

Chapter 23

Erna was waiting in the alley as the drunk ambled out of the warm diner weaving through blowing drifts. He was laughing about something inane like having ‘shaved his cat’ or ‘cat-fishing’ a woman. Gibbering like a lunatic between chortles, this man was pushing off the alley wall as he stumbled along. How filthy these humans were, thought Erna. Their minds were filled with garbage and humiliation. Preying on them for decades had not engendered the living to her. Man had only gotten more guttural. Savage acts cloaked with the veneer of ‘civilized laws and morals’ were what these people acted upon everyday. Erna kept her eye on media outlets to stay educated as to what shape the world was in this day and age. After more than a hundred years, she could attest that Human Beings had not risen above her low expectations. She remembered when she hunted that religious zealots and gun-toting maniacs killed more people than she. People were disposable. Out there in the streets, only to be used. Either by her or someone else.

It was so much better to just think of them as chattel to be devoured, drained and discarded. Mad Animals who needed leashes.

She stood, a tall statue covered in dark blood, blending into the shadows. She watched her prey fumble closer to her. The

tall man stooped and leaned against the stone wall. He unleashed his pallid member and urinated a sputtering stream into the drifts. His laughter continued. This man muttered something again about bald felines. He used his stinking man tool to write letters in the snow. The wind barely covered the sound of the urine hissing. The cretin pissed himself. Briefly wiping his hands on his trousers, he used the same wet palm to preen his black hair into a matted cowlick. The curl looked greasy even in the dim light.

Erna frowned. Use this time to calm yourself, she counseled. You are damaged, she cautioned. You always wolf your meals down. Best to play with them first. After the damage sustained at the firehouse, best to take her time. Let her body resettle itself. This fool was not going anywhere.

The man had a tough time buttoning his pants back up. He was easy prey. Erna was patient no longer. She strode over the snow, seeming to glide across the tops of the frozen runnels. Her black gloves grasped the back of the man's dark hair and snapped it back. Her incisors extended as she sank them into the man's neck. Struggling was a useless endeavor. Her strength was impressive, her muscles implacable. She broke his spindly arms by simply holding them too tight. Her grasp exceeded her reach. Bones cracked and organs liquified through her suction and devouring of a life-force. His essence flowed into her like a blood soda through a straw. The man with a cowlick like Superman, died like Clark Kent.

He succumbed and ceased moving. A barely heard snuffling, hungry sucking were the only sounds left to be heard in the dim alley. Pure snow hid this tiny death. Erna wiped her mouth with her sleeve. Her now beautiful turquoise eyes shimmered in the night. Her thoughts drifted, wondering if

the Gray would allow her to sample the black box, if even for an instant. Would he even give her a chance to get close to it? Would he see what brazen avarice she held in her heart? It excited her so. Was sucking the essence of ancient souls as orgasmic as the drawing of blood? The endless power of taking Life. What must that be like? What delights awaited her and the Gray?

If she were honest, what greatness awaited her? It was time for a woman to lead. She wanted the black box.

Erna kicked the broken man into a dark corner of the drift packed alley. She pulled his limbs off as cruelly as one would a fly's wings. Erna did not want this fool to return after three days. It would not be good to have a bunch of unruly Chicago vermin entering the clan's fold unless she vetted them. If she replaced the Master, the clan would have to accept her new rules.

When, not if, she corrected herself.

The human's carcass was covered after a mound of fresh snow collapsed upon it. She paused to consider her plans. Thoughts pounded in her head. Memories fought to resurface. The endgame was near. Everything she wanted was within reach.

The all night diner was just around the corner. There was work to be done. The Grey was coming back.

Erna licked her lips. Her teeth clacked. She remained hungry.