

C L A N B O O K

Malkavian

Sample

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A BRIEF PROCEDURE

It was the consummation of a marriage.

The vows were unspoken, of course. The courting had taken place long ago, in the language of grants and internships rather than doses of clichéd poetry. It had been patient and professional, trust given out measure by measure as he let me further and further into the great work of his... life. First the gift of vitae, then the gift of responsibility – always rationed out with perfect reason, perfect control.

And now...

It would have been unprofessional to shudder as we stepped into the operating theatre, so naturally, I did no such thing. Although I felt certain that he wouldn't have interpreted it as fear – why should I fear this place, almost an old friend? – it certainly would have been forward. The fluorescent lighting was no different, the polished steel table the same as it had been throughout years of procedures, case studies and experiments. The catheter, the plastic drum – new, of course, but hardly unsettling.

No, the difference this time was anticipation. Delight, almost. But a show of such emotion would surely be embarrassing to him, and that would be unforgivable.

The repetitive echoes of his shoes' soles against the floor bounced off the walls. As I slid off my lab coat, I lowered my head and closed my eyes; time for the game to begin again. He had taught me a trick of superhuman hearing some time ago – and I'd been so flustered by how hard it was to learn that I felt sure he'd turn me out before I grasped the secret. But when I finally heard for the first time, that was when the game began.

Clack. Clack. He was beginning his circuit of the theatre – always attentive for the slightest foreign element, the least chance of chaos. *Clack. Clack.* At the left edge of the one-way mirror now, scrutinizing the seams. *Clack. Clack.* Halfway across the mirror now. Can he see through the reflection to the observation booth on the other side? He's never said, but he *must* be able to. *Clack. Clack.* The far end now. *Clack* – and a pause. My smile faded. What had he found? And then there it was – the squeak of cloth, certainly his handkerchief, on metal. *Clack. Clack.* The circuit began again.

I'd be deluding myself if I thought that the vitae-induced sensory amplification allowed for as complex a sensory mechanism as echolocation. But this theatre was home, moreso now than the house I'd grown up in or the apartment I slept in; to be frank, I believe last year I'd slept late hours at the lab as often as I'd managed to crawl into an actual bed. We'd run so many case studies in here that I knew every corner, every inch of the equipment better than I knew my own bedroom. And I'd watched Dr. Netchurch pace the room just like this before every study, before every procedure.

That was the game. To see him as he must be, to watch every footstep with my eyes shut tight, to see him crinkle his brow just slightly with every pause, with every possible imperfection.

At the risk of dropping all objectivity, it was frankly exhilarating.

Ten more steps, and he'd be within arm's reach once more. *Clack. Clack.* His pace picking up just a little now, as he becomes more certain that nothing's amiss. *Clack. Clack. Clack. Clack.* By the cabinet now – and there, the slight touch of skin on metal as he slides his fingers gently along the steel doors, almost unaware that he does so. *Clack. Clack.* Almost here. *Clack.* And – a pause? He's testing me, I thought giddily. Don't open your eyes yet. He still lacks one more step, just one.

Clack.

I opened my eyes and raised my head, smiling ever so slightly. His face was immobile, a statue with glass eyes – and then there was just a twitch of movement by one eye. I could have shrieked with laughter, but instead I simply tilted my head a centimeter or so to the side, and raised my eyebrows just so. Precise control. Precise communication. That was the heart of our relationship.

"Well then," he lightly coughed. "If you're quite ready, Doctor, we'll begin the procedure."

"Of course." I forced my hands to remain at my sides, although they ferociously wanted to smooth down the goose pimples on my arms.

He took my coat, folding it crisply and setting it to one side. I sat down on the table and lay back. The cool of the metal rose up against my bare arms and seeped through my clothes, and it was so refreshing – the laboratory's cool atmosphere (a perfect 65 degrees Fahrenheit – I might have giggled at the thought) wasn't cooling me down at all. I must have seemed so feverish to him; how like him, so courteous and concerned, not to mention it at all. Straps of metal and leather closed on my wrists, ankles and brow; it was an interesting feeling. The feeling of physical restraints coupled with anticipation – yes, it was an appetite, but something going beyond sexuality into so much more.

Sex, after all, is a purely physical intimacy. Only clouded through psychological delusion does it seem more than that – a lesson I'd gradually learned from my work. Watching him slice through the layers of tissue and blood down to a subject's very bones – the same thing, really. An intimacy that means only as much as one lets it.

But this – to think of it. An intimacy of body and psyche, and of such intellect...

"Are you comfortable, Doctor?"

So reserved. So gentlemanly. I nodded quickly, refusing to smile like an embarrassed teenager.

"Very good." His fingers, strong and cool as the table itself, closed on my arm. I closed my eyes. There was the quick, tingling dab of wet cotton – force of habit, or tenderness? Surely the latter – then the stab of the needle. Like a good patient, I held my arm perfectly still as the metal slid into my flesh. Like a good patient, I began to give of myself.

It wasn't the first time I'd let someone draw blood, of course. I was glad to participate whenever the blood drives came to my college; I'd long gotten past any latent fears of doctors and needles by then. It seemed preposterous to develop any sort of personal attachment to my blood, so the issue of perceived "violation" wasn't at all relevant, either. Very simple.

This time, though, I was growing colder and sleepier than ever I'd been before. There was a brief moment when I thought of my blood, all my blood, draining into sterilized plastic, leaving me stiff and lifeless, and I wanted to panic. But the lethargy, coupled with discipline, was master here. A simple sleep, ever-so-brief, I sluggishly reminded myself. He is in control; there won't be any accidents. Relax. And above all, remember – we would never get another chance at a professional, objective observation of the transition from ghoul to...to Cainite.

And relax I did, and I set myself to remember.

Scientific observation began to fail me, though. I would have been disappointed in myself, but as the drowsiness grew, I couldn't muster any focused emotion. My heart rate slowed, my pulse beat lethargically. My mind drifted, and I let it.

Intimacies. They came to mind so easily, while I was in this half-conscious state. And in this state, so easy to see them from outside, to analyze myself objectively. My cravings for an intimate connection to another person were wholly typical of the norm, I suppose.