

Chapter 1: Dark Agents

The soft yellow glow of the lamps along the grey walls did very little to illuminate the great hall. In the center of the sunken room was the council's table adorned with gold trim along a semi-circle design. Each member of the council sat at their respective seats dressed in their ancient ceremonial robes and armor. Tapestries from each family of the council decorated the walls behind each member. They were worn out by time and had been on the walls as long as the council had existed. How long that was, Lullaby had no idea. The twenty foot dome ceiling was engraved with carvings of battles from several previous centuries. Hanging down were multiple stalactite shaped lights with gold beads imbedded in them for reflection. The overall effect made the hall look grand and eerie at the same time.

Lullaby listened to the raucous of the council's discussion while she waited outside the main entranceway. Although she could only make out a few words, she was sure they were talking about the most recent events from New York. Her two counterparts stood silently nearby, ignoring her like they always did. Neither of them acknowledged her unless absolutely necessary. Lullaby only knew them as Trammel and Myriad. What their real names were no one had ever told her but then again she never asked.

Their names didn't matter because what they were capable of told her all she needed to know. Seduction and entrapment was Trammel's specialty. Lullaby had heard rumors of entire nations falling due to her influence but she had no first hand knowledge of this. Everything about her cried of lust. The woman's long flowing blonde hair, dark

blue eyes and a figure that made men's heads turn summed her up. Lullaby didn't like her.

Unlike Trammell, Myriad was a mystery to her. One of the servants mentioned that he was the finest marksman in history. His claim to fame was supposed to be the assassination of John F. Kennedy but again there was no way to be sure that was true or not. Lullaby found it difficult to know how Myriad actually looked given his ability to change form. Currently he stood at a height of about six feet with a medium build for a man. His baldhead and lack of eyebrows along with his super pale complexion made him resemble a manikin. Lullaby had only seen it happen once and probably wouldn't have believed it any other way. Myriad was leaving the council chamber and transformed his appearance. His hair grew out of his head and his skin darkened as his body shortened slightly. His demeanor told Lullaby to stay away and she did just that.

A fist banged hard against the council table and brought Lullaby's attention back to what was happening. Standing up now was Shemhaze, head of the council and direct descendent of Shemhazai, thought to be the first and eldest of their kind. How many generations she wasn't sure but that is how he gained power over the council.

The floor trembled as the four giant council members exited the chamber through the side doors that were guarded by two dark creatures. The very sight of them frightened her. They were called the Soulless Ones. Evil creatures that showed no emotions. She didn't even want to think about them and turned her gaze elsewhere.

“Step forward,” came the low guttural call from Shemhaze.

The three of them stepped forward and stood in front of the council table. Lullaby could feel her heart skip a beat at the site of her master. His long neck and large head

were hard to describe. He had overly large black eyes set back into his oval shaped head. His leathered grey skin and bulging veins along his neck and arms pulsed with his rapid heartbeat. He stood at least four feet taller than her with broad shoulders that bore the black and gold family armor. Standing in his presence was always intimidating.

Shemhaze waved his muscular hand over the council table producing a frozen three dimensional scene that had been taken during the crash of the building three days ago in New York. The picture was of the anomalies they had encountered. Their intel was that the woman on her knees crying was called Janet Renard along with her uncle Leigh Barrus. The FBI agent's name was Nick Catlin and the other three were still unknown.

“Myriad,” Shemhaze pointed at the dark haired young man running from the scene, “where is he?”

Stepping forward he said, “Master I tracked him to Munfordville Kentucky. He has stopped running for the moment.”

“I want you to help Trammel get to know our anomaly. He will help us find our lost brother.” Shemhaze turned his gaze upon Trammel. Lullaby wasn't sure if he was smirking or not when he said, “And you know what to do.”

Trammel bowed her head slightly and smirked back at Shemhaze. “My pleasure master.”

Lullaby hid her disgust at their attitudes.

“Lullaby you are to find Agent Catlin and the others. We know they are being held in West Virginia. Run into our FBI agent and see what you can find out. I want to know where the others came from. All five anomalies must be found.”

She bowed her head as Trammel did. "Yes Master."

"You are dismissed." All three of them bowed and turned to leave. "Accept you Lullaby. Stay for a moment."

A knot tightened in her stomach as she turned back to face Shemhaze. He waited until the other two had left the hall.

"Yes Master?" she hid the fear from her voice. Does he know?

"The council has mentioned to me that your essence feels different since coming back from London. I have noticed it also. Did something go wrong with the Member of Parliament's wife? She did die in her sleep as you were ordered but was there more that happened?"

His gaze was penetrating. It took all of her skills at controlling her body to keep a straight face. Any inflection or eye movement contrary to what Shemhaze was looking for would give away her secret.

Focusing on keeping her heart rate steady she looked directly into his black eyes. "No Master. I did exactly what you had asked. She went quietly and nothing more."

She continued to stare into his eyes hoping he would be the first to flinch. Finally he said, "Good. Then you should have no problem with this assignment."

"None at all Master," she said while holding his gaze.

"You are dismissed."

She bowed again and turned to leave. When she was finally out of Shemhaze's site she let out a sigh of relief. Her life would be over in a second if he found out the truth of what happened that night in London.

Chapter 2: Fallen

(Thee days after New York City incident.)

The Spring night air brought with it a cool breeze that Marcus desperately appreciated. It had been three days of running and soon would be four. He knew he was somewhere in Kentucky but no idea what part. Everything was new to him and he didn't know where he was heading. Having almost no food for nearly four days was making him weak. The little bit of water he had been able to get from streams along his path was far too little. Thirst was a priority as he wondered through the forest.

He stopped running for a moment and leaned up against a tree. Panting uncontrollably he fought off exhaustion. Again the memories accosted him, the men he had killed, the creature he had beaten nearly to death, Sampson... Mamma. The tears welled up in his eyes. He blinked causing them to run down his dirt covered face leaving streaks as they disappeared into his long black beard that had grown in. He pushed his black hair out of his face to wipe his eyes when the sound of people and music in the distance caught his attention. Instinctively Marcus headed toward the lights shining through the trees coming from a building directly ahead. When he reached the edge of the forest he saw the cars and motorcycles in the parking lot. There was a neon sign in the front window that simply read Jakes Bar & Grill.

Country music from inside grew louder as he snuck to the back of the building. There it was, a hose. Marcus hurried and unscrewed it from the spout. Like a man who had been lost in the dessert he turned it on and drank greedily. The water ran down the side of his face but he didn't care. He knew he looked like a madman. The jacket that had been given to him by the police was torn and stained with blood and dirt. His pants were

in just as bad a shape. Having no way to shave or cut his hair he was sure he wouldn't be welcome in any public setting. He surveyed his surroundings to see if anyone had noticed him. When the close was clear he used the water to wash himself. A quick rinse was all he had time for when the sounds of a woman screaming from around the side of the building jerked him to alert.

"Please don't," Marcus could hear the woman plead with a shaky voice.

Peering around the side of the building Marcus saw six men dressed all in leather and covered in tattoos surrounding an older man and a young woman. The older man was being held against the building with a knife to his throat. This wasn't good. For a moment Marcus thought about running away. But that quickly passed as the thought of what his Uncle Leigh would say wiped away any idea of running.

The large man holding the knife said, "Look old man I've given you two weeks to come up with the money. Either you pay right now or we take it out on your sweet little daughter. Are we clear?" As if an unspoken command had been given one of the other men grabbed the girl and pushed her up against the building. To emphasize how serious he was, he leaned in close to the girls face and gave her an evil grin. The girl winced and turned her head away while crying.

"Please," the older man pleaded as he looked over at his daughter. "I already gave you all I have. I'll have more in a few days. Please don't do this."

Marcus had seen enough. His temper was already starting to boil over and the feeling of adrenaline flowed through his body.

Having to clear his soar mucus filled throat he finally called out, "Hey Tats! Why don't you and your boys mess with someone who can fight back?"

All six men immediately turned to look at Marcus as he slowly approached them.

“What?” the man holding the knife lowered it from the older man’s throat and turned toward him. “Look freak I don’t know what you’ve been drinking but why don’t you go back and find a nice alley for the night.”

Marcus realized they thought he was some sort of vagrant bum.

“How about you put away that knife of yours and then you and your boys leave peacefully. Otherwise I’m afraid of what I may do to you.” He wasn’t just putting on a brave show. Marcus really didn’t know what he would do if they attacked him. Several people had already died at his hand. It came too easily for him and he was scared of himself.

Marcus and the man with the knife stood face to face. “You’re just asking for a beating aren’t yo...” Marcus snatched the man’s right wrist that was holding the knife and twisted. His attacker fell to his knees and let out a cry of pain. He grabbed the knife out of the man’s hand and threw it into a nearby tree.

“I’m not going to ask you again. Take you and your buddies out of here.” He twisted the man’s wrist harder to emphasize his request.

That was all it took for the other five men to attack. Marcus assessed them as they pulled out weapons. Three of them had knives, one had a chain and the other some sort of club. The knives needed to go first. Jerking up the man he had by the wrist he kicked him in the stomach and sent him flying into two of the knifed attackers. The third one made a quick slash at his face. After having sparred with Zack the attack felt like it was in slow motion. Grabbing the man’s attacking arm he propelled his assailant into the side of the building and knocked him out. His senses were now in full heightened status. The

whooshing of the chain behind him gave Marcus plenty of warning at what was coming. Throwing himself backwards onto his hands he brought his feet backwards toward the sound of the chain and kicked the man in the chest. The rush of air leaving his lungs involuntarily told Marcus he hit right where he intended. Standing back onto his feet the last man brought the club down hard toward his face. Marcus grabbed it in mid swing and held on tight. The man was stunned at the sudden stopping of his attack. Marcus smirked at the man and punched him in the face. Without a sound the man fell.

"Go now!" Marcus yelled out to the men attempting to get to their feet. They each gave him a sideward glance and walked out to the parking lot. The sound of several motorcycles starting up and accelerating away into the night helped him to relax. Turning around he saw the older man and girl staring at him with wide eyes. Marcus wasn't sure what he should do or say.

"Are you alright son?" The man asked him.

The words tried to come out of his mouth to let them know he was just fine but he couldn't formulate them. Instead the world spun around as blackness overcame him.

When Marcus finally opened his eyes again he found himself laying on a small bed. It was difficult at first to focus his sight. When it cleared up he saw he was in what appeared to be someone's bedroom. The sound of the country music was still playing but it was faint and coming from beneath him. He locked gazes with the girl from earlier as she hurried over to his side with a drinking glass.

"Here let me help you sit up," she said with a smile. "You need to drink this." Marcus accepted the glass from her and drank it without a question. It was apple juice. He never thought something so simple could taste that good.

"I think you passed out from hunger. When was the last time you ate?"

Words failed him. The door to the room opened and the older man walked in with a bowl in his hands.

"Good," a big smile came to the man's face. "I was getting worried there son." Handing the bowl to him the man said, "Eat up. You need to get something in you." He pulled up a nearby chair and sat in front of Marcus. "My name's Jake and this here is my daughter Krissy. I can't thank you enough for what you did earlier."

The man's graying hair and weathered skin reminded him a little of Uncle Leigh. He was about the same age but a little heavier. Marcus felt an instant liking to Jake.

"Now you don't have to say a word son. Anyone who saves me and my kin the way you did doesn't need to explain anything. What I would like for you to consider is staying the night. This here is my son's old room. If you feel comfortable enough there are some clothes in that closet over there that will probably fit you. I understand if you don't want to. Not knowing us and all."

Marcus finally was able to say, "Thank you sir. I appreciate that." He tried to manage a smile.

"OK then," The man stood up. "Come Krissy. Let's leave this man to rest." The two of them were at the door when Jake turned around and said, "Anything you need you let me know. If you want something more to eat come on downstairs and I'll fix you up something from the kitchen. Oh and you can use whatever you find in here. The

bathroom is through that door over there. You have it all to yourself.

Anyways...goodnight."

Before Jake could get out the door, Marcus called out, "Name's Marcus and thank you again." He held up the bowl and gestured around the room. The man smiled at him and closed the door. Marcus surveyed the room once they left. It was filled with boxes, fishing equipment and hunting gear. They must have been using this room for storage. There was assorted stuff scattered all over ranging from old photo albums to oars. He quickly ate the bowl of soup forgoing the need for a spoon. He was already starting to feel better.

Setting down his bowl he made his way to the bathroom. Leaning over the sink he looked at himself in the mirror. Staring back was a stranger, a filthy and crazed looking stranger. His hair had grown several inches past his shoulders and his beard was long enough to braid like Sampson. Sampson... He was too weak to cry again but that didn't stop the sick aching in the pit of his stomach from coming back. A whisper in his head told him he would probably never see his family again. *I failed them.* They were better off without him. A new beginning was being handed to him regardless. He reached over to the back of the toilet and grabbed an old pair of scissors. Pulling on his beard he took a deep sigh and began cutting.

Chapter 3: Confinement

Darkness surrounded Anna. There was something evil in the air around her. Slowly her surroundings came into focus. Off in the distance she saw lightning bolts filling the night sky as she stood upon a mountainous precipice. Gusts of wind tossed her

auburn hair into her face forcing her to push it aside to see. At first she could only make out two large silhouettes with arms locked in combat. Their shadowy appearance slowly took on definition. The larger of the two she didn't recognize but the second one she knew, it was her brother. Marcus let out an anger cry while in an adrenaline filled rage. She had never seen him like this. There was something very wrong with him. At first she could not see what it was as the figures fought one another.

Anna took several steps closer to get a better view. That's when she saw the third figure. Her heart raced when she noticed that her brother was somehow connected with it. They were black tentacles that attached themselves to Marcus's body. An ungodly blackness surrounded her brother. Anna tried to call out to him but as was the usual with her dreams she could not interfere. Helplessly she watched as Marcus grabbed his assailant by the neck and drop it's lifeless form to the ground. Screaming again at the night in a fit of rage her brother merged with the third figure. What stood before her now was not Marcus anymore but an insane killing machine. Darkness consumed him until no features were recognizable. The figure slowly walked toward her and stood only a few feet away. Through the blackness that engulfed his head Marcus's face came into view. Anna's heart was beating so fast she could hardly catch her breath.

He said to her, "Help me." Then his face disappeared again. Without warning the figure charged her...

Anna sat upright in her bed screaming. She tried to catch her breath and slow her heart rate down. The door to her room opened and one of the guards with his hand on his pistol asked, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, sorry," was all she could say.

Looking suspiciously at her he slowly backed out of the room. A clear head is what she needed. Normally sitting along the lake shore reading her Bible and feeding the small family of ducks every morning helped. But that wasn't going to happen any time soon or ever again from the looks of things. Stuck in this two room cell they called her quarters with only a bed and bathroom was getting old real fast. No contact with Mamma or anyone in the family was getting hard to deal with. She was sure Angie and Zack were going through the same thing. At least they let her have a Bible to read. Not much of anything else other than a few old magazines.

The last week had been hard for her. Not only did she need to deal with being isolated from her family but the introduction to such wickedness kept her up at nights. Twelve hours a day they had her interrogating suspected terrorists and criminals. Having lived with just her family all her life Anna wasn't prepared for the evil she was facing. Serial killers and murderers alike they brought to her for interrogating. Each one of the prisoner's files were filled with every atrocity known to mankind. She had seen things on the television but Mamma never let them watch anything like this.

With each criminal she interrogated something of their emotional state stayed with her. Everyday was a torture just to sit in the same room with these people. They didn't even have to say anything for her to be able to read the horrors that they had inflicted on others. Some of them even drew a sick pleasure from the pain. She wasn't sure now if the dream she had about her brother Marcus was one of her visions or just a nightmare created from the stress of what they were doing to her.

Anna needed to get her mind thinking on something else. Opening her Bible, she turned to Proverbs. She couldn't remember how many times she had read through them but she always gleaned some wisdom when she did. Opening to Proverbs chapter three versus five and six she read.

" Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight."

Closing her eyes she whispered, "I do trust in you. Please give me wisdom." A peace filled her and she realized God was speaking. That quiet voice that she'd known all her life said within her, "Find him."

Still whispering she replied, "Yes Lord."

There had been one upside to her repeated interrogations that she hadn't shared with anyone. Her abilities of influence had grown stronger. Although she had never used it while interrogating the criminals Anna had tried it several times on the guards. Now she needed to use it to help get her family out of this place and save her brother. She thought hard on formulating a plan and all that they were going to need. If they were to get out alive she was going to need everyone's help, including Agent Catlin.

Calling out to the door she said, "Hello. Mr. Guard. You still there?"

Within seconds the same guard appeared. Clearly agitated he asked, "What?"

Extending her power of influence toward him she said, "Come here for a second."

Without hesitation he walked over to her. "Lean down, I want to tell you something."

Again he did exactly as she asked. The room was constantly bugged and monitored so

she needed to be very quiet. Whispering in his ear she said, "You are going to go to my brother Zack and discretely repeat to him exactly what I'm about to say to you." He nodded his obedience to her. "I want you to tell him do not fight whatever they are doing to you. I will send you more messages soon. We are leaving this place and that he needs to be prepared. Just hold on a little while longer. Got that?" Again the guard nodded his response. "Good. One more thing. Once you have delivered this message to him you will forget we ever talked or that you ever delivered the message. You were in the men's room with cramps for the entire time. Now go."

The guard immediately turned and left her room. She wasn't sure if her message would work or not but she would find out soon enough. Taking a deep breath she realized how sleepy she still was. Climbing back under her covers she closed her eyes in hopes of getting some rest.