

Excerpt: Abomination

Coming soon in the Blood of the Gods series.

The ocean stank. The gnome lied. And the unicorn I was sent to rescue was not a unicorn.

Just another night working Supernatural Crimes in a city that pretended this was normal. The only way New York had learned to survive the apocalypse was to normalize it.

Since the Turn, the city had mastered the art of lying to itself. What began as whispers, grainy cellphone footage, conspiracy threads, and emergency room cover stories hardened into policy, task forces, and press releases. Vampires stepped out of folklore and into zoning laws. Werewolves got labor protections. Fae negotiated trade agreements that read like poetry and functioned like loaded guns. Public hearings sat behind bulletproof glass while outrage was rehearsed and safely contained. Politicians spoke about coexistence the way generals spoke about ceasefires: temporary, strategic, dependent on who was bleeding more this week.

The NYPD etched iron wards into precinct walls, threaded silver filaments through holding cells, and built the Supernatural Crimes

Division to keep humans and monsters from tearing each other apart. Peace was the word they used, a generous and fragile word spoken the way people speak about ancient treaties written in dead languages and signed in blood that was never quite dry.

None of it changed the smell.

The docks stretched ahead of me like a corpse bloated with time. Rusted shipping containers leaned in crooked stacks, paint blistered and peeling, serial numbers scraped half away as if the metal itself had tried to forget where it came from. Iron ticked softly as it cooled, uneven clicks echoing like insects inside a coffin.

The planks beneath my boots sagged and complained. Old wood swollen with salt and decades of neglect, splinters jutting like exposed nerves. Every vibration traveled through my soles, mapping weakness and rot without conscious thought.

Fog rolled in off the East River and wrapped around my ankles first, cool and insinuating, then climbed steadily upward. It pressed damp hands against my chest and slipped beneath my collar while streetlamps blurred into sickly halos, the world smeared like a watercolor left in the rain.

Cold seeped through my clothes and into bone. Salt and diesel hit first. Beneath it lurked something worse, something old and wrong that my curse refused to ignore.

I wasn't just a cop. I was born a werewolf. No ritual, no infection, no tragic moonlit backstory. I entered the world with teeth under my gums and a wolf curled in my marrow. Packless by choice and circumstance, city raised, state licensed to hunt my own kind when they crossed the line. SCD liked officers who could smell lies and survive the fallout.

Claws and teeth were easy. Violence was honest.

The real curse was sensory. Every scent arrived layered and precise, a symphony of decay: rot, rust, dead fish torn open and abandoned, grave dirt dry and mineral sharp. Beneath it ran corrupted magic, sour and metallic, like blood left too long to clot on iron. It threaded the fog like invisible barbed wire, the kind of magic that did not belong in living things.

The fog swallowed sound along with light. Cargo chains groaned somewhere to my left and a buoy bell clanged once, sharp and lonely. Farther out, a ship's horn sounded, long and mournful before dissolving into mist. The city shrank to a distant heartbeat while New York held its breath.

Something in that silence was bleeding. Not fresh blood. Not human. Old death.

It was the same death I had been tasting in my sleep since October, since the Wendigo infection burned through me and rewired something fundamental. I remembered the fever, skin stretched too tight and bones humming like they were about to crack. I remembered the hunger that was not hunger so much as an abyss yawning open. I survived it, though I was not supposed to. Nothing came back from that kind of curse unchanged.

My wolf stirred anyway, not alert but hungry. The hunger was quieter now, smarter. It no longer clawed at my ribs. It waited, watched through my eyes, cataloged weaknesses in the boards beneath my feet and the fog ahead. It tasted the corruption in the air and considered it.

I stopped beside a shallow puddle pooled in warped planks and glanced down. For half a second my heart misfired.

Wrong face.

The illusion ring on my left pinky pulsed faintly, softening my cheekbones and blurring my jaw while turning my once amber

wolf-bright eyes into flat bureaucratic brown. My deep brown waves fell iron straight and matte black, pulled into a severe knot at the nape of my neck. My nose, once long and upturned, had been filed down to something obedient. My reflection had been sanded into a stranger.

The ring shaved the predator off me, muffling my scent and smoothing my movements until I was just another shadow in the city.

Tonight I was not Detective Maria Villalobos of the NYPD. No badge, no jurisdiction, no Pack politics breathing down my neck. Just another ghost in the undercity hunting something people paid obscene amounts of money to pretend did not exist.

The last few weeks had dragged me deep, deeper than SCD liked admitting in briefings. Black markets hid behind butcher shops and dance clubs. Doors painted cheerful colors opened into rooms smelling of copper and old fear while bouncers with glamoured smiles kept claws tucked behind human teeth.

Blood vials corked in bone. Hexed weapons wrapped in wax paper, still humming. Bottled glammers swirling like trapped galaxies.

And cages. Always cages.

Derek's voice crackled in my ear, my partner and anchor in the dark. "Warehouse looks clear," he murmured, calm voice with a tight edge underneath. "Eight heat signatures. Three flickering. Fae wards in the support beams. Old ones. Pre Turn. Sloppy but powerful. Mawu says the dark's awake... and watching."

"Copy," I murmured.

I rolled my shoulders, leather creaking softly as sweat clung cold to my spine. The air felt aware, like the moment before a storm breaks.

I was not alone.

John Mikasi Dogstar stepped out of the shadows like he had been poured from them. Tall and lean, dressed in dark layers that drank lantern light, he moved with predatory economy, every step deliberate. Darkness did not cling to him. It deferred.

Mikasi was not SCD, not NYPD, not anything official. Information broker. Fixer. Something older than either title suggested. While I kicked down doors and filed warrants, Mikasi traded favors and secrets. He knew where the bodies were buried, and sometimes he chose the graves.

He gave me a single nod. We were past explanations.

We had followed the trail here to the Menagerie.

Unicorns were not just rare. They were god touched, living conduits of creation magic. Their blood rewrote spells. Their bones bent reality. A single horn could power a city block or unmake one. In the wrong hands they were extinction events waiting to happen.

And someone was trying to sell one.

The warehouse loomed ahead, concrete and corrugated steel hunched against the fog. No guards, no cameras, no visible wards. Just silence and confidence.

I knocked. Three quick. Two slow.

Undercity code.

The door opened with a groan that vibrated through my bones. Hank filled the frame, nine feet of troll muscle stuffed into a pin-stripe vest straining at the seams. Gray green skin was crisscrossed with pale scars and one tusk was chipped smooth.

“Well,” he rumbled, voice like gravel on steel, “if it ain’t SCD’s favorite undertaker. How are ye?”

“Still breathing,” I said. “World must be slipping.”

He snorted and stepped aside.

Inside, lanterns hung from chains and swayed gently, casting jaundiced light over air thick with sweat, fear, and old magic baked into concrete. Shadows misbehaved, stretching too far, pooling in corners, twitching when no one moved.

And there he was.

Winky.

Four feet tall, sequined jacket flashing manic light, sunglasses indoors because irony was apparently a lifestyle. His beard was braided with tiny silver charms that chimed when he moved. Dwarf. Dealer. Broker of rare things with flexible morals.

His smile was too wide for a face that smelled like rot and desperation.

“Right this way, babe,” Winky chirped. “Premium stock tonight.”

The cages started early. Iron bars etched with scorched sigils and runes worn thin by cruelty radiated cold that prickled my skin.

A manticore slammed into its enclosure as we passed, bars screaming under the impact. Its lion body was gaunt, ribs stark beneath matted fur, while humanlike eyes tracked me with feral intelligence and something worse.

Hope.

Redcaps hissed from a lower cage, teeth needle sharp. A nixie swam lazy circles in a jar barely larger than a goldfish bowl, cloudy water swirling around her webbed fingers.

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Each cage was a story. None ended well.

Then we reached the last enclosure.

It was not a cage.

It was a tank.

Concrete formed a wide basin in the warehouse floor, edges fractured as if something inside had tried to chew its way out. Black moss wept from the cracks while warped magic shimmered in the air above it.

The water was not water. It was thick, viscous sludge that stank of rot and stagnant swamps. The surface pulsed like something beneath it was breathing.

Winky spread his arms. “Behold,” he announced grandly, “the unicorn.”

The sludge split open with a wet gasp and something rose slowly, filth cascading off its hide. Yellow eyes breached first, lidless and luminous. A twisted horn jutted from its skull, cracked down the center and stained black at the base. Its mane hung in clumps like rotted kelp.

Then the mouth opened.

Too many teeth. Too sharp.

My wolf surged forward with a growl vibrating through my chest.

If that was a unicorn, then I was a flying ostrich in a tutu.

“That’s a kelpie,” I said flatly.

Winky laughed too fast, sweat cutting tracks through his powder. “Hybrid,” he insisted. “Boutique breeding. Trace unicorn blood. Very exclusive.”

The kelpie's gaze locked onto mine.

Hunger met hunger.

Frost spiderwebbed along the concrete rim as I stepped closer.
"Who's the buyer?"

"I don't know," Winky yelped.

The lie stank.

"Bullshit," Mikasi said softly.

Then the air shifted.

Authority entered the room before the man did.

Jason Calder stepped from the shadows like a storm given bones. Bigger than most men, scar tissue laced his arms and throat like pale lightning while power rolled off him in controlled waves.

My wolf went still. Not fear. Instinct.

Pack authority lived in marrow. His green eyes swept the room, cages, cracked concrete, the writhing kelpie, before settling on me. Even through the illusion ring, recognition sparked.

Ugh. Of course it did.

"Detective Villalobos," he said calmly. "You really can't stay out of trouble."

"And you can't mind your business."

Behind us the tank groaned and a fissure split the concrete with a sound like bone snapping.

The kelpie screamed. Not a horse's cry, but something layered. A woman's wail tangled with something ancient and aquatic.

Derek's voice tore through comms. "Maria! Mawu is losing it. If that kelpie hits open water it will call the river. You will have more climbing out of every storm drain. And your manticore is about to breach!"

Iron shrieked behind us. The manticore slammed again. Bars bent. That was when the kelpie lunged. Concrete exploded outward in a spray of sludge and shards. The stench hit like a punch, rot and brine and old curses cracking open. Slime splattered across my boots, hissing where it touched the warded leather.

Alarms screamed. Metal tore. Something monstrous hit the warehouse floor.

Jason moved in a blur of muscle and fury. Mikasi's hands flashed, sigils igniting like burning constellations. My wolf clawed against my ribs, teeth aching for corrupted flesh. And beneath the surge of magick, violence, and adrenaline, one clear thought surfaced.

This job sucks.