

Prelude: Katerina Bogdonovich

59:07

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Storyteller Rina 00:00

theme music Thank you for joining us wherever you are. This podcast episode is brought to you by the Old Ways actual play team. This actual play uses the 5th edition Vampire the Masquerade tabletop role playing rules by World of Darkness. This actual play is performed by adults and in an adult setting. Listeners should know that this podcast is intended for a mature audience and will include strong language and mature themes. All content including names, places, events, companies, and so forth that may bear resemblance to entities living, dead or undead is strictly coincidental. My name is Rina Haenze, and for tonight's game, I will be your Storyteller.

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Storyteller Rina 00:59

Good evening and welcome to another episode of The Old Ways Podcast's Vampire the Masquerade chronicle "Blood Moon rising." I am your Storyteller, Storyteller Rina, and tonight we are bringing you yet another of our character prologues introducing our coterie to you, our beloved listeners. So thanks again to all of our Patreon backers who are helping us bring this Chronicle to life, and thank you to everyone who is listening to the show and contributing in any way. So without further ado, I'd like to turn the spotlight over briefly to our subject for tonight. So Ali, why don't you introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about your character.

A

Ali (Katerina) 01:44

Hi, I'm Ali and I will be playing Katerina Bogdanovich, and she is a Toreador. And she's pretty short, but very physically well built. She's like 5'2, 110 pounds soaking wet. But she she has the body almost of like a dancer, is what you would think that she would be more built for. But she actually is a like, just locally known Baker, because she's done a few big catering jobs for people of renown, catered a couple of weddings, specifically one for like the mayor's sister and the like head of police, and things like that. So she is basically just around helping provide the coterie with connections they might not otherwise have.

S

Storyteller Rina 02:52

Excellent, I can't wait to see what treats and delights you have for our Chronicle. So let's take a little bit of a deeper dive into Katerina this evening. So it is about 6:30pm on a Friday in October, the sun has recently set, it's a fairly cold evening because of, as usual, the chill off the bay, but it's bright and clear for the most part, no rain, no drizzle. And being a Friday, when you wake up, you can hear street noise; you can hear loud partygoers, now that the majority of the pandemic is over and people can actually go out and do things again. You've had to readjust perhaps to the street noise that was absent for about 18 months of your unlife and lots of cars going by and more smells of marijuana and cooking and all sorts of delights waft up to your window. So, where does Katerina sleep during the day?

A

Ali (Katerina) 04:04

She has a little townhouse that's just kind of in the...it's not like in the heart of the city, it's kind of out towards the edges, but definitely not like down towards any suburbs. But she sleeps there during the day. And she has a state of the art security system in place to like detect movement and that sort of thing so that she knows if there's gonna be any real potential danger to her and it's, it's soundproof, as much as it possibly can be.

S

Storyteller Rina 04:41

So do you have anyone who lives with you? Or do you live alone? Do you have any other vampires or ghouls or anything of that sort? Or is it completely silent when you wake up?

A

Ali (Katerina) 05:00

It's not completely silent. I imagine there's a ghost or something that lives in my house because I hear noises sometimes during the day when I'm trying to sleep. When I'm the only person around, I have the suspicion that my haven is haunted. And I just I would leave it alone, whatever it might be. But other than that, I definitely live alone. By the time that I'm tired and ready to go to bed, I value that time alone, when I can get it.

S

Storyteller Rina 05:42

Definitely. Well, you wake up this particular evening, and as you are waking up, stretching, getting ready to face the night ahead of you, you're feeling as usual, hungry, you feel the stirrings within you. And I'd like you to give me a Rouse check to see if you're able to contain your hunger or if it's going to be a little bit more difficult for you this evening. So I'd like you to roll 1d10, and you need to roll a 6 or above.

A

Ali (Katerina) 06:20

I did not get a 6. I got a 2.

S

Storyteller Rina 06:24

Ok, so with a 2, that means you Failed your check. It's a little bit more difficult for you to restrain your urges. So I'd like you to take 1 point of Hunger, you can mark that on your sheet. As you're waking, whatever it is about tonight, maybe it's the anticipation of the events that you know are coming your way, maybe it's something that happened the night before, regardless, you're feeling a bit more hungry tonight. You can feel the blood pounding in your head, you can feel the hunger rising to a point where you're normally able to control it, and you can, tonight, if you choose to; you're not going to rush out and rip out the throat of the nearest passerby, but yeah, when when you stretch and close your eyes as you extend your your head backward, crack your neck a little bit as you rise from slumber, you can almost feel the beating heart of someone walking past your building, just for a moment you can hear that. You bare your fangs slightly in anticipation of the delights that await you before you recall yourself to where you are. So what would you like to do?

A

Ali (Katerina) 08:06

Probably the first thing that I'm going to do is call the bakery and check in just to make sure that nothing dire is happening this evening. And to make sure that everything that I need to have prepared is prepared for the evening.

S


Storyteller Rina 08:31

So tell us a little bit about your bakery. What is it called? What do you do there? Give our listeners a little picture of your life as a baker.

A

Ali (Katerina) 08:45

My bakery is called Dragonfly Confections. And the day side of the bakery caters to mortals obviously, and basically everything that's on the on the day menu is also on the night menu. Aside from a few select things that are reserved for fellow Kindred, for the most part it's like little desserts, so we're looking at, like, individualized like tarts and pies, cream puffs, truffles and like some little lava cakes that are like frozen to like be warmed up at home or to be eaten there. And we also do a wide variety of breakfast pastries. So you're, you know talking about pain au chocolat and scones and muffins and things of that nature. And we're probably pretty well-known throughout the city; business is steady, but not so busy all the time that it's a concern of too many people being curious where I am all the time. But on the night side, there's a room that is sectioned off in the back that is for Kindred, where they have a identification card. And they are screened through recommendations and a bodyguard on site to make sure that they are appropriate to be part of what mortals probably view as a exclusive club. And every pastry that's on that night list, anything that would be red velvet flavored or cherry flavored or strawberry flavored, basically anything that's going to be bright red, is well, it's a blood that's been provided by humans from a farm.



S

Storyteller Rina 11:23

Wonderful. So you go down to your bakery, to Dragonfly Confections. Do you walk? Do you take the public transportation system or Uber? Do you drive? How close is your bakery to where you live?

A

Ali (Katerina) 11:41

I live like a block from one of the trolleys and it's only a couple stops away. So I almost always ride the trolley down.

S

Storyteller Rina 11:50

Ok, so you take the trolley down to work. It doesn't take you that long to get there. You pass lots of revelers, apparently going to some kind of party downtown, a little early to be a Halloween party; it's only about mid October. Perhaps it's just the exuberance of being able to leave the house and go out and do things and live fairly normally, that people seem to be indulging in of late ever since the population of the United States reach what could be considered herd immunity, a term that the vampires of the area have chuckled at perhaps, in private conversation. But you can walk among them fairly easily. Most people don't take any notice of you as they're talking to themselves. You see one group that is obviously fairly drunk, even though it's only at this point about 7:30 in the evening. And one very, very drunk young man chugs down from a bottle, even though open drinking in the streets is not legal in this part of town. He throws the bottle down an alley as he staggers off, and you see a homeless person scurry up out of the shadows and carefully collect the bottle, put it in a bag full of glass bottles and aluminum cans before departing back into the shadows. But it doesn't take you long to get to your work. It's still open for business for another half hour or so to the humans around town. You sometimes get the late evening customers who wants to sneak in for a big treat before going off to whatever it is they're doing, or maybe you have your executives who were working late and stopping by for a treat to placate the spouse when they get home. So who do you have working in the bakery when mortals would be about? When you walk in, who do you see?

A

Ali (Katerina) 13:59

As I walk in, I imagine I see whoever my business partner has hired working at the counter and I'll definitely you know, be acknowledging them with a brief wave. Most of the people during the day shift I don't see most of the time, so I don't really bother to learn their names. And the backside of the bakery will definitely be, like, empty at this time of day. Production's already, you know, pretty much done for the day. But tonight's a special occasion. So I imagine that I have one person who's familiar to the nighttime products who's finishing preparing things for me while I go into the office to talk to my business partner, who I affectionately refer to as Ray Ray.

S

Storyteller Rina 14:46

Ok, so you walk through the front part of the bakery and a young Hispanic woman with her hair pulled back in a bun and then with a hairnet over it, she's wearing a tag that says "Lexi," is finishing up with a customer who is probably going to be the last customer of the evening. You

finishing up with a customer who is probably going to be the last customer of the evening. You can tell by Lexi's demeanor she's just really desperately hoping people will stop coming in so she can close up and go home. It's Friday night, people don't want to be working. But she smiles and she waves at you as you go past her. And you can tell that it's been a very busy day; the shop is mostly empty of the baked goods that were so carefully prepared the night before. There's a couple slices of cheesecake still left looking rather forlorn in the front window, and about a half a dozen sugar cookies off to one side that Lexi is now packaging up for the one customer. But everything else seems to have been cleared out. So it's been a pretty productive day, at least, for Dragonfly Confections. And you make your way to the back. Does the worker who is familiar with the...night goods, let's say, is that a fellow vampire? Is it one of your ghouls? Who do you have working on on those treats?

A

Ali (Katerina) 16:12

It's definitely gonna be a fellow vampire. I don't tend to keep ghouls. They're extra things for me to keep track of and I already have enough things in that *laughs* in that window. It's probably another Toreador and just knowing knowing me it's probably going to be someone who's a pretty close friend because usually I'm the only person that gets to touch the the night goods.

S

Storyteller Rina 16:48

So you walk into the back and you see Lucy West, who is your Toreador friend. She's been with you in this part of San Francisco for about 15 years now; she's originally from England, came over to pursue an acting career like many young Toreadors do, only to find that there wasn't much of a market for another blonde, blue eyed, pale, even modelesque looking young woman, so she moved up to San Francisco and you met and she is now helping you out sometimes in the evenings, working with select customers. And she waves at you and asks,

L

Lucy 17:35

Hey Kat, you want to take a look at what we got on offer tonight? Are we all good?

K

Katerina 17:43

Lucy, you know my name is Katerina.

L

Lucy 17:49

Sorry, sorry. Sorry. I still haven't gotten used to the whole "don't shorten people's names" thing. I'll get it. I'll get it. We've got all eternity to figure it out. Sorry, Katerina.

K

Katerina 18:04

But yes, please make sure that everything is prepared for the party tonight

But yes, please make sure that everything is prepared for the party tonight.

S Storyteller Rina 18:14

She opens a massive refrigerator and she shows you with great pride this humungous Red Velvet cheesecake that's got these beautiful artistic swirls done through it and in the very center is a quote unquote "Red Velvet" clan symbol for Tremere, which is the hosting clan of the party that you are catering tonight. She looks up at you and smiles and says,

L Lucy 18:47

I spent a lot of time learning to do the patterns recently. It's just, I think I'm really letting go of my artistic side. North California has just been so good for me in learning to embrace my inner artist

K Katerina 19:04

That's all well and good Lucy, but did you also make the cream puffs and the strawberry tarts for me?

L Lucy 19:13

Oh yes, I did those first, I did those first. Of course, they're easy. I could do them in my sleep.

S Storyteller Rina 19:18

And she points to the back of the room, and you can see rows upon rows of tarts and cream puffs and other delights.

K Katerina 19:26

And you coordinated with the driver to make sure that everything is going to be packaged?

L Lucy 19:32

Oh yeah, yes, the driver will be here in about 35 minutes.

K Katerina 19:39

Alright, let me know when he is here, because I need to make sure that I touch base with him. Because you know I'm very particular about these things.



Lucy 19:49

Of course, of course, of course. Don't worry about it. I've got everything under control. There won't be any problems whatsoever. I got this.



Katerina 20:01

If your cheesecake wasn't so beautiful, I would be cutting into it.



Storyteller Rina 20:06

She looks a little scared.



Ali (Katerina) 20:09

As she should. Katerina's very, very specific and she hadn't necessarily approved the giant cheesecake but she's gonna go with it and pray. Thankfully there's enough other baked goods there that if the cheesecake is not going well, it can just be removed and ushered back into said vehicle, if necessary. *chuckles*



Storyteller Rina 20:36

Lucy protectively puts the the cheesecake back into the into the fridge and gently closes the door, and she looks a little disappointed by your reaction to her work, but she goes back to the back of the kitchen and starts working on boxing up cream puffs. So you are free to go on to your office to meet with Ray Ray.



Ali (Katerina) 21:02

So I will just rap on the door. Ray Ray and I have known each other for so long, he knows what my knock sounds like.



Ray Ray 21:13

Come in!



Katerina 21:16

Hello, Ray Ray.



Storyteller Rina 21:16

S Storyteller Rina 21:19

You go in to the office and Ray Ray is sitting at the desk; he's got his feet propped up on the desk as he's flipping through something on his phone. What does Ray Ray look like? Tell us a little bit about your partner in baking.

A Ali (Katerina) 21:39

He is a mixed African American and Latino and he is very openly, comfortably gay. He isn't necessarily, like, overly flamboyant, but he's definitely very comfortable with himself and there's certain like, he likes to sashay his hips and he uses a lot of more feminine hand gestures when he talks, especially if he's very excited about something. And he keeps his hair down in a buzz cut. But he's got like these just these like hazel eyes that don't necessarily match his complexion that kind of catches you off guard. And he's like 5'10, pretty, he's got a pretty thin frame. But you can tell that he is healthy. He maintains himself very well.

S Storyteller Rina 22:40

Ray Ray looks up from his phone as you enter and he smiles, flashing very, very white teeth at you. He spends a lot of time on teeth whitening. And he says:

R Ray Ray 22:55

Hey, Katerina, ready for the big party tonight? Wish you'd tell me what's going on; I could do some marketing on the Instagram. I mean, Lucy wouldn't even let me take pictures. I don't know what you're going on with all these secret parties and stuff. But hey, did you see the cheesecake? She was working on it, looks pretty good. I only caught a glimpse of it as I was walking through the kitchen, but it looks pretty good.

K Katerina 23:19

Yes. Well, I did not give her permission to make it, but we'll see how it goes.

R Ray Ray 23:28

She's just, she's just eager. You know, youth.

K Katerina 23:31

She wants to please and I understand. But it looks like we were productive today, yes?

R Ray Ray 23:40

Oh, very productive. We had a, we had a whole group coming in after lunch. They were

sounding really hungry and they bought out all the cake section, like the entire cake section. Can you believe it? I've never seen that happen. There were 8 people comin' in and just like "give me all the cakes you got." "All the cakes?" And they said yes, "all the cakes". I said, "are you sure you want all of them?" And they said, "yes, all of them. Do we look like we're joking?" And so we boxed up all the cakes and they just carried them all out. One guy was carrying five boxes of cake.

K

Katerina 24:10

Nothing to complain about. We haven't had, we haven't had a big sale like that since our last bachelorette party.

R

Ray Ray 24:16

Yeah, maybe they were doing some big surprise party or something for the CEO, who knows? But they were very excited about having so much cake. I can empathize.

K

Katerina 24:27

Yes. But you know that I like handling these night parties. You do so much marketing for the day side; I don't want to put extra pressure on you. You and I have been together too long. And you remember that fight we had back in New Orleans when we were working on that food truck and I thought you were going to kill me if I didn't let you help me out a little bit.

R

Ray Ray 24:53

Yeah, water under the levee, you know.

S

Storyteller Rina 24:56

And he smiles up at you again and takes his his feet off the desk. He's wearing very brightly colored Vans with no socks. And he stands up, stretches to his full height of 5'10, and you can hear a slight crack in his neck as he stretches.

R

Ray Ray 25:16

Yeah, well, I mean, I got stuff to be doing tonight anyway. You know, I met a guy. Have I told you about Raul?

K

Katerina 25:25

No.

R Ray Ray 25:26
Ah, well, Pablo didn't work out. I mean, nice guy. But he chewed so loudly, it was just driving me crazy.

K Katerina 25:37
You are so picky, Ray Ray.

R Ray Ray 25:40
I mean, can you imagine living with someone for your entire life who chews so loudly that you feel like you've got these nails going down your spine?

K Katerina 25:49
Well, no, I could barely stand living with you when we roomed together for a year.

R Ray Ray 25:56
Right? Right, right. You're one to talk about being picky, anyway. So we split ways, you know, we still go out to the club sometimes. But I met Raul on Grindr. Oh, he's got some nice abs. let me tell you, at least I think he does, based on the pictures. I hope he's not catfishing me but you know, we'll find out tonight.

S Storyteller Rina 26:18
And he winks at you lasciviously.

K Katerina 26:20
Well, you know I love you, Ray. Be careful as always.

R Ray Ray 26:27
When am I never not careful?

K Katerina 26:29
When you drink too much. Yeah?

R Ray Ray 26:33
Me, drink too much? Hey, you're quite a joker.

S Storyteller Rina 26:38
He winks.

R Ray Ray 26:39
Don't worry. We're not going to the bar. We're going out for pasta or some shit. He says he's classy.

K Katerina 26:50
Well, alright. Enjoy yourself. And did you hear from Cora? Is she coming in to cover the night shift, since I won't be here?

S Storyteller Rina 26:59
He flips through his text messages.

R Ray Ray 27:01
Oh, yeah. She'll be here in 45 minutes. Is that okay? She got stuck in traffic or something.

K Katerina 27:09
Yeah, no, that's fine. As long as, as long as she's here by nine. That was, that was all I wanted.

R Ray Ray 27:16
Yeah, she said she'll be here.

K Katerina 27:19
Perfect. Then I will trust her to use the hide-a-key. We have done this many times before, but I need to make sure that everything is perfect. You know?

R Ray Ray 27:34
Yes, yes, yes.

S Storyteller Rina 27:35
And he laughs this deep belly laugh.

R Ray Ray 27:39
Perfect Katerina gotta be perfect about every perfect thing. I know. That's what makes you such a good boss. I mean, that's why we're a popular business because your stuff is always perfect. But have you ever tried to let loose? I mean, letting your hair down or something? I mean, come on.

K Katerina 27:57
Yeah. How do you think I came up with, how do you think I came up with the blood orange pain au chocolaat that we sell so many of, huh? That was when I was just throwing flavors around and decided, "Fuck it. I might as well try something I've never done before."

R Ray Ray 28:13
That's food, though, Katerina, I mean going out and letting your hair down. I never see you at a party or anything. I mean, we were in New Orleans. And you never did a Mardi Gras.

K Katerina 28:25
Well, no.

R Ray Ray 28:26
Nobody was throwing beads at you.

K Katerina 28:27
confused Well, no.

R Ray Ray 28:29
That's what I mean!

K Katerina 28:31
Civilized, civilized women do not behave that way.

S Storyteller Rina 28:35
He just shakes his head and mutters something under his breath that sounds suspiciously like "killjoy." But then he gives you a big side hug, catching you maybe a bit unawares as he walks out the door and he calls back,

R Ray Ray 28:51
One of these days you're gonna have to have some fun.

K Katerina 28:56
Well, maybe one of these days, I will let you take me to a club.

R Ray Ray 29:00
Oh, don't tease me. Don't tease me Katerina. That's so cruel.

S Storyteller Rina 29:06
And he clasps his hands over his heart and tilts his head up at you dramatically.

R Ray Ray 29:11
I want nothing more in this life than to take you out on the town and make you have some fun, eh?

K Katerina 29:19
I will make an effort to let my hair down at the party tonight.

R Ray Ray 29:25
That's all I want.

S

Storyteller Rina 29:28

And he gives you a big thumbs up and he saunters out of the building.

A

Ali (Katerina) 29:33

Alright, so I'm gonna go and make sure that everything is boxed the way that I want everything boxed. Lucy, she's still learning. And I want to trust her but trust comes with time. And Cora is, Cora Mills is someone that I have come to trust over the last like 25 years because she also came from New Orleans, but she moved up into the San Francisco area about a decade before Ray Ray and I made it up.

S

Storyteller Rina 30:15

Is Cora a fellow Kindred?

A

Ali (Katerina) 30:18

Yes, and she is also of Clan Toreador.

S

Storyteller Rina 30:22

Keeping it in the family.

A

Ali (Katerina) 30:27

Yeah, it's a pride thing.

S

Storyteller Rina 30:28

The family business. Well, everything goes fairly smoothly, the driver shows up and you're able to explain exactly what you want and where to go. Lucy has packed everything perfectly, you go back and check every single box and they are immaculate. And she's, Lucy's just standing in the back watching you with her big blue eyes, just sort of nervously shifting from foot to foot as you carefully, meticulously check each box. And Cora comes in while you're doing that, and she just sort of shakes her head and laughs at both of you as she goes back to the office to change into her working attire for the evening. But everything goes off without a hitch when it comes to packing, getting everything in the car and getting ready to go.

A

Ali (Katerina) 31:27

Perfect.

S

Storyteller Rina 31:28

So this particular party is being hosted by Vera Giovanni. And Vera Giovanni is a Tremere, and she's fairly well known in town because unlike most Giovanni, she is not Hecata, she is not any of those sort of undergrounds cults into which most of the Giovanni disappeared when their clan broke up. There are rumors because she's a 250 year old vampire, there are rumors that there was a feud between a Giovanni family and a Tremere family and they swapped children to be sired by the other family to sort of mend some kind of rift, there are rumors about a Giovanni child who was stolen by a Tremere family, there are all sorts of rumors swirling around Vera, but nobody really knows the truth. And she hasn't seen fit to enlighten anyone. So all you know is there is a Giovanni who is a Tremere, and she is fairly adept at hosting parties, usually for the more bookish sort of Tremere who don't get out very much, tends to be sort of publishing parties and celebrations of academic achievement, that sort of thing. But you've hosted parties for her a few times at this point, so you know her well enough and you are her preferred caterer at this rate. So according to the invitation, fancy dress is required. What does Katerina wear to a fancy dress party?

A

Ali (Katerina) 33:25

Oh, Katerina is definitely wearing like this killer, like green number that has a super deep v-neck. And she's got, you know, heels for days. They're probably a four inch heel with no platform that just outline the curves of her legs. And despite the deep v-neck, there's nothing directly exposed, despite it looking almost like what could be considered club attire. It's definitely something that you could see potentially being like on the red carpet at some kind of award ceremony. It's just lovely.

S

Storyteller Rina 34:16

So you get all gussied up before you head off to set up the catering for this party, and you are absolutely flawless in appearance when you get into the vehicle. And the driver takes you to the Hellspawn Club. The Hellspawn Club is the most popular vampire hangout spot when it comes to parties and large events. It's an old, condemned or theoretically condemned, building down near the wharf. It has been condemned for about 50 years now, but for some reason, no one ever seems to get around to actually tearing it down. So, the Hellspawn Club has been set up quite nicely there for some time. Various clans use it for different events and parties; some nights you can go in and you can find all sorts of clan members, especially the younger ones, dancing and partying and bringing human escorts to drink from, and then depositing somewhere outside in fits of ecstasy. But tonight's event, knowing Vera Giovanni, is probably going to be a bit more dignified, a bit calmer. And when you enter the Hellspawn Club tonight, your guess is borne out; there is a classic waltz being played over the loudspeakers, the floor, which usually has a disco ball or five spinning around over it, now has chandeliers and you see several vampires in coats and tails putting up some posters and a few other things. It looks like a book launch party, perhaps, or something similar. That's what it looks like, based on your experience with these people. But everyone who's helping to set up and get the place ready seems very dignified and very, very snobby. So as you enter the club, you direct the driver where to take the boxes of cream puffs and the cakes and everything. A vampire who you've seen before, very tall, very muscular, short, close cropped dark hair wearing a dark blue suit comes up to you. And he says,

B Bodyguard 36:53

Ah Miss Bogdanovich. Miss Giovanni will see you now. Thank you.

S Storyteller Rina 37:06

And he just nods his head slightly to the side. He has been Vera Giovanni's retainer, faithful retainer for at least the last 75 years. You never see her go anywhere without him. So you follow him through this throng of younger vampires running around, setting up chairs, a couple practicing a waltz - maybe they're performing tonight - candles being set up and lit; it's all very quiet and calm and classy, except for the vampires running around looking like they've forgotten what they're supposed to be doing.

S Storyteller Rina 37:44

The retainer leads you up a flight of stairs to a sort of balcony area, like an overlook, and there is a red velvet couch set up in front of a low table and you see Vera Giovanni sitting on this couch. She's wearing a gorgeous, close cut crimson gown; it hugs every curve of her figure. She's got long, dark hair that is usually loose over her shoulders but is piled up into some very elegant but very reminiscent of a forgotten age hairdo on top of her head with small gems stuck into it. Her eyes are a very piercing green as she looks at you. And next to her, standing, is a shorter woman, another vampire, wearing a very dark, unobtrusive black evening gown. And she's very curvy, she's got spectacles, little round spectacles, and shorter, close-cropped pixie hair. She's looking at you. And as Vera smiles, this other woman steps forward and Vera makes very intense eye contact with you, and she brings her hands up and she starts expressively signing in American Sign Language. And off to her side, her interpreter begins to speak for her, interpreting the signs for you. And the interpreter says,

V Vera 39:19

Good evening, Miss Bogdanovich. Thank you for catering my party this evening. It is a pleasure as always to see you.

S Storyteller Rina 39:27

And Vera smiles

K Katerina 39:30

As always, Ms. Giovanni Thank you for having me.

V Vera 39:34

- V** vera 39:34
You know I would not have anyone else cater my parties, not after the most magnificent spread you provided for me the last time
- A** Ali (Katerina) 39:44
And I will just, you know, have a faint smile on my face and and bow my head as thanks, and freeze it back up.
- K** Katerina 39:59
We are going to have a experimental cheesecake tonight. Um, it's not the main centerpiece, of course, but give out a few smaller slices before too many people get here and see how it goes over, I think.
- S** Storyteller Rina 40:20
Vera is watching your lips very intently and as you mention cheesecake, she smiles slightly and signs back to you:
- V** Vera 40:30
Oh, this is very interesting. Was this from Cora or from Lucy?
- V** Vera 40:36
This is a Lucy creation.
- V** Vera 40:38
Ah. Like the Danish? Yes. Well, we shall see how it goes.
- S** Storyteller Rina 40:43
And she, Vera, laughs out loud. And even the interpreter smiles a bit, just remembering a previous event that didn't quite go the way they wanted it to. And Vera pats the seat next to her on the couch, and the interpreter says,
- V** Vera 41:03
Please, join me on the couch.

A Ali (Katerina) 41:06
I will definitely walk over and sit down next to her. We always have a good time.

S Storyteller Rina 41:13
So Vera angles her body towards you so that she can see your lips better and the interpreter steps around so that she can follow the signing. And Vera gets more expressive the more she talks, her body language gets bigger and bigger. She looks like she's always 21, she's been stuck in this 21 year old body for about 250 years now. Sometimes she still speaks as if she is still 21 and just happy to have someone else there. And she signs back,

V Vera 41:46
I get so very tired of all of these Professor types, you know, and I have to throw this party because my Sire says I have to throw this party, but they're just so boring.

K Katerina 41:59
I know, my dear, and you know that you are always welcome at my place. But I also know that your sire does not always approve of your adventuring.

V Vera 42:16
He's so...old.

S Storyteller Rina 42:18
And just the sheer exasperation on her face, this 250 years old vampire's face, is somewhat comical. But she laughs a little bit. And then she reaches over, she pats your hand and says,

V Vera 42:39
I wish for some company tonight. would you mind?

S Storyteller Rina 42:44
And she flutters her eyelashes at you.

K Katerina 42:48

I'll stay with you. But you know that I still have my boundaries.

V Vera 42:54

I know.

K Katerina 42:55

That will not change.

V Vera 42:57

I know.

K Katerina 42:58

But I will...accompany you this evening. Be an escort if you'd like.

S Storyteller Rina 43:06

She smiles. She turns to her interpreter, Paula, and she signs something at Paula. And Paula looks at you and says,

V Vera 43:18

Dressed the way you are, how could I not have you accompany me as my escort tonight?

K Katerina 43:27

Though all the eyes will be on you. They always are.

S Storyteller Rina 43:33

She signs something at you that you recognize by now as "you're such a tease." And you chat for a little bit more. You know this is, it's been a few years where you come up and you chat to her after directing people to set up the party, so you have a very easy familiarity. She doesn't give you a whole lot of details about her life, and it's mutual. You don't share a whole lot but you can talk to each other. And she seems at ease with you in a way she's not at ease with a lot of the members of her own clan. And then, finally, there's a murmur of voices at the door. And she signs at you:

V Vera 44:18
I think, Professor, Professor...

S Storyteller Rina 44:23
She looks at Paula and raises an eyebrow, and Paula signs the name "Hawkins" at her and she nods and keep signing.

V Vera 44:35
Professor Hawkins is here. He wrote some boring, boring, boring tome on something or other, historical blood magic of the Pyrenees tribes, I don't know. I tried reading it. I fell asleep.

S Storyteller Rina 44:58
She extends a hand to you.

V Vera 45:06
But Sire says we must make it a good night for him because he has won some sort of award in the clan or something, I don't care. But here we go again.

A Ali (Katerina) 45:24
And, as always, because I imagine this is the second or third time that I've performed this particular honor of being her escort, I hold my arm out for her.

S Storyteller Rina 45:36
She takes your arm and you lead her down the stairs. There's a gathering crowd of vampires in mostly older garb. This appears to be a particular group of the Tremere in town, who are perhaps a couple centuries out of date, and tend to stick to their own little groups and publish their own little tomes and do their magic together and not interact much with other people, especially other Kindred. There's a lot of suits and tuxedos, and there's a few, there are a few vampires in those very tight knee-length trousers and stockings and coats from from the Revolutionary War era, including powdered wigs, and you can feel the the slight giggle in Vera's shoulders that she keeps suppressed as you walk past that particular group. But she goes up to the front of the room with you and the music comes to a slight stop. And everyone turns to face the front of the room. And she begins signing to the whole crowd, with Paula interpreting.

V Vera 46:54

V vera 46:54

Thank you, everyone, and welcome to our honor ball for Professor Hawkins to congratulate him on the recent publication on his tome on the blood magic of the Pyrenees tribes of the First and Second centuries.

S Storyteller Rina 47:13

And she just goes into this long prepared speech, and her fingers are flying so fast, you can't keep up with them. You've been learning some some sign language, perhaps, since you've started getting to know her. But when she goes into Speech Mode, she is a blur of motion. And everyone is very quiet, with a few appreciative murmurs, and instead of clapping, everyone shakes their hands in the air in silent applause. And then she smiles at everyone and says,

V Vera 47:46

Well, enough of the speeches. I'm sure you're all eager to get to the actual party, which has been catered by the lovely Katerina Bogdanovich.

S Storyteller Rina 47:59

And she gestures at you and there's another wave of applause. And she says,

V Vera 48:06

We have some wonderful music tonight, appropriate for Professor Hawkins, and specifically requested by him and his family. So I hope you will remember your waltzing skills; there may be a foxtrot or two, but do have a good time, everyone.

S Storyteller Rina 48:23

And she smiles and everyone waves at her and then begins chattering and you can hear Professor Hawkins in the center of the room, beginning to pontificate on something to another group of academics who are asking him some very obscure point of terminology that he must have used in his tome. And everyone else appears to be going towards the towards the snack table. And Vera looks at you and signs to you,

V Vera 48:55

Would you care to dance?

K Katerina 48:58

I would indeed.

A

Ali (Katerina) 48:59

And I hold my hand out to her and escort her onto the dance floor.

S

Storyteller Rina 49:06

A Foxtrot strikes up as you go out onto the dance floor, a little bit more lively than a waltz, she seems relieved by this, and a few other couples come out onto the floor, and you have an enjoyable first dance in the hum of the room. Vera seems to be enjoying herself a bit more, perhaps especially since she doesn't have to talk to anyone, as the dance ends. However, you're walking off the floor and Vera is signing something to you about getting getting some dessert, and someone interrupts you. A small man with very sharp, inquisitive fox-like features, he's got tiny sharp little eyes, and a very angular face, wearing a long trench coats with a fedora under his arm, he breaks out of the crowd and comes up to you. And he looks directly at Vera and he signs something at her that you can't keep up with; his hands move very gracefully, and very fast. And she tilts her head, she looks at you, she looks back at him. And then she signs to you and Paula interprets,

V

Vera 50:28

He would like to speak to you alone. You of course know Sheriff Luther Garibaldi, yes?

S

Storyteller Rina 50:39

Sheriff Garibaldi is the Prince's right hand enforcer. He's a Gangrel. And pretty much everyone knows of him even if they haven't met him. And Luther smiles slightly at you.

A

Ali (Katerina) 51:00

I will, like, hold, like, almost a subconscious, almost human-like action, like, hold my breath for a moment. Vampires don't need to breathe, but it's a, it's almost like just a natural reaction. I am not super fond of Gangrel, so it takes me a moment of retaining a nice poker face to not actively grimace.

A

Ali (Katerina) 51:34

Vera, I will bring you a piece of cheesecake after...after this conversation, yes?

S

Storyteller Rina 51:44

She smiles and nods, but she looks a little bit anxious between the two of you. The Sheriff of a Prince, it's not usually a good thing or an exciting thing when the sheriff comes to speak with

someone individually. And Luther has a particular reputation for being a bit on the brutal side of things. But she looks back and forth at you, and she nods a little bit and she and Paula walk off towards the dessert table, but she keeps casually looking back over her shoulder at you as if to make sure you're still there. And Luther bows slightly.

K Katerina 52:36
Ah, Ms. Bogdonovich, a pleasure to meet you. I've heard so many things

K Katerina 52:47
And our graceful Sherrif. What can I do for you this evening?

S Storyteller Rina 52:53
He gestures towards a darker corner off to the side of the dance floor. It's a little more out of sight.

K Katerina 53:01
I would prefer not to speak so much in public.

K Katerina 53:05
Of course.

S Storyteller Rina 53:06
He walks off. It's almost a prowl, like a panther, the way he moves through the crowd. And you follow him into this this darker corner. He pulls a packet of cigarettes out of his trench coat. He looks at a cigarette, he lights it up, and he holds it up to his nose as if to inhale the scent, and there's a deep sigh before he puts it out and puts the packet back into his coat.

K Katerina 53:37
Well, it's a little bit of a tricky situation, you see.

S Storyteller Rina 53:45
And his dark eyes make very intense contact with yours.

- K** Katerina 53:51
You must not repeat this. But there's been a death in the Prince's family. And you might say I'm investigating.
- S** Storyteller Rina 54:04
And he tilts his head slightly.
- K** Katerina 54:08
Did you know the Prince's Clan brother, Louis?
- K** Katerina 54:13
No. I, I've never met him.
- K** Katerina 54:20
Well, could you perhaps then explain to me why I found this at the murder scene?
- S** Storyteller Rina 54:28
And he pulls out of his shirt pocket one of your business cards, the kind that are reserved for your special customers and it's spattered with dark blood.
- A** Ali (Katerina) 54:44
I do run a business, sherrif. But I do not personally screen all of the clients. They come by recommendation. There's systems in place for that that have been honed over many years. So I have never met him personally.
- K** Katerina 55:03
Oh, was he recommended to you? But Nosferatu, they don't really eat much, even of the infused things, although I am aware our noble Prince has connections to the same place you obtain your humans from. But I don't know why our noble Prince's Clan brother would have your card, hmm?
- S** Storyteller Rina 55:35
And he tilts his head inquisitively, like a bird

And he tilts his head inquisitively, like a bird.

K Katerina 55:39

Perhaps someone recommended it to him.

K Katerina 55:43

Can you think why or who? It would be...helpful. As you can understand, the Prince is most distress distressed at their clan brother's being gone after so long.

K Katerina 56:02

Of course, losing a member of the family is never easy. So I will do what I can I for you, consult with the other people who work with me at nights and see if I can find out that information for you.

K Katerina 56:23

Thank you. That would be most helpful. You must keep this to yourself, of course.

K Katerina 56:31

Of course. I will simply ask my night crew to provide me with the records. And I will go through them myself.

S Storyteller Rina 56:39

He pulls out another card from the other side of his coat and he hands it to you. It just has a number on it, a phone number.

K Katerina 56:48

You can reach me here any time of night.

S Storyteller Rina 56:52

Luther flashes his fangs at you. It's not unpleasant, but it's not pleasant either, this sharp smile of his.


K Katerina 57:04

 Katerina 57:04

Now, I would be very grateful for any information you can bring me. I do not want our Prince to be distressed any more than they have to be. They have such a weight on their shoulders as it is.

 Katerina 57:20

Yes. I do understand. May I request to begin looking through the records tomorrow, so that I may finish out this party so that there is no breach of etiquette?

 Katerina 57:39

Oh, the Prince would not wish to breach etiquette, of course. No, we can't have that. No, no, no. Tomorrow will be fine. Give my regards to Madame Giovanni.

 Storyteller Rina 57:53

And he puts his battered fedora on his head, and almost before you can react, he slips off through the crowd and has disappeared out of sight, leaving you standing there, maybe looking for him, wondering what exactly is happening, as Vera Giovanni looks at you from across the room with a questioning look on her face. And that is where we will end tonight's session. Thank you very much to everyone for listening, and I hope you will tune in next week for our next in this series of prologues for our coterie. Thank you and good night.