

Eternity

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The past present and future unfolds, of ancient God-like beings; immortals that live in our world still, as told from the point of view of "Reth", brother to the current ruler of Hell.

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1 - Prologue

.Prologue.

12:00AM - October 3rd - 2004

The smoke from the cigarette floated upward to the heavens, rain dampened streets stretched out ahead of me and my breath crystalized in the air. A rush of wind swept my hair back - a vivid red against a dull background of concrete and night. Here I am, 2000 years old, and what the frack do I have? Nothing. I'd spent my life spitefully and there was nothing to show for it. I stood up from the curb and looked around. Where would I drown my sorrows this evening? The zippers on my pants glinted in the neon lights of china town glaring at me from across the street. I could do with a shoot load of sake right about now.

Four or five hookers leaned against the outside wall of a bar I headed towards. Thick long black hair tied up in pigtails, ivory skin wet with rain and shaking from the chill. I shook my head as I walked by making sure not to lock eyes with any of them. I could feel their starving eyes staring at me with scorn. I wasn't so well off myself. But half an hour from now I'd be passed out somewhere and it'd be easier to forget. Hot sake always goes down easy on cold nights.

My name is Reth and the first thing you have to understand... if I had been out in the world for these 2000 years I would've killed myself long ago. Thing is, I only just escaped the shadows a couple months back. Doesn't mean things aint shoot anyway.

While my inebriation sets in, how about I give you a bit of backstory as to why I'm so bitter. Let's go back a-ways... back to my childhood... back to my brother and back to Rome.

I was born in a small back-alley district of Roma.

My parents were both dark occult practitioners and therefore we were never near much civilization. At a young age my brother, sister and I were branded in turn with the four-horned goat at the base of our skull; the very top of our neck. The head and facial regions are influenced by Aries, a sign of fire and war, therefore tattooing over the skull is a place of power for such a symbol. Hair grew in over it, but pieces could always be seen when the hair was parted. By the age of two, in the year 8 when my sister Ebony was born, I was already marked. Already I had a path set out for me. Yet, I didn't quite have a purpose. Alaric, my elder brother born in 4, before this place was even part of the great Roman Empire, was being bred to challenge the gates of hell, to take over the throne from its last owner so they could rest in peace. He partook in rituals down by the Mare Tyrrhenum daily with my parents watching over him. Ebony, at her birth, pleased my parents very much. A woman, who could continue the line through her body. Ebony would be taught seduction, and raise as many for our cause as possible, marking them with blood and ink and continuing the tradition.

Fast-forward past my misspent younger years, with no schooling other than the minimal amount I needed for survival, given to me by my parents. Fast-forward past the favoritism aimed at my brother -

Ebony and I defending each other as she strayed from the path set out for her, and fast-forward to death.

It was a sunny day in June, just a week past my birthday. I was 16 and betrothed to a stunning girl from another family of our type. A little lower class, not directly connected with the legions of the underworld, but worthy all the same. Alaric was 18 and would soon be taking the throne. I was content to sit back and let whatever was going to happen, happen. At least my asshole brother would be off to another realm and I wouldn't be seeing him again until I was dead. Ebony, 14, had taken to spending much time on her own in the woods near our small home. I knew she had connections with the Fae. She had more interest in their trickery and mischief than the blatantly cruel acts our parents wished for us to perform. This was a week before the day that Alaric was to leave. The river would turn to blood, but only for the shortest time, and my brother would enter into it. It would boil. He would burn, choke, drown, but rise again beneath. He bore a second mark no one but my parents had ever seen. Another below his first, and he always wrapped a piece of fabric about his neck to keep it from view. That is the mark that would separate him from the other bodies.

But one final act was required before he would enter the Mare Tyrrhenum. He had to kill a human as a sacrifice. An innocent. Of the past few years I had gained a condescending attitude - acquired it from some passing nobles whose behavior I watched with great intent. I thought of the acts of my parents as "boorish" and ignored the whole ordeal. Until, I found it was Ebony who Alaric was meant to kill. This was the real joy for her birth. Yet, I was too late in finding it out.

Alaric came upon her in the woods where she sat in a faerie ring, speaking to creatures I had never been able to see. He had a sacrificial knife, I pictured his eyes a cold hard emotionless black. They were never anything else. I pictured him doing it quickly, to get it over with and proceed to his destiny. The little mind games played with him all his life had made it so he would be able to perform this one last deed for his parents - and I suppose he in his own way had tragedies.... No matter. Her blood was spilled in the sunlit grass and I could never bear the light again.

On nights like this I can't help but remember the way the river looked in the darkness. What little light there was, reflecting onto my betrothed's hair, in a ghostly silver. I spent hours that night contemplating my life and the meaning of it all by that very river after my sister's death. Little did I know, another pang was yet to come. The next morning, Albina, the girl I was meant to marry, vanished along with my brother. My parents were furious. They alerted everyone they knew of the disappearances and a search party was sent out.

My head began to swim as I thought of my past. I couldn't remember how much I had to drink and I did not recognize the colour of what I was consuming right now. The bar tender gave me a toothy yellow grin, his eyes slits in a sallow face, black hair plastered to his forehead. Christ, it really was hot in here. My pants were clinging to my legs and I suddenly wanted to be home very badly. I felt a tingle rise from the base of my spine to the back of my neck and I shuddered. A moment later I realized there was a woman standing behind me, her hand touching the shaved part of my hair, the part which revealed the mark from so many years ago. I turned to look at her, squinting to try and straighten out the world around me.

"Hot tattoo... there some kind of story behind it? Or am I ... over analyzing"

She purred, stroking my hair.

"Stop that. Don't touch me right now - you want me to fracking vomit?"

She removed her hand as if it had been burned on my scalp. I just wanted to sit. Sit and think of her. Albina. The one I lost to my brother.... and as I turned my head back to my drink, the rest of the world phased out and the girl must have moved on, as I couldn't tell if she was there or not anymore. There were plenty others who would take her in on a rainy night.....

Albina and Alaric returned two nights later, together. Alaric acted as if he did not know her and Albina sulked. She had given him something she could never give again. Something that was meant to be mine, and she was ruined now. My parents would not allow me to marry her. Another had already "claimed her". But she could not follow where he was headed. I never saw her again after that, I was told. And I knew my brother had done it just to spite me. He was not anywhere near interested in her. From what I had witnessed he was interested only in himself and his destiny - which really was just another part of himself. It was simply the way he was raised. My parents would dash my only hope for some sort of life to pieces without a second thought but did not care what Alaric did. Any deed he committed was part of his path to greatness. He had a "get out of jail free" card for life, the spoiled bastard.

The day the river turned red, I sat at its bank. I sat in a spot where I would not see my brother. Of course my parents wished for me to help with the right, but I ran off at dawn and the ritual was to happen in the black. I heard their voices... they did look for me, but not for long. You have to understand, though Alaric was chosen, everyone in this family had power to manipulate shadows. I suppose I forgot to mention that earlier but you'll have to forgive me, the alcohol is thinking for me at the moment. In fact, I believe I had a better understanding of them than Alaric because he was so goal oriented and I could not see anywhere into the future. I worked with what I had. But, Ebony and I hardly used our power whereas Alaric was performing little tricks all over the place every chance he got. He had to show off what little he had to make it seem like he had more... or something like that. Anyway, I twirled the speckling of shadows which fell from tree branches, around with a finger. They'd pull up from the ground and become something physical, like smoke. Then they'd float away with the wind into another patch of dark. After hours of thought and boredom, the clear moonlit water gained a tint of crimson and gradually the pigment was complete. The river was indeed red.

I guess up to that point part of me had thought maybe, just maybe it wouldn't happen. My parents could have been suspicious folks, doing insane things to their own children for something that would never happen... but the red came and went and I made my decision. I would never go home again. I would not be trapped in whatever life my parents would set out for me next. I decided to join the Roman army. Become a soldier. And maybe die doing something good.

My glass was empty. I tilted it, looking to see if there was something in it I was missing. Nope. Ah, it would be best to take a trip to the washroom right about now anyway. I would harass the barkeep when I finished. I took a smoke in the stall, clouding up the whole room, finished my business and exited. God I love d'jaurms... even the smell they leave behind is good. I closed my eyes and breathed out as I reclaimed my seat at the bar. I looked up at the bar tender from my slumped position and after a moment he served me another bottle of sake. Good, he was learning. Now where was I.... oh yes, the Roman army. You would never see a bigger bastard than the general of that endeavor....

Titus Markas of Roma was second to none. He had risen in the ranks to lead a large part of the army and was currently training the latest to sign up. Which, I was one of. He'd lead us around, beat us, let us know that we were lower than the dirt he walked on, but once we cleaned up he'd claim to others we were the finest. His eyes were cold and black like my brother's and so I always had a hard time trusting any aspect of him. Not really the best way to think of someone who is to lead you in to battle. Then again, I was right to tread with caution, as he betrayed us in battle. Fled. I can hardly remember the day or the circumstances. It's been so long now. But I know he had the chance to be a great leader and threw it away. After that, I grew tired of fighting. I was good at it. I was born strong and could defeat any opponent. I was clearly not going to die honorably in battle. And so I retired to Egypt in the presence of a few lovely court ladies. One in particular, dressed in green, adorned with emeralds, with long thick black hair - Tahira - I took a strong liking to and stayed at her side for a number of years. We never married, as she was one of the King's. But she was good at sneaking away on occasional nights, those of which were the most enjoyable times I had in Egypt.

"You been babble on on on for hour now, you pay tab, you go! We closing now!"

The bar tender awoke me from my thoughts. Rudely, I might add. I stood shakily and staggered out the door

"You be back! You pay! Or I call cops on your @\$ \$ right now!"

"Do what you want, Chinaman"

I was out in the street again, sheets of rain still falling from the sky drenching the pavement black. These people, in this world... they hadn't changed since Rome. Little things always getting on little peoples' nerves. ...

My apartment was on the other side of a subway tunnel. I would walk down the tracks, ignoring homeless people and avoiding gang members. The tunnel was rank and entirely littered with garbage. At least the train was loud enough that even when piss drunk I would know to get out of its path.

It wasn't that nice of an apartment... really. Bad side of town, Break-ins everywhere... typical. I couldn't be expected to be entirely self-sufficient in a new era right off.

I lay on the torn futon folded out on the hardwood floor. The ceiling spun, the wall spun, when I saw the floor out of the corner of my eye, it spun too. I closed my eyes but it didn't stop. I was still spinning, just in a void now. And I remembered. The reason I am here now. The fourth major woman in my life - though I never learned her name or saw her face.

I left Egypt when my affair became too dangerous. Tahira felt the Pharaoh was catching on. She would be found missing many mornings, so often that all the other ladies expected it. She wanted to stop seeing me. Either that or I had to steal her away from the Pharaoh - yet I faltered, when it came down to it I really did not want to grow old with her. And so one night I disappeared. She must have come to my home that evening and would then know she would never see me again. I left no message.

Thirty or so moons later I heard of a female scourge causing a panic in Egypt. It was rumored she would

attempt murder on the Pharaoh himself. Word of her spread like fire through Egypt and Rome. I wondered where she had come from, how she had this power... and a flame inside of me began to burn. I wanted to be known. I always had deep in my heart. I wanted power. The power my brother had had.

Many nights my dreams were littered with faceless women, masked women, all of whom had thick auras of the shadows, sin, and my sought after power. In all these dreams I was helpless. The simple idea of this person drove me mad. Drove me to the river. The river where I had always found my peace. I threw myself upon its banks begging for a calm mind and the strength to gain acknowledgment. I had aged. I wanted to be remembered when I died. Or - never die. My brother, would never die.

Black tangled shadows of tree branches twined together and flowed along the ground, mimicking the water near it. It began crawling over me, seeping in to me. I felt better, I felt incredible, until something began to feel wrong - the emotions turned negative. To anger, to despair... I watched as my own skin began to grow darker, translucent. I was turning into a shadow myself, and as I faded, whatever I was, was pulled in with the other shadows, and down below the ground. Through the dirt and roots, into Hell itself.

End Prologue

2 - Chapter 1

12:00PM - April 6th - 2004

Reth... Reth.... She's here, up above, in the light... Come to me and I will grant you form, come to me and you can finally prove your spirit... My name is Lucrezia and I will set you free

I stood still in the black of hell, a single shaft of light pouring down from the rocky face of wall. And a voice echoed through it to me. So I pulled myself up to the crack, staring through it and blinding myself with white. Wind and electricity rushed through my ears, and I lay at the foot of a towering building of steel.

I blinked a few times and held my hands out, touched them. Flesh. Human flesh. I knew I was grinning as I noticed the woman standing over me. Dressed in a short white dress and tall black boots, her shining black hair hung loosely over her chest, falling to her waist, and her thin face held one pale scar along its left cheek descending to her chin from beneath thick-rimmed glasses. She held out her hand.

Ten minutes later we were sitting in a coffee shop. How strange I must have looked dressed practically in rags. But I didn't care. Luckily I had viewed the changes of the world from beneath it or else I would have been faced with a huge shock. I hadn't tasted anything in decades though and so when the coffees came, I burned my lips drinking too quickly.

"I can't believe this worked. My name is Lucrezia - Luc if you like. I'm a wicca - a mage - I recently gained access to a library of sorts... it's rather ancient... anyhow, I've been researching and I came across your story in threads throughout history - I became so interested in setting you free!"

I blinked a few times and tested the coffee again. It was safe.

"I had no idea I was in books..."

"Well, no books around in this world, they're elsewhere, and there isn't much. Your name certainly comes up in a lot of larger stories though. I've always liked digging into things. Most people focus on the big stuff, I like smaller things."

"That's not really a compliment Luc"

She laughed. I hadn't heard laughter in so long.... well not joyful laughter anyhow.

"So what was with the fancy talk back there?"

"I'm a drama queen"

"Drama queen?"

"I like making things appear to be more than they are"

"Oh. Well, you did raise me from Hell."

She shrugged

"I recently found out that the woman - Kanika - the one who drove you mad in Egypt - she was killed, sent to the shadows like yourself, but as a Goddess of the shadows... trapped...well, she came back and she wanders the world as you now do!"

Luc's piercing grey eyes gleamed and she grinned with perfect teeth. She was so excited, and it was easy to gain the feeling myself, as I thought of finally meeting - and challenging...

"Kanika..."

"Yes, Kanika! Oh I'm so interested in seeing this play out it's like being a part of history"

"You're a strange girl, I never ran into someone like you"

"I'm a history student - you've never met a history student?"

"Well uhm, no. In my time - not to say you... shouldn't but - they weren't really educated at all"

"Oh I know that, don't be silly"

She laughed again. Looking back I must have seemed like such a fool... not to mention a dark cloud on top of it all.

"So what, you sit by and... watch me on my vendetta"

"I'm not busting out the cam corder or anything, I just want, well, this every once in awhile. Let me know what's going on. Give me some diary material"

"Cam corder?"

"Video... moving image of what you're doing, I follow you around and, record it"

"Oh, those. I've seen those"

"You'll catch on fast"

I looked into the swilling bottom of my coffee cup and remembered tea leaves... Ebony in the forest with tea leaves... Ebony in the sunlight...

"So I'm going to hand off the cash at the counter then we can head over to my place. I've got a spare room or eight"

Laughing again. I didn't answer but continued to stare blankly as she got up to go to the counter.

Soon we were walking down the sunlit street. The world was so ... civilized... and beautiful. I could get used to it here. But I got the feeling I would have to restrain myself from any acts of violence. That would be a little difficult.

"My parents both died a few years ago, limo crashed into a bus... pretty nasty, they left me with this huge place, enough money to last me..."

"I'm sorry"

"I've healed"

She smiled but didn't show her teeth. It reminded me of how Albina smiled around me; it wasn't true happiness or conviction.

"So you live in a castle?"

"Not a castle, people don't really live in those anymore, the government owns them because it'd be too hard to pay for one and stuff like that"

"Oh..."

"The economy, stuff like that. My house is big but it's not like a castle, just modern day wealth. Not uber wealth"

She talked a lot. But that was okay right now. And then we were at the gates. She unlocked a padlock and they swung open. She locked it again behind her.

"Wait a minute - that's not much security. No guards..."

"No security! Not really. Got a couple alarms near the house. I let all the help go. Most places in my house I haven't been into in months. I clean what I need; I keep up what I need. Rather spend my budget on school than servants, I feel more comfortable that way"

"I wouldn't"

The grounds were grass covered, yet it was all overgrown except for a small patch of lawn near the front of the mansion, obviously the bit that Luc could keep up herself. The place looked entirely abandoned....

"Well you're a warrior, aren't you? I've got protection now"

"I- yeah. I guess."

"So, d'you want a window?"

"Excuse me?"

We were at the front door, the walkway up was long.

"Got a few spare bedrooms - My parents' room is locked up, off limits. Nicest room is taken by a girl staying with me right now, but the others are great I think"

"Girl?"

"Yeah, her name's Jess. Younger than me, not much of a memory, found her wandering the streets. She's a sweetheart - free spirit like me I think"

"You got a habit for picking up strange people, Luc"

"Keeps things interesting and... not so lonely"

"She knows about the magick?"

"Oh she knows, darling"

She gave me a smile as if I knew absolutely nothing. The door swung open.

In the middle of the entry way, an ornate carpet had been folded back to reveal hardwood floor and sitting on it was a girl younger than myself with light brown hair. She had her legs crossed and her eyes closed. All decoration in the entryway was either floating off its table or away from its wall as if some other worldly source was pulling at them. There was a blue haze surrounding her small form.

"Jess?"

"Luc!"

Her eyes opened, the pictures smacked back against the wall and a vase crashed onto a table, spun and broke on the ground. Her eyes shut tight again.

"I'm sorryyy"

"That's okay Jess; just... clean it up please"

"Will do"

She jumped up and flopped the carpet back to its original position.

"Who's he?"

"His name's Reth, he's staying with us"

"Cool"

She then walked out of the room.

"So she definitely knows about the magick"

"Definitely. C'mon up, I bet you're tired"

And in fact, I was even though it was the middle of the afternoon. I remember that sleep in the upper corner guest room as the best I've ever had. The bed was large, comfortable... and the heavy drapes blocked all sunlight, leaving me in pitch black comfort.

"Orange pancakes!"

Sunlight streamed in blinding my eyelids as I kept my eyes tightly shut trying to stay in a dream

"Good mooorning sunshine"

I sat up rubbing my eyes and Jess put a breakfast tray onto my legs.

"Eat. You've been sleeping a full 24 hours! I mean, you just came back from the dead pretty much but you still slept an extraordinarily long time then again I've never seen someone brought from the underworld and-- I'm talking too much. Eat!"

She left the room and I looked down at the steaming pile of pancakes, custard on top, some strips of bacon and a glass of... orange juice. The girl liked oranges that was for sure. At least her cooking was good; I hadn't tasted food in so long I thought I'd gone to heaven.

These are the moments you look back on when so short a time after all your cupboards are stocked with are instant noodles coffee and booze, and your bed is a mattress on the ground.

A couple hours after I had eaten, I found myself walking down the street, Jess in the lead, to a bus stop. Luc hung back to point out various buildings to me as we walked. She briefly explained basic laws and politics to me and I tried my best to keep them in mind. It was very strange to know that people no-longer dueled to settle arguments and that it was rare for there to be an arranged marriage. Watching the world go by is one thing, but what I only saw was skin-deep. Learning the ways of these people was a whole different thing. A complicated thing.

We reached a square glass shelter and sat down on metal benches inside. I looked around this city, it was really wonderful downtown. Weathered brick buildings were hung with multitudes of plants like the hanging gardens of Babylon.

I had to say I really liked the concept of cars, though they also seemed very scattered and I found it hard to comprehend the rules of the road. The idea you had to go a fixed speed, that if you hit another one you might -die- from it. When the bus driver showed up, Luc pushed me up the steps and handed me a ticket. The driver gave me a pointed look as I figured out what to do with it and Jess ended up grabbing it from me to shove in a little slot near the man.

As we walked to the back of the vehicle, Luc grabbed my arm and leaned in to my ear

"He probably thought you were on drugs or something" she giggled.

I just blinked and figured I'd learn about that later.

"Now in the museum, you can look at everything but you can't touch it, unless it says so. Also, none of it is real it's just preserved"

"I know about museums"

I grumbled.

Learning wasn't really my number one interest. I had the basics, now I just wanted some action. Luc, with her studies was quite different. I was certain a museum was the sort of place she would spend an entire day in solitary and scholarly.

The bus ride was exhilarating; I kept my face close to the window, the wind whipping my hair back. Jess and Luc spoke in quiet confidence and I was glad they weren't directing anything at me right now. What would I do in this world? I certainly wouldn't settle into domesticity. Luc had informed me there was pretty much always a war to sign up for but I thought I was sick of that as well. I suppose there are many opportunities for an immortal.

3 - Chapter 2

8:00 PM - October 4th - 2004

It was dark just as it had been when I went to sleep. Perhaps a lingering sunset lay outside but it was covered up with a board over the small broken window. Better that then let the elements and street people get in. I let my feet slide off the futon as I rolled over and sat up. I knocked over two bottles sitting at the end of the bed. Glancing at them letting last night register I acknowledged that yet again, nothing of interest had occurred. I stood up and the floor creaked, something sticky clung to my foot and I didn't bother to see what it was.

The kitchen yielded no food or coffee. Damn cupboards were empty, I wondered for how long. Each evening I awoke thinking, if there is food and drink here, I won't go out tonight, I'll just sit, and think. Meditate. But there is never food and there is never drink and my nights remain the same. Dead dull and foggy.

I threw on a pair of pants and a t-shirt. I could feel a chill clinging to me already and wondered if a hot bath would suit me better. But lethargism took over and abandoned that thought. Out I went again.

On arrival at my usual haunt, I found two men standing outside the building speaking with the bar tender. As I approached he pointed vividly at me and squawked something in Chinese. The men must have understood it and turned, eyeing me with steely glares. They came forward.

"He claims you come in here night after night. You've built up quite a tab yet never come up with a single part of what you owe. You either hand it over now..."

He gestured at the thin angry man seething through thick-rimmed glasses

"...or you have a few words with my fist"

I eyed him up and down. He looked threatening but to me was a small obstacle. A swift uppercut to the jaw and he stumbled back. His partner stepped towards me and I easily extended my leg to trip him. I brought my foot down on his back hard as the first lurched towards me to take a shot. I flattened my palm and hit him hard on his chest, winding him.

"Look, I'm gone from here. Chink's a pain in the @\$\$ anyhow, but you two come after me about anything again and I'll do more than throw you down."

I removed my foot, and slumped off, putting a cigarette between my teeth and going to light it.

My lighter was dead. I spat the cigarette into a puddle and kicked it.

"frack me."

This night couldn't get any worse if it tried.

"Excuse?"

I turned to see a woman standing a few feet away from me. Whether or not she had witnessed the whole scene, I wasn't sure. If she had, she didn't look shocked at all. She looked annoyed. Like I had somehow put a pock mark on her lovely evening stroll through this disgusting back lane.

I held up my lighter awkwardly and let it fall.

"Doesn't work"

I muttered.

For her small stature she was actually rather imposing. Her eyes were harsh and I could tell immediately that her thinness had come from exercise rather than not eating. A dancer? No, this one looked more likely to be a kick boxer. She had long dark brown hair which was currently decorated with hair clips that looked like she had pasted clockworks to her head.

"You look like you need a drink"

She said it tersely, but maybe she wasn't all that bad. She certainly knew how to speak my language.

"Oh do I ever"

"Been through the wars, hm?"

She raised an eyebrow and smirked a little, clearly poking fun at me.

"A couple"

I nodded and she dismissed it as a bad comeback.

"Where are you headed?"

"Somewhere a little classier than where you were by the looks of it"

"So, where are you from?"

"That isn't any of your business"

I stared straight ahead and decided not to make any more conversation until she had had some alcohol in her. Apparently she needed it more than I did.

4 - Chapter 3

4:00PM - April 7 - 2004

On entering the museum I was not terribly interested. Luc payed \$18 for all of us to get in and the first image that greeted us was a stuffed ancient elephant. A hairy one. And to add to it, it wasn't even a real one, it was recreation because all they had of the old ones was bones. I read the plaque on dinosaurs and walked ahead, down a small hall turning immediately into a huge room with polished black floors revealing the largest skeleton I had ever seen in the centre of it. A Tyranasaurus Rex, I read. I did not believe it. Impossible something like this could have roamed the earth.

"I don't believe this"

"Amazing isn't it"

"Amazing horse dung maybe"

"What??"

"That's not real, I don't believe it."

"Reth... this is proven history, those are real bones they found."

"All in one piece?"

"No..."

"Then they've put it together wrong it must actually be multiple bodies"

Luc crossed her arms over her chest.

"No. Reth. Everything in here is true."

She turned her back and went to read a plaque I knew she must already have memorised.

"You're in trouuuble"

Jess sang out to me quietly as she walked by to go in another room.

"Luc?"

I stepped over behind her and put a hand on her waist. She jumped away like I had electrocuted her.

"You can't do that. Okay? Just... don't."

Stunned, I didn't even know what I had done wrong.

She followed Jess into the other room and I came along a few paces behind.

We walked through a whole room that had "teepees" and "log cabins" in it. I was very bored by this. A cozy home with a cat sitting on a rocking chair was never my image of happiness. Neither was a leather hovvle in the middle of the woods.

"I love this!"

Jess exclaimed as she sat down inside the teepee.

"I could live here. Under the sky with the stars and the grass and the birds..."

She smiled to herself and closed her eyes. Luc joined her inside and they fell into talking again.

I went into the next room and beheld... mock up crypts and sarcophogi. Tombs... hieroglyphs... I could read them, read their history. Like it was yesterday.... Cleopatra, Caesar... I had been alive in their time, so long ago. At a further end of the room was roman armor and weaponry. It was behind glass, perfectly cleaned in amazing condition with a plaque describing its material. I remembered dressing in this to kill. Sneaking into Tahira's room and kissing the jade that hung around her neck...

I felt dizzy. The room was clean and quiet and polished. No one was here. There was a small security camera in the corner of the room. Such life in all the items, hidden behind glass. I had to leave.

Luc found me in the next room, a forest, speaking of hunting through the ages, stuffed foxes and wolves and bears scattered throughout. I sat near a waterfall staring into its churning water, remembering bathing in a much larger one once.

"A bit much?"

She put a hand on my shoulder and knelt beside me.

"I'm sorry about earlier, I've just had... some bad experience. I have trouble being touched."

I nodded, watching Jess enter the room and be even more herself here than in the teepee room.

"Does anyone else ever come here?"

Jess looked up at me.

"Field trips, occasionally. Mostly Luc and I though. I think it's more calming here than a library"

"Field trips?"

"When schools take a whole group of students to an outside location to learn more"

"Oh"

Jess sat by the waterfall watching the water, making it swirl and bubble in unnatural ways, it splashed without her hands hitting it. Her powers were so calm. I barely wanted to use mine for fear of hurting someone. She had control.

The final room of the museum we went to was made to look like an old harbor, a huge ship was docked and sounds of seagulls, waves and wind were piped into the room. I went aboard the ship and remembered a time I sailed on one similar to it for days. A man stood on the ship making sure no one decided to sleep in it for the night. He droned on about the uses of each item on board. Thing I had known for years. It was so basic.

At last an announcement came on proclaiming the Museum was closing so we walked back into the fading sun.

"We could go for dinner if you like. I know a really nice Italian place, come on"

We would down a few populated streets. A festival was happening in a park nearby and relaxing music drifted over to us.

"That's called reggae music"

I nodded.

"Here we go- Tap and Grill"

Luc opened a door, we walked up a flight of stairs, and I viewed a semi-classy restaurant, mandolin music playing from somewhere with plants hanging from the ceiling.

It was all so civilised, the waiter came, Luc told me not to order so much meat as it would cost a lot. And prices certainly had sky-rocketed in comparison to what I was used to. Meat was such a staple I would think it would be very inexpensive. I settled on a steak and lobster dinner which Luc assured me was still the most expensive thing on the menu but it was alright just this once.

"Next time you're paying if that's the kind of taste you have"

She said after ordering a bowl of pasta and a salad. Jess had a small pizza.

We decided to walk home. The day really had been a good one. I didn't mind it as much as I had thought and didn't mind so much if there were more like it to come. A few blocks away from Luc's home, she reached for my hand and I let her take it.

5 - Chapter 4

11:00pm, October 7th, 2004

"So what's your name??"

I yelled through the cacophonous voices at the club the girl had brought me to. We had taken a cab; it was a long ride, practically to the outskirts of the city.

"Gidget!"

She yelled back. I raised an eyebrow she did not see. That wasn't quite what I had expected... too cute for someone with this attitude... rather... fake sounding to me.

She plunked herself gracefully down on a bar stool and beckoned the tender over with her finger. His eyes widened like a slave receiving instruction and hurriedly brought us each three shot glasses full of what looked like vodka but smelled more along the lines of tequila...

Gidget tipped them back in succession and looked at me expectantly. So I followed suit and only after the third felt the burn in my whole body.

"The frack is in that?!"

"Everclear. 95% alcohol"

She smiled devilishly. My kind of woman.

Another three shots later we were both feeling it. I knew why it took so much to get me going, but I was wondering about her. Any average woman especially of her small stature would have been passed out or vomiting or maybe even in the hospital by now. But she wasn't. I could see a drunken haze pass over her eyes and at one point noticed her brush at hair that wasn't actually in her face. I suggested leaving.

"We can take a cab back to... wherever you came from... I'll just stop where you... found me"

"Nonono I'll uhm come with you"

She pointed at me and smiled, running her other hand up my thigh.

My place it was then.

The cab took a very long time to reach us. She had insisted on one business and only that one. It was located across the city where we had come from, but it was her fare and if that's how she wanted to travel, farbeit from me to stop her.

We got in; it was the same one that had dropped us off. Same driver too. He looked at her knowingly.

"Back home, ma'am?"

"Not tonight! Tell. Him. Your Address."

She whispered to me loudly enough that the driver could hear, and I awkwardly told him where I was living. Seemed as if Gidget had money, and I doubt she'd like what she saw when she came into my place.

The cab dropped us off sceptically and as she fumbled with fare I got out to fumble with the door. When she reached my arm we drunkenly got ourselves up the stairs and to my apartment.

"What a shoot hole"

She giggled, walking in.

"Thanks..."

She plunked down on my futon feeling it with her hands - for bugs? Disease? I wandered hopelessly to the kitchen

"I was going to offer you something but I uh, don't really have anything"

"Fine with me, come here."

I hesitated, and then some old part of my brain seemed to gear into action. I paced over and sat down beside her, looking deep into her night sky eyes.

"You remind me of another time..."

"I think I know exactly what you mean..."

She cooed back.

She couldn't possibly know exactly what I meant, but it was nice she was willing to understand, and as we fell on each other, no more words were necessary.

There was thunder in our bodies, hot in this night, in the sheets. In the black. There was biting, and holding, soft soft skin in my teeth on my legs. Dizzying. I liked this, I really liked this, all of this, and then she spoke again.

"I want to tell you something... that I've never told anyone... in a long time"

"Mh?"

My brain wasn't really set up for talking at the moment, a thought in the back of my head dearly hoped

she wasn't the sort to spill every single emotion in her on the first crack.

"I want to tell you my name"

"Gidget"

I mumbled back, letting my mouth once again find her neck.

"No, my name is Kanika"

6 - Chapter 5

2:00pm, August 6, 2004

Breeze off the water blew Lucrezia's hair back off her face letting the sun play with shadows on her face, blocking out the scar on her cheek with darkness. Her skin was tanned a soft natural looking brown, Luc held a hand above her naked eyes as she looked off over the waves. She wore a soft yellow sun dress made of thin fabric and in the hand limp at her side she held a straw hat. Her feet were bare. She had brought no shoes with her, but walked here this way.

"Lucrezia?"

She blinked as if brought out of a dream and faced me, red brushing lightly across her cheeks. It could have been blush, or the beginning of too much sun.

"Why are you calling me that?"

"It's nice to say sometimes. Come here?"

She walked over, the white sand stirring around her ankles as wind caught it.

I noticed a slim gold anklet on her right.

"Luc, you never told me how you got that scar"

No response and I hoped I hadn't insulted her somehow. Over the months I really had come to care for Luc - I hadn't thought it would be possible again.

Luc had that blank stare, looking over the waves as if a ship was coming for her.

"Remember I told you how my parents died?"

"A... car crash."

She nodded, still not looking in my direction.

"I was in the limo with them. Five years ago... I was 16. I was in so much shock, I couldn't call for help. Someone on the sidewalk--"

She paused

"It's okay. You don't have to --"

"No."

She said it firmly and I closed my mouth.

"Someone, on the sidewalk called the police. When the crash happened, I had been sleeping with my head on my mother's lap, her-- wine glass... it broke right into my face. I couldn't even feel it. I watched them both bleed out. God, that ambulance... it took so long."

A family played in the foam near the sand, children splashing, parents laughing with them, Lucrezia so bright yet so sad in the foreground; I don't think I had felt anything more intimate before that. I gathered her into my arms and didn't care if she would protest. She didn't, but let out a shaky sob before going quiet.

Jess stood on the path near the beach. I saw her over Luc's shoulder. She had gone to get some drinks, but made no move forward until Luc drew away from me, wiping her eyes and smiling.

"I'm sorry; I haven't really talked about that before"

I attempted an understanding smile and brushed away some strands of hair that had plastered themselves to her wet cheek.

"I leave you two alone for one minute..."

Jess made a tutting sound and gave us our drinks. Luc laughed.

As Jess settled herself on Luc's other side, I noticed the clouds darkening rapidly in the distance and felt a great foreboding in the pit of my stomach. When I turned to Luc she was looking at the same thing.

"Is that what you've been staring at all afternoon..?"

I asked her. How could I have not been perceptive to the feeling before this? I had been feeling too many other things.

She nodded and squinted her eyes

"What is it? It just exudes uber bad"

"It does..."

"Well it's not rain. I'd smell it if it were rain"

Jess was so attuned to the elements I was used to statements like this.

"It does smell like something though"

Luc and I looked at her, in her blue sundress and pigtails holding an orange crush

"It smells like Hell."

It was the evening of the sixth, the day when Hell had peeped over the churning waves. Jess had gone out. She insisted she knew someone who could help with divination. With finding out what exactly was about to go down. Somewhere in a distant room in the house, I heard the noises of water draining. I walked towards it. The room was Luc's bathroom, attached to her bedroom which I now walked through.

Her bed was surrounded in deep red velvet drapes, the sheets were silky white. I had never been in here before. William Morris paper decorated the tall walls, leading up to an ivory-painted tin ceiling. The floors were wood. A large oak wardrobe stood near the bathroom door. I inspected the vanity for a moment, and then the door opened.

The scent of warm wet and rose oil left the room with her. She wore a black silk robe. The scene was so elegantly gothic, something I had never seen before in her, that it gripped my heart. She had her wet black hair clipped up into a bun.

We stood silent for a moment and then the worlds slipped out of my mouth. I had meant only to think them quite honestly

"Lucrezia... you've touched what's left of my soul..."

She stood still and statuesque and I went to her. She made no argument and I was so confident when I took her in my arms. Roses.... the old scents of Egyptian musk leaving my mind.

Roses and silk. So cliché. So perfect. We sank into the pure white of the bed.

10:00 am, August 7th, 2004

"Luc! Luc! Luc"

My eyes flew open. Luc? What? No. It was okay. She lay beside me, breathing softly. I sat up.

Jess, standing in the doorway flushed deep red.

"R-Reth!"

"Bit early isn't it?"

I scratched the back of my head and looked at the clock on the bedside table.

"Uhm. I can... talk to you two later"

She made a move to rush out of the room.

"No, tell me now. Is it about the divination? When did you get in last night?"

"I didn't... my friend and I worked on the divinations until late and I slept there. But Reth, I was right... it is Hell. It's rearing its ugly head. Whoever rules over it, we got no name but he's super angry at someone

near us."

Luc was stirring now. I furrowed my brow. If I brought Hell upon this household I could never forgive myself.

"Gee, I wonder what they did"

She was genuinely inquisitive. I questioned how she was not pinpointing me right off.

"Hell...?"

Wrapped in blankets, Luc groggily brought herself into the conversation

"Mhm!"

Jess nodded fervently, seemingly excited that she had this information.

"Someone's gone and pissed off the Lord of Hell!"

How I hated the amount of awe "Lord of Hell" inspired when spoken in a room. It was just Alaric.

"His name's Alaric and he's really just a big ponce."

"Touchy"

Luc raised her eyebrow at me.

Jess looked back and forth between us.

"Jess, The Lord of Hell is Reth's brother."

"Wow!! Maybe he's just coming for a visit, hey?"

She grinned

"We hate each other. Utterly."

The room went quiet.

"Reth... do you think that..."

I knew that Luc was catching on. She knew he was coming to take me back.

"I have to leave. Now."

"No! You can't do that. I just- we- Jess and I can help you. We can help ourselves. You don't need to be all heroic and run off!!"

"I'm really lost here..."

Jess still stood in the doorway

"Jess, leave. Please."

I knew I sounded abrupt. It was the old me showing. I didn't give a shoot.

"Fine! Asshole."

She stormed off to another wing of the house.

Luc looked cowed as I stood up and got dressed. I walked over and closed the door.

"You two cannot stand against him. You know resurrection. She knows light and elements. You are both far too much about life to cause him any pain."

"But we're the oposite of him then. We should be able to destroy him entirely if we tried!"

The anger rose up in her now

"NO. It doesn't work like the movies, Luc. You have to have death in you to kill death."

"I knew it. I knew I shouldn't have done this - given in again"

She threw the sheets off her angrily, wearing only underwear, fragile looking, angry body - I felt a pang of regret. I had to be harsh though. I was leaving. She walked into her ensuite and slammed the door. I opened the door of her room and walked out.

Like the draining water of the night before, I heard soft sobs echoing from two locations of the mansion. And I left them.

9:30pm, August 10th, 2004

The appartment was crap. Abandoned. The one I would have up to this current day. But I could live in it, and it was far from Lucrezia and Jess. They must not have been trying to find me, as I was pretty certaint hey'd succeed if they wanted to. I walked by electronics stores, pawn shops nearby and watched the news. It had been heavily dark since that day. Pale haired weathercasters could not hide the look of confusion on their faces as they remarked they had no idea as to why the city was so dark. They merely stated that it would pass.

It would pass if I went to it. But I wasn't planning on giving Alaric that satisfaction.

I lay on my back on the futon I had found in a back lane. This place was so barren and cold. Peeling walls and splintering floors. I closed my eyes and hugged my arms to myself remembering the warm sunlight pouring in on a fresh breakfast in the welcoming kitchen, Luc sitting tired with lank hair, looking

so blank in the morning. Jess bright and vivacious, thoroughly enjoying prodding at her friend the non-morning person.

This was for the best. It wouldn't have lasted. I've never belonged with people such as that.

My thoughts began to wander to ones purely of Luc. The corner of my mouth twitched upwards involuntarily and I could feel myself sinking into the warm dark of the night...

When a knock sounded on my door.

My eyes snapped open and Alaric stood over me. How nice of him to give a second's warning.

"Lookee here, it's my lost lamb"

"frack yourself"

I closed my eyes again.

"Now brother, why would you say something as confident as all that"

I heard him stepping around my living space, shined footwear making a tapping businessman sound on the hardwood.

"I surely thought you were here because you had found something worth being here -for-"

I opened my eyes again and sat up. He was looking skeptically around the apartment, quite honestly confused.

"Well, I didn't bring me back and this, is far better than your "home"

"Really? I was under the impression that my home was quite exquisite"

"Hmph"

"Come home"

He smiled in a way I assume most mortals would find horrific. I didn't reply.

"We have a deal. You have your strength, I keep your soul"

I could hear the anger in his voice elevating

"And if you will not return with me of your own accord, I have other ways. I don't have time for this childishness. I am running the underworld; a job our parents didn't view you as fit for."

It still stung after so many years.

"Oh just leave and take your bullshoot with you. Anyone can sit on their @\$\$ all day doleing out torture"

He stood tall; arms crossed and was silent for a moment, staring at me.

"Right then. I'll be seeing you"

A smile lit his face and he blended into the shadows, disappearing.

Then my mind started racing. Idiot brother or not he was the Lord of Hell and he was fracking insane. This wouldn't be the end of it. I desperately needed to stay a step ahead of him or I could lose my own sanity, my life, or worse yet, the only two people in the world that I cared about.

What did he want? Control is what he wanted. What would I do to control the situation....?

Go straight to the hurting point of course. Did he know about Luc? Jess? Could he? Of course he could. He'd probably been watching my every move once he decided to get me back.

I threw on my boots and hurried out the door. Staring at an empty bus stop, I considered it before shaking it out of my head. I'd have to use the shadows. I stood at the corner, concentrating on my form, my surroundings, and slipped slowly into the dark. I navigated through my memories quickly and found myself outside of Luc's home.

It was blackest here. Blacker than anywhere else in the city. It looked black inside as well, I could not see through the windows.

I grabbed the handle of the door and flung it open. Black. I stepped out and felt no floor beneath me, yet still stood. It was if I stood in the foyer with eyes closed, but my eyes were wide open.

It was purely silent in this darkness and I cursed Alaric for discarding the warmth and beauty that used to sit here. Part of me had been happy to return.

"Our final guest is here!"

His voice echoed and then it was as if someone flicked on a light switch. But we were in Hell.

Alaric stood, in front of his great ornate stone throne, Jess and Luc on piers on either side of him. A sick feeling swam in my stomach.

"Will you bind yourself to me again, brother?"

"No, never."

"Will you send one of them in your place then? Is that your plan?"

Strange little Hell shadows, demons and dead souls leapt about his feet as he walked towards me. Sand around Luc's ankles in the sun... her mouth was bound and she could not move on the pier.

"Brother, do you love one of these mortals??"

I blinked

"Of course not, but that doesn't mean I'm about to come back to this place. Let me be."

"No, we had a deal, a promise, and if I let you get off, well then all the children will want a break too"

He shook his head, laughing at me.

"No no, I'll make it easy for you"

He thumped his hand on to my shoulder.

"Which, is the one you love more?"

"I care for them both. I worry for them both."

He ignored my response.

"Is it... this one?"

Jess floated off the pier, desperation in her eyes

"She knows magicks, not that they're much use down here, she's interesting... the shadows make her weak. I'd love for her to stay with me for awhile, so I could see why..."

I refused to acknowledge him. He wouldn't kill either one yet, he knew they both were a little more than average humans and would want to keep them around. At least I had that on my side.

"Or is it this one..."

His smile sweetened as Luc was illuminated

"She's pretty isn't she. Bit damaged though... nasty scar. Must be a bit of a turn off hm?"

I wouldn't show him the emotion that had just stirred in me

I saw Luc fighting against the magickal restraints.

"But she's also a little interesting, she has so much life in her, it makes me feel as though I can breathe again! It surprises me that the flowers haven't begun to bloom in here."

I sighed and looked up, trying to appear bored with him

"You talk a lot, Alaric. I think that's why Mom and Dad sent you down here - they were sick of hearing you talk."

"Alright then. One in exchange for you, one goes free. With you. I'll leave you be. For awhile anyhow. Do you know what I think?"

"What do you think."

"I think you care for the younger one.... does she remind you of our Ebony?"

"Don't say her name."

"She had a lovely shade of blood"

My fist flew out, towards his head but he caught it

"No no no. Let's have some class now. Come here sweet heart"

Jess, unable to move, floated forward.

"You're going to be my new friend"

He smiled turning to her. The shadows crackling at his fingertips. He had a knife in his belt---

I had not been looking at Luc while he spoke and now I heard her - she had somehow regained the movement in her arms and had torn the gag off.

"Don't hurt her! I brought him back!"

Why?! Why had she said that. I tensed in horrifying anticipation and reached for the knife, but Alaric had disappeared and was now standing beside Luc. Shocked at his sudden appearance she had gone quiet.

"You... are the one who stole him from me?"

"Th-that's right"

I made a move to shadow step to him but found myself unable to. The little Hell goblins were holding my ankles with wierd strength, smiling impishly up at me with the winking white eyes.

"Don't hurt her!"

"But dear brother, she has hurt me."

He looked at Luc and not me as he spoke. Jess struggled wildly with her bonds.

Then he did it. He created an ever lasting image in my mind. A bloody print.

His hand turned to shadows and he plunged it into her chest. Her eyes went wide a moment, sliding to look at me before they closed. He removed his hand and blood seeped through her clothing. He had a

crushed her heart. Jess fell to the ground, free, yet un-moving from shock.

"Well that was an easy solution, wasn't it"

"You son of a---"

And Jess and I were standing on the sidewalk, in front of the mansion, in warm morning sunlight. My eyes snapped shut from the sudden brightness.

"No. No no no NO"

I fell to my knees in frustration as Jess got to her feet. I could feel hot tears on my cheeks.

Jess looked down at me coldly.

"This, is all because of you."

I tilted my head up to look her in the eye

"I will NEVER forgive it."

She turned shakily on her heel and went up the walk into the house. I heard the door lock.

7 - Chapter 6

12:05am, October 8, 2004

I stopped. Raised my head up from her neck and sat facing her, suddenly feeling a lot less intoxicated.

"...Excuse me?"

"Kanika"

She stared right into my eyes and I saw what I hadn't seen before. Endless ages stretching into the deep blue of their young appearance.

"Is somethinnng wrong?"

She spoke it more as a statement than a question and looked instantly guarded.

"I have been... hunting you across time itself"

She sensed the sickened tone in my voice and stood up slowly

"What, are you talking about?"

I stood up quickly

"I am as old as you are, Kanika"

"I'm 20 years old! The frack are you talking about!"

I laughed

"You told me your name, why lie about the rest of it - killer. You did what I couldn't"

She was backing up now, looking almost like a slight, scared girl. But I knew better than that. The small part of my mind that told me I could be wrong was made to sit back. As she reached her hand behind her to grab the door knob, I grasped her wrist and knew then that I was right. She flung my hand off her easily, glaring through steeled eyes, and disappeared into the dark.

"NO. frack!"

So close I had been so fracking close. This is what I had been brought back to do and I wasn't about to make Luc's efforts be wasted. I plunked myself back down on the futon and lay back, arms spread and eyes closed.

Sleep came easily that night.

1:00am, October 8, 2004

My heart hadn't beat so hard in my chest since Egypt. I held my hand up to the left side of my chest, feeling the thumps against my chilled skin. I had goosebumps.

Hunting me across time. Why. I'd never seen his face in Egypt or any of the years leading up to this day.

I pulled off the thick gold bracelets I wore on each wrist and dropped them beside me on the velvety red couch I was curled up on. The sounds of my breathing echoed off the marble floor to the high ceiling. The darkness felt absolute. It was calming.

Something strong had compelled me to tell him my true name. I thought on it, staring up at the ivory moulding covered in shade. It smelled of incense and musty books in here. So perfect. The purple and gold curtains twirled around in the room as a breeze played with them. I was so unready for sleep.

He had had deep red hair and--- a symbol! Yes. He had had a Satanic symbol on the nape of his neck. That had been the sign I skipped over. So many people got tattoos that meant nothing in this era, how can one be expected to pick out the ceremonial ones?

I pulled the little gold chain on an ornate floor lamp and the little cozy area with the large soft couch flooded with a warm glow, revealing around it shelves upon shelves of books, some new some old, all interesting. I moved quickly over to the section on symbolism. I had organized these well. I couldn't help but smile to myself as I easily skimmed the spines and found one on Satanic ritualistic symbols and once sitting down on the couch it took only 10 minutes to find the one I was looking for. The four horned goat in the assignment of Aries.... Hell symbol over Aries, fire and war. Most commonly done with a mixture of blood and ink. His tattoo had had a reddish tint to it... more powerful a symbol than I had expected. He came from a lineage of dark practitioners.

Staring blankly ahead I leaped up and hunted for boots on dark lineage. I found no sect that marked with that particular symbol. Failure wasn't fun. Sitting in frustration, my ears perked up when I heard a voice

"Would you like some help with this..?"

His tone was like snakes and I turned to face him

"Who are you"

I stood, prepared to defend myself

"You research Hell yet know not its leader?"

"And does Hell's leader have a name?"

I raised an eyebrow and stepped out from behind the couch, closer to him

"Alaric"

He held out his hand and I did not take it, yet retained eye contact with his black, black eyes.

"That symbol is my family symbol. They were un-named people, destined to produce an heir to Hell when the time came. That symbol was to prove their ownership of all their children, secure them all a good place in the underworld - I bear a second symbol, that separates me from the rest of the corpses as the next leader"

He turned his back to me, unwrapping the long black silk scarf he wore about his neck. A sign of utter trust. It confused me.

His long black hair draped over his shoulder at the front and I viewed a single black rune on his neck - one main line, like a cross, with three crossing it rather than one. I knew this. It was a Christian papal symbol. The triple cross. Heaven, Earth and Hell. How interesting to twist it.

"Alright, so you and Reth are related"

"He's my annoying little brother"

I laughed to myself

"I've got an annoying little sister of sorts"

"I know"

He turned back to me.

"I'd like you to consider working for me"

He re-wrapped the scarf, gave a half smile and left.

There was no more research to be done at this time. I ascended white marble steps to my bedroom, sinking into black - fabric like Alaric's scarf.

My sleep was fitful.