

VAMPIRE
THE MASQUERADE

CHAPTERS

Campaign Introduction

The City of Saints

Betty locked eyes with Gabriel, a small smile making its way across her face as she brushed his hair back.

— *Tonight's a big night for you, Gabe. I'm going to introduce you to some heavy-bitters, you know? You need to look smart, be on your best behavior, and don't ask any stupid questions.*

As her fingers trailed down past his ear, over his cheek and perpetual stubble, before resting on the side of his neck, she tutted, an irritated roll of her eyes replacing her loving gaze.

— *For God's sake, you've still got blood on your collar. Let me get that... At least tell me they won't remember anything.*

Gabriel spoke up for the first time that night. Who knew a corpse could feel nervous? Ever since he'd joined the ranks of the undead, he'd found life... difficult. He didn't choose this path. He never knew his sire. He found the ordeal of hunting, feeding, and duping his victims that it was just a kiss or some kinky shit near to impossible. He'd been torpid beneath the earth for somewhere close to four decades, and the Montreal he left, with the vampires he knew back then, was far different to the Montreal of tonight. To worsen matters, he was considered a Caitiff — a vampire without a clan, — at least until Betty Duhamel took a shine to him. He knew it was a shallow attraction. She was constantly complimenting his hair and cheekbones, the way his ribs looked when he wore a vest — her words, not his — but for now she was prepared to act as a patron, which was better than what he had the month prior.

— *No, they won't remember anything... I... had to kill them.*

Another tut from Betty, this one followed by a laugh.

— *If you killed them, you'd better have hid the body damn well. Don't worry: if it needs moving, Montreal always has some construction work going on. We can find a nice patch of wet cement. Pretty much every car park, road, and sparkling high-rise has someone's drained drinking vessels in the foundations...*

With a kiss and a squeeze she reassured him, and then stepped to the dresser to grab her keys.

— *Let's get to the car. Places to be, honey. This is your prom and we can't be late, and there's a lot of nasty shit going down in our city that concerns me.*

Betty drove. She always drove. She liked to remind Gabriel that even in the car, she was in control.

— *Yeah, they call Montreal the City of Saints, but that name sure as hell didn't come from the vampires here. We call ourselves Kindred, of course. Do you remember that? Not like the previous tenants. The one around when you were buried.*

She shot him an appreciative glance between checking mirrors and peering through the rain at the traffic ahead.

— *Before the Camarilla — that's us, the elite sect for discerning Kindred — and the Anarchs — those troublemakers with their dreams of freedom from a feudal hierarchy — moved in, a medieval death cult sect named 'the Sabbat' ruled the roost here. You must remember the Sabbat...?*

The Toreador trailed off. It took Gabriel a good twenty seconds to realize she was waiting for a response. He grunted a non-committal “*don't know*”, which was good enough to nudge her into continuing.

— *They ruled for hundreds of years. Yeab, we can live forever when the going's good, and it went well for them for some time. And then, one night, not two decades ago, a group of mortals with half a clue worked out what the Sabbat were. You were enjoying your beauty sleep at that time, of course.*

She cast another look his way, flashing an appreciative smile. He forced one in return.

— *Did you know the Sabbat called themselves 'Cainites', as in 'descended from the biblical Caine'?*

Suddenly, she was pulling over into a cycle lane, much to Gabriel's surprise. He shifted in his seat. Was this the place?

— *Wow, did you see those kine?"* Apparently not. “*The ones we just drove by? I'll have to swing by here tomorrow to go hunting...*

Gabriel had found his patron prone to distraction and fascination with things she considered beautiful, and with Betty, it always seemed to be attractive bodies. Bodies she found attractive, anyway. Her tastes were specific. Merging back into the traffic, she continued speaking as if a flight of fancy hadn't just interrupted their journey.

— *Anyway, the Sabbat took their role as children of the first murderer seriously. Blood orgies, ritual sacrifices, testing their mettle by walking through bonfires — and that's not the worst of it. War packs raiding cities, wholesale slaughter of small communities, vampire cannibalism, called 'diablerie' by some...*

As she stopped at a red light, she pointed a finger in Gabriel's direction.

— *Don't mention diablerie in the court. Anyway, these mortals, a modern Inquisition, discovered the Sabbat nest and put them to the torch, figuratively and literally, in an event we now call 'the Night of Ashes'. Centuries of rule, reduced to a cinder.—*

Gabriel's eyes were fixed on the buildings passing by, the occasional pedestrian braving the heavy rainfall, and the stunning graffiti marking the walls, ever-popular in Montreal and in the cases of these pieces, considered works of public art. Betty didn't bat a well-manicured eyelash in their direction. Her sole interest was flesh and blood. And politics. She was called a “city Herald” by those who respected her, a “harpy” by those who didn't, and was responsible for the conveyance of news, rumors, and quantifying of boons owed to and by vampires throughout Montreal. Betty was oblivious to Gabriel's disinterest.

— *And I should mention, those Inquisitors are still around, armed, pretty well-informed, and they love nothing more than to 'stake and burn.' It's not the stake that kills you, remember. That'll just lock you in place, paralyzed, leaving you unable to fight as you feel the flames bite through you from the toes up. Of course, you know all about that.*

Betty took her foot off the pedal and looked through the windows for a street sign.

— *All this talk and I got turned around.*

She gestured at a towering building to the car's left.

— *You see that cathedral? Sabbat vampires used to congregate in a place like this, once upon a time. Led by a guy named Strathcona that used to be one of ours, a Camarilla. He's gone too, now. Turncoats always get what's coming to them one way or another. But the cathedral? Well, some of us hang out among the living, others among the undead. And when we come together, we often do so at places or events referred to as 'Elysia', which amounts to neutral ground. Elysium, handsome, is where we're going tonight.*

Finding her sense of direction again, she turned the car around and drove the rest of the way in silence. Gabriel's sense of relief was palpable. There it was, in all its glitter and thick bands of gold surrounding the doors and tinted windows: La Jungle. Gabriel had heard of the clandestine casino — there aren't many of them in Montreal — but had never visited, himself. He wasn't much of a gambler. It wasn't an ethical decision, so much as never having the spare cash to risk losing. As usual, Betty had something to say.

— *Ah, here we are. Smile at the valet. Tip well. Remember, most mortals don't know what we are. That's the Masquerade. We keep our true natures hidden. As far as these walking blood bags are concerned, we're just a couple of high rollers about to enjoy a night's entertainment.*

She gauged his discomfort and provided his forearm with a stiff pat as he walked with her to the door, being held open by a young man in a pristine sky blue uniform.

— *I'm guessing you've not been here before. La Jungle's an exclusive casino inspired by a club the vampire Prince of Paris — François Villon — set up in his domain, called Le Jardin. The main difference is our place is fiery, expansive, and a little wild, as befits the Québécois Kindred.*

Betty smiled at the various attendants passing her by, some of whom greeted her by name, and she expressed a kindness their way by return, commenting on the weather, attendance at the casino, and asking about any big winners coming through lately. Gabriel observed how she somehow won over the room just by entering it, and recalled to himself how it wasn't the first time he'd seen her use that trick. As unsettling as he found it, it was reassuring when compared to the depressed state she'd sunk into in recent nights. Something about the state of "some members of her clan", which she'd promised to tell him about tonight, though he'd never asked.

— *This place is a static Elysium, which basically means Camarilla and Anarch Kindred come here to rub shoulders, even if the Anarchs are plotting the destruction of their elders, as they so often do, and the Camarilla are contemplating how best to squeeze the Anarchs for a little more money, territory, or blood.*

She lowered her voice, though Gabriel was able to hear every word clearly over the sound of tumbling coins and gamblers shouting more in irritation than joy.

— *We can't just brandish claws, blades, and bullets in a place like this, sweetheart. Not without one of the domain's inspectors — what constitutes law enforcement among our kind, with a Sheriff in charge — taking heads. The message is clear: when you come to a place like La Jungle, you leave your feuds at the door.*

Stopping at the blackjack table, she handed Gabriel a roll of cash.

— *Go exchange these for some chips, would you? Go for 20s and 50s, there's a good boy. Oh, and don't talk to anyone but the cashier.*

As Gabriel wordlessly left her side with her tight bundle of notes, a part of him seethed. The condescension. The pet names. The fetch and carry. Yes, he was grateful to her for her tutelage, and yes, he was better off at her side than cast to the wind, but he hoped against hope that she lost everything on cards. It was passive-aggressive, but he had no other way of striking against her. Not since drinking her vitae, that time. She said it would rejuvenate him and bring back memories. Well, it definitely made him tougher, but he could feel the bond between he and Betty binding itself together, and he had a strong feeling it was a one-way thing. He'd had substance addiction problems as a mortal, and this was a familiar enough feeling that he wasn't inclined to take a second dose. Picking up her chips, he returned to the table and calmly placed them at her side. Betty gestured for him to sit and started playing. She also continued speaking to him in a low voice, all without missing a beat.

— *Camarilla and Anarch aside, vampires come in bloodlines, or clans. Did you see that creep lurking around the slot machines? Can you see him? Look a little harder. You know, some Kindred can use talents to tell if their prey is scared, angry, turned on, or whatever? Yeah, so that creep? A Nosferatu, like the movie.*

She made a vulgar retching sound, surprising the croupier and turning her gagging noise into a laugh.

— *They are hideous to behold, masters of the information brokerage, and that one's probably waiting in the dark to trade secrets or offer services to an elder who can't work out how to log on to Facebook. Hit me again. Thank you.*

Gabriel had to do a double-take as he was focusing on penetrating the gloom of the casino's edges, unsure of whether she was talking to him or the croupier, or whether she just enjoyed the sound of her own voice. Probably all of those. Betty nudged him, pointing at a rigid-backed woman with hair so waxed she could be a mannequin. She was accompanied by an entourage of heavysset-looking men and women, all in suits.

— *See the one who looks like her spine's been fused? She's headed over to the Sewer Rat now. That one's a Ventrue — they're a clan of powerplayers, politicians, and puppet masters, or at least that's the angle they try to corner.*

She beamed as the croupier dealt a natural 21, multiplying her chips.

— *Oh, that one won't touch the Nosferatu herself: she'll get one of her ghouls to shake his hand, take a USB stick, probably pass over a briefcase full of cash...*

At the mention of "ghouls", a word strangely familiar to Gabe, Betty leaned toward him and whispered into his ear.

— *Don't worry, honey. You're not a ghoul. Ghouls are mortals who drink a mouthful or more of Kindred vitae — what we call our blood — and become devoted to us like junkies to a needle. It's a disturbing kind of blood slavery, and it's not even limited to vampire-mortal relationships. It wasn't long ago that a Hecata — they're Kindred death-dealers, traffickers, and mercenaries-for-hire, unaffiliated with the Camarilla or Anarchs — came to Montreal from Toronto on some assignment or other and got themselves hooked to one of our veins.*

She shook her head, apparently disappointed.

— *Very unusual, as the Hecata rarely stray outside their family, but it caused quite a stir. I wouldn't be surprised if the Necromancers come to investigate their errant cousin.*

Betty was oblivious to Gabriel's reaction as she pushed more chips forward. His fingers gripped the table's edge with sufficient force that he felt it cracking in his hand.

— *Like junkies to a needle...*

She was shameless. A dealer. A slaver. His eyes narrowed and his jaw clenched. Yes, being around this Elysium setting and figuring out how other vampires operated was indeed helping with his memory. He was starting to recall what complete cunts a lot of Kindred could be, and his patron was certainly no exception. Rather than lashing out, he muttered "Excuse me" before walking at speed to the restroom. Gabriel stood there, staring into the mirror. He'd brusquely ordered the washroom attendant to take a break. Gabriel knew that if he was still alive, he'd be having a panic attack right now, or scoring something hard to take the edge off. He didn't take his eyes off his reflection.

— *You're better than this. You could do better than this.*

Gabriel wished it was he who was softly speaking such a mantra, but the voice was emerging from one of the restroom cubicles. He politely waited for the woman inside to emerge, and when she did, he gave the nervous, thin girl a curt nod and gentle smile. The gesture was returned. From her waxy skin Gabriel guessed that she was Kindred or, more likely, incredibly ill.

— *Someone fucking with you, bud?*

The pencil-thin lady nodded and sighed. A very human gesture.

— *Don't worry. It'll get better. Those bastards can't stay on top forever, can they?*

The two parted ways, Gabriel feeling an anarchist's fire burning inside him, a memory of something he used to feel strongly about. He made his way back to the blackjack table, where Betty had tripled the number of chips in front of her. Clearly, those bastards were going to stay on top for a while yet. Betty glanced at him and didn't question his sudden absence or unheralded return.

— *We're waiting on some damned Rat to make a proclamation in one of the conference rooms, apparently,*" she muttered, *"I hope she's going to tell us where my missing associates have gotten to.*

Accepting her winnings, Betty passed the tray of chips to Gabriel to carry and moved with him to a row of slot machines. She looked less jovial than earlier, as if the night was chipping away at her, or an underlying anxiety was eating her from within.

— *You should know something, darling. The Prince of this city, Martin Hilkers... he's a joke. Oh, it's up to him to approve you or cast you out, but he's a paper tiger, his authority as flimsy as a wet tissue. He's a puppet, and I don't know if it's Villon in Paris pulling his strings or some other Kindred, but my problem, ...*

she leaned in, almost nudging the tray of chips from his hands,

— *...my damn problem, is four members of my clan, and the artists we were patronizing, have just vanished in a short space of time and Prince fucking Hilkers has done nothing — fucking nothing! — about it. So now, we, have to rely on Nosferatu information to find out what's what.*

Gabriel hadn't seen Betty like his before and was taken aback, his eyebrows raised. Had something happened while he was in the restroom that broke this dam? Maybe she was using him as a safety blanket just as much as he was depending on her. He put his hand out, tentatively, and squeezed her shoulder.

— *Hey. I'm sure they'll find your companions, or what's left of them.*

That wasn't the right thing to say, as became apparent when Betty knocked the chips from his hands, ordered him to pick them up, and stormed off toward the roulette wheel. Gabriel got down on his knees and started collecting high-value chips, tucking a few in his pockets. By the time Gabriel made his way to the roulette wheel, Betty was already playing using credit she had banked with the casino. Clearly,

the Kindred tendrils ran deep in this establishment. Gabriel's assessment of the Toreador, as he'd come to know them, was they considered themselves a clan of artists, lovers, and creatives. From his perspective, even more were just plain deviants capable of making everybody love them, regardless of their lack of taste. He'd already been warned by one of Betty's now vanished associates, that while members of the clan enjoyed the finer things and played at games of power until it bored them, they have a horrible tendency toward bloody, but poetic vengeance. Sitting next to Betty, Gabriel decided to push his luck.

— *So who do you think vanished your associates?*

She paused a second before collecting a handful of chips and dumping them on Red 13.

— *Some think the Anarchs are saying 'fuck Paris' by striking at or kidnapping other members of Villon's clan. Others are guessing the Sabbat are making a new play to retake the domain, and they're starting by eliminating the deadliest opponents.*

Even she couldn't stifle a giggle at that, though whether it was because she thought the idea was ludicrous or that she found the idea of conflict amusing, Gabriel had no clue.

— *Whatever the case, we were all called to Elysium to hear this Nosferatu, and I'll be introducing you as part of the evening's proceedings. I am certain that with any news of sufficient scale, your acceptance within society will be a simple formality...*

As her voice trailed off, she grinned abruptly, artificially.

— *Not that you are a simple formality, my beautiful man. You are a true work of art, and once my associates return, they will all celebrate you as much as I do.*

As ever, Gabriel found his patron's change in temperament disquieting, to say the least. As his memories came inching back, this entire evening setting something running in his mind, his consideration toward the Toreador was a surprising one.

— *Fuck 'em, he thought. With those poseurs out of the way, there's more real estate for us to take, more influence for us to grab, and more slots in the hierarchy for us to step into. It's a dead-man's-shoes game in Montreal, Gabe. Status is hard to come by, so don't mourn the falling of that bitch's brethren when the only way to step up is on their swiftly crumbling bodies...*

He shook his head and looked around. Yes, that monologue was internal, and no, nobody was staring at him as if he'd just had a conversation with himself. Was that his consciousness? His id? His Beast — that monstrous part of the soul every vampire is said to possess? Or was it just his true thoughts? Who was he, before the Sabbath buried him? Two hands came down, one on Gabriel's left shoulder, one on Betty's right. A reedy voice piped between their ears.

— *Finish up your game, you two. Lucianna's ready to make her news proclamation in the Crave Suites.*

Gabriel turned slightly to see the speaker. It was the small woman from earlier. Was she a herald too, like Betty? As she walked away, Betty collected her chips and passed them to an attendant.

— *Put these by at kiosk A. I'll collect on the way out. Take fifty for yourself.*

The two made their way to the conference room as directed, with Betty threading Gabriel's arm around hers. She made several efforts to clear her throat, with Gabriel noticing her twitching a little, clearly distressed and making some effort to compose herself. Despite himself, he whispered to her as they walked,

— *Whatever happens, I'm by your side.*

Betty looked surprised, but his words seemed to relax her.

— *I should tell you, she spoke as they exited the escalator and walked toward the suites, be wary around that woman who told us where to go, okay? She's Hilker's lieutenant, and as a Malkavian, that means not only does she possess a lack of mental stability, she's also damn good at prying secrets from your skull.*

They reached the door, and before pushing it open, she added one last piece of advice for his benefit.

— *Oh, and the lieutenant's Tremere buddies? While the lieutenant gets you to confess to every sin you've ever committed, from the first time you wore your mother's heels to the recent mortal you pumped and dumped in an alley, the Tremere are going to boil the vitae in your veins with their blood sorcery.*

Unexpectedly, Gabriel found himself tightening his grip on Betty. Was that fear? She seemed to interpret it as such. He was just wondering if the Malkavian had been in his head ever since their encounter in the restroom.

— *That's right, blood sorcery,*" she continued. *"It's horrifying. They're an interrogation squad. You've been warned. Now, stay silent and let me do the talking. I'm going to get you recognized.*

Gabriel needed no encouragement to stay silent, at least. Gabriel was surprised at the supposed conference room. It was in fact an ornately designed chamber in gaudy neo-gothic decor, clad in drapes, classical art pieces, and containing a set of game tables for high rollers, though dealers were absent. A chandelier hung from the ceiling, probably an antique, and chairs designed more for form than function littered the chamber's perimeter. He watched the Kindred gathering around the room, some sitting, some standing, all in their respective gangs. He quickly came to the conclusion that the man in the center of the seating formation was probably the Prince, with his lieutenant, the Malkavian from earlier at his side. Betty subtly pointed toward the man at his other shoulder.

— *That's Caleb Duval. Big, powerful Caleb. The city Sheriff and not someone you want to cross, I promise you.*

The first order of business, as expected, was the Nosferatu vampire Ricci stepping up, taking position at the poker table, and addressing the room while facing the Prince.

— *Kindred of the court, I apologize that it required a full night for this information to reach your ears, but the Prince declined word to travel via my agents, citing a 'suspected lack of security' despite our absolute loyalty to Montreal, the Camarilla, and its Traditions.*

Gabriel watched the Prince shifting uncomfortably in his seat while Duval stared witheringly at the speaker. Ricci continued, at this point unbothered by the Prince's discomfort or the Sheriff's judgement.

— *One of my retainers discovered the minivan.*

This revelation meant nothing to Gabriel, but several Kindred started muttering among themselves, and to the Caitiff's alarm, Betty shot up from her seat.

— *Kindred of the court, this Sewer Rat's coterie are clearly responsible and are now trying to point us in the wrong direction. Please use your collective wisdom to judge carefully everything Miss Lucianna Ricci has to say.*

The room exploded into motion, a couple of Betty's remaining associates walking over to her to stand with her against the possibility of reprisal, vampires of Clan Nosferatu quickly moving to play down accusations being hurled from the other side of the room. The Prince did nothing to silence the hubbub, relying on Duval to state, placidly but with authority,

— *Allow Lucianna to speak.*

As the assembled vampires' cries turned to whispers, the now rattled Nosferatu stuttered through what she had to say.

— *Yes, well. We located the minivan behind a shed. At the Botanical Garden Parc, I should say. We didn't search it, of course, because the Prince refused us permission without this formal hearing. Not to mention, the gardens are territory under Yuma of the Anarchs...*

Gabriel found himself gripping Betty's arm to prevent her leaping over the table. Against his best judgement, he spoke loudly for the first time in years.

— *Please, everyone. The speaker clearly has something further to add. Can we hold off on the accusations...?*

Lucianna gave a weak smile of thanks toward him before concluding her statement.

— *Yes... Sorry. One last thing. I encountered what I thought was a feral vampire — a wight — in the sewers. Initially I was going to put the poor thing down, but discovered it using gifts we commonly associate with the Sabbat. When it noticed me, it came at me, and easily overpowered me. I narrowly escaped and I've been spending the last few nights recovering. We've known this for over a week, but again...*

she looked at everyone but the Prince before sitting down. The frenzy of activity in the room had shifted to a stunned silence. One or more Sabbat operating under the Camarilla's nose? Some of the Kindred felt foolish, even ashamed. Others looked left and right, seeking reassurance. While many had never encountered the Sabbat, knowing them only through rumor and horror stories, a few had, and they were the ones who looked sickest with concern. Finally, Prince Hilkers rose to his feet and with his hands clasped in front of him, a politician's smile on his face, he nodded in assent to Ricci.

— *Thank you, Miss Ricci. Enlightening. Yes, I of course waited, because if there is a Sabbat agent, and I doubt very much that there is, rumors of such things could cause mass instability. Better to present this information to the entire court rather than rely on heralds and harpies to spread half-baked rumors, no?*

Gabriel could hear Betty grinding her fangs together, preventing an insult exploding from her lips.

— *But naturally, the Prince went on, we must now take action. I have already selected a coterie, a capable assembly of Kindred, to investigate both the gardens and this Sabbat rumor.*

He gestured at a gang of vampires, until now largely ignored by the court.

— *They will find out the truth behind both matters, and I trust them to serve me diligently in this role. Is everyone clear on that?*

Betty could restrain herself no longer. She burst from Gabriel's hand, wrenching her arm free as she gesticulated at the Prince.

— *Please, my Prince, do not put my companions' fate in the hands of some unknown coterie. Send Duval. Send me! Send my ward, Gabriel! Sending someone capable would surely be the best course, though I've no doubt it somehow evaded your wisdom...*

Duval was unprepared to take these veiled insults directed at the Prince, and strode over to Betty, speaking quietly, yet somehow forcefully and loudly enough so that everyone in the room could hear.

— *Dubamel, you know better than this. Calm yourself or that role of Herald will slip through your fingers. Remember your position. You are to reassure the court, not agitate them. I know you can do this.*

Gabriel looked at the faces dotted around the conference room and found himself studying a mixture of fear, apprehension, and undisguised awe at the Sheriff's power and control. He spoke to her like a strict parent to a child, or a teacher to a troublesome student. Nevertheless, Gabriel felt as if his patron was under some kind of threat, and stood up to face the Prince's enforcer.

— *She got the message, Sheriff. Betty will be respectful.*

As Duval's expression flicked from surprise to amusement, he dropped Betty back into her seat and stalked back to his own. The Prince, who remained standing, opened his hands to Gabriel.

— *And you must be the clanless wretch we've heard so much about. What balls you must have. Yes, of course. Betty Dubamel, you have raised him well. Your Caitiff is permitted to remain in Montreal.*

None of this went as Gabriel expected. Looking at the forlorn figure of his patron, he doubted Betty was expecting any of these outcomes in quite the way they were delivered. He studied the coterie the Prince introduced, as they made to leave the conference room and head to the botanical gardens.

— *Better you than me in this fucked up city*

he muttered, as he wondered how many of them would survive hunting a vampire of the Sabbat, the sect that kept him buried for decades and that brought Montreal close to inferno. Yes, he was remembering more and more about that sect, and right now, he didn't rate this coterie's chances highly.