

FALLEN
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BAD DOG PUBLISHING

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MALICE

How bold you are,
Wicked with vice,
Preying with innocence,
Naughty not nice,
How bad you are,
At being so good,
Hurtful and spiteful,
You don't need,
But you should,
How rotten you are,
Lazy and insane,
Meeting malice,
Ice in the pain,
How evil you are,
Twisted with spite,
Even in winning,
You still turn the knife,
And empty,
In the end when you've won,
How lost you are,
A prodigal one...

PROLOGUE: SEDUCTION IN BLOOD

The cold often evoked thoughts of abandonment and poverty for Travelle. He had not been a victim of such considerations while living but he had seen enough of the deprived side of life to know that changing things was a monumental task, even when one had the perceived benefit of time. Perceived because vampiric existence could be just as fleeting when you had been left out in that cold, proverbial or otherwise. He had made too many mistakes, the number of which was defined by a growing intolerance for his presence among those who had a propensity to end what was perceived as taking wilfulness too far. His head hurt from the effort of deliberating too long on any subject that required a lasting attention and Darius had been less than sympathetic for his ailing mind of late. He was *Brethren*, but soon the *Castellan's Protector* would consign him to the fate of the damned – *Deposed*. He could hardly believe that it had come to this after a reasonably prolonged existence in servitude to *Doctrine*. *Deposed*. How could it even have been possible for Travelle to be so disparate? While he had witnessed the shadier side of a mortal world, and walked amongst those who had been similarly cast out, the thought of existing as a dispossessed *Brethren* made his stomach churn in a very human and disconcerting response to his growing apprehension. He was not prepared for such an eventuality.

What one had to realise about vampires was that most of them died in their youth – young, vibrant and beautiful. As much as they are pictured as old, decadent, or decaying, that was simply not true. Other vampires were drawn to beauty like a moth to a flame. Of course there had been those who prized talents, unusual abilities, or they saw something more in a mortal, but for the most part, it was the beautiful people who survived. The exceptions were rare and pivotal for the extraordinary qualities they possessed. The burden of the gift could be too much to bear for some. For others it was an opportunity to excel in an existence protracted in the endeavour, granting the vampire more time to understand all that they could become. Most became absorbed or obsessed with a singular narrowminded focus that afforded them the time to explore some aspect of their former existence but left them open to the folly of decay.

Beautiful and gifted. Travelle was unusual in that he fell into each category or aspect of interest. His beauty meant nothing to him, but his gift made him... temperamental. He was not prone to anger or outbursts but was inclined to brood for terribly long periods of time. His melancholy did little to ingratiate him to the likes of Darius Black. He had never gone so far as to cause concern enough to force his exclusion or to make himself the subject of censure but he had proved singularly insufferable when the mood waned to this less affable characteristic. At least not until he chose sides and he did so for no other reason than playing up to moody bouts of malcontent. During these lapses, Darius viewed him as having existed far too long to have suddenly developed a rebellious streak, and far too short a time to be so daring. He may have looked young, but he was not. He might have played the jaded resonance of a disgruntled and tragic soul but he enjoyed too much privilege to carry the notion far enough to sway those who knew him into accepting it as anything more than a charade or a childish play for attention. Yet, Travelle did feel discontent, or he borrowed those feelings from others. Choosing sides in vampire society was often dangerous. Choosing sides against the hierarchy, or in particular in defiance of the *Castellan* Darius was sworn to protect, could prove fatal.

Travelle's error in judgement was not borne out of malice, but the cost had been just as severe and equally unforgivable. Even if James Bourne had been inclined towards accepting that Travelle had made a lapse in judgement – Darius would not waver to any persuasion. The *Protector* was immovable on matters of *Doctrine*, unless it suited the hierarchy to which he offered his fealty – then it was very much a matter of interpretation and abeyance. None of this would change the outcome for Travelle. He had supported Neville Termini in spite of any warning the *Protector* had given him about the rationality of such an association. Travelle and Termini were friends, or at least Neville proclaimed friendship when it was convenient and practised indifference when it was not. James and Darius were the polar opposites of Neville and Travelle, though his friend clearly had greater ambitions than he had previously pretended. Travelle was torn between his loyalty to Darius and his friendship with Neville. A conflict that nearly drove him mad because he could not solve the dilemma. He was tired of fighting with Darius, bickering with Neville and being forced to swallow the unsavoury pill of his obligations to the *Brethren* and *Doctrine*. He was also tired of trying to resolve the conflict of his faith. He had believed in God once, wanted to believe in something heavenly, but it had all been a lie. He had never found anything divine in a living or *undead* existence. The world was hard, cold and dark and it eroded the soul, if one

really had a soul and this was not just some divine lie. As a mortal he had no time to ponder such things. As a vampire, he had too much time. Everything else was a distraction. He was a creature of the night, one who preyed on the blood of the living. He had heard the prayerful cries of so many mortals calling out to God, but they still suffered, lost and died at the whims of fiends who took everything they were or would ever be and left them broken. Nothing answered. Nothing intervened. No divine providence guided them in that fatal moment. Joy was an illusion of the blood, a fleeting instant of ecstasy that promised more. It was the ultimate lie, a falseness derived from self-delusion and self-loathing.

Travelle walked away from Bostonia with a heavy heart and a mind dulled by the pain of trying to please everyone. He knew that he would in all likelihood be *Deposed* along with Neville, even should such a decision be made in his absence. While Travelle had made no secret of his friendship, Neville had set about the task of bending *Doctrine* to the point that outright defiance was only a matter of time. The difference between bending and breaking was indiscernible. Only the words of a practiced politician made it appear less so in the eyes of the *Brethren*, but using the same gamble time and time again eroded any tolerance James might have had towards Neville Termini. Travelle had been responsible for giving his friend an understanding of *Doctrine*. In the end, his gift had been a curse in disguise. He could see the flaws in the words, the mistakes where interpretations were too ambiguous, and he had given Neville too much with which to indulge his discord. Travelle remembered every written word to which he had ever been exposed, but he could find nothing in all of those documents to excuse his culpability or to save him. Travelle had fanned the fire that fuelled Neville's gift for persuading those around him into a position of compromise, but they quickly tired of his antics when he went too far, and he always went too far. He was impulsive in a way that invited retribution. Travelle left because he couldn't face the consequences of the choices forced on him. He left because he was tired of a game he never really understood and had no hope of mastering. He left because he no longer knew what to believe.

The cold had been the first thing to jolt Travelle from his melancholy. The urgency to retreat from the approaching dawn was enough to force the issue as instincts for self-preservation kicked in. Travelle had really gone too far, but in a manner of distance and not like Neville. He was at the edge of populated areas, on the periphery of the Northern Expanse. He did not need the cold to reaffirm this fact. The wide open range of a bleak landscape meeting a dismal sky as a perception of the edge of the world validated his location perfectly. There were few dwellings nearby and most were unsuitable to conceal him adequately during the daylight hours. If he was discovered, they might just think him dead. These were not learned folk, but they were full of human superstitions and likely to imagine all sorts of ill omens within the limits of their imperfect mental reasoning. They would react badly to what they did not understand. Finding the dead body of a relatively young man in any of their dwellings would not bode well, and he could not rely on burial as an absolute. Some of these folk might be inclined towards burning his body to quell any chance of sickness. Cremation would be final. Travelle was out of time. Already the night sky was beginning to take on a lighter hue and he could not withstand the light for more than the briefest of touches, and not at all when he had neglected to feed. The lethargy was beginning to creep through his bones as the sleep of the dead called out to him. Neglect was insufficient a word. He had not fed in some time. His lapse was dangerous in his present precarious situation amidst the unknown. The snarls of hunger preyed upon his innards calling for sustenance, but they were not vocal or audible. They were the pangs of hunger that existed in the blood and burned his enlivened nerves with the onset of a most terrible need. He would not be... agreeable when he awoke again. He had no time to correct this problem. A small farm on the very edge of the Expanse offered the only salvation. The dwelling looked run down but this only served as a boon. The barn appeared to have been unused for some time and it had a hayloft that was closed to the light. It had all the signs of a place that was not frequented and would serve him well enough. One day was all he needed. The night would come fast and while there was still a chance that he might be discovered, he was unlikely to find a better retreat before the light overwhelmed the night. He spared no time to take in the details of the house as he ran for cover, other than to notice the smoke and the less than subtle aroma of pine. In seconds he had reached the hayloft, collapsing amidst loosely packed bales of straw. If this decrepit building proved to be inadequate to keep him from the light, he would not have cause to regret his decision for any longer than it took the light to reduce his form to ash. As he slipped into the sleep of the dead he just had time to see a blond girl looking at him from behind the bales, her features immediately blurring as the heaviness of his eyes shut the lids and he succumbed to the void of death.

Night did come, and when Travelle opened his eyes, his first feeling was one of relief, followed in an infinitesimal second by a gnawing hunger that he had to fight to control lest the carnal nature of his vampiric self took hold. He had been covered by a blanket that had in turn had been covered by straw. *Concealed*. The blanket had a quaint floral pattern – worn but functional. Someone had been here with him. Travelle did not require light to see though he became aware of its presence from a lantern fixed to the high crossbeam of the hayloft. Yet, he had not been harmed or secured in any way. *The girl*. The blond apparition who had been staring at him as his eyes closed. The hunger sent pangs of pain through his body. He needed to feed, and soon. Still, Travelle was reluctant to move. He felt like he was being watched. The blood that sustained him was low. Then he saw her standing there as he rose to a sitting position. *She was not afraid*. He would have felt her fear even in his weakened state. She was blond, lovely, but she had a brooding countenance of contempt that far outweighed the brevity of her years. When Travelle sat up, she smiled, all at once disarming.

‘Oh goody, you are awake. I was beginning to wonder if you were ever going to wake up. I tried to listen to your heart but I couldn’t hear the beat and you were so cold.’

Nervous. She spoke in one continuous stream. Nervous but not afraid. Her curiosity overwhelmed any fears about the dangerous creature she had chosen to help.

‘My name is Emily,’ she continued. ‘I covered you over while you slept.’

Travelle shifted uncomfortably and climbed to his feet. He was a little unsteady and the hunger set fire to his ailing body. Emily stepped forward.

‘You need to feed, don’t you?’ she enquired with a false frown of disapproval as if she were scolding him for aberrant behaviour. Travelle offered surprise and a faint smile as he watched this mortal curiosity intently for any signs of subterfuge. When she pulled up the sleeve of her dress and proffered her wrist, the pale white arm throbbing in expectation as her heart quickened. She was not afraid, but overcome with... excitement.

‘It is okay,’ she said. ‘I don’t mind. I want you to take some. My mother told me about your kind but I think she only meant to frighten me, but I am not afraid.’

Travelle had little choice. The pain was manageable but would not remain so indefinitely. He cringed further. He did not like pain. Travelle had been careless to go so long without feeding. Emily just smiled and kept her arm outstretched like an offering. *Temptation*.

‘I will not take much,’ stated Travelle, but he knew that was not necessarily within his control at this moment.

‘Take as much as you want,’ replied Emily. ‘I want you to... take me completely,’ she continued with a seductive tone that seemed so out of place – so wrong – given her young years.

‘Perhaps I should...leave,’ countered Travelle, trying vainly to exercise control, but he had already involuntarily taken her hand and was drawing her closer. The thought of enduring any degree of pain made him shudder.

Emily closed her eyes and held her breath for a moment in anticipation of something for which she had painted romantic notions in her mind. When Travelle pierced the soft white flesh of her wrist, a gasp escaped Emily’s lips, a slight grimace soon replaced by moans of pleasure.

‘You... you can have me,’ she sighed provocatively. ‘All of me,’ she added.

Travelle was already lost to the feeding and his own desire. She was too young. She had no idea what it was she was giving herself to, or the consequences that would follow her for as long as she existed. Emily should have run away. A vampire was a predator. *Death incarnate*. Travelle could not withdraw. The hunger had not been satisfied but it had been sated enough to restore his moral awareness. However, Emily held him in an embrace akin to a lover’s and she kept him locked to her with the weight of her own passion. She wanted this with every fibre of her being. As he tried to withdraw, she drew him upward to her delicate neck, forcing the kiss he offered to her unblemished white skin to become more. His fangs remained extended and the flesh was pierced before he could restore enough of his mind to stave off the powerful taste of her blood. Travelle was compelled to continue in his embrace in spite of the fact that the young girl’s heart would soon fail as the blood thinned and she was lost in the fainting throes of death without hope of recovery. Emily’s fingers moved through the hair of her *vampiric* seducer. In truth, it was she who seduced Travelle, with her blood, with her will and with her overriding need to induce him to further desire.

Once again Travelle tried to pull away but Emily wrapped her legs around him to complete the picture of a lover's embrace. In spite of her greatly weakened state, she used all of her being to keep him with her until that fatal moment when life had all but expired and she swooned in his arms from loss of blood.

Whatever she wanted, it was not death. Her urge to go on was just too strong. Travelle held her in his arms and watched as the last flicker of life gave way to the surety of death. If he did not intervene she would be lost. She was too young to be sure of the choice she had made. Any hope of living had all but passed. Without the intervention of Travelle, her existence was at an end. *Too young.*

'Plea...please,' whispered Emily as she roused against the fainting, the quietest sigh escaping lips already pale with the throes of death. Her heart held on to this feeble moment when it should have already failed.

Travelle hesitated. He had come here to hide from the light and she had guarded his body throughout the day, knowing full well what he was – what he would do to her when he woke. He had come here to escape the consequences of his association with Neville Termini and the melancholy that had driven him away from inevitable conflict. Emily had seduced him with her blood though in truth his need had been great. She could have avoided the end of her life. She was too young. *Beautiful.* He could not let her pass away without a choice, one he rationalised that she had already made.

Travelle tore open his wrist and let the blood flow into Emily's mouth. He drew her to him as she gulped furiously, a trickle running down her chin. Her tongue chased the errant droplet lest it escape. She stirred a profound mortal reaction in him but he did not have time to indulge in a carnal exchange. She would know him if she survived. He could not keep her from that knowledge even if he had the wherewithal to try. When he was sure that he had passed enough of himself to give her a chance, he pulled her away and lay her down on the straw. She was still weak from blood loss and would take some time to recover in darkness. He concealed her only enough to ensure that she would not suffer if the light returned. He lingered momentarily even though he had already decided to return to face the consequences of his own choices. Travelle fled into the night with far more vigour than the moment of his arrival and the weight of heavy doubt which had brought him here unbidden. As he passed the periphery of this ailing farmstead on the fringes of nowhere of note, he heard a scream that filled the night with all the anguish of a wounded heart. He did not pause. His interest had waned with distance and his own melancholy distraction. He had given the child a chance. The rest was up to some fate that would determine his destiny in the time to come as well as that of his willing progeny in the long night...