

FROM THE
AMARANTHINE UNIVERSE

Tales of the Executioners

AINE:

Another Complication

A short story

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You never know what you'll find in the shadows...



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COMING SOON:

Tales of the Executioners



Thanks to Susan Koenig and Bonnie Mutchler for their ninja-like proofreading skills.

What is an Executioner?



The Executioners are the vampire's equivalent of special police. They go on "assignments" that The Guild (the vampire government) sends them on, and they don't have a reputation for being very nice. It's a reputation that is often well deserved.

For more on Executioners and the universe they live in, [check out the *Amaranthine* series by Joleene Naylor](#).



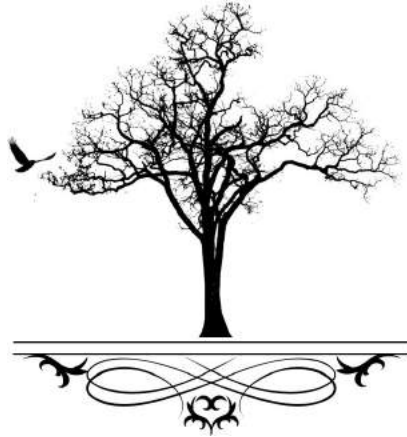
This is the first in a collection of short stories, *Tales of the Executioners*. Each story is about a different Executioner from the *Amaranthine* universe.

Aine becomes an Executioner during *Ashes of Deceit*, taking over for Philip. You can find Aine in the novel *Ashes of Deceit*. This story takes place at the same time as the novel *Heart of the Raven*.

This story may contain violence, strong language, sexual content or other disturbing scenes and is not intended for a young audience.



*



Aine

The phone reception was good, though background noise on the bus made it hard to hear. Aine plugged his other ear and listened as the male at the other end finished his spiel. “Right,” he said when it was finished. “You two keep looking. I think I’m in the last known neighborhood, or I will be soon. If he follows his usual nightly routine, I should be able to intercept him easily. But just in case, if you see him call.”

The male on the other end agreed and Aine hung up. Those two were more than capable of handling things on their end. They’d been trained, just as he had.

He tapped an app shortcut on the phone’s screen and flipped through the information. He’d memorized the photo and the details. The included GPS map showed that he was only about half an hour from the guy’s den. Hopefully their information was correct and his quarry would do what he was expected to, then they could get everything sorted out quickly and head back to the Citadel.

Aine stashed his cellphone in his coat and turned to the window. The bus pulled away from the curb with a load of new arrivals. Not that there was room for more. Despite the late hour, the bus was crammed with people jostling, arguing, laughing, talking, and, in the case of the man next to him, drinking. Aine scanned the crowd, seeking the newcomers. His brown eyes moved from person to person and then-

“Hey! Watch it!”

Aine jerked away but didn’t avoid the splash of hot coffee. It soaked into his coat and splattered across his black t-shirt. He was still better off than the coffee’s owner, who now wore it on his pants and his heavy sweater.

“Sorry,” the guy said and mopped at the mess with a flimsy paper napkin. His eyes moved to the large, dark skinned man who’d nearly bowled them over. “Lousy drunk.”

But it wasn't just a lousy drunk, not if Aine's nose and experience told him anything, and a hundred plus year couldn't be wrong. It was a vampire. Or rather the vampire Aine was looking for. It was almost as if he'd stepped off the cellphone screen.

Right on time.

"Excuse me," Aine murmured to his seat mate and then casually stood and moved towards the front of the bus. This wasn't the place for a confrontation. It was too crowded. There were too many witnesses and potential casualties. Vampires hadn't survived for millennia by advertising their existence. In fact, the Laws were very strict. You were never to reveal yourself to a live person, or at least not one you were going to leave alive.

The bus ground to a stop and Aine followed his quarry out onto the sidewalk. The vehicle had barely pulled away when the vampire glanced over his shoulder at his pursuer. Their eyes met and then he seemed to vanish.

Aine groaned. "A wind walker, great."

That hadn't been in the information.

He gave the darkened street a quick glance and then hurried after him, though he knew he had no chance of catching up. They might both be vampires, but their skills varied, and he was no match for the other's speed.

He swung down an alley that was thick with the other vampire's smell, and skidded to a stop as a large, hulking object seemingly appeared from the shadows.

"Who are you?"

Aine fingered the dagger in his coat with one hand, and with the other he flashed the silver medallion that hung around his neck. Made of twisted silver bands, it was more than just jewelry; it was a badge that identified him as one of the vampire guild's elite police force.

An Executioner.

A quick hiss of breath and a step back showed that the vampire knew what that meant and all the shades of dark subtleties it implied. "What do you want?"

"The Guild sent me, Tom," Aine said and let the medallion drop back to his chest.

The reaction was slow, thoughtful. "What for?"

"You know very well, after the mess you left. If you'd like to come with me, we can do this the easy way."

Tom snorted. "I don't take invitations handed out by Executioners."

"Look, just come with me and-"

Tom was gone before Aine could finish his sentence. Of course this had to be difficult. That was why he'd been handed the assignment. The Executioners with seniority didn't want it, and they couldn't hand it to the two new recruits, not that Aine had been an Executioner for more than a month and a half himself. He wished that Verchiel was back from his trip to Germany. He seemed like the kind of guy who would enjoy an assignment like this.

With nothing else to do, Aine turned and headed back to the street. The light above the bus stop threw flickering light over the bench and its two new occupants. The pair of teenage girls looked on their surroundings with wide eyes and nervous, drunk giggles.

Aine checked his watch and the faded bus stop schedule. It claimed another bus would stop within the hour, though he wasn't sure if he should bother. He'd lost Tom, but it shouldn't be too hard to find him, if The Guild's information was correct.

And considering they'd been wrong about Tom's abilities, it wouldn't be a surprise.

He leaned against the light post and waited. The teenage girls checked him out and giggled, at first obviously finding his young face and long, copper colored hair attractive. But, as moments passed and he remained motionless, not quite human but not quite something else, their approval slipped into dislike, and they shied away, sliding to the far end of the bench with apprehensive looks. It was that moment when you were too human, but still not human enough, and the mortals got scared.

He didn't feel like messing with them, or trying to fake mortality, so he abandoned the wait and headed out on foot. It would be easiest to go to Tom's den and wait. There were only a handful of hours left until dawn, and no vampire would stay out after that, unless they wanted to turn into a crunchy mess. He tugged his cell phone from his coat pocket to check the map again, but the device was damp with coffee and when he pressed the button nothing happened. It was just something else to make the night complete.

What have I done to deserve this?

He tried to remember the map, and came up with a vague, shadowy impression of it. The street names were a blur. He reminded himself that Executioners had survived without GPS for thousands of years. Surely he was as good as they were?

As he walked, he sniffed the air, seeking Tom's scent. He picked up a variety of smells; sweat, paint, cinnamon, and something very much like old varnish. There was the scent of another vampire, one he didn't know, and then, finally, there was Tom.

He wound down a dark street and an alley, until he came to a rusty door. Tom's scent was strong; he'd been there recently, though whether it was his den or not was hard to say. There was only one way to find out.

The door wasn't locked, so Aine opened it and peered inside. He sniffed again and came up with stale cigarettes, blood, and something else. It smelled vampirish and yet it didn't. Another complication.

He couldn't smell anyone else, so he pushed past the door and up a set of dark stairs. His vampire eyes could see in the gloom, but there was nothing to look at. The walls were bare and the hallway at the top of the stairs was empty except for another door at the end. The scent was stronger as he crept towards it, and he paused at the door and listened. He could hear something like soft scratching; perhaps someone moving around?

He gripped his dagger in his hand and threw the door open with a shout, "Executioners! Come out!"

No one replied to his call, and he stood tense and expectant as his eyes scanned the room. It was dark and sparsely furnished; a folding table, a chair, a broken couch and on the floor a well-worn book with no cover. A door on the far wall led to what he assumed would be a bedroom. Whoever had been moving had fallen silent now, but he could guess where they were.

He raised his voice and tried to sound scary and authoritative, like Senya did. The former Executioner was a bitch, but she knew how to instill fear in others. "I said, Executioners. Come out, now!"

Nothing happened and Aine groaned silently. "This is your last chance!" He counted off the seconds and then charged the door. He kicked it open in a flurry of splinters and landed inside with a cry.

A low growl came from under the sagging bed and, slowly, a pair of glowing eyes emerged. Aine blinked in disbelief and lowered his weapon as a large angry cat slinked into view; back arched and tail like a bottle brush.

Aine stepped towards it and the animal hissed and darted for the door. The Executioner was faster, and he caught the seething mass of fur behind the neck and hefted it in the air. It snarled and struck out as Aine sniffed it. This was the odor he'd detected. Had Tom...

He could smell the immortality and knew it had to be true. Tom had created a vampire cat. Now what in the hell was he supposed to do with that?

He heard the downstairs door open and close, and footsteps tromp up the stairs. He dropped the creature and hid just inside the bedroom, tensed and ready. Tom's scent wafted to him as the vampire shuffled to a stop outside his door. Aine cursed silently; he'd left it open and now Tom knew.

"Executioner!" the vampire roared. "I can smell you. Come out!"
So much for surprise.

Aine debated for a moment and then decided he had had enough. It was time to pull out the big guns. He slid the dagger back into his coat and stepped into the doorway. He leveled his gaze with Tom's. The vampire snarled and made to charge, but his body didn't move.

"What in the hell?"

"We've already done the introductions," Aine said coldly. "I'm here to escort you to the citadel where you will stand trial for a long list of crimes, including turning an animal without due permission."

Tom strained and snarled, but his limbs stayed stationary, held immobile by Aine's vampire abilities. "You're a puppet master, aren't you?"

"Yes, actually. Do you have a phone?"

Tom looked puzzled. “No, why? Is that a crime, too?”

“No.” Aine pulled his cellphone out and pressed the buttons. It stayed dark. Though it would have been easier to call the guards and let them restrain the prisoner and haul him off, it looked like he’d have to do it himself. “It doesn’t matter. Do you have an animal carrier for the cat?”

Tom adopted an attitude of fake innocence. “What cat?”

At that moment the animal strode out of the bedroom gave a loud “meow” and rubbed against his legs. Tom looked away and then muttered, “Oh, that cat.” His voice rose as he snapped, “It’s a bunch of bureaucratic nonsense, demanding that we ask their permission to turn something. They don’t care about making more vampires, but don’t turn your bloody cat immortal or the police come for you.”

Aine was inclined to agree, but he knew better than to say so. “I’m not here because of the cat. I’m here because you tore up a diner, killed two people, and left a score of witnesses to the fact.” Tom’s mouth opened and Aine quickly added, “Save it for the council.”

Tom fell into an unhappy silence, save the occasional straining sound as he tried to move his limbs, and Aine searched the apartment for a box to cram the cat in. He wasn’t sure what would hold the creature; with immortality came increased strength, and he didn’t want it ripping its way out during transit and running loose in the city.

He found a metal safety deposit box under the bed that he thought would work. Like themselves, the cat wouldn’t need air. Tom gave another loud grunt and fought against his seeming paralysis. Aine’s head ached with the force required to keep the vampire immobile. He wasn’t sure how he was going to make him walk down the stairs and through the streets to the appointed meeting place. He’d have to deal with it when the time came.

He rubbed his forehead, then turned to the feline who was systematically shredding the book on the floor. “Here, kitty, kitty.”

The cat gave him a long, cold stare, and then in a single leap disappeared into the bedroom.

With a muttered, “God dammit, I’m ready for this night to be over!” Aine bounded after it. The thing tore around the small room, over the bed, halfway up the wall, down again, and around the floor. He finally managed to tackle the beast and force it into the box, howling, hissing, and slashing all the way.

“There,” he proclaimed to no one in particular and stormed back to the living room. His head pounded and he was covered in long, angry scratches. To make his mood worse, he found that Tom had managed to raise his arms and spread his feet, proof he was slowly getting free. The prisoner stopped his struggles when he saw the metal box, and Aine had a sudden burst of inspiration. “You can cooperate or else I’ll incinerate this monster myself.”

Tom's face went pale and his eyes burned with a mixture of fury and fear. "You wouldn't. It's not Salem's fault."

"You should have thought of that before you turned Salem." He lifted his chin and narrowed his eyes into angry slits. "If you think I'm in the mood to mess around, you're mistaken. You will accompany me to the Guild, where you will stand before the council for your crimes and receive just punishment."

"Sure I will. More likely you'll cut off my head when I'm not looking and eat my heart for kicks. I know how you and your boss Malick operate."

Aine began to slowly release his influence, watching for any signs of Tom's fight or flight. "Malick isn't in charge anymore. It's Eileifr now, and the rules are a little different."

Tom's face twisted back and forth between surprise and bitter disbelief, and stopped on the latter. "If you say so. Just don't hurt my damned cat or I'll tear you apart myself."

"You're not in a position to call the shots," Aine pointed out. "But if you cooperate I won't hurt it."

Tom growled low in his throat but, as Aine pulled away the last of his control, he continued to stand motionless. "So where the hell are we going?"

It was a long walk to the abandoned warehouse. Tom strode next to Aine like a thunder cloud, his glittering eyes mere slits that said he was going to grab that metal box and run for it at his first chance. Aine held the unlikely prize in one hand, and his dagger in the other. He wished he had a more substantial weapon, but there hadn't been any way to get something larger on the bus, and from the intel that had seemed the best place to catch him.

A pair of gray clad guards was suddenly visible in a slice of streetlight. They stood like dark statues against the rusty, corrugated walls of the warehouse, barely disguised masks of irritation on their faces.

"I got him," Aine announced, just for something to say. "I would have called but my phone got coffee spilled on it."

"Coffee?" one of the guards demanded. "Or did you just want all the credit?"

"Roger!" cried the other with alarm. "You can't talk to Executioners like that."

Roger rolled his eyes. "It's not like it's one of the *real* ones. It's only Aine. For crying out loud, I've been a guard longer than he was. Just because he's got a title now doesn't mean anything. Two months ago he'd have been in your place!"

"That was then," said the other quickly. "Now he could kill you for talking back!"

Aine didn't have time for this. He couldn't believe Tom had cooperated as long as he had, and any moment he knew the vampire would decide to abandon the cat and take off. If he did, they might not catch him. "Sorry to interrupt, but could you take the prisoner into custody?"

The nervous guard gave a high pitched “eep” sound, snapped a salute and muttered apologies as he ran to take one of Tom’s arms. Roger produced another eye roll, but did the same. They quickly bound Tom and hauled him towards a van that sat half concealed in shadows.

“We’ll take him in,” Roger said with no small amount of bitterness. “And I imagine we’ll do the paperwork.”

Normally Aine would have done it himself, but his head still hurt and Roger’s attitude annoyed him. “Sure, go ahead. You’ve had a lot more practice than I have, since you’ve been a guard longer.”

Roger scowled darkly. “The next time an Executioner spot opens-”

“You should put in for it,” Aine agreed. “You’re probably good at filling the application out by now.” He nodded to a black sports car that was parked near the van. “I’ll follow you in, unless they give me another assignment in the meantime.”

“Your phone would have to work for that.” Roger sniffed disdainfully.

Aine gave him a smile. “Then I guess I’ll get a vacation.”



When Aine got back to the citadel he filed his report and turned his cell in for a new one. As he tested out the menu he asked causally, “So, the prisoner?”

“They, uh, took him to detention. Looks like he’s likely to get ten years or more, if they go by the, uh, book.” He gave Aine’s paperwork a quick, nervous read through and stammered, “Uh, s-sir? You, uh, you mentioned a cat in your, uh, report.”

Aine wanted nothing more than a shower and a nice big glass of blood. “And?”

“Well, beg your pardon, sir, but I, uh, you- you didn’t fill out an extermination request for the, uh, for the animal. I’m sorry, but you’ll need to fill one out and, uh, you’ll have to take the animal down to the basement to be destroyed.”

“Didn’t Roger do that already?”

“Roger? Uh, no, no sir, I don’t believe so. He did file some paperwork on the prisoner and such, but um, not, not anything on an animal.”

Aine rubbed his forehead with irritation. “He didn’t let the damn thing escape did he?” He suddenly narrowed his eyes and snapped, “That’s great. Now there’s a vampire cat running loose somewhere. Put him on report for negligence!”

The stammering guard gave a quick salute, and started to shuffle through papers. “Yes, yes, sir. Of course, sir. Right away, sir.”

“I’m tired of incompetence,” Aine added for good measure. “If there’s nothing further that Roger forgot to do, then I’m going to my quarters.”

“Y-yes sir. Of course, sir. Have a nice day, sir.”

Aine took a shower, dressed in fresh clothes and fetched himself a large bag of blood. He dropped onto the sofa and poured some of the crimson liquid into a cup. It shimmered in the light and he reluctantly set it aside and turned to the metal security box at his feet.

“All right, monster. I’m going to open this, and if you try to take my head off I swear I’ll fill one of those forms out.” It was a lie. Evil or not, he couldn’t bring himself to have the thing destroyed.

He snapped the locks and waited for the cat to spring at him, but instead it sat hunched back in its box and meowed piteously.

Aine sighed and stuck his hand inside. “Come on, kitty, kitty. I won’t fill the form out. Come on.” He picked the cup up in the other hand and waved it towards the feline. “Come on and have some nice blood.”

The cat gave a long, low howl and leaped. He bounced off of Aine’s chest, ping ponged off the arm of the couch, and pounced to a stop on the floor at his feet, expectant eyes peering upwards. Aine slowly set the cup in front of it, and drew back before the beast could tear him to shreds. It set on the blood like a kitten to milk, lapping happily.

Aine leaned back and sucked at his own dinner. He’d have to wait a week or two, but then he could put in a request for a cat. Everyone was so busy with construction and organizing new policies that he doubted anyone would oppose it.

Finished with its meal, the creature hopped up on the couch and settled itself in Aine’s lap, purring loudly. The vampire tensed for an attack. When none came, he relaxed and gave it a half-hearted pat on the head. “Good kitty. Nice Salem.”

Salem it did have a ring to it. At least Tom was capable of giving the cat a good name. Aine scratched its fuzzy ears. A cat was something he needed like a hole in the head, even if it wasn’t permanent. He’d have to give Tom back his cat when he got out.

Maybe.

You can find Aine in the full length novel *Ashes of Deceit* by Joleene Naylor.



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About the author:

Joleene Naylor is the author of the glitter-less *Amaranthine* series, a world where vampires aren't for children. As a compliment to the novel series, she has also written several short story collections and the *Amaranthine Files* encyclopedia.

In what little time is left she watches anime and updates her blogs, all from a crooked Victorian house in Villisca, Iowa. Between her husband and her pets, she is never lonely, and should she ever disappear one might look for her on a beach in Tahiti, sipping a tropical drink and wearing a disguise.

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