**October 12**

“Have you figured out how they are animated?” Никодим asked, leaning close to the abomination on the table.

“I haven’t a clue,” Doctor МакМурнинг admitted, his gloved hands held loosely behind his back. They twisted and fidgeted anxiously. Никодим poked the flesh of the cadaver, cut in a square from the muscle beneath, one side still connected to the body. It was pinned to the wooden slab at the two corners of the skin. It was thin and dry like paper. Никодим felt the firm flesh, hard and brittle, with his forefinger. МакМурнинг didn’t approve. The undertaker traced the tube protruding from its wrist that traveled within his forearm, to exit at its armpit and into its open chest cavity. The tubing connected to a metal tank approximately four inches in diameter and, although him bedded within the thing’s chest, there were numerous dials, gauges, and adjustable knobs to the adjoining apparatus. With the inner organs removed and the front of its chest fully absent, perhaps the original reanimator, clearly a prodigy of resurrection and grafting, could continue to make modification on the design and operation.

“How did our anonymous friend reanimate a corpse so old, so disconnected from its spirit and forgotten in the depths of time?” He asked softly, more to himself than МакМурнинг. Still, МакМурнинг responded.

“That’s exactly why I called you here. The grafting technology makes no sense. Like it’s superfluous, an afterthought. Half of The internal apparatus aren’t even connected. ”

Никодим was skeptical. “This chamber,” he said, pointing to the internal cylinder, “it’s the necrotic pump, no?”

МакМурнинг grinned a broad and toothy smile. It made Никодим scowl in contrast.

“Yes. They keep thinking it’s a steam boiler. ”

Никодим opened the small hatch at the top of the rusted cylinder, and the stale and acrid odor of necrotic residue struck him at once. It was long dry, of course, but the smell would linger forever.

“Steam? Why would they think so?”

“Narrow-minded, of course. They get fixated on one idea and cannot accept any other.”

“Then what do you make of the pump and necrotic assemblies if they’re ‘superfluous’?”

“My theory is that this corpse has been reanimated several times.”

Никодим lifted his head from examining the disconnected apparatus within the remains.

“I cannot tell which might have come first: a reanimation using more conventional Воскрешатель arts such as you employ, or the grafted mechanika that may have first driven it.”

“And now they’ve been awakened again. By the Event?” He shrugged.

“Possibly. But many modifications to this corpse have been made over the numerous years since its original demise. Although dead flesh does not scar, of course, lacerations into it decompose differently than surrounding tissue. Some of these inner components have been added to the original design and older material is discarded but left mounted where it was. What’s most fascinating is not how it has been reanimated--”

“Of course it is,” Никодим interrupted. “Raising a single corpse, over and over, despite injuries to the flesh – this could be the missing piece to our puzzle.”

“Yes, yes. We will study this thing, of course. But, listen. This corpse is ancient.”

“Нерожденные. Some ancient practitioner ahead of his time.”

“Much of the technology is too modern. And the corpse isn’t exactly Нерожденные.”

“Then human. From the first Breach exploration a hundred years ago.” МакМурнинг smiled that broad, ridiculous smile that made him look like a carved Jack-o’-lantern. He cracked his knuckles and looked practically overjoyed.

“It’s not human, either. It’s far older than the other Breach, as well. This has anatomy similar to both humanoid species. Like it’s descended from both. Many generations removed from the originals. ”

Никодим’s scowl drew deeper.

“We know that small breaches open from here to there all the time. They must have brought some humans over and conducted some experiments?” Никодим offered. Even he was not convinced. МакМурнинг’s expressive face conveyed his distaste of the theory.

“Not like the Нерожденные we know. They would cross-breed with a human? That seems the kind of thing only a human would do.”

His grin returned to the discomfort of Никодим.

“Seems the kind of thing I would do.”

He began wringing his hands, excited at the prospect. His mind was already busy thinking of the difficulties in the endeavor, the delicious impossibility, and the joy of overcoming it. He detached further and further from Никодим, into his own realm of science and the twisting of the natural law that was his dominion. His pondering was interrupted as the bulbous head of МакМурнинг’s assistant, Себастьян, popped from around the heavy wood door to the dissection lab.

“Pardon and ‘scuse me, suh,” he said, his thick tongue smacking within his mouth and his fleshy jowl squivering.

“But there be a inspectuh or two waitin’ to ask a few questions of ya, suh.”

One of Себастьян’s eyes pointed to the ceiling above the two Воскрешательs while his primary eye may have fallen in the general direction of either МакМурнинг or Никодим.

“And I maybe so bold, Doctor,” and his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper, “but I b’lieve they got a Маршала Смерти along. ”Себастьян sounded like a buffoon; just a simpleton off of Old London’s impoverished streets. He was far from any of those things, Никодим knew. It was all an act, obfuscating the truth of a man who knew and understood far more than any might suspect. МакМурнинг didn’t seem to notice Себастьян oracknowledge his statement. So it was Никодим who said, “Stall them, Mister Себастьян. Give them a tour of the good Doctor’s examining room. That should give them something to be excited about.”

Both men smiled at one another. Себастьян because it added to the illusion of his simplicity. Никодим merely to add to the illusion of his genteel politeness. Both knew the Гильдия Inspectors would find nothing incriminating in this mortuary. Not that МакМурнинг was overly cautious. On the contrary, he was addled and absently forgot he even stood upon Гильдия facilities. Себастьян, however, hid everything for his master.

“Of course, suh. I b’lieve ‘t’ will.” He waddled off to keep the Гильдия inquisitors running in circles.

“Doctor,” Никодим ordered, his voice more commanding than his thin frame would suggest. МакМурнинг’s eyes fell upon him.

“Гильдия Inspectors? Маршал Смертиs?”

“Yes, and it’s their third visit, so I imagine it’ll be an uncomfortable afternoon.”

Никодим sighed but managed to refrain from rolling his eyes.

“What have you done to garner their attention?”

“Work you requested, actually. Trying to make a better warrior. And I stole a page from your book. Like you use those crazy sword wielding Nipponese monstrosities, I’ve been working with some deceased Гильдия Guardsmen. That’s why the Inspectors are here. A couple of Гильдия autopsies ‘seem to be missing’,” he said in a mocking lilt. “So did you succeed? Can they shoot?”

“They can, but not worth a damn. I’m still fiddling with their brains to see if I can access that part of their training and get them to remember. So far, if you give them the typical weapons they were trained to use in life, they seem to try to shoot the sword and slice with the gun. Doesn’t even matter if you switch the weapons to the other hand.”

He drifted off in thought, again forgetting the gravity of the Inspectors waiting to question him. He was thinking of the brain and the layout of the organ, already contemplating how he might revise his last attempts. Neither felt any urgency to either finish their discussion or evade the Гильдия Inspectors. Никодим gave no thought to the Гильдия officers within the building when he said, “We cannot afford to wait much longer. What of the reclusive scientist you once spoke of? Could he give you any insight into this problem? Identify something you’re overlooking? It’s been long enough and neither of us have made any significant progress.”

МакМурнинг winced. It clearly offended him to suggest he could not solve this problem.

“He’s no longer a teacher. No longer my professor, that’s for sure.”

“No. You said he came to Малифо to escape the law that condemned his experimenting on the deceased. Is he still here conducting those experiments?”

“I don’t have a bloody clue. It’s been over a year since we spoke. I hear he’s not been in the City in nearly as long. Maybe he’s gotten himself killed out there in the wild, poking his nose in a Nephilim nest.”

МакМурнинг hated to admit that anyone was a better scientist, but his old teacher was something of a prodigy and pioneered an entirely new way of looking at the function of the anatomical form. In fact, he might have inadvertently invented the Воскрешатель art, though that was not exactly his intention. He would say that he wanted to improve upon what nature had begun. It was, however, enough to have him driven out of the University at Ingolstadt (where МакМурнинг had enthusiastically studied beneath him), his research compound in the Orkney Islands, and finally from his lab in North Africa where he was rumored to have conducted horrifying experiments that were intolerable to civilized man. In fact, his experiments were deemed as “crimes against humanity” though МакМурнинг considered them nothing short of revolutionary and inspirational. Doctor МакМурнинг, in fact, pursued the work of his old professor so doggedly that a report from Scotland Yard, though vague and clearly misrepresentative of the facts, so inspired МакМурнинг that he, too, fled the Old World to take up residence in Малифо. Now, like the professor that gave birth to a science of longevity and staving off death, itself, the lawhad come knocking upon his door. The narrow minds of the simple man sought to judge what it could not possibly comprehend, he thought.

“Doctor!” Никодим barked, shaking МакМурнинг from his reverie. Those times were long gone and the old professor surely devoured alone in Малифо’s wilds.

“Stay focused,” Никодим said, clearly annoyed. МакМурнинг understood. He had little use for the living. They were all a mere irritation to him. Ironic since his own research was focused on bringing an eternal life from the ashes of death, to give back what must be taken from all living things. The thought reminded him of the key piece to the unsolvable puzzle.

“What of your new prodigy? What’s her name?”

“Кираи.”

“Hmm. Whatever. Have you implanted a spirit into one of our empty vessels?”

“No.” Никодим cursed beneath his breath, irritated at the string of set backs that kept them from initiating plans that should have already ensured their freedom from the vigilant probing of the Гильдия and any other eyes that sought to keep them from their destiny.

“Keep working on the Гильдия autopsies, then. We need something that can properly challenge those who oppose us. Give me that and you will have the place to conduct the research you wish, unimpeded. Now, what of this problem with the Inspectors?” МакМурнинг waved his hand as if brushing aside a fly.

“I’ll kill them. Dress them up like the autopsies that went missing. Two birds, one stone, that sort of thing.”

Никодим couldn’t help but roll his eyes that time.

“There will be a paper trail. More inquiries about why these Гильдия officials went missing.”

“Ugh! Yes, you’re right. What a nuisance they are.”

“You will, no doubt, use them to conduct the next wave of experiments. Will you not stop until Lady Justice, herself, comes to ask you some questions?” МакМурнинг looked surprised, assessing whether Никодим were serious or joking. Then he remembered who he was addressing.

“Justice? Have you not heard?”

“What?”

“The Lady is in the infirmary across the street.” Никодим nearly staggered. Eyes wide he asked, “Here? She’s wounded?” МакМурнинг rolled his eyes, then, mocking Никодим.

“I’d say. She’s only regained consciousness once since your Observatory fell on her. You nearly killed her.”

“Really? That was months ago. She’s still comatose? I assumed she escaped unscathed. I thought she was indestructible. And I nearly killed her.”

“Nearly. Don’t get too proud of yourself. You blew her up and your whole complex fell on her and she Still breathes. But, yes, she suffers. One side of her body is crushed and she struggles even to breathe.”

Which side?”

“It matters?”

“She swings the sword with the right.” МакМурнинг nodded.

“That’s the crushed side.”

Никодим nodded, pleased by the discussion with МакМурнинг after all.

“Well, then. I’ll depart, out the back way, of course. You have visitors, and I wouldn’t like to keep them waiting any longer.”

In fact, he heard the clack of their boots upon the wood beyond the chamber door and Себастьян’s voice echoing down the hall, ensuring МакМурнинг wouldn’t be taken by surprise. Никодим tipped his hat to МакМурнинг as he slipped through the narrow secret door hidden behind a shelf of books, beakers, and other lab equipment. As he pulled the shelf closed behind him, the main door to the chamber opened, and МакМурнинг stood stoically beside the partially dissected remains of the abomination hauled back to his lab from the open pit within the bayou. The two Inspectors brushed past Себастьян in a huff, but he merely smiled and nodded at each as they passed. The Маршал Смерти, wide-brimmed hat pulled low over his brow, leaned a shoulder against the opposite door frame, too close to Себастьян for comfort. The assistant seemed not to care and smiled absently at him, too, licking his lips audibly, nodding happily at the officer. The Маршал Смерти turned to regard him, the upper portion of his face obscured in shadow. The lower part, however, caught the light briefly as he slowly returned the nod to Себастьян, and it was oddly discolored and gray, with thin tendrils of flesh pulled taut from cheekbone to jaw and exposed musculature beneath, as if part of the skin had rotted away. At first, the assistant suspected leprosy, but realized this Маршал Смерти was not fresh off the Guardsman line, rather, a seasoned veteran of the position that had come into contact with too much necrotic fluid, charged with the acidic chemicals and magics that allowed a Воскрешатель to infuse a corpse with more than mere mindless shambling, but with the brief inclination of emotion that Никодим demanded. Bringing a Маршал Смерти was warning enough, but this one might be one of the highest of their ranks. Perhaps had been elevated to the command of the department while Justice and the Judge recovered.

“Doctor МакМурнинг,” one Inspector began. “The leads you had given us turned out to be dead ends, I’m afraid.”

МакМурнинг stood emotionlessly beside the corpse on the gurney, eyes fixed upon him.

“Questions keep us coming back to you, it seems. Oh, yes, you’ve been very helpful in leading us to new suspects, but they have a tendency to give us one dead end after another. Any idea why that might be?”

МакМурнинг raised his eyebrows and cocked his head to the side. The beginning of that