

An excerpt from *Supernatural Crimes Unit: NYPD*
Book 1: *The Thin Blue Ley-Line*
by Keith R.A. DeCandido

As soon as she got back down to the second floor, Kiernan made a beeline for the vending machines. She had a rather ridiculous craving for corn chips.

Umali was sitting at what used to be Jiminez's desk, typing furiously using only her two index fingers.

"That," Kiernan said as she passed by on the way to fulfill her salt craving, "is the fastest I've seen anybody two-finger type."

"Years of practice," Umali said with a smile. "How'd it go with IAB?"

"My gynecologist is less invasive. And it was some new guy, so I had to explain fucking *everything* to him." She tapped her debit card on the snack machine's reader. It beeped and the display read CARD READ ERROR.

With a snarl, Kiernan swiped her card instead, then entered the code for the bag of corn chips.

The machine disgorged the small yellow bag of blessed, salty junk food into the bin in the bottom. Kiernan snatched it up and, as she headed for her desk, said to Umali, "Hopefully Grullon won't be as long up there. Hawk showed you around after roll call, right?"

Umali nodded. "Yeah. Went up to three and saw the kitchen and the interrogation and conference rooms. Went to four to see the regular holding cells. Went to five to see the bunks and lockers. Went down to one to see the big storage unit, the evidence closet, and the extra interrogation rooms for people who can't do the stairs or who we want to keep at ground level for whatever reason. And then he took me all the way down to the basement and showed me the *really awesome* special holding cells," Umali said that last with a big grin. Kiernan was starting to understand why the younger woman was so hot to join SCU. Beyond her ridiculous hero-worship of Kiernan herself, anyhow.

Sitting down at her desk, Kiernan smiled at the new detective. "They're pretty fabulous, right? The iron manacles, the silver manacles—oh, and I especially love the big-ass pentagram on the underfloor."

"There's a big-ass pentagram?"

Kiernan rolled her eyes as she popped a few corn chips into her mouth. After chewing and swallowing, she said, "Fuck, he didn't show you the pentagram? You push a button and the floor rolls back and there's this big pentagram in red on the underfloor. We need it to hold some kinda monsters in place."

"Hawk said we're not supposed to use the word *monsters*."

Grabbing a tissue from the box on her desk to wipe the corn-chip residue from her fingers, Kiernan said, "He can say that all he wants, but anything that can get held in place by line art on the floor? That's a fuckin' *monster*. I mean, fine, we deal with plenty'a people I'd be happy to call *creatures* or *beings* or whatever, but if it's frozen by a fuckin'

pentagram, then it's a monster." She ate a few more corn chips and added, "Please tell me he at least showed you the UV lights."

At that, Umali looked away, embarrassed. "Yeah."

"Lemme guess—you asked if that would burn the vampires to a crisp?"

She nodded.

"*Everybody* thinks that the first time—including me. Well, except Hawk, actually. But the whole idea of vampires bursting into flames from the sun comes from *Nosferatu*, which, it turns out, was just an unauthorized ripoff of *Dracula*. Everybody started doin' it after that in pop culture, but it was never part'a vampire folklore. Or, as it happens, reality."

"Wait, the bursting into flames thing is because of somebody's fanfic that everyone took seriously?"

Kiernan had to admit to loving that way of putting it. "Pretty much, yeah. The UV just keeps them at normal strength, instead of the super-strength they get at night."

As she tapped the space bar to wake her computer back up, Jurienny shouted across the squad room. "Domenica, line 2!"

"Thanks, Jurienny." She grabbed her phone, stabbed the button labeled "2," and put it to her ear. "Kiernan."

"Hey, Detective, it's Joe Lin from the One-Oh?"

"Oh, hey, Lin. How's Grabowski doing?"

"Nothing broken, just bruised ribs, but he'll be riding a desk for a week or two. IAB's talking to him now about discharging his weapon."

"Of course they are. Tell him I'm glad he's okay."

"Will do. Um, did you hear about the domovoy?"

Not liking the sound of that in the least, Kiernan slowly said, "What about the domovoy?"

"He—he got loose."

At a volume that was almost as loud as Jurienny's, Kiernan cried out, "How the *fuck* did he get loose?"

"A doctor came in and took the bullet out of his chest and then he snarled and tossed the doc around and ran off. They took shots at him, but he just shrugged them off and ran out into the street. There's a BOLO out and we've got a blue-and-white sitting at his place on 29th."

"Well, the BOLO's fucking useless, since he can change shape. And now that *he* knows that *we* know he committed the assault, no way he's gonna go back to looking like Leybenzon *or* going to that apartment." Then something rather important occurred to her. "After what the city paid to put in those specialized cells, how the *fuck* did he get out of one?"

"Um . . ." Lin hesitated.

Finally, when Lin's awkward pause threatened to go on forever, Kiernan prompted, "Lin?"

"They had him in a regular cell, not one of the new ones."

"*Madonna mia*, are you fucking kidding me with this? Why'd they do that?"

"I have no idea. Look, I only know what I do know because the report came in to us, since we brought him in. The DA's office was CC'd on it, but you guys weren't, so I figured I'd call. You want me to forward you the paperwork?"

"Please." Kiernan put a hand to her forehead.

The report was in her inbox almost before she hung up. She glanced over it, noting that yes, the suspect, Valery Leybenzon, had been placed in one of the regular cells. *Fucking idiots.*

She got up and went to the Major's office. The door was open, so she knocked on the frosted glass as she crossed the threshold.

"What's up, Kiernan?" the lieutenant asked.

"You're not gonna believe this." She filled him in.

The Major's first question was, "Why didn't they put him in one of the new cells?"

"That wasn't in the report, but my money's on 'they're fucking morons.' By the way, that report? They sent it to the One-Oh and the DA, but not to us. Luckily, I impressed the shit out of Lin yesterday on the bust, so the first thing he did was call me."

Majorowicz smirked. "Gee, Kiernan, it's not like you to *make* friends."

Kiernan casually replied with an upraised middle finger.

Chuckling, the Major reached for his phone. "All right, I'll call downtown and get into it. How'd it go with IAB?"

"The usual bullshit. Grullon's with him now."

"I'm sure it'll be fine. It was a clean shoot."

Kiernan hesitated. "Well, one of the things he asked was why I didn't try using a regular round before going to my backup weapon."

"Didn't one of the uniforms throw a shot already?"

"Yeah, which was in the report that this idiot didn't bother to fucking read. Anyhow, I don't trust that it'll come back clean from this *mamaluco*. Why couldn't they've sent Peña?"

"He's on vacation." The lieutenant, who had been holding the phone in his right hand for several seconds, finally started pushing buttons with his left. "I'll let you know what I get from the Tombs duty officer."

Grinning, Kiernan asked, "Can I listen in?" At the Major's dubious expression, she added, "C'mon, I love listening to you yell at morons. And I need cheering up after IAB's bullshit."

He sighed. "Fine, take a seat."

Still grinning, Kiernan plopped down on one of the guest chairs.

Someone answered the lieutenant's call, and after a second, the Major said, "Linda, this is Lieutenant Stan Majorowicz of the SCU. Who's the duty officer for you guys today? . . . Great, can you transfer me to him? . . . Thanks." Putting his hand over the mouthpiece, the Major said to Kiernan, "It's Frank Reilly. We were in uniform together in the Nine-Four a million years ago."

"Is that good or bad?" Kiernan recalled that the Major knew a third of the cops on the job and was on good terms with most of them, even the ones he thought were, in his words, "flaming-hot doofuses."

"I haven't talked to him in almost a decade, so it's hard to say." He uncovered the mouthpiece. "Frankie, it's Stan Majorowicz . . . I'm fine, thanks . . . Yeah, Hanna's doing great . . . No, Stan Junior's away at college. He's up at Cornell . . . I know, it feels like his confirmation was just last week. How's Mary? . . . Oh, damn. I'm sorry . . . Well, I'm glad it's amicable, at least . . . Good, arbitration's less painful than two lawyers going at it . . . Right, well, I got a problem with one of my cases . . . No, Frankie, I'm not at the Three-Three anymore, I run SCU . . . Yes, Frankie, it's real. That's why they built all those spiffy new cells in your basement."

Majorowicz looked up at the ceiling in supplication. Kiernan was squirming in the guest chair and practically biting her tongue to keep from laughing out loud.

"No, it's not for people high on PCP, it's for vampires and werewolves and domovoy's—like the guy who got loose yesterday . . . Yeah, he was one of mine. I know officers from the One-Oh brought him in. That's 'cause we don't have room for him here. I only got four special cells, and right now they're full. I've got a naiad, a hugag, an aweskon-wa, and a kappa . . . Basically, a mermaid, a funny-looking bear, Tinkerbell, and a slime monster with gas."

The Major's tone had been genial and friendly to start, but now he sounded very much like a Marine. "*No*, Frankie, I am *not* making this up. This is who we've got in holding until they can get arraigned. We ain't got space for any more, so we sent our latest collar down to you. Didn't you notice that Leybenzon looked like Bigfoot's cousin? . . . Cosplay, right. Look, Frankie, I know for a fact that the paperwork on Leybenzon said that he was SCU and that he should go in one of the new cells, and only *then* should the silver bullet be removed from his chest. The only part of that you got right was taking out the bullet. How is it you managed to see the part about removing a bullet but missed all the other parts? . . . Uh-huh . . . Uh-huh . . . Uh-huh . . . Actually, Frankie, yeah, it's *totally* your fault, and believe me when I tell you that the memo that I'm about to write to the commissioner will completely blame you. And you'd better hope the memo that I write on my computer is a helluva lot nicer than the one I'm writing in my head right now."

The Major slammed the phone down into the receiver. "What a flaming-hot doofus. Hope Mary takes him to the cleaners in the divorce."

At last, Kiernan felt comfortable enough to bust out laughing, which was good, because if she'd held it in much longer, her teeth would've exploded. Between guffaws, she asked, "Didn't he say it was amicable?"

"Yeah, but I hope she does anyhow." The Major also started to laugh, though he was visibly trying to keep control of himself. "It isn't really funny, y'know," he said between chuckles.

"Oh fuck no, it's tragic and pathetic and stupid." The straight face with which she said those words was fleeting. Kiernan let out another burst of laughter as she added, "But it's *also* funny. And frankly, after the rectal exam IAB gave me and finding out that your pal Frankie lost the domovoy, I needed the laugh."

"He is *not* my pal." Majorowicz shook his head. "This is why I buy the huge bottles of antacids. I'm gonna call Vondelikos and let him know we might need ESU if anyone ever finds Leybenzon."

Getting to her feet, Kiernan said, “Let’s hope the asshole actually sends them this time. I need to go finish requisitioning new silvers.” She refrained from mentioning that she hadn’t even started filling out the forms. The Major was having a bad enough day . . .

Grullon was coming down the stairs as Kiernan came out of the lieutenant’s office. The IAB inspector—whose name Kiernan refused to remember on principle—was right behind him. A short, squirrely man with salt-and-pepper hair, a cheap suit, and a snotty attitude, he asked, “Is Lieutenant Majorowicz in his office?”

“He was a second ago,” Kiernan said as she sat back down at her desk.

“Good.” The IAB guy headed toward the lieutenant’s office, then stopped and faced Kiernan. “By the way, Detective, I’m not supposed to tell you this, but you’ve probably got nothing to worry about. Once you explained what that thing was—and once I did a little reading on my phone between your interview and Detective Grullon’s—it all made sense. This stuff you guys do is pretty wacked out, but it looks to me like it was a clean shoot.”

With that, he continued into the Major’s office.

“Damn,” Kiernan said, “now I almost feel bad that I can’t remember his name.”

Grullon started to open his mouth, but Kiernan held up a finger.

“*Don’t* tell me what it is. I don’t feel *that* bad.”

Grullon chuckled. “Fair enough.”

Kiernan tapped the space bar on her computer to wake it up, then started to fill out the paperwork for more silver bullets.

Let’s hope they show up before I need them again.

She had only gotten through about a third of the form when a familiar voice said, “Excuse me, Detective Kiernan?”

Looking up, Kiernan saw a short, stout Latinx woman wearing a dark blue blouse, jeans, and flats. It took her a moment to completely recognize Catalina Mercado, as the woman’s dark hair was much shorter than it had been the last time Kiernan had seen her. She still had a mark on her lip, though it was a scar now instead of the raw injury Kiernan had seen before, and all the bruising was gone. Even so, there were still some minor indications of swelling around her right eye.

Standing up, Kiernan said, “Ms. Mercado! I-I wasn’t expecting you. Was I?” She added that last, worried that she had arranged to meet with the domovoy’s assault victim and forgotten.

“No, no, Detective, I just—” Mercado took a deep breath. “I just wanted to see him in prison.”

Kiernan winced. “Have a seat, Ms. Mercado. Can I get you something to drink?”

“The nice woman up front said she’d get me some tea.”

Glancing at the front of the squad room, Kiernan saw that Jurienny wasn’t at her desk. Mercado sat down in Kiernan’s guest chair. “I’m sorry to bother you, Detective.”

Kiernan waved her off. “It’s no bother, Ms. Mercado. It’s good to see you. I like the haircut.”

Smiling shyly, Mercado said, “Thank you. My son says it makes me look like a badass. My daughter says it’s too butch.”

Returning the smile, Kiernan said, "Well, I'm with your son."

Then Mercado's face hardened. "It's just, it's been so long since that bastard beat me up. Like I said, I want to see him behind bars. Or behind a steel door, I suppose? You don't have bars on your cells, do you?"

"We don't, no." Kiernan sighed. "The problem is, Ms. Mercado—the domovoy wasn't brought here. We're all full up, so the officers who helped us take him into custody took him to the Tombs downtown."

"Can you take me downtown to see him?"

Jurienny arrived with a mug of tea, which gave Kiernan time to figure out how, exactly, to tell this poor woman what had happened at the Tombs.

"Here you go, Ms. Mercado," Jurienny said as she handed the mug over. "*Cuidado, es caliente.*"

"*Gracias.*" Mercado gingerly took the mug by the handle.

Jurienny nodded, then also nodded to Kiernan before returning to her desk.

As Mercado blew on the tea and took a small sip, Kiernan said, "The problem, Ms. Mercado, is that—well—the domovoy isn't in the Tombs anymore."

"Did they transfer him somewhere else?" Mercado asked, sounding confused. Kiernan didn't blame her.

"Not exactly." Kiernan leaned forward. "I only just found out a few minutes ago myself. Someone down at the Tombs screwed up and the domovoy escaped. He's at large again. We've got a BOLO out," she said quickly as Mercado's left eye widened in horror; the right one hadn't healed enough to be able to do so.

"How does this happen?" she asked in a ragged whisper. "You said you arrested him."

"I did. *We* did. But, like I said, someone at the Tombs screwed up. They didn't put him in one of the special cells, so he was able to break out." She put a hand on Mercado's knee. "But he's on the run, Ms. Mercado. We've got officers watching his home and every cop on the job knows to look for him."

"Look for what? He can change shape, how are they supposed to find him?"

Kiernan had really been hoping that Mercado wouldn't have thought of that. "There are ways, Ms. Mercado. Trust me, we're professionals. We got this. We'll do everything we can to put him back—" She smirked. "—back behind bars."

"You promise?"

Again, Kiernan winced. "You know I can't do that. But I can promise we'll do our best."

Mercado took another sip of tea, then set the mug down on Kiernan's desk. "That's what you told me in the hospital, too."

"The good news is, we got a *lot* more information now than we did when you and I first met at St. Vincent's and I took your statement. We got a positive ID on the perp, complete with a DNA match, we got his movements and habits over the past six months, and we got a police force that gets cranky when people break out of our cells."

"And you think this is enough?"

"I think that when he assaulted you, we had limited options and he had infinite ones. Now? It's the other way around."

Mercado closed her eyes and shook her head. “I hope you are right, Detective.”

“Me, too,” she said with an encouraging smile.

“What if he comes after me?”

“If you want, we can assign a car from—” Kiernan hesitated, trying to remember where Mercado lived—ah, yes, an apartment in the Corona neighborhood of Queens “—the 115th Precinct to your building.”

“I would like that very much, yes.”

Nodding, Kiernan said, “I’ll get right on that.”

After taking another sip of tea, Mercado got to her feet. “You will keep me posted, please? Even if there is no news?”

Also standing, Kiernan said, “Absolutely.”

“*Gracias.*”

“C’mon, I’ll walk you out.”

She nodded, and the two women walked toward the staircase. As they passed Jurienny’s desk, Mercado said to her, “*Gracias por el té.*”

Jurienny put her right hand over her heart and smiled.

As she walked the domovoy’s victim downstairs, Kiernan hoped that everything she’d told Mercado was true and not a whole lot of bullshit to cover a rather massive fuckup.