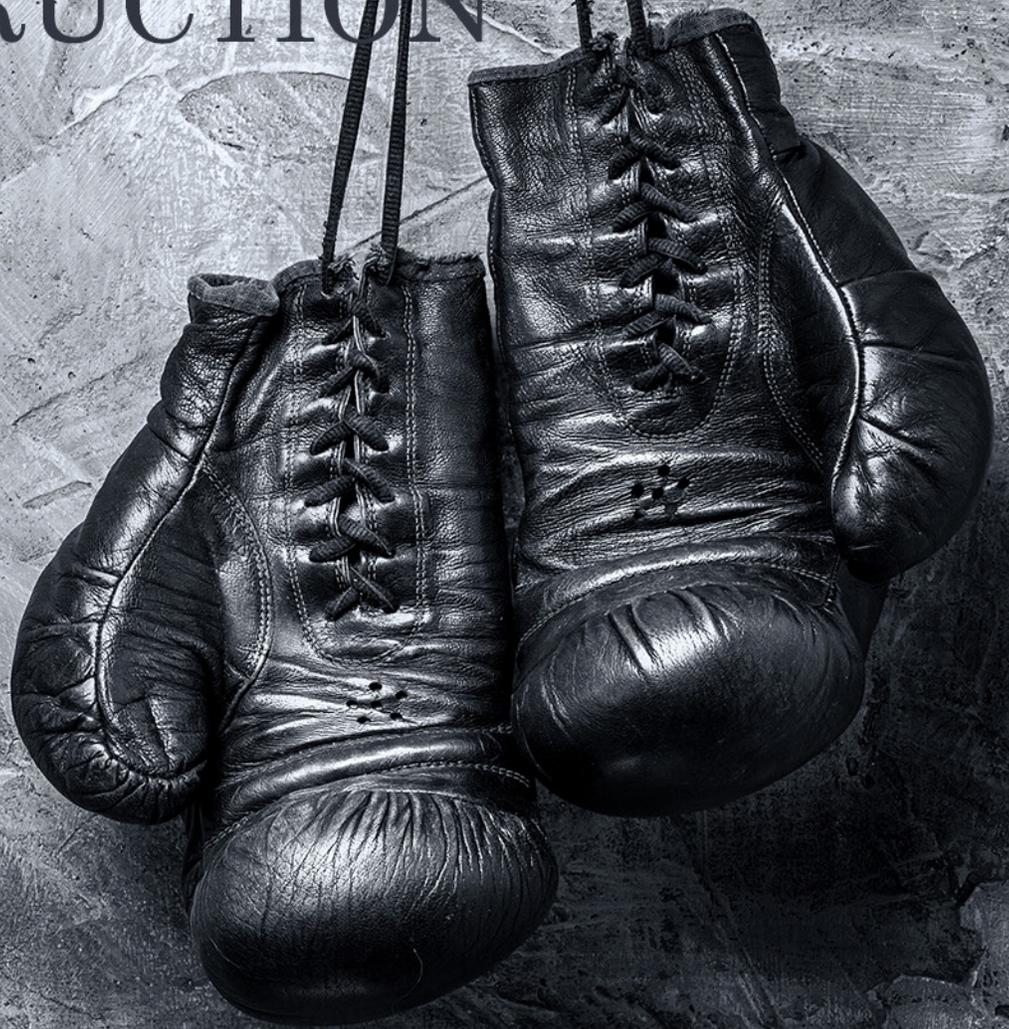


# DIVINE CONSTRUCTION



by James S. Austin

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“We have to leave tonight,” Danica’s agitation almost bubbling up to break her eternally composed face, an opalescent mask of youth pinned with penetrating clear blue eyes.

Shadrach looked hard at her, taking in the view to appreciate this moment in time. His longtime friend, one of a handful, rarely allowed a situation to rattle her so. To think an insignificant man could have brought her here to him now, to nearly plead with him.

She stood in the center of an exquisite rug of vivid greens captured in emerald interlocking swirls. Her midnight gown, short-sleeved with a neckline of lace, fell off her shoulders in an almost innocent fashion to accentuate her natural curves. The strands of her voluminous dark hair pinned back over the left ear, to cascade down in meticulous curls. The glint of light twinkling off the onyx stones ringed around her delicate throat. He tried to recall any recent exchanges they have had in her antique shop that provoked Danica to exhibit such a reaction. None came to mind. But then, this is a serious matter... in her eyes.

“Oh, I think I’m good here.” Shadrach leaned back into his high-backed chair, gently swirling the dark red wine in his glass. He casually crossed his right leg over, counting the beats in the conversation. Shadrach enjoyed the feel of the silk pajamas hid underneath the gaudy night jacket he had liberated from the bedroom almost as much as this simple exchange. The light blue running stripes made him feel even taller, as if the clouds touched upon his skin.

“You look ridiculous in the smoking jacket, by the way.”

“Now you are just trying to hurt my feelings.” Shadrach rose his arms, as if embracing his surroundings, and smiled, “This is just.... on loan. So is the jacket,” he tugged at the collar, again settling back into the chair.

Danica sneered. “After all these centuries, you make yourself at home in a plush loft above a boxing gym. Ever the eccentric criminal type.”

“Oh, Bob? He’s back in Toronto. He won’t be back till August.”

“I see I’m wasting my time. I came to warn you, and I did.”

Shadrach caught a slight hiss in her tempered declaration. “Please, my love. Jehiel? He *is* no threat.”

“You know better than that. He is Vatican trained. A Knight of the Vigilant Rose.”

“I would more say *was*.” Shadrach could see his game of words was wearing Danica thin. He knew one does not live as long as he has without knowing when not to push a vampire too far. “Danica, my everlasting love, he lost their support almost a year ago. He’s gone rogue, you could say.”

“Wouldn’t that mean he is more of a threat now that he is off his leash?”

Enjoying a sip, Shadrach smiled. “Ah, I suppose. Problem is, he was excommunicated after accidentally killing a young girl as she was stepping off a school bus. Stray bullet on a mission in Naples, I understand. A great tragedy.”

“Wonderful. And why should I care?”

“You? True. For me, though, all the reason I need.”

Finally, Danica cocked her head, anger beginning to recede.

Shadrach stood, paced himself slowly to stand before a window overlooking a darkened street below, neon lights casting colorful swatches on the wet asphalt. He always enjoyed his short stays in Boston. The city never disappointed him. “You see, the gym below is owned by a one, Mr. Marius Vancinni.”

Danica huffed, “The mafia boss?”

“You would be correct.”

“Great. Hide here while Jehiel hunts you down. He is in Boston, you know? Could be on his way here now.”

“In fact, he was here earlier,” Shadrach said as he turned to look at Danica. “About an hour ago.”

Danica’s brow furrowed. “What?”

“Yes, he *somehow* got wind I was hiding out here. Imagine that.”

“And?” anger again rising in her voice as she must know he was dancing about with his half-spoken words.

“Well, it just so happened Mr. Vancinni was conducting... business downstairs when Jehiel arrived. A moment of divine construction.” Shadrach brought his glass up for another sip to heighten the pause.

Danica could no longer suffer Shadrach and took the empty chair. Her graceful movement reminded him of a large feline, but exuded a feminine lightness that could not be denied. Shadrach knew if not for who he was, she would have his complete and utter devotion.

“That is the thing. That poor darling that was lost so suddenly was a niece to Mr. Vancinni.” With a swift burst of exuberance in his voice, “Can you imagine the surprise on his face when the person responsible for her death walked through his door? Divine construction, I tell you.”

“And they say vampires are devious creatures,” Danica smirked, a glint of mischief in her eye.

Shadrach’s expression fell as if hurt, but then widened with a smile, “Jehiel will trouble us no more.”

“Huh,” Danica sat back, as if exhausted from the whole ordeal. Shadrach always enjoyed her human expressions, still deeply coded in her undead mannerisms.

A chuckle escaped Shadrach as he waved his finger, “You know, we don’t know who hired Jehiel to... *dispose* of us...”