

Moonlight Xanadu

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Killing the Mansion

It is often claimed that one's life flashes before one's eyes when they are dying. And as I sit here with all these wounds, it seems to be true, at least partially, because I indeed am dying, but my life didn't "flash before my very eyes", only the events of the last six hours. It began at one of the many extravagant, some may call them quite decadent, masked soiree. During one of many such a party, befell me a curious encounter. Footsteps I did hear, very calculated, profoundly precise. The type of profoundness that disturbs the mind and seizes attention. Soon the proprietor of the disconcerting step showed herself. She approached

and introduced herself as Elisabeth maiden to the Jadewill mansion. I retorted as is expected of me in this company. I was bid to be a guest at yet another gala and of course, with my then lavish manners, I accepted hastily. As soon as I did, without a second word the maiden walked away. Disappearing in the crowd as abruptly as she had come. At the time I thought nothing of it.

Soon I came about my old friend Clerval with whom I spent most my time, he is a tremendously learned scholar and speaks to that accord, I bear a strange liking to him. Angell was absorbed into this style of life with me as the primary catalyst. Clerval bowed, I rebound with a gesture of the hand and the greeting was over. We exchanged thoughts on the night and Clerval inadvertently mentions Elisabeth's invitation. And so I inquire, "Clerval, did you obey the invitation?". "No, for I fought the invitation and overcame it."

Walking home that night, roaming around former St.-Stephen's tower, I saw a White raven roost, its patchy skin imperceptible through its white veil of feathers. Back home promptly after I retired to my room and bed, I was awoken by a loud reverberation of all six walls and a pleasant illumination coming from across the room, breaking through the blinding darkness. Donned my gown I reach out my hand to the handle of a door that seems to be the source of the glow. The moment my hand makes contact with the door, I find myself before an Elizabeth stood in the doorway. She beckons me toward my dresser and utters that they shall be waiting outside. Once through my front door, I enter a red and black checkered little lounge, with a sofa in the centre and a newspaper with a wineglass by the side. Sitting down, turning to the page with the wineglass, I notice a drop of wine not from ink had appeared on my page. One glance upward yielded the answer to that question,

Clerval was sitting there with a wineglass in his hand, having just spilt some. With haste, I received an apology for the potential danger he had posed to my suit, nevertheless interrupted by a quiet Elisabeth we were each led back out our respective door.

We found ourselves standing in a tremendous amphitheatre headed by several grand figures. A strikingly tall man, with great muscle, his long silvery hair skillfully done into a wavy ponytail protruding from his ruffled hair, and a beautifully white old shirt, decorated in red by flowery etchings. He greets us with wide gestures, welcoming us to the Jadewill family Mansion. Introduces himself as Astrophel, next pointing to a pair of young girls dressed in little black dresses, whose names are apparently Callidora and Lucilla. The latter seeming slightly off. With the realisation that Callidora is not indeed alive, rather propped up with strings, came a powerful sense of Astrophel's wish of silence about the matter. You've already met Elisabeth, and Saber will show himself in due time. We've invited you here to celebrate Callidora's anniversary, and so we'll partake in a night of games. Each resident having prepared something that you may play, everyone else shall watch and enjoy themselves.

It is midnight, Let the games begin!

Lucian finds himself in a library. Not many people make up the current inhabitants of said library. One does approach Lucian and inquires, "Kind sir, would you mind dividing these digits into two groups?". Lucian replies with, "I shall name them M and F".

1F 2F 3M 4F 5F 6M 7F 8M 9M

"Correct!", exclaims the man, "and for that, I shall shoot you." "do not be hasty close friend", replies Lucian drawing a sword. But haste did

overpower the men, and a shot was fired. Lucian stood there with a bullet wound in his heart, which curiously returned back from whence it came, the damage having healed completely. A shot man dropped the sword and proclaimed, "For now that I am dead, I shall rest my body in this here chalk outline.", and so he did. The shooter was soon arrested for manslaughter. Through a swift trial, with abundant eyewitnesses, he was sentenced to solitary confinement, with madness-alleviating torture. Lucian died in that prison at age sixty-seven.

Lucian wakes up on a bed, in a familiar room. Green and black flower pattern, of course, this is where he waited before the audition with As-trophel. Checking his pocket watch, Lucian finds it is fifty-nine minutes after midnight, and so stands up from the bed. The lodging promptly rotates around, revealing that Clerval had been resting on the reverse side.

Upon Clervall's awakening from his slumber, the duo is greeted by a familiar sight, a raven had roosted upon the bedhead. It seems that Saber had come to introduce himself. He seems to have as many bandages as he has hairs, a long flowing red cloak hiding surely yet more ravens and to top off the look, he had an animal skull attached to his head. He explains that the next event will be quite simple and that their entire purpose is to banish his pet. This is Strisk, Saber exclaimed soaring to the ceiling and performing a backflip onto it's back.

Clervall stated in his always calm and calming voice, "RUN". We didn't even think, running through the nearest piece of wall into a hallway complex. We managed to evade the beast for a few years, even managing to find some information on how we could be able to dispose of Strisk. He could still be behind any corner, waiting... at any time or thought.

Every time he'd catch us, the pain was less unbearable. We tried, but one day, it came. I was on my back, Strisk devouring my body, which instantaneously grew back and repaired. This was quite preferable to running. The physical pain was nothing when compared to what I had suffered through, up to that point, however, it seems that the human psyche can only take so much pain before weakening, if only they made that part immortal as well. But being immortal, wasn't preferable in this situation, it was a curse, to make me able to experience what really mattered to them. As I lay there being feasted upon, in form by Strisk, in spirit by the rest of Jadewill, contemplating these circumstances, a flash of light appears next to Saber riding on the back of Strisk. The light instantaneously materialises into Callidora, slamming with inhuman force into the side of Strisk's head, knocking off Saber through the sheer force of impact. "I will not let you enjoy another second of this, for what you have done Astrohpel", shouts a very discontent Callidora at the top of her lungs. Before anyone could even begin to contemplate the thought of beginning to consider what to do next, reality around me started to show cracks. Through it I began to see my room, a place I had not seen in an hour and ten minutes or over fifty years, I have no idea. No matter how long it had taken, I was most certainly returning there. Falling bluntly into my recliner.

It started with immense pain, my head started bleeding. I thrashed around for a few minutes. Then, bite marks started to show. I am glad or sad, I don't know, I wished to die, but now I cling to life with all my might, that is the nature of man. As I lay here with all these wounds, I contemplate if I truly won. I would not have survived it by any chance, but Lucilla's death shortened my suffering. Death lead to death. However, this death, was the greatest gift.

The Will to Tango

"So... what do we do about the book?" said Cordelia looking around the dimly lit room, where several characters sat each in a deep leather armchair, each of their faces illuminated by a fire shimmering in the corner of the room. "Every one of us wants it and if one were to take it by force, the others would quickly overwhelm him" continues Ezekiel. A very old man, his image covered with many a grey hair and scar, in a deep vibrant voice suggests, "Whatever would you crave in return for surrendering it Ezekiel?". Perhaps if the person lost an arm and a leg I might be entertained enough. Saber starts to say something but is swiftly cut off by Ezekiel, "You are in no position to make demands Saber, I'm not afraid to take you on, the only ones here who can make demands except Astrophel is Callidora and Cordelia". "How about two castles then?", says Cordelia. Callidora makes an effort to look in the direction of Cordelia, even though her blindfold makes it a slightly problematic task, "Truly, you would yield your claim for the low price of two castles?". "Each", adds Cordelia. "The proposition is highly reasonable", replies Callidora, but I must conclude this debate for the time being for Astrophel seems to be somewhat Drowsy and I myself would greatly benefit from a slight whiff of fresh air. Cordelia snaps at Cordelia, "And who will guard the book if we're out?". Saber shyly and now with a slightly startled gaze at Ezekiel, suggests "Since Callidora has limited omnipotence she will be able to keep oversight of the book, while I keep an eye on her". "Yep, sounds swell", exclaims Ezekiel driving his palms right into the old carved wooden door; after the loud collision Ezekiel left the room with Cordelia and Saber in tow. Callidora sighs softly and beckons her butler close, whispering in his ear "Sabien, would you mind doing something about

that clock, please". Sabien bows deeply and humbly, "Yes, ma'am". "Shall we?", asks Clerval with hand extended towards Callidora. "Thank you, I am able to stand by myself but walking around without colliding with all the walls is the arduous task, safe your care for later.". And so, Clerval and Saber walk slowly, leading Callidora through the halls towards a moonlit corridor with a wall full of windows, all of which are now open.

Ezekiel and Cordelia may have a terrible temper, but they sure know how to make a good draft. The walls are lined with classic wooden carvings with depictions of torture, every stake a different carving. Some are lined with twisted metal reinforcements shaped into giant snake skeletons topped with animal sculptures of a cat, a winged man, a raven and a lion. "Have you ever been here before Callidora?", Clerval inquires. "The Jadewill Mansion's then residents never let anyone enter other than mortals.". "However I heard that you met the family head, what happened to them?", Clerval asked on. Callidora smirking continues, "After Lucilla Jadewill's death, her sister massacred the Jadewill family in retribution, not much is known about the incident. Though without her father's centuries of wisdom, which I must say he did not express in his manners even slightly, she could not tend to the mansion and wasn't able to carry on her clan's legacy. The Jadewill family was no more.". If you met him... how old are you Callidora? Oh that is no question to ask of a lady like myself. You are utmost correct on that Callidora, I apologize. Callidora turns her head in the general direction of Clerval, informing him that she wants to advise him on a matter very important, "The Jadewill lineage is exceptionally longer than you think and considering the mansion's history the souls it claimed must be incomprehensible. None of us has the business of owning such a thing".

Saber raises his hand to stop the trio. "What might it be Saber?", asks

Clerval, "wait... ohh, what is that smell?". "This way", signs Saber. The three run down the corridor to a half-open door. Saber lightly nudges the door with the rear of his hand. "Keep your eyes on the book" shouts Clerval. Callidora gently nodding. Saber catches a glimpse of what is inside and turns around to vomit on the floor. Callidora tenderly addresses the vomiting pile of gibbering nonsense on the floor, "Oh we do have to do something about that weak stomach of yours, now don't we Saber?". Clerval peers inside just to be met with Astrophel's face. Continuing upwards with his gaze he comes to see that his upper body is completely wrapped in spiked chains, shred absolutely to pieces and bleeding. Clerval momentarily pauses pondering whether the part covered in chains is the upper or lower body, considering the chain is attached to the ceiling causing Astrophel's lifeless body to gently sway upside down in the wind coming through the door. Ezekiel, hearing the commotion, tears in and promptly slips on the blood.

Back in the room, now shorter by one very old man.

"So who was it Callidora?", nags Cordelia, "you know who it was... just spill the beans so we can punish them already!". "I will tell you in due time". Ezekiel stands up, "If you aren't telling us them it must've been Sabien acting on your orders, whatever she whispered when we left, must've been the old man's death sentence". Callidora sips a smidgen of tea and as if to herself notes, "Oh how the young gentleman does like to cry wolf. Scon anyone? Tea perhaps?".

"Nevermind", rasps out Callidora sounding quite unsettled, and looking upwards at the ceiling. "What're you on about?", the loud boy tries to bark, before grabbing his head in immesne pain, and seeing the source of the pain, attempted to lash out at it. Just as his hand connected with a

shiny cross on the ceiling, with a flash of light, he was gone. Yet instead of him, the center of the room had been filled, by a four-winged being, standing about 3 feet off the floor, with a sword in each hand, flowing white hair, and donning the name Nephilim.

Callidora, in contrast to one's expectations of her, did not greet this stranger to her kind. The being, very slowly extended it's hand towards the book, after which it opened and a slip of paper was taken into Nephilim's hand. Everybody's headaches and a collapsed Cordelia stood up as before, when the being unexisted with yet another great flash of cross-shaped light. Every person save for Callidora had a stunned look on their face, one that reads "What in the nine hells just happened?". Callidora, started calmly explaining,

"That was Nephilim, a collector of souls, for heaven's next age. Humanity is by its nature corrupt, and when the world is beyond the control of the heathens. They start again, anew, this world shall be the 10th hell and Eden will become the new world. But they need the purest of souls to populate new Eden, and so they steal from us. That right is their's to keep, for by definition, it is an act of God.",

and as the clock struck ten, it was midnight, and on the strike of midnight, it was so.

When Fire Reigns

Thousands of years of ancestry now lie uncovered, closer than ever, glaring him in the eyes. Inviting the lost soul to take refuge in the few remains of what they once bared. The burdens of all he saw seemed to

him as to shift unto his heart, with every step he grew more tired, more scared of this world. One he had helped build, but one he did not want. Vines surround him clutching his feet with all the might of centuries untold as if burdens his own had not been enough to bare. He endures for his journey's end is not far away. What he strives for, had been decades untended to, nature's grasp had dragged its legends deep into the ground. Stairs crumbled under every step he took, countless times he thought he'd fall, but this he did not care for, not for a single moment, he had not another place left to go, no other purpose. On his journey he passed countless statues, nature had taken their faces. Though he still recognized many, none of them could help him now. The gateway to this sanctuary once-great now lays broken and twisted. His mere presence disturbs this crypt lost in time. He placed his foot unto the tiled balcony which weaved his step into a melody announcing his arrival as it echoed through the crypt. He approaches... gently raising his hand, inciting the rose and vine laden door to open. The scape of rust and degraded wood almost quelling the sounds of falling metal echoed once again throughout the tower. He entered the room, his feet disturbing layers of leaves, ash and dust. He had never come here, he had never been allowed. Overhead, cowering, sat many doves, he greeted them, for now, they shared fate. He passed torn paintings, old carved stone and many crosses. The room had once been decorated with beautiful wallpaper gold-laden with icons of religion and nature, even these were now but a reminder of a bygone world. He approached an old altar on each side of which stood the statue of an angel, one clutching a quill and the other a piece of parchment. He approached and as he knelt down one of the doves flew down unto the altar, raising its head in anticipation. The old man dropped to the ground crying and begged for forgiveness, for the world to be saved, for the world to not suffer for his sins. He pleaded the

struggle would come to an end. The dove flew outside the tower from whence the man came and picked an olive branch, then soared off the tower. The old man's soul was at rest, he followed the dove outside and having completed his journey he took a step off the ledge.

Manifest Legacy

Standing in this hall, the air is much staler than I had expected, as my consciousness dips slightly, I remember very well... a moment.

I was leaning upon my office door, reading the change-log of current law, looking smart, looking loyal. I was called by the loudspeaker to my superior's office. I scramble through the camp as to not keep him waiting. I enter as is apt for my post, with a salute on my chest and the words "Sir, Fjäderklädd Christopher Gosling reporting". "At ease", he replied "you are no longer my problem, tomorrow you are to board the High-train, head for Daemon and report directly to the vice-secretary of the Daemon Overseer Reignen, I don't know why he requested your presence, however it is his will, you will be on that train tomorrow 6 hour sharp", he had nothing more to say to me and I had nothing more to say to him, my salute, right arm firmly resting against my chest, I bowed low and walked out his door, dismissed I leave.

After my arrival in the tenth ward where Daemon is located, I was directed by the automatic system to my lodgings and allowed some 2 hours of Private Time since the journey was long and couldn't be made within reasonable time. And so I peered across the landscape from my balcony, through the mist just along the horizon, Ward 11 was just about visible. It's exactly as I'd imagined it, all those astonishing buildings were indeed

so imposing, even more so helped by the fact that the common folk is usually kept out. With a sip of whiskey I retire to my room.

“Good morning; Look at the sky and wake up to a day prosperous to our nation”, they often try to change up the text, but it’s always the same crap, one starts to internalize, these morning drills are as despicable as the man that designed them.

I know why the Lord wants to meet with me, and when he does I shall die. The question is how much of this I can take down with me, the answer would come soon enough, but I could improve my odds by finding a couple compatriots.

This group, if we may call it that, would soon come to form, the Overseer had been called off to important duties, this gave me a small amount of leeway to prepare.

Nobody who would be of any use to me would be allowed a stay in Daemon, so I was forced to wander around Wards 6 or lower, despicable places they are, everyone is forced to live in such cramped and unsavory conditions, while the higher ups get all that space. The founding fathers meant well, that is infallible, lower ranking citizens simply have a higher natality, but the high wards keep all the self-regulating statistics low. This used to be a technocracy, but the most fit to rule, wasn’t necessarily the most fit to set his own rules. So many years of tiny government degradation, we have to cleanse it. Anyway, for the time being I was stuck here, the first day, I ran into a young boy, we ran into each other on the street, at first I of course thought I’d been robbed, hurt or some similar. After swiftly checking myself and seeing that he was just distracted by his camera, I started walking away, but the boy just kept staring... that uniform, he’s from the Wrelnach, I had little time to do background

checks, things were now or never and had to be done quite whimsically, my least favorite way of doing things. I retraced the few steps taken and stood close to him, examining his stature and mannerisms.

Kommunikationschief, Izlaron division of the Wrelnach sir, the boy exclaimed in a significantly stutterful way, while hiding the camera behind his back. I waved my hand dismissively, and asked him for his name. Clerval sir. Clerval who? Clerval Angell, sir, he continued, exhaling quite loudly, grabbing his elbow and hanging his head, looking somewhere on my lower person.

...

At that moment, an idea struck me, and so I inquired, do you take many photos Clerval? Yes sir, I've been photographing everything I can, since I got my first camera. Have you every photographed anything illegal? No sir, I woul... I don't like when people lie to me Clerval. It was a stretch, I had no idea, but the bait worked, Clerval told me about how downright passionate he was about breaking the rules with photography. Then covered his mouth and turned around to leave, I grabbed him by the shoulder and dragged him off. Hopefully the digital overseer would ignore his little confession, since it would be tagged as dealt with by me.

We sifted through his photos, after a lot of time wasted calming him down and explaining I wasn't about to bring him in. After a couple searches we hit my jackpot, he did have photos from Aleksis Reignen's visit to his division. And plenty enough to build a 3d copy of him, but all we needed was his face. The software required some babysitting, so Me and Clerval stayed up late, in the end he fell asleep in the room I rented, since it wasn't mine, I felt fine leaving him there, disconnecting the camera and taking my PDA, before leaving very early the next day.

That was one thing down, I had already taken care of another years ago. I used to be quite close with a colleague of mine, back in the StrikeForce. Petra Helvete was her name, she was quick and strong on her feet, but stronger in the head, they recognized this, and made her a Mechanist basically the moment she arrived, with additional physical training for later fieldwork. She had closer to accessing some files, that I needed. With her help we managed to snatch a blueprint of Reignen's prosthetic arm. He lost his real one somewhere, and commissioned a replacement at the facility where Petra worked. Wasn't even difficult to convince her, she was always down for no-good.

Now I had once again an old friend to visit, Petra couldn't take leave so suddenly and communicating with her, has a risk anyway, but she didn't leave me empty-handed, apparently she has a friend who doesn't ask questions. I walked into her establishment and somehow she recognized me, Petra probably showed her pictures or spoke about me. Just to be safe, she still initiated the exchange, "What are you here for?". And so I replied, "To leave something by and take something of mine", not my idea she always thinks her catchphrases are so clever. I put my PDA on the counter and she lifted up a very dusty clunky steel box from behind it. I explained to her that I needed her to quickpress a Dragonfly Festival mask for me with a custom face, she obliged and prepared the whole blank, then I sent the extracted model I got from Clerval's photos to the press. Once the woman saw the mask, she got stunned for more than a few moments, then with a shaky hand took it and handed it to me. "Is that? Is it really...", she started but I quickly replied, "I remember Petra saying you don't ask questions". She smirked slightly but was visibly still upset. "How much do I owe", was as far as I got before her arm shot up to my mouth, then pointed towards the door, and she shouted, "Just get

out".

Outside, I checked my PDA, and the situation on the front had resolved itself, Overseers and the Tenno can flashport so he might be ready for me after lunch, I've got all this sorted, so I may as well retire before the big finale.

As I had some time to kill, I walked back to the old hotel to eat, as I was perusing the menu, who else would show up but Clerval, from his expression, I think he slept up until moments earlier. He ushered a Vyper deck onto the table. I asked Clerval to choose a meal for me and he said, "Take the third from the top, I always do, never went wrong". So I ordered it twice and drew a hand from the deck. He... really wasn't a good player, he mostly played light creatures, with fire spells, because he, "enjoyed the chaos it brought to the game", as most of this chaos comes to be when a light creature dies, yes, he saw a lot of it. I usually play a lot of dark, which negates these effects, but I couldn't bring myself to spoil his fun. In the end, I let him win once, at least I managed to create a size 28 green creature, which I would take as a personal achievement as this is the largest I ever managed to make one of my own cards, but against him, it wasn't a big deal.

We ate and we laughed, well, he laughed, but I felt slightly alleviated thanks to him. He had no idea what fate has in store for me today. Then I stood up, payed and left.

Clerval followed me to the high-train station for some reason. And onto the train, he didn't have the authorization to enter Daemon, I sighed and signed off on him. A while after we crossed the border into Daemon, the dreaded message came, there was a time and I had about an hour to use. I walked straight into Reigen's estate, Clerval close in tail. At the

end of this corridor was a lift, he can't go in there. Clerval is still behind me and states, "You look like a madman who's going to get himself killed". I pay little attention to him, preparing the items I brought with me, opening the case, and adjusting the prosthetic arm I took from the steel case, dropping it at my side. "I ain't just meeting one lord today", I replied. Clerval grabbed me by the shoulder and turn me around, I used that force to drive my hand directly into the wall in-front of him, prosthetic still adjusting some tidbits here and there. Our faces were very close, almost touching, we both breathed heavily as if just having given a rousing speech. I took my hand and caressed Clerval's cheek before, giving him a slow and deep kiss. I let go when Clerval collapsed on the floor, then I turned around, flipped Clerval's handgun in my left arm and stepped into the elevator.

Once having arrived on the correct floor, I stepped out and shot out the camera and the Overseer's vice-secretary, the room was otherwise empty, and the camera was allowed to glitch and disconnect for a second, I would disable that measure momentarily anyway, so my job should not go interrupted. I put on the mask and begun, "Clearance level Overseer, surveillance footage from satellite SK451". The machine replied, "Facial recognition scan required... Accepted". I browsed through the footage back and forth a bit, what I needed was a video of Aleksis authorizing a high-profile order. I found it eventually, then swiftly extracted sound using motion amplification, his silver decor proved quite adequate for the purpose.

A bunch of voices behind me snap me back to reality. The hall is empty but there's probably a bunch of guards realizing just now that they have a corpse on their hands. But that does not concern me anymore, a few steps and I'm in Aleksis Reigen's chamber. I walk in, and as expected

see Reigen, smugly walking around, brandishing a classical sword, used for honor duels. His chamber is in the shape of a tall dome, with glass all across the ceiling. I exclaim that that is not necessary, since I have already won. He looks extremely puzzled. I want him to understand what is happening to his oh so beloved nation as he watches it happen. You, as the Overseer of Daemon, have a lot of power, that power is manifested in many ways, and of course through your wide array of digital authorizations. But a password, a face recognition scan, and an authorization key hidden in your prosthetic, wasn't enough to stop this country's citizens from besting you. This country was build with ideals, ideals which you and all the officials in Daemon seem to lack. You are the ruin of my people, and that I cannot forgive.

For that purpose I issued an order in your name. Daemon has 10s of thousands of flights both with and without passengers, but all of them, will be heading straight for our capital, I thing some of them may even hit directly where you stand. "That cannot be right, the Tenno will surely catch such a preposterous attempt.". "He will, the Tenno is a powerful entity, but it would be too late, all of the aircraft's are gliding". Every single one of those crafts has a fried circuit board, and is flying high above their recommended altitude, with turned off engines. Unless somebody acts really fast, Lucian shrugs, won't help much anyways, I add as the first loud explosion is heard. Nasty things to crash these plasma engines are, aren't they Overseer? Another explosion is heard, and yet 3 more. Aleksis, runs down for cover and I take his place in the center of the room on a control platform. My arms open wide looking up at the sky, at what beautiful justice I had created. The glass shatters falling down, and raining on me and Aleksis. The smaller fragments might've given us a chance to survive, but no chance, the bigger shards were basically

flaying us. I stood there laughing, until my death.