

“The Price of Blood”

The dog-mix Being squirmed frantically, but to no avail—the silken wraps binding his arms and legs to his bed were actually quite comfortable, but he could not move an inch. He had already tried to scream, but he was gagged as well.

Standing over him on his bed was a coeurl. She was dressed in the tightest outfit he had ever seen, and he had actually seen several dominatrix outfits. She licked her lips and stretched a small whip.

He probably would have been hornier than he had ever been if it weren't for the leathery wings on her back and head.

Tomara closed her eyes and savored the moment. It was every bit as glorious as Cass had said it would be—she had never before tasted such *delicious* fear.

She leaned down and fixed the dog with a malevolent grin, making sure her teeth looked plenty sharp. “Hello, Ghali—yes, that’s right, I know who you are. I’ve actually had my eye on you for a while now. That strange smell you’ve noticed in your room at night lately? That was me.” She felt his fear spike briefly. “I can hear your thoughts... and you’re absolutely right! I *do* want your soul.”

He started whimpering as she got down and straddled his stomach. “But I’m in no hurry. See, I like to play with my food first. And I don’t necessarily mean like *that*, you dirty little boy,” she said, smacking his crotch with a wing-tentacle. “You see, souls tend to taste better after they’ve been... *handled* a bit.”

With that, she slowly moved a leather-clad hand to his chest. He trembled as she traced his pectorals with a finger. Then, her hand began to glow slightly, and a ball of light started to emerge from the dog’s chest. The dog’s eyes were so wide by now they were bugging out of his skull.

Tomara was so glad she had picked up that illumination spell back at SAIA. Her breathing became heavier as she played with the ball a bit, pretending to squeeze it and even lick it. The dog’s fear was so

intense, she could barely concentrate enough to maintain the spell. It was all coming together like a symphony: his rapid breathing, his pounding heart, the tears flowing from his eyes—she didn't know how much more she could take before she lost it. Suddenly, she heard a scream in his mind and his fear shoot through the roof.

Then, she felt nothing.

No fear, no trembling, no breathing, no heartbeat.

Nothing.

She snapped out of her trance and dropped her gaze from the ceiling to the dog's face. His eyes were still bugging out in terror, but he didn't move at all.

She sat there for a moment, frozen in shock. Then, she began to tremble fiercely. "No... no... no no no *no no no NO!!!*"

Suddenly, she gasped as the locked doorknob on the left side of the room began to rattle. A voice on the other side of the door said "Ghali, what's that noise? Is someone in there with you?"

Tomara's head snapped back and forth from the Being to the door. Then, she heard the lock click. She bolted back out the window she had come in through as the door began to open...

Two days later...

Jakob kicked back on a recliner in Jayhawk's arctic base. It was time for his favorite sitcom: The Andy Gryphon Show. He reached out with the remote and flipped the TV on. But, instead of the show, a news bulletin was playing.

“Breaking news,” said the anchor, “The succubus Tomara Cuahl turned herself in to H-Ann authorities just moments ago, confessing to the murder of Ghali Yassir, who was killed in his own home just this Monday.” The screen showed a coeurl succubus being led out of the police station in enchanted bracer-cuffs. Jakob could see the mark of Clan Daryil on the back of her right shoulder. “Authorities have not yet confirmed the exact charges she will be facing. We now return you to your regularly scheduled programming.”

Jakob just sat in stunned silence for a moment before shaking himself and activating the communicator on his wrist. “Daryil? I think you’re gonna have to cancel that date with Simeon tonight...”

Tomara sat on the cot in her dungeon cell. She had already resigned to her fate. Whatever they would do to her, she deserved it, she told herself.

She barely even looked up when a guard rapped on her cell door. “Miss Cuahl? Someone here to see you.”

The door opened and a silver fox in gothic garb walked in. “Five minutes, Mr. Ikaarion,” the guard said before closing the door and leaving again. She looked up at the fox’s face. It was stern, but not cruel. His violet eyes pierced her very soul. She would know those eyes anywhere. Her mouth went dry, but no words would come to her lips anyway.

“Hello, Tomara,” Daryil said. “I am pleased to see that you have not decided to run away from the consequences of your actions, but you really should have called me. You *know* that you answer to me, first.”

Tomara turned her eyes down from his gaze and her lip quivered slightly.

“First things first... Where is Ghali Yassir’s *soul*, Tomara?”

Tomara's gaze shot back up to his. "No! I didn't! I swear I did not touch his soul! Read my mind if you don't believe me!"

Daryil breathed a heavy sigh. "I already have. Thank you for not lying to me." He sat on the cot next to her as she began to cry. "Do you know what they are going to do to you?"

Tomara spoke between snuffles. "I don't know for sure, but H-Ann has pretty severe punishments for murder. I hear 'Cubi get the guillotine more than any other Creature here..."

"It may not come to that."

Tomara glanced at him askance, but said nothing. Daryil could feel a bit of confusion from her.

"Do not misunderstand. You *will* face judgment for this, but I do not believe execution is the answer, especially considering it was an accident. In fact, Ja—er, *Kristofer* is negotiating with Mr. Yassir's parents even as we speak. His father just so happens to come from a culture that encourages alternatives to retribution. I am confident we can at least talk them out of pursuing the death penalty. With luck, we may even get you a suspended sentence."

"Wait, 'alternatives'? What exactly will I do to repay his parents if they do not seek my death?"

Daryil closed his eyes and shook his head. "I will personally arrange a... *special* payment for their son's death. *You*, Tomara, will be repaying *me* for covering your debt."

Tomara felt a lump in her throat. "W-what *will* my punishment be, then?"

Daryil fixed her with another stern glare. “The ‘Cubification ritual.” Tomara blinked. Knowing she had never heard of it, he continued, “I will place you with a mate—a *Being*—of my choosing. With him, you will bear a child for the Clan... and give him half your power.”

Tomara grimaced. She didn’t like the sound of that.

“It may turn out better than you think. You remember Kaci, from the Tree Party? I had her go through the ritual for similar reasons, and you saw how happy she was with her family.”

Tomara looked back to the floor. After a moment, she nodded.

Daryil stood back up and stepped toward the cell door. His five minutes were almost up. “You’ve done the right thing, taking responsibility for your actions like this. I think I can safely say I’m still proud to have you in my clan.”

He wiped a tear from her eye as the guard returned.

Jakob, in the guise of Kristofer Ausmann, sat across a table from a Being couple—both of them canine. Beside him sat Joshua.

The husband of the couple, a Saluki, spoke with a thick Arabic accent. “So, you wish to negotiate the *Diya* for our son?”

Jakob nodded. “That is correct, Mr. Yassir. And we thank you for understanding that what happened was an accident.”

Mr. Yassir leaned back and grunted, folding his arms and closing his eyes. “Be that as it may, Ghali was our only son. His ransom will be no small amount.”

Jakob leaned forward. "Actually, Mr. Yassir, we can offer you something far better than money."

Mr. Yassir opened his eyes and glared at Jakob.

"We can bring your son back to you."

Mrs. Yassir's eyes widened, but she remained silent. Mr. Yassir snapped forward with a snarl.

"*Yen'aal deek ommack!* I will not have my son raised as an *Undead*, Angel!!"

Jakob held up his hands dismissively. "You misunderstand, Mr. Yassir. I do not wish to raise your son's body from the dead. Rather, I wish to give him an entirely *new* body!"

Mr. Yassir just continued to glare fiercely at him.

"Do not read too far into this, Mr. Yassir. No one will be sacrificed to create a new body for your son. We will create an *artificial* body for your son; a body not of flesh and bone, but of circuits and steel."

Mr. Yassir threw out his hands in exasperation and leaned back again. "I say again, *yen'aal deek ommack*. What you speak of is impossible."

"I had a feeling you might say that, Mr. Yassir. That is why I brought my companion here. Mr. Oswald, if you would please?"

Joshua removed the t-shirt he was wearing and, smiling, pressed his hand to his left ribcage. Two small doors in his chest opened slowly to reveal an array of circuitry and cables. Both Mr. Yassir and his wife leaned forward, eyes wide and mouths agape, as if getting a closer look would make it less shocking.

“As you can see, Mr. and Mrs. Yassir, Joshua here was also murdered like your son. In fact, he is the *first* person to ever have been given a replica body.”

Mr. Yassir looked long and hard over Joshua, then folded his arms and leaned back again.

“This is too good to be true. How can I be certain that this... *thing* you will create is actually my son?”

Jakob smiled. “You can ask him yourself when you see him again.”

Mr. Yassir stared at Joshua again for a moment, then closed his eyes and pushed a finger to his brow. His wife took his hand and he looked into her eyes. After a few wordless moments, his expression softened and he nodded to her.

His gaze returned to Jakob. “Very well. We accept this reparation. But remember, Mr. Ausmann,” he said as he hardened his gaze again, “there is a special place in *Jahannam* for liars.”

Jakob breathed a quick sigh of relief and nodded. “You have no idea how much it pleases me to help you in this way, Mr. Yassir. We will begin the construction of your son’s body immediately.”

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