

## Prologue

Dryden was afraid.

In all his years of treachery and destruction, not so much, as he was now as he saw this man approach him, half-naked, hair awry and all over his temples and collar-bone, wine glass in one hand, a half-eaten rose in the other, walking slowly towards him like a lion does toward a prey, like he did himself toward his own victim only the hour before— nothing fast or hurrying about his attitude, nothing as as of fear the prey could possible escape the snares of his ineluctable glance. And it couldn't. Not possibly. Dryden felt his brain stop signalling him, the death-defying reflexes that he was known and lauded for, slowly began to leave him as though never to return. He felt something he had never before felt but had always sardonically wondered at what it might have felt like to his victims — helplessness. In a time since he could far back remember in more than a million years of haunting the Ethereal space, he prayed. He prayed to what he considered as the most Holy. He prayed to that one thing that kept that tinge of his belief in love and hope alive amidst the bloody and blinding hatred all around him - he prayed to the love that he had for his protégé, Dietrich.

Someone said he was a killing-machine not capable of being afraid. And that is the belief that he had always borne in his heart to this day. All through as he raided towns, as he sworded and slashed those bodies in pieces, as he punished the Evil with unflinching hands of destruction, that is all he has ever believed - there is no fear in his heart. If there was something wrong that he was doing, and was liable for such to be retributed by higher might, *they might as well try me out*, he thought with a smirk, *who knows I might win, as always*. But in any case he had sworn to fight till his last breath, without being hindered, or taken aback, without feeling afraid. Only now he had begun to see things in a different light. The man approached him stopped inches before him. He took a nice whiff at Dryden and muttered, *nice*. Dryden's blood froze cold. He couldn't move from his position tightly stuck up against the wall with this formidable man right on his neck. The man lifted his wine glass to Dryden's lips and with the other hand cupped the back of his neck, and even before he could protest he felt the taste of a sour wine and vodka mix flow down his throat and he felt sick. He wanted to spit it out but something formidable in the eyes of his confronter made him slowly

swallow. The man smiled softly and disappeared in the crowd as quickly as he had appeared. Dryden's on-lookers hurried to him, "What about him, lord? You let him go?" Their shock-filled voices sounded hazed and light to his ears, which were still buzzing with the quiet sounds of the man's footsteps. These men had never seen their lord let a victim slip away, they had never seen their master forgive, let alone leave without the slightest injury the person he had spent an entire evening setting a trap to catch. They personally expected this one to be a big kill, a one significant in Dryden's career, but no one was ready to really accept what had just happened. Dryden slowly sunk into reality and felt the need to make up for his lost actions, "Wrong person," he simply said and walked off, leaving a dazed four gazing eyes behind him. More than the others did, Dietrich noticed something more about his silence, he found a deeper intent in his tacitness this time all other times that he was reticent. This time was different, as though unlike the other times, he actually wanted to talk.

The more he saw Dryden the more he felt afraid for him. "What happened back there?" he asked himself, he didn't dare approach him much, he was simply as afraid of talking to him as he has seen his congeners to be, although he admits that he has always felt that Dryden has a soft spot for him like he has for nothing else on this planet, and was always secretly happy for this.