

Dry Ice In The Graveyard

Details of a Deceased Priest

Jonathon's downfall really began when he hit puberty, when, for the first time, he began to appreciate the difference of girls.

He noticed the slimness of their limbs...

... the softness of their skin.

... the pleasantness of their aroma.

... and, most of all, he noticed the shortness of their skirts and the tightness of their blouses.

Although sex itself was still a dark mystery shrouded by youth (he could never understand what it was that made him look at the girls in that way) he did know that all of it, every sordid, furtive peer, every stolen glance, was not just wrong, it was sinful.

Jonathon Heller was a pupil at a New York catholic school during the 1970s. And, while society around the school was changing, becoming more accepting of the differences in creed, gender and even religion, the Catholic Church was still as static, unyielding and implacable as ever.

The lessons he learned told him that sex was a necessary evil and that only chaste couplings within the crucible of marriage were acceptable and even then, only out of necessity.

As if it weren't enough for him to be ritually (and painfully) purged of sin by strict Catholic tutors, the world outside the window of school was a permanent taunt.

In that world, people were having fun: not everything in life was a sin and you could look at the girls.

And there were older girls too: girls who were worldly and actively sought to catch your eye.

Day in, day out, Jonathon was indoctrinated with religious dogma and the more he learned, the more guilt he felt. However, that didn't stop him from watching his older brother's *videos* and checking out his *magazines*.

As he got older, he found that he wasn't the only one who was experiencing these sinful thoughts.

Maria Santos was the girl that everyone looked up to and at. She was long of leg, dark of hair and tanned of skin: an exotic Spanish beauty who was the pride of the class.

Jonathon was an athletic lad with charisma, charm and the looks to go with it. It seemed only natural and fitting for them to get together and of course, one thing led to another and soon they'd both got what they desired.

Fate then dealt a new hand and it wasn't just the Jacks that were wild.

Maria fell pregnant with Jonathon's child and that is not a thing one can keep secret. Everyone was furious, especially considering the fact that the two of them were only 14 years of age.

He never learned what happened to Maria but Jonathon received punishment after punishment by not only his parents, but by the school: by the Church. He was sent away to an all boys' school where he received more punishment and more doctrine.

He was miserable at this new school for he still had the dark thoughts and the impure desires.

Heller threw himself in to his studies and upon the mercy of God but He was too busy to listen. Jonathon strove harder and harder to please the Lord in an attempt to win his attention and somehow provide salvation from Lucifer's grip.

He became a priest, a servant of God Almighty but still the thoughts never left him. No matter how he filled his days nor how he occupied his mind, his consciousness would always turn to lurid fantasies.

As Father Heller, he returned to New York, a man changed by his experiences. He wanted to return to the only place he had ever felt happy and the Church was only too happy to oblige (New York being a hellhole of suffering). He settled in as one of a number of priests at a large Catholic church where he was able to do some good amongst the faithful and the faithless. His life became a simple routine that was somehow comforting to Jonathon.

It was then, at the age of 26, the shadows began to whisper to him.

Jonathon preferred to stay out of the company others and remain in contemplative study whenever he was able. His time in the church had taught him a deep shame of himself, his lurid and oh-so *wicked* thoughts, and it was sometimes unbearable for him to be in the presence of the people he was meant to be helping.

It was during one of his long sessions with the Bible that the whispers began.

Something wanted very much for Jonathon to indulge himself. It wouldn't be very difficult for him to put on a pair of jeans, hit a nightclub and enjoy himself. He might meet a woman who was just right for him. He didn't have to plan anything. He could just go and see what happened.

The problem was that the whispers were right. It wouldn't be very difficult for him to do any of those things but he knew where it would lead. He gave in to temptation once and God Himself had decreed justice.

So he ignored them, blaming it on his imagination.

But the whispers kept coming back whenever he was alone. It made him miserable because he dare not tell anyone about it: he already felt like a servant of Lucifer and to declare his problems out loud would only confirm that.

He strove to be in the company of others, which was a mixed solution: he no longer suffered the whispers but he felt deep shame and guilt. Especially around women. *Especially* around women.

Then one day he woke up naked in a strange place, in a strange bed, a strange woman by his side with no recollection of who she was or how he got there. He got up and started to dress, which only served to stir the woman. He froze as she awoke and smiled at him. When she bade him good morning, he bolted, semi-naked, out of the apartment.

Jonathon was frightened. He'd done something sinful and couldn't even remember it. He'd heard of psychotics who suffered episodes of amnesia after doing something heinous and began to worry that he was losing his grip.

He managed to cover up his previous night's activities and eventually, once he accepted that only he and God knew, he became less concerned about it.

That is until it happened again.

This time he was with another woman, in another place and still he had no idea what had happened. However, he knew for certain that this woman was married and he'd really done something wrong this time. Again, he fled the scene as quickly as he could and made his way back to the church, trying to piece together what little he could remember.

As it happened, that wasn't much.

Jonathon was fortunate that no one suspected a thing, despite the fact that he felt increasing guilt and unease.

Things grew worse for Jonathon as time went by: he'd find himself waking up with teenage girls in his bed, sometimes girls who had barely hit puberty. More often he'd be in bed with all manner of women, ranging from the married to the pregnant. Sometimes there would be more than one woman. Sometimes it would be with a prostitute, the money displayed quite openly on the bedside table. The list became endless and each and every time he would have no recollection of what had happened and a hell of a time trying to explain the circumstances to his colleagues.

This was a serious problem he was suffering from and he knew it. Yet, who could he tell? He'd quite literally started fucking up his life and it was far beyond his control.

The end for him came when he awoke in a strange bedroom lying next to the corpse of a dead woman. He was horrified at this and lay whimpering in the corner of the

room for some time. Eventually, he forced himself to move, to get out of there: frightened that the Police might come breaking down the door at any moment.

For days he roamed the streets, too scared to return to the church: certain that his colleagues would read the guilt on his face like a verse from the Bible. By chance, he came across a newspaper which declared that a woman had been found dead in her own home. She'd died of carbon monoxide poisoning and the article went on to espouse the virtues of checking ones heating system for flaws.

Jonathon was both elated and horrified. It was fantastic that he hadn't killed her but did that mean he'd had sex with a corpse? He felt ill; light headed and weary.

He returned to the church later that day feeling desperately unwell. Unsure whether this was just a virus or part of his increasing mental illness, he went to bed and lay there unmoving.

After several hours, one of his colleagues noticed that Jonathon's room was occupied and, upon checking, discovered his return. There was much concern over his whereabouts over the past few days but they were quickly silenced as they noticed he was very ill.

A Doctor visited him but could not determine what was wrong with him, so he prescribed lots of rest, lots of liquids and lots of food.

So Jonathon was looked after as he lay in his room, suffering the whispers in the darkness.

You did it.

Your sin killed her.

God has judged you and all that you touch to be evil.

You are hell's creature in false service to the Lord Almighty.

It was endless: on in to the night, keeping him awake, never allowing him to sleep.

At dawn, the whispers stopped and he was allowed some rest, though his dreams were those of nightmarish corpses offering him forbidden pleasures of the rotten flesh.

Weeks passed and Jonathon was not recovering: some internal malady affected him which neither priest nor doctor could identify. He was sick of spirit, ill in the mind, and the Doctor finally suggested that he be put in to care, at least until he was more cogent.

He barely noticed he had been moved: the whispers returned at sunset.

How long he spent in the mental patients ward at the local hospital, Jonathon cannot remember but at some point, he remembers screaming "Forgive me, Lucifer, for I have sinned!" and that was when everything changed.

The shadows stopped whispering and instead became a woman. She introduced herself as Olivia Red, daughter of the Night, and she had come to bring Jonathon home.

Heller was on the brink of insanity and took everything in his stride, as a good mental patient should. It didn't matter that a woman made of darkness was biting his neck. It didn't matter that his blood was being drunk. It didn't matter that he was dying.

Ecstasy consumed him.

His heart stopped and he was dead but as the ambrosia of Lucifer filled his mouth, his mind and body awoke to feel anew, despite the loss of his mortality.

Even wracked with pain as his body died, Jonathon felt the fugue of insanity and impatient drives of humanity drain away. His torments were over as his body no longer surged with male desires. As he twitched spasmodically, caught in the throes of death, Olivia cradled Jonathon as if he were a child and crooned to him while he underwent his changes.

“Hush child, hush” she said, “do not fear. Soon your death will be over and you will be free. You are to become one of night’s creatures, a thing of blood and shadow, no longer fettered by mortal desires. Oh, how you have suffered at the hands of the mortals’ religion. Hush, mother has made it better. A little pain now for your freedom is a small price to pay. You have told me all about your desires and how that God has punished you for impure thoughts. Do not believe so, child. God does not care what you do or what you think. The truth is that the creatures of the night have given you salvation and that from hereon, you are one of us. My son. You are my son. My first and only son. My Adam.”

His first real memory of being a vampire was some nights later. Olivia had explained what he had become; a blood drinking creature of the night, re-made in her image.

Her blood was in his veins and he was now her child. That they belonged to a family called the Lasombra and that they were first amongst Night’s Creatures. Membership in this family was very select. He should be very proud.

When full cognition returned to him, he was a changed man. His mind, fractured by years of repression and painful punishment at the hands of the Church (and of course Olivia’s handiwork), healed and righted itself once freed of mortality. The doubt, guilt and shame were stripped away with his life, for suddenly everything made sense. He’d had these thoughts and desires because he was meant to be a vampire. He was *meant* to be a creature of the night. And now he was, he could think freely: his thoughts were at last his own.

Olivia explained that the women he had slept with (the young ones, the old ones, the married ones, the pregnant ones, the dead ones) he had done because she had released his desires. She had allowed him to explore that which he truly wanted, unfettered from the rigid strictures put in place by the Church. And although she had removed

his memories of the occasions, something of what he had done had lingered within his psyche.

She had *had* to do it all, as much as it had pained her. For as long as he still clung to his Catholic values, he would never have been able to feel the freedom he does now.

The freedom of total acceptance.

Jonathon had no problem accepting any of this: the majority of it, he felt, was irrelevant. It didn't matter to him the course of how he had got here, merely the fact that he had. His mind was free and for the first time, Jonathon felt some peace.

Of course, the peace he felt soon dissipated with the first pangs of infinite hunger...but, with time, he became accustomed to this new need and, for the majority of it, he was able to deal with it. As a vampire should.

Jonathon was quickly inducted in to the ways of the vampires and of the Lasombra. He was a precocious learner, adapting to his new nature rapidly. Olivia was a good and able teacher but much was owed to Heller's mental state. He was bordering on insanity derived from Olivia's abuse of his psyche and the mental abuse he had suffered from the Church. Every morsel of information Olivia threw him, he quickly snatched and gobbled down.

He asked many questions about how she had found him and how she had known what he wanted but she was reluctant to answer. All in good time she said, all in good time.

She introduced him to her sire (Antonio Black, a venerable and charming Italian) and to her peers and to her compatriots. She was a popular vampire, despite (what he came to understand as) her weird philosophies and she received many compliments about her new scion: many were impressed by the way he had come to grasp his new nature and they had high hopes that he wouldn't have to be destroyed.

"Destroyed" was the key word Adam (as he had now become known) picked up on. Did his new family now propose to kill him if he didn't measure up to some unknown criteria only they knew about? For the first time since his embrace, Adam was beginning to wonder what exactly he had become a part of.

His tutelage continued and he learned about the Sabbat and how it operated. It all seemed very much like the Church he had left behind: instantly familiar but at the same time, more than a little disturbing. Why would Creatures of the Night mimic an organisation based on lies and oppression of human nature? He began to think on this and to think on the whole situation with regard to himself and his new nature.

After much deliberation, in and amongst his lessons from Olivia, he came to the conclusion that the vampire existed for a reason. God, in a fit of self-justification, had created a mirror of Himself but said mirror remained too infinite, too awesome to be contained within just one vessel (for surely only another God Himself is infinite enough to reflect Himself). Thus, to adequately reflect Him, the Holy Spirit, existing in trinity of the whole, is a spectrum of His true self. At the positive end, or the light/holy end, there are the angelic entities and they are ethereal creatures of the

heavenly host to which darkness is a destruction. At the negative end, or dark/unholy reflection, there are the abyssal entities to which light is anathema, spawning and living in the darkness of the Abyss (or anti-heaven).

On Earth, the physical melting pot in which the metaphysical cosmos combines and becomes the reflection that He desires, humanity acts out his reflection. Just as He is reflected, so are the Angels and the Devils (for want of better terms) in one great spectrum. Humanity is that which by light casts its shadow: the yardstick by which positive and negative are measured. Not surprising then that the vampires stem from humanity.

But to believe that vampires are unholy reflections of humanity is wrong. They are creatures which represent the umbra cast by heaven and thus a necessary part of the Holy Spirit. Their behaviour is not evil but natural, as part of God's plan.

The words Holy and Unholy are not terms of good or evil, more like terms of on or off, positive or negative, light or dark. They are a measure of God's extremes and everything within that range is God.

To Adam, the power of Obtenebration was all the proof he needed. The power over darkness itself, to even become one with the darkness, is a telling experience. Regardless, the vampiric condition itself evidences his philosophies. For if they were not creatures of darkness, then why would light be such an anathema? And the blood drinking. Do not the Faithful partake of the blood of Christ, which in turn is God? Do vampires not exist by drawing on the same substance? Do they not utilise supernatural powers utilising the blood?

Olivia and Adam spent many nights discussing his philosophy. It was of supreme interest to her and, with her own teachings, she took on board much of what he had to say. There were holes, things unknowable to the fledgling, but they were able to correct these errors.

It was during this time that Adam began to appreciate that the vampiric condition must be adapted to if one wish to remain sane. To keep basically human values was unacceptable in the long term and would surely lead to destruction. They were vampires, creatures of darkness, and thus it is essential for a person to behave like one. It is a paradox to be a human vampire, a paradox leading down the path of the Beast. Though humanity is where all vampires stem from, the human animal is merely the stock from which the darkness draws.

However, to totally accept a new set of alien values is a very difficult thing. And of course, if one wishes to be the best vampire one can possibly be, that requires the acceptance of the path best suited to the condition.

This beggared the question: which was the path most suited to the vampiric condition? Immediately, Olivia's instinct was to advocate her own path, as it seemed to cater for the religious place of the vampire. However, Adam was quick to point out that the vampire should not need to even think of its place within God's plan. If this is the case (does the bee or the dog contemplate it's place in God's Ideal?), then surely a philosophy which promotes that which vampires do best would be the preferred path?

She could not help but agree and of course, it occurred to both of them that they were ill equipped to truly answer the question.

Olivia Red had always been something of a scholar of enlightenment and if a person wanted to know something about the paths, they could depend on her to have at least some knowledge, although far from inexhaustible. With Adam's fresh perspective, she realised that there was so much more about these paths and the vampiric condition that she didn't know. Thus, when her prized child expressed the desire to learn more about the paths, she spread the word amongst Les Amies Noir.

Indeed, their desire for exhaustive knowledge of the current paths of enlightenment was of interest to many of Les Amies Noir. The paths are, by their very nature, limiting in behaviour and discovery that a person does follow a particular path can lead to useful knowledge of that person. Behavioural predictability is just one of the disadvantages to be exploited from this study.

Thus, it was not difficult for Olivia (and through her, Adam) to secure something akin to sponsorship by the Friends of the Night and, through the Friends, she arranged for the two of them to move around in relative safety and always have a place to stay.

Adam and Olivia spent much time moving around the world, discussing with various persons the paths of enlightenment, documenting their discoveries and the value and history of each of these paths.

It was the early 90s and Adam was but 2 years a vampire when the pair of them began their studies. It was a very interesting time for both of them and they came to know one another very well over the nights.

During their studies, Adam touched bases with many different vampires and bloodlines including the brother clan, Tzimisce. He found the Tzimisce to be interesting enough, especially their sense of age, however, it was their power of Vicissitude that particularly caught his attention.

Whilst the Lasombra have power over the darkness from which vampirism stems and was indeed, so he believes, where vampiric *power* stems from, the Tzimisce had control over the vampiric *form*. More importantly, they had the power to unlock the true vampiric physical form through the power of Vicissitude. To Adam's mind, the Tzimisce understood and had power over the vampire's physicality whereas the Lasombra had power over the vampire's spirituality.

He was fascinated with the power of vicissitude and sought to learn all he could about the discipline. The Tzimisce he spoke with found him an interesting student, as he quickly grasped the ideas inherent in the power. To all involved, they were delighted that he seemed to have a natural facility with the discipline and was quick to proceed to the higher levels. Once he learned the ability to transform himself in to the Horrid Form, essentially becoming the quintessential vampire (the illusion of mortality shed), Adam lost his interest in developing the art further and returned to his studies of enlightenment.

Olivia and Adam eventually completed their work in 1993 and became something of authorities on the paths of enlightenment (at least within Les Amies Noir). Their tome, *Discourse on the Paths of Reason*, was full of useful bits of information, though hardly the guide to behavioural studies certain Lasombra were expecting.

The years spent travelling and meeting those persons within the clan, and the Sect as a whole, taught Adam a lot. More importantly, the networking he performed whilst doing his research served to raise his standing amongst his brethren and that of Olivia.

This was something of a double-edged sword for the pair of them: for whilst they both earned respect from the clan, their presence became known to one Lucia Grey, and uncovered a lie Olivia had maintained to Adam for years.

Lucia is the first child of Olivia and had been a prominent New York Ductus for years. She and her sire had been on bad terms ever since Lucia refused to accept Olivia's philosophy.

Her first child is something of a failure for Olivia, in that Lucia espouses the typical Sabbat belief that the Elders are all wrong, the Camarilla are all weak pawns of the Antideluvians, humanity is nothing more than cattle and only all out war will resolve the situation.

Lucia was strong willed, domineering but impatient and implacable. She would not accept that being a vampire meant more than strength and bullying and that if any war were to be won, it would take more than guns and knives. It was especially annoying for Olivia because she knew that Lucia once possessed subtlety and patience but the Embrace (perhaps she learned that the use of Potence and Dominate could get her what she wanted much quicker) seemed to all but destroy what she had sought to make eternal, as it sometimes does.

After many years of attempted tutelage, Olivia gave up and allowed Lucia to get out there and do what she wanted: fight the Camarilla and prove to everyone (to her overbearing, over-protective Italian mortal father, as Olivia knew the case to be) that she was strong and had power.

Ironically, in their years apart, Lucia learned something of her old self, learned what fun it could be to manipulate. Although hardly the master temptress she used to be, she did learn that messing with the minds of mortals could provide her with a lot of entertainment.

This is where the seeds of the lie were sown. Lucia used to frequent the same church that Jonathon had joined and when she noticed the new priest, she saw that his aura was very quixotic. That caught her attention and from there, she sought to find out what exactly had twisted this mortal so.

Through a combination of Dominate, Auspex and 'chance' meetings Jonathon doesn't remember, she learned that he had suffered years of sexual repression at the hands of his family and the Church. There was a lot of mileage to be had out of this man.

Whenever she had spare time to herself, she would disappear down to the church and whisper at Jonathon. He was, for the most part, unresponsive but the nervous glances he cast about him and the trivial reasons he would give people to be in their company (no matter how uncomfortable it made him) amused her for a time.

Of course, this grew tiresome after a period and to amuse herself further, she made him do more and more depraved things, exploring the repression he suffered. Of course, this slowly twisted his mind, but that was just the icing on the cake.

Eventually, word of Lucia's exploits got round (she was never one to keep her mouth shut) and therefore got back to Olivia.

The sire was very interested to hear that her child was doing something with mortals other than killing them and decided that, perhaps the time might be right for them to renew their relationship. However, she wasn't so naïve as to merely walk in to her child's communal haven and expect a warm welcome. Instead, she did some research in to what Lucia was doing and, more particularly, who she was doing it to.

She followed Lucia's movements, sometimes in person, sometimes through an agent, and eventually discovered that her child was tormenting a mortal priest. This interested Olivia because it meant that Lucia had learned that entertainment could be had from more than just blood drinking and combat and this was something she could work with.

Olivia examined Jonathon more closely and found him to be one step removed from insanity. Through several long interviews, she determined that this was not entirely due to Lucia and she became angry that what her child was doing was nothing short of self-gratification: pleasure without purpose being a far cry from the Lasombra philosophy of power-politics.

She was irritated once more at Lucia and realised that she hadn't really learned anything. The child was Ductus of her pack, Exit Wound, purely because she was a bright flame and her weak-willed pack-mates flocked to her like a moths drawn to her strength.

Olivia sought to teach Lucia a lesson and intended to confront the child when she next attended Jonathon. However, whilst Olivia lurked waiting for her child to arrive, the mortal did a curious thing that totally captivated her. He gave in to the darkness that Lucia had been plaguing him with. With the complete turnabout of his faith, she saw that he would make a perfect devotee of the Path of Night and made to do so.

She embraced him and unexpectedly, he became very compliant. Once he'd finished dying, a beautiful smile washed across his face and she knew that something was very different.

From her perspective, this fledgling offered a lot of promise in that he was something of a blank slate. He may not possess any of the skills or talents that she usually looked for (but then, where had that got her with Lucia?) yet he was so accepting of his new existence, that she could make whatever she wanted. Of course, to do so would mean

a lot of work on her behalf but then she had a lot to make up for, after the dulled razor that Lucia turned out to be.

Within Les Amies Noir, Olivia had lost a little face when Lucia had not turned out to be the seductive, manipulative Lasombra she was expecting and was nothing more than an attractive looking bully (of which, there were plenty in the world already).

Although said loss of face was possibly more imagined than real, to Olivia, it was vital that she make up for her presumed failure: a very Lasombra thing.

She took Jonathon from the hospital and under her wing, all from under the nose of Lucia.

Years later, when Adam and Olivia had completed their tome, knowledge that Olivia had taken a new child arrived on Lucia's doorstep. Lucia was not very happy and became consumed with discovering more about this new sibling she had.

A friend of hers, a Nosferatu named Smokey Joe (who operated out of a café, believe it or not), provided her with photographs and details of this new Lasombra. When she saw who it was, she was dumbfounded: this new child whom she'd heard good things about was none other than her mortal plaything that had disappeared several years ago.

Lucia was furious. Although not in control of her temper at the best of times, she went decidedly berserk at this new information. She'd intended to break the spirit of this mortal and embrace him. As a will-less bastard, she would make him pack-bitch. In her experience, it was very hard to make a vampire do all the shit duties without breeding resentment but if she had a piece of shit who was scared of his own shadow, Exit Wound were set.

Instead, the bastard had disappeared and she'd had to start all over again. Never did she suspect Olivia (her control freak sire who wanted nothing to do with her) to have kidnapped him and *embraced* him. It was just too weird, though not entirely unexpected of Olivia. She was a weird person and sometimes did things Lucia didn't understand.

However, it bothered her that not only had she been messing in her business but she'd taken a new child and that somehow troubled her. They'd never really got on but the fact that Olivia had cut their last tie affected her.

Lucia was going to get some sort of vengeance (if only to make her feel better) although how exactly, she didn't know.

That vengeance came a year later in the form of a decree from the Courts of Blood. Somehow, Lucia had gained enough favour within the Lasombra Court to earn the right to take Olivia out. If she could claim the sire's vitae, she was free to do so...or die trying.

Olivia's child was a complex case. For while many had respect for Olivia Red, her child was, at times, an embarrassment. She had the mind and attitude of a Camarilla

Brujah and about the same level of subtlety. Yes, the Lasombra could be brutish and yes they could be bloody-minded but always it served a purpose. Lucia had never done anything wrong as per se, it was just that...well...she just wasn't Lasombra *material*. When she petitioned the Courts of Blood for destruction of Olivia, she was almost laughed out of Court but it occurred to certain parties that, if she went after her sire and was destroyed (almost certain, as far as the Court was concerned) the low-grade Lasombra was removed and Olivia (nor anyone else in the Sabbat) could say a thing about it. It was an easy way to remove Lucia from the picture, since they had no good reason to expend any of their own energy to eliminate her.

Lucia and Exit Wound went after Olivia and Adam, tracing them from their last known whereabouts. They caught up with them in a virtual no-man's land: a motel somewhere in middle-America.

The problem for the pack was that Olivia and Adam were well aware of their hunt (Les Amies Noir are quick to assist when it is in its own interest) and they completely underestimated the ability of the two vampires.

Instead of catching Olivia and her fledgling unawares, they arrived at the motel to find an enraged elder, her more than capable assistant and a motel full of dominated mortals armed with all manner of weapons.

Not surprisingly, Exit Wound took considerable damage.

The battle came to head in the car park of the motel. The place was a wreck and bodies lay everywhere: some of them immortal, most of them not. The remnants of Exit Wound (some three vampires) stood held off by Olivia whom, transformed in to her half-shadow body, held Lucia by the neck, high above the ground. Near to her stood Adam, towering over them in his Vicissitude-unleashed Horrid Form.

"Explain yourself, my child" she commanded of Lucia.

"I hate you!" she managed through her constricted throat.

"Enough to warrant my destruction?" she asked lightly.

"You...betrayed me..." spluttered Lucia.

"I? I, who gave you the Blood? I, who tried to teach you what it means to be Lasombra?" she questioned, a hint of barely-concealed anger in her voice.

"Yes!"

"You have a very twisted notion of betrayal, Lucia. Sweet Lucia. My child, Lucia" said Olivia, softly.

The struggling child's eyes flickered to the Horrid Formed child: Olivia did not miss the gesture.

"Ah. Sibling rivalry, is it?" said the sire.

The child remained quiet.

“Jealousy? It does not become you. Nor does it become your Blood” said Olivia, a note of finality there.

“You took what was mine!”

Adam looked at Olivia, a quizzical expression on his face bestial face.

“This is the truth! Whatever she’s told you, it was a lie! I was the one to select you and to tempt you! Me! Not her!”

Adam thought on this for some moments: his gaze shifting from Lucia to Olivia and back. Finally, he said “It matters little. Vampires lie to one another. The truth is of no concern, only that she made me, taught me and now I am here”

Lucia seemed limp and doll-like in her sire’s grip: her final gambit a failure.

Olivia smiled at Adam: a very human thing. “You are my son, Adam.” She turned to Lucia. “You resist learning the lessons I would teach you and I grow weary. I will now reclaim that which I gave you.” Punctuating her words, she bared her fangs and prepared to drink everything of her daughter.

“Mother” said Adam suddenly “It is not necessary to destroy Lucia.”

Olivia looked at Adam, a curious expression on her face. “Speak, my son for her time grows short”

Adam strode over to his sister and mother and turned to gaze at Lucia. “She knows that she has failed in her matricide. But does she know why? Even I, her younger brother, younger in both age and power, can see how inherently flawed her thought processes are.”

Olivia turned to regard her ‘son’, her features shifting as she resumed her more mundane vampiric form.

“To use ones time inefficiently is not only detrimental to success but not utilising ones natural advantages, ultimately denying ones vampire-self. Was it necessary for her to seek us out and attempt destruction so soon? The fatal flaw was petitioning the Courts of Blood and then seeking us out. It is a simple thing to conclude her purpose of movement and make preparations.”

Adam turned to look at the faltering members of Exit Wound. “Do you see your error?” but all he received were blank looks.

“Adam, you broach her folly and exemplify why she *must* be terminated not why she must *not*.”

He bowed his head in obeisance and turned back to Lucia. “She cogitates even now over her loss. She understands that she has failed and was destined to failure by her very nature: her personality predetermining her downfall”

Olivia looked from her son to her daughter and seemed to think on his words. “Learn from your mistakes and you may one day deserve my vitae, child. If I am too weak to defeat you, then *I* am the one who does not deserve it.”

She released Lucia and looked down on her kneeling child, a distant expression on her face. Lucia looked up at her sire and nodded. She stood, picked up her sword and walked away.

What remained of Exit Wound made to follow her but Lucia stopped, turned on her heel and bared her fangs in a hiss at them. A very vampire thing.

Exit Wound looked at one another, sharing a communal lost expression.

Lucia walked away in to the night.

Olivia and Adam, mother and son, turned to make their leave when the boldest amongst Exit Wound stepped forward. “What about us?” he asked.

Olivia turned to the group and looked at them. “Be what you are. Vampires.”

Again, he looked to his packmates, a nod of agreement and he returned his gaze to Olivia. “Show us” he asked after a time.

Olivia looked at Adam, whom nodded. “Come. You have much to learn.”

Olivia became Ductus and Priest of Exit Wound there and then. What remained of Exit Wound were a Lasombra named Frere Leon (the boldest amongst them), a Tzimisce called Like-Anne and a City Gangel calling himself Stray.

They’d been following Lucia’s lead, wishes and desires for so long that they really didn’t much idea of what they wanted. They were shovel-heads who, by luck or by crook, had somehow survived the assault they were employed for and then expected to just get on with life as a Sabbat cainite. They were given a typical indoctrination of what the sect was about and then dismissed. Lucia had stepped forward to lead them and from there, they had done what she commanded.

Now that Lucia had left them, they really served no purpose and didn’t really understand what they were supposed to be doing.

Olivia Red had taken them under her wing for a many reasons, primary of which was her need to account for Lucia’s actions. Her child had made a choice to learn from her mistakes (if indeed that is what she was now doing) and had left these vampires to do so. As a Lasombra, she felt the necessity to take responsibility for her actions. This meant doing what she could to assist these individuals. Yet, at the back of her mind was the knowledge that Adam had never experienced pack life and this was an important part of Sabbat culture which he needed education in.

So, right in to the thick of it they went; a nomad pack where all involved had a lot to learn from one another.

Olivia (and to some extent, Adam) taught the other members of Exit Wound about the Sabbat, taught them what they believed vampires to be and their reason for existence (though this element was a little more difficult to believe) and also something of the paths of enlightenment. Their induction in to the Sabbat and education in the path of Power and the Inner Voice (the path which both Olivia and Adam now followed after their long research) went a long way to resolving their loss of identity.

As a nomad pack, they existed to assist members of Les Amies Noir when and wherever they could and their services were required quite often. For whatever reason, Lasombra of the Friends would require the pack to perform various tasks in secret, never letting on to other parties exactly where this assistance came from. A very Lasombra thing.

They remained together for a few years, their roster changing a few times due to disillusionment (and sometimes dismemberment) but overall, they were a successful pack.

The time came of course for Olivia to move on. She had taught the members of Exit Wound as much as she felt necessary and had turned several weak-willed vampires in to strong-blooded warriors of the Sabbat.

Her decision to leave also marked another split. Adam had learned a lot from his time with Exit Wound and the time he spent with his sire but was ready to forge a course of his own. For too long he had lived his life in the shadow of others and was now ready to go forth and join the Sabbat for true, without the ever-present watchful shadow of Olivia.

Exit Wound (now consisting of Frere Leon, Stray, a Tzimisce named Bloodied Mary and a Pander named Orphus) were a strong pack, unified and able. It was a shock that both Olivia and Adam had decided to leave but not unexpected. Indeed, Leon had detected Olivia's growing restlessness for some time.

Thus, it was without bitterness that they all accepted the decisions of one another: Olivia deciding that she would retreat in to study for some time before perhaps taking up a more active role in the Sabbat political machine (there was still much she had to cogitate on before she decided what she wanted to do), while Exit Wound decided that they would continue to assist Les Amies Noir, perhaps opening up their contractors (for want of a better word) to other vampires and finally, Adam declared that he would join another pack and become their Priest, to better learn the political machine and to better preach his personal philosophies until a time came when either Exit Wound or Olivia needed his assistance.

So it came to pass that Exit Wound, Olivia Red and Adam Umbra all went their separate ways, though certain that the future would bring them all back together again...in some way, shape or form.