

A Clocktower Meeting  
*A Gate of Myth and Power* short story  
By K. M. Shea

Aristide, Ker, Charon, and Noctus had sacrificed a lot for each other. No one could remember how many times Noctus had taken blows meant for the others in the heat of battle, and Aristide, Ker, and Charon had frequently risked their lives for Noctus.

But if Charon had to guess, neither Ker nor Aristide ever expected that perhaps their hour of greatest sacrifice...would be in a meeting room of the Curia Cloisters, presenting the schematics and proposal for the clocktower to the Regional Committee of Magic in place of their elven friend.

“Next on our meeting agenda is a presentation of a proposed Clocktower for downtown,” Elite Bellus—the wizard representative on the board—announced as he flipped a page in his stapled agenda. “Our presenters are... Mr. Ferryman and Mr. Monet?”

Charon stood still in his purposely ill-fitting tweed suit with a matching flat cap that had the ear flaps pulled down over his ears. He wore tinted glasses that obscured his eyes and had inserts in his nostrils and cheeks to fill out his angular face. Hopefully he’d pass as a fae without his usual glamour. His hair had been dyed a garish red to draw attention away from his face, and to offend the noses of the vampire and werewolf in the room.

Next to him, Aristide gripped Ker’s harness, his seething anger boiling near the surface as he’d been stuffed into the clothes of a late 1600s aristocrat—a blue coat with a green waistcoat, and an enormous cravat tied at his throat—complete with a giant, flowing wig that was appropriately curled. (They were attempting for Nostalgia Vamp, but Aristide wasn’t exactly selling it.)

“Yes,” Aristide said through gritted teeth. “I’m Mr. Monet. This is my associate Mr. Ferryman. Thank you for allowing us the *gift* of showing this presentation.”

Queen Leila—ruler of the Night Court, rumored Fae Empress candidate, fae representative to the board—slapped her palm on the table. “The fae vote against the clocktower!”

Charon took the news without blinking, and Ker laid calmly at Aristide’s feet. Her disguise—they’d used animal safe dyes on her fur, covering up the darkness of her coat with bright reds and oranges, going so far as to paint her nails—was in place if not convincing. They’d attempted to groom her similar to a prized poodle, but instead she looked like a werewolf that had fallen into a vat of paint. The smell of the dye they’d used was so thick in the air, even the wizards were squinting.

With Charon’s stillness and Ker attempting to avoid any kind of notice, Aristide was left to continue.

He put on what Charon imagined would pass for a decent sales smile. “I beg your pardon, Queen Leila, but this is a human project that has already been approved by the human city council,” he said in his honeyed vampire voice.

Leila turned her purple eyes, which would have been breathtakingly beautiful if they weren’t narrowed in suspicion, to Aristide. “Then since we weren’t given a voice on the matter, the fae will *not* be contributing to the cost of this project.”

Aristide waited a moment, probably to see if Charon felt like extending himself.

Charon didn’t. He flipped open his notebook, took out a pen, and remained silent.

As the newly elected spokesperson of this frustrating venture, Aristide continued, “None of the supernaturals are expected to. As I stated, this is a human project. A human investor is building the clocktower—and paying for the entire process as he will own the construction. Today’s presentation is merely a complimentary effort to include supernatural interests in downtown beautification at the suggestion of the human city council.”

Which was a fancy way of saying the city council—in their exuberance—had told Noctus the supernaturals should be informed of the clocktower, and Ker, Aristide, and Charon were only here because they *had* to be.

Noctus appearing before the Regional Committee of Magic was *begging* for trouble, particularly because during negotiations with the city, he’d presented himself as a human.

No one on the Regional Committee was capable of seeing through the glamours Noctus wore, and it was unlikely that any would even suspect he was an elf. But they’d know at a glance he wasn’t human, and there was a slim possibility they’d recognize his glamour wasn’t of fae origin.

That left Aristide, Charon, and Ker to give the presentation—hence their disguises. However, they didn’t particularly want to be remembered by anyone on the committee either, so glamours were still out of the question. They resorted to human tricks to distract the supernaturals.

Not even a werewolf would be able to sniff out their true scents between all the hair dye, Aristide’s musty clothes, and the facial tissues that contained several drops of fox urine that Charon and Aristide had stuffed in their pockets.

“The clocktower is a human project? Oh.” Queen Leila leaned back in her chair and impressively smiled despite the foul-smelling air.

Rigel, the sole audience member for the night’s meeting, relaxed, which—for the Night Court King—amounted to letting his shoulders drop a fraction of an inch.

Charon wrote in his notebook.

*Queen Leila = Committee Miser. Avoid discussing finances with.*

“In that case, thank you for taking time out of your schedules to give this presentation on behalf of the builder,” Queen Leila said.

“No,” Killian Drake, Eminence of the Midwest vampires and the vampire representative on the committee, interrupted. “There are no thanks in this.” The handsome vampire raised his dark eyebrows and managed to look down his nose at Ker, Aristide, and Charon, even though he was sitting and they were standing. “Because I don’t *care* about whatever silliness the humans are partaking in. This is a waste of the committee’s time.”

Bellus—a dapper, older gentleman—straightened in his chair. “Eminence, you are perhaps being a little harsh. Isn’t that right, Pre-Dominant Harka?” Elite Bellus peered in Alpha Harka’s direction.

Harka, a slender woman with dark hair, a quick smile, and sharp eyes, had both of her hands pressed to her nose—apparently their scent-based warfare was working. “Why, is a *werewolf* serving as a seeing eye dog?” she asked in a nasally voice, ignoring Elite Bellus’s question.

Silence reigned over the meeting room for a moment.

Elite Bellus rubbed his eyes. “Harka, you can’t just ask that kind of question.”

“Sure I can,” Harka said. “I represent werewolf interests on this board.”

Charon wrote in his notebook.

*Harka = not interested in Committee. Planning to retire early?*

“Nonsense,” Killian said—he had to have even better self-control than Noctus’s sources had estimated, because he didn’t seem bothered by any of the potent smells the trio oozed. “You don’t have enough information to make any kind of meaningful conjecture. For all you know, the vampire might not *know* his seeing eye dog is a werewolf, and now you’ve outted her. She might be living the highlife without a care in the world, and you just ruined it for her.”

“Hmmm.” Harka inhaled deeply, most likely intending to sigh, then scrunched her face up from the horrific smells.

Ker, still laying down in front of Aristide, wagged her tail, thumping it on the flooring. Charon wrote in his notebook.

*Killian = Committee Troublemaker. Avoid speaking to.  
Most likely cause of Harka’s early retirement.*

“If we could commence with our presentation,” Aristide asked. The vampire probably felt dutybound to get the whole thing over with as quickly as possible.

“Please,” Elite Bellus said. “Continue.”

“Wait a moment, please.” Adept Hazel Medies raised her hand. “Before you begin, might I ask if this project is a human interest, why are supernaturals presenting it?”

Ker stirred, and Charon was very grateful she’d *had* to attend the meeting in her wolf form, or around this time she’d probably descend into a rant about the wisdom of Dale Carnegie.

“Our employer is human,” Aristide explained. “While he wished he could be here today, he is a very busy man, and expresses his regrets that he couldn’t make it. However, my cohorts and I have been involved in every step of planning for the Clocktower, and will—if you excuse my arrogance—serve as suitable stand ins for him.” Aristide gestured with his free hand and accidentally got his fingers snarled in the hairs of his long wig.

“A human hired supernaturals?” Hazel Medeis—the young Adept of the wizard House Medeis and the protégé of Elite Bellus—frowned thoughtfully. “That’s pretty rare. Sometimes humans will hire wizards, but it’s rare for other supernaturals to lower themselves to work for mere humans.” She glanced at her superior, whom she was seated next to, and he nodded in agreement.

Aristide’s smile didn’t even dim. “Perhaps,” he said. “But in this case our employer is very futuristic thinking, and my fellow employees and I are very pleased to work with him and have a hand in shaping the future of Magiford.”

Hazel stared at Aristide’s cravat and aged wig. “I see.”

Charon scratched in his notebook.

*Hazel Medeis = Committee Voice of Reason, very dangerous, do not approach.*

“I believe we’ve interrupted enough,” Elite Bellus said. “What plans, Mr. Ferryman and Mr. Monet, does your employer have for the clocktower?”

Charon obligingly set up the fancy paperboard they’d printed that had the clocktower’s schematics—or at least it’s *public* schematics, so it didn’t include any indication of the portal gates that would be installed inside of it—on the easel they’d brought.

“What, no powerpoint presentation?” Killian Drake asked, his voice indolent.

“*No*,” Aristide said, sounding stuffy enough to suit a true nostalgia vamp.

“The Clocktower itself will work as another tourist attraction to downtown Magiford,” Aristide rattled off. “Taking inspiration from the likes of Big Ben in London and the Allen-Bradly Clocktower, it has classic, artistically designed clockfaces. Four-faced, it contains a belfry with bells that will strike to mark the hour.”

As Aristide continued with the talk, Charon studied the committee members faces.

Killian, for all appearances, was tuned out, rotating between looking at his phone and staring at the ceiling.

He was possibly texting his wife, Hazel Medeis, as Charon heard her phone buzz multiple times, but the staunch wizard ignored it.

Queen Leila also appeared to be watching Aristide's presentation, but her eyes occasionally drifted to the paperwork she had stacked in front of her.

Harka was desperately trying to plug her nose—if she didn't bow out of the meeting in the next few minutes, Charon would be most impressed with her diligence.

The real danger was with Elite Bellus, and Hazel Medeis.

The pair watched Aristide drone on about “gothic revival architecture seamlessly blended with modern conveniences,” “spaces for small-businesses looking for scalability and cheaper rent rates that will encourage relocation,” and “shared areas, encouraging the intermingling of humans and supernaturals in mineral-friendly, scent-positive, forward-thinking environments,” and as many other buzzwords the vampire could fit into his speech with the general hope of leaving everyone a little confused.

Charon flipped displays—showing a different level—and no one questioned that it was Aristide—the blind vampire—pointing to various things on the board.

Charon would have said it was because the Committee wanted the meeting over as fast as possible, too, but through all of Aristide's inventive drabble Hazel Medeis took *notes*, and Elite Bellus smiled encouragingly and never made a motion to cover his nose.

Charon turned to a new page in his notebook.

*Wizards + kindness = Trouble.*

When Aristide paused to take a breath, Killian growled, “Are you finished?”

“Would you like me to be finished?” Aristide managed to not sound hopeful.

“Yes.”

“Then this concludes our presentation. Our employer looks forward to creating and contributing to the continued beautification, peaceful co-existence, and positive can-do attitude that prevails in Magiford.” Aristide tugged on Ker's harness, and she stood, her eyes watering from the terrible smells they were giving off.

Charon swiped the presentation boards and the display easel, then started marching towards the exit.

“Leave the doors open, please,” Harka called, her voice muffled by her hands.

“This was courtesy of the human city council, yes?” Killian's voice was dark and low. “Perhaps we should send them a token of our appreciation.”

“If you do anything to acknowledge them, they're going to take it as an invitation to reach out to you,” Queen Leila said.

Charon, Aristide, and Ker hustled out of the room, marching through the Curia Cloisters—which were empty considering the late hour, and because any shifter or vampire could smell them coming and fled the area.

“Are you *certain* we have to drive all the way back smelling like this?” Aristide growled, his wig flapping out behind him due to how quickly he was striding down the hallway, nearly being dragged by Kerberos.

“Unless you'd like to stop at a fire station and get hosed down,” Charon said.

“Don't tempt me,” Aristide said.

Ker whined in the back of her throat.

“You said it, Ker,” Aristide said. “Noctus owes us—*big!* And he needs a hobby—you should get on that Charon.”

“He already has too many claims to his time,” Charon said.

“Yeah, and if he had something that lowered his blood pressure, maybe he wouldn’t be so hot to trot to create even *more* time sinks,” Aristide complained. “Try getting him a book about bonsai.”

“I’ll pull the car around,” Charon said. “And meet you at the front door.” He peeled off, pushing open a door to a bare, cement staircase.

“You could get him a goldfish—or a cat! I’ve heard good things about pets,” Aristide called after him before the door swung shut.

Charon kept his pace measured as he hurried down the stairs, still juggling the collapsed easel and the presentation boards.

It would take a miracle to find anything—pet, hobby, or otherwise—that Noctus would be willing to let himself be vulnerable with. The Mors Elf King was forever repenting for what his family had done.

Charon wasn’t sure there was anything in the word that would slow him down. But he hoped, for the sake of his king, that there was.

Though it probably wasn’t going to be a goldfish or cat.

The End