being watched by any of Delaval’s minions, he was not aware of it. That was another reason that he had wanted to step out in public tonight…to determine if he, or his team, was being watched. So far as he could surmise, David’s suspicions and plans were still a secret to anyone in the corporation or the Tokyo underground.

Destina coaxed him out on the dance floor a few moments later, and he surrendered himself to gyrating embarrassingly to three songs before he could get her back to her seat. She glowed with exertion and pleasurable excitement from the dances as she flopped into the booth. Her eyes were sparkling with joy and pleasure, her smile was a big grin, plastered permanently across her face, and her attention was captured by the energy and excitement of the moment. Laughing and shouting were competing with the bone-drilling bass beat of the music, rising in volume, only to be drowned out by a surge in musical madness.

A drunken, blundering couple of young people bumped the booth so hard on their way by, that Destina’s drink shook and almost tipped over on the table. Skanek scowled at the swaying young man as he slurred an apology and wheeled about with his young lady and wove off through the crowd.

*Shouldn’t have done that, little man…you just might have become dinner for tonight. Go on and enjoy yourself, you thoughtless prick, while you can. Tonight could be the last night of the rest of your miserable, little life.*

Destina was also trolling for her supper, gazing at the crowd like a supermarket shopper in the meat department, trying to decide on the most delectable morsel in the showcase. She spotted what she thought was probably a young college boy, swaying at the bar against the far wall, barely able to hold on to the bar top and maintain his balance. He was young, handsome, vitally healthy, and seemed to be (conveniently) alone. After downing the last half of the mixed drink in front of him, he waved to the disinterested bartender and turned to weave and wander towards the exit door to the back parking lot.

“I’ll be back in just a minute, love,” she said. “I need to go to the ladies room and freshen up.”

“If you’re going to *freshen-up* with that kid’s internal fluids, you can forget it. Go out back and find one of the derelicts in the back parking lot. There’s always some out there. And you better be sure it’s in private and that you dump the body in the woods behind here. I don’t want any trouble with the management—we push our luck at this place as it is. They can only hide or dispose of so many human bodies, before the authorities become suspicious. We might own most of the local police, but missing persons are still missing persons. If it’s somebody who’s somebody, awkward questions are asked. So, keep your shit together…have you had any hard drugs tonight?”

“No, of course not. You know I’d tell you if I was doing anything. I know you always look out for me, Rol. That’s why I love you so much.”

“Yeah well, just be careful and no fuck-ups. I don’t need to follow you to take care of you, do I?”

“No love, but thanks for the offer. I can take care of my own business. Be right back.”

She had been watching the kid wander out the back exit as they spoke, searching his front pants’ pocket for his car keys, apparently. Smiling at Skanek, kissing her index finger and transferring the kiss to his nose, she slipped gracefully out of the booth and disappeared into the dancing crowd, headed for the exit.

Skanek watched her be absorbed by the twisting crowd of dancers, a worried wrinkle appearing on his normally smooth forehead. He’d give her a few minutes to make the back lot, then he’d check on her. It seemed that she had acquiesced to his demand a little too quickly. *Something was* *fishy in Denmark.*

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*The blood and blood and blood*…she could feel his body more distinctly than was *humanly* possible; bones, muscles, the sinew of his arms—she could almost see what she felt as she fed on his carotid artery. His puny writhing and jerking only fueled her hunger and remorselessly she gulped the crimson fluid. It was good…*so good.* But too soon his frantic attempts at escape dwindled and ceased. She drew back from her embrace just before she sensed the last few beats of his heart, just as she had been taught. The last few drops of a dead man’s blood brought madness and terror to a vampire. That was to be prevented at all costs.

Raising her head, she surveyed the parking lot of the nightclub to determine if she had had an unexpected audience to her crime. No one was in sight. To her position at the back of the lot, next to the wooded area behind the nightclub, she had coaxed her unwary victim…knowing she was almost invisible to any wandering clubbers. Aisotope was notorious for the late night rendezvous anyway, so seeing a couple *coupling* was not an uncommon occurrence. Lifting the one hundred sixty pound dead man was an act of nonchalant strength that would have amazed any onlookers, as she walked to the edge of the woods and flung the corpse into the dense shrubbery. Then, straightening her hair and blouse, licking the blood from her lips and chin, she turned and sauntered through the parking lot, skirting the parked vehicles on a casual walk back to the club. Halfway in her stroll, she spied Skanek coming out of the back fire exit, scanning the lot with his enhanced night vision. Seeing her right away, he moved in her direction, a slight smile showing on his handsome face.

When he came within speaking distance he said, “How did it go? You took care of the body, I assume.”

“Of course love. He was just some punk out here in the parking area, hanging around, hoping to rob or rape. No loss to humanity.”

“And what about the young man you were looking at leaving the club…what became of him?”

“Oh him…he got in his fancy Ferrari and left just as I came out...probably wind up killed in a car wreck before the night’s through. Promise I didn’t touch a hair on his over-privileged head.”

“Good girl. Now, if you’d go on back in and let me do my thing here. I’ll see you inside in a few.”

“Bon appetit, Mon Cheri.”

With that parting wish of good appetite, she strolled on through the parking lot, her hips swiveling on what looked like frictionless ball bearings…smooth and silky. Skanek gave her one last lustful look as she entered the fire door and disappeared into the club, then turned his sight to the parking lot’s back perimeter, searching for his victim. His tongue swirled slowly over his extended eye-teeth, feeling the sharp points. He had killed many times; he had killed for food and for sport.

The malady of mortality was something that all humans must deal with in their puny existence.

*Death was an integral part of the life cycle—even more so for those of us who live forever…*

## *Delaval’s Misgivings*

**There had been too many mistakes made.** He knew it in his bones. They had to be small, inconsequential mistakes, he was sure, but he had a strong feeling that they were beginning to add up. He could feel it creeping along his spine and prickling his skin with each and every tick of the clock. Someone had gathered false, erroneous information either fed to them by La Touche’s people, or gathered by just plain ignorance.

*Either way, I don’t have the complete picture and it bothers the hell out of me.*

It was like he had a firm, steady grip on the operational tagline, but could feel the rope ever so slowly slipping from his grasp. Mental calculations and calisthenics aside, he still felt like he was missing some critical piece of the overall puzzle.

All information that he had obtained so far led him to believe that the operation was going as planned, except for just a few surprises, which he couldn’t have foreseen. Too bad he didn’t have a seer in his organization like some of the ancient vampires employed, but they were a scarce commodity and expensive to obtain…

As the full moon drifted from behind the ominous storm clouds in the sky, shining a pale, orange glow on the nightscape below his penthouse suite in Hong Kong, Delaval mused on the enjoyment of living in times such as these. Times were good in this new world of jets and cell phones and computers…not like the derelict streets of France in which he had grown to young, overweight adulthood, grubbing beneath his father’s glare and desperately seeking his approval…

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He had been turned in 1869, in a little French town near Paris called Letome. Just barely into his adulthood, his abundant girth the joke of many of his co-workers in his father’s leather trade business, he had ventured out one night in search of a prostitute for his carnal pleasures…someone who would not laugh at his obese body when displayed in all its naked unhealthiness.

The streets of Letome were rife with underworld activities, much to the dissatisfaction of the mayor and the other businessmen of the town, and any vice imaginable could be had for a price. But, all Delaval wanted that night was a silent, efficient fuck—nothing else was required. Romance, or even the thought thereof, was rarely a part of his degenerate imaginings.

The alley down which he found himself wandering was dark and smelled of rat droppings, with water running sluggishly in the gutters from the recent rains. He stepped in a puddle of muddy water in his drunken weaving down the narrow lane, cursing under his breath. The filthy brick walls of the buildings on either side were slimy with mold and other biological offal from the roofs above. Storm clouds covered the moon that night, and it was with abrupt surprise that he confronted the cowering young girl in the doorway of a building. She glanced up from under stringy, black hair which covered all but her angular chin, simpering incoherently in the dark. Rags hung on her thin, but comely frame, remnants of a once light colored dress of linen.

Delaval moved to her side, whispering encouraging words of unfelt concern. Drawing her to his arms with soft whispers of alluring kindness. He knew she would fit his bill for that night…a street urchin, with no one to protect her and therefore, no one to care what he might decide to do to her.

“Come, my dear,” he said, stroking her tangled mass of hair. “Let me get you out of this weather. I’ll get us a room for the night, and I’ll see that you’re properly fed and clothed. Come…”

“Sir, you’re very kind to help me. I’m sorry I look such a fright, but my father has beat me and kicked me out of our home. I have no where now but this street in which you’ve found me. I’ll show you a good time, I promise. I know what men want.”

As Delaval reached for her to kiss, she moved with blurring speed, shoving his head to the side and sinking two-inch, spiked fangs into his jugular vein.

Screaming in fright and pain, Delaval tried to shove her away, but her strength was the strength born of desperation and she would not yield. His legs jittered and shook as she drank the life’s blood from his body, clamping her arms around his own, successfully immobilizing him. His heart beat furiously as he strove to throw off her grip on his arms, the pain a knife of agony in his neck. She changed her grip slightly, drawing her head back into the night, and screamed a triumphant ululation to the dark. Then, swooping down on his neck once again, she bit viciously into the wound on his neck once more, drawing another cry of pain from him. His furious heartbeat began to slow down, beat by beat, until it was little more than a puny throb against her sucking mouth. His thrashing became feeble throws of spastic, jittering movements which slowly subsided. He was almost amazed amidst the pain…he could feel his body’s spirit drifting from him like a swirling mist of ethereal vapor, slipping from his mortal frame.

The slow throb of his dying heart became an almost confused, erratic stutter, ceasing to provide nutrients to his brain. Grey nothingness enveloped his conscious thought swarming sluggishly over his id…

He felt his life leaving him and he despaired…

Darkness…pain in his neck; thirst like he had never experienced before were his first encounters with awareness. The girl had disappeared…but not before she had taken pity on him and given him the blood of vampire life. He knew instinctively, if not rationally, that she had turned him into one such as herself. He had heard old granny tales of such, but as everyone else, had dismissed them as just that—fairy tales to frighten the unimaginative and uninventive sheep of the average crowd. He had always considered himself to be above such mundane myths.

He was, however, if nothing else, a pragmatist and would learn to live with this curse or *cure* to the human condition. Who knew, maybe living virtually forever wasn’t so bad after all…even though he still looked almost the same as he did before his turning. Sometimes the vampire blood did not cure human ugliness, but magnified the ugliness within…

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Finishing his blood cocktail and slamming the crystal goblet down on the bar of his suite, Delaval gathered his anger and mentally directed it towards a distant La Touche, wishing him all the denizens of hell for playmates.

His cell phone lay at hand on the bar, and he grabbed it, speed dialing his security guard second in command, Sai Kung. The call was answered immediately, almost as if the young vampire was waiting for the call.

“Yes sir, Sai Kung here,” came the answer.

“Sai, I want extra security guards on the pier when the shipment comes in. I will try to be there, but business may prevent me from attending. If I’m not there, it’s your show, so be sure to make sure there are no slip ups. We can expect some sort of retaliation from La Touche, I just don’t know what, yet. So, be on your toes at all times. Once the shipment is unloaded, I want you to be with it all the way until it is delivered to the clients. I’ll text you the address upon the blood shipment’s arrival, not before. I don’t want the information leaking out. Got all that?”

“Yes sir,” said the distant voice. “I’ll personally see to all the details. Do you have any new information on La Touche’s movements, sir? We are kind of in the dark here, but I’ll vamp-up the extra guards just the same.”

“No, nothing new on La Touche. He’ll make a move… that I know…I just don’t know how or when. He’s a devious and vengeful adversary, I’ll tell you that. Is there any news on Ja Jang? He’s my best man…hope he pulls through.”

“Yes sir,” said Sai Kung. “He lost a lot of blood, but he was treated in time, with lots of human blood. He’s recuperating just fine.”

*Yeah, just fine, you son-of-a-bitch. Wouldn’t be so concerned if it was just me, would you? You fat fang-head…*

“Okay, follow my orders to the letter. I don’t need any more fuck-ups. I’ll have your throat if this gets dicked-up!”

“Yes sir, we got it, no problem…”

## *Ship’s Arrival*

**Fog horns moaned balefully** as the tugs drew the transport through the misty waters of Hong Kong Harbor, gently maneuvering the huge container ship to its place at Berth 21. When positioned appropriately, the big ship began to move perpendicular to the pier by way of the tugboats. Water frothed from the rear screws of the four tugs as they moved the heavy transport ship sideways to the berth. With just a slight *kiss*, the cargo ship stilled its movements against the rubber bumpers on the pier. Linemen on the pier grabbed the heaving lines as they shot over with the mooring lines, pulling the heavy mooring lines forward and attaching them to the bollards, making them fast. With that done, the ship-board crew drew the mooring lines taught, securing the ship’s stability and preventing unwanted drift.

Sai Kung and twenty five vampire fledglings waited in the big bob-tail moving van on the pier to unload the merchandise. Parked beside the terminal warehouse, the white, moving van was almost inconspicuous, but still Sai Kung wondered. Misty, midnight fog swirled across the concrete pier as fog horns groaned in lonely moans over on the waters of the harbor. The arrival of the transport ship was right on schedule…things were moving along with meticulous precision and his hands fidgeted slightly with his invoice sheets as he waited for the unloading plank to be laid.

Ship’s crewmen extended the gangplank forward and the loading/unloading quay on the aft-starboard side of the ship, as Sai Kung watched anxiously. No sign of any of La Touche’s men had been reported in the last few days of waiting, but Sai Kung still felt an unaccountable dread for the whole operation. Something didn’t feel right. His vampiric senses were alight with nervous fire, tingling like an arm that had gone to sleep, and his dreams had been nothing but apocalyptic of late. He instinctively knew something was going to get screwed up; he just didn’t know what or when.

As ship’s crewmen began to disembark the ship, some going on shore liberty, others going about business on the pier or the harbor, Sai Kung addressed the van full of young vampires.

“Okay, you all know the procedure…just like we went over it. He glanced at his new “first lieutenant,” Nanami Akira, a martial arts instructor from Tokyo, recently recruited and turned for his fighting skills and physical attributes. Delaval didn’t sanction any turnings unless he felt the prospect to be of value to his organization. Nanami was stocky, just as most Japanese were, but also possessed a speed and agility that made him valuable as a guard and soldier. Dark, oriental eyes stared complacently back at Sai Kung. Nanami was the epitome of the serene efficiency.

“Nanami,” said Sai Kung. “Put two men in the hold to guard and monitor the unloading from there. Have two more men stationed here on the pier to guard the workers. With our twenty-man crew, I estimate an hour and a half to complete the unloading.”

“As you wish, sir,” said the little oriental.

“Okay, looks like they’ve got all everything ready for unloading. I’ll contact the cargo-master and arrange for the unloading. Everybody out on the pier.”

The twenty five men exited the van’s rear double doors and began milling about in a small cluster at the warehouse side of the alley adjacent. All were dressed in coveralls of harbor longshoremen and were instructed to blend in with the regular dock workers. The soft sounds of shuffling feet and individual conversations floated in the black night. Some, who still maintained a smoking habit even after their turnings, lit up their cigarettes and puffed into the thinning mist of fog around the pier. After all, the old adage that smoking would kill you, no longer applied to them. Visibility was about twenty five feet in the disorienting blanket of fog, making the men unconsciously edge close together. Small talk drifted on the mist from the restless crew.

Sai Kung returned from the ship and motioned for the men to gather around him. When they were assembled, he spoke to the group in low tones designed so as not to carry too far.

“Okay, we’re all set. Now, all of you know, without having to be told, that you’re not to speak of the contents of the containers. For all these harbor officials know, those are bio-hazard wastes for research in the Delaval medical industries—otherwise unidentifiable.”

There were nods and signs of assent all around.

“Nanami, assign the guards and have the men begin.”

Nanami motioned for his four guards, surreptitiously scanning the surrounding berths, noting nothing unusual for daily traffic. Visibility was still severely restricted but seemed to have improved somewhat…the fog seeming to have thinned slightly.

“Yoshimora, Katsuro, you two go down below and take your stations there. Kei, and Takahiko, you two remain here with the van. Everyone else is on unloading detail. Let’s get with it.”

Sai Kung turned and gave a “thumbs-up” to Delaval as the boss stood in the darkness of the alleyway next to his shining black Lotus limousine. Delaval had shown up after all, just to gloat on his latest smuggling feat.

Smiling confidently, Delaval retrieved his small crystal vial of cocaine from his coat pocket and gave himself a generous snort—his fifth of the night, so far. The slight habit had become a rather large monkey on his back just lately, but he rationalized its necessity by telling himself he needed all the sharp attentiveness it provided…not admitting to himself that his rationalization was actually irrational. The angel dust vibrated through his already-nervous nervous system, heightening his awareness, but contributing to the degeneration of his critical thinking. He wasn’t aware of his erratic thinking, however, and was losing his sense of self-preservation…his ability to detect danger. As the only matured, enhanced vampire and leader of the crew, he should have been able to spot anything unusual about the night. But, that ability was degenerating every time a line of the angel dust wafted down this nostrils, filling his sinuses with its false courage and confidence.

Moving to the driver’s seat of the van, Delaval watched anxiously as the first of the containers began to appear on the aft unloading quay, followed consecutively by the other vampire crewmembers, cradling their heavy burdens. A three by three plastic container filled with virgins’ blood weighed upwards of sixteen hundred pounds and the vampire crew was understandably burdened by its weight, but a vampire was ten times as strong as the average human being and the task was well within their capabilities. A few of the younger ones wobbled slightly in their walk, but Delaval knew that they would be able to handle it—fear of him, if nothing else, would motivate them sufficiently.

Time passed lethargically, it seemed to the obese vampire, as he counted the containers being loaded into the back of the twenty two foot bob-tail. So far, forty containers were loaded, and at that rate, Delaval estimated that the moving was going as scheduled. No delays had risen their ugly heads yet, but Murphy’s First Law, *(anything that can go wrong, will go wrong)* Delaval had found, would always be handy to exert itself at the most inopportune times.

Sai Kung walked up to his window.

“Halfway point…everything’s fine. The captain gives his thanks for the welcomed contribution to his Home Finance Fund and the excellent Saki. I’d guesstimate, about forty five minutes longer.”

“Wonderful,” said an expansively gesturing Delaval. “Tell the men there will be a party tonight and the girls are on me. If anyone wants a young boy, they’ll have to provide their own.” He laughed uproariously at his own, weak joke.

*Great, I’ve been employed by the Clown of Beldare! This guy’s as unstable as the San Andreas Fault. I’d better make arrangements for new employment after this gig is over. Christ-on-a-broomstick!*

A loud, foghorn went off in the night air, warbling slightly and going on for a full minute. It was the signal for the dock workers’ mealtime break and Delaval could see already the small crowd of men beginning to exit the forward gangplank. Conversations and jibing shouts from the emerging ship personnel penetrated his thoughts as he considered the implications of so many people on the pier. He played with the idea of suspending operations until the break was over, but after thought, decided to let the unloading continue. His confidence in the smoothness of the operation thus far was giving him added conceit in his abilities. Nothing was going to stand in his way of getting this financially-enriching operation complete.

“What do you think, sir,” said a curious Sai Kung, indicating the growing herd of dock workers going down the pier. “Think any of this is a problem?”

“No, no, of course not,” said Delaval, eyeing the forward-milling Chinese dock workers. “Continue on with the work. What’s a few, ignorant, human cattle to us?”

Delaval returned his attention to the unloading manifest and Sai Kung returned to his supervision of the loading into the rear of the van. Both vampires became absorbed in their work...

What they had not noticed was the fogbank at the end of the pier begin to swirl in a disturbed oozing billow.

Slinking from out of the edges of the rolling, opaque mists, from the seaside end of the pier fifty yards down, came dozens of shadowy, bipedal forms…moving slowly through the fog. What was at first a bunched-together murk of bodies, became a spreading line of ominous creatures, stealthily surrounding the ship’s unloading quay and the vampire crew.

The ends of the line began to curve towards the unloading crew until the handlers were encased in a loose semi-circle, almost invisible in the fog. The invaders were still about thirty yards away, but drifting, progressing shadows moved closer…

Sai Kung spotted the movements just as a shout rang out from middle point in the shadows.

*“NOW!”*

Twenty-something ghost forms charged forward through the curling screen of floating precipitation. They materialized like magic, slashing through the fog screen. More shouts erupted from the unloaders as Skanek, Movado, and Company fell upon the unwary crew like ethereal denizens of death.

“Ambush!” yelled Sai Kung with a bellow, trying desperately to alert his men. It was the first thought and the first word that came to his frantic mind.

Blood shot from necks as vampire bit vampire, screams of agony and surprise split the night scene. Grunts of bodily contact were drowned out by cries of pain as Skanek’s men ripped into Delaval’s unloading crew, gouging huge bites from their necks, releasing fountains of gushing blood. Humans ran away, down the pier, as the vampires brawled like animals. One Black Guard ripped the arm from a howling fledgling, kicking him in the teeth so hard that canines flew through the air in a torrent of blood. Screams ruptured the night…

*“Aiii…ahhyii…yeiii!”*

A few of Skanek’s guard began to go down as the unloading crew recovered from their shock and surprise and began to fight back, but the Black Guard was by far the superior combatants. Skanek and Movado teamed together, slashing, ripping and biting—killing vampires with extreme prejudice. Three more of Delaval’s vampires went down. Shouts and screams, flailing limbs, dying cries of agony were everywhere. Skanek gouged the eyeballs from his opponent’s eyes then ripped into his shoulder muscle, tearing sinew and arteries alike.

Five more of Delaval’s men were felled, their throats bloody masses of ravaged, red meat, their life’s blood spurting rhythmically on the pier. Their attackers moved further into the fray, seeking the next victim.

Gun shots barked and roared in the darkness as opponents fired at each other’s shifting, evading shadows.

Skanek shattered the cranium of his nearest enemy with a down-stroke of his massive fist, then ripped the throat out of another to his right. Arterial blood shot across Skanek’s chest—a crimson, surging arch of life fluid.

Movado elbowed the vampire holding him in a bear hug, then slashed his throat with razor fangs, ending the creature’s life as it went into an epileptic fit, scarlet blood fountaining from his neck. Dying horribly, the vampire thrashed its life out on the pier.

Vampires are immortal…but not, (so it was being proved) indestructible…

Screams of dying agony, groans, grunts, curses, shouts, bellowed into the air as pandemonium took reign. Slaughter of the blood smugglers was proving to be both swift and viciously efficient…

Delaval knew that the battle was a loss. He saw two more of his men go down to Movado’s tearing fangs, then jumped on the rungs of the fire escape on the side of the warehouse. The rungs ringing dully, he made his way up the side of the wall, spider-walking up to the roof of the building.

Through the cacophonous battle-furor and noise, none of Skanek’s guard saw him disappear…

## *Blood on the Plane*

**“Excellent, my friend,” said La Touche.** “Have the blood in that van transferred to a secure location, post a considerable guard, and then you and Movado come back here to the Crowne Plaza, Hong Kong Kowloon East, Room 3205 on the 32nd floor. I’ve had five adjoining suites reserved and one at each end of the hallway. Bring your Black Guard for security teams. These rooms will be sufficient to house them comfortably, I think.

“Okay Boss,” came the weary voice from the other end of the phone. “We’ve got some injured I need to take care of and see to their medical needs, first. We lost six out of our thirty men and five down with severe injuries. I’ll see to that and then have Movado pick a squad for guard duty. We’ll be there in probably just a few hours. That suit?”

“Not a problem, Rol,” said La Touche. “You’ve done an exemplary job. I’ve got three Black Guard with me now, and I don’t expect any trouble. As far as I’ve been able to determine, no one knows I’m here.”

“Very good, sir,” said Skanek. “Expect us within the next few.”

La Touche saw Lin Sung out of the corner of his eye as he disconnected, leaning in the doorway to the suite’s bedroom. Luscious in her flowing, sleeveless gown, she followed him with her exotic eyes as he moved to her. The elegant, gold armband she wore and the diamond encrusted watch gave her a regal appearance that was not wasted on La Touche. A diamond ring adorned the slim finger of her right hand.

“Lin, you look exceptionally lovely this evening. To what do we owe your eloquent attire?”

“You’ve been under a lot of stress lately, David,” she purred, draping her arms over his shoulders. “I know you’ve been dealing with the smugglers, even though you don’t ask for my opinions or help. I’m concerned about your welfare. We need to go out and feed. How long has it been since you’ve fed?”

“It’s been awhile, my love. But as you well know, I can go without much longer than you, when need be. Forgive my forgetfulness. We will dine this very night, but after I’ve finalized a few things with Rol Skanek. I’m so sorry I’ve neglected you and haven’t been much company, lately. As you heard, the raid went successfully, with the exception of Delaval escaping. I’m not a bit surprised, however, because he’s always been one to cover his own ass. Have you had any other visions that might help us? I could use any aid you can provide.”

“David, I haven’t tried…they scare me so. But if you will stay with me, I’ll try another trance this evening. I need you there with me—I need your support. I can’t do it by myself.”

“You do not give yourself enough credit and don’t understand the strength within you. You possess a power of spirit so strong that I have never seen its equal. But, of course, I will be with you every step of the way…always.”

“Thank you, my dearest,” said the shy Asian. “With you by my side, I really think I can do wonders. But, come on, let’s go get *someone* to eat. We’ve got a good two hours before Rol Skanek arrives. Do you feel like *Chinese*?”

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The Crowne Plaza Hotel was one of the proud architectural accomplishments of the city’s architects, with its thirty eight, reflecting-glass, window-covered floors gleaming in the sky, and the modern artistic design promising luxury and decadent enjoyment to all patrons. The architectural concept was innovating and screamed *big-business*. The shape of the building was long and slim, with rounded corners, making it appear to have been made with molded, glass edges.

Inside the foyer, the place reeked of modern—glass-topped, stainless steel coffee tables and shining glass accessories, trimmed with shining, brass accents covered the entire lobby. The chairs looked ultra-modern and miserably uncomfortable…but chic.

Rol Skanek, followed by Movado and eight Black Guard strolled into the lobby with briefcases in hand, looking for all the world like a convention of business men arriving for a company conference. Their strides and demeanor gave them a no-nonsense appearance that the Chinese knew well. In their casual but expensive looking black slacks, Polo shirts and black jackets, they appeared to be all wearing the company attire—which they were, Black Guard attire. In the jackets of the Black Guard lurked formidable, 45 caliber automatics loaded with silver bullets. The briefcases were all packed with high-strength polymer pistols which were loaded with 357 caliber, silver bullets. Skanek would see to it that the men had AK-47’s also, after they were all settled upstairs. He had no intentions of being caught unawares or unprepared.

The team moved to the elevators, eliciting no particular notice from the other hotel guests, and headed up to the 32nd floor. In the elevator, Skanek turned to the group.

“We’ve got six suites, two on either side of Mr. La Touche, and one on either end of the hallway. You will pair off into four-man units and take the two, adjoining, outside suites. Movado and I will be in the inside two suites, next to Room 3205. I’ll man the other two rooms at the end of the hall later tonight from Mr. La Touche’s guards. For now, heads up, stay alert, expect retaliation if it comes. I’ll brief everyone more thoroughly on procedures later, after I speak with the Boss. Any questions?”

“Rol, we need to feed, man,” said one of the guards.

“Yes, we all do…I know that. Okay, two men on each team can leave to feed, quickly. Then, upon their return the other two can go. It’s imperative that you use the “Small Sip” and leave no dead bodies.”

The “Small Sip” was the vampire way of feeding without killing the human victim—taking only enough blood to sustain, but not slay.

“We must assume, Delaval has men everywhere and we do not want to draw attention. That work?”

“Sure, no problem.”

“Good. Here’s your card keys. Get settled in and take up watch.”

The elevator slid open at Floor 32 and the team departed, dissolving into two, four man groups just as if it had been choreographed. Skanek and Movado stopped at Room 3205 and rang the doorbell.

After only a few seconds the door swung open to reveal one of the most beautiful creatures either man had ever seen, lounging against the door sill, smiling a friendly, warm smile for the two vampires. Dangling, elegant, diamond earrings adorned the gracious neck and the slightest hint of make-up accentuated her Asian beauty. Her slinky, floor-length, strapless gown hugged her dainty figure.

“Rol, Movado, it’s so great to see you both, unharmed. David is very proud of you two,” said Lin Sung.

“Thank you Lin, and good evening to you, too. We got a little lucky with the fog. The rest was pure training and rage. No one threatens the Boss and lives to brag about it,” said a smiling Skanek, entering the suite.

“Good evening, Lin,” said Movado, shaking his head with a grin at Skanek’s bragging and following the Security Chief into the suite.

La Touche was behind the bar, busily mixing congratulatory Bloody Bulls for both men.

“David, you two look like you’re going out for the evening. Should we do this later?”

“No, no, my friend,” said La Touche, coming around the bar to the coffee table with the drinks. “We just returned from feeding and we are both quite content, I assure you. Come sit with me and drink. This will give you sustenance until you can feed properly, later.”

Once seated and after each of the vampires had done considerable damage to their drinks, La Touche said, “I know things didn’t go completely as we planned with Delaval escaping, but you did a first-rate job of recovering our stolen property. I know Delaval, and I know he’s going to run for the darkest hole he can find. I expect he will be on the next flight to Boston, if he can. That’s his home base and that’s where he’ll feel the safest. If not flying, he may try to go by way of ship, but since that’s such a slow way to go, I don’t actually think so. We need to cover all plane flights to Boston. I want eyes on all the airports and men watching the concourse in general, looking for any vampire activity.”

“That’s what I figured, so I’ve already sent men to the airports and have men watching the approaches to the concourses, too,” said Skanek. “I’ll put more men on the Ports of Call. I may have to send to Tokyo for reinforcements, but I promise you, we’ll find that little varmint.”

“That’s great, Rol,” said La Touche. “I should have known you would have anticipated his next move. Lin tried a trance earlier and she got a few things. He’s holed up somewhere in the hills around here…somewhere in a poor, rural-village area, but she couldn’t get a good fix. He’ll try to get a flight out…I can feel it, myself.”

“We can send some men out to the outlying areas, searching, if you want,” said Movado. “I can find a few to spare.”

“No, no need,” said La Touche. “I want our men to just concentrate on the flights to Boston. That’s his home base, and he’s such a creature of habit, he’ll feel safer there. He’ll feel like he can hide from me if he’s on home territory. He’s wrong, though...”

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Six p.m. on Sunday night in the concourse of China Southern Airlines was both hectic and unnerving. The huge Hong Kong International Airport was just as bustling as a Friday night in Hong Kong’s red light district…or more so. The glass-walled corridors gave a glorious view of the outside activities of the plane baggage-crews as they scurried about the different behemoths of the air, fueling jets, and shuttling baggage. La Touche, Lin Sung, Skanek, and Movado moved through the throng as unobtrusively as possible, keeping to the outer edges of the voluminous herd of air passengers making their ways to the different check-in desks.

La Touche had taken the precaution of having everyone in the entourage apply face make-up, giving them a nicely-tanned, human appearance for their trip. Movado, in particular, looked like a Middle-Eastern Muslim, with his long, black hair and prominent cheek bones. Lin Sung looked as exotic and oriental as always, blending in perfectly with the Asian crowd of “red-eye” flyers in the airport. She was dressed in the traditional Chinese garb—a gold, silk pajama-like pant suit with tiny red dragons embroidered on the stiff collar. La Touche’s handsome, aristocratic features were a little harder to make blend-in, and he received several appraising glances from the ladies in the crowd. Skanek scanned the milling horde as they walked, on-watch for any suspicious movements in their direction…his thoughts putting him somewhat at ease.

*So far, so good…looks like the place is clean. Wonder if this is just a dry run. Lin Sung seemed to think that Delaval was gonna make a break from here. Sure hope her visions are accurate. He could be vacating from somewhere else, right now.*

“David,” said Skanek. “Do you still think we’ve got it right? I don’t see any sign of any of them.”

“Lin,” said La Touche as they walked. “What do your instincts tell you?”

“He’s here, David,” said Lin Sung. “I get a strong feeling of his presence…he’s close.”

La Touche stopped at an Arrival-Departure monitor and scanned the flights. There was a China Southern Airlines departure for Vancouver with a connecting flight to Boston leaving in two hours from Berth 5. No other flights to Boston were shown for the rest of the night. That had to be the one on which Delaval planned to sneak out of the country.

“Rol,” said La Touche, turning to his security guard and friend. “How about you book us four first class tickets on that flight, if they’re still available. I think that’s our best bet, and like Lin Sung, I’ve got a strong vibe about this.”

“Okay, will do. If nothing else it gives Movado and me four hours to search the rest of the airport. I just wish you would have let me bring more men.”

“We discussed this. I don’t want Delaval to get wind of us by our having a whole squad of Black Guard wandering the airport like FBI agents looking for a terrorist,” said La Touche with a touch of a smile. “Lin and I both feel that he’s on that flight. I’ve learned to trust her talent implicitly. Perhaps you should too.”

La Touche’s demeanor was one of serene assurance; he was confident in Lin Sung’s ESP abilities. His actions and emotions were controlled and self-possessed, displaying no hesitation or doubt. He intended to end Delaval’s intrusive charade upon his corporation and Lin Sung’s preternatural abilities would be the deciding factor in the game.

“Okay, Lin,” said Skanek as he moved towards the ticketing counter, smiling ruefully. “We’ll do it your way.”

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The China Southern Airlines, Airbus A380, bound for Vancouver, Canada was squatting patiently on the tarmac as the fuel handlers finished up their tasks and buttoned-up the access panels. There was a slight haze to the evening, muffling sounds and distorting vision. The behemoth airbus’ gleaming white body shone in the floodlights as the handlers trundled by the view windows of the concourse. Made up of two levels of passenger seating and a third, upper level which offered a small bar and twelve sleeping suites, the gargantuan plane seated over five hundred twenty six passengers, not counting the flight attendant staff and pilots. An elegant, spiral stairway aft and a straight staircase forward led from the upper to lower levels for the attendant and passenger use. An elevator was provided amidships for moving from the seating area to the bar and sleeping accommodations.

Boarding of the first class passengers began and La Touche and his small entourage filed into their reserved seats, making themselves comfortable for the take-off. With nearly two thirds of the plane booked, the boarding process would take almost an hour, but the first class section was paneled-off for privacy, so La Touche, Lin Sung, Skanek, and Movado could not see the passengers entering the economy class.

Skanek leaned over towards La Touche’s seat, handing a seating chart to La Touche for his perusal.

“I know he’s not here or in business class. He’s somewhere down below in economy class so he can hide. I bet it irks him not to be flying in first class. The bastard is such a megalomaniac that it probably damages his narcissist pride terribly. Look here,” said Skanek, pointing to the chart. “I think he’d go for one of the seats on lower level towards the back so he could have a good view of anyone coming onboard. He knows he’d be trapped back there, but he’s run out of options; he has to get out on this flight, if he’s flying.”

“He’s here, David,” said Lin Sung in a whisper. “I can feel his vile aura on the air.”

“He would hide back there…like the mole he is,” said La Touche, looking over the seating chart. “When the plane is in the air, we’ll move down there. I’d like to keep from having too many civilian casualties, but I can’t mind-control someone with his power. There will be blood spilled, make no mistake, but let’s try to keep it to a minimum.”

“He doesn’t know Lin Sung by sight,” said Skanek. “How about we send her back to reconnoiter a little bit?”

“No, absolutely not…he’s too powerful for her. If she’s spotted, she’d never stand a chance,” said La Touche.

“David, I can sense him and his emotions,” said Lin Sung softly, leaning into La Touche’s shoulder. “I’ll know if he spots me. If he doesn’t, maybe I can find out how many people he has with him. I don’t sense any more vampires, but I’m sure he has human body guards with him. He’d be stupid if he didn’t and we need to know how many we’re dealing with.”

“Yes, I know…I’m sure you’re right about all the above, but I hate to put you in harm’s way. Okay, look…I know you can handle yourself and defend yourself against any humans, but make damned sure you don’t let him get his hands on you. Got it?”

“Don’t worry, love. I’ve got this.”

Lin Sung stood and moved with assurance to the winding staircase in the aft portion of the cabin, leisurely scanning the passengers as she walked. The stairway was an elaborately designed swirl of steps leading to the lower level, carpeted in a red and black mosaic pattern with shiny, brass handrails. Esthetically pleasing photos of downtown Hong Kong hung at intervals on the curving bulkhead.

When she reached the bottom of the staircase she was facing aft towards a horseshoe-shaped bar, around which sat several passengers imbibing last minute cocktails. None showed any particular interest in Lin Sung. She skirted the bottom of the stairs and moved forward towards the seating area about fifteen feet away, the plush, grey carpet muffling her steps. The seats faced forward, which meant that she was in luck—all the passengers had their backs to her and most everyone was either perusing the inflight magazines, chatting, or looking out of the windows. From her vantage point she studied the passengers. The muted chatter of the adults and children floated through the air like an opening-night audience, rising and falling in volume. Nothing looked out of the ordinary for a group of strangers trying to look nonchalant about flying in a behemoth of the air. None seemed extraordinarily nervous or twitchy.

Then she spotted them…

In the middle seats, taking up the whole row, four sets forward, was a group of five men sitting together, nervously watching the last of the boarding passengers, seemingly searching faces for recognition. She concentrated on the group and sensed a vampire in the middle; an obese, fidgeting little man with an ugly, scared look on his piggish face. That was Delaval—she had no doubt. Had he been human, sweat would most definitely be streaming down his bulbous face.

Turning away from the aisle, hugging the bulkhead on her left, she moved back to the stairway, stepping softly as if they might hear her, and sped up the stairs.

Skanek turned at her approach, nudged the intense La Touche in the ribs, and questioned her with his quizzical expression. Gliding down the aisle with an excited expression on her sweet, exotic face, she smiled at La Touche and Skanek.

“Yes, they’re here,” she said, slipping into her seat and facing La Touche. “Delaval, surrounded by four human body guards in Row 65, Seats D,E,F,G, and H. That Delaval is one vile looking creature. How could you ever do business with him?”

“He is a poor example of vampiric beauty, I’ll admit,” said La Touche with a touch of a smile. “But his business acumen was what I was after. His looks are the result of genetics so corrupt that even vampire blood could not make him presentable. He’s always carried a chip on his shoulder because of it, but as long as I kept him busy with the corporation and gave him some authority, I thought that he would be serviceable. Obviously, I was woefully mistaken.”

“Well, what’s the game plan, Boss?” asked Skanek. “You want Movado and me to take ‘em?”

“We *three* will take care of them. But we want to avoid any human interaction or deaths, if possible. We’ll wait until we are almost to Vancouver. By then, everyone will be settled down, most will probably be sleeping. With luck, we can incapacitate them without bloodshed. If there are any Air Marshalls or military onboard, we’ll have to deal with them also, but the civilians won’t be a problem. I can implement mass mind control on the human passengers for a short period—long enough for us to land and disembark. Lin, I want you to remain here.”

‘I don’t think so…you may need me. I said I saw four body guards. I could tell by the way they were so attentive to him, but that doesn’t mean that he might not have some more, scattered throughout the plane. Those gorillas with him were obviously dangerous, trained assassins, and guaranteed to be familiar with fighting vampires. They were chosen just for this escape. You can’t keep me behind.”

“I didn’t really think so,” said La Touche with a defeated grin. “But, it was worth a try. Okay, so you go with, but stay behind us unless things get too dicey and we have need of your aid.”

“Ja whol, mein Herr!”

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Leveling off at 37,000 feet, the huge airbus flew with quiet, aristocratic monarchy; ruling the midnight sky. La Touche looked out the plane’s window and determined by the stars that they were over the South China Sea on their first leg of the journey to Boston, by way of Vancouver. The full moon shone down on the enormous body of water like a muted searchlight, highlighting the miniscule waves below.

Settling back in the first class lounger, moving his seat to a reclining position, La Touche said, “Everyone relax and get some rest. It’s going to be quite a while, yet.”

Skanek and Movado both reclined in their loungers, closing their eyes and entered a relaxed, trance-like state, designed to optimize their rest. After some experimentation, Lin Sung also reached that state of relaxation, her senses still alert for any dangers.

The clock ticked grudgingly…

*Tick…tick…tick…*

Thirteen hours later, the mainland of Canada crept into sight through the window. La Touche had been looking out at the early evening darkness, thinking of the events that had led them to this impasse, and thankful that they would be arriving after sunset. Because of their air time (15 hours) and direction of flight, they would arrive at nightfall in Vancouver. He and the others could withstand the sunlight for short periods of time, especially with the sunscreen make-up they had on, but it was uncomfortable as hell. And they could never allow themselves to become stranded out in the sunlight for extended periods of time for fear of spontaneous combustion. He was thankful that they would not have to endure exposure to the sun, this time.

The captain announce that he would begin their decent within the hour, so time was at a premium. If they were going to confront Delaval, they must do it now.

La Touche stood, straightening his charcoal grey suit coat and black-and-grey striped tie, then motioned for the others to rise. Lin Sung squeezed his arm lightly, conveying her faith in his prowess.

“Skanek, you take Movado and Lin aft with you,” La Touche said softly. “I’m going forward and then down to the economy cabin. Being in front of the passengers is the only way that I can entrance the whole cabin at once. But once I begin, Delaval will probably be alerted to my thought emanations immediately, so you three must be prepared to act at once.”

He waited for any questions. When none came, he proceeded.

“Take out the four guards with knives as quickly as possible. Disable them, if that’s all you can do right away. No gun play…if we hole this plane’s superstructure, it’ll go down like a very large bag of rocks. Delaval is stronger than the three of you, but I hope to have made it to the back by the time it becomes necessary to deal with him. Just fend him off as best you can until I can get back there.”

Both Black Guard were armed with silver-plated combat knives and Lin Sung had a silver stiletto concealed somewhere on that petite little body, he knew.

“Delaval will not have any such qualms about using firearms on the plane. I don’t think he’s smart enough to even think of the danger. So, speed is essential. Disarm them as quickly as you can…okay, any questions?”

The faces of both Black Guard were made of stone. Deadly, serious threat emanated from their red-rimmed eyes. It was time to do what they were trained to do and neither would hesitate in the least. Skanek’s face quirked into a devilish grin. Movado blinked like a lazy Gila monster, relaxed but ultimately dangerous.

“I think it’s time to party, Boss,” said Skanek. “Let’s do this…”

As La Touche moved to the aisle and started forward, the other three left their seats, and single-file, headed to the winding staircase in back. Passengers were either sleeping, reading, or engrossed in the mid-flight movie with headphones and none gave the trio anything but a cursory glance as they passed. At the stairs, Skanek silently positioned Lin Sung at the rear of their line so that he and Movado would reach Delaval and his men first.

The plane was eerily quiet—a feeling of anticipation seemed to hang in the air. The susurrating drone of the jet engines and the quiet bustling of the flight attendants in the galley were the only sounds in the craft as it flew into Canadian air space. The foot of the staircase widened out in an elaborate, southern-plantation style design, giving the three room to idle over to the bulkhead on the right without looking suspicious. Lin Sung’s slender arm pointed out the fifth row where Delaval and his four goons were seated. So far, they hadn’t detected anything amiss.

Craning his neck to look over the tops of the passengers’ seats, Skanek spotted La Touche just emerging from behind the amidships’ curtains. He must have finished placing the forward passengers in a trance and now was about to begin aft. One by one (Skanek noted) the passengers became immobile and torpid, staring straight ahead at La Touche. As the back rows reacted to La Touche’s mental commands and froze in their seats, Delaval half-stood from his seat and glared at the front of the cabin.

“It’s La Touche!” he screamed to the henchmen, slapping the nearest in the face. “Get up there and stop him!”

The four bodyguards arose and started forward. Their progress was swiftly arrested by a flying body coming from behind them. Skanek downed the first two on the left as he contacted with the body-block. Movado grabbed the two men on the right of the group, slamming one to the deck of the aisle. He grabbed the second by the throat, leaning into his neck and snarling as he bit into the hapless human’s neck. Blood erupted from the victim’s shoulder, spewing in spurts across the aisle onto somnolent passengers. The downed human jumped to his feet and bolted for the stairs, aft.

The luckless human in Skanek’s grasp suffered a similar fate, as Skanek ripped a mouthful of flesh from the man’s neck, creating a miniature flood of crimson liquid. He felt a hot pain in his back, shooting up his spine, almost sinking him to his knees. The other body guard had stabbed him in the spine with a bayonet-sized weapon, searing pain washed over him, the assailant twisted the knife.

With a surge of strength, Skanek rounded on the attacker, groping for his neck. The guard squeaked, then gurgled, then fought desperately for air, as Skanek squeezed his throat, cutting off all air flow. The human’s eyes, shining with life just moments before, slowly glazed over and air deprived lungs deflated for a final time—Skanek’s silver-plated combat knife slid into his heart. Dropping the guard’s lifeless body in the aisle, Skanek swirled around to his friends.

Delaval’s eyes bulged in their sockets, straining for release from the horrendous spectacle. He moved to flee up the back staircase. Shoving Lin Sung easily out of his way, he surged towards the stairs. But his efforts were too late, too lame, and too slow.

La Touche launched himself through the overhead, literally flying the twenty feet that separated the two of them. Delaval squawked like a stuck chicken as La Touche landed on his back, slamming him into the carpeted base of the staircase. He roughly spun Delaval over onto his back. Whimpers arose from the fat, porcine lips…Delaval began to cry-out like a small child, terror spreading over his countenance. La Touche smiled into that terrorized face.

“My dear friend and colleague,” murmured La Touche. “You can only imagine how long I’ve awaited this meeting. Your depravity and loathsomeness is only exceeded by your cowardice and shame. It is time now for us to settle our account.”

Lin Sung stumbled into the two vampires, sprawled next to their engaged bodies, and rolled to her feet, still brandishing the silver dagger. Smiling sweetly at La Touche, she mumbled, “Oops, so sorry.”

Leaping passed them on her way to the last, living body guard, who was still trying to run from his inevitable fate, desperately fighting for the spiraling staircase. She swung her arm over-handed. The silver stiletto flashed in the cabin lights as it found its mark, through the chest of the hapless human, and deep into his heart…killing him instantly. With the blood dripping from the deadly killing weapon, Lin Sung licked the delicious droplets from its blade and turned to witness her lover’s revenge.

The death-grip on Delaval’s throat eased somewhat as La Touche leaned back from his sitting position on Delaval’s chest.

“La Touche,” cajoled the desperate Delaval. “It was just a mistake…I would have told you…I-I just needed time. I wasn’t trying to take over—just wanted to make my own way.”

“Oh yes,” said a still smiling La Touche. “I understand now. You just made a mistake…stealing twenty nine of my virgins in Singapore and over seventy five cases of virgin blood from my warehouses. You just needed time to explain? You weren’t trying to take over? You just wanted to make it on your own…with a few small withdrawals from my blood banks…*IS THAT IT?*”

“That’s not how it was, I swear,” croaked a profusely perspiring, lying Delaval. “Please, please, just hear me out. I can explain…”

“Rasmin, the only one you have to explain to is whoever is in charge of the afterlife. Because that’s where you’re going.”

His breath taking on a rattling wheeze, Delaval struggled futilely to break from La Touche’s vise-like hands, but to no avail. A dying scream from the last of the body guards sent him into a frenetic fit. His eyes averted from La Touche as the scream rose in horrendous scale and then petered out into a warbling screech.

“David,” said Lin Sung at his ear. “Let’s take him with us. We’ve already got a blood-bath up there to deal with. It’ll be even harder to conceal a dead vampire body.”

“Perhaps you’re right, my dear,” said La Touche, still staring into Delaval’s tortured visage. “Are Rol and Movado finished with their tasks?”

“Yes, dearest,” she said. “They’ve ended the other three guards. The plane is beginning its descent into the Ontario International Airport.”

La Touche could feel the downward pull on the plane as it swooped through banks of clouds made pristine in appearance by the soft moonlight. The plane was descending towards the runways. Skanek and Movado walked up in back of him as he considered Lin Sung’s proposal…

## *Tying Loose Ends*

**La Touche’s indestructible fist punched** a hole in the aluminum wall of the airbus just as the plane made its three-point landing in Ontario International Airport, tires screeching as the rubber hit the asphalt. Gripping a hand-full of the aluminum wall, he gave an effortless yank on the hull, creating a three foot hole in the bulkhead, scattering debris over the aisles and comatose passengers.

“That should do it,” said La Touche. “Rol, you and Movado spread the debris over the dead body guards. Make it look as if they were killed by the implosion of the wall.”

He smiled, thinking of how baffling the damage would be appear to the FAA agents.

We’ll take Delaval with us.”

Skanek immediately moved to obey his orders and threw pieces of the aluminum wall over the four bodies of the body guards. The pieces of aluminum gave false-witness to the method of death of the humans, successfully covering up the vampires’ guilt in the deed.

As the plane coasted down the runway, no humans noticed the five vampires exit the rear through the manufactured hole in the side. Feet clopped down on the tarmac, the sound completely unnoticeable in the roar of the plane’s retro-firing engines. The figures moved swiftly through the night heading for an unattended baggage unloading dock.

In the impenetrable darkness of the deserted dock, La Touche dumped the defeated, sniveling carcass of Rasmin Delaval. Moans of agony escaped the captured prisoner’s lips as he was unceremoniously trussed-up to a stanchion at the end of the dock. A wooden, white-oak stake shone in the dimly lit shadows of the elevated staging area, when La Touche drew it from the inside coat pocket of his jacket.

Delaval’s eyes tracked the movement of the stake while it came within inches of his frantically rising and falling chest. A bead of blood-sweat slowly trickled down the side of his face. He raised his pleading eyes to La Touche, trying with his expressive eyes to garner some small bit of sympathy from his captor.

“David, I implore you, don’t be too hasty here. I am still a very valuable asset to La Touche Enterprises. You still need me overseas,” pleaded Delaval.

“Rasmin, you have always been a cunning, resourceful vampire,” said La Touche. “That is without a doubt. One of the most intelligent, ruthless, pragmatic underlings that I’ve ever known. But you made a few mistakes when you decided to steal from La Touche Enterprises. You didn’t surround yourself with dependable people…people who showed faith, trust and dedication to your little schemes. They had no allegiance to you because you did not foster any faithfulness from them. Therein, primarily, is where you went wrong.”

“Look, I can make things right. I’ll turn everything over to you. I’ve developed my own operation with my own customers…some of them are wealthy ancients from Europe. They’ll pay top dollar for the virgins and the virgin blood. It’s all yours…and I promise, I’ll disappear altogether. Please, David…”

“They say: ‘Revenge is a dish best served cold.’ You know, I think they’re right. I was furious when I found out it was you who was stealing from me. If I had been able to get my hands on you then, I would have ripped your throat out with my fangs. But since you’ve been kind enough to evade us all this time, I’ve had ample opportunities to think of some very inventive and original punishments.”

La Touche motioned to Movado who brought over a small black-leather briefcase with golden clasps. He placed the case on the concrete in front of Delaval, turning it so the opening was facing La Touche. On the back of the briefcase in gold lettering were the initials, DAL. La Touche opened the case and stood smiling at the gleaming array of instruments glistening in the moonlight.

Inside, lined up side-by-side were several stainless steel instruments of torture, ranging from pliers to scalpels to thumb screws. Also in the pockets at the top of the briefcase were ten vials of liquids of different shades and viscosities…poisons and truth serums, no doubt.

“I think we’ll start with this little beauty.” La Touche started to pick up one of the instruments. “You’ll particularly appreciate this, because it’s used on the testicles. Since you tried so hard to emasculate me, it’s only fitting that we begin here.”

“No David, no…no please, no! I’m begging you…please!”

“Rol,” said La Touche. “Hold his head. I can’t stand this cowardly ranting. I’ve got to fix that before it drives me insane.”

Skanek grabbed Delaval by the head, jerking it back until it cracked into the stanchion behind him. Reaching into the briefcase, La Touche came out with a slender, razor-edged scalpel, twirling it in his dexterous fingers as he produced a death-impending grin for Delaval. Delaval fought futilely to move his head; Skanek clamped his jaws shut, immobilizing his head, and La Touche made a hair-line incision just at his larynx, slicing into the voice-box. Blood began to leak out of the puncture wound, slowly running down the front of Delaval’s white, silk shirt. Crimson bubbles swelled from the bleeding incision.

“There now, no more pleading or wheedling…you can just sit there and enjoy the show…get the full effect and affect, so to speak,” said La Touche.

Delaval’s eyes ran with tears of terror and pain, but his larynx had been cut, effectively rendering him mute…so all he could do was plead with his eyes. Gasps of pain issued from him with each breath and his shoulders sagged with the realization of his destitute predicament. He started coughing up the blood that was slowly collecting in his bronchial tubes from the incision.

La Touche reached once again into the black instrument case, bringing up the testicle screw.

“This, my friend, is what we will use first. Rol, let’s strip down Mr. Delaval’s trousers, if you please,” said La Touche.

Delaval tried kicking out at Skanek when he moved in front of him, but the vampire Black Guard nimbly evaded his efforts. Untying his belt, Skanek bound the vampire’s legs and then stripped his trousers and underwear down to his ankles.

La Touche kneeled down in front of Delaval and gingerly, almost gently, put the testicle screw on the vamp’s nuts, adjusting the screws to just a snug fit. The two-halved, adjustable enclosure was slowly screwed inward, capturing and squeezing the testicles as it drew in.

“Now, Rasmin, I want you to think about your treachery and unfaithfulness as we administer this small punishment. Never let it be said that I don’t let the punishment fit the crime.”

The screws moved in minute jerks as La Touche turned them inward, cramping and crimping the captured testicles in the cage. Delaval’s eyes bulged out in pain and shifted from face to face, his tortured throat silently screaming his agony.

La Touche made several more turns of the screw, thoroughly enjoying himself, watching his old nemesis suffer…and became sorely disappointed when the vampire’s nuts burst on the last turn. Blood, blood vessels, mucus, and two crumpled husks that had once been productive organs, slither-slid down through Delaval’s thighs, leaking onto the concrete beneath him.

Delaval had fainted…

La Touche sighed…

*Now I’ll have to wake him up before we can continue our little enjoyment…oh, well…*

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Movado and Skanek gathered up the used torture instruments, scattered around the dead vampire traitor. Skanek pulled the fangs from Delaval’s swollen mouth with a pair of needle-nosed pliers and deposited them in the black briefcase along with the cleaned instruments, closing and latching the golden latches.

As La Touche and Lin Sung waited on the dark apron of the loading dock, Movado poured aviation fuel over the corpse, soaking the vampire’s hair and clothing in the combustible liquid. Then, producing and lighting a Bic lighter, Movado ignited the cadaver and stepped back as the aviation fuel *phoomphed* into a towering inferno of scarlet and orange flame, wildly devouring the vampire corpse.

La Touche stood admiring the galloping flames of the vampire bonfire, smiling with an enigmatic grin, a display of satiating, satisfying revenge.

“Gentlemen…and lady, this is indeed, a suitable termination to one despicable entity, if I do say so myself,” said La Touche to his small entourage. “Now, I believe we should be off to greener pastures, before the authorities decide to investigate….*Adieu, my friend…Roast in peace.*”

The four vampires dissolved into the early evening night of Vancouver International Airport like a dissipating mist, moving as blurs of speed through the airport throngs, becoming invisible to the human food…

*The End*