

Summary: None given

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## 1. [Chapter 1](#) by Jay

Chapter 1 by Jay

As he was feeding Jean-Claude felt a surge of nausea. He blocked off his link to Anita, as well as he could anyway. A multitude of things became clear to him as he realised something he had failed to notice before due to Anita's tendency not to bother keeping an awareness of him, certainly not the sort /he/ kept of her. That was the only reason he could hide things from her - his mind and thoughts were always open to her, they had been since a time about a month before Musette arrived, when he let her satisfy the ardeur with him. And hers were almost completely closed to him - he was merely very good at extrapolating from the few clues that slipped through normally. Jason seemed surprised to see Jean-Claude stop feeding and rush to the bathroom where he collapsed in front of the toilet and vomited Jason's blood up.

"Jean-Claude, what's wrong? Can I do anything?" Jason was standing in the doorway by the time Jean-Claude had finished vomiting, looking shocked to see the condition his master was in.

"Get Asher and Hannah. I might be able to feed in an hour, at least a little, come back then. I'll explain as much as I can then. Don't tell anyone else about this." Jean-Claude looked faintly green and even paler than usual. Jason left almost running to find the vampires named.

Asher arrived first to find Jean-Claude huddled on his bed, wrapped in the covers. He was shivering and his eyes were wide and frightened, there was even a spattering of vomit on his hair.

"Jean-Claude, Jason said there was something wrong with you?" Asher sat on the bed and put a hand on his master's shoulders, falling back into old habits from the time Jean-Claude was newly come to Belle Morte's court.

"I'm pregnant, or at least I think so. It makes sense now, doesn't it?" Jean-Claude's voice was flat and resigned.

"If you are pregnant, then yes. It would explain why you're a *sourdre de sang* so young. What other evidence do you have?"

"I threw up the blood I took from Jason. I can't close off my link with Anita the way I used to be able to - she just doesn't pay attention to it. But I can only really sense her when she lets me, or when her control is overcome by the ardeur - and then the fact that she even /has/ the ardeur, that she acquired one of my powers. And..." Jean-Claude blushed in shame as his eyes fell to where his hands were clutching at the sheets. "...my nipples have become more sensitive recently."

"Master?" Hannah knocked from outside the room and waited.

"Come in Hannah." Jean-Claude held a £50 note out to her. "Go out and get some pregnancy tests, if there's any that work on blood. Please, and don't let anyone know."

"I won't master. I hope you don't have too much trouble if you are pregnant."

"I appreciate your well wishes." Hannah left quietly and Jean-Claude leaned up against Asher for comfort, to be held. He just lay there until Hannah returned with the tests half an hour later.

"Thank you." Jean-Claude took the two tests, of different makes he noticed, and opened one. "Could you go and run a hot bath for me?"

"Of course." Hannah went through to the bathroom while Jean-Claude used the tests - and they both proved to be positive.

"I need to tell Anita. I'll ask her to come here tomorrow. Would you stay with me during the day?"

"Of course." Asher's arm tightened slightly around Jean-Claude's body in response to his wide eyes and upturned face.

Hannah came in and told them that the bath was ready. Jean-Claude glanced at her and smiled as he thanked her. Jason came back just as he was undressing.

"Jean-Claude?"

"I think I'll be more likely to keep it down if I feed when I'm in the bath. I can explain there - but you can't let /anyone/ know what I tell you until later." Jean-Claude walked through to the bathroom and slid into the bath, waiting for Jason to join him. He fed, taking only perhaps a fifth of the blood he'd normally take.

"I'm going to need to feed more often during the night for at least the next three months, possibly the next eight months, but I won't be able to take as much at once. There are six vampires alive who can become pregnant and give birth to a healthy child. I didn't realise until now, but I'm one of those six, and I'm carrying Anita's child. Don't ask how it works - I don't know myself. I'm not even certain how I'll give birth." Jean-Claude shivered and Jason took him into his arms.

"Let me wash your hair, that should make you feel better."

"Thank you." Jean-Claude relaxed and let his pomme de sang tend to him.

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"Yes?" Anita sounded curt as she answered the phone and she knew it, but she was running late for her raisings, and she hadn't had the chance to eat yet.

"Ma petite. I need to speak to you. Can you come to the Circus tonight?" Jean-Claude's voice wasn't seductive for a change, it was quiet and almost frightened.

"No. I'm overscheduled on my raisings. I've got eight to do and I'm already running late."

"Then will you be able to come tomorrow, about five? I'll certainly be awake by then." Jean-Claude sounded almost desperate, and Anita didn't like that.

"Yes, I'm sorry but the Circus is too far from my raisings tonight." One of the graveyards was only ten minutes drive from Anita's house so she'd scheduled that for half past twelve, immediately after she'd fed her ardeur.

"I understand. I would not expect you to inconvenience yourself for me. Just please come tomorrow, I have something that I must tell you, and once you know I am required to tell the council, with your consent."

"What do you need to tell the council? Do you really want to get involved with them again, after we've just had to deal with Belle Morte, and embarrassed her in the process?" The mention of the council hit a button with Anita and she vowed to do whatever she could to see Jean-Claude as soon as possible.

"It is not a matter of want. They will declare me rogue if I do not inform them of this unless I have a very specific justification. But once they hear what I have to tell them none of them will be able to touch me, or more importantly you, and they'll /know/ that I /can't/ take a council seat so I'm not a threat to them."

"Why...I don't have time for this. Tell me when you see me." Anita hung up and rang for Larry, just back from being trained as a Federal Marshal.

"Hi. Who's calling?"

"Larry, it's Anita. How many raisings do you have tonight?"

"Four. Why? Do you need me to take one of yours Anita? Do you think I can?" The kid sounded eager and Anita couldn't believe how old that enthusiasm made her feel.

"My last raising of the night's just a disputed will. As long as you don't have anything more than ten years dead you can pull it off. I've got eight - I know it's my own stupid fault, but I /need/ to see Jean-Claude tonight. Do you mind?"

"No, of course not. Where and when is it?"

"Shady Fields cemetery at five in the morning. It's Mr. Hughes. His wife and adult daughter are arguing over the will." They asked specifically for Anita, far too many did, which made it far too easy for her to overschedule herself in an effort to distract herself from the fact that she had, for all intents and purposes, a harem.

"Right, I'll take it for you. Do you think they'll make a fuss about not getting you specifically?"

"If he's of legally sound mind there shouldn't be a problem. You can tell them that one of my family, a close member, is ill. It's even the truth." Anita'd been sensing nausea and fear from Jean-Claude intermittently once she thought about it, and she wanted to find out what was wrong with him. The second to last appointment she had was an abusive father and a therapist. Jameson could take that one easily enough. He only had one appointment, and truthfully the corpse only had to look good to satisfy the therapist. Jameson did agree to take the raising, and told her that he'd be ringing the therapist to reschedule it for earlier in the night. As she was thanking Jameson Anita felt another echo of Jean-Claude's nausea and fought it off.

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Anita had been feeling nausea on and off throughout the night, and somehow she /knew/ it came from Jean-Claude. That only made it more urgent for her to see him, but Anita did her best to hide her concern from her lover - she didn't want to add to his worries.

As Anita let herself into the Circus she sensed yet another surge of nausea from Jean-Claude, this one so strong that she knew he had to be vomiting. She let herself into the Circus and made her way to his bathroom where she found Asher crouching beside Jean-Claude and holding his hair out of his face as he vomited up blood - something she'd only seen before when she was getting Damian out of the coffin Jean-Claude had left him in for six months.

"Stephen isn't powerful enough, you'll need to find someone else. Or Anita should do it for you."

The hardening of Asher's voice on the last sentence told Anita that he felt it was her duty to find someone powerful for Jean-Claude to feed on for some reason, and she hung back a bit to listen in if she could. She wasn't entirely certain why neither of them had noticed her, but she had a feeling they wouldn't be as open once they realised that she /was/ there.

"I haven't been able to sense her at all tonight." Jean-Claude sounded almost terrified. "I think I might have angered her when I asked her to see me. I probably inconvenienced her with my request. How can I ask her to do that for me? I don't even know how to tell her that..." He trailed off at that, unable to continue, apparently too scared.

"Tell me what?" Anita finally made her presence known, stepping forward. She had /not/ expected the reaction she got. Asher stood, backing away from Jean-Claude immediately, while he spun to face her on his knees and bowed to touch the floor with his forehead, wrists crossed behind his back.

"My Lady." He whispered the acknowledgement, puzzling and shocking Anita.

"What?" She shook her head, dismissing her initial reaction. "Get up Jean-Claude!" There was a snap of command in her voice, but it confused her even more when Jean-Claude kept his wrists crossed at the small of his back as he struggled to his feet with an uncharacteristic lack of grace, compounded by the way he kept his head bowed. Forcing her voice to gentleness she spoke. "Jean-Claude, do you want to brush your teeth and get the taste out of your mouth?" She waited until he nodded, keeping his eyes focused on the floor at her feet all the time before continuing. "Then do that and join me in the bedroom. And look at me when you tell me what it's so urgent that you talk to me about. Asher, I'm covered in blood, would you mind running me a bath for afterwards?"


"Very well Anita, but I would like to be there when Jean-Claude tells you."

"Come in with Jean-Claude then, but once he's told me I do need to get clean."

"I realise that. When I'm sure you won't react badly then I'll take care of that for you."

"What is it you think I'll react so badly to?" Anita was honestly puzzled, more so as she saw the way Jean-Claude was obeying her orders, head still bowed down, a slight tremble in his hands. "Never mind. Jean-Claude will tell me won't he?" Anita went back through to the bedroom and sat waiting in the single chair.

When he came through Jean-Claude did look at Anita, following instructions, but he knelt at her feet, gazing up at her, and Asher stood just slightly behind him, watching.

"Jean-Claude, please don't kneel to me. Stand up and explain why you wanted to see me." Anita stood herself, and helped Jean-Claude to his feet  probably unnecessary, but after she saw the way he'd struggled to stand last time she wanted to make sure he didn't embarrass himself the same way again.

"I'm pregnant with your child." Anita lifted her hand and slapped Jean-Claude across the face in reaction to that statement, impossible to her knowledge, it seemed a joke.

"When I push off my job on other people to come and talk to you because you say it's urgent I expect more than a ridiculous joke from you." Anita growled, barely noticing that it was only Asher's intervention that kept Jean-Claude from flying across the room. He looked gratefully at Asher, but he still went back to stand before Anita, to finish explaining.

"It is not a joke, I would not joke about this. It makes you my master, you own me totally." Jean-Claude had wrapped his arms around his belly protectively as he spoke, and when Anita lifted

her hand to grasp his chin he flinched, then with an obvious effort forced himself to stay still, to submit as she turned his head, first to inspect the bruise that was forming across half of his face, and then to force him to meet her eyes. He was scared of her, and she tried to minimise that, but she still didn't believe him.

"I can't believe that what you describe is possible. Vampires can't give birth ❖❖" and even if they could you're a man, men don't give birth." Faced with such total disbelief Jean-Claude broke down in tears. Asher immediately grabbed him and tried to comfort him.

"Of the six vampires who /can/ give birth only one is female. You can accept that Jean-Claude is ill I trust?"

"Yes, I've felt it myself. That's why I arranged to come here now."

"Well, even if you don't believe he is pregnant can you treat his belief as just another symptom until you have a chance to ask Damian about it?"

Given a practical suggestion Anita embraced it eagerly, and if Damian did confirm what Jean-Claude had said she would accept it, ridiculous as the idea of a pregnant male vampire seemed to her, much less one who was carrying her child. "What treatment does he need?"

"You need to get him to stop crying ❖❖" he's making himself worse. And he can't take blood from anyone less powerful than Jason, added to which he can only take a little blood at a time, a lot less than he needs, so you need to arrange for pomme de sangs of that power to be available throughout the night."

"I can manage that. Get him to sit down on the rug and go run that bath, he can feed on me in there." Once Jean-Claude was on the rug Anita managed to pull him into his arms and rocked him against her. He was apologising to her for being so weak, for displeasing her and she responded by reassuring him as well as she could. "It's alright. You haven't done anything wrong. I'm not angry with you, I promise. I love you no matter what, I swear it." She kept on repeating those simple words until he accepted them and fell silent. While she was repeating the reassurances by rote she thought about her people, Nathaniel and Cherry were both weaker than Jason, but Zane was his equal in power, or perhaps a little stronger. She'd get Zane and Micah to help, and if she had time she'd let Jean-Claude feed on her when he woke up. After Jean-Claude had calmed down she took them both to bathe together and let him feed, as they enjoyed each other, finally taking him to bed with her. Just before she managed to get to sleep one fact occurred to her ❖❖" Jean-Claude had become more and more focused on her pleasure, even at the expense of his own since a month or so before Musette arrived ❖❖" the incident with Asher had been just that an isolated incident, atypical for him and carried out at Anita's insistence.

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When he woke up the next night Jean-Claude's first thought was to get somewhere he could throw up quickly. Anita's arm was lying across his body but he threw that aside in his rush to get to the toilet, and once there he collapsed to his knees in front of it and threw up. The only mercy was that at least he wasn't vomiting good blood ❖❖" it was just really stomach acids and bile, but that made it /feel/ even worse.

When he heard the sound of Anita moving around in the bedroom he felt a wave of terror come over him, with the knowledge that he'd woken his master up. His left cheek was still aching and bruised in a brutal reminder of his new status and he couldn't bring himself to move from where he knelt, even knowing that it could anger her even more to be made to find him. It always had angered his masters more when he tried to hide from their rage, but very rarely hiding had allowed him to avoid punishment if they were just looking for someone to take their anger at other targets out on.

"Jean-Claude?" He heard her voice, heard the concern in it ❖❖" but he didn't see it in Anita's face because he'd prostrated himself as soon as he knew she was going to come into the bathroom in an attempt to appease her. He didn't feel her worry that he was sick again because she hadn't thought to /allow/ him to feel it. All he knew was that he'd woken his master with his weakness. "Get up!" It was a curt order and Jean-Claude automatically assumed that the tone came from anger, that he'd displeased Anita by the very act of submission intended to calm her. He obeyed but kept his head bowed, letting his hair, the hair he'd grown to please Anita ❖❖" and in retrospect that should have been the first warning sign, that he wanted so much to please her and meet with her approval, fall obscuring his face. He thought he was prepared for what his master would do to him, but he felt only shock when she reached out and lifted his chin so she could see his face.

He stayed silent doing his best not to shiver as she turned his face to the right and traced one finger over the bruise on his cheek.

"Why hasn't this healed?" He could tell that she genuinely didn't understand and he allowed himself the comfort of believing that she'd grant him healing from whatever injuries she chose to inflict immediately in the future, at least as a rule. The only other vampire he'd met who was capable of bearing children, Regulus, had told him that /his/ master often left him unhealed for weeks on end ❖❖" and he had the bruises to prove it.

"Because you did not permit it to. From now on any injuries I receive at your hands will not heal until you explicitly say that you wish them to."

"Then I wish for this to heal when you drink from me. Do you think you'll be able to keep it down if you feed now?"

"If I can feed while we bathe together then yes."

"Run a hot bath then. I can feed the ardeur as well." As Jean-Claude moved to obey Anita asked another question. "Why did you react like that when I came in? Why did you bow down that way and refuse to look at me? And why do you feel so scared of me?"

Jean-Claude didn't dare pause from obeying Anita's orders to answer, but he could still explain while he did what she had told him to. "I woke you. I thought you were angry with me and I hoped a display of submission would appease your anger. And I can't tell anything about how you're feeling, not the way I used to be able to."

"Do you really think I'd hurt you because you woke me up?" Jean- Claude bit his lip before responding, the fury in Anita's voice undeniable.

"No, but most of my previous masters would. And my situation changed so totally when I realised /why/ I became a *sourdre de sang* during Musette's visit that I fell back on old habits, on reacting the way I did when I belonged to Julian, or to Belle Morte." He glanced to check that the tub was at least half full and then he tried to distract Anita the only way he could think of. He'd worn pyjamas to please her ❖❖" he never had understood why she wanted her lovers dressed when they slept with her, but he had enough sense to accept it. He unbuttoned his shirt and let it fall to the floor at his feet, carefully not trying to entice, making what he was doing seem as commonplace as he could, afraid that if Anita thought he was trying to seduce her she would be truly angered and refuse to allow him to feed on her. He didn't look directly at her as he loosened the tie keeping his pants up, instead glancing down to the knot at his waist, but he did note the effect his actions had on his master when he let his pants fall to the floor around his ankles and stepped out of them. "And I know you are not a cruel master, but I do not know what behaviour you require of those who serve you." He knew he sounded pathetic, that was the entire idea, but he knew that manipulating Anita was a risky proposition ❖❖" she could hurt him very badly, and

would if she realised what he was doing.

"I won't hurt you just because you wake me up. I promise you that. I won't hurt you unless I have good reason ♦♦" like endangering someone else under my protection." Jean-Claude wondered a little about Anita's choice of phrase, it implied that /he/ was under her protection himself, which was what he'd been aiming for. "Now get in that bath and pleasure me. Then you can explain what else makes you believe that you are pregnant. I /will/ ask Damian about this, if he tells me it is possible then I will accept it, but it seems a little..."

"Fantastical master? I felt that way the first time, the only time, I saw a pregnant vampire. Do you want information on what this will mean for you as well?"

"Not yet." Anita had been casual about undressing and she pulled him into the bath, caressing his hair with one hand. "You can tell me that ♦♦" and about this other pregnant vampire ♦♦" once I've accepted this." There weren't any words for a while after that.

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Anita wasn't entirely convinced that vampires could have healthy children, nor that Jean-Claude was pregnant, but she /was/ certain that he was ill and couldn't hold down blood from anyone weaker than Jason. She made certain to act on her implicit promise and asked those of her pard who she considered strong enough if they'd be willing to let Jean-Claude feed on them. Only Zane and Micah agreed, but hopefully with her aid it would be enough. And if it wasn't she could probably force Elizabeth if the leopard defied her, or ask among the wolves.

The next issue was finding out whether Jean-Claude had been telling the truth, and to find that out she waited for Damian to rise for the night.

"Anita, you said you wanted to speak with Damian when he rose?" Nathaniel had been left down in the basement, for Anita's servant to feed on when he woke.

"Yes, thanks. I'd rather no one was around to overhear, it's almost embarrassing, and certainly something that needs to be kept private." Anita picked up a radio, she did know that a simple trick like that would help confuse anyone who did overhear by accident.

"I could make sure no one comes down the stairs, wait outside the door for you?" Nathaniel had his own ideas, and Anita definitely approved.

"Please." They went to the basement where Anita left Nathaniel on guard as he suggested, then went down into the basement. She set up the radio first, to make sure no one could make sense of what they overheard while Damian watched her curiously.

"Anita?" Damian sounded puzzled. "Nathaniel said you wanted to talk to me?"

"Yes, but I don't want to be overheard. It's a rather delicate matter. An obscure...ability on the part of some vampires I was unaware of." Anita wasn't too bothered that she hadn't known it was possible for vampires to give birth, if it was true, it was only one of many things she hadn't known about before she became involved with Jean-Claude, and not something he would have wanted to bring up.

"I'm not sure how much use I'll be Anita, but I will try to help."

"There were two female vampires in St. Louis who gave birth, but not to healthy human offspring. What do you know about vampires giving birth to human children?"

"There's only five vampires alive who /can/ and they've all been claimed, they can't give birth to

children by anyone but their master. Unless...is Jean-Claude pregnant? I know there's a power boost during pregnancy, that's one reason the council forbade any vampire who can give birth from challenging for a council seat. Of course the reason they /gave/ was that any vampire who gives birth to a child is totally submissive to the 'father' of their children. And Jean-Claude is very young to be a source de sang."

"Yes, Jean-Claude told me he's pregnant with my child. I didn't believe him until you confirmed that it's possible. How much do you know about this? And how do you know it for that matter?"

"One of She-Who-Made-Me's friends had a vampire as a mate. That is to say he had a vampire lover who could give birth to his children. They are always referred to as someone's mate. Whoever impregnates them is referred to as a Sire, She-Who-Made-Me had an alliance with the Sire Hugo, he only has one mate, Regulus. He wanted more. Enkil has three mates, he found vampires with mate potential, and got them pregnant. You know that if a Sire hurts his mate ♦♦ and you're the first female Sire ♦♦ the mate cannot heal without the Sire's permission? Hugo used to like leaving Regulus with bruises and worse for weeks, sometimes months. Regulus gives birth to one child every ten years ♦♦ he says it's better than the first century after Hugo claimed him ♦♦ then he was kept almost constantly pregnant. A Sire will live, and cannot be killed so long as any descendants from the children he had by his mate live."

"What you're saying is that it's usually an abusive relationship?"

"As far as I know yes."

"But why would any mate put up with that? I know that Jean-Claude wouldn't have, at least not until he got pregnant."

"They are changed the first time they carry a child. They lose the ability to refuse whoever claims them, among other things, and they /have/ to be claimed by someone. They become vulnerable in ways the rest of us aren't."

"So I have to protect Jean-Claude more. I can deal with that. I might want to pick your brains again, but I'll ask Jean-Claude a few things first. Thank you."

"You are welcome. Anita, I know a little about how to deal with a mate's pregnancy, Hugo used to get me to help with Regulus when he was pregnant ♦♦ he also used to rape me then, which is one reason I'm homophobic. With your permission I'd like to move back into the Circus to help Jean-Claude through this."

"You have it." Anita was grateful that Damian was being supportive of her lover ♦♦ she didn't have the faintest idea of what Jean-Claude would need while he was carrying her child. "You can come with me at seven. Can you get packed by then?"

"Yes, if I can start now." Anita recognised the dismissal and left, slightly amused by it.

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"Anita?" Jean-Claude made sure to put a question in his voice, but not to explicitly ask what Damian was doing with her, carrying his luggage.

"Damian says he's got some experience with pregnant vampires ♦♦ he said he used to help one when he was pregnant. So he's moving in with you to give you some help and some idea of what to expect."

"Where do you want me to put him then?" Jean-Claude half thought she'd say that her vampire servant was to share his bed, but he wanted her to be explicit, so that he'd /know/ what she



expected of him.



"The closest available bedroom to yours. If you think you can get away with kicking someone out then you can if you're willing to, but I don't expect it."

"Meng Die left shortly after Musette did, Damian can take her bedroom. It's two doors along from mine." Jean-Claude didn't speak very loudly, nor did he look directly at Anita or her servant, choosing to instead glance from beneath lowered eyelids.

"Right. Damian, you know where to go then?"



"Yes Anita." Damian took that as a dismissal, Jean-Claude would not have and for a second he envied Damian his confidence and comfort level with Anita as his master.

"Jean-Claude." When he looked to Anita again he realised she had sat on one of the armchairs in the living room and he immediately knelt at her feet, hoping that was what she wanted. It seemed to be, as she caressed his face and neck with one hand, petting him, as if he were an animal. "I need to know some more about this, would you like to keep it as secret as possible, or are you comfortable with people knowing?"



"I would prefer that no one outside my inner circle find out, at least in the city, but we will have to tell the council at some point   between when I start to show and the birth, and you are required to present your child before them, only the first child, along with proof that you have claimed me."

"I see. So we should continue this in your bedroom. Come." Jean-Claude repressed a shiver at the peremptory command and followed Anita a step behind and half a step to the right. When she sat in the room's only chair he curled at her feet, waiting for the axe to fall. She petted him gently for a while, calming him. Jean-Claude was half tempted to bury his head in her lap and use his tongue to pleasure her, to put off the orders he feared were coming, but he feared even more that to do so would anger her. And so he did nothing, merely waited for instructions.

"Jean-Claude do you have any idea /why/ this happened now?"

"Not entirely. I do know that I must have had mate potential from the time I was brought over, and for some reason you managed to activate it, making me pregnant with my first child. I do not know what made that time different from any other. But you will be able to decide when I carry any future children   simply by telling me that you wish me to carry another child before you lie with me from what I understand." Jean-Claude bit his lip and sat back on his heels before he continued. "You will marry me won't you ma petite?"

"Why are you asking me this?" Anita didn't sound angry, she simply didn't understand his reasons.

"Until you claim me there are spells that can be used by /anyone/ with enough magic to control me, or force me to bear their children   and I can be claimed by anyone whose child I have conceived. Once I am claimed as yours no one will be able to touch me sexually without your explicit permission, nor can I bear any other's children. Marriage is one way for you to claim me, the easiest way from my point of view."

"What other options do you know of?"

"Piercings, a collar, branding, tattoos, the sort of thing you did to Damian /might/ work, I do not know."

"Your nipples are too sensitive to be pierced now, the navel is dangerous during pregnancy, and

the ears don't feel right. I will not put you in a collar, or brand or mark you like livestock or a slave and I'm not sure I can duplicate what I did with Damian. Let me think about it. For now tell me what three things you are most scared of about being my mate."

"That you could make me carry children without any break between them, force me to have another child as soon as I've given birth. The thought that you could leave me with whatever damage you choose to inflict on me forever if you wanted to. And the idea of being lent to others as a sex toy." Jean-Claude was trembling as he recounted the nightmares that haunted him.

"Right. I will /not/ let anyone but me and Asher sleep with you, I'm far too possessive for that. I won't make you bear any children unless you ask to. I'll let any injury more severe than a bruise heal within no more than twenty-four hours of infliction, I retain the option of leaving bruises there for up to a week." Jean-Claude was overjoyed that his master was being so generous, he was in no mood to challenge her ❖❖" not that he could. "Write a contract that covers those three points and whatever you consider your duties to apply for the next century only. I'll sign it and so can you. We'll swear vows with three witnesses each, immediately before we sign the contract. I think that will work for my claiming you. If it doesn't we can find something else. You can write the vows. Bring the vows to me for approval, but take the contract to Damian, I'll tell him what I want." Jean-Claude felt a flash of surprise that she thought something so simple would suffice, but he knew better than to question her.

"Yes master. Do you wish me to start now?"

"No, of course not. Tell me, do you have any questions about making our vows?"

"I'd like Asher as one of my witnesses, and one of us should choose Richard, to maintain the unity of our triumvirate. Will you do that or shall I?"

"I'll have to get back to you on that one, once I've decided on my witnesses, have Asher by all means."

"Thank you." Jean-Claude smiled up at his master, and he wasn't surprised at all when she decided to take him.

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Jean-Claude knocked at Richard's door, nervous about telling the werewolf that he would be exchanging vows with Anita, something the Ulfric would certainly interpret as a marriage, when she'd refused Richard. He was all too aware of how vulnerable he was to Richard, that until Anita did claim him he'd be vulnerable to anyone linked to her ❖❖" not that that would change afterwards, but at least then he'd be safe from rape.

"Come in." Richard opened the door to him. Jean-Claude had wanted to meet somewhere neutral, closer to public, so the Ulfric would have to control his temper. He /knew/ that Richard would react badly and he was dreading it.

Jean-Claude moved forward past Richard and sat in an armchair, one arm lying casually across his belly in an unobtrusively protective gesture. When he realised what he was doing it was a slight shock to him, and he realised just how much his body language was changing. Richard sat down himself before asking why Jean-Claude was here.

"What did you need to talk to me about so urgently? I know there's nothing wrong with the pack, is there some sort of problem with the vampires?"

"No, it is rather more personal than that. But it will affect the dynamics of the Triumvirate, in a number of ways, for more than one reason."

"What is it then?" Richard sounded impatient, and Jean-Claude did his best not to flinch, not to betray how much the increasingly unstable werewolf scared him.

"First I belong to Anita now. She owns me totally and I can no more disobey her than Damian can. This will obviously affect the balance of power among us, and it is entirely possible that Anita will be able to call wolves as well as leopards. I thought you should have some warning, and Anita did not disagree."

"What else?" From Richard's tone Jean-Claude could tell that he was not happy about what he'd learned, and the vampire knew that he would be even more displeased by the next thing he had to say.





"Anita is claiming me as her mate by swearing vows with me in a weeks time, on Monday."

"You mean she's marrying you?" Richard pulled Jean-Claude to his feet, then tossed him across the room. Jean-Claude tried his best to make sure his belly was protected, that his child would be safe. Only then did he consider trying to reduce the damage he would suffer himself. In the end it was mainly his shoulders that took the brunt of slamming against the wall, and he struggled to his feet before Richard got to him. When the Ulfric hit him it almost broke his jaw, and /did/ shatter his cheekbone, and the fact that Jean-Claude didn't even try to defend himself shocked Richard enough that he calmed down a little.



"Why would she agree to marry /you/?" Unspoken was the corollary, 'when she wouldn't marry me'.

"It isn't exactly marriage, not in any conventional sense. I'm vowing to obey her; she's vowing to protect me. We'll also be signing a contract; it gives me some protection from the things I fear most about being Anita's mate. This is happening because I'm pregnant with Anita's child, it's rare but it can happen. That's what makes me her mate, and why I have no choice but to obey her, I need three witnesses, I was hoping you'd agree to be one."

"Who else do you have?"

"Apart from you and Nathaniel we decided to keep witnesses to those who already knew I'm pregnant. Anita chose Damian, Jason and Nathaniel, because he might have overheard  " he was standing guard when she asked Damian if it was possible. I wanted you to support me, Asher is one of my witnesses, and the other is Hannah  " I sent her for pregnancy tests to see if I was right when I first suspected." As Jean-Claude spoke Richard took hold of his shoulders and guided him back to sit down on the couch, the vampire carefully compliant.

"Yes, I'll be a witness for you. Is there anything else I can do for you? Do you want help getting out of this?"

"No, I belong to Anita for all eternity now  " and I'm glad of it. I don't have to worry about being challenged, or anyone thinking I could be a threat to their position. I've been taken out of a lot of the politicking, but I still have my lands, and will, until, or unless Anita decides to take them from me."

"You're happy to be a slave?" Richard plainly couldn't understand that, but Jean-Claude had never expected him to.

"To be Anita's slave, yes. She isn't abusive, and I /can/ manipulate her if I need to. She'll honour the promises of protection I've made too. My primary motivation has always been safety, mine and that of those I care for, and that's what she offers."

"I've told you what you need to know. I should go now." Jean-Claude stood, ready to leave.

"What about...?" Richard gestured vaguely towards Jean-Claude's cheek ♦♦♦ he seemed to recognise that it might not be good for the Master of the City to be seen with so much damage.

"I can hide it with glamor." Jean-Claude forced himself to stand and move with his customary grace rather than awkwardly as the pain in his back would dictate. He forced himself to smile at the Ulfric. "It's not important, and I will heal once I have a chance to feed." Richard ignored the hint, and Jean-Claude decided not to press it any further ♦♦♦ if the werewolf /wanted/ to explain to Anita why he'd been beating her mate that was his affair.

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It had been two weeks since Anita had decided how she was going to claim Jean-Claude as her mate. The very thought put a warm feeling in her belly, on some level Anita /liked/ the fact that she now owned Jean-Claude. But at the same time she found it disgusting, and disturbing just how subservient he tended to be to her since he'd learned he was pregnant. In an effort to alleviate the feeling that she was taking advantage of Jean-Claude by swearing vows with him and signing a contract to bond him to her Anita had left it to him to prepare the contract, only asking that he have Damian check it over. She had inspected the vows, they were simple, but rather one-sided in many ways. Still Jean-Claude seemed to be happy with them, so she would accept that.

From what she understood of the things Jean-Claude had talked to her about he liked the idea of being owned ♦♦♦ at least owned by her. And so the necklace she'd ordered for him, which had started out as a joke, wasn't a joke any more, she thought it was serious to her mate.

Anita smiled as the jeweller showed her the piece that had just come in, held in a display box. It was an 18ct white gold curb chain with a rectangular piece of metal as a pendant, one engraved with the words 'property of Anita Blake'. The engraving was in a simple style, unfussy, and there was a very plain border around the edge, simply a double line in a box to enclose the words.

"It's perfect. And what about the other thing?" She meant the rings she'd ordered, again in 18ct white gold, but this time each with three square-cut sapphires set in flush with the ring itself on each of them. Effectively they were wedding rings, but Anita had no intention of using them as such, certainly not of wearing hers all the time. She planned to give Jean-Claude's ring to him in private before they exchanged vows and to wear it for that, but otherwise for the most part she would leave her ring with Jean-Claude, so that he knew she would come back for it.

"Here are the rings. Are you getting married? I was wondering why your fiancé wasn't with you."


"No, I'm not getting married. It's more like a commitment ceremony."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I just thought that this was a man's ring." The old man lifted the lid on one of the ring boxes.

"It is, but it isn't a marriage. You've done good work. Thanks, how much do I owe you?" The jeweller named a figure and Anita wrote a check without hesitation before leaving.

Damian was waiting for her with the contract Jean-Claude had written when she got back to the Circus ♦♦♦ Anita hadn't moved in the way Damian had, but she was spending a lot of time there and she'd asked to see Jean-Claude after he'd spoken to Richard, so she'd have a read on his reaction.

"Anita, I know you said you wanted me to take care of the contract, that you trusted me to look after your interests, but I really think you ought to read this. I don't have the option of rejecting it,

not according to the criteria you gave me." Having Jean-Claude to look after seemed to be good for the red-haired vampire, he was standing up for himself and for other people a lot more now. Anita took the contract and read it over  not just once or twice but three times before she could believe it.

"I'll talk to Jean-Claude about it when he gets back. Send him to his bedroom immediately."

"Yes Anita." The necromancer took the ring boxes with her, she'd left the necklace in the car, to hide it from Jean-Claude, but she was going to give his ring to Jean-Claude today.

"You wished to see me ma petite?" Jean-Claude had dropped his glamor, but he did his best to hide the damage to his face by bowing his head and letting his hair fall to cover it. Anita recognised his evasive tactics and reached out to jerk his chin up so she could see what he was hiding.

"Who did this to you? And how did it happen?"

"I cannot defend myself at all against anyone who is linked with you my Lady, not unless you give me specific permission."

"Then you have my permission to defend yourself against everyone who is linked to me. I do not want to see you like this again."

"That will not work, you need to name the people who I am permitted to defend myself against."

"Then you can defend yourself against Micah, Merle, Noah, Zane, Caleb, Elizabeth, Gina, Vivian, Gregory, Nathaniel, Violet, Damian...who else do you need permission to defend yourself against?"

"Asher, and Richard."

"You have permission to defend yourself against Asher and Richard then. Richard was the one who hurt you, wasn't he?"

"He saw the vows we will be making as marriage, and he was angered that you would make them with me. He stopped as soon as he realised I could not defend myself, and it will heal soon enough if you permit me to feed."

Anita wasn't convinced, but she nodded in acknowledgement, dismissing the matter, although she vowed to 'discuss' the way he'd treated her mate with Richard. "I've just read the contract you wrote. What exactly were you thinking of?"

'Bonding Contract

'For a period of one century, starting from 24th September 1997 Jean- Claude will obey Anita Blake without question, and submit to her totally with the following three provisos.

'1. He will not have sex with anyone except for Asher and Anita Blake.

'2. Excluding any damage suffered during sex, which will heal at the normal rate.

'a) Any injuries more severe than bruises that Anita Blake inflicts on him will be permitted to heal within a day.

'b) Any bruises will be permitted to heal within a week.

'3. Any future children will be conceived at Jean-Claude's request. Anita Blake has the right to refuse these requests, but she may not compel him to bear offspring.

'This contract will be renewed before expiry and may therefore be superseded.'

"That if I didn't explicitly state your full rights it might not work. I do not wish to be left vulnerable." Jean-Claude's voice was low and frightened. Anita hadn't realised just how very scared he was about what she was doing, and so she reluctantly accepted his choice of contracts ♦♦♦ which when she thought about it only described the relationship they already had. Anita changed her mind about giving the ring to her lover today, she decided instead to leave it for just before the ceremony.

"Very well. Come here." She pulled him into her arms and pressed her wrist to his mouth, letting him take the blood he needed ♦♦♦ she'd found that /now/ she could do that and let him feed as often as he needed to, she healed perfectly from his teeth in minutes. Once Jean-Claude had satisfied himself with her blood she began exploring his body, and it moved on to sex, that they could feed the ardeur together.

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Jean-Claude smiled appreciatively when he saw Anita two hours before they were to exchange vows. She'd agreed to let him dress her up for the ceremony, and even given him free rein provided he chose colours within a limited palette she had selected.

He was wearing full court dress, from the time he had spent as a paramour at the French court before he died, in dark blue and an equally dark shade of blue-green with silver edging, and he'd dressed Anita to match him. He had the feeling that she would be displeased that he had even added a corset to her outfit, but it was probably the last chance he would ever have to get her into one, and she looked incredible in it. He'd even managed to convince her to let him put her hair up, and now he had the chance to do so.

"You look beautiful ma petite. I am very fortunate to belong to you." Jean-Claude gazed at Anita with worship in his eyes, he knew that she was much kinder than any of the other Sires, even Inanna's Severus hadn't been willing to give her the sort of reassurances Anita had offered him.

"Compared to you how can I be considered beautiful?" It was obviously a rhetorical question so Jean-Claude remained silent. "But there's something I wanted to give to you before we exchange vows. Here." She held out a ring, a match for the one she wore on her left ring finger. They were both white gold, set with three sapphires, square cut and set into the rings so the jewels were flush with the metal. And now it was apparent why she had specified the colours she had. "Wear it at the ceremony, and on formal occasions in future, the way I'm wearing mine."

"Thank you my Lady. Might I tend to your hair now?" Jean-Claude couldn't think of anything else to say as, while he obeyed her, sliding his ring onto his left ring finger, he deliberately projected his gratitude and adoration to her through their link.

"Go ahead. I don't want anything too fancy though." Anita sat in front of him waiting for him to do as he wanted. Jean-Claude brushed through her hair, and then began pinning it up in a mass of curls which fell artfully over her left shoulder.

"Does this please you?"

"Oh yes, you are good. Did you ever do this for Julianna?"

"Sometimes, yes. But I learned it before I met her." Jean-Claude carefully didn't say that he'd learned how to dress a woman's hair to please one of his many masters. Anita turned to smile up

at him and reached up to hug and kiss him deeply.

"I've got a hotel booked for tonight and tomorrow night for us. It is safe for you to stay there during the day, I made certain of that."

"My thanks my Lady." Jean-Claude stepped back, lowering his eyes to the ground. He was actually dreading what would happen after they'd exchanged vows, intellectually he knew that things wouldn't change for him, but Anita hadn't required that he share her bed for the past few days, and it had been a relief, he didn't really feel like having sex with anyone.

They moved through to a small room that Anita had set up for them, there was only an altar with a gold bowl, the one she'd once used to catch his blood, and Richard's and hers after their first attempt at triumvirate magic, a knife, one with a silver blade and an ornamented hilt, two quill pens, from a raven's black feathers and their bonding contract lying on top of it. Their witnesses stood waiting on either side, Asher, Richard and Hannah to the left, Damian, Jason and Nathaniel to the right.

"Give me your left hand." When Jean-Claude obeyed Anita held his wrist over the bowl, pushing the sleeve back and picking up the knife to cut open his wrist. "Make your vow."

"I swear to obey you as long as I live." Jean-Claude's voice was low and breathy, he was nervous, Anita hadn't given him any instructions beforehand.

"Do you three witness this?" This time Anita addressed herself to Asher, Richard and Hannah.

"We witness it." Anita released her mate's arm and instead held out hers, wrist over the bowl so it would catch the blood.

"Jean-Claude, cut my wrist open, as you do so ask me to make my vow. When I've made it ask if they" a jerk of her head indicated Damian, Jason and Nathaniel, "witness this. Use the same words I did."

"Yes Anita." Jean-Claude lifted the knife and used it as directed. "Make your vow."

"I swear to protect you as long as you live." Anita sounded cool and collected, confident in her ability to protect her lover.

"Do you three witness this?" Jean-Claude looked over to Damian, Nathaniel and Jason, waiting for their verdict.

"We witness it." Once they had spoken Anita lifted a white gold necklace from a pouch at her belt and fastened it around Jean-Claude's neck.

"I had a gift made for you Jean-Claude." When he looked at the pendant piece he read the words 'property of Anita Blake', and it made him feel safe that he wore a tangible sign of Anita's ownership.

"Thank you my Lady." He kept his gaze below hers, carefully submissive.

"It is nothing." She picked up the quills and handed one to him. "We sign in blood, and together." Jean-Claude dipped his quill in their mingled blood and obediently signed his name on the right hand side of the contract as Anita signed on the left. "Our witnesses must sign now, in our mingled blood, and in pairs." Asher and Damian signed first, then Richard and Jason, and finally Hannah and Nathaniel.

"You may keep this my love." Anita picked the contract up carefully and handed it to Jean-

Claude. "As for what blood remains, do with it as you please. We are leaving." Anita addressed her last words to their witnesses as she firmly led her mate out of the room.

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Anita let Jean-Claude go in the bathroom first, she knew he would spend ages there, soaking in the bath for as long as he thought he could get away with, and she used the time to prepare the room. She'd specifically requested an inside room, one with no windows for anyone to climb through - although the hotel staff thought that was because her companion was a vampire. She'd also asked to have the bed against the wall opposite the door, so she'd be able to stay between it and her mate, protecting him. She stowed a gun beneath the pillow, loaded, but with the safety on, and fastened a special holster to the headboard to accommodate her Browning. Then she hid two of her knives beneath the mattress, and another two went on the bedside table. After that all Anita had to do was wait for Jean-Claude to come out, he was onto drying his hair, so it wasn't likely to take more than another half an hour.

When he came back into the bedroom Anita smiled happily at the sight of him in the outfit she had chosen for him. It consisted of a close fitting black silk jumpsuit, leaving nothing to the imagination, and half a dozen layers of diaphanous robes, again in silk, but much finer and in shades of blue to compliment his eyes. Rather than a zipper, or buttons it was held closed by lacing it up from the groin to the neck. Anita had wanted to give her mate something for /her/ to strip from his body, rather than let him give her something to strip from hers. He still wore the necklace she had given him, proclaiming her ownership, and he kept his eyes cast down modestly, and his arms crossed in front of his midsection in a pose that had nothing of seduction in it.

Anita turned back a corner of the sheet and watched as Jean-Claude walked forward and climbed into bed. Once he was actually in bed she went through to take her turn in the bathroom - she brushed her teeth and took a quick shower with no effort to wash her hair. When she returned she found her mate had pulled the covers up to near his chin.

"I will enjoy undressing you to partake of the bounty of your body, you are beautiful, and your touch is something to be treasured." For a second Jean-Claude's fingers tightened on the sheet he was holding to his body, and he seemed to mouth the word 'No', but then he appeared to relax and lay back, smiling an uncertain smile.

"I am here for your satisfaction my Lady, please take your pleasure of me."

Something about that turn of phrase bothered her, but she ignored it and moved forward to join her lover in the bed, pulling the sheet back to expose him and exploring his body with her hands. As she stripped off the outermost of his robes Anita realised that Jean-Claude was /not/ comfortable or happy about what she was doing, instead he was surrendering to what was morally, if not legally, rape. She knew it had happened to him before, but only intellectually, she hadn't understood it in her heart, now she did, Anita saw that there was a stiffness and reluctance to Jean-Claude's body she had never seen before. Jean-Claude had always had a high sex drive, as high as Anita's without the ardeur pushing her, or perhaps a bit higher.

"Jean-Claude, did you try to refuse me earlier?"

"Y-yes. I am sorry, for a moment I forgot that it is my place to please you, my desires do not come into it."

"You are wrong there. I don't want you to sleep with me from duty. If you don't want to have sex tell me, and I won't force you."

"You have the right to take me to your bed any time you wish it. I can serve your pleasure



whether I have any interest in sex or not. I am perfectly willing to do so. It wouldn't be rape, my Lady."

"Yes it would. I know that you can't say no to me, and that makes it rape. Do you know /why/ you aren't interested?"

"No, but I think it is because I am carrying your child. Damian said that sometimes when he was pregnant Regulus wouldn't want to have sex at all."

"Not that his wishes would have made any difference to Hugo, or would they?"

"No, as far as Hugo was concerned Regulus was nothing but property, something to use as he pleased, not a person who had an opinion about how he was treated. I met Hugo once or twice, and Regulus as well, I counted myself lucky that Belle Morte never agreed to lend me to him, now I have one more reason to be grateful for that fact."

"Yes, I suppose you do at that. I won't force you, I have other ways to take my pleasure, other people I can lie with if I need to. I refuse to rape you my lovely one."

"Thank you my Lady." Anita kissed Jean-Claude and pulled him into her arms, snuggling against his body, then let herself begin to sleep.

She was woken up later by the feel of Jean-Claude's tongue between her legs, arousing her expertly.

"What are you doing?" Anita twined her hand in Jean-Claude's hair to jerk his head up to meet her eyes.

"Forgive me, the ardeur..."

"You need to feed, I see. This does not upset you?"

"I love you. I am content to offer you pleasure, it does not hurt me, and it is hardly as if you are forcing me." He shrugged casually and then made to go back to his work. Anita noticed then that Jean-Claude had already let the outer layers of robes fall from his body, so he was just wearing the jumpsuit.

"Didn't you like the robes that went with that?"

"I did like them, they are beautiful, and probably fun to get out of, but they got in the way. Do you find me pleasing in them?"

"Yes, I've got another three sets on order actually, the jumpsuits are all in black, but one set of robes is red, one's purple and the third's black. It's all in silk, so nightwear, or perhaps formalwear."

"It might be better if you, or I, had some done in wool for the jumpsuit, and cotton, or linen for the robes if you wish that to be my attire on formal occasions."

"I think I do, and go ahead." Anita smiled as Jean-Claude took that as approval of his earlier actions and returned to them, when she thought about it she felt a stirring of desire and the ardeur flared, so she let him feed and fed herself at the same time.


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Jean-Claude stood alone on a hill, looking out over the city. He'd pretended that it was /his/ city,

his territory, but if he was honest it never had been, instead it had been a gift from Anita's hands. All the power and position he held was a gift from his master's hands, or at least that was how it felt.

He knew it wasn't accurate, but he'd been taught that a mate was nothing more than a piece of property, his power dependent on how many children he carried for his owner. Any other vampire he met would dismiss him as nothing more than Anita's bedtoy, and broodmare. The vampire was so wrapped up in his brooding that he didn't notice someone coming up behind him until he heard the start of a spell. He spun in place, but he didn't get a chance to see whoever it was before the spell took effect and he collapsed to the ground unconscious.

When Jean-Claude woke up he was naked, chained to the ceiling of a stone room by his wrists, and his ankles had been chained to the floor far enough apart that his legs were spread so wide he was totally off balance. He heard spellcasting again and shivered at the thought of what would surely happen.

"Shut your eyes." Jean-Claude hadn't expected that command, he didn't recognise the voice or the scent  his kidnapper had drenched himself in a dozen competing scents, enough to overpower his own scent, and there were spells, fairly simple ones to change a voice, not to mention even simpler human machines that did exactly the same thing.

He felt a short body, too hot to be anything but a lycanthrope, pressing up against him as his captor reached to fasten a blindfold around his eyes. Those hands wandered down his body, to first circle then pinch at his nipples, when he shivered at the initial touch. A soft whimper came from his lips. The unseen man took that as an invitation to explore further. The hands stroked down his ribs and rested for a moment on his hips before sliding over his groin. Jean-Claude felt an intense sense of relief when he realised his assailant /couldn't/ touch him there. He didn't have any better luck exploring the vampire's ass and Jean-Claude could almost taste his fury.

The vampire strained to hear what was happening while he was tied up and the man was moving about.

"This isn't a claim, I can't find a claim on your body, so how in hell is it that I can't touch you?" The shapeshifter hit Jean-Claude across the face with what felt like a chain and pendant, from his words it had to be the necklace Anita had given him. The vampire heard the chain drop to the floor and knew that something bad was going to happen.

A fist slammed into his midsection and Jean-Claude couldn't prevent himself vomiting as his fear came to the fore. His captor stepped back and cursed. Jean-Claude grabbed the chance to do /something/ to protect his child, however little. He concentrated on heightening the lycanthrope's distaste for the fact that Jean-Claude had just thrown up all over him in an effort to discourage him from repeating his actions.

It worked, in a way. His captor left him for a few moments, walking away and out of the room. But the lycanthrope swiftly returned, and though Jean-Claude tried he couldn't recognise the animal from his scent. He really should have expected the whip, was all that he could think of when he first felt its bite across his back. All sadists seemed to be fascinated by the few scars on his back from his mortal life and they /all/ liked to use whips on him as a result, sometimes as a warm-up, or a side-dish, but sometimes as the main course. His current tormentor concentrated on his back at first, but moved to cover most of his body, paying particular attention to the still tight abdomen. Jean-Claude managed to stifle his screams, but he was moaning enough to satisfy almost anyone, but when the whip caught his right nipple making it bleed he /couldn't/ stifle his scream. The shapeshifter paused, Jean-Claude sensed his sudden arousal and seized the tiny opportunity, he did everything he could to increase his kidnapper's arousal and desire.

Jean-Claude /hated/ using his body like that, but for his child...And it would let him feed through

the ardeur when he couldn't on blood ❖❖“ he wouldn't /lose/ the energy from the ardeur either. The shapeshifter began to play with Jean-Claude's nipples, just touching at first, then nipping and biting and then tearing. He didn't just use his mouth and fingers of course, but metal clamps and needles too.

When Jean-Claude was released from the chains holding him up he didn't have the strength to do more than collapse to the floor, there wasn't an unmarked inch of skin on his body. It hurt as the man jerked off onto him, but at least he'd been able to feed the ardeur, it would substitute for blood, at least for a little while.

By the time Jean-Claude could move the shapeshifter had left the room. He pushed the blindfold out of his eyes and looked around groping desperately for the necklace that marked him as Anita's. This was the first time it had been off his neck since Anita had given it to him and he felt a touch of panic at the prospect of losing it. When he found the necklace it was lying in a pool of vomit, but he clutched it so hard the metal tag cut into his hand.

Jean-Claude's head snapped up and towards the door when he heard someone approaching. He wrapped his necklace around his wrist and curled to protect his belly and his unborn child.

Jean-Claude felt gentle hands use a soft cloth to clean him up a little. He bit his lip and let the vampire, the mate, for he could sense the sort of power he'd only ever felt from the Earthmover and Regulus before, move him.

"Regulus?" He was almost naked, wearing only a thin, almost transparent pair of pants and the nipple rings Hugo had used to mark him.

"I'll help you get away ❖❖“ you belong to Anita and I can't let Hugo do this again. But the best I can do is get you to a little park nearby. Is there anyone I can call to get you?" The spells had weakened Jean- Claude and he wouldn't gain any strength until he fed on blood.

"Anita, her number's 07685132217 or the RPIT if you can't get her or remember the number. What do you mean do this /again/?"

"That's why I belong to him. I was someone else's mate, I belonged to Leo and Hugo kidnapped me while I was carrying our first child. He cut our son out of my body, and when that didn't break our bond he dumped me for my master to find. The second time he kidnapped me I'd just conceived again ❖❖“ he beat me until I miscarried, and /that/ broke my bond to Leo. Then Hugo forced a new bond on me, one with him." While they were speaking Regulus guided Jean-Claude out of the building and then flew with him to the park he'd mentioned.

"I'll call them now, I have to be back as soon as possible, and I'll try to distract him."

"How will he react?" Jean-Claude was still too weak to stand, but he was concerned about the man who'd saved him.

"If I tell him I was jealous he won't be too angry." With those words Regulus disappeared.

It wasn't too much later that one of the female RPIT detectives arrived, he'd seen her when he was arrested for 'murdering' Anita, but he couldn't remember her name. She was pretty, with short dark hair, and a triangular face with delicate bones, but not beautiful, not the way his master was. She cursed when she saw how hurt he was and wrapped a blanket around his shoulders, helping him up.

"Come with me, I'm supposed to take you back to headquarters, we've contacted Anita and she's bringing some clothes for you but you'll need to tell us what happened."

"Not until I've had a chance to talk to Anita. I do not trust human law, I know better than that."

"What does that mean?" The Detective was angry at his observation, Jean-Claude's eyes opened a bit wider, but that was the only evidence he showed of his sudden fear.

"That human law does not treat monsters the same way it treats humans. Your Lieutenant Storr wanted to have me executed because I tried to help Anita after she almost died and got covered in blood carrying her to those who could help her. He tried to get my pomme de sang locked up because he drove Anita to a murder scene when she was too ill to drive herself and because he's a werewolf. He tries to use the law as a weapon against people he doesn't like." Jean-Claude let the bitterness he felt coat his voice, better that than the fear he felt. It seemed like he was a lot more scared now that he knew he was a mate than he had been before. The Detective was guiding him back to her car and into the passenger seat next to her.

"Why are you strapping in?" She sounded surprised.

"Anita has me well trained; she doesn't let anyone in a car with her unless they wear a seatbelt." Jean-Claude sounded tired, he was safe, but he still wanted Anita to come and tell him what to do.

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Jean-Claude hadn't been seen since two hours after dusk, he had been supposed to feed three times more before Anita finis

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