

Chapter Eleven

Silence And Borrowed Magics

Nights passed without a single response and Kether rose each night from the woman's bed in her Georgian terraced townhouse, where he now resided, to patrol the London streets, visiting every location in which he had left his series of three ancient blood-daubed appeals. But every location remained still and silent, each site and setting empty and hollow.

Kether moved from one to the other in turn, sending his sight upwards and outwards, always searching, lingering in case some immortal hovered hesitant somewhere, unsure of just what it was that this new vampire intended. But every vigil proved worthless. There were no vampires left in the city anymore. Just humans. Just the same mortal beings who soured everything with their banality, made foul and broken everything that they touched, made dirty everything because of their greed and corruption and polluted ignorance.

What few options the vampire Kether Mica'tore had possessed before had now dwindled to almost nothing. He returned after his seventh night of solitude, a week of dashed hope and yearning, back to the woman's townhouse that overlooked the park - which had seen significant police attention since a courting couple had literally stumbled into bushes that they had hoped would obscure their love, but which had actually obscured a dead dog and its naked and

murdered owner - in order to contemplate past events afresh.

He sat on the window seat, the same window seat the woman had sat upon that first night he'd watched her from the street, and gazed blankly out at the empty, nighttime world. The park was still closed off to the community, the gates sealed by police incident tape that whizzed and whined in the night breeze. Maybe he had failed to recognise the feeling of peace and safety on the streets, now that the vampires of the city had gone. Maybe he had failed to recognise a lot of things.

There must be some other way, was all he could think.

But what?

He couldn't summon an army. Hell, he couldn't even double his own number. And it was then, thinking of two, that his brother came to mind. Or rather, what his brother had spent countless years of his life studying and developing.

The vampire known as Casta Mica'tore knew dark magic, elemental magic. He had dedicated his life to it, and it had constantly demanded a high price: his sanity. The power of such primordial magics that could undo and redo life itself demanded colossal compensation. Kether had never wished for such excessive abilities, other than what he already possessed. Casta had demonstrated his earliest incantations with glee - creating fire in his hand, making inanimate objects dance like puppets - experimental tricks necessary to master before moving on to whatever dark deeds he truly had in mind. And he had shared certain other fancies too, the reanimation of dead bodies, the conjuring of life from death. Kether had

watched his brother with a combination of both awe at his learned abilities and indifference. He had not seen the significance at the time, not for his own purposes anyway. But the plans his brother had in store for the populace of Kar'mi'shah - both mortal and immortal - could never have been foreseen. What Casta Mica'tore had unleashed upon the world of the bloodgods had been as cataclysmic as it had been selfish, and its echoes and ramifications were still being felt centuries later.

Irrespective of such past abuses, however, his mind fancifully conjured forms of unnatural possibilities against the darkness of the park, of figures that lingered in the half-formed shadows beneath the avenues of trees, of soldiers that prepared for battle amongst the tangled blackness of the rhododendron groves. He toyed with this notion, of bringing life from death, of servitude from the mindless, just as his brother had done. Could he really hope to create a companion or a soldier using those same magics?

He knew he would have to travel to Highgate Cemetery, to the tomb in West Highgate now overgrown with trees and ivy, half hidden from scrutiny. It was in this tomb that he kept his possessions, gathered and valued over a lifetime, including the books and diaries his brother had written. It would not take long to get there, heading north through the dark night and across Hampstead Heath. But it was now that such a thought had taken hold, he could not unthink it. It seemed his only choice. And so it was that he found himself already making for the door, heading back out into the darkness, with urgency for this new direction, and excitement for what he was about to unleash upon the world.

The text was harder to read than he'd thought. What Casta had clearly seen as commonplace was indecipherable to the ill educated. Kether sat at the window seat once again, his brother's books beside him, and turned page after page, realising the enormity of what he was about to undertake. He could remember snatches of what his brother had done - the incantations he had recited, the rituals he had performed - but here was all that times ten, the intricate instruction, the detailed illustration, everything that would be involved and necessary written down in Casta's handwriting.

He looked up from the book and stared out at the night beyond the glass of the window, his lips breathlessly forming silent words, practising the vowel and consonant shapes that would be needed. The books intricately showed the hand movements and conjurations too, and more complex motions than the simple ones he used himself. Candlelight was needed too - no, candle wax - to bind joints like cartilage, to seal wounds and torn tissue. And raw materials, the spare parts required to construct the subservient, the bones and the teeth and the muscle, taken from some cadaver or wild beast.

Kether turned then, away from the window, slipping off the window seat and striding to the top of the stairs where the stiff and curled husk of the woman still hung rigid and empty from the curtain cord. He studied her, measuring by eye her height and weight, selecting body parts, what he would keep, what he would not. There was not enough, that much he concluded, and

her blood had gone. He would need more. More blood. More bone. More teeth.

He inclined his head, back in the direction of the bedroom window, to the midnight park beyond and the recollection of the dog he'd left to decay in the rhododendron grove. It was gone now, of course, taken by the police along with its owner's dead body, its raw material wasted. He would take another animal then, take its bones, its teeth. His subservient needed only to fight the humans, to take on their guns, their new equipment, and do it all without pain, without concern for its own welfare or existence. It would need to be armoured too, and have weapons of its own.

The vampire descended the stairs, renewed with inspiration and the potential for creation. He swept out into the night once more, eager to collect the materials necessary for his creature of awesome ferocity. Soon he would be returning to the blue-glass building the humans called Eden, and do vicious and bloody murder upon those who had dared to harm him. At the corner of the street he saw a courting couple, the woman nestled into the man's arms and laughing; these would serve no purpose. A businessman striding towards him on the opposite side of the street, briefcase in one hand, mobile phone to his ear in the other; normally a swift dispatch, but tonight of little use. Kether continued to the next street, then the next, until he finally found what he was looking for: another dog walker. Not a labrador this time, but a breed bigger and more suited to his purpose: a bull mastiff, famed for its powerful jaws and solid muscle.

The man out walking this dog could not see the vampire watching him from the other side of the road.

He himself was strong, possessed muscle produced by time spent in a gymnasium, carried himself with the gait of someone used to sport and exercise. Kether had already decided he would take them both as he slipped silently and undetected across the street. He did not want more blood on the air, did not want any more attention than the police investigations that had already come to the park over the road from the townhouse. With his own hand gestures and whispered magics, he silenced the throats of both the man and the dog, and claimed their weights in his arms before they slumped lifeless to the ground.

He carried both bodies back to the house and laid them on the dining room table. He then set to filling the table with all the other objects his brother's books had said he would need - the stiffened husk of the home's owner from where she still hung at the stairs, the candles from her living room and bedroom, knives from the knife block in the kitchen - until he stepped back to survey what was before him. What would his brother think of him now, he thought, ready to begin such unnatural deeds that even he had previously thought too far? Kether stood over the bodies, looking down at them - the man, the dog, what was left of the woman - with one of the knives ready to be put to work in his right hand. His fingers, however, were uncertain of which parts to cut, which bones to crack, which bones to leave. A surgeon he was not, unschooled in anatomy. He knew how to take blood, take life, not how to put it back together again.

Was there anything he had forgotten?

Probably.

He closed his eyes, remembering the past,

remembering what he'd read. He still had the books open on the dining room table next to the cadavers, only now he wasn't so sure. He saw his brother's face, his brother's lips, forming words, conjuring, creating. He did the same, the birth of new magics trickling uncertain from Kether's lips, forced at first, stumbling. But then they came, the words wanting to be made, until they almost made themselves. His fingertips tensed against the handle of the knife, wanting to be used, wanting to mirror strokes his brother had made, righteous incisions with a blasphemous scalpel. The bright yellow flames of the candles on the table flared with ambition, feeling their own moment was close. Kether opened his eyes, exhaled his ancient magics, and began the first incision.

Piece by piece, the body parts came away, the useful ones seeming to know their importance, the discarded ones falling redundant to the floor. Blood spilled in copious amounts across the table as he worked and spoke his words, the knife growing with accuracy and glee, and he claimed much of it to the same bucket he had carried around London. The fashioning of new limbs and the transfusion of mixed bloods would come later. For now he was surprising himself with what parts could be put to new uses and more ingenious devices, wondering why God the Creator had not done so before him - using rib bones as teeth, employing extra eyes in better located sockets. And why only have one heart, one stomach, when multiple organs served such a greater purpose?

Blood, slick and dark, coated his forearms, from excavating up to his elbows the body cavities of his donors, his feet sliding now amongst the accumulating

muck of blood, bile and bone shavings clipped beneath the dining room table. The candles he tipped, his lips still forming words that made it more than what it was, using their smoking threads of molten wax to seal joints, to glue bone against bone, to cauterise wounds. The more he worked, the more he realised how skilled his brother had been. Casta had studied the ancient dark magics well, had built considerable learning over many years, filled gaps of his own choosing, luxuriated in their opportunities and purpose. Casta had bathed in ambition, formulated dark plans that no one else had shared, not even he. But despite his own lack of knowledge, despite the misshapen and awkward soldier forming before him, Kether persisted, and continued to labour with what ill-made effort he had managed to create.

When at last he had finished, and had sealed the final open wound with an untidy weld of glistening candle wax, the vampire with his borrowed magics stood back from the dining room table to see just what it was that he had made. It was an abomination, a monster conjured by the most horrific of nightmares, a blasphemy to any Creator of life brought into being by the most amateurish of hands. Designed to be as symmetrical as any animal, its form in reality had become awkward and misshapen, twisted by bad workmanship. Its arms and legs were indistinct, so that it looked as though it walked upon four hands. Barbs and spears ran along what could vaguely be called forearms. Lengthened teeth, fashioned from split and sharpened rib bones, protruded from jaws cracked and made wider. Around its chest was intended a breastplate of armoured bone, a protective component mirrored

in similar bony plates across its shoulders and throat. All these things had looked good as he'd worked. Now they appalled the eye, tested sanity.

Kether looked down at this thing, considered just what he had done, now too late to undo. The incantations had been uttered throughout, the magics performed as best he could, but both butchered by someone more eager than knowledgeable. Here now, its grotesque form spread out upon the soiled table top, was the lethal soldier he had sought to create. Only he had created something more monster than warrior, something less controllable than servant.

The kitchen knife, its wide blade coated in muck, lay just in front of him in a pool of thick blood. It would be so easy to simply take it up and undo the mistakes he had performed here this night, and dismember every blunder, and disjoint every inaccuracy, he had so foolishly undertaken since its inception. But at least it was something, he thought in the same moment, another being to take with him.

Maybe he wouldn't be able to take it directly to the blue-glass pyramid just yet, maybe it wasn't ready for such a frontal assault. He looked down at it, this thing he had made, with a gaze not quite that of a loving father, as its first eye flickered open with gummy awareness and the unnatural life he had given it, and it glared up at him with its own internal ferocity.

Kether took an involuntary step backward as its jaw suddenly cracked open, testing jaw muscles donated from the mastiff. A series of clicks reverberated from somewhere deep inside its chest, like a clock mechanism being wound up and tested for the first time. But from what and quite where he had little

idea.

A shudder came from its raw and bloated body, and then another eye slid open. A barbed claw lifted from the table like that of a baby, fingers curling, testing out its new world, seeking perhaps a comforting touch from a parent. But this was no infant, no helpless new-born that would receive nurture or some suckling breast. It had been designed with just two instincts: to destroy, and to obey.