

I was born again in darkness and baptized in blood. Against my will, the blood became my daily bread. They made me a slave to the thirst and a soldier in their army of the night.

I was conscripted by a Blood Saint. He drained me completely, an unholy stigmata. He fed it back to me, torturously, from his own veins, drop by drop. The transformation was excruciating: from the first, instinctive but redundant breath of my rebirth into undeath, to the creeping fire that vivified each dead cell. I was in agony.

And he watched every moment of it. Bathing himself and his acolytes in my living blood. My savior, my dark lord of resurrection: Saint Christopher.

Seven years I spent in his household: as bootlicker and bedwarmer, moving on to valet and then seneschal. I oversaw the conversion of fifty souls before I became a Korporal in Christopher's personal guard.

The guard taught me to fight. And they tried to convince me that I had been one of the lucky ones. Taken into Christopher's household; elevated they said, not conscripted into service in the armies of The Elders. The Footsoldiers of The Night, as they were called, waging war against the living.

I saw far too many of the converted go to war. Too many of those whose hands I had held, whose tears I had dried, the filth of whose passing I had washed away. I knew I couldn't save them, they were already damned. Twice damned, after they'd been sent to the Footsoldiers, to die another death by sword or stake or sunlight.

It wasn't their plight that turned me against my masters. I truly wish I could say that underneath my outrage you might find altruism. But that would be dishonest. Underneath my outrage you would simply find rage.

I hated Christopher from the moment I first laid eyes on him. He was looking up at me, with his black hair and his feral green eyes, and his fangs buried in my wrist. He stopped drinking long enough to give me the most chilling smile, my blood wet on his teeth and lips.

That was when I knew I had to kill him.

Before I became seneschal, I thought my humanity had been excised: humiliated and raped out of me, drowned in eddies of blood. I would never have accepted the position, right hand of a monster, if I had realized that it still lived.

Presiding over my first conversion, I discovered that my humanity was not dead, merely whipped into submission and hiding in the dark recesses of my heart. At first, Christopher and his acolytes found me amusing: the seneschal who wept, who showed compassion for those

about to be converted. But in time they came to believe that these acts were drenched in my own dark humor and sense of bloody ritual.

I encouraged these beliefs. It allowed me to salve my battered humanity and at the same time to keep the fires of my rage stoked. It was how I finally became one of them; a Blood Priest, they called me and seneschals of other houses started to ape my performances.

That was how I met Tommie, seneschal for Saint Cyprian and we found in each other a kindred spirit. We found Morgan, serving the Crone Justinia. And Jerome, walking in the shadow of Patrick the Necromancer. And Andréa, weaving for the Dust Witch Philomena.

What had been my quest to end Christopher became our mission to burn down the edifice that the Elders had built. We built our following in silence and secrecy, a cult within a cult. But we only chose from the converted, even when we were of sufficient rank to have our own acolytes. It could never appear that we were forming power bases.

But of course we were, each in our own way. Navigating the baroque corridors of power, the webs of deceit and intrigue; nights of blood-soaked ritual, torture and murder. All the while, manoeuvring ourselves and our followers into positions of power, extending our reach within the converted to the point where we owned the Footsoldiers of the Night. Our operatives were deep within each of the four Followings.

The others, my brothers and sisters in the blood, chose the anniversary of my conversion for our moment, though I argued against it. And Christopher was our first strike. Jerome ran point and Tommie was my backup. Morgan neutralized the guard and Andréa wove us all protections that rode our skins so tight it felt like wearing armor.

He never saw it coming. We wouldn't have the full advantage of that again. That was why it had to be the four of us. To show that it could be done. And without tipping our hand.

Part of me wanted it to be slow: an agonizing end by inches. But in that moment, with the sword in my hand, and Christopher on his knees, I simply wanted the end.

I won't say that I didn't take satisfaction in it. I did. The look on his face when I took his head, I will carry that sight with me down the dark road of however many nights I go on.

We consigned Christopher to the flames, his final end.

I was born again in darkness and baptized in blood. Against my will, the blood became my daily bread. They made me a slave to the thirst and a soldier in their army of the night.

But their army is now my sword. And the blood is my ally.

In time they will see us coming. And they will know fear.

The End