

A full moon is visible in a cloudy night sky. The clouds are dark and textured. On the left side, the dark silhouette of a tree branch is visible, partially obscuring the moon.

NIGHTMARES

ARE

MADE OF

THESE

BY PAM LYNNE

Nightmares Are Made of These

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NIGHTMARES

Nightmares are made of these
To this I do agree
Travel the crypts of the deceased
No one can hide from everything
All of them want to find you
All of them want to damage you
All of them want to keep you
All of them want to steal your soul
They're gonna find you and harm you
They're gonna ruin what's inside you

I am the scratch at the window and the footstep on the stair
I am that which you will not dare

I am the unseen thing that makes the dog cower
All light and hope I devour

I am what brushes against your foot as you climb into bed
I am the shadows that make you pull blankets over your head

I am the whispers that wake you from your sleep
And in the darkness make you weep

I am with you from birth to death
I will be your last breath

I make you scream in terror and whimper in despair
I am your nightmare

[BEDTIME PLEA](#)

Now I lay me down to sleep
As lost souls begin to creep
If they should catch me before I wake
I hope my soul they do take
To play with them in eternal night
And return again in dawns first light

Sweet nightmares, sleep tight
Don't let the vampires bite

MERRY-GO-ROUND

The fair is in town and me and mommy and my sisters and brothers are going. Daddy has to work and can't come.

There are lots of lights and all kinds of smells. Some are good and yummy others are stinky. There are lots of people and I have to hold my sisters hand 'cause mommy says I'm too little to go by myself. Sometimes she treats me like such a baby and I'm not! Having to go with my sister all the time isn't fun. She walks faster than me and sometimes I have to run to keep up. Then she stops and looks at things I don't like and doesn't let me look at things I want to see.

Mommy said we can go on any of the rides except the merry-go-round. I don't know why 'cause I really like the merry-go-round. My sister takes me to the little kid's rides. There are boats in the water. I'm scared of water and don't want to go in that one. My sister laughs at me and says its not deep. But its deep to me. There are cars that go up and round a track. It looks fast and high but I ride it 'cause I don't want to tell my sister that I'm scared of that too. There's a train that goes around the kids park. I like that one! I see the merry-go-round while I'm on the train. Its so beautiful. There are pretty lights and music. The horses are pretty colors and they look like they're dancing. It goes round and round and there are lots of kids on it and they're laughin' and havin' fun. Their mommies let them ride it, why can't we?

The train ride ends and I get off and other kids get on the train. My sister is talking with her friends. I go over and ask if I can please, please go on the merry-go-round? But she says No! Mom told us we are not allowed on the merry-go-round. But why? And then her stupid friend says because the horses aren't horses – they're night mares. Everyone laughs but I don't know why. Then my sister tells me to go on the train again while she talks to her friends and then after she'll take me to get cotton candy. I don't want to go on the train again but its no fun standing there with her stupid friends who say stupid things that I don't know what they're saying and then laugh. I go back to the line to get on the train. It just left again so I hav'ta wait. I can see the merry-go-round. It stopped and kids were getting off and new kids were gettin' on. Why can't I go on? It isn't fair! I'm not a baby and I'm no gonna get hurt. I look back at my sister but she's not looking at me. I look at the merry-go-round and the ticket man calls out for everyone to hurry and get on 'cause it's gonna start again. The train is coming back. I look back at my sister and she's still not looking at me. I bet I could go on the merry-

go-round and by the time the train comes back again I would be done anyhow and she wouldn't know!

There's a rope and I crawl under it and run to the merry-go-round. There's a pretty pink horse that no one's on and I try to climb up but it's higher than it looks. Then the ticket man comes and says up you go little girl and pushes me up on the horse. I give him the ticket that I was supposed to give to the train man and I hang on real tight.

It's way bigger than I thought it was! The music's real loud now and the lights are so bright! I can't wait for it to start 'cause when it's done I can tell my sister that I went on then everybody will know it's ok and I'm big enough. The ride starts and I hold tight as my horse goes up high and then comes down low. I look out at the people but I can't see my sister. We start to go faster and I hold on tighter. I look at the other kids and they are having fun but I'm starting to get scared. The ride goes way faster and way higher than I thought it did and it's hard to see any of the people watching. I look back at the kids but I don't see as many as before. Up and down, round and round, faster and faster. I can't see the people outside anymore 'cause it looks all fuzzy and dark. I look for the other kids but there's only some left. Where did they go? Then I look back at the people and there aren't any. All I see is dark. I'm scared of the dark. And there are no more kids on the Merry-Go-Round. I'm all alone. The lights are going dark and there's no more music. It's just me going up and down and round and round. I can't see anything anymore 'cause it's all dark now. I'm really, really scared and I yell at the ticket man I want to get off even though I can't see him. I hear the ticket man laugh a scary laugh. Why didn't I listen to my Mommy!? I start to cry and all I can hear is the man laughing and laughing as I go round and round, up and down, all alone in the dark riding the night mare...

[MR. WINCOTTE'S GRAVE](#)

It's Halloween once again and my co-worker asked if I had any plans. I don't, I say. I have no children of my own, no nieces or nephews, not even so much as a god child. I plan on staying at home I tell her, and relaxing. But in reality I am going to do what I have done for the past 20 years or Halloween. I am going to put flowers on the grave of Mr. Hank Wincotte who, according to the tombstone was born on August 25, 1913 and died March 23, 1979. Beside his grave is the tombstone of his loving wife of 45 years Mrs. Wilma Wincotte born on January 19, 1912 who also died March 23, 1979 the same day as her husband. You see, I have these tombstones memorized.

So after work I get ready to take the four hour drive to the graveyard. I hurry so I am not home when the trick-or-treaters come out. I stop halfway there at the same small roadside diner that I have for the past 20 years since I began my annual ritual. The diner has had five different owners since I first began coming here but I have never been recognized. I am grateful for that for I would have hated to be asked why I came every year as I could not have told anyone and I hated to lie.

I suppose however the time has come to tell someone why I do what I do every Halloween. You see I don't know how much longer I will be able to carry on this ritual. I have been diagnosed with cancer and though the doctor is encouraging me with all the successful treatments for cancers such as mine, I am not certain that I want to be treated. Don't be alarmed - this is neither a suicide note nor a confession. It's simply my story.

So who is Mr. Wincotte that I would place flowers on his grave every Halloween? He means

nothing to me. I have never met the man, or his wife, or any member of his family. I know nothing about them save two things. One, they both died on the same day while on a cruise somewhere down in the Caribbean or some such place. Two, their graves are actually empty as their bodies were never found.

Well, Mrs. Wincotte's anyhow. There is a body in Mr. Wincotte's and it is in fact that body that I am putting the flowers on the grave for. The problem of course is no one believes me that there is a body there. But I know it's there and if they would have dug it up 25 years ago when I begged them to instead of sending me to a mental hospital - well, not much would be different except everyone would know the truth besides just me.

I suppose I should start from the beginning though.

It was 1981 and I was 18 years old in my senior year in high school. Life was grand. I was an ace student and was assured acceptance to the college of my choice next year. I had lots of friends and was head over heels in love with my boyfriend Todd. Todd and I had met the year before when I first transferred to his school. Up until then I hadn't dated so Todd was my first boyfriend and as far as I was concerned my last. We had already talked about marriage as he felt the same way about me as I did about him. We would of course wait until we were through college and we never discussed this with anyone else because we knew they would tell us we were too young to even think about marriage. We kept our plans secret.

So, it was Halloween night and all of my friends planned on doing something extra special knowing this would be our last chance to be foolish and childish on Halloween. After tossing around different ideas we finally came up with what we called a spooktacular adventure - haha. We were going to play Spooks in the graveyard just on the edge of town. For anyone that doesn't know what Spooks is, it's hide-and-go-seek in the dark. The catch being, the person that's It has to find the hiders first because if you walk past a hider without seeing them, they jump out and scare the hell out of you! Believe me - you do not want to be It during a game of Spooks!

There were fourteen of us altogether and we met at 9:30 to get the game started. We decided to pair off; Todd and I of course went with each other and we decided to have two people It instead of just one.

It was the perfect Halloween night. There was a chill in the air and soon after getting started a fog settled in. I was anxious already as I wasn't much into the whole scare thing. I rarely watched horror shows and was terrified of the dark, but Todd was totally into it and dragged me about holding my hand which made it worth it. He decided we should lie down on a couple of graves and when the It's came by we would rise up like zombies crawling out of the grave! He was super excited; I was horrified at the thought of lying on top of a dead body. I didn't care how much dirt there was and that there was a coffin to boot between me and a rotting corpse - I still didn't like the idea! We were with Joey and Karen still when Joey (who I hated forever after that night) told us to look for the Wincotte's graves. He told us they died while on a cruise in the Caribbean and their bodies were never found but since they already had the plots the family decided to keep them. I still didn't want to do it, something nagged at me about this. In the end however it was the best compromise as I didn't want to ruin Todd's fun. So we looked around until we found the graves. Todd laid down on Mr. Wincotte's and I laid down on Mrs. Wincotte's. Lying there we could hear others moving about, laughing, and scaring each other. The game was well on its way and we talked quietly at first and Todd would poke his head up every few minutes to see if he could see the others. It was easy to spot the Its because they were the only ones allowed to use a flashlight; Todd kept watch on the bobbing lights so we knew when they were getting closer. Suddenly he lay down and hushed me. 'They're headed this way,' he

whispered. I lay still but was giddy from the excitement; Todd was a foot away with a stupid grin on his face. I loved him and knew at that moment he was the only man for me. Then I looked up and watched the stars that were still visible through the wisps of fog and fell asleep.

How I could have possibly fallen asleep is still a mystery to me. I was neither tired nor sick and I have never fallen instantly asleep in my life. So, that was bad enough, the nightmare I had was worse. I dreamt I was running around with friends and we were chasing each other, laughing and having a great time. Then I stopped and leaned against a grassy hill to catch my breath when all of a sudden the ground behind me gave way and I was being pulled down deep into the ground! I was trying to grab onto something but there was nothing there except darkness and I screamed. All of a sudden I woke up, panicking when I realized where I was. I tried to sit up but it felt like something was holding me back. Whatever it was though, I ripped myself free and twisting around ended up on my hands and knees looking at the bare ground beside me. A few seconds later I faced a new nightmare which turned out to be much, much worse than the one I just had. Todd wasn't there. I felt the ground and called his name but my voice was dry and hoarse and cracked as I called out. I sat up on my knees and looked around. I couldn't see anything! The wisps of fog had now turned into a blanket that darkened everything around me. I didn't know what time it was and I couldn't see or hear anyone. I jumped up not sure what direction to even run in. I remembered the small flashlight in my pocket and pulled it out shining it at the fog. I still couldn't see anyone but maybe they would see my light. I didn't care that I was giving my location away, hell, as far as I was concerned the game was over and if they were playing a trick on me, it wasn't very funny! I just wanted to find the others and go home!

There was no one though. No sound, no voices, no movement. It was dead silent. If not for the tombstones in front of me, I would have thought I was lost in another world. I looked down once again and can recall that image as clear as a bell to this very day; the name Wincotte on the gravestone forever burned in my memory.

I stumbled about with no idea where I was going until I ran into the brick wall that surrounded the cemetery. It wasn't very tall, four feet at most. It wasn't meant to prevent trespassers, only to mark the grounds. I crawled over it and fell down on the other side. It took a few seconds to comprehend what I was seeing. There was no fog and the moon was bright enough to light up the darkness to the point that I didn't need the flashlight to see. I was just a few feet away from the parking lot; an empty parking lot. I shuddered, but then remembered we didn't drive here. We parked further away then walked down here. I stopped for a few minutes anger now mixing with my fear. To hell with them, I thought, for playing such a mean joke on me - especially Todd! Well, they'll see. I was going home and then let them come and look for me! I didn't go to where the cars were parked but ended up walking home alone in the other direction, still angry for I felt like it as a horrible thing to do to me. When I finally got home I was surprised it was only midnight as I was sure it had been much later. I didn't care though. I could hear my parents still up but I didn't want to talk and instead went straight to my room. I changed into my pyjamas and crawled into bed and cried myself to sleep.

I slept right through the rest of the night and only woke up when I heard the phone ring. I could hear the muffled voice of my mother and then a few seconds later a knock on my door. My mom opened it up and poked her head in. She said Todd's mother was on the phone; apparently he didn't come home last night and she wanted to talk to me. I was instantly out of bed and went downstairs to the phone. At first I asked if she checked with Joey, or any of his other friends; she had and all of them said the last time they saw him, he was with me.

A shiver went down my spine and I got a really, really bad feeling. I told her I left on my own and didn't know what happened to him. I hurried up and got off the phone and went upstairs to the

bathroom and threw up. I knew something was wrong - really wrong, but not what. My mom came then and started asking me what happened last night. I told her everything we did and cried telling her how I was left all alone and thinking everyone was playing a trick on me. After I was done talking to my mom, I started phoning my friends asking what happened last night. Things just got freaky then. They claimed that no one found us even though at the end they searched everywhere, including the Wincotte's graves. They gave up then figuring that we had snuck off to be alone and weren't worried about it until Todd's mom began calling everyone.

It wasn't too long after that the police came around. They asked me all kinds of questions like if we had a fight, and where we went when we left. I kept telling them the same thing I told my mom. We were lying on the graves, I fell asleep and when I woke up everyone was gone including Todd. I came home - period! By this time Dad had come home from work and both my parents confirmed they heard me come in at twelve o'clock. Mom also said she came and checked on me about fifteen minutes later and I was asleep. The way they were talking to me though scared me because they kept looking at me like I was lying to them. Finally they left, but not for long. A few hours later they came back again and asked the same questions and I told the same story. Then the one police officer said there was a problem with my story. They talked to all the other kids that were there and they said it was clear and bright all night. The police said they checked last night's weather too and nowhere did it report fog.

There was nothing more I could say and frustrated I screamed at them to stop asking me the same questions and go look for Todd and ran crying to my room. I lay on my bed trying to figure out what was going on. Where was Todd? Why were they questioning me like this? I told them everything - well everything except the nightmare I had. Remembering that nightmare felt like being punched in the stomach. I remembered the horror of feeling like I was being pulled into the darkness and waking up struggling to get up....

I snatched up the clothes that I wore the night before still on the floor where I tossed them. The back of my jeans had mud and grass stains, the sweater had short blades of grass sticking out like tendrils. I pulled on some but instead of sliding out, it was if they were hooked onto the material and I had to tug at them.

There was one more thing I remembered then but it wasn't something that happened last night. This happened twelve years ago when I was six years old. My grandmother talking to my mom in the kitchen clearly upset. 'It isn't right' she kept saying. 'They oughtn't 'a done that, it aint right and the good lord would not approve. You don't consecrate a grave that's got no body!' My mother tried to hush her and say that was silly talk. It was the only means the family had to say goodbye and what possible harm could it do? 'Mark my words,' said Granny 'a consecrated grave needs a body and if one aint placed in it, then by god, it'll find its own!' At the time, my grandmothers words made no sense to me but now it was as clear as day. I never knew who she was talking about but I knew where Todd was and if I hadn't woken up, I knew where I would have been too! Thinking back now, I wish I hadn't woken up that night.

I fainted and when I came to my parents and police were standing looking down at me. I didn't understand what they were saying and all I could say was I know where he is, he's in the grave - the grave took him! I was hysterical begging them to go dig up the grave because he might still be alive!

The next couple of years became a drug filled haze for me. Every time I tried to tell them about the grave and what my Granny said, and the dream I had, they just gave me more drugs. I ran away at one point and went myself to dig up the grave to prove to them I was telling the truth. I had just got there and started digging with my bare hands when they caught me. That's when they sent me out of state to

a big hospital with a lot of crazy people. I was there for almost five years. The only reason I got out then was to agree with what they said. According to them that night Todd and I snuck off and went to the river where he tried to rape me. I fought back and accidentally killed him and threw his body in the river though they were never able to recover it. I made up the story about the graves based on what my grandmother had said when I was little and the fog was just me blacking out what had actually happened. They said it was ok though because I didn't know what I was doing and now that I understood what happened, I could leave the hospital.

It wasn't true. Todd didn't have to rape me because we had already slept together. I would never have killed him because he was my true love. We never left the graveyard that night – at least Todd never left.

I realized that no one would ever believe me and I gave up trying to tell the story. Until now that is.

So every year since getting out of the hospital I have gone back and put flowers on Mr. Wincotte's grave, not for Mr. Wincotte, but for my beloved Todd. Hopefully this will be the last year; hopefully this year my twenty-five year nightmare will finally end.

[BLOODY DAY](#)

Some days are better than others and it's true when they say you just never know what's going to happen when you walk out your front door. Darlene was late leaving that day and had no one to blame but herself. She slept in because she shut the alarm off instead of hitting snooze; she didn't bother to check the outfit she picked out the night before so failed to notice the tear in her shirt made bigger as she pulled it on, and instead of putting her keys in the usual spot, she left them in the living room which took her an additional ten minutes to find.

All in all, Darlene calculated she could still make it on time by taking a different bus and cutting across the park. It was a cool, cloudy morning and though there was a risk of rain, she was willing to take that chance.

The bus, unlike her was right on schedule giving her ample time to walk through the park and make her appointment. The weather combined with it being a weekday reduced the number of park users that morning. This was a bonus for Darlene as she preferred solitude when surrounded by urban wild. This was particularly true at one spot in the park that was most isolated. The path led through old growth trees and was far from the sports fields, playgrounds, and picnic areas. Here the noise from the outside world was suddenly silenced and you could almost imagine what it was like before the city encroached on the natural serenity. Of course provided that no one else was using the path at the same time; this was one of those rare moments when she had the path to herself. She slowed down enjoying the solitude and quiet becoming lost in her own thoughts. That's why Darlene didn't hear the man coming up behind her until he had her locked in his grip and forced her into the bushes.

Before she could even think of screaming, he had her face down on the ground, his own weight pinning her while his hand clamped over her mouth. Putting his mouth to her ear he scowled "Welcome to your nightmare, sweetheart!" then tried to bash her head against the ground to either knock her out or at least knock her senseless. She was fighting back though and managed to squirm out

from underneath him but he still had a tight hold on her and had no intention of letting go. Try as she might, she couldn't get out of his death grip and that's when the blows started to come.

The first was a knee to the gut that knocked breath out. Gasping, the next blow was to the side of the head making the ears ring. Then a chop to the throat crushed the windpipe; any hope of crying out for help gone. Still the blows kept coming. Stomping on the knee caused pain never experienced before and the type of damage that could never be repaired. Running away now was not an option as an identical blow fell on the other knee. Still it did not end even when the thought that there couldn't be any more pain - there was more. The next was the left arm breaking as the entire body weight was dropped on it. It sounded like a branch snapping. Trying to twist away earned a dislocated right shoulder rendering both arms useless even to use as cover in self-defense. Two quick, consecutive stomps to the abdomen not only broke ribs but now caused blood to begin pouring from the mouth. These blows were no longer intended to render the victim helpless, they were intended to inflict as much pain and harm as could be done. And still more came. A swift kick to the face shattered the cheek bone and knocked out two teeth while two more punches for good measure fell; one crushing an eye socket the last breaking the nose which caused even more blood to spew forth. One more blow would mercifully end life; but it never came.

Darlene stood there looking down at the bloody mess on the ground. Stooping she looked into the eye that wasn't swollen shut and smirking said "I guess it was your nightmare after all *sweetheart*." She walked out of the bushes while the man that had grabbed her a few minutes ago lay in a bloody heap. Her only concern now was getting cleaned up.

The appointment that she had rushed to get to would be missed, but somehow it didn't seem as important as it did when she woke up late that morning. She walked to the public washroom grateful that no one was close by. The mirror she looked in reflected her blood splattered face which she quickly washed off. She then stripped off the clothes she was wearing. Considering her day was just one bad thing after another, there was one stroke of luck. She had almost cancelled her plans to go to the gym after her appointment but grabbing her bag at the last minute she now had clothes she could change into. After fixing her hair and stuffing the grimy bloody clothes into her bag she walked out and left the park. The cloudy morning was turning into such a beautiful day, she decided to walk home.

Later that day the local news reported that a severely beaten man had been found in the park. A few days later, they announced the beaten man had died without regaining consciousness. Weeks later it was revealed the beaten man was identified as a suspected serial rapist and murderer; DNA testing would later confirm his guilt. His attacker was never identified; many believed it to be the work of a vigilante.

Darlene didn't pay too close attention to the story as she didn't really care.

[CRUEL WORLD](#)

Theirs was a cruel world. You were either slave or Master. There was nothing else. Masters had homes, children, parties, laughter. Slaves had endless work caring for their Master's homes and their children and catering their parties. The Masters lives were divine, the slaves were a nightmare.

Sa and Ta were slaves. They had come to their Master's house both as very young children. They quickly learned they were not the Master's children and did not play like they did and were not schooled such as they were. Their entire world was work from the time they rose in the morning to the time they crawled onto their sleeping mats at night. This is how it always was for them and how it always would be. There was no hope of change, only death would free them. All that Sa and Ta had were each other and they truly believed they would not otherwise survive.

When Sa was just a little girl she did the unthinkable and took a small piece of bread that had fallen on the floor and put it in her pocket. She wanted to take it to Ta who, having accidentally broken a dish in the kitchen early that day, had been denied his evening meal. Sa was caught and beaten. The Keepers delighted in punishing the slaves and the punishments were not limited to just beatings. Sometimes they were tortured just because a simple beating wasn't deemed harsh enough. Worse however were the acts of perversion they had to endure at the hands of the Keepers and Masters. Neither age nor gender spared any slave from this greatest of indignities. It was deemed a necessity and more often than not, it was the Masters themselves that first performed the atrocities on the victims. This was how they marked them as their property.

This night Sa was just beaten, but so badly that when they threw her into the slave pit, no one would touch her thinking she would be dead in the morning. No one except Ta. He dragged her bleeding body back to the mats where they had always slept together and cradling her head in his lap spent the night whispering in her ear begging her not to die and leave him alone. For three agonizing days he had to leave her in the morning and could only hope she was still alive when he returned in the evening. On the fourth day she was finally awake and could eat. By the fifth day she could walk and was deemed well enough to return to work. And though the beating forever left her so scared that she would never be considered pretty, she was beautiful to Ta.

During the day if and when Sa and Ta worked together, they did not acknowledge each other. If for one moment the Masters thought they had formed a bond, they would be immediately separated. This typically meant one being traded to a different Master, but if they felt a lesson needed to be learned by the other slaves regarding allowing relationships between them; one would be executed in front of everyone. Execution of slaves was not quick and by no means painless. The methods ranged from slow strangulation, to being burned alive, beaten, hanged; they delighted in finding new torturous deaths.

This was the life of a slave in this cruel world. A slave never lived to old age. They were never allowed to marry and when a female slave gave birth, her child was deemed a slave and she had no ownership over it. She was not even allowed to hold her newborn for it was immediately taken away and raised elsewhere until such an age that the child could be sold. It was probably better that way.

Sa and Ta were no longer children but just barely considered adults. This was an even more frightening time for them. They had managed to keep their bond secret from the Masters and the Keepers but as adults, they would be separated. Ta was a strong, healthy male and would be sent to work either in the mines or as a foot soldier in the Master's army. Being handsome, he could also be considered for the Master's brothel. Sa was a strong young girl and she would either be sent to the fields or to be a household servant; her scars made her undesirable for the brothel. A slave had no say in their destiny and would not know what it was until the day it took place. All that the two young friends knew was that day would soon be upon them and neither could bear the thought of separation. The only bright spot in their miserable existence was each other and the few precious hours they spent wrapped in each other's arms at night.

The day they actually ended up being separated was not predetermined; fate it would seem deemed

to interfere. Sa and Ta thought it the most fortuitous day when instead of going to their usual separate duties, they were both ordered to work that morning in the barn tending the young, sick, and injured animals that could not go out to pasture. It was not quite dawn and most of the household still slept with the exception of a few Keepers who were just finishing up a night of rowdy revelling. Planning to sleep the day away in the barn, they were delighted when the two young slaves arrived to work. A chance to finish their festivities with a young couple was to them a great ending to a fun night. Regrettably Sa and Ta realized that their being assigned this duty was not mere coincidence. One of the Keepers grabbed Sa and while pressing her into his filthy body forced his mouth on hers.

Something snapped in Ta. Never had he seen another man touch Sa in that manner, though of course he knew it happened before, just as it had happened to him; just as it happened to all of them. But seeing it was different. Feeling her fear and loathing and remembering the haunted frightened looks on her face when she would return from previous encounters such as this, created a fire within him that he could not control. Ta attacked the Keeper. Of course he had no chance of winning and not even a chance of a least sparing her further indignity. The others were on him so quickly that he only had enough time to get in one blow to the Keeper's face; a blow that drew a trickle of blood. That trickle of blood was enough. That trickle of blood was Ta's death sentence. Any assault on a Keeper was punishable by torture. To draw blood or break a bone was punishable by death. There was no defense, no excuse. Keepers could do as they pleased to slaves.

Ta was hauled away by two of the Keepers to face the Master. The remaining three finished their revelling with Sa.

The execution was carried out that very afternoon. Every member of the Master's household, every Keeper, every slave was brought forth to witness it. The Master of the household read out his crime and gave speech as to why this law was necessary and why the punishment was just. Ta was to be flayed to death with whips embedded with sharp pieces of metal. It was one of the slowest, most painful of deaths. Worse however for Ta was Sa, who being forced to the front of the crowd where she had full view of him, was to watch every moment. Suspended by the chains that bound his wrists the first blow came. He could not help it; a cry of pain emanated from his lips and though Sa tried to bow her head as to not see his torment, the Keepers on each side forced her head up ordering her not to close her eyes. Every sound the whip made as it snapped upon flesh, every sound of leather lashing across his skin, every cry of pain, every gasp of agony, she saw, heard, and felt. The whip was like hot iron on his skin and if that hurt was not enough, the metal cutting flesh made the hot iron burn all the more deeper into his being. How long it lasted neither could have told; it was forever. Finally a moment came when Ta no longer made a sound, his body merely dangled from the chains like a rag doll. Sa no longer struggled to turn away and in his last final moment of life, Ta lifted his head and looked one more time at Sa, his love, his life and she looked back at him. With eyes locked he died leaving her alone in this cruel world.

A numbness such as she had never felt before over took her but she did not cry. She did not utter a sound as she was dragged unceremoniously away from the crowd and thrown into the slave pit. She crawled over to the mats where they slept together and lying on his spot buried her face where he had laid beside her all these years, breathing in the smell of him for it was all she had left now. She did not hear the other slaves return. None spoke to her or offered her any comfort. How could they? There was no comfort for her. She lay there and waited for them to fall asleep and quietly got up and walked out. Though the slave pit door was locked it was simple enough to pick. The guards were slack that night thinking the slaves cowed enough that they would not do anything.

Sa no longer cared if she was found. She moved without fear, moved with simple determination.

He may have been just a slave in this cruel world, but he was *her* life. He was the only brightness in her day. He was the only one to cause a smile to touch her lips. He was the one who got her through every miserable day of her existence by simply holding her every night while she slept.

She silently made her way to the death pit. Slaves were not buried, they were thrown in a pit and once a week a bonfire lit to rid of the bodies not only of the dead slaves, but any animal carcasses that could or would not be eaten and any other garbage to be burned. The ashes were then callously mixed in with dirt in preparation for the next bonfire. In the meantime, all manner of scavengers were allowed access to the refuge. So she found Ta with a wild dog gnawing at his leg. It growled but she did not pause as she walked up to Ta's corpse and bending down, grabbed hold of it. The dog normally would have attacked the one stealing its food but something about her frightened even him and he slunk away. The body was heavy but living a life of hard physical labour, she was strong enough to haul his corpse out of the pit and began dragging it. Having no rope or other means to move it she was forced to drag it by one arm through the darkened night. Half way to her intended destination, the corpse became lodged on a rock jutting up from the ground bringing her to an abrupt stop. She fell to one knee, the corpse's arm nearly ripped from its socket while the lower leg that the wild dog had been feasting on became completely separated. She almost cried, she almost gave up, but she didn't. Standing up she went back, picked up the detached leg and dropping it on the corpse's chest began dragging it again by its other arm.

Ignoring her own pain she continued on until finally reaching the Master's cemetery. This was where the members of the Master's household were buried, never a slave. But to Sa, Ta was not a slave and this she thought was at least something she could give him.

Sa dragged the corpse to the oldest part of the Master's cemetery where the gravestones were so worn names were no longer identifiable and choosing one beneath a tree, kneeled down. She had managed to pick up a broken fence board and raising it above her head, shoved it into the ground and pulled it towards her using it as a shovel to remove the dirt. She continued like this for what felt like forever. She did not stop despite the protest of every bone, muscle, and fiber in her body. She did not stop when the board broke again and again until it was unusable; she simply grabbed a broken piece of tombstone and used that and long after that fell apart, she found a piece of flat, rounded bone in the dirt and used that as a shovel until finally having nothing else, she used her bare hands. And she continued still despite fingernails being ripped off, despite the broken finger, despite the fire in her aching arms and back. Finally, after hours of toll it was big enough. She dragged the corpse one last time to the newly dug hole and with what little strength she had, rolled it into the makeshift grave. It was a most undignified burial. With her last bit of strength, she pushed the piles of dirt into the hole on top of him not daring to stop for fear of being unable to continue if she did. Finally she was done and taking a small rock marked the stone with a crude circle and a small line at the bottom. This meant Ta, hers was a circle with a line on the top. They had created these marks; their own rudimentary form of writing they made up. As children they would write them whenever they could in the hopes the other would come across it. This brought a small semblance of happiness to them and a reminder that they at least had each other.

Soon daylight would come but she had finished and sitting on the new pile of dirt, she propped her weary body against the tombstone. She was numb, she felt nothing. Then she saw something sticking out of the dirt. So haphazard was this last bit of work, that the corpse's hand remained unburied.

Ta's hand.

She reached out intending to push dirt over it but instead touched it and everything he was to her came crashing upon her and she wept.

She wept for the smile she would never again see on his face. She wept for the comforting arms that would never again hold her in the dark lonely nights. She wept for the love that was in his eyes whenever he looked at her. She wept for the only thing that ever spoke the words I love you to her. Her body trembled from the sobs that now poured uncontrollably from her. Clutching his dead hand she wept still for all the indignities that both he and she had suffered and all that she would continue to suffer alone now. And while she clutched his hand she felt one of the pieces of metal imbedded in his skin by the whips. A parting gift from her beloved. Taking the metal she began cutting at her wrist until her blood began to flow from the ragged wound. Still she wept watching as her blood pooled on the ground mixed with her tears and dirt from the grave. Her tears finally ended when the last drop of blood dripped from her body and eternal darkness wrapped its deathly cloak about her.

The crows alerted them to where she was. They found her slumped over a long forgotten grave. They burned her body that day; a corpse's hand still clutched in hers.

HIS DARKEST MOMENT

This was his darkest moment. He couldn't bear the vacuum of his existence anymore. It was a darkness that consumed his soul. It was a loneliness that a thousand lovers could not satiate; a cavity in his core where all the riches in the world would disappear into the nothingness of its void. This dark had no beginning or middle; only an all-encompassing endlessness. His only release from this nightmare was the blade he held in his hand. Holding the blade to the top of his arm he made the first cut, deep enough only to start a trickle of blood that dripped down his arm. The physical pain paled in comparison to his internal turmoil. The next cut was in the middle of his forearm, a little longer, a little deeper, more blood. The third would be the longest and deepest on his wrist intended to end this meaningless existence. For the moment he simply watched the blood run down from both cuts.

She sat with the others, bored, restless, and disillusioned, wondering what the point of this gathering was. To sit amongst this group was a privilege that no amount of money, fame, or power could have obtained someone a seat. The essence in this room could conquer or destroy all that ever was or could be. Yet she could barely focus on those around her. The Hag suddenly grabbed her hands and said "he's there, and he's leaving. If you are to stop him you must go now!" These words were meaningless - who was he and where is there, and where is he leaving to!? But the Hag never spoke frivolously; even if the listener did not understand her truths.

As is with her kind, she could look to whatever time or space she desired but she normally needed a point to look toward. Not this time; as soon The Hag released her hands, it was as if a door suddenly crashed open and she saw, she felt, and she knew. Without a word she leapt up and ran from the gathering. The others were at best curious, but as it did not concern them personally, turned back to their own dealings.

Now imagine searching for something continuously and thinking numerous times you found it, only to realize in the end it wasn't it. Imagine then you find the actual thing you were looking for; no doubts, no false ideals, no wishful thinking, no mistrusted hope – just *it* and suddenly all your being is focused on just that. It was not hard to find him then.

She came in time to see the blood trickle down from the first cut and watched as he made the

second cut. He didn't flinch yet she could feel the pain as intensely as if it was being inflicted on her.

He did not see her until she stood before him and kneeling down, placed her hand on his bloody arm. She removed the blade with her other hand and tossing it aside, ran her hand up his arm smearing his blood. He felt her touch like fire and ice and his breath caught in his chest. His head down, he wanted to look at her but couldn't. All at once he felt joy, ecstasy, love, confusion, fear, fulfillment, and other emotions beyond his ability to describe.

She leaned into him and he closed his eyes, still unable to look at her. He felt her sweet breath as her lips brushed his. Gently, softly, she caressed his lips with hers. Then more intensely, more passionately and he desired nothing more than this sensation. She tasted him and for her it was nourishment to a starving soul. She had spent endless nights alone, hungering for him, searching for him, until all hope had left her in finding him.

Finally but not without slight regret she moved her face away, rose up and straddled his lap. She was now slightly above his still slumped form as she looked down at him. His will no longer seemed to be his own; his face turned upward and he gazed into her eyes. There was a fire in both them that only each other would ever be able to quell. A deep, almost beastly moan escaped his lips and he gripped her arms leaning into her, pulling her down and once again engaging her in a desire obsessed kiss.

Pure passion engulfed both as their bodies began pulsating against each other. He removed her shirt exposing her breasts, his hands massaging the tender flesh. She stroked his chest further smearing the blood that previously flowed freely from his arm. The touch of each other brought its own sensual pleasure and as she rocked against him, she could feel his hardness. The clothes that still remained were quickly gone until only flesh touched flesh. She wanted to stroke his hardness but he couldn't bear that, it was taking all he had not to let go, but he couldn't, he wouldn't until he was inside her. He stroked her feeling her sweet wetness and a deep almost beastly moan escaped her lips at his touch. She rose up; his hands gripped her hips and pulled her down as he slipped inside her with ease. Their bodies moved in effortless synchronicity. Their beings intertwined for an eternal second as they became locked in a sexual euphoria. A few minutes, or an eternity; time didn't matter. Finally, simultaneously they climaxed in a passion so profuse, the gods felt it.

Well after their movement stopped they still embraced each other not yet ready to let go.

When finally they could pull apart she knelt once more in front of him, forcing him to look at her. She looked at the arm where he had cut; the blood dried but flesh still very tender. And she spoke to him these words "Don't do that again, for every harm you do yourself, you do to me." And she showed him her arm and the two red welts matching the cuts on his. "I will come again, but I cannot stay yet. Wait for me." And with that she left just as quickly as she came and he sat once again alone and in the darkness but this time, it was no longer endless.

[HOUR GLASS](#)

I sit staring at the hour glass before me. The sand that marked the passing of time had almost finished falling to the bottom when it suddenly stopped. How long since this has happened and how long before it will change, I do not know.

I cannot measure the passage of time for it sits motionless.

I do not know the cause, only the reason.

There was one more.

We were certain all were accounted for; we are ready to finish the last that we need to do. We are ready but now we must wait.

The hardest part is that it is out of our control. Whoever it is we cannot find; they must find us.

The room where I sit is dark, lit only by flickering candle flames that cast dancing shadows upon the walls.

Outside is the grayness of approaching dusk before final darkness descends.

The light of day ended as we wait in perpetual twilight.

I stand once again and walk to the fireplace watching the fire incinerating the last burning log. Just as the candles consume no more of the wax and wick that feeds its flame, neither will this fire turn the last log into embers.

This will not change until the sand once again falls in the hour glass.

Leaving the room I descend the stone steps and as I have countless times before, I go to see the others.

The first one I see is the boy sitting before his father's crypt. He does not look at me. "Has time started again?" he asks, knowing the answer.

"No." and I walk on.

Next is the mother sitting upon a bench before the rubble of a decayed building.

Just beyond the last standing stones, the daughter gently sways forward and back on a swing amongst the rusted pieces of a playground. Black ringlets of hair gently bounce with her movements, the picture of perfect innocence but there is no joy as the forlorn child sits all alone.

"So close" whispers the mother, "yet so far."

I can feel her heartache.

Farther still I walk until I come to the girl that kneels before her lover's grave holding a single dried black rose in her hand, taken from the bunch propped against the headstone.

"I talk to him, though I know he can't hear me."

It is her only comfort.

I gently touch her shoulder and carry on.

Finally I come to the sentinels.

The man and woman watch ceaselessly over the group drawn together at the ruins of what once was a gathering place for the faithful to congregate, celebrate, mourn, and pray.

The identically cloaked figures simply stand and wait to be called. They do not understand that time has stopped but accept it as part of what must be for them.

The sentinels are the only ones that don't speak to me.

Beyond the horizon, the elements wait.

They are impatient as they have been curtailed for so long.

It is their time to once again have free reign over this world.

I had wondered if they would be able to restrain themselves long enough for us to finish what we must, but they, like us, are suspended in time.

We are all prisoners of a few grains of sand.

I return to the room, glance at the stilled hour glass and move to the furthest wall.

I stand before multiple doors, all closed, all locked.

Multitudes passed through the doorways, and when the last one of each house crossed the

threshold, the door was closed and locked forever against this world.

Except one. The last key weighs heavy upon my breast.

It is not without regret and sadness that I will pass through this door one last time, but I do wish it would be now.

I once again perch myself upon the seat before the hour glass and stare as the flickering candle flames cast dancing shadows upon the walls.

A grain of sand falls and time, like the sand, once again flows.

I rush out and see a man walking, head bowed. He does not know where he is going driven solely by the need to move.

I watch as he walks towards where I now stand.

This is who stopped the sands of time.

Approaching the steps that ascend to me – only then does he stop and look up. I look into his eyes and I see. Long ago he betrayed his house and he was not allowed to cross with the others. Not knowing what else to do he simply wandered hoping eventually to reach somewhere; anywhere.

Whether his actions were noble or an atrocity, I do not judge for that is not my place. I simply step aside and point to the last remaining open door that stands behind me.

He looks and with absolute gratitude, enters the room and I watch him cross the threshold of the last open door.

I return to the girl kneeling at the grave. She stands and calls out and her lover appears.

She throws her arms around him. He grasps her so tight her feet are lifted from the ground as he buries his face in her long flowing hair.

Her lover waited long in his final resting place, trapped by his betrayal, not wanting any existence that did not include her. She returned only to take him home once more.

Once again reunited they radiate completeness as hand in hand they enter the room and cross the threshold of the last open door.

I continue to watch in awe and amazement as the last few moments of this eternity come to an end.

The boy calls to his father; a father that did not cross though he could have. So unforgiving of his own sins he felt unworthy to continue his existence. Now summoned the father stands before his son, head bowed with self-imposed guilt.

“I forgive you.” his son whispers as he takes his father’s hand. The father grasps firm on his son’s gentle hand, finally accepting forgiveness given; redemption complete.

The boy leads him into the room and they cross the threshold of the last open door.

With a heart wrenching cry, the mother calls out to her daughter that it’s time to come home. The daughter hears her mother’s voice and jumps from the swing and runs to her waiting arms. An order given with loving intent, her mother told her that should anything bad ever happen she was to wait for her to come and get her. And so the daughter waited, and waited, and waited long after all the others left and despite their own pleas for her to accompany them.

She waited for her mother.

The mother carries her daughter emanating the purest love of a parent and child as they enter the room and cross the threshold of the last open door.

Finally the sentinels descend the embankment and go to the cloaked figures. These are the last vestiges of remaining souls. So lost in this world that that they ceased to have their own identities. Only a spark of essence remained of each of them and only by coming together were they able to form the simple semblance of cloaked beings that stood single file, waiting. Whatever tragedies, sins, or horrors reduced them to this will never be known, for they have absolutely no memories of lives past.

This is part of our agreement; every soul must cross, none can be left. We will take what other houses would or could not.

Side by side, the man and woman lead them to the room and they cross the threshold of the last open door.

I watch this final procession as they disappear.

I turn back as the burning log in the fireplace is reduced to nothing more than dying embers. The last candle flame flickers and dies never again to cast dancing shadows upon the walls.

Darkness descends.

One grain of sand remains suspended still in the glass.

Through the open window I watch the elements pounce unrestrained on their new playground.

The Fire Dragon comes scorching everything in its path, needing not to touch something to set it ablaze.

The Water's Nymph's fluid movements carry it rolling over the land pushing and tossing about everything in its path.

The Air Denizen blows about nearly invisible as it passes with sudden ferocity no longer restrained to gentle winds.

The Earth Dryad rumbles about making the ground quake wherever it steps.

Round and bout they play and dance and wrestle through the world.

Fire Dragon and Water Nymph dance creating clouds of steam then Fire dives under the earth and explodes it to molten lava.

Air Denizen rushes Fire Dragon with such intensity, its own fire burns back on itself.

Earth Dryad rolls and bubbles, smothering Fire Dragon, scattering Water Nymph, and blocking Air Denizen.

I could watch no longer, but not for lack of want.

The last grain of sand plummets in the hour glass. My grain of sand.

I walk to the door; the obligation to see the last souls taken home fulfilled thus freeing them from their lonely nightmares.

I remove the key from round my neck and place it in the lock.

I cross the threshold of the last open door.

It swings silently closed and the lock turns never to open again.

[MONEV](#)

[Pires](#)

When she hunted, she hunted alone. Others would go in packs; better to round up, divide conquer, or safety in numbers – there was always a reason for pack hunting. For her, she wanted absolute freedom in her choice of prey. She didn't want helpful advice on who or not who to pursue. She also didn't like the competition that sometimes happened when hunters sought the same target. Some like to share, she didn't.

She had a few select hunting grounds and chose based on mood or perceived availability of prey.

Sometimes she went for the Undies – university nerds, or Mows – meals on wheels aka bikers. Her choice this time was Yuucs - young urban upper class. In a city the size of Vancouver they were the easiest to find and not far from one of her dens was a night club catering to them.

She was a skilled hunter and knew the greatest success was achieved by bringing the least amount of attention to herself. She didn't spend a lot of time preening; with long black hair and vibrant blue eyes, she looked good and didn't need to go all out as to draw the attention of everyone, she only needed the attention of one.

Timing is everything. She arrived at the club just before eleven when everyone who was going to come was there and enjoying themselves in just the right amount to still have their wits about them. Too sober made more work for her, too drunk and well, that just left a bad taste.

She walked in and paused, taking everything in. The sights, sounds, and scents enthralled her; the music had an ethereal effect. The gathering of people provided a cornucopia of sustenance. She came to feed though she was not particularly hungry but better to eat in times of feast, for famine always follows.

It did not take her long to find what she was looking for; the moment his gaze locked with hers the choice was made. He smiled at her and she at him and moved toward the place he stood. Someone beside him spoke temporarily taking away his attention but only for the briefest of moments as he turned back to look at her. She was gone and on his lips was the boyish pout of disappointment. It was all part of the hunt. Find the quarry and begin to lure it in. It was always much easier when they exhibited a desire for her, which they almost always did. For the rare ones that didn't, she quickly moved on. Being older, she had mastered her art and the hunt did not hold the same thrill. It was a necessity; she had to eat, therefore she had to hunt.

He stretched up trying to see her thinking she was lost in the crowd only to have someone brush up behind him. Turning he smiled when he saw her standing there. Social niceties followed; this part bored her for no matter what lines given and stories told they all seemed to be the same. This though was only a means to an end; less than an hour later they left together arm in arm as she escorted him to her den.

She had a variety of domiciles, some were strictly for her own use, some shared with others, and some were simply convenient feeding grounds. She was selective when choosing quarters in which to bring special guests. Hotels were too conspicuous with too many eyes to see comings and goings and should things get a bit boisterous, there would be a less speedious response to disturbances in a private residence. This particular abode was absolutely perfect and one of her favourites. It was a self-contained suite in a non-descript building not easily distinguishable from the surrounding structures. It had an elevator allowing her to easily distract guests during the ascent so they did not know where they got off; even the numbers on the doors did not indicate the floor. Her suite was in the very back of the building, the door inset so not immediately visible from the hallway. Inside it was a cozy kitchenette with stools and counter top instead of a table and chairs. The sitting area was a sofa and small arm chair, the sleeping area a bed the perfect size for two to be intimately close. The only two windows afforded a view of brick walls across grungy alleyways. The view was perhaps at one time more scenic before the surrounding monstrosities of buildings were erected. All of this however provided an air of anonymity that she needed. It was easy to lead her guests to and from and no one was ever able to identify the place enough to retrace their way there – provided they should be so inclined. No one ever was. Time spent with her was intended to be a forgettable event.

Once inside she offered him a drink which unaware to him was non-alcoholic as he already had enough to suit her tastes, while they engaged in more inane chatter. Then the seduction began. They

were sitting on the sofa and she took the lead, leaning into him caressing him with soft seductive kisses intended to arouse him. Keeping him in a sitting position she crouched over his lap and reaching down between her legs began massaging him through his jeans. She could feel him getting hard and carefully undid his pants slowly pushing down the zipper. A bit of wiggling and he was quickly out of them. She was still dressed but the skirt she had purposely worn was pushed up and she began rubbing against him with her body. The feeling of her silk panties rubbing on him was exquisite but he quickly slid his hand down forcing them away from her body as his hand glided on her wetness. She pushed his hand away and removing her panties slowly slid up against him until reaching his tip, paused and then moved down as he slipped easily inside her. He did little but sit there and enjoy the sensations. She moved up and down, slowly at first then faster until their moans of arousal quickly became the gasps of frenzied breaths as both climaxed in a state of ecstasy.

All this, though enjoyable for her was part of how she prepared her food.

Still sitting up on him put her in an ideal position. She leaned in to kiss him though with a different intent this time. He tried to stop her "Wait, don't..." but she didn't listen continuing the kiss anyway. The instant she thought he was in a lucid state she quickly leaned in as if to kiss his neck instead taking first bite - and instantly froze. Ready to drink deeply of his blood, she now gagged having to reverse the natural instinct to swallow. The bitterness burned like acid in her mouth and she struggled to pull away. She managed to make it to the nearby sink spewing forth his foul blood and desperately trying to rinse her mouth with water from the running tap. She was dizzy and barely able to stand and that was all she remembered.

She awoke the next morning with the worse hangover she ever experienced in her life. Her mind was still lost in a fog as she struggled to remember where she was and what had happened. She was lying on the bed when a body sat down beside her speaking. A male voice, and finally she understood that he was offering her coffee and it would make her feel better. She opened her eyes and looked into his smiling face. This was wrong; this was not how it was supposed to be. Slowly she recalled the events of last night. She could still taste the vileness that was him.

For what was a rarity for her, she did not know what to say or how to act. In all her encounters, start to finish, she always controlled the situation. She determined the start and end and all that happened between. Now she lay in the bed barely able to move while this person had free reign over her and appearing oblivious to the position he was in. Again he offered her coffee assuring her that she really would feel better and rambling on about how he hoped she didn't mind him scrounging about; she did of course but could do nothing about it. Having no other choice she managed to sit upright enough to begin sipping coffee. Caffeine really didn't affect her but this liquid was powerful enough to dilute the lingering effects of the poison which is exactly what she needed. After only half a cup her head began to clear and she was able sit up completely; after finishing the whole cup she was able to stand and move about. In the meantime, he had gone to use the shower which she vaguely remembered him asking if it was ok. This gave her time to gather herself better. What exactly happened after she passed out? Why was he still here? And why did he seem so *comfortable*? Though apologetic, he didn't appear to be uncomfortable after spending the night with an incapacitated woman, tending to her with coffee and using the shower. What was she supposed to do now?

Gathering her thoughts one thing was clear to her, she had found a Monev. Monevs were the bane of all Pires and a complete mystery to them. Every so often a human would come along whose blood was poison to them and meant an excruciating absolute death if swallowed. Even a taste will render them helpless for hours. There was no way of having prior knowledge of those who possessed such blood. There was no way to test for it, there were no warning signs, and there were no common

factors between those with it. They were singular; neither close nor distant family members shared this blood trait. It was not of a particular blood type, it was not exclusive to gender, race, or age. For the human, it had no discernable effects on them.

When any Pire came across these individuals their law was clear. The human must be immediately destroyed. That was the value of hunting in packs; the Pire might die but the others would have known who they last fed off and would have carried out the deed.

She had a couple of problems with this however. The first problem was timing. It was now daylight and she was in a serious depleted state which meant taking extreme immediate action would not be a wise undertaking. She was also alone making it unnecessarily difficult to clean up.

There was also one more, very compelling reason for not killing him; the thrill of forbidden temptations. She had not felt that for ages and as uncomfortable as she was at having been put in such a disadvantage, she could not help but feel intrigue.

The sound of running water stopped just as she finished a second cup of coffee and felt ready to regain control of the situation. He came out of the bathroom shirtless still drying his hair and smiled immediately upon seeing her. She got her first real good look at him. He was handsome with a boyish charm and a captivating smile. He had light brown hair and eyes that matched and as she would later learn, looked much younger than he actually was.

“Carrie, you’re up!” he greeted excitedly. She had to think for a moment; perhaps the fog hadn’t cleared entirely, then she remembered the name she had told him last night.

She smiled back. “Sorry about that, I don’t know what happened.”

He laughed charmingly, “Yeah, you passed out pretty quick. I gotta tell you, I was a little scared at first ‘cause you were really pale.”

She found herself somewhat at a loss. He was simply not what she expected. It wasn’t just his looks which were quite appealing; he also had a certain charm about his persona that she found alluring. “Coffee?” was all her only response already beginning to pour him a cup from the now near empty pot.

“I hope the coffee was okay.” he said taking the proffered cup “I tend to make it a bit strong, everyone usually complains.” he laughed.

“No, it’s perfect. I like it strong.” she smiled back and moved to the couch, deciding that perhaps sitting would be a good thing.

He came and sat beside her; she didn’t speak but sipped from her cup. After a few moments, he said hesitantly “I hope you’re not upset that I’m still here. I really just wanted to make sure you were gonna be ok. I woke you up ‘cause I figured if you didn’t get up, I might have to get medical help or something and that would’ve been real awkward!” he sipped from his cup of coffee and she looked at him wondering at the last comment but before she could think any more on it, she saw the bite marks on his neck. Two perfect puncture holes. Had the feeding gone as planned, those marks would have been gone. Once done, a Pire’s bite released a healing substance so any wounds disappeared in less than an hour. She never completed the feeding so healing never happened.

He looked over, saw she was staring at his neck and let out a little chuckle. “Yeah it’s still a little sore but didn’t bleed too much. I tried to tell you not to but you didn’t listen.” again giving her a charming smile.

This was too much; she just couldn’t seem to wrap her head around this. Why did he appear to be at such ease with this? Why was he still here!? What the hell was going on? The apartment that was cosily small suddenly felt suffocatingly tiny.

She quickly regained her composure however. “You know then what I am.” she said sounding

more confident than she felt.

“Yeah,” he said slowly and with more caution. “and you know what I am.”

“Yes,” she responded using his same tone “and you know what I am supposed to do to you.”

“No” he said rather surprised. She looked at him gauging his honesty. He was telling the truth, her last response surprised him.

“Let’s start over.” she said with a sense of once again gaining lost control. “My name is Ava, not Karen.”

“Carrie.” he said. She gave him a somewhat stern look and he quickly added “You said your name was Carrie.”

“Whatever, my real name is Ava. Now what is yours?”

“Nathan, just like I told you last night.” a hint of disappointment perhaps that she did not remember or did not believe that was his name.

“Nathan. So Nathan, what am I?” Despite knowing what he knew, she was not going to be the first to state it. After all there was always the chance that he had mistaken her for something else like a sadist perhaps.

“You’re a vampire.” He said a bit confused by her question.

“Yes. So what are you?”

“I guess I’m a vampire killer. I don’t think there’s a special name for me.” It was not just his words that surprised her, it was his tone of voice. He had just confessed to being a vampire killer to a vampire while casually sipping a cup of coffee!

Ava was an expert in discerning the characteristics of people; it was part of her longevity. Nathan was not a liar, he was certainly not a hunter, and there was absolutely no arrogance to his statement. It was just a matter of fact to him.

“We call you Monev.” He smiled slightly at this. “Monev, yeah, I could live with that name.” She remained absolutely composed continuing the conversation as casually as he was. “No you couldn’t.” and before he could respond asked “You understand how it is you are able to kill us?”

“I’m pretty sure it’s my blood, though I don’t know why. I had a complete physical. There is nothing wrong with me, not even a rarity to my blood type. I am very average according to my doctor.”

She laughed “Yet extraordinary to us! We can continue bantering back and forth, but why not tell me your story instead starting with how you found this out.”

“Ok, but you gotta swear you won’t kill me.” She found his request absurd but simply responded “I haven’t yet.” She didn’t agree to it but he continued on as if she had.

“I first found out about you guys when I was a teenager out at a bush party. There were all kinds of people there which me and my friends only knew a few of them. Everyone was drinking and doing drugs it seemed like except me. This was the first time I had ever been to one of these things and I gotta tell you, I was nervous. I kept pretty much to myself and just watched everyone. People were coming and going all over the place. I wasn’t looking at anyone in particular but then I saw a guy who had this girl backed up to a tree and it looked like they were making out. I wasn’t some perv who made a point of watching this shit,” he laughed “this couple just happened to catch my attention. Anyhow he was kissing her on the neck, only it seemed like an awful long kiss and she wasn’t doing anything but standing there. Finally he pulled away and she just kinda sunk to the ground. He didn’t let her fall, like he knew this was gonna happen and helped her down. Then while he was kneeling in front of her, it looked like he licked her neck and made sure she was propped up so she wouldn’t slump down anymore and left her. I waited to see if she would move or something then figured I’d

better go check it out just in case. She was completely passed out and I could see two holes on her neck and of course realized he wasn't kissing her. I thought vampire, then I figured it had to be some weirdo freak 'cause vampires weren't real! I didn't know what to do and I thought maybe I should just kinda hang out there and make sure she was ok. I couldn't believe that the marks on her neck wouldn't be noticed but then it looked like they were disappearing until not too much later they weren't there at all - but I know I saw them! That's when I thought again maybe this dude really was a vampire. Anyhow, right after noticing the bite marks gone she all of a sudden wakes up and freaks out on me. She had no idea what had happened and jumped up and ran off before I could say anything."

"Did you tell anyone?" she asked

"Yeah, but no one believed me. They said I was fucking high and they never saw the guy or the girl passed out under the tree." Ava was not surprised.

"So you saw a vampire but evidently they didn't see you."

Nathan jumped up "More coffee?" he asked, as he headed to the kitchenette and began preparing another pot.

"Sure." Ava followed and poured the water while he scooped more coffee in a clean filter. Yeah, he liked it strong noticing how much grinds he put in. They didn't return to the couch but sat on the stools at the counter while they waited for the coffee to brew.

"What did you do after that night?"

"I researched all I could on vampires and I kept hoping to see one again."

"You weren't scared?"

"A little, but more curious I think. I was a teenage boy looking for thrills, what do you expect? I didn't find any - hell you guys looked like regular people and I pretty well gave up! A vampire did find me though when I was twenty-one and in college. I had gone to a bar with friends and this really hot girl comes up to me and we start talking and shit and well, you know the routine." he said smirking at Ava. "I thought it was totally cool, but weird too. She was way too good looking for me but she seemed to really be into me you know. So after a few hours she invited me to a private party and of course I went. Then she took me to this park but there was no one else there. She said she lied and just wanted to be alone and starts making out with me. The next thing I know she bit me and it hurt like hell!" He paused and looked at Ava and hesitated for a moment, for the first time she picked up uncertainty in him. "Even though I hadn't had that much to drink, all of sudden I felt like I was totally drunk. I fell on my hands and knees trying to hold myself up and I could just make out this girl on the ground, jerking every once in a while and making these weird choking noises. I passed out and when I woke up it was just startin' to get light out. The girl was still laying there and she looked bad - real bad. Her skin was this weird yellow gray colour and her eyes were like all white and I could hear her making weird noises. I went over to her and just then the sun comes up - and she died." He stopped then and stared into his coffee cup. "How can you be certain she died?" Ava asked prompting him to continue. "Because she stopped making noise and her skin turned this gross blackish, blue, puke green colour and the smell was like something - well had died and rotted! Sorry about that, but you have to understand that I didn't know yet that it was me that killed her - hell I didn't know what the fuck was going on!"

Yes, what he described was a vampire's death as a result of feeding on a Monev. She found his reaction rather odd; was he apologizing to her for killing some unknown vampire - a killing which he had not intended and had no control over or was he apologizing for fear of what her reaction might be?

"If you are apologizing to me for this female's death, don't. Now, go on with your story." She had

already discerned that he encountered more vampires than just the two previously mentioned and she had to admit her curiosity was peaked.

“So after that, things changed I guess. It was minor at first but since that first time I got bit, it was like I could ‘see’ you guys if you know what I mean.” No, she didn’t know what he meant, this was indeed very intriguing. “How so?” was all she asked. “Like, I would be in a bar or something and I would look at someone and knew they were a vampire, like they had a different light about them, at least that’s the only way I can describe it. It wasn’t too often but I always kept my eye out waiting for a chance to try to get close to one of you. I thought I finally got a chance when I was at an extreme fighting match. There was this guy that I just knew was a vampire. I watched him for a bit and when I saw he was leaving, I tried to follow him but lost track of him as soon as I got outside. I just wanted to talk to him you know?” Her surprise must have been evident as he quickly stated “Yeah, I know, dumb ass of the year. Well I guess this guy must have noticed me following him ‘cause I had walked a bit around the block to see if I could see him and just when I went past an alley, I get grabbed and pushed into some doorway. Man, he was pissed! He had me hauled up by my jacket and I swear my feet weren’t touching the ground - he was strong! I’m like Dude! I just wanna talk! But he didn’t want to talk to me – he went right for my jugular! Well, just like with the first girl, as soon as he bit me he was on the ground rollin’ around like he’s in serious pain. I felt a little queasy again, but not like the first time when I passed out. I was able to go over to him and I was asking him if he’s okay – yeah, I know he isn’t but that’s the first thing you say right? But he is not lookin’ good. I don’t know what to do but I figure I’m gonna stay there and at least see what the fuck happens. I figured he was in no shape to hurt me. Then I hear people talking and someone saying ‘I think he went in the back alley’ and I just knew they were talking about him. I jumped up and looked around but there was no one there. I ran though, ‘cause even though I was doing a stupid thing, doesn’t mean I’m a complete idiot! If more vampires were coming for him and they find me with a dying one, I figured I would be in a shit load of trouble then!”

She didn’t know what to say to this. That he deliberately went looking for vampires was in itself astounding. But to try to purposely approach one of her kind was unheard of. Pire’s identities were protected with death.

He stopped then and looked around. “Do you have any food here – besides me?” he jokingly asked. “Because I’m getting hungry!” “Finish your story.” was her only response though she was oddly amused by his little joke.

“Well, third times the charm I guess, because I met you and here I am finally able to sit down and talk to a vampire, which I swear is all I ever wanted to do since that first time!”

He had clearly said all he was going to at that moment and waited for her to speak. She herself was feeling much better, her energy returned and the fog that had been clouding her thinking was finally lifted.

“As for food, I suppose there is something in the cupboards, have a look.” Nathan jumped up and went to one of the three cupboards only to find dishes. He was in luck with the second one; there were a few non-perishable foodstuffs but no spices. The third cupboard contained pots and pans. These things, like the coffee were there for show and she couldn’t have told him how old the food was even if he had asked. He didn’t appear concerned however as he set about cooking some of the items. In the end he managed a simple tuna casserole using a box of macaroni and cheese, a can of tuna, and a can of peas and carrots. She did not wait around for him to indulge in his culinary activities, instead taking her turn in the shower.

Ava deliberately took her time, enjoying the feel of the water on her skin and going over the

strange turn of events of the past few hours.

Nathan was having a peculiar effect on her. He certainly was full of surprises, not the least of which was her attraction to him. She, like others of her kind viewed humans only as a food source, a tool and perhaps for some, entertainment. Those that socialized with them did so to satiate their own egos; it made them feel like gods to the humans. She kept her association with them to little more than sexual entertainment and food purposes.

Nathan was the first human that she found alluring beyond that of just sustenance and was in no particular hurry to be rid of his company.

When she finally emerged again, Nathan was finishing up the dishes. He had made another pot of coffee which this time she declined. Once again they moved back to the sitting area but she opted to sit on the armchair instead of beside him on the sofa.

“Feeling better?” she asked “Yes, and you?” he replied. “Much. Now back to our little chat. You said you only wanted an opportunity to speak with a vampire but before we go any further, I need you to clarify a few things for me.”

“I’ll try.”

“You said that after you were first bit you were able to ‘see’ vampires. At what point did you recognize me as one?”

“I spotted you right away. I don’t know if it’s because there’s something special about you but you were easier to spot than the last guy.”

“Between me and the last guy, had you seen other vampires?”

“Yes, but only from a distance. You were the first one I was able to get close to since.”

“Did you find them easy to identify?” He paused having to think for second. “Yeah, I guess I did. At first, I mean after the first girl, it wasn’t too often and sometimes I wasn’t too sure, you know. Then after the last guy, I guess I was more sure about what I was seeing. I figured I just knew more what I was looking for then.”

“Which was?”

Again Nathan had to stop and think about it. “I don’t know if I can describe it. I guess you have a different way about you, like the way you walk and like there’s this lack of light about you.” He paused again trying to find words to describe it. “Instead of standing out like other people, you’re just the opposite – you don’t stand out at all. It’s like you’re there but you’re not. Does that make sense?” Actually it made perfect sense. Vampires could make themselves as inconspicuous as they needed to. She just nodded her reply.

“Were you afraid of me at any time last night?” was her next question.

“No, I guess ‘cause I was kinda watchin’ to see if you were with others or if others were coming around. But after a while, I was pretty sure you were the only vampire in the place.”

“So you would have been more concerned had I been with others? You don’t think I am formidable on my own?” and before he knew what had happened, she had grabbed him by the throat and lifted him straight into the air so his feet were no longer touching the floor. She got the reaction she intended and dropped him when she recognized the look of terror in his eyes. Not only was her strength back, she had exerted her control once again over the situation.

“Don’t ever be lulled again into thinking you are safe with just ‘one’ vampire.” She sat down and waited for him to do so as well.

“Yeah, I’ll keep that in mind.” Though shaken, the terror from a few seconds ago faded all too quickly for her liking.

“I don’t think you really understand your current predicament. You should be more concerned

being alone with me - why aren't you?"

"I guess because if you were going to kill me, you would have by now. And I get the impression that you are almost as curious about me as I am about you."

"Oh? And are you prone to having such 'impressions' about people?"

"No, it's fairly new, I guess. An old girlfriend used to accuse me of being so out of touch with what was happening around me that I wouldn't see a psycho murderer coming at me until the axe was in my head!" He laughed though he was beginning to have a feeling that perhaps those first vampire bites had more of a consequence on him than he realized. Ava was thinking the same thing and decided against questioning him further for the time being.

"Now it's your turn. You said you just wanted to talk to one of us. What about, certainly not the weather?" trying to add her own humour to the conversation.

"No." he laughed. "I guess I was hoping to find out more about actual vampires. I always thought they were make-believe, right? Now I know you're real I guess I want to know if the stuff I hear about vampires is real too."

"Well, I am certainly not about to give you the absolute complete history of our kind. It would probably be easier if you were to just ask questions and I will try to answer them."

"Okay, you drink blood right? Do you eat? I mean, I know you drink coffee but you didn't eat when I made food, is it 'cause you can't?"

"We can eat food yes, but it has no appeal and it is not necessary to sustain us. Blood however is. Without that we will starve to death."

"What else will kill you?"

"Aside from drinking your blood?" she smiled mischievously at him and he laughed. "Is this for future reference or still just curiosity?"

"Well, it is good to know I guess, but like I read you get fried in sunlight. Why is that?"

"We don't 'fry' in sunlight, we don't like it and don't function as well in it. Did you know that humans deprived of sunlight even in artificial form would soon die? In simplest terms, light helps you to produce the energy needed to survive. So it was with Pires, we need dark; denied to us it would lead to sickness and eventually, death."

"So the vampire in the park didn't die just because the sun came out, that was just like the final straw for her?"

"I suspect so. Had she been healthy it might have given her a headache, at least that's what happens to me but that alone would not have killed her."

"So I know you have fangs, but I don't see them now. How does that work?"

"It's similar to a snake, they fold back and only extend when we are ready to bite."

"I guess you really don't turn into bats or sleep in coffins then huh?"

"No, but I think being able to turn into any animal would be quite fun." she laughed. "And believe it or not some vampires do sleep in coffins but only because they want to, not because they have to."

"What about a heartbeat? Are you really dead like they say?"

She laughed again "I don't know how that came about; yes, we have a heartbeat," and leaning toward him said seductively "would you like to feel it?" He grinned back and leaned into her placing his hand just above her right breast. Yes, she had a heartbeat and where she had taken the lead last night, she now relinquished to him as it was his turn to seduce her. He moved to kneel in front of her, removing her clothes, while he began kissing her. Once she was naked he pulled her up and led her to the bed. As she lay down he climbed on top, still wearing his jeans and in no hurry yet to remove them. He kissed her on the mouth, the neck, then the breasts pulling on her nipples with his teeth. Then

he ran his tongue down her torso and though she had been silent until that point she let out a lust filled moan as his tongue then began caressing and sucking between her legs. Only when she had climaxed did he remove the last of his clothes and went inside her pushing so fast and so hard she climaxed a second time. When finally he finished they lay exhausted in each other's arms, he fell asleep but she was wide awake.

She marvelled at what just happened. Up until now only another vampire had ever been able to bring her to that level of ecstasy. Vampires were naturally inclined to seduction while humans were simply driven to sex. Nathan appeared to be the exception to the rule.

When she first picked up Nathan she hadn't really been hungry but now she was famished having been denied her last meal. She got out of bed and after another quick shower, got dressed trying to be as quiet as possible. She needed to eat but was reluctant to leave him lest he wake up and leave. She convinced herself that it was because she could not let a known Monev simply walk away, but that was not her true motive for not wanting him to leave. That she felt this way shocked her. He was only a human, and they were only food. In this case, he wasn't even good for that! She resolved herself to simply take it for what it was; great sex and a nice break from routine. She left to go hunting again, only this time she went for fast food.

It was dark once again but still early enough that more people were out. The first opportunity at prey was in a darkened movie theatre. She purposely picked a less popular movie and as luck would have it she found a lone male in the very back corner. Being a porn flick, he was no doubt some pervert waiting to get off in the theatre. Well, that's fast food for you; the prep work is pretty well done. She didn't fuck him as that would be like drinking antifreeze wine after having champagne. She was already in feeding mode so the kiss she gave this anonymous man was only meant to drug him senseless. It took only a minute to render him helpless and she quickly drank her fill from him. His blood had a higher than normal salty taste, but you are what you eat and she had no doubt he had salt on everything.

Though her hunger was satiated the encounter itself left her feeling uncomfortable. She preferred taking her time but when hunger began it was better to satisfy it first before undertaking serious ventures and what waited for her at the den was a big one.

She controlled the urge to rush back trying to keep her emotions in check. When she finally got back she was greeted with the smell of cooking meat and the sight of Nathan chopping something on the tiny counter. The realization that this person had freely left was somewhat disturbing for her; that he returned was a relief. Hearing the door he turned to greet her. "It's about time, I was getting worried."

"Really? Considering this is my home isn't it logical I would return at some point?"

He laughed, "This isn't your home, no one lives here!" He continued to chop what she now saw were fresh vegetables which he then tossed into a pan of chicken along with some type of sauce. He appeared to truly enjoy what he was doing and she was enjoying watching him. It only took a few more minutes to complete and dividing the contents of the pan between two plates, he placed one in front of her and kept one for himself. "Join me?"

She looked at the food but unlike humans it did not evoke any desire to consume it. Not wanting to disappoint him she picked up the fork and began digging in the food. The first thing she did was remove the meat and put it on his plate "I don't understand the appeal of eating something dead." "Oh yes, that's much worse than drinking blood." he responded. Though not an ideal conversation there were still eating habits he was curious about. "So is it just human blood you eat?"

"We can consume the blood of any animal; human for the most part tastes better and is much

healthier. We need to drink more animal blood to get the same quality as a fraction of the amount human blood provides and it's much easier to obtain. We just can't seem to get the same level of cooperation from animals as we can from humans." she smirked.

"Do you drink vampire blood?" was his next question.

"Do you eat human meat!?" she asked in disgust.

"No!" he responded equally disgusted. "That would be cannibalism!"

"So it is with us!" Ava, deciding it best to change topics asked "So how do you know this isn't my home?"

"Well, despite there being food, it wasn't very good and kinda stale. And though you have some stuff in your bathroom, you are a girl and girls typically have a whole lot more stuff. There's also only a few clothes here. My guess is your wardrobe is a lot bigger than what would fit in that tiny closet." he said pointing to the small door just on the other side of the bathroom door.

"Very astute of you." Once dinner was finished, she helped clean up the dishes. She really needed to follow his lead in this as these activities were not common to her.

They settled down once again on the sofa with an after dinner drink. There was still more that each wanted to learn about the other; Nathan however was the first to speak. "When we first started talking, you told me that I'm called a Monev and when I said I could live with that, you said I couldn't. What did you mean?"

She hesitated, oddly reluctant to tell him. "Monev's are death to us and when one is discovered they are to be immediately killed."

"Oh." He was silent while she sat observing his reaction. "Are you going to kill me then?" His tone had changed to that of acquiescence which evoked in her a sudden feeling of protectiveness towards him. She was not going to kill him and most certainly was not going to let anyone else!

"No, but others will, so as long as we are together no one is to know what you are."

"So we're going to stay together?" a smile on his face and once again radiating charm.

Controlling an urge to laugh she said "It would appear that your insistence on pursuing vampires puts us in a most precarious situation. I would be remiss if I simply let you go on your way knowing your activities could result in the demise of more unsuspecting Pires!" She was not about to reveal that her true motive was simply the desire to keep him around, at least for the time being. Perhaps she hadn't been able to completely hide her true intent as he leaned over, kissed her on the cheek and said "I knew you liked me!" She laughed then not really caring that the upper hand she always painstakingly fought to keep just fell to her side.

"Look, there's a lot you need to learn if you intend on being around Pires." bringing the mood back to a more sombre level. Mention of Monevs reminded her of the seriousness of allowing him to live. By doing so, her own life was at risk. There had been those in the past that attempted to keep Monevs for their own purposes. When discovered, their death was worse than what they would have suffered drinking Monev blood. Strangely though, she was more concerned with him at the moment than herself. He was in extreme danger and his insistence on pursuing vampires would be his undoing. She was convincing herself that he needed her, suppressing her own desires to remain with him.

"Why do you call yourself a 'Pire'?"

"Slang. We use it a lot as it helps in the event that conversations are overheard by others. Then they are less likely to understand all we say."

"Is it true you live forever?"

"Forever is a long time."

"Ok, so you don't get old and die, right?"

“We do age but it is much, much slower.”

“So how long do you live for?”

“Long enough as to appear forever.”

“How do you become a vampire?”

“We’re born to vampire parents just as humans are born to human parents though births are very rare among us.”

This truly surprised him. The common belief was that humans were turned into vampires by other vampires. She always found that odd and rather insulting comparing it to a disease that can be passed on to others. Enale had taught her a long time ago that it was better that way. This made them mystical and easier to hide in the human dominated world that didn’t really believe they existed. Humans did not tolerate other species equal to them and throughout their evolution had attacked others until they forced their extinction or like the vampires, forced them into hiding. Once again she was snapped back to reality; she had told Nathan more about her kind than was allowed further jeopardizing both their lives!

Thinking of Enale reminded her that she had not spoken to him in a long while; perhaps it was time to pay him a visit. Vampires have occasionally suffered mental illnesses that caused them to act irrationally or inappropriately. Perhaps her recent behaviour was an after effect of the Monev poison. Though she believed her feelings were genuine towards Nathan, they were not natural for her kind and certainly not normal for her. Enale would fairly assess the situation and assist her to do what was necessary if this was the case.

“What about you Nathan? Tell me about yourself. I am going to assume you aren’t married. What about family, do you have children? What is your current occupation?” Such questions were not uncommon when getting to know someone; he suspected another motive behind them of course. “Well, I don’t think there’s a hell of a lot to tell. I’m not married, no girlfriend at this time, no kids that I know of. I just got laid off making me an unemployed bum as my father used to call it. I live with a couple of roommates, but otherwise, I could probably disappear and it would be a hell of a long time before anyone really noticed.”

“Well then why don’t we disappear together for a while? There’s someone I want you to meet.”

“Who?” He naturally assumed it was another vampire and though he felt comfortable enough with Ava and she was accepting of him, what she had told him about vampires so far didn’t mean he was safe with others.

“His name is Enale. He was my mentor and remains my closest friend. I need to figure out what to do with you and he can help.” It’s funny how a simple statement can be interpreted in two very different ways. For Ava, what she meant was that if indeed her recent behaviours were a side effect of Monev poison, Enale would help her dispose of him and get her back to health. Nathan interpreted the same statement to mean this other vampire would give her advice on how best to protect him from other Pires and was therefore agreeable to this, though he was surprised by his own reaction. He should be scared – hell his life was literally on the line, but he wasn’t. He should be disgusted – this thing drank blood! But he was totally captivated by her as once again he felt an overwhelming desire to fuck her. No woman had ever aroused him like that before! It was probably a vampire thing and she put a spell on him or something and once she was done with him, would probably kill him in the end. But what the hell – I might as well enjoy it while I can he thought to himself as he grabbed her and kissed her and fucked her one more time.

It was the middle of the night by the time they managed to leave the apartment. Ava packed the few clothes she had there and took Nathan back to his place. She waited in the car while Nathan was

getting his things and called Enale to let him know she was coming. Luckily he was between visitors and it would only be them. Ava didn't disclose the reason for coming only that she was bringing a human and requested that he decline any other visitors for a couple of days. Ava with a human was simply unheard of but he agreed to her request. He had known her too long and too well not to trust what she did or asked of him.

It didn't take Nathan long to come back and tossing his single bag into the back climbed into the passenger seat. She had explained that Enale lived a few hours' drive outside the city and they would get there shortly after dawn assuring him that some exposure to daylight would not be fatal for her. Nathan was full of questions and Ava gave up pondering her willingness to divulge so much about vampires and answered his questions as best as she could.

The first thing he questioned was around feeding which rather surprised her. She explained that when feeding there were several things that happened. First, the victim never remembered the encounter. Depending on how the vampire handled it they might have a vague recollection of having been with someone but never remembered being fed upon. Some like her, enjoyed sex before the meal as it provided a natural release of energy and put the human in a torpid state. When feeding it was better the blood was not pumping too fast so having the person in the most passive state possible was best. She compared it to drinking from a faucet; you certainly don't turn it on full force, you only want it fast enough to drink comfortably. A vampire's bite first numbed the immediate area so the person didn't feel discomfort. This avoided the body's automatic pain responses which might otherwise cause the person to involuntarily flay about while being fed upon. Rarely did a feeding end in death; those that liked doing that didn't last long. Not being a dominant species and one that would not be tolerated, you don't bring unwanted or unnecessary attention to yourself. When the feeding was done, the bite released another substance that quickly healed the bite mark leaving no trace behind.

She asked more questions about him, but like he had said, there really wasn't much to tell. He had an ok childhood, no major past traumas or shit like that. This she instantly knew was a lie but didn't question him on it. He had one brother who was athletic while he was more into books and movies. His parents treated them both the same, never displaying favouritism for one over the other. He hadn't seen much of his brother as he moved to Europe after both his parents died a couple of years ago. She did not denote the typical affection that humans had when discussing family. He did well in school, went to college, and had an okay job which he referred to as being a desk jockey and he had a few friends he liked to hang out with. This was all he would really say about his life.

Finding out that vampires were born instead of 'turned' sparked curiosity about vampire children which was Nathan's next line of questioning for her. It turned out their upbringing was nothing like humans. First of all, they did not remain with their parents. All Pire children were raised in what they called a Sanctuary. There were only a few such places in the world and their location was the best kept secret of all. Only the Pires known as Keepers that were in charge of the blood-broods were privy to that. Pregnant Pires were taken there in secrecy to give birth; once done they might never see the child again. When it was time for them to leave they were on rare occasions taken back to one or both parents but it was more likely they were taken to a mentor that would teach them survival in the outside world. There were reasons for this, but she would not reveal all to him.

They were taught to speak, read, and write in multiple languages; Ava herself was fluent in twenty different ones. They played games as well as engaging in artistic activities. As for what they ate, children required solid foodstuff along with blood; it was only after becoming an adult that they stopped eating and subsisted on blood alone. She assured him it was only animals they ate, though she knew it wasn't. As for things such as television – electricity hadn't been invented when she was born

so needless to say this made her childhood all the more different from his. She became quiet then and Nathan sensed an internal struggle but before he could say anything else, she said “We’re here.”

They had arrived at their destination and after driving down a long country road, stopped in front of a large house surrounded by forest and as with Ava’s den, for someone to find it on their own would have been virtually impossible. Quickly Nathan asked one more question. “So like, how do you know when you’re grown up?”

“Our wings fall off.” With that she jumped out of the car leaving him to wonder if she was joking or telling the truth. At this point, he would believe anything.

Enale greeted them at the door, hugging Ava while carefully scrutinizing Nathan. Ava introduced Nathan and quickly said “I’m sorry for springing this on you but...” He held up his hand preventing her from speaking further. “I’m sure you have your reasons, which you will no doubt share with me later. For now, I bid you both welcome.” Ava could not help but feel relief.

What Enale saw in Nathan when he first met him confused and alarmed him but he was careful in masking any adverse reactions. He always assessed every situation as thoroughly as possible before giving his thoughts, opinions, or advice on any matter.

Enale led them into a sitting room, offering tea to Nathan. Neither Ava nor he drank anything. There was idle chatter about the trip and Enale asked a few questions of Nathan regarding casual information such as what he did for a living and personal interests. It wasn’t a long conversation for Nathan was extremely tired after being up all night. Ava led him to a room upstairs and he was quickly asleep. The tea worked as it should helping him to fall asleep and assuring he would sleep for a long time. This was necessary as she and Enale had many things to discuss.

Though Pires did not move about in daylight, it did not mean they slept during that time the way humans did at night. Pires stayed awake for long periods of time. As a result when they did sleep they slept equally long, sometimes to the equivalent of months in human life. When such a time came the most important thing was for a Pire to be with others for protection, for like humans, it is a most vulnerable time. She was not close to her sleeping time.

Once alone Ava told Enale everything from the first encounter with Nathan to their arrival here including her own feelings and fears around the situation. Enale asked only a few questions during this time, otherwise she did all the talking. Finally, when she completed her tale she looked woefully at Enale and asked “Am I suffering the effect of Monev poisoning - am I truly losing my mind?”

His only response was “What would you do if I told you, you were?”

Despondent with head hung she said “I trust you explicitly to do what is right and what is best though I fear I will fight you over this even if I know it to be necessary!”

They sat in silence in their own contemplations. Just before noon an older couple arrived at the house. They were humans employed by Enale to tend the grounds and clean house. This was an example of using humans as tools. They were paid well and did not divulge information of what they saw or thought about the place they tended or its occupants. Even if asked they would have only vague recollections of it. Thus was the power of secrecy with the vampire. They spoke briefly with Enale and were not seen by them again for the rest of the day.

Once they left, Enale and Ava fed. Though preference was for human blood, the reality was any blood from any living animal would do if that wasn’t readily available. Enale himself rarely partook of human, having a stronger preference for bovines. Ava was accustomed to this.

Only then did they resume their conversation while Nathan continued to sleep upstairs.

Ava could no longer contain herself, she needed to hear Enale’s verdict.

“I have never heard of Monev poison affecting the mental capacity of one of us. The effects are

purely physical and if you survive, recovery is complete in a few days at most. You are healthy and from what you described, healed quickly. As for your mental state, though certainly unusual for you, I as you know have had dealings with mentally incapacitated Pires. I assure you, you do not display any such symptoms. So I suppose for the time being, you must figure out why you feel the way you do.

She was very pleased to hear this, but not for long. “There is still the matter of allowing a known Monev to live. You have in fact broken a death law. I understand you do not wish to do away with him, but did you think I would suffer him to live? By divulging this information to me, you have now made me an accomplice and subject to equal a punishment as the offender.”

She honestly had not thought of that. When uncertain in any life dealings she naturally went to the one person that guided her through the beginnings of adulthood. Enale was the equivalent of a parent to her and taught her about the human world and how to survive as a vampire in it. “I suppose that if my sanity is still sound, I need advice on what to do.”

“What if I told you to kill him and forget him? He is after all, only a human.”

“I can’t.”

“Can’t or won’t? You don’t wantonly kill, but you certainly have when necessary. What would you do if I told you that I must then kill him? I have every right as my own life is now in jeopardy because of it.”

“Then why don’t you?” Enale and Ava were both startled by Nathan’s unexpected entrance. Before Ava understood what she was doing, she immediately went to his side. Both now stood looking at Enale who continued to sit.

“Well, I guess you have found me out. If I was going to kill you, I would indeed have done so by now regardless of Ava’s feelings.” he said to Nathan. “Sit, both of you. I admit that my own curiosity has been aroused by you, though my feelings are not as intense as dear Ava’s. The question now is what to do with you.” There was noticeable relief on both their parts as they sat together. Seeing Ava’s reaction to Nathan, Enale was not certain that killing him while she was around would have been an easy matter. But as long as he remained here there was no concern of another Pire finding out and no need to take immediate action. Let them relax; he would find out more about the human Nathan and in the end, if it came to it, would kill him despite any protest from Ava. He had the ability to incapacitate her if need be in order to carry out the deed.

So for the next few days Ava and Nathan explored the house and surrounding grounds remaining indoors during the day. Enale would engage Nathan in some conversations mainly regarding his upbringing which he appeared most curious about. Nathan commented to Ava on this one time when alone and her response was “You’re a human and what is there really to discuss besides the weather?” laughing at what was becoming a private joke for them. Despite Enale not indulging in lengthy conversations with the pair, he was however very observant of their interactions with each other. And though they thought they were alone in reality the only time they had true privacy was in the bedroom. It was arranged that they would each have separate rooms which of course they did not once adhere to.

As for Enale, his fascination and concern with the two was simple, they were far too comfortable with each other. Enale had never seen Ava treat a human in the manner she treated Nathan and Nathan, knowing his life was at risk, still acted blissfully content in the company of his potential death master. Ava didn’t appear to be thinking of anything more than the present moment and Enale himself was still uncertain on what was to be done. But all would quickly change with a simple knock on the door.

It was just past midnight of the fourth night when three uninvited vampires arrived. It is courtesy among Pires to pre-announce arrivals or wait for an invitation to visit others but when it is ‘family’

there tends to be an open door policy and just dropping in is acceptable. Two of the trio, the only male and the younger female, were considered that. They, like Ava, had been mentored by Enale though more recently than she. The third female was a friend that they decided to bring to meet Enale.

Martin and Lisella walked in and happily greeted Enale and though surprised, were just as pleased to see Ava. Their friend Mary waited patiently for greetings to finish and introductions to be made. Ava was horrified to see them, but only because of Nathan. It was one thing to tell Enale but no decisions about dealing with others had yet been made. She thought it fortunate that Nathan was asleep, but that did not remain the case.

“What brings this surprise visit?” asked Enale. He too was a bit disturbed by this unexpected turr of events but of course realized it was bound to happen and better to begin now with family.

“Mary is a brood mate of mine and while catching up on our lives since leaving the Sanctuary I told her about you and naturally she wanted to meet you. We are only passing through however but Ava being her is a treat! We were actually planning on visiting you next!” explained Martin.

“Yes!” piped in Lisella giving Ava a friendly hug. “I have missed you and am so happy to see you again!” Ava was the female that Lisella was most fond of and held her in the highest regard.

Ava was very fond of both Martin and Lisella and despite her fear, could not help but smile at them. They were young still and so full of energy and took great delight in the world about them. Mary had sat by politely quiet while they engaged in chatter about recent escapades. Time went quickly by and suddenly Martin, who was in the middle of a story about a store owner and stray cat, stopped talking and stared at Nathan who just entered the room. Vampire’s conversation naturally stopped when a human entered the room; seeing him wasn’t a shock as it was assumed he was a servant. The shock came when he sat down beside Ava and held her hand. “Good Morning.” he said smiling at the group.

Lisella, being young and still not having completely mastered the art of discretion exclaimed “Ava! You have a human!?” and laughed. Martin was simply confused. Mary showed no reaction one way or another.

Enale did not speak but waited to see how Ava was going to handle this. “This is my friend Nathan” she said smiling politely “and like you, I wished for Enale to meet him.”

“Friend? He’s only a human, isn’t that a bit odd?” asked Mary with unmistakable distaste in her voice.

Martin looked sternly at Mary “If Ava says he is a friend, then human or not, he is a friend.” Mary merely shrugged “Whatever, I am but a guest and will of course abide by the conventions of the house.”

Lisella gave a look of dislike regarding Mary’s attitude and as if to make up for it, jumped up and shook Nathan’s hand. “Nice to meet you!” she greeted cheerfully. “Same here!” added Martin as he in turn shook his hand. Martin was taller than anyone else with a build to match, Lisella was the shortest with blonde hair and deep brown eyes. Both had the persona of friendly easy going natures. Mary with short dark hair and pale green eyes was more aloof. All had the clear vampire appearance about them despite their different features.

“Thanks. Sorry about interrupting the conversation.”

“It’s all right Nathan, you are no doubt hungry. Ava, why don’t you take him to get some food.” This was said politely but was in fact an order and not just an act of courtesy on Enale’s part. Ava took him immediately away.

“Well, I too am hungry. Perhaps that’s why she has the dear boy; it’s her personal food supply.” said Mary. She was told before coming that there would be no human blood available for

consumption.

Enale's reaction was swift and firm "No human is to be touched on my property whether they are servant or guest!"

"Of course." Mary timidly responded. A Pire of Enale's stature was not questioned and certainly not disobeyed!

"Martin will get you sustenance, in the meantime, Lisella – assist her in getting settled into a guest room. I have no doubt she wishes to take a respite after travelling." As with Ava, this was not a request.

Enale then went to the kitchen in search of the other two. Nathan was cooking something on the stove while Ava was searching in cupboards trying to assist him in finding things he needed. Humans were rather high maintenance. Enale could not help but be amused seeing Ava behave this way.

"That went rather well." he said. Both looked up from what they were doing and smiled.

"Well, with two anyhow. I am not certain about Mary. Where are they by the way?" asked Ava.

"I have sent them to feed and get some rest."

Enale was rarely in the kitchen and found it interesting to be here now. He sat at the table and Ava joined him while Nathan continued to cook.

"What think you know Ava? Lisella's and Martin's reactions were supportive of you, but that of course is because of their fondness for you. Mary's reaction will be more the norm if you are open about him with others." Turning then to Nathan "And you; I am not certain whether it was foolishness or arrogance that caused you to come in unannounced on us, but what did you think of the encounter?"

"Sorry about that, I guess I wasn't really awake yet. I heard voices and I assumed it was the servants you were talking to. I honestly didn't know it was other vampires or I probably would have waited! As for what I thought – yeah, Martin and Lisella seem okay. Mary though is another story. She looked at me like I was food!"

"To her you are and indeed speculated that was what Ava had you for! You can be certain I made the house rules quite clear to her." said Enale. Ava had explained the rules to Nathan regarding vampires partaking of human blood in Enale's home. He sensed Ava's and Nathan's sobering change of mood. Reality was now literally under the same roof for all of them.

"For the moment, it is imperative they not know his nature. Let it be that he is a friend and they can draw their own conclusions. But, how to handle this must be decided soon!" With that, Enale left the two alone.

Nathan brought his food over to the table and began eating. Both sat in silence. Though neither spoke it out loud, they were of the same sentiment; Ava was not going to leave his side and Nathan had no intention of being away from her.

They did not join the others again until late afternoon; it was a large enough house and easy to avoid other occupants. When they did get together, everyone behaved as if the awkwardness of the first meeting hadn't happened. Mary was very polite to everyone including Nathan though she kept conversation with him to a minimum. They spent a pleasant evening conversing and playing games. Both Nathan and Lisella were excellent chess players and enjoyed a few spirited and competitive games with each other. Once dark all but Ava and Nathan went outside and did not return until just before dawn. The next day was spent similar to the first, though in a bit more relaxed atmosphere.

Enale had spoken separately with Martin and Lisella on what they thought about Nathan. Lisella was perfectly fine with it. Her generation was more accustomed to being around humans than older vampires were. She also accepted whatever Ava did and saw no reason to question it. Martin was of similar thoughts but one comment surprised Enale. "When Nathan first walked in I thought he was a

Newling that had just come to you which explained why Ava was here. It was only after he sat down I realized he was a human. But I think he is the most vampirish human I have ever seen.” he said jokingly.

It was late in the third evening when things went wrong. The guests had all become relaxed around each other and admittedly began to let their guards down. Ava and Martin were engrossed in a complicated card game that Nathan could not begin to fathom. They played with Tarot cards instead of a regular deck and part of the game included long debates of how or when one card trumped another. Likewise Enale, Lisella, and Mary were engaged in conversation related to more vampire things until Mary went outside with the promise that the others would join her shortly. Nathan was by now tired so excused himself and headed for bed. Being otherwise preoccupied, no one noticed that Mary still lingered nearby and only she paid any real attention to his departure. Thus she easily slipped upstairs after him completely unnoticed a few moments later.

Nathan went into the room he shared with Ava and not looking, pushed the door to close it but Mary caught it first and slipped into the room. Nathan hearing something turned quickly around and saw her approach him.

“You shouldn’t be here.” nervous at being alone with this Pire.

“Now, now, don’t be alarmed.” she said trying to sound soothing. “I just wanted to speak with you in private. I am not used to seeing a human interact with us in the manner that you do and I just want to get to know you better and it’s so hard to do with others around, don’t you agree?” He recognized that she was trying to charm him into a state of calmness, but as he never trusted her, this was not going to work.

“Can’t we just sit and chat for a bit – you and I, alone?”

“No. Now get the fuck out of my room.” he said aggressively.

What little patience she had quickly faded. Unlike the others, Mary’s diet consisted entirely of human blood and now to settle for less made her very agitated. She had known she would not have any here, but they were only going to spend the day before going on to the city the next evening. She could go without food until then. Now however, she was famished and the longer a vampire goes hungry, the more irrational they become. Her original plan was simply to get him to a receptive state, feed a bit and leave him alone and no one including him would have been the wiser. This was not going to be the case now and she no longer cared.

“Don’t be a fool! You don’t think I know about you!?” Nathan paled thinking that she was actually here to kill him and not feed on him. “Ava might be able to dupe the old Enale, but it is clear to me that you are her private food source. I may not know her personally but I have heard of her and Ava does not associate with humans – *ever!*”

That she did not know of his nature was little relief as he was now in a position knowing she will die if she feeds on him. Ava had not acted upon the news of the previous vampire deaths after their encounter with him but he had no such guarantee the others wouldn’t. He also couldn’t tell her as he knew that she would instantly kill him according to Pire law. As for fighting her off, Ava had already demonstrated the power of just one vampire.

There really was no time in the end to react even if he had been able to decide on one action or another to take. She had him quickly pinned on the floor and bit hard into his neck. Where the other bites had hurt – this one was excruciating and he cried out in pain.

Pire’s instincts are very strong and while the encounter upstairs was just playing out, the others suddenly looked at each other sensing a dread deed about to take place. Then they heard the scream and Ava was out of room and at the stairs before the chair she tipped over in her haste to get up had

finished falling. The others were right behind her.

Ava burst into the room, the door breaking from the force. Nathan was laying on the floor holding his bleeding neck while Mary was already thrashing about in the throes of death. Had that not been the case, Ava would have killed her regardless of Pire law forbidding the killing of another over a human. As it was, she still wanted to hurt her!

“Go to Nathan and get him out of here!” Enale cried to her. She did and picking him up carried him to the next room which he was originally supposed to stay in by himself.

Martin and Lisella watched with a mix of shock, horror, and morbid curiosity at Mary’s current state. She was clutching her throat, gasping for breath and choking on a vile fluid she was trying to vomit up. Enale simply watched knowing there was nothing that could be done. She had swallowed his blood which was even now dissolving her insides. He was waiting to see what the other two reactions would be to this new situation.

“Is that...?” Lisella asked, not able to finish as she stared transfixed at the sight before her.

“Yeah, at least what I know of it.” replied Martin. Then looking at Enale asked “Isn’t it?”

“Yes,” he replied calmly “it is Monev poisoning.”

“Ewwww – gross!” cried Lisella, a far different reaction than Enale expected from her.

Mary was quickly succumbing to the poison for she had taken in a large amount with that single bite. Her body was beginning to convulse and her skin already turning the blackish, bluish, green that Nathan had witnessed with the death of the first vampire. The pungent smell that began to emanate was beyond repulsive. Enale grabbed a blanket from the bed and tossing it on her, crushed her chest with his foot causing her heart to burst thereby instantly killing her. He then ordered the other two outside to start a fire in the pit at the other end of the yard. They gladly ran out grateful to get away from the awful smell. In no time they had a large blaze going and Enale soon came carrying the blanketed body. Tossing it into the fire, they all stood silent as a show of respect for a dead Pire.

Enale was the first to speak. “I am sorry about your friend. Though this is not meant by any means to justify her death, she did break the rules of my house by trying to feed on a human. Rules I made quite clear.” Though he did not state it, he felt no guilt in what he had just done.

“You two however, for better or worse, were her friend. You know what you witnessed, and you know the law and what is expected. What now will you do?” he asked in an officious tone.

After a lengthy silence, Martin was the first to speak. “I was not overly fond of Mary and if not for her being a brood mate, would probably not have associated with her. I am angrier that I brought someone to your house that would behave in this manner, and for that I sincerely apologize!” he said with hand on heart and bowing his head in respect to Enale.

Lisella echoed the same sentiment. “She was not my friend and I tolerated her out of respect for Martin. Her death is meaningless to me.”

“Your apology is accepted, for I know you would not intentionally betray me. There is the matter of the Monev still; what of that?” Enale asked again.

“I suppose by law, he should die.” Martin said reluctantly.

“Along with any that knowingly allowed him to live.” added Enale.

This of course distressed them realizing that meant killing Enale and Ava as well. If it came to battle, Martin and Lisella were no match for one of them, let alone both. But Enale knowing the repercussions, would go to death without a fight and if need be take Ava himself first so great was his honour.

The fire was dying down, the body completely burned. Dawn would soon come, so they went inside.

“You knew Nathan was a Money, right?” asked Martin. “Why did you allow him to live, let alone to stay in your house?”

Knowing this to be a fair question Enale explained “Ava did of course tell me she was bringing a human but did not explain what he was until after they arrived. I admit to being curious as to why she was with a human and why she herself did not immediately kill him upon discovering his nature.”

“How did she find out?” asked Lisella. Enale disclosed all that Ava herself had told him. Both were captivated by the story and amazed at the relationship that had so quickly developed between the two of them.

“I think that is it time to go and speak to Ava and Nathan. Then you must decide all of our fates.” With that, he led them upstairs.

Since carrying Nathan away, Ava had not left his side save to get a cloth with water to clean the blood from his neck. Mary’s attack was brutal to say the least and had the poison not had an instantaneous effect she would likely have ripped his throat out in her frenzy to feed.

As it was, Ava was not certain that Nathan would survive. He was deathly pale, clearly in pain, and getting weaker by the moment. All she could do was sit by his side and hold his hand. Her heart was breaking and at that moment she had no concerns for anyone but him.

When the others came, she did not bother to look at them but continued to sit holding Nathan’s hand. “If you have come to kill him, I doubt that will be necessary for he is dying. If you have come to kill me, I only ask that you wait until he goes; I will not fight you, just take me quickly so I may follow him.”

That Ava would utter such words struck each of them to their very souls. Lisella immediately ran to her and throwing her arms around her cried out “No, Ava, no! We’re not going to kill either one of you! There must be something we can do!” Then pleading to Enale, “Please, can’t you help him!?”

The other two came to stand by his bed. Enale simply shook his head. “There is nothing I can do, he will either live or die.” Martin was standing behind Ava and placing his hands on her shoulders said to her “I am sorry Ava. We have no intention of taking your life or his, if he should survive.” Martin then leaned over Nathan and whispered into his ear “Hang in there guy, we’re pulling for you!” With that he left the room followed by Enale. Lisella stayed.

It was a long day for all. They were more grieved over the possible death of Nathan than they were for the death of one of their own which demonstrates the complexities of vampire relationships. Vampires can be very indifferent toward each other but when they bonded with others it lasted a lifetime. There is no rhyme or reason as to why bonds are formed but it was clear that all present that day had formed that invisible connection with Nathan that would hold them together as a family.

Nathan lived. After the sun had set, Lisella opened the windows to let the night air in and a few hours later he awoke. But he was not the same. He looked at Ava and tried to smile, but his mouth hurt and he cringed. She quickly grabbed him some water and helped him sit up to drink. He took a small mouth full and spit it out; it tasted terrible to him! He was able to sit on his own and after a few moments stand though Ava begged him to remain still a little longer. Humans were so fragile compared to vampires; she did not want him to risk hurting himself more. Nathan couldn’t tolerate the thought of lying down anymore and waved her away. He could not speak for the pain in his mouth. The bite itself was still healing and he would carry two small scars from it for the rest of his life. He walked to the open window and breathed in the fresh air. That itself invigorated him. Ava stood by his side as they drank in the night air together. Lisella ran downstairs to tell the others. “He’s fine, except his mouth hurts.”

Martin and Enale looked at each other as if this had significant meaning but said nothing about it.

Just before dawn, the two came downstairs. Nathan still looked pale, but otherwise alright. Enale and Martin were shocked at his appearance. Perhaps because the other two had been with him throughout the night, they did not notice the change. Nathan was finally able to talk though awkwardly. He explained the encounter with Mary and they in turn told him what happened to her. By this time the human servants had arrived and though they never interrupted Enale when he was with guests, the old man needed to ask about fixing a problem outside.

Just as quickly as Mary's attack had been on Nathan, so it was that Nathan was leaping toward the old man. Ava by his side was able to stop him, but only by throwing him to the ground. Enale stood in front of the old man ordering him to leave at once and for Martin to help Ava as Nathan was fighting to get loose of her grip.

Martin and Ava struggled to roll him over and cried out in shock upon seeing his face. Blood lust was in his eyes, mouth gapped open and the clear, unmistakable vampire fangs extended ready to feed! "Get him blood NOW!" Enale ordered to Lisella, who responded immediately. Enale had a supply that the humans did not know about and she quickly grabbed a bottle that he himself collected and stored such as one might do with wine.

He leapt on top of Nathan while Ava and Martin still restrained him. Only a little did he first give him and Nathan devoured it. "More!" he gasped but only in small amounts would Enale dole it out. After a bit, Nathan began to quiet down, the bloodlust gone from his eyes but still he craved the blood. Finally they were able to release him and under the strict guidance of Enale, Nathan was given the bottle of blood to continue sipping on his own. Not once did Ava take her eyes from him; what she thought was anyone's guess. Finally Nathan completed the bottle and looking mournfully at them asked "What the fuck just happened to me?"

"You turned vampire!" responded Lisella excitedly.

Looking at Ava with utter despair, he cried "But you told me vampires are born, not made! How can this be!?" All she could do was shake her head in disbelief and whispered, "I don't know."

Enale and Martin appeared to be the least surprised by this turn of events. "You were not turned into a vampire. You obviously always were one, but those traits were dormant until now." said Enale

Everyone but Martin looked at Enale in confusion. While those three had been upstairs, Martin and Enale had been discussing Nathan and all they knew about Monevs. It turned out that Enale had a lot more knowledge on this subject than he ever revealed before.

"Nathan, are your parents in fact your biological parents?" asked Enale. Nathan hesitated a moment "No, I was adopted."

"Why didn't you tell me this?" asked Ava in surprise.

"I didn't think it mattered. Besides, it wasn't something I discussed."

"Why?" asked Lisella.

"Because I was thrown into a dumpster after birth and if it hadn't been for a homeless guy looking through the garbage, I would have died there. Knowing that your own mother thought you no better than trash isn't exactly a happy childhood memory you know." he said bitterly.

"So, there is no way of knowing who your biological parents are. This at least I can tell you. Your mother was human and your father vampire." said Enale.

"I never knew such a thing was possible." exclaimed Lisella, which Ava agreed. Martin simply said "I just recently found out otherwise myself." looking at Enale.

"And just how do you know my mother wasn't the vampire?" asked Nathan in a sarcastic tone. It was to be expected, his life had just changed in a most dramatic way. He would need time to adjust.

"This is something that none of you would have learned during your earlier education and certainly

not something I would teach you. This knowledge is one of the oldest, most well-guarded secrets we have.”

Enale insisted they first partake of sustenance before continuing and of course there was no need to hide it from Nathan.

“Yes, humans and vampires can produce a child. As you all know, and as you will learn Nathan, it is infrequent for vampires to give birth. It is even rarer that a half-blood is born, let alone survives. If the mother is vampire, it is easily discovered for another Pire is always there at birth so the offspring can be expedited to safety. It would immediately be known if the child was a half-blood and it would be destroyed. It is more difficult when the father is vampire and the mother human. Sometimes in these births the vampire genes are more dominant. In those cases humans see it as a deformity and the infant soon dies as they do not understand it needs blood to survive. It is more difficult when human is the dominate trait and as with Nathan, there is no indication of abnormalities, at least not that we know of. Clearly there was not a need for blood in the beginning. Be assured Nathan, you and I will spend a great deal of time together so I may learn as much as I can about your childhood and development.”

“What good would that do?” was his only response.

“Well it may help in determining how dormant the vampire traits really were and if the changes that happened to you would have come about on their own or, as I suspect, brought on by the Pire bites you received. Perhaps it was triggered as a natural defense mechanism, or simple exposure to Pire chemistry. There are many possibilities!” Ava, Martin, and Lisella recognized the look in Enale’s eyes. This was a mystery to him and for someone who knows all there is to know, learning something new was exhilarating. This was the best possible reaction that could be expected towards Nathan; having the support of a Pire with Enale’s standing greatly increased his chances of survival among the Pires.

“You see it could save your life if you are proven to be able to provide invaluable knowledge to us. You may now be seen as a vampire by some, but you are still a half-blood and your life is still very much at risk. It would appear you have several strikes against you, do you know what they are?”

Nathan was not quite certain why Enale was questioning him, what did it matter? The other three recognized what Enale was doing; he was beginning his edification though instead of teaching how to be a vampire in a human world, Nathan would have to be taught how to be a vampire in a Pire world.

He looked at Ava and she smiled reassuringly at him and suddenly he felt much calmer. “Ok, well I killed what – like three vampires now. I guess that in itself is probably a big no-no.” Everyone smiled. “Well, not exactly.” answered Ava. “This is again one way we differ. A human killing another human is a very serious matter for them. A vampire killing another vampire is usually not for our killings are done for different reasons. We do not kill out of anger, or revenge, or to take something from someone. In other words vampires don’t commit murder - that is a human trait. When a Pire kills it is either accidental, or for mercy to a fatally sick or injured Pire, or because that Pire has broken a death law. In your case, it could be argued as unintentional as you did not purposely take their lives and really had no control over the situation.”

“What other reasons then?” continued Enale with his questioning.

“Well, Ava already told me I’m a Monev, and that means I should have been killed right away. And you made it pretty clear that half-bloods aren’t allowed to live either. I mean fuck – how many reasons does someone need? You only die once no matter how many reasons there are for you to die!”

“Well said.” laughed Enale “There is another though. You have more knowledge about us than

perhaps any human in history has. Knowledge in the hands of an enemy is a powerful weapon, that is why we guard our true identities from humans through death and that is why a human with that much information is destroyed.”

“Now for being Monev,” this time looking at Lisella “any guesses as to why that is a death law?”

“Well, they can kill a vampire and there is no way of telling who is a Monev is...” suddenly she stopped and with a look of astonished realization cried out “a Monev *is* a half-blood – that’s why!”

“Indeed.” responded Enale, pleased that Lisella was able to arrive at the correct conclusion. “It is a peculiar trait that a half-blood’s blood is poisonous to us and became the only way to identify them when the vampire traits were dormant.”

This was amazing information for all of them.

This was how Enale taught. He did not provide the answers; he provided the information then got the learner to think it through by taking all the knowledge they currently had and analyzing it and comparing it with new knowledge until the correct conclusion was arrived at. He was a powerful teacher and any one privileged enough to learn under his tutelage was ranked as a great Pire mind.

Nathan had yet to fully appreciate the group whose presence he found himself in but he would come to realize that he was very fortunate. Any other Pires would have destroyed him long ago and none would have put their own lives at risk for a Monev. Even though he could now be seen as a Pire, his human half would still have to remain a secret.

“Well, I think this has given us all a lot to think over. Nathan, you must get some rest for if I am not mistaken there are still physical changes that you will undergo which may prove taxing. We all know this feeling as we experienced our on transformations during our growth.” The other three nodded in agreement.

Ava took Nathan back upstairs. His head was spinning and he just wanted to lie quiet for awhile. The feast of blood he consumed earlier in a desirous fit of madness now sat queasily in his stomach. Meanwhile Martin and Lisella were full of questions for Enale who was very pleased to answer them.

It was later decided that all of them, Ava, Martin, Lisella, and Enale would teach Nathan. Ava would be his companion and protector. Martin and Lisella understanding more the modern human world would help him adapt to the everyday world of human/vampire. Enale would teach him vampire history and in turn, hopefully learn from him why and how this transformation came to be.

In the meantime, Ava was content to sit by Nathan’s side as he rested. Suddenly his eyes opened and looking over at Ava said in surprise “Monev is venom backwards!”

She smiled and replied with humoured sarcasm, “Yes, and good of you to figure that out so quickly!” Chuckling, he closed his eyes again and fell asleep.

So Nathan’s life as a vampire began though it would be rife with uncertainties.

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As predicted by Enale, Nathan's transition was uncomfortable and indeed proved nearly fatal.

Though he appeared fine with the first blood he had consumed, the next time he fed he was only able to keep down small amounts and despite their attempts to slowly feed it to him his body rejected most of it. He then craved actual food which at first he devoured, but afterwards was sickened by that as well. It was Martin that finally figured out to feed him meat, at first only partially cooked, then finally giving it to him raw. This, he was able to consume and keep down. Physically his body ached, sometimes so bad that he couldn't move, other times he was either fevered to the point of delirium or so chilled that nothing would warm him. Ava was unnerved wanting to make him feel better and pleading with Enale to do something. Enale himself was at a loss as to what he could do. Vampires rarely got sick; they did not get colds and flus and were not afflicted with cancers or diseases such as humans were prone to. On the rare occasions they did get sick, he of course was an expert healer, but nothing he tried worked for Nathan. He didn't believe however that Nathan was sick but rather transitioning from human to vampire. After birth every Pire went through two transition stages or metamorphosis; the first when they changed from child to adolescent then from adolescent to adult. He did know that there was the possibility that Nathan simply would not survive. It was a sad reality for them that not all vampires survived the metamorphosis. From what he could perceive Nathan was experiencing these transitions though not in the same manner as a full-blooded vampire.

During the second week, Enale ordered Lisella to take Ava away. Nathan was in a very bad state and fearing he might not pull through, did not want her there. She was to the breaking point, and he didn't know what Nathan's death might do to her.

By the time Ava returned, it appeared that Nathan had slipped into a coma but Enale believed it to be a sleep stage and assured them this was an encouraging sign. His body needed to rest and this was the only way for it. But everyone was deeply concerned and tried to prepare themselves for the worse.

Then, at the end of the second week, Nathan suddenly woke up with nothing more than a slight headache as a lingering effect. They accounted this to being daylight and sure enough when darkness came, the headache was gone. Despite being near death, his recovery appeared complete and his strength immediately returned.

Nathan was now in what was considered the Newling phase of life. It was the stage just after the final metamorphosis from adolescence to adulthood and the time when vampires were sent to live in the human world.

That night they all spent outside; everyone was curious to see what changes Nathan had undergone. Of course they noticed that physically he was more muscular but most changes were internal and only he could tell them.

The first thing that Nathan himself noticed was his heightened senses. It was a dark moon and being in the country there was no artificial light to brighten the black of night but he could see as clearly as day. He could hear noises all around him; things scuttling and flapping. The others happily identified the different sounds for him. The air itself was aromatic; he never realized how many different odours existed and each one so distinct from another. He could not only smell the cows in the nearby field, but could distinguish their individual scents. "So this is what it must be like for animals!" he exclaimed. There were odours that were not as pleasant, but instead of being repulsed, he was simply fascinated. It would take years to learn what sounds and scents belonged to what creature or vegetation. It was good thing he had four willing tutors all wishing to participate in teaching him.

When daylight once again came, they retired inside. Nathan still needed more sleep, though slowly that need would lessen. For now he and Ava went upstairs and Nathan fell immediately asleep. He did not sleep for long however; rolling over and cuddling up to Ava, she was very pleased to discover that his new stalwart build applied to *all* his muscles and all too soon woke him up. It would be natural to assume that since Pires were physically stronger than humans, their love making would be more physically intense. It could be and Pires did have to be conscious of this when having sex with humans. However, Pires also possessed a gently touch that when used in sex, was in itself extremely erotic. This is what Ava now did to Nathan. Rolling him over on his back she reached over and felt his hardness but instead of massaging him, she very lightly let her fingers run up and down his length. Her fingers rested on his tip and then still barely touching him continued to do this over his entire body, never once grabbing or pulling. So delicate was her touch that had she done that when they first had sex, he would not of noticed. But to his half sleepy, new Pire side the touch sent shivers down his spine. Nathan was in a state of euphoria until finally being unable to control himself pulled Ava on top of him and slid inside her. Ava pinned him down and it was her that moved rhythmically up and down until both moaned their ecstasy. Nathan was now wide awake. "What was that!?" he exclaimed, clearly pleased. "Sometimes the softest touch can have the most powerful effect." she laughed seductively. She was still on top of him and taking his hand, held it to her breast. "Hold your fingers so they barely touch the skin; don't press down." she instructed. Nathan did and was surprised by the sensation rippling through his own finger tips. Lifting her off of him then, he touched every part of her body pleased with her reaction and amazed at the tingling sensation he experienced. Nathan was a natural and all too soon she was lost in her own state of ecstasy.

Weeks quickly turned into months but for Nathan, time itself was nonexistent. He slept less; at most only a few hours every other night. His waking time was spent talking and learning about vampires. Physically, Nathans bones and muscles were much stronger and his senses were far more acute. He could see in the dark as clear as if it was day but discovered that in bright sunlight his vision was far less keen even with sunglasses. He could tolerate daylight longer than the others, but like them, did not spend much time in it. He could hear the quietest of sounds from a long distance, as well as hear higher and lower tones not audible to human ears. His appetite had changed and foods such as fruits, vegetables, and grains held no appeal to him. Mentally, his was mind was more acute; he could comprehend things far quicker than he ever remembered being able to in school. In fact, he would remember concepts and ideas that he struggled to understand then that now made sense. He could also remember things with an astounding clarity, not only how things looked, but the sounds, smells, and tastes. He also remembered the feelings he had with his past experiences both pleasant and unpleasant. When he talked about this with the others they said that was natural for Pires and to simply keep in mind that they are past events no matter how clear the memory and emotions are.

He also experienced what he thought of as a sixth sense. He had heard of this many times but of course dismissed it as nonsense. As far as humans experience it, he still felt it was nonsense for it could not be anything like that of a vampire. He could easily distinguish the difference between the human servants and his new vampire family with just a glance. He could sense the others moods and when focused on them, immediately knew where they were at. Ava he was able to sense the clearest.

There was one thing however he did not tell the others, largely because he didn't think it relevant. When he slept, his dreams changed. Having taken some psychology courses in college he believed it was nothing more than his sub-conscious mind battling his conscious mind over his new reality, but he never remembered having such strange and vivid dreams before. He was secretly glad when the need for sleep began to lessen as there was less time spent in his new dream world.

Nathan consumed raw meat along with animal blood in those early weeks but soon his diet became only animal blood and he appeared to be satiated. Though he recalled that night when he first leapt at the human servant, the desire to attack he felt then had not returned. Enale speculated that perhaps it was because he fed on animal blood right away but cautioned that this could change at any time. He had yet to taste human blood; psychologically no one was certain if he was ready for that including himself.

Since his transition Ava, Martin, and Lisella had not made an open objection to their forced diet of non-human blood but it was beginning to affect them. Being a much older Pire, Enale's diet of animal blood was sufficient, but the others needed the nutrients of human blood. Seeing this, Enale sent the three away for a few days to feed. Nathan and Ava were reluctant to part from each other, but as is necessary in life we are most often forced to forgo wants over needs. Ava knew Nathan was in good hands with Enale and her own desire for human blood was becoming overwhelming. They needed to go and go quickly.

The first night alone, Enale and Nathan had a long talk about Pire history. Until now, all of Nathan's education had been in bits and pieces and prompted by questions from him or to him, or from general stories and experiences shared by everyone. Now that it was just the two of them, Enale was going to take full advantage and give Nathan more formal lessons in vampirism.

So Nathan learned some basic history. Vampires had existed as long as humans had. Some were of the theory that each started out as completely separate species but evolved to the similarities they now share with humans. Others believed that at one time, they were of the same genus but something changed and their paths diverged. Either way, they were different enough to be separate species yet similar enough to mate, though that was very, very rare. Enale used the comparison of wolves and the present day domestic dog. Though completely separate animals, they could still occasionally interbreed and retained enough similarities as to be recognized as kin.

"So Pires are the wild wolves and humans are the dogs?" joked Nathan.

"Yes, if you must contrast it as such. I suppose Pires will never be tamed to the extent that humans appear to be with their family units and structured societies." He did not express other thoughts on this however. He knew that when a wild wolf mated with a domestic dog the offspring was not accepted in human society due to the unpredictable nature of the beast. Would this prove to be the case with Nathan? In the end, which side will prove to be the stronger; human or vampire? In their distant past half-bloods had been allowed to live but the consequences to both sides were devastating. Scenarios ranged from a half-blood's Pire side overwhelming them and becoming uncontrollable; they decimated humans around them being almost unstoppable by even full-blooded vampires. Or their human side would dominate and they betrayed the vampires. It was this unpredictability and resulting devastation that brought about the death law regarding half-bloods.

Continuing with the history lessons, Enale explained the social separation of the two species. Nathan was surprised to learn there were other species similar to humans that were rendered extinct while vampires were driven dangerously close by them. Nathan thought that with overall superior strength, health, and longevity that vampires would be more dominate.

"Well nature appears to keep its own balance. We are the predator and any predator would not survive if its numbers were greater than its prey. It has been explained already to you that vampire births are rare especially compared to humans. If a vampire couple ever produces an offspring it is usually only once. Our total population is but a fraction of that of humans."

Nathan found the history lessons interesting but unfortunately rather tedious. As far as he was concerned when he had graduated university and gotten his degree, his formal education had ended.

He was smart, but he was not the scholarly type. Enale liked to instruct in his own style but as Nathan was a unique student, he tried to be more flexible. Perhaps he could incorporate a different method.

“Come with me.” he said leading Nathan to the far end of the library. Enale approached the far wall and with a simple touch to the bookcase it eased back revealing another room. At first it looked much like an extension to the existing library but with fewer books and more artefacts. As more and more lights lit up, he could see that the room itself extended much further back than was imaginable. As large as Enale’s home was, Nathan could not fathom a room this large being contained within and remaining hidden. There were no windows and as far as he could tell, no other doors. The room was filled with books, paintings and art work, tapestries, and armour and weapons of all kinds.

“What is this place?” asked Nathan

“I call it The Hollow Room.” he answered.

“Why?”

“Because it took an extreme effort on my part to hollow it out!” he laughed. Then Nathan realized that this room had been carved from solid rock.

At first he just walked around marvelling at everything. Though some things he recognized, others were beyond his current comprehension.

Enale was patient and let him move about at his own pace. When he had a question about a certain object, he would answer it. Enale was quite enjoying the look of wonderment on his face and the excitement in the manner in which he asked questions. They spent the rest of that night and well into the next day just in that room. Nathan absorbed far more knowledge in the first few hours about vampires than he had so far and still had not seen all there was to see. But more importantly, he gained a greater understanding and appreciation of his newly awakened other half.

Nathan found the books in this room fascinating as they were written by and for vampires in a language beyond his current ability to decipher. “We have our own language and unlike humans that developed multiple languages and dialects, we have only one. It is the first language taught to Pire children as they are not developed enough to master other speech; they do not learn human languages until they are in the adolescence stage. You of course must now begin learning this language.” Nathan groaned at the thought of having to do more formal learning but before Enale could speak more on it, Nathan had already moved from the books to a table containing various small weapons. Enale explained how they were used; Nathan was particularly intrigued with a rectangle piece of metal with elaborate designs on it. Pressing on a precise spot caused the piece to suddenly spring open and turned into a lethally sharp blade. Nathan nearly lost a few fingers; Enale was amazed that he was able to activate it.

Things that vampires invented and created were naturally designed for their use only, not humans. They often concealed weapons in such a way that they looked like something completely different and unless activated, were completely harmless. Only true vampires could activate them. Nathan had experienced the incredible strength Pires possessed and indeed, that he himself was developing. They speculated that he would never have the same strength as a full-blooded Pire. But along with great strength, also came the most gentlest of touch. A Pire could pick up the most delicate of insect without causing harm. A human could not. Many of their secrets were concealed not by keys that could be found by others, or elaborate locks that sooner or later could be picked, or by means that required great strength to open or operate. A gentle touch was the safest and quickest way to activate hidden devices just like the door to The Hollow Room. It was not a specific spot that Enale touched; it was the touch itself that opened it. Nathan had the touch. What Enale didn’t realize was that Ava instructed him on this but only as it related to making love. She hadn’t suggested it was valuable in other ways

to vampires. Enale pondered that if he had the gentler Pire touch, perhaps he could someday be as strong as a full blooded Pire.

Finally, they reached the far end of the room where some the most frightening things were kept. This part disturbed Nathan though he didn't know exactly why. The last thing that Nathan looked at was a large painting. He stared at it for a few moments, rather confused by the scene. It depicted medieval type of soldiers battling what he could only describe as winged gargoyles inside some type of castle. Actually, they were not battling as much as slaughtering the monsters. Though there were plenty of dead soldiers, they still appeared to have the upper hand. The winged gargoyles ranged in different sizes, all with razor sharp teeth and claws. There were other figures; some could only be described as fairies, while others he was confident were vampires, though more monstrous looking. There were three other figures in the top corner of the painting, two gargoyles and a fairy, that appeared to be escaping the massacre. Nathan did not like this picture; he believed it was the depiction of other species being rendered extinct by humans where only the vampires survived. Enale closely watched Nathan, waiting for him to ask questions that never came. He accepted that Nathan was not yet ready for this information but someday he would need to learn the truth behind it and unbeknownst even to Enale, when the time came it would prove to be the ultimate test for him.

Though Enale suspected the picture made Nathan uncomfortable, he did not realize the profound effect it had on him; this picture would haunt his dreams the most. And when he dreamt about it, he was watching this scene play out over and over again as if he was there. He did not speak to anyone about this, including Ava.

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All the time that the others were gone was not spent in just Nathan learning about vampires for Enale was also interested in finding out all he could about Nathan's childhood. He asked many questions of him and analysed every story constantly looking for any indication of the vampire side in the child. Nathan's story didn't come out in complete chronological order. It was more bits and pieces as he remembered different parts of his life. He surprised himself at old forgotten memories; some good, some not so much. For the most part, he believed his life had not been too bad. Probably the darkest time for him growing up was when he found out he was adopted. "It was my brother Kent's friend that let it slip. Kent was four years older than me which as adults isn't a huge gap, but when you're nine and your brother is thirteen, it's a life time apart. Of course we were forced to play together and of course my brother wasn't happy about it. One weekend we were all hanging out and Kent's one buddy Freddy, who was a total dickhead, was really giving it to me. He did not want me around and finally I called him a jerk and he says 'well at least my mother didn't throw me in a dumpster when I was born, garbage boy!' Everybody all of a sudden went dead quiet and just looked at Freddy." Nathan paused reliving the memory over again, as clear in sight and feel as the time it happened. "Kent socks Freddy in the arm really hard and yells at him 'whatta gotta tell him that for asswipe!' and I knew it was true. I guess if Kent had teased me too like that, I wouldn't have believed it, but instead he was defending me. You don't defend somebody over a lie right? So I went right away to mom and I totally caught her off guard and she told me the truth. Later she told me that it was always their plan to tell me someday but since I found out from someone else she figured it wasn't fair to lie to me, and then try to tell me the truth again later on. All anyone knew was that I was tossed in a city dumpster and some homeless guy rootin' through the garbage bin found me. They weren't sure how long I had been in there and they didn't think I was going to survive at first, but I did. Since they didn't know exactly how old I was, my birthday became the day the guy found me and my mom and dad were the ones to adopt me."

Enale questioned him closely about this, largely about how he felt and his reactions. Finally Nathan admitted to him that he didn't just cry over it. "I remember hiding in my closet hating myself - I mean fuck, I was so pathetic my own mother didn't want me. And I remember hating her even though I didn't know who she was. I was lucky my brother found me 'cause apparently I was clenching my teeth so bad, I nearly bit through my tongue! I was bleeding all over the place! Funny how I forgo about that."

"Are you certain you were just clenching your teeth when it happened?" asked Enale. "Of course" he quickly responded "what else would it..." He recalled with clarity how upset he was about learning the truth and hiding in the closet just wanting to be left alone. His family couldn't find him and kept calling him and when he opened his mouth to yell at them to leave him alone, it suddenly felt like there were knives in his mouth.

He told Enale this and then added as another memory flooded back to him "Growing up everyone would get worried whenever I got really mad or upset because supposedly I had a bad habit of biting my tongue when that happened."

"And do you recall that same feeling of 'knives' in your mouth each time?" he asked.

"Yes, I do. I thought it was just in my head though. So, does this mean - I guess the teeth were there all along huh?"

"That first time when you tried to attack the old man, we automatically assumed that your fangs were a very recent growth and in fact speculated that was why your mouth hurt when you first 'woke up'. However, the more I thought about it, the less logical it seemed. A young vampire, like humans, loses their first set of teeth and the new ones include the retracted fangs. As adults, our fangs only extend when we are ready to feed or on the rare occasions when we are in battle mode. Children naturally don't have the same self control as adults and highly emotional situations will cause their fangs to extend. This is painful for children when it first begins to happen. When you woke up, your body was exhibiting a need for blood which included fangs being prepared for the bite. Your fangs clearly hadn't extended since childhood; therefore it caused you great pain. Yes, most definitely your fangs were there all along and your stories are undeniable proof of this." Enale smiled. "So you see, in my questioning you on your past, it is also turning into lessons for you. I suspect there are still other tales that will also point toward the pre-existing Pire traits in you. Have you ever had a cavity?" he asked. Nathan shook his head no. "Vampires have excellent teeth and we do not get cavities such as humans. You also said you were later in your development than other children your age and Ava pointed out that when she met you, you looked much younger than what she thought you were. You are aware that we do not age the same as humans. And that is only a smidgeon of what I have gleaned to far! Certainly there are other things - but for now, I think we have both been in too long and it's time to stop lessons and stories and enjoy the night."

The timing could not have been better for shortly after Enale and Nathan went outside, the others arrived home. Nathan and Ava were ecstatic to see each other and did not hide the fact from the others. Nathan could not help but notice the smell. It was on all of them and it awakened something within him. He did not immediately understand; all he knew was that he suddenly felt hungry even though he and Enale had just fed. He didn't say anything and instead they talked about things that happened to each other over the past few days. The night wore on and it was almost dawn. They were heading back inside when a strange car pulled into the driveway. The driver got out immediately asking for directions. "Damn GPS!" she swore "You never know where it's going to lead you. I have been driving all night trying to get to the Back Wood Inn, which I take it this isn't it? Can you please tell me the right direction I should be heading when I leave here?" she pleaded.

“Yeah” volunteered Nathan heading toward the stranger; being still human, he thought it was better if he talked to her. What happened next was so quick that afterward it took Nathan a long time to even comprehend those few seconds. He was still at least a dozen feet from the woman when the smell of blood hit him full force. The first time Nathan had tried to attack the old man he was much like a young cub that first felt the instinct to hunt prey but could not comprehend the how or why. Now Nathan’s Pire instinct took over completely; he could see nothing but this woman, he could no longer hear any sounds outside of his victims beating heart, and he felt nothing but an absolute uncontrollable urge to feed.

He had attacked so quickly the stranger had no time to grasp what was happening. Nathan pinned her to the ground and bit deeply into her jugular. The blood gushed into his mouth and each heart beat from the female sent a new surge. The taste was sweet and wild and had a dizzyingly effect; it was empowering and gratifying. And it was over in a few seconds. Nathan heard the faint, final heartbeat and his teeth automatically released their grip on the flesh. Raising his head, he looked into the dead eyes of his victim.

Nathan stood up still looking at the woman. Blood had spilled onto the ground around her head, the holes from his teeth vivid on the stranger’s neck. Nathan was still in a daze as the others watched and waited. When Nathan attacked he was too fast for them to have stopped him and they instinctively knew that they would be unable to. Sooner or later this happens to every Pire; Nathan had experienced blood-lust. This is what happens when a Pire goes too long without feeding. Luckily it happened in private with no witnesses beyond themselves.

When it appeared that he had regained some semblance of awareness again Ava approached him. He was in shock at what happened. For a Pire this is an accepted part of their life. For Nathan, he had taken another’s life and that was unacceptable for humans.

She put her arm around his shoulder and whispered “Come inside with me.” and began to lead him back to the house. He hesitated and began to protest pointing to the corpse on the driveway. “It’s alright. The others will take care of it.” she assured him. Once inside she took him to the sitting room where they tended to gather most often and sat with him on the sofa, arm still around him.

“Are you alright?” she gently asked after a few minutes. Nathan sat with head in hands. “I don’t know. I’m sorry. I couldn’t help myself. Holy fuck! I killed that woman!” His voice full of anguish he turned to Ava “Did I get us in trouble? I mean I killed a person – fuck Ava! People go to jail for the rest of their lives for shit like that! They’re gonna find out about us! They’re gonna – “

“Hush, it’s alright. They will not find out about us. This sort of thing happens and we know how to take care of it. You are not the first to have done this and I assure you that you will not be the last.”

Nathan looked at Ava and she smiled. She was sincere in her words. She was not angry or upset in any way and offered only comfort to him. “Nathan, darling,” she said facing him and taking his hands in hers “what happened to you is not abnormal for Pires.”

“But it is for humans.” he replied dejectedly.

Then Ava gave him a curious look. “So far you have been responsible for the deaths of three vampires which you seem unaffected by, yet you are now distraught over the death of one human. Why is that?”

Nathan was confused. “Well, those vampires attacked me and I had no control over that and this was a human-”

“That you attacked.” finished Ava “You are correct in that you had no control over the other Pires actions just as you had no control over *your* actions. Their attacking you is what vampires do. Nathan what you just now did, you did as a vampire, not as a human.”

They sat quietly then, Ava said all that she could. It was not too long before the others returned.

“All taken care of!” greeted Martin as he plopped down on the opposite sofa across from Nathan and it was evident he could not control the smile on his face. “Nathan my man, you can move fast!” he exclaimed clearly impressed.

Lisella was a bit more understanding “Are you ok? You looked a little freaked outside Nath.” She asked as she sat down on the other side of him.

Enale sat in the large chair at the ends of the two sofas. “Well Nathan, I must admit that was an impressive kill.”

Nathan looked at the others trying to sort through their reactions as they did not fit to the standards in which he was raised. Sensing his thoughts Enale said “Understand Nathan, that what you did is natural for us, though typically we try not to kill our prey.”

“But...”

“No, please hear us out.” said Ava. This was a significant moment; this was a turning point. They had speculated whether he would or should ever consume human blood. Until now, he did not display the need or desire to do so as animal blood appeared to be satisfactory for him. In hind sight they realized that once he stopped needing to eat any solid food, logic would follow that soon animal blood would not be sufficient enough but still this was new for all of them. Enale himself had only brief exposure to living half-bloods. Most of his knowledge came from written and verbal accounts only of other Pires.

“What you just experienced was a blood-lust. It happens when Pires go too long without human blood.” said Martin. “You know of course that we need human blood to remain healthy.”

“I can survive on animal blood, Nathan” interjected Enale, “because I am an older Pire. Younger Pires cannot and if denied it for too long they go into a darkness and nothing, not even the strongest vampire, can prevent them from feeding on humans.”

“Yes!” agreed Nathan. “Yeah, it was like I suddenly couldn’t see anything but her and I was on her before I even knew what was happening and then it was over so fast! Man, I was totally out of control!”

“Enale was right when he said that was an impressive kill.” Lisella said smiling at him. “Typically when one of us gets to that state, we rip the human’s throat out. You didn’t which made our task easier, so thank you!”

“What did you do?” uncertain whether he really wanted to know.

“The simplest solutions are of course the best.” answered Enale. “We made it look like her vehicle careened off the cliff further down the main road and while being ejected from the car she was decapitated.” Nathan cringed. He was filled with remorse and needed time to deal with this.

The others left him to his own thoughts while Ava continued to sit quietly with Nathan. Enale, along with Martin and Lisella went to the room he had recently revealed to Nathan. Their time with Nathan was fascinating for them all but it was also very precarious. As much as they bonded with him and would defend him with their own lives; should he become a threat to all vampires, there would be no choice but to eliminate him. Nathan now tasted human blood and there was no turning back. Enale had already warned them of this and so it was perhaps why they put off this experience. Nathan would crave it again and he would need to be shown the proper way to feed and also learn how to recognize and control the urges – all of their survival depended on this.

Vampire’s need to feed varied one from another. Some fed more often in smaller amounts, others fed in larger amounts but less often. As with humans, some Pires had bigger appetites but gluttony was unacceptable. Pires did not feed just for the sake of feeding. Gluttony led to unnecessary draining

and more often lead to deaths which inevitable led to unwelcome attention from humans.

Newlings however generally needed to feed more often and they needed to be taught how to hunt and the proper way to feed so the victim neither remembered the attack, nor suffered after completed. They could only assume that Nathan's bite would release the healing agents needed at the end though there was no way to know from his first feed.

Though they explained the practical parts of feeding to Nathan, his success as a hunter would be decided in the hunt itself. Nathan was loathe to try this. Another distinct difference between human and vampire was the emotional and psychological makeup. Pires and humans had very different reactions and responses to the same situations. Nathan's human perspective was understandably upset over killing the stranger, whether intended or not. To his Pire peers, this was just one of those things that occasionally happens and cleaning it up was no more emotional than would have been felt by a human hunter cleaning up after his kill. This was Pire nature. They were concerned for him because if he was unable to get over this and somehow learn to deal with it, he could not feed himself. Any Pire that was too great a liability did not live long and Pires who could not feed themselves were too great a liability. The entire vampire race would not be placed in jeopardy for a marginalized few; continuation as a species was the prime concern of all vampires.

Enale told them to be patient and wait until the next time the need to feed came upon him. He believed that Nathan's first step in this stage was accepting human blood was now his diet. They did not have to wait long and this time they recognized the signs immediately. They did not take him to hunt but instead brought it back to him. Ava handed him a bottle filled with blood. For a second only did he hesitate but the desire to eat was definitely stronger than his aversion to the source of food. When he was finished she asked "How was it?"

"It was good, I don't feel hungry. I tried not to think too much about what I was drinking you know?"

"How did it taste?"

Nathan remembered the first blood and how succulent it had been. "I guess it didn't taste quite as good as the first time but maybe that's normal for me. I wasn't as hungry and food always tastes better when you're hungry."

"Or perhaps because it's not fresh." interjected Martin. Another lesson learned was that vampire bites also had the ability to preserve blood and stop it from coagulating. This was how Enale was able to store animal blood in bottles and how Ava was able to bring back human blood. It was never the same as fresh which is why they did not make a regular practice of storing it but it did suffice when it necessitated doing this.

Nathan had been struggling with the aspects of hunting and feeding off of humans and still carried the guilt of that first kill. However, if he was to survive as a Pire he would need to learn how to hunt. Part of him was still convinced that he would simply not be able to do it but another part wondered if it just might be possible. Remembering the overall sensations had created a new desire he wanted to experience again.

When it was once again time for Nathan to feed Ava said bluntly to him "Nathan, you need to go hunting. You need to get over whatever hesitations you have about this. This is important. This is your life. This is our life. Martin is taking you hunting tonight."

"Why can't you!?" he quickly responded.

"Because I love you and my desire to keep you from any sort of discomfort, even when it is necessary, could override my personal judgment which would not be beneficial to either of us." She did not give him an opportunity to respond, instead getting up and immediately leaving the room.

Martin came in a few moments later. “Well, friend” he said with a huge smile on his face “it’s just you and me. Are you ready to go hunting?”

“I guess it’s now or never.” and mumbling under his breath, “It’s not like I have a choice.”

“You’re right there Nath!” he laughed. Nathan momentarily forgot how acute Pire hearing was. He had to learn to stop talking under his breath!

Martin drove, bypassing the nearest town. “We try not to feed too close to Enale’s.” he explained. “Enale’s is sort of like a safe haven and has been for a long time. The less attention brought to it the safer it is which translates into no ‘weirdness’ in the immediate vicinity.”

“So is a lot of weird unexplained shit a result of vampires?” asked Nathan inspired by Martin’s comment.

“Yes and no. You see it all depends. We can usually tell if it’s a Pire related occurrence and of course if you ask around, others will confirm it. You’ll find we’re really not much for keeping secrets among ourselves. Don’t get me wrong, we don’t tell everyone everything, but we’ll tell the truth when asked.”

“Would you tell the truth about me?”

This was a profound question for Martin as vampires do not lie. They can and are selective with information they provide others and if someone suspects another Pire is not being forthright with them they simply ask direct questions to ensure they have all the information. By their very being they are deceptive but this is a survival trait as they cannot be honest with humans about their true identities. When it comes to other vampires, however they are very honest and it is rare that Pires will suspect others of lying to them, so more often than not, the answers and explanations given by one is accepted by all.

“Wow, I never really thought about it. I mean we know you can’t stay hidden forever; you’re going to be meeting other Pires sooner or later. I can tell you that at this point, it’s not likely to come up. You really do have the appearance of a Newling and that is no doubt what others will assume. And why shouldn’t they? After all, no one’s first thought would be that you could be anything else. So I think we’re safe there.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“No, I didn’t friend.” he laughed “This I can tell you, I would not lie and neither would I betray you but I truly cannot foresee being in a position where I would need to.”

Nathan smiled. He liked Martin, he felt like a true buddy to him and that is something he never felt he had in his human life.

The drive to where they were going was rather long but it gave them time to talk more.

“So what is going to happen tonight?” asked Nathan. “I mean, how the hell am I supposed to do this?”

“For tonight, you need only to follow my lead and do as I do. We are going to start with hunting Cunts!”

“What!?” exclaimed Nathan.

“Country urban night trippers. Geez, didn’t Ava teach you anything?” joked Martin. Nathan remembered one of the first conversations he had with Ava about the use of slang in Pire language. He had since learned that Pires only had one language which was never spoken with or around humans. This law was created millenniums ago for it was used by humans to help identify vampires. Nathan by now had heard the others speak it and it was truly unique; even spoken today, it would stand out from all other languages. It comprised not just of words and dialect; it was a series of other sounds and clicks incorporated into their speech. They also had the ability to speak in higher

and lower tones not audible to humans. Nathan understood why they kept it private. So they developed their own slang allowing them to speak English in public while keeping the actual meanings still private.

“Cunts.” he chuckled. “You know humans have their own slang for that word?”

“Yes,” said Martin with a questioning look “it is a derogatory name for your females, isn’t it?”

“Yup.”

“That is another thing that we find interesting and odd with humans; you have a much larger separation of the sexes than we do. I mean there was a time in your history and for that matter even today in some parts of the world where females are considered not much more than the animals you keep. Odd that you treat half of your species in such a manner especially considering that if they did not exist, neither would you!”

“Yeah, you’re right there. I don’t know why. People have different theories as to how that came about. I never really cared much because in my time and my world women can do whatever the hell they want and that’s just fine with me!”

“Yes, it is much better” agreed Martin “but still, look at your sports. Men and women don’t play on the same team or compete against the other gender.”

“Well, they’re built different. It wouldn’t be fair to have a woman fight a man in a boxing ring when he can clearly hit harder than her. Hitting women is pretty low you know. I mean, I can’t imagine a vampire girl allowing a vampire guy to smoke them!”

“We would never do that though.” Martin said “Pires rarely fight each other; we will argue yes, but try not to engage in physical conflicts. Besides, Pire females are just as strong as Pire males. Our muscle and mass are shaped different but we are equal in agility and strength!” he said smiling. “I think that once you start integrating more into Pire society, you will have a clearer understanding of our relationships.”

“But for now, we need to discuss matters of a more practical nature. What do you know about Pire hunting?”

Nathan thought about it for a few minutes. He knew by this time about the actual feeding part. What he knew about hunting was only through his own experience of having been hunted. “Well, it seems that you pretty well seduce your prey and if Ava was any indication, you fuck them first before feeding. At least that’s what she did with me.” Nathan smiled at that memory; he and Ava sure could fuck!

“And do you know why that is a common act before feeding?”

“Ava said it was to get the person calmed down so their blood didn’t pump out too fast.”

“Yes, it’s also a convenient way to get the person alone and away from others so we won’t be seen.”

“Oh, good point! So, am I expected to find someone and fuck them first? And aren’t you gonna be there to make sure I don’t kill them? I don’t know if I could do a girl with someone watching. And I ain’t doing no guy! No, that’s not happening. Do you ever pick guys to feed off? No, don’t answer that, I don’t want to know!”

Martin looked at Nathan amused but confused by this sudden outpouring. “Um...well, to answer your questions - no, yes, and yes.”

Nathan, realizing he was rambling laughed “Sorry, that’s what happens when I get nervous, stuff just pours out of my mouth! But like no – I don’t have to fuck them? And –“

“Wait, one answer at a time. No, you won’t have to fuck them first because yes, I will be there to make sure you don’t kill them and clearly sex is something you prefer to do in private. No, you

certainly don't have to feed off of males, but it is interesting that another clear distinction between male and female humans is they do taste different from each other. If a Pire didn't know what sex the human was, they could tell from the taste. And you might also be interested to know that homosexual humans actually taste like the opposite of their physical build. A new saying among younger Pires is 'It may look dude, but it tastes bitch'. Someday you will undoubtedly find out for yourself. And I believe that answers your last question even though you recanted it in the end."

"So, one question though, why don't you just kill your prey right away like human hunters do – not that I want to do that and am sure glad you don't!" Nathan quickly explained. "I mean I get the feeling it's not a moral thing with Pires."

"No, it's not morals; partly its nature itself. Dead bodies don't bleed. We don't 'suck' out blood, we drink from its natural flow. It's also self-preservation as dead bodies don't heal and would leave a rather noticeable trail of bite marks leading back to us."

"Oh, ok, so how do we do this?" By this time they had arrived to what was clearly a cowboy town and Martin proceeded to a western nightclub. Once parked, Martin did not immediately get out and indicated to Nathan to remain as well. He was watching the entrance where people were coming in and out. He didn't say anything and just watched so Nathan did too. Suddenly Nathan understood Two Pires, a male and a female were entering the bar. Martin turned to Nathan "You saw that?"

"Yeah, there are others already here."

"Yes. So lesson one, always check for other Pires. Now, if it was just me I would at least talk to them. You're not there yet, so I think we'll pick another place to hunt."

"I'm cool with that!" Nathan was already nervous enough without adding more on top of it!

Luckily Martin was familiar with this town and quickly located a bar on the other side. It was not as large but there were still lots of people. Once again they sat for a few minutes, then not sensing others, went in.

"Let's have a drink and check out the people." They spent the first part of the evening talking and playing pool. Martin was clear to Nathan about drinking too much. For him, alcohol had little effect but they didn't know how much Nathan could now handle.

Nathan had been to a lot of bars but as a vampire in hunting mode, this was entirely different. The best he was able to describe it was the sights and sounds were more vibrant. Watching people, they seemed almost to be moving slower even when they were dancing to a fast song. He found he could easily pick out a single person and focus on them from across the room. And those he noticed, noticed him back. The smells were stronger and he was aware of a new one; the smell of human blood. Once he was over the initial surprise, he began to enjoy himself.

Martin then managed to work it so they were seated with two slightly older (in human years) and slightly more inebriated women. Nathan followed Martin's lead. He certainly was good at talking to others and the women were hanging onto his every word. All too soon, the four of them were heading out to the parking lot. Martin drove to the nearest hotel and rented a room. Once inside, Martin quickly whispered to Nathan so quietly the two women were unable to hear what was said. "The trick now is to kiss her and make sure you do it for at least sixty seconds – don't ask, just do. You'll see why."

Martin grabbed the blonde female and Nathan grabbed the brunette. He did just as Martin said and kissed her long and hard. Two things happened. First Nathan became extremely hungry. He was hungry at the bar, now he was definitely ready to feed. He could smell her blood and could feel her pulse and he felt his own fangs extending. When he stopped kissing her, the second thing to happen was the female went into a trance like state. He looked at Martin who was in the same position with

his female. Martin smiled ruthlessly and nodded once to Nathan. He didn't need any more encouragement; Nathan bit into the woman's neck. Not hard or savagely like the first time. It was actually slow and gentle. With each beat of her heart, the blood pumped out and Nathan drank. His body filled with the strange ecstasy he remembered from before but this time he was better able to appreciate it. It was an unadulterated thrill.

Instinctively, he knew when to stop. He released the bite, his fangs retracted and he licked the bite marks. The female was not able to stand on her own and just as Nathan had seen the very first vampire he ever witnessed do; he eased her down onto the bed. The kiss is what put her into the trance. Martin would later explain that when Pires are ready to feed, their saliva changes and has the effect of a tranquilizer on humans. Of course he knew already that when done properly, the bite released a healing agent when completed. Nathan licking the bite numbed the area so it wasn't felt while healing.

Martin too had finished feeding and slapping him on the back said "Well done! That's it, my friend. You know how to feed!" They waited only a bit longer to confirm that the bite marks were healing before heading home. Nathan was amazed. He felt good. He felt satisfied. And best of all, he had no guilt over what he had just done. He fed, the woman was ok and safe in the hotel until she woke up, and neither would remember what happened to them.

Yeah, he could feed himself. Ava would be proud!

Ava was beyond relieved when both hunters returned. Nathan had been successful. If he hadn't, Martin's duty was clear. If Nathan showed any signs of aversion during the hunt, if he backed out, if he could not complete it, Martin was to end his life. Nathan didn't know this; in fact he didn't know that virtually every step of the way through his learning process his life was in constant threat. Any slip up that could be deemed as harmful to the whole would result in death.

Nathan hugged Ava and said "I did it! And I didn't even have to fuck her!" Ava laughed "You know that would not have mattered to me."

"Yeah, but it matters to me." There were his damn human emotions again; fidelity was not a concern among Pires. Yet another thing that Nathan would have to learn to deal with because though Ava could not imagine him not being a part of her life, she simply would not promise to never have sex with another Pire or human again.

More months passed and though Nathan's vampire side was becoming more and more dominant, his humanness would still show itself once in a while. He slept more than the others but could now stay awake for days on end. His senses were acute, though still not as attuned as theirs. He took to hunting quite easily. He learned to recognize his own signs of hunger and when it was time to feed. More often than not, all four of them would hunt together. Ava was a superb hunter and it was a pleasure watching her in action. Each of them learned new things from her and where before she had begun to be bored with the hunt, she now found a new excitement in doing it with these three.

Nathan still did not have sex with his prey and for the time being neither did Ava but this was quickly wearing on her. She didn't realize how much she enjoyed that part of her feeding ritual. Though humans could not compare to a Pire lover and she now ranked Nathan as her greatest lover, it was still fun to have them. She also appreciated having something different. She tried to talk to him about this on several occasions but he would always appear upset and she would back off.

Along with acquiring hunting skills, Nathan's knowledge of vampire society continued to increase and included learning the Pire language which, when he first heard it thought it impossible to learn. There were certain sounds he could not master and the others laughed for those sounds were learned as children and if not for that, they probably would not be able to either. Martin once said "Let me

split your tongue and you can make that sound. It would only be at the tip” he laughed, “and would quickly heal.” But Nathan would have no part of that – whether he was serious or not! Soon they all began to speak only vampirenese when no humans were around expediting his learning.

The most tedious though was learning how to read and write vampirenese. As all vampires knew this, he had no choice in the matter. Sooner or later the need to read and write would come up and he must be able to accomplish the most basic of Pire communication. He learned quickly however and Enale was very impressed with his progress.

A year had now passed since Nathan had first arrived at Enale’s though it felt like only a few short months. Since the time of his transition they felt Nathan’s integration back into human society should be done with extreme caution and exposure to other Pires kept at a minimum. This was not an uncommon practice when dealing with Newlings but the fear was doubled for Nathan. Though he knew well how to be human, his Pire instincts were now awakened and until everyone could be satisfied with his ability to control his new natural desires for blood, he must not be left alone among them. This wasn’t difficult for him; his only brother moved to Europe to marry a woman he met online and being guys, their contact was minimum since their parents passed away. He never had any friends he considered close and telling them he got a job out of town was good enough for them. A cell phone and email were ideal ways of staying ‘close’.

It proved easier to limit his contact with human society to feeding purposes than to remain secreted from other vampires indefinitely.

Until now, any one expressing a desire to come to Enale’s was politely turned away or at least only permitted a short visit at which time Nathan and Ava would leave. Word was out that Enale was tutoring Ava on how to mentor a Newling resulting in his normal open door policy being currently closed. However it was thought wise not to put visitors off too long as Newlings needed to be integrated into their society sooner or later. So when two elder Pires requested a visit, Enale could not turn them away and it would have been considered inappropriate that they not be introduced to his entire household. Everyone was nervous about this visit, Nathan most of all. He would rather have met younger Pires first like Lisella that he could at least more easily relate to. He respected Enale but viewed him as he would his grandfather; full of past wisdom but present dumb. The only saving grace that he could see at this moment was that Lisella had only met them once and it was a very long time ago making them almost strangers to her as well. Enale considered their visit fortuitous. They were his peers and if any vampires were going to see through to Nathans true nature it would be them. It had been a very long time since meeting with them and he looked forward to it. He certainly enjoyed spending time with the younger Pires but he viewed them as he would children; full of present smarts but past dumb. It would be nice to spend time with other more mature adults.

The guests arrived in the middle of the night, a male and female Pire. Both were older than Enale the female Serille being only slightly older than her male companion Delonde. Whereas Enale had the salt and pepper hair of middle age, these too were mostly gray haired though that was the only real physical sign of age that any of them sported. They were both very formal not only in their attire but in their mannerism. They did not smile but were courteous. They at first gave little acknowledgement to Lisella and Nathan beyond what a stranger just introduced to children would. They asked a few obligatory questions but spent the rest of the evening engaging in conversation with Enale, Ava, and Martin. The ‘kids’ were left on their own to play games. Lisella and Nathan were encouraged to remain, just not included in the conversation. It was a good thing for they spoke vampirenese which Nathan still had not completely mastered and he would be unable to ask questions if he didn’t understand something. For as much as he couldn’t understand though, there was a surprising amount

that he could and when Serille was recounting an amusing story, he laughed along with the others having caught on to what was said. But their visit was more than just a social call and on the second night they met privately with Enale so the four younger Pires left for the evening.

It had not been that long since they last fed and none were really hungry. They decided that perhaps a social night out was in order. This would be the first time back in the human world for Nathan where he wasn't just feeding. They did not travel far as the guests were not expected to stay long and vampire etiquette was that partings were as formal as the greetings and the guests would wait for them to return before departing themselves.

They ended up in a bar as they all liked the sights and sounds of this environment and though Pires could remain very inconspicuous when they wanted to be, they decided to be more social this evening. Soon they were involved in various conversations with different people and everyone was enjoying themselves. Nathan and Martin were talking with a human male about the game that was on the half dozen TV's throughout the bar when Nathan suddenly turned to look for Ava. She was about twenty feet away engaged in a conversation with a large rough looking male. She had laughed at something he said. This irked Nathan, but he quickly controlled his ire. The male was clearly intoxicated. Nathan continued to look her way every so often and all too soon the undertones of their conversation changed. The guy was trying to grab Ava's arm. She kept pulling away and was slowly backing away from him. Despite the distance between them Nathan could clearly hear her say "No, I'm here with someone, maybe another time." But the man wasn't taking the hint. Then he said "C'mon, he's obviously not here, how about a kiss?" as he grabbed hold of her arm and began pulling her to him. Nathan had crossed the distance between himself and Ava before the man had gotten any closer and pinned him against a square cement pillar with his arm crushing the man's chest. Enraged he growled at the offender "How dare you touch her!" He did not hear Ava and Lisella yelling at him to leave the man alone nor did he feel Martin trying to pull him away. All he saw was this man who he wanted to seriously hurt. Finally Ava managed to get in between them and only when he saw her did the angry subside enough for him to hear her. "Let him go now!" This was an order and his Pire side immediately obeyed. He stepped back as the man crumpled to the ground. A few minutes longer and Nathan would have crushed him to death.

Just as quickly as the angry had struck, it subsided. Once again he could hear the noise of the bar. People were screaming and yelling and they were being ordered out of the bar. He looked at Ava and for the first time saw anger in her and it was directed at him. She did not say a word but turned away and left with Lisella. Martin still had hold of Nathan's arm. "Let's go." he snarled leading him out, clearly no more happy with him than Ava had been.

Once outside they quickly walked away and down the street. In the distance the sound of sirens could be heard; they did not wait to see if it was for them.

When they were a fair distance away, Nathan tried to speak to Martin. "Where are we going and where did Ava and Lisella go? Why didn't we take the car?" Martin who had been walking in the lead stopped and swinging around glared at Nathan "You put us all in jeopardy with that little stunt! We cannot afford to be picked up by the police or even questioned by them! Ava and Lisella left in the car – we walked to draw attention away from them!" he growled and without another word continued the hurried pace.

Martin didn't stop again until they had walked at least half way across town. They were in an empty semi-wooded lot when he turned on Nathan.

"What the fuck was that!?" he demanded.

"I don't know – I saw him grab Ava and I lost it! I'm sorry, I was only protecting her!" trying to

explain himself.

“Ava does not need your protection! She could have easily handled him without bringing any attention to us!”

“But he grabbed her...” he said, trying to defend his actions. Martin was furious with him.

“She is a vampire! No human can outfight a Pire, male or female!”

Feeling defensive, Nathan shot back “I’m sorry, but you know what, that’s what humans do! We come to the aid of someone we think is in trouble.”

Martin got in Nathan’s face “Are you still human then?” he challenged. Though he lowered the volume in his voice, it was still no less intense.

Martin turned away leaving Nathan in stunned silence. After a few minutes Martin spoke with his back still to him, his voice a controlled calm but intensely serious. “Nathan, you are my friend and I will always do what I can to protect you but you must understand this. Any vampire that is deemed a threat to us all must be destroyed.”

“You would destroy me then?” asked Nathan, hurt by this sudden revelation.

After a long tormented filled moment of silence, Martin said in an agonized whisper, “Please don’t do anything to make me have to.”

They both stood in silence.

Nathan could do nothing but relive the event though this time through the eyes of a vampire. Yes, he had been jealous at first which was absurd for he knew that Ava had no interest in this human. There was no reason to react to Ava’s situation the way he did. Of course she could have easily handled this litch on her own and yes, he did put all of them in serious danger by risking exposure of them. The only saving grace was his being able to pull back. If Ava had not somehow gotten through to him and broken his trance, he would have killed the man regardless if he intended to or not. He no longer had human strength; he had the strength of a vampire and in a moment of absolute clarity, he knew there was more vampire in him than human. For the first time he truly understood that this was his new reality. He realized he did not want to do anything that would ever put Ava in harm’s way, nor his friends, nor any Pire.

“I am so sorry.” was all he could say at first.

Then standing straighter and with true conviction in his voice said “I am vampire.”

Martin turned and looked at him and slowly smiled. Nathan had a true look of vampire now.

“Well, you are Pire, with a little bit of human still. We can work on that though.” he said, completely smiling now. “Let’s find the women.” and began walking back to the street. The change in Nathan was visibly noticeable and more important it was a true and sincere change. If Martin did not believe that, Nathan would not still be alive.

They had said all that was needed to be said at the moment and they walked in silence needing time to comprehend this new paradigm of trust and friendship they had now been thrust into.

Not very far away they came to an empty parking lot with only one car parked; Ava and Lisella standing beside it. They merely looked at each other, no one spoke though it was not lost on Ava or Lisella that Nathan looked different.

Once they were well on their way, Ava spoke. “The guests are leaving so we must hurry to say goodbye. I don’t think it necessary to point out that we should not speak to them about the evening.” Everyone agreed. Ava, Martin, and Lisella had already forgiven Nathan; only he carried the regret of that night for a while longer. Blame it on the lingering bits of his human side as guilt was also not a Pire trait.

In the meantime, the purpose of Delonde and Serille's visit was revealed as soon as the others had left for the evening.

Pires do not engage in idle chatter or dispense unnecessary pleasantries when discussing matters of great significance. As soon as the others left Delonde immediately said "There have been two confirmed Monev deaths in the past five years and one missing Pire who was last known to be in the company of Martin and Lisella and you are now mentoring a Newling. There is only one blood-brood left and we are the only Keepers."

These were neither accusations nor questions. They were merely stated facts.

Enale sat in silence as his mind comprehended the magnitude of these revelations.

Monev deaths were the result of vampires having fed off a half-blood. They knew there was a half-blood somewhere.

There was no such thing as a missing vampire. Her last known travelling companions were here, she wasn't and no mention of her having been here.

With only one blood-brood left and they being the sole Keepers, clearly Nathan could not be a full-blooded vampire.

They discerned their secret, Nathan was a Monev and all of them faced death for allowing him to live.

The most shocking for Enale however was not that they were about to face their immediate demise; it was that the entire vampire species was facing extinction. One blood-brood could not hope to continue populating the whole. They were all dying.

Then the final realization dawned. "You have not come to kill us. You came to see him for yourself!"

"The irony of our existence; a Monev is death to a single Pire yet they may hold the key to saving our entire species." said Delonde.

"He has been with you for a year and since we have not heard otherwise, it is safe to assume that so far at least, all is going well." said Serille.

"You have seen him," responded Enale "what did you think at your first meeting?"

"If I did not know otherwise, I would have thought him a Newling." answered Delonde.

"We would like to hear everything." said Serille.

Enale began his tale. "Ava called me and told me she was bringing a human. Well, you know Ava! Her with a human was unusual to say the least, so I was curious as to why. Then when I first glimpsed him, I saw vampire but only in that first moment. Then she told me he was Monev." As with Martin and Lisella, Enale once again narrated Ava's encounter with Nathan as she had told him.

"I have to confess that I was intrigued. Ava had bonded so quickly with him and you could see Nathan had bonded with her!"

"As all of you appear to have." Serille pointed out.

He then told about Mary, the Pire that attacked Nathan and her death and how they were more concerned with the possibility of Nathan dying than one of their own. "You are right, none of us wished to see harm come to him. Then he recovered and it was remarkable the changes in him, not just physically, but mentally as well!" Enale's excitement rose as he continued to tell the tale of Nathan. "I questioned him about his past, his childhood, and his upbringing. I wanted to know how he survived, I wanted to know what if any signs there were of vampire in him then and I still want to know the reasoning for the vampire to now become dominate over the human." He told all that he discovered so far surrounding Nathan's birth and the oddities that clearly pointed to his vampire traits during his childhood.

“Even he does not realize his potential – past or present. As a teenager, he saw a vampire feeding! Humans don’t see us when we don’t want to be seen, but he did!”

“What of future potential?” asked Delonde.

Enale shook his head “I don’t know. He continually amazes me with how quickly he learns. He shunned drinking blood, especially human, but now has no hesitations about hunting! He has learned the Pire language far more quickly than I would have guessed he could. He has the strength and agility that at least matches the weakest of vampire. So what are his future potentials as a vampire? I really don’t know. It would appear in light of your news that it is imperative to learn this.”

“Yes, but I think his full potential cannot be realized until he begins interacting with other Pires and in this we all play a dangerous game.” said Serille.

“Indeed,” agreed Delonde “there are many Pires that simply will not suffer half-bloods to live regardless of the cost to us. But I see that we have little choice. We have struggled for years watching as less and less vampires were born and we could not determine why. It seems as the human population exploded, ours proportionately diminished yet we can find no connection between the two events.”

“Now we struggle to reverse the tide of extinction by taking extreme risks.”

“You’ve tried it already then!?” asked Enale, surprised by this confession.

“Yes, and each time was a failure. You it would seem, have had the greatest success so far with Nathan. None of ours successfully reached the stage he is now in.” said Serille. “That is why we need to know everything we can. Is Nathan an exception; a freak of nature that will never be duplicated, or are there others more like him that we simply haven’t found yet?”

“It was interesting when you mentioned the bond between Ava and Nathan though you appeared somewhat concerned. Why?” asked Serille.

“Simple. Ava’s bond is so intense she is willing to die for him.”

“Remember Enale when it first came about for you to mentor Ava.” Serille pointed out.

Enale looked at her and in an instant recalled with clarity first meeting Ava. She was not yet a Newling and should not have left her Sanctuary, but there she was frightened and alone in the strange new world she had been cruelly thrust into. He was the first to find her and so frightened was she that she instinctively tried to fight him. But he held onto her soothing her and assuring her it was alright. Once she understood, she collapsed in his arms and he carried her to safety.

“The bond between you two was so instantaneous and so strong that no one could pry you two apart. She was your shadow; where you went, she went and you were so protective of her in those first few years everyone had to be very careful of even giving helpful advice on how to handle her and teach her.”

Enale remembered when she went through that final metamorphosis into adulthood and how great his fear was that she would not make it. At that time, had she died Enale knew he did not wish to live without her and he realized this was exactly how Ava felt with Nathan.

“Perhaps that was a missing piece in previous attempts with other half-bloods; there was no bond formed.” speculated Serille. But any further discussions would now have to wait as the others had arrived home.

Of course, Pire instinct being what it was and despite their efforts at camouflage, Serille immediately asked what happened to them.

Martin answered “Nathan got into a fight with a human.”

“He thought he was defending me.” Ava quickly added.

“Is that all?” asked Serille as she and Delonde both smiled. “No one was seriously hurt, I take it?”

“No.” they all responded.

“I see Ava is learning that not all aspects of mentoring a Newling are pleasant.” said Delonde more to Serille and Enale, though he still looked at the group before them.

“Well, no harm, no foul as they say. Don’t be too concerned Ava, these things happen. It is hard for young vampires to adjust being around humans. They are so different and new Pires are not yet experienced with that. He will learn to interact without over reacting.” Delonde assured her.

“It is especially difficult when it is the first Newling. A special bond is always formed between the mentor and their first Newling. It’s only natural he would be easily bothered by trivial events. We can see he is learning well. It is good that you have the support of not only Enale, but these two as well.” Serille said pointing to Martin and Lisella. “We have no doubt that he is watched over *very carefully*.”

With those words all of them understood with absolute certainty the underlying meaning of that statement; two other Pires now knew about Nathan and all of them shared equal responsibility for him.

With that they finished the goodbyes and the two guests departed. Afterwards they explained the events of the evening to Enale. His only response was to look at Nathan and said “Well, it appears that incident has matured you quite nicely.”

So ended Nathan’s formal introduction to Pire elders and his first social foray back into human society, though the first event appeared more successful than the second.

Enale did not discuss the meeting with Serille and Delonde and whether curious or not, the others didn’t ask. A few nights after the fight at the bar, Martin took Nathan outside alone.

“Well Nathan, I think it’s time you learn how to fight.”

Nathan was surprised at this considering the trouble he caused by fighting in the first place.

“I thought you said vampires don’t fight.”

“I said we rarely fight and seeing that you are now stronger than you were before, it’s better to learn how to control that strength.”

Nathan could appreciate that.

Nathan did not have near the strength of Martin but he could move fast and Martin taught him how to use his speed to manoeuvre around an opponent. He showed him vulnerable spots and how to inflict as much pain as possible with minimum effort to both humans and vampires. He also taught him how to restrain his opponent without causing harm.

Many times Martin bested Nathan before he got the hang of dodging blows and gained enough agility to be able to come around and deliver his own blows to Martin.

They spent many nights doing this, both thoroughly enjoying the time. One night Ava and Lisella joined them. Nathan was amazed to see how well both fought. Lisella had no problem taking Nathan out and though Martin was considered an expert fighter among Pires and was much larger in size, Ava easily bested him. It was true the physical abilities of Pire females equally matched those of males!

On the last night of lessons, they were once again alone and Martin’s demeanour became very solemn. When finally he did speak, Nathan knew it was a serious matter. This last lesson was to be very different.

“I questioned over and over again whether or not to teach you this and discussed it at length with the others. I – *we* decided that as every vampire learns this, it is only right that you should too. If we truly accept you as one of us then we must treat you as such.” Nathan could not imagine what he was talking about.

Finally he said “I am going teach you how to kill a vampire.” A chill went through Nathan

realizing this put him on truly equal ground with vampires.

“Up to now, what you and I have been doing is merely ‘play fighting’. There was never any harm done to or by either of us. I have told you that we rarely fight. The only time we fight humans is when they attack us. The only time we fight other vampires is when there is a dispute that cannot be resolved in any other way.”

“First thing to explain is Frenzy. This is when a vampire reaches battle mode. When a Pire reaches Frenzy, there will be a fight and there will be only one winner. A Pire can go to Frenzy when at war or when either they or other Pires are in mortal danger. Frenzy cannot be willed; it occurs naturally and it is not something that can be demonstrated. Trust me though, should you ever witness it you will not mistake a Pire in Frenzy for anything but what it is!”

“Vampires in Frenzy change physically. We become stronger and our muscles expand increasing our size. Our skin thickens and hardens becoming like armour that not even human bullets can fully penetrate. Our fangs remain extended and are filled with poison and our hands and fingernails become lethal daggers. Where human made blades will not cut our skin, our nails will!”

Nathan struggled trying to imagine such a beast as he was describing. Martin paused, then taking a deep breath continued.

“The only way to kill a vampire is to stop its blood flow. As long as blood still circulates to the main organs, a Pire can recover from even the most vicious assault. We can have our limbs cut off; they will eventually grow back. Humans learned this and it is why they began killing us by putting a stake through our heart. They can of course only do this to a sleeping vampire. The other way is decapitation and it can take an entire human army to do that to just one Pire in Frenzy. For one vampire to kill another, you must either rip out the heart – and yes, we can do this in Frenzy - or rip out the throat! So, defend your heart, defend your throat, defend your blood flow!” While Martin was explaining this, he went through the motions but it was merely a mock exercise.

“And that is it. As I said, I cannot demonstrate this as it is not done by simply willing it to happen.”

“Have you ever experienced Frenzy?” asked Nathan.

“Yes, a very long time ago though I will not yet tell you that story.”

“What was it like?”

Martin easily recalled that time so very long ago. It was during a battle against humans. “I can tell you that physically the change did not cause me pain – or maybe I just didn’t notice! Mentally, all I could comprehend was attack. The reason why or even who the enemy was became secondary. I attacked all that I perceived as my enemy and I knew I would not stop until I either defeated them or died myself. There is only victory or death in Frenzy!”

“You have weapons, don’t you use them?”

Martin laughed “In Frenzy *we are* the weapon, Nathan! Weapons are used against humans, not each other.” And with that the last lesson ended. Nathan didn’t mind the fighting he and Martin had first engaged in. He was pretty sure he neither wanted to see Frenzy nor experience it for himself!

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A few more months went by when one night Enale announced that it was time for Nathan to start meeting other Pires but instead of inviting them to visit here they would go to them. The others were very excited by this. Though none of them ever expressed concern over their self-imposed exile from vampire society, just thinking of getting out again and being with others suddenly made them realize how isolated they had all become.

It was decided that they would go back to Vancouver where Nathan and Ava first met and spend a

few weeks. They would stay at Ava's. When Nathan heard this he immediately asked "That tiny apartment?" remembering where she first took him after picking him up at the bar.

"Of course not!" she exclaimed. "As you may recall pointing out to me back then, that was not my home. I do have other domiciles Nathan, though it has been a long time since being in any of them! I think you will find my other home nice enough." "Oh, that one was just fine!" he smirked, hugging her recalling quite clearly their first encounter.

By late next evening they were on their way. They arrived just before dawn to Ava's secluded condo in what was considered the better part of the city. It had underground parking and her place was in the very back of the complex. Like the first place that Nathan had been in, her condo was not easy to identify or find. The only reason he found his way back to Ava's apartment during their first meeting was his due diligence in noting suite number, floor and building address; if not he would never have found the place again. This was a similar situation. It was a large complex comprising of several buildings with consistent features; a perfect place where a Pire was able to hide in the open.

Unlike the first place however, this had more of a feeling of home and Nathan could sense Ava in every part. The décor was refined and expensive; she had exquisite taste. Seeing this Nathan began to wonder exactly how much money she actually had. Money was not a topic brought up or discussed. The only thing Enale told him regarding Pire finances was as part of a lesson on history and society. "Money is an invention of human society and as we need to exist as part of this, we need money. To us it is to take care of needs; it is not something we strive to achieve for its own sake. When you live a long life, you have a long time to acquire wealth. We invest and have various business enterprises. Every Pire works sooner or later whether it's for or with other Pires or occasional humans. Suffice to say we take care of each other and you will never see a poor homeless vampire." Nathan understood this was the mindset of the Pires and though a strange concept to him accepted it which was a relief to Enale. Part of his study of Nathan was observing the intensity of his human side. Nathan did not display greed, the most unpleasant and despised of human traits. He had witnessed untold times human greed and the countless lives needlessly and selfishly destroyed because of it. As for Nathan, having still an inheritance from his parents his financial needs were met and he knew at this stage in his life he could not work with either Pire or human so the topic never came up again.

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The first Pires to be invited to Ava's were Garrett and Charisa. Garrett and Charisa were only slightly younger than Ava and as Serille and Delonde were to Enale, so were they to her in status.

Garrett was a working Pire which meant being more active in human society. He was CEO of an import export company owned by vampires. Nathan found this very interesting as he was the first Pire he met with such close contact to humans. Having to work for a living also created an additional sense of camaraderie though he could not know of Nathan's past.

Charisa was very beautiful and finding Nathan absolutely delightful was flirtatious to the point of making him blush. He felt like an awkward teenager around her and everyone including Ava found this very amusing. They spent the night talking and reminiscing which Nathan found surprisingly interesting as he learned knew things about all of them.

Nathan had been extremely nervous but meeting friendly Pires was encouraging. The only warning Enale really had for him was to be careful of what he said as he was considered a Newling with limited exposure to human society.

They spent the first few nights with just these two until the fourth night when another couple joined them and they spent the evening out on the town. The first stop for the troop was to the symphony. This was not exactly to Nathan's taste but he enjoyed it. Afterward, they went to a private club for a few

drinks. The females of the group decided to leave early while the males walked back to Ava's later on. During the walk, Nathan was with Garrett who was explaining about a current contract he was negotiating with a company that turned out to be Nathan's last employer and in an absolute absent minded lapse Nathan said "Oh yes, I worked there a couple of years ago - " suddenly stopping, his heart sank and he visibly paled - he had revealed his human past! Garrett was a suave Pire. Without missing a beat he said "This is indeed fortuitous! Perhaps when we are in private you could give me some inside information." He then winked at Nathan and he felt instant relief as his Pire instinct told him his secret was still safe and he knew another vampire was privy to the conspiracy.

The next two weeks were spent either having guests over or going to others homes. Every Pire that Nathan met was friendly toward him. He learned his lesson and was extra careful on what he said. Other than Garrett only Charisa appeared to know the secret and as such she too became part of the conspiracy.

During the second week, Garrett and Charisa held a gathering in which a few more vampires living close by were invited to. It was another successful event. Nathan met several new Pires and all seemed impressed by him with the exception of one. Their introduction was brief; his name was Pearson and unlike the others he simply said hello and excused himself. Charisa told him not to be concerned. "Not all Pires are as social as we are with each other. Some are more private and tend to keep to themselves. No doubt Ava can give you better instruction on this." Pearson did not stay long and Nathan was not disappointed. There was something different about Pearson that made him extremely uncomfortable; he was not like the other vampires.

The night quickly passed and soon it was early morning. All the other guests had since left except Enale's group. They were just getting ready to leave when there was a knock at the door. Pearson had returned accompanied by three other vampires. Whereby Nathan had noticed something different with Pearson, these new vampires were definitely not the same as all the others he had met. He instantly disliked them and though he did not understand why, did not trust them.

Garrett stepped forward and formally greeted them. "Welcome, friends." he said. Greeting a Pire in this manner was more than just a courtesy, it was also a warning. You were welcomed as a friend and expected to behave as such.

"My apologies for intruding." said Pearson, though there was no sincerity in his words. "I encountered these three individuals after leaving earlier in the night and after hearing of their dilemma, brought them immediately back here."

Garrett nodded ascent and one of the Pires stepped forward. "Thank you, Sir." he said holding his hand over his heart and bowing his head. "Forgive this sudden appearance but I have in fact come to make an enquiry of you."

"Perhaps than you would be so kind as to introduce yourselves and make your enquire, unless it is of a private matter?" Garrett was carefully scrutinizing these individuals. They did not live within this area and he was uncertain of their identity.

"My name is Carl and these are my travelling companions, Tyler and Leland" he said pointing to each as he spoke their names. "This is not a private matter and in fact would be better if I could ask all present. You see, we are looking for one of our companions who should have met up with us in this city a long time ago. We still have not found her nor have we had any word from her. Her name is Mary."

"I know of no Mary here at this present time."

Pearson quickly interjected. "They told me that she was last known to be in the company of an old brood mate named Martin and his current companion Lisella. Since I knew they were visiting you

tonight, I immediately brought them here to see if they could shed some light on the missing Pire.”

Not a word was spoken nor a sound made by the group until Martin stepped forward holding Lisella's hand. "I am Martin and this is Lisella." he said, a formal tone to his voice. Enale and Ava stepped closer to the pair.

Garrett still stood in the fore front as this was his house and he was in charge. Still looking at the new group, he asked Martin "Do you know then of Mary and her current whereabouts?"

"Yes." he answered "Forgive me that I did not make mention of this, but – "

"It was at my bidding." interrupted Enale who now took his place beside Garrett.

The three Pires realized that something was amiss and tensed. Though they never formally met Enale, everyone knew who he was. "Forgive us Garrett," that we did not mention this tragic event before." he said with all sincerity, finishing what Martin had begun to state.

Carl bristled at this statement and his tone became hostile. "Why do you speak for these two?" he demanded "They were the last with her, they know what happened. I want to hear from them!"

Though Enale was by all appearances a calm individual and not one that would appear aggressive, this quickly changed. "Because what *happened*, happened in MY home and is thereby MY responsibility!" Glaring at the group their tone quickly changed. Enale was not to be challenged.

"Forgive me, I meant no offense." replied Carl though still clearly tense. "I am but concerned for Mary's welfare as it has been a long time since we had some sort of communication from her and this is not like her. We feared that only extreme circumstances would have prevented her from at least sending some kind of message."

Enale responded in a more calm and controlled manner. "I am afraid that Mary met her demise in my home shortly after arriving."

"How!?" demanded Carl instinctively knowing her death was not accidental. A vampire death was not usually something that was kept quiet. It was Ava however that spoke up next. "She attacked a Newling." A deathly quiet fell upon everyone present and the entire mood dramatically changed. A crime such as this was unthinkable.

"Then you killed her?" he asked Ava. "No, I did." answered Enale. This was true enough, though Mary would have died regardless; it was Enale that crushed her chest thereby ending her life and her suffering.

Controlling himself from another outburst and speaking carefully, Carl said "I don't question that the punishment was just. I don't understand what would have possessed her to do such a thing." An elder Pire such as Enale was not questioned as to how or why he did something, especially by vampires as young as these.

"Perhaps it was my fault." offered Martin. "Our intention was only to spend the night but we stayed longer and I didn't realize how long Mary had gone without feeding. She went into bloodlust and tried to attack a human but the Newling was in the way." Though skewed, this was as close as they could get to the truth while protecting everyone including Nathan. She attacked the human Nathan, but the vampire Nathan was indeed in her way. Martin had remained true to his word; he did not lie and neither did he betray Nathan.

"My apologies Enale." responded Carl, though sincere, was not friendly. "As I said, we knew something was amiss and I feared that she was in fact dead. At least we know it was justified." then addressing Garrett, "Forgive the intrusion, we will leave." And as quickly as they came, they departed without saying anything further. Pearson however was the last to leave and before departing addressed Enale "We have not had much opportunity to speak Enale. I would enjoy coming to visit you some time." He did not wait for a response but turned and left as quickly as the others. He at least

did not appear to be intimidated by the elder vampire. Enale did not care for this Pire.

And just as quickly as it began, it ended. Nathan experienced panic when the group began asking about Mary but watching the others reactions, he knew they would not betray him and indeed found Martin's response to be very cunning. He also had a new respect for Enale. When Enale responded to Carl, even he felt his power and was glad not to be on the receiving end of that. Nathan thought back to that long ago night when he walked in on Enale and Ava discussing what to do with him. Nathan believed without a doubt that yes, not only could Enale take him out, he could have taken out any vampire. He was slowly beginning to realize there was far more to Enale than he first imagined and thought that perhaps he should spend more time with him.

Now it became necessary to tell Garrett and Charisa the full story. Enale already knew that Serille and Delonde had been in contact with them and though Garrett was never given exact information he knew there were special circumstances surrounding Nathan. These visits and introductions of Nathan to other Pires were calculated to see if any one might see or sense something different and measure his abilities to interact with others beside just family. Garrett then told them that it was only Nathan's slip of tongue that made him realize he was a half-blood. "I naturally told Charisa but she informed me she knew it as soon as she met him, though wouldn't tell me how." They all turned to her then, curious as to how she figured it out. Charisa grinned mischievously "It was very simple. Vampire's don't blush." and everyone laughed.

It was with a sense of relief that yet two more Pires knew and they could relax at least around them and not have to feel as if they were monitoring every little thing Nathan said or did. But now the discussion turned to other things, first regarding the reactions to Mary's death. Nathan could not quite understand how it appeared to be so easily accepted – not liked, just accepted. If that had been a missing human and it was discovered that she was dead and not by natural causes, the outcome would have been far different!

Ava explained that harming a Pire child including a Newling was punishable by death. "Survival instinct is the most basic trait shared by all living things. Offspring means the continuation of any species and as children are so rare for us, they were protected by all. It is our most sacred law. As we do not have court systems or special forces to administer or govern our laws it is the responsibility of individuals to enforce them when they are broken. It was accepted that Mary had broken a death law and was punished according to that law."

Though it was not spoken out loud, it was not lost on any of them that they too were breaking a death law by allowing Nathan to live. This was indeed a dangerous game they played. At any time, one single vampire upon discovering the truth could justifiably kill them all. There would be no courts to plea their cases to, no jail to sequester them from society as means of punishment. There was only death.

Which led to Nathan's next request. "Tell me about the vampires that were with Pearson."

"So you noticed something different about them?" asked Garrett.

"Yes"

"What did you think then?"

"That I would not trust any of them."

The others laughed, not out of amusement but rather agreement.

"We had explained to you that all vampires are equal, however that does not mean we are all the same." said Enale.

"We call them Nypers." said Ava, and then with a slight grin added "a slang term for night vampires. They do not socialize or interact in human society and keep contact with other Pires to a

minimum.”

“They are in essence the personification of the human legends regarding vampires.” added Lisella. “They cannot tolerate daylight even in the slightest amount and do not go outside until it is completely dark. They do not hunt where humans gather; instead they seek those that are out alone in the night. The only human contact they have is to feed and they utilize black breath to incapacitate their prey.”

“What is that?”

“Black breath renders a human completely incapacitated but unlike the effect we have when feeding where the human remembers nothing, they are not so lucky after being fed on by Nypers.” explained Martin. “Consequences to the humans vary. Most times, the human blacks out and upon waking can recall only having bad dreams. Sometimes the human becomes physically ill but not right away; it can strike weeks after the encounter and though more rare can be so severe it leads to death. There are rarer occasions still where some humans can have nightmares that last for weeks or months and can lead to a mental breakdown or even suicide.”

“Mary was a Nyper.” added Enale.

Nathan flashed back to that night. He remembered the bite itself and how excruciatingly painful it was. He also remembered that was the time his own dreams began to change.

Ava sensed this was upsetting Nathan and led him away from the others. “Nathan, are you ok?” clearly concerned.

“Why do you allow this? If they are killing humans, shouldn’t they be stopped? You said that any Pires that are a danger to all are not tolerated!”

“But those deaths are rare and not common enough to raise alarms with humans and are not traced back to us.” she said believing his concern was only about the possibility of discovery, uncertain now as to why Nathan should react so strongly about this. “They are vampires still. Not all humans hunt and kill wild animals. Should those humans that don’t have the right to destroy the humans that do hunt simply because that is not their way?”

Nathan did not respond because he did not quite understand his own reaction. He grasped what Ava was saying and to his Pire side this was acceptable. But it was the mention of nightmares that made him flash to his own. Was being bitten by a Nyper the cause of them and could they lead to him having his own mental breakdown? Part of him wanted to tell Ava about the dreams but another part was unsure about disclosing it now. Would they question his mental state knowing this?

He then looked at Ava, smiled and taking her in his arms said. “As crazy as things get with me Ava, don’t ever doubt that I love you.”

Ava laughed “I love you too.”

They remained at Garrett’s the rest of the day. No more was discussed about Nypers and all too soon Nathan was back to his old self.

Two nights later it was just Martin and Nathan hunting. This time they went to a concert at a small venue of an up and coming metal band not yet up enough to play large venues. As usual, they first looked around for other vampires but didn’t spot any. The music was good and the people were just as entertaining as the band. Then Nathan spotted one. “Martin look!” he exclaimed excitedly “over by the far wall – the red head sitting at the table full of girls.” It took Martin a few moments to finally pick out the one Nathan was talking about. “Ok, so you want that one?” a bit confused as to why Nathan was excited over her. She didn’t look like much to him. “Can’t you see!? She’s a half-blood like me.”

“What!?” disbelief clearly in his voice. “No way can you know that Nath!”

“Yes, come on, you must see *some* Pire in her – I do!” and he began to get up.

“Whoa, hold on!” Martin grabbed his arm. “What are you *doing*?”

“I’m going to go talk to her, what else do you think – I sure as hell know I can’t feed off her!”

“And say what?” It was evident that Martin was not pleased with this. Then suddenly two other males approached the group of women stopping Nathan in his tracks. They were Pires. Neither had noticed them coming in and they either didn’t see Nathan and Martin or simply didn’t care.

Nathan was uncertain what to do. He knew it was not good etiquette to interfere in any way with another’s hunt. This was certainly Martin’s thoughts as he ordered Nathan to stay put. “We should just leave this one alone Nath and go somewhere else.”

“But shouldn’t we warn…” not finishing the sentence. Nathan was clearly in turmoil.

“Warn who Nath? The girl or the Pires?” Besides – you just *think* it’s a Monev, right? I mean you couldn’t *know* that! And they might not be hunting her. There are four other women at the table.”

Nathan struggled with this. His excitement at having recognized a fellow Monev was quickly subdued by the appearance of the others. Martin was right, they should just leave but it was already too late. Now that both of their attention was on this group, Martin and Nathan could easily pick up what was being said even from as far away as they were. The Pires had convinced at least three of the girls to leave with them including the red haired female. Nathan followed much to Martin’s dismay. He could probably stop him but at this point not without creating a scene and he didn’t want to risk making things worse than they already were. They followed, though cautiously.

By the time they reached outside, the others were nowhere to be seen. Martin could not say he was disappointed. He wasn’t sure what to think about the possibility of Nathan recognizing another half-blood.

Nathan stood staring down the street hoping to still catch a glimpse of them. He began to question what he saw. Maybe Martin was right; there was no way to tell if someone was a half-blood just by sight. Maybe it was his own wishful thinking. It was hard being the odd person knowing he would never be quite the same as the others no matter which world he was in – human or vampire. It would be nice to know that there were others out there like him even if they didn’t know themselves.

After a few minutes, they went back inside as they still needed to feed. Nathan quickly returned to his old self and he and Martin enjoyed the rest of the night.

Nathan never brought up the topic again but Martin did speak to Enale. He at first thought the same as Martin that Nathan was mistaken but kept a close eye on the news. A few days later a young female’s body was found. It was identified as an individual that had been reported missing after failing to come home from a concert. The cause of death was not released but no foul play was suspected. The picture released of her matched perfectly the description provided by Martin. A few enquires by Enale confirmed that a Monev had been found and killed by a group of local Pires. Nathan had been right. This added a whole new element to half-bloods.

There would be one more incident where Nathan’s human world and vampire world would collide though the incident seemed minor at first.

It was the following week and this time Nathan, Martin, and Lisella went hunting with a small group of Pires they had met at Garrett’s. Ava rarely joined them opting instead to do her own visiting. Though they would have preferred hunting alone, they had been invited and it would have been considered inappropriate to decline the invitation. Nathan didn’t mind as this group comprised of younger Pires and he felt comfortable enough with them. Besides Lisella knew them and got along well with everyone. After a bit of discussion they went to a mutually agreeable place. Though Nathan had actually been born and raised in Vancouver, the bar they went to was one he had never been to. The evening quickly passed and soon Nathan separated from the rest of the group having found his

intended prey when he suddenly heard someone call his name.

“Nathan? Is that you?” Looking over his heart sank and he could feel an intense sensation of panic; it was a human female that recognized him. Her name was Sandra and he had dated her many years ago, long before meeting Ava. There had been nothing special about their relationship; it was short and ended amicably. Back then they hadn’t shared many common interests and he honestly never thought about her again.

But he was supposed to be a Newling and a Newling certainly would not have dated a human. “Wow, look at you!” she said excitedly. “I barely recognized you!” Hugging him she clearly found the ‘new’ Nathan more appealing than she had in the past. His mind raced, does he deny it and try to get away, or stay there and try to keep her from bringing unwanted attention to them? “Uh, hi, uh Sandy is it?” “Of course silly!” she admonished him coyly “Really Nathan, it hasn’t been that long. What are you doing here?”

Nathan struggled with what to say. “Uh, you know...” he said at a complete loss for words when Martin suddenly appeared by his side. “Well Nathan, who is this charming woman?” he burst in. “Uh, this is um...”

“I’m Sandy. Nathan and I dated three years ago but you wouldn’t know it by the way he’s acting.” she said slightly miffed by his less than receptive attitude. “Well Nathan’s funny that way. Say, how would like to dance?” asked Martin, now standing between Nathan and her. She appeared a bit confused but before she could respond, she was whisked away by him. Just as quickly as Martin had appeared so did Lisella.

“Don’t worry, Nath.” she said “Martin will take care of her. The others didn’t notice but why don’t you and I finish hunting together and get out of here as quick as we can?” Nathan readily agreed.

They of course should have anticipated the possibility of Nathan running into someone from his past and he at least should have been on the lookout for this, but with a city the size of Vancouver and Nathan claiming not to have known a lot of people this hadn’t crossed any of their minds. They weren’t too concerned however. After all, no harm, no foul.

But it was a foul that would cause harm though not right away. None of them realized there was one more vampire at the bar that night. This Pire heard everything and found it very interesting that a Newling would have had a former human girlfriend. The Pire left immediately after overhearing the exchange before he was noticed.

They stayed another week. Serille and Delonde came to the city and stayed at Garrett’s and Enale spent a few days with them. That left Ava, Nathan, Martin, and Lisella. They spent the rest of the time together completely enjoying themselves.

At the end of the fourth week the five companions ended their foray in the city and once again returned home to Enale’s. By all outward appearances things returned to normal.

Outward appearances can be deceiving.



## [Dream World](#)

Once home, everyone easily slipped back into what was becoming their normal routine. Any unpleasantness that Nathan had experienced appeared to be forgotten. He neither talked about the possibility of Monevs nor did he dwell on Nypers and Mary and at home, he didn’t worry about accidentally running into any other humans that might recognize him. He was back in his safe little

world where he didn't have to be careful of what he said and how he acted. He was surrounded by those he loved and who loved him back and would take care of him and protect him. Best of all, he had his Ava and she was ultimately all that mattered to him.

As for being vampire, Nathan was completely embracing his new life. Physically and intellectually he was far more superior than he had been when he was 'just human'. Other vampires accepted him as one of their own whether they knew his identity or not, which for him solidified himself as a true Pire. He was more fluent than ever in Pire language and could read and write it with relative ease. Lessons still continued however for there was still much to learn. The most interesting was learning about vampires worldwide. One day Pires from Japan came to visit Enale while traveling North America. He was surprised that they resembled Japanese humans. He hadn't realized that he had a preconceived notion that all vampires were Caucasian. The others found his revelation amusing; of course Enale turned it into another history lesson utilizing the Darwinian theory of evolution which Nathan had to endure. "Animals adapt to their environment and develop physically based on survival needs. We need to live among our prey therefore it is far more beneficial to resemble them as much as possible. Vampires exist side by side with humans in every culture and that is why there are vampires of every cultural demographic."

"So vampires evolved to look like their prey?" asked Nathan. Enale gave him a puzzling look. "Yes, in basic terms." Nathan liked things to be in basic terms. He was not like Enale that enjoyed pondering and deciphering complex ideas or theories. That is why he didn't often seek out Enale's company as much as he would the others; they tended to keep things simpler.

As for being human, there lingered some remnants such as he would spend more time in daylight than the others would and secretly missed going to the beach on a hot sunny day and lazing about in the sun. And he ate ice cream. The others found this entertaining and had even tried it themselves but did not have the taste for it that he did. He accepted these as just his own unique idiosyncrasies as did the others. Enale was the only one that cautioned him not to be too open with his quirks as they may be just enough out of the ordinary for some vampires.

Otherwise, in his mind's eye, the assortment of strings that represented the varying aspects of being vampire and human were wrapped up in nice little separate balls, secure in his own psyche.

~\*~

And so more months passed and everything was perfect in Nathan's world except for his dreams. The dreams were getting worse. To add to it, he began to sleep more rather than less. It was still only a few hours at a time, but instead of sleeping once ever several weeks, he was now sleeping at least once a week. He expressed concern to Enale but only about the change in sleep pattern. He still had not mentioned his dreams to anyone. Enale could only tell him that Newlings often had unusual sleeping patterns. As long as Nathan felt healthy and was still feeding he told him not to worry.

One night Nathan woke up after having slept for a few hours and found Ava lying beside him. This was not uncommon as she got into the habit of sitting with him while he slept. He rolled over and teasingly poked her in the arm with his finger but she didn't move. He half sat up looking at her ready to say something but the sight of her stopped any words. She was lying on her back with hands clasped across her abdomen and so still he could not even discern the rise and fall of her chest from breathing. Worse was how pale she looked. Ava was not exactly tanned but this pallor was not normal. Alarmed, he called her name but there was no response. Not knowing what to do, he jumped out of bed and ran downstairs. Finding Enale he exclaimed "Something's wrong with Ava!" clearly distressed. Enale was rather confused having just seen her a short time ago. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know – please come!" and not waiting for an answer Nathan raced back upstairs with

Enale following. Arriving in their bedroom Nathan immediately sat on the edge of the bed looking at the pale figure of Ava.

“She’s not moving. I woke up and poked her and she didn’t move and it doesn’t even look like she’s breathing! What’s wrong with her!?”

Enale looked at her over Nathan’s shoulder and suppressing an urge to laugh asked “Why did you poke her? She’s asleep.”

He turned and looked at Enale, still clearly confused, then turned back to Ava and gently poked her once. “Don’t poke her Nathan, let her be, she needs her sleep.” He turned and walked out, a huge grin on his face. Nathan followed and just as they came down the stairs, Martin and Lisella came in from outside. “Is everything ok?”

“Ava is asleep and Nathan is poking her.” answered Enale.

“I didn’t know!” he cried defensively. The other two quickly caught on and Lisella said “Don’t poke a sleeping vampire Nathan.” as she shook her head at him. Martin laughed.

“How long will she sleep for?” he asked, now feeling foolish for not realizing what was going on.

“Sleep time varies among individuals and it can depend on how long we have been awake. Ava has been awake for a long time, so it could be several days but I wouldn’t be surprised if it was several weeks.”

Nathan was not encouraged by this. What was he supposed to do in the meantime?

As if reading his thoughts Lisella laughed. “Don’t worry Nath, we will keep you entertained until your Ava awakes again!”

And they did. They spent the time hunting and playing and the first week quickly passed. At the end of the first week, he slept again. And he dreamed. This time he dreamed about Ava or to be more exact, he dreamt he was trying to find her.

*At first they were all at the house and then Ava was gone. She must have gone to the city, so he went to her condo but she was not there. Others were and they told him not to worry, leave her alone, she’s fine. But they didn’t understand; he needed her. He went to all the places he had been to during his last visit to the city and at each place he went she had just left. Finally he thought to go to the tiny apartment where she first took him and wait there. Sooner or later she would come back there especially when she found out he was looking for her! But when he arrived there was already another Pire there. It was Pearson and he laughed at Nathan as he stood over Ava’s dead body. He screamed and suddenly he was in a very different place. He could only describe it as being underwater, everything around him was blurred or warped and he could not identify what he was looking at. Was that a chair or a tree? Was he outside or inside? Was it day or night? Then he heard Ava call his name, only it sounded like she was talking to him from faraway. At first he couldn’t make out what she was saying then finally he thought he heard her say ‘It’s ok Nathan, I’m alright and I will be home soon. Just wait for me.’*

He woke up drenched in sweat, Ava still asleep beside him.

He went downstairs to find Lisella sitting by herself. “Martin and Enale went hunting together.” she said.

“Why didn’t you go?”

“You were asleep and we didn’t want to leave you both alone. We are most vulnerable when we sleep so it’s important to always have another awake during that time.”

“Enale went hunting?” he asked a bit surprised.

“Yes, but I think they were also meeting others.” She smiled at him. “You have never seen Enale hunt have you?”

“No, I honestly didn’t think he did.”

“You should ask him to take you hunting sometime. I think you will be very surprised by his techniques.”

“Are you all right?” she then asked, as he looked disturbed.

He didn’t say anything right away, wondering if he should or not. But this was Lisella, and he knew if anyone would understand, she would.

“I had a bad dream.”

Lisella waited for him to continue knowing there was more to it. Then he asked “Do vampires dream?”

“Yes, but from what I understand of human dreams, it is not the same. Are your dreams different now – is this the cause of your concern?”

“Yes, I suppose, I don’t know.” Lisella again waited quietly as he sat beside her leaning forward staring at the floor. They had all observed the many occasions as Nathan came to terms with different Pire reality but this struggle was somehow different. She was right. During all other times of change and experiences, Nathan was able to rationalize the event and accept it for what it was. And of course he always had Ava supporting him. But his dreams left him feeling frightened and confused and he couldn’t understand them. All other times, he was able to just stop thinking about them and concentrate on his awake world. But now the images would not leave him long after he was awake. After an even longer pause, he finally spoke again trying to find the right way of explaining it if he could.

“I don’t really recall many dreams from before. I dreamt more as a kid but nothing really ever stood out for me.” Though that wasn’t quite true, he continued. “Now, I dream all the time and the dreams are so real. I don’t just see and hear things; I can smell things and taste things. And the feelings are so strong!”

“What happens in your dreams?” He recounted the dream he just had. “This one was not quite the same; I get why I dreamed it. Ava’s asleep and I can’t talk to her. I didn’t like this Pearson from the start, so I figure that’s probably why I dreamt of him.”

“Ok, so this last one was different. What about other dreams?”

“I guess I dream a lot about what already happened, only it’s like I am there all over again.” He described some of the more common dreams but then paused wondering if he should tell her all of the dreams. After a deep sigh, he continued “Other dreams are just weird. You know that painting hanging in the back of the The Hollow Room - the one that shows the battle scene with the humans killing those winged gargoyles and fairies and vampires? That’s what I dream about. I see that, only it’s like I’m actually there watching it over and over again. And every time I dream about it, it becomes more real.”

Lisella knew well the painting he described for this was not just a rendering of the artist’s imagination; this was a depiction of an actual event. She was taken aback by his description of it. That Nathan should describe the figures as gargoyles and fairies was disheartening. She knew he was never told this story nor was it explained to him who the figures in the painting actually were. Enale purposely withheld that information from him. Nathan had to question it on his own for only then would he be ready to learn about it. And they waited all this time for questions that were never asked, despite the number of times they saw him go back and look at that picture, and despite their own hints and innuendos. Would he now?

She did not want to say something that may be taken as an interrogation or otherwise influence him regarding this but needed to say something as he once again fell silent. "That painting disturbs you." He simply nodded but would not say anything more. Lisella decided it was better to refrain from any further questioning regarding it. Let Enale speak to him, he can better assess whether Nathan is ready to learn this or not.

"I don't have answers to your dreams but believe it or not, I have studied human dreaming as I found it to be very fascinating so maybe I can give a comparison for you and you can tell me if it's accurate to you. From what I understand, human dreams are far different than waking. Humans may dream of a place that they know such as their home, but it appears different than the actual place. And for some reason, things in dreams are often a symbol for something else."

"Yeah, that sounds about right. What do vampires dream?" he asked.

"You said that some of your dreams are reliving past events that appear so real it's like it's actually taking place again. That is a vampire dream. Just as our memories can be recalled with extreme clarity in our waking, so can they be recalled in our dreaming. The difference is when you are dreaming the event, you can change how you see the event. For example, when you recall the memory, you see what you saw at that time. But when you dream it, you can pause it so to speak, and look in a different direction and actually see something you had no idea was there to begin with."

Nathan looked at her with surprise. "Really?" She nodded her head yes. "But it takes practice to do this and not everyone can. From what you have told me of some of your dreams, it sounds like vampire dreams. There is another part though. When we are asleep, we can access the collective conscious of all Pires. I do believe based on my own research that humans can also access the collective conscious of humans, but it is not understood by them and they often confuse what they are seeing with their own memories. We can see events that have taken place throughout our history that affected the whole even if we were not part of it or yet born. Sometimes we can speak to individuals that we are close to. When Ava spoke to you in your last dream, you might very well have touched on the consciousness. Because you were both asleep at the same time and you are so close to her, she perhaps was able to open the way for you."

The mention of Ava and that she might actually have spoken to him gave him great comfort. This was not however the part that Lisella hoped he would think about.

Nathan felt much better now but he always did when he spent time with the others. Anytime he was troubled by something they always made him feel better. He still missed Ava though and each night that passed and she still slept, he missed her all that more.

The discussion on dreams ended then and Nathan and Lisella spent the rest of the time playing chess which was one of their favourite pastimes with each other. When they first began playing together, more times than not, Lisella won. Now it was pretty even for losses and wins. Martin and Enale returned just before dawn. Lisella told Enale about her conversation with Nathan. He, like her saw the most significant part being the painting. Perhaps they should not wait for him to ask about it. He would discuss it more with the others. If it was decided to tell him outright, he would at least wait until Ava was awake. This part of their lives had the greatest impact on her and it was not fair to deal with it while she slept.

Another week passed. Nathan was fine but as time went on they began to notice subtle changes in him. He was happy, but not as happy as he normally was. He was quieter and sometimes didn't do anything but sit with Ava. They were used to Nathan having moments such as this but he would always come out of it and return to his normal, happy self. They probably should have been concerned when it didn't happen as quickly as it usually did.

Then he slept once again but as usual for him, only for a few hours. He woke up; Ava was still asleep. It had been just over two weeks and he hoped it wouldn't be too much longer. He missed her.

It was early morning and he wasn't too surprised when he didn't see the other three. He became concerned only when daylight came and they were still not around. Nathan was good at being able to focus on any one of them and find where they were if they were close by. He tried now but came up with nothing. It was at that point he became worried.

He went back upstairs, this time going to Enale's bedroom. He knocked quietly on the door but getting no response, carefully opened it and peeked inside. Enale was lying on his back in almost the same position as Ava and like her, he had the same pallor look. Enale was sleeping. He then went to Martin's room and then to Lisella's only to discover that they too were asleep. For the first time since encountering Ava, Nathan was alone. He was not only alone; he was now responsible for the safety of the others.

Feeling somewhat at a loss he went back downstairs and sat by himself. He was not too concerned over the others safety and as he did not anticipate anything unfortunate happening. Hunger was his main concern. Nathan always woke up hungry and fed on the blood that Enale had stored. By the second night he knew this was not going to suffice. He could feel the need for human blood increasing and was uncertain of what to do about it. He did not want to leave the house but knew he would have to feed. He had never been hunting alone before but if he didn't go soon, he risked blood lust and there would be no one there to help him if this happened.

When the human servants came the following day, he could feel his hunger intensify as soon as he saw them. Nathan ordered them to leave telling them that Enale was called away on an emergency and they should not return to work until he called them. He saw a look of fear in their eyes as he spoke and this he thought was a good thing. They should be afraid.

He would have to feed tonight; he knew he could not hold off any longer even if it meant going alone. He remembered what Lisella said about having someone there when another Pire slept but surely they would okay for a few hours?

Then he thought of Garrett. Garrett and Charisa knew about him and he had gotten along well with them. Perhaps if nothing else, they could assure him that it was ok and yes, he could leave them for a few hours. He called and when Garrett answered he tried to suppress the relief in his own voice upon hearing his.

"Hello" said Nathan.

"Nathan, how are you?" greeted Garrett somewhat surprised but none the less pleased that it was Nathan on the phone. "Where is the rest of the family?"

"Asleep."

There was a momentary pause and it was clear Garrett was on speaker phone when he heard Charisa ask "All of them?" surprise evident in her voice.

"Yes."

"We're on our way." was all Garrett said. "See you in few hours Nathan." added Charisa.

Nathan hung up the phone relieved they were coming and that he did not need to explain things. As soon as he had mentioned everyone was asleep, they understood his situation completely. It was the middle of the afternoon, but Garrett and Charisa did not wait for darkness to leave. They both knew Nathan should not be alone, at least not yet. They arrived just after dark. Charisa went immediately to check on the others while Nathan told Garrett about waking up one day and finding Ava asleep beside him. His story included poking her and just as he got to this part Charisa returned. "You shouldn't poke sleeping vampires Nathan, that's not nice." she immediately said. Exasperated Nathan replied "I

know that now, I didn't know she was asleep when I poked her!"

"Do you always poke Ava?" she asked, clearly amused by this.

"Yes – no! I mean..."

"Leave him alone Charisa, clearly Ava knows he pokes her and is ok with it. But really Nathan, you should at least refrain from that activity while she's asleep."

"Yes, of course" he said shaking his head. Clearly his poking would be a source of amusement for all of them for a long time!

Both laughed at him and Nathan, though embarrassed, felt immediately comfortable with them and glad that they were there.

"Do vampires always sleep at the same time, and don't you have some warning that it's time to sleep, like yawning first?" he then asked. It had caught him off guard because it had only been a few hours between the time that he last saw them and they fell asleep.

"Yes and no." answered Garrett. "You have been with them for what, almost two years now? And in that time, none of them have slept, correct?" Nathan nodded agreement. "It is safe to assume that they had been awake prior to meeting you so I would guess that sleep was long overdue for all of them. Combine this with being as close as you all have been, it makes it less surprising that as one fell asleep, the others would feel the same need. Charisa and I have been together for a very long time now; when she sleeps I am awake, but as soon as she awakes, I need to sleep. As for any warning signs, there are but as with blood-lust, if the signs are ignored or not recognized, sleep appears to be instantaneous. I have no doubt that when everyone awakes, they will be surprised to learn that each other has slept at the same time. Enale would never have purposely put you in such a position. I am glad that you called."

"What of you Nathan? Are you sleeping less or more?" asked Charisa.

"Funny you should mention it, but I was going for several weeks before I slept, now I sleep at least once a week."

"It could be that this is your sleep time too but because your patterns have yet to stabilize, your sleep is coming in the form of shorter, but more frequent spells." Having mentored Newlings herself, she had a bit more understanding of them.

That solved at least one mystery for him.

"But, as the others are safe and Garrett can watch over them – we are going hunting!" she said and Nathan gladly followed.

It had been a long time since Charisa had hunted in this area and as things change over time, it was left to Nathan to decide where they would go. As his hunger was rapidly increasing he went to the closest, safest place he could think of. They ended up at a very loud, raucous bar. It didn't take them long to find a couple that suited their needs. They made quick work of it leaving the couple passed out in small out-of-the-way motel room.

On the drive home, they had a chance talk; the first for both of them without others about.

"You didn't care much for that place?" Nathan asked. If he had to describe Charisa, he would have said she was more 'upper class' though not in a negative way. She was better suited to fine dining, than a dingy smelly bar.

She laughed. "It was fine. I understand that we can't always discriminate in hunting grounds; necessity can often dictate location." Then more as an afterthought she said "I hope I didn't offend you at our first meeting." referring to her flirtatious greeting.

Now it was his turn to laugh. "No, I was just caught off guard I guess. I kinda get the feeling that you don't spend much time with humans."

“Very perceptive. You are correct. I suppose I am similar to Ava in that respect though our reasons are very different. For me, I find humans boorish and it is hard for me to maintain interest for very long. You are the first one that I have ever found to be at least *half* tolerable.” she smirked.

Nathan laughed at her last comment then asked, “So why does Ava not associate with humans?”

“You mean you have never asked her?”

Nathan just shrugged. “No, I never thought to ask.”

“Well, it is certainly not my place to tell you that story, but you should know and if they do not tell you, you need to ask.”

Her response surprised him. He hadn't really given Ava's aversion to humans much thought as it didn't seem to be that big of a deal. The others didn't have much contact with humans either. It never occurred to him that there might be a significant reason behind Ava's non contact.

“I will when she wakes up.”

“Good idea.”

They arrived home soon enough and the next few days Nathan got to know the couple much better. He really liked them though they were quite different from Martin, Lisella, and Ava. Garrett, he felt was similar to Enale in mannerism. Charisa was unlike any vampire he had met so far. Garrett laughed when he told him this. He was in complete agreement. “I think that is what I love most about her!” he confided to Nathan.

Another week went by and still the others slept; it was now three weeks since Ava first fell asleep. Once again it was time to hunt but this time he went with Garrett.

They travelled further then he had gone with Charisa, but Nathan's need to feed was not as urgent. Once alone, it was Garrett's turn to ask questions of his own about Nathan's past as well as how he was doing with his transitioning. Nathan too learned more from him about how Pires interacted with humans on such a regular basis as he did while maintaining anonymity.

Eventually they ended up in a place that played very loud rock music. This was what Garrett called his guilty pleasure. Charisa, as Nathan had ascribed, did not care for places like this; Garrett loved them and he eagerly jumped at any opportunity to visit these establishments.

When they arrived, there were already three other vampires present. Had it been Martin, he would have chosen another place or at the very least asked Nathan if he was ok with others. This did not occur to Garrett and he naturally introduced himself. He did not want to infringe on someone else's hunting ground and would have left if that was their preference. They had no objections to them joining with the rest. As one of them put it, there was plenty to go around.

Nathan was nervous but they were amicable enough. Garrett did most of the talking anyway. The evening wore on and soon everyone began to focus more on the hunt. They had been mingling among a group of humans that matched their number when they were joined by another female. She was young, barely into her twenties and the look on Nathan's face when he saw her was not lost on Garrett. He looked at Nathan who leaned into him and whispered “Monev.” Garrett maintained his composure; he did not doubt Nathan. Enale had told him about the incident in the city where Nathan was certain he recognized another Monev and that Enale was able to later confirm it.

This female didn't get a chance to sit down as the other Pires had already talked the group of humans into leaving for a house party with them. Garrett could sense Nathan's apprehension and wanted to pull back but Nathan had no intention of walking away this time.

They travelled with the others to a house on the outskirts of town. There were even more vampires and humans there. Too late Garrett realized these Pires were part of a lair party. Nathan had never heard of this. Garrett quickly explained. “It's when a larger group of vampires get together to feed.

There are different types of these gatherings and are referred to by different names. A lair party can be a bit more volatile than others. None of the Pires are local and as soon as they are done, they will all leave. Though they try not to do too much harm, they do consider deaths of humans at these parties part of the cost. Nypers love these types of gatherings and I have no doubt, are the organizers.” As soon as Garrett had said that, a group of four Nypers entered the house.

Nathan tried to count how many vampires there were, but lost track after thirty. There were more humans than vampires and the humans were in different states of drunkenness or drug induced highs. Nathan kept watch over the young Monev and tried to get closer to her but there were so many people it was difficult to move around. He and Garrett were soon separated. He then watched as a pair of male Pires led the Monev outside and he pushed his way through the crowd after them. He didn't know why or what he would possibly do. What could he do? As Martin had asked that first time, who was he going to warn, the Monev or the Pire? But he knew he had to follow.

Once outside, he immediately saw the Pires with the Monev leading her away from the house. She was stumbling barely able to walk on her own as they supported her between them.

Garrett watched as Nathan went outside and had his own sense of panic that he would do something to jeopardize himself and in turn, all of them and made his way through the crowd as quickly as possible.

Nathan caught up to the trio at as they stopped among the trees. The two Pire males were standing facing the female. They looked over at him not caring he was there then turned their attention back to the female “What are doing? Let me go right now!” she said groggily. A human seeing this might have thought her drunk, but Nathan understood she was suffering the effects of the vampire kiss which was supposed to incapacitate her but because she was Monev, did not take full effect.

“What's wrong sweetheart, we just wanna have a bit of fun, thats all!” said the male Pire closest to her in a mocking tone as he moved aggressively toward her. “Forget it!” yelled the other male “Let's just feed and finish her – who cares if she screams, it's not like anyone is going to do anything.” he laughed sadistically. The first Pire rushed her clearly not concerned she was still conscious and Nathan cried out “No!” but it was too late. The female gasped in pain as the Pire bit into her neck and within seconds he was thrashing about on the ground, quickly dying. She in the meantime had fallen to her knees clutching her bleeding neck. The other Pire realizing what happened moved in to kill her but Nathan stepped between. He had no idea what he was going to do as he bent down and picked her up by her arms and stood her up. She looked at him and he saw the terror in her eyes; she looked at him like he was a monster. His mind was reeling. He wanted to save her – he had to save her; she was him! But she didn't know this, she only saw a monster. Nathan leaned into her and cradling her head between his hands whispered into her ear “It will be alright.” as he snapped her neck. The only sound he heard was the crack of breaking bone and the thud of her dead body hitting the ground.

He turned and walked away. All this happened within a few moments. Garrett had reached the others just as Nathan cried out ‘No’ and he watched as Nathan picked up the girl, ready to step in and do whatever was necessary. He was shocked when Nathan broke the girl's neck. Of all ways Garrett thought this might play out, he did not imagine that.

He quickly followed Nathan, ignoring the vampires that were now beginning to filter toward the spot they just left. No one followed them, why would they? It was not like they committed any crime against vampires and there were no human witnesses as they were purposely kept inside unless escorted outside by vampires.

Nathan kept walking; once Garrett caught up to him he managed to guide him back to the car and drove him home. Not once did Nathan speak. He would not answer any of Garrett's questions; he

would not even look at him. All he could see was the face of the female Monev. His only thought was he was a monster that killed another monster.

Nathan's worlds began to unravel.

Charisa knew something had gone terribly wrong the moment she saw Nathan. Garrett quickly explained and much like Ava would have done, she went to Nathan to console him. She was not Ava though and could not offer him the same comfort but she was at least able to pull him out of his tormented stupor enough to talk.

Garrett needed to know exactly what happened. His demeanour was calm for that was how he was but this was a very anxious moment for him.

"Why did you kill the female?" that was the most important question that Garrett needed answered and the one that Nathan couldn't.

"I don't know. Because it had to be done. Because I would rather it be done by me than those bastards!" the disgust evident in his voice.

"I admit I don't agree with their method and would not myself ever feed like that, but those 'bastards' are other vampires and they did nothing more than what any Pire is capable of doing."

Nathan just looked at Garrett. How could he get him to understand something he himself couldn't?

"She looked at me like I was a monster and all I wanted to do was help. I am a monster. No matter where I go I am a monster." The anguish in his eyes and in his voice was so overwhelming it compelled both him and Charisa to want to do nothing more than ease his sorrow.

"If you look at yourself as a vampire through the eyes of a human, then yes, you are a monster. But Nathan you cannot live in both worlds – you are one or the other. You are either a human that lives a life as a human or you are a vampire that lives a life as a vampire."

"But I am both! And why can't I live both, why must I choose? When humans of different colors have a kid, the kid doesn't have to choose – it can have the best of both worlds if it wants! What's the difference?" he demanded.

"That's absurd and even you know that. Humans are humans regardless of the color of skin. We are vampire, regardless of the color of our skin. But humans are not vampire and vampires are not human. We are the predator, they are the prey." Though Garrett's words were a harsh reality, it was never the less said with kindness.

Nathan knew it was not the same. He just didn't know if he could ever be completely Pire if vampires included those that he just witnessed at the party, or Mary, or Nypers. And if he couldn't, then what? Where did he belong? He could not go back to the human world even if he was allowed to. He either lived vampire or died human. There was no existence in between.

Garrett truly wished one of the others would wake. He had no doubt they could reason with him and comfort him better. He did not know what to say that might offer him any solace.

When he had met with Enale, Serille, and Delonde they discussed some of the failures of half-bloods in the past. "One of the things that proved to be the most difficult was not the physical changes, but the psychological ones. More than once the half-bloods we tried to cultivate to vampire status went mad and either took their own life or had to be destroyed before irreparable harm was done to others." Serille had told them. "Those that survived the physical transformation and then made it past the moral issues with becoming the predator instead of being the prey eventually reached a point where they had to make a final acceptance of what they were. Each time ended in utter failure."

Garrett did not want to be in the position he now found himself but understood that it was probably better this way. He had been told of the numerous turning points for Nathan where he could have gone one way or another; the outcome determined by his choices. There was only one consequence for a

wrong choice and Garrett saw the angst the others suffered at the thought of having to carry it out. He liked Nathan, there was no question of that, but his bond was not yet as strong as the others and he would be able to do what had to be done with less turmoil, even if it grieved him to do it. And should it come to that, it was probably best to do it while the others slept.

As soon as Nathan had mentioned monsters, Charisa at least understood. As a vampire he was a monster in the human world. As a Monev he was a monster in the vampire world.

Then Charisa said to Garrett “You need to explain the painting to him.” Garrett could not fathom why she would say this now, but Charisa possessed an instinct unlike any Pire and the look she now gave him, he knew what she said had great significance even if he did not understand it.

Nathan too looked confused. “In The Hollow Room? No – I don’t want to see it. I hate the painting!”

“Then all the more reason to understand it.” she said to him. “Go with Garrett.” this was not a request and though Nathan tried to fight it, he had little choice and with extreme reluctance finally went.

Charisa understood that questions never asked must be answered. Nathan must face the monsters.

Once there Garrett asked “Do you know what this is about?”

“No one told me.”

“Did you ask?”

“Why? Enale told me how humans tried to kill off anything that was like them. This is what this is - humans killing gargoyles, and fairies, and vampires. Why would I ask, I can see!” He was not pleased with having to be here. He wanted to be left alone, he wanted to go and sit with Ava and he didn’t want to leave her side until she woke up.

“These are all vampires Nathan. They are not gargoyles, they are not fairies. They are vampire children.”

He waited a moment, allowing him to absorb this information before explaining further.

“When children are born they are raised in a Sanctuary and cared for by a vampire known as a Tender and watched over by other vampires referred to as Guardians. What you see here is a blood-brood. Humans discovered this over five hundred years ago and destroyed it.” He paused and then taking a deep breath said “This was Ava’s blood-brood.” Garrett pointed at the top corner of the painting to the three figures that were escaping; the ones Nathan identified as two gargoyles and a fairy.

Looking at where Garrett pointed Nathan could not believe he did not see it before. The ‘fairy’ was Ava. His Ava and she was trying to escape the slaughter perpetrated by the humans.

Nathan slumped to the floor overwhelmed with confusion. Garrett walked away. There was nothing more he could say or do for Nathan. Nathan had to come to his own understanding of this. Nathan had to accept that this is what they are and what he is.

But this was not the only horror that was unfolding while the others slept. Unbeknownst to all of them, while Garrett and Charisa were trying to help Nathan with this final struggle, another ever greater threat was quickly descending on them.

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Pearson was coming. The vampire Pearson that Nathan met only briefly at Garrett’s during their visit to Vancouver, the one he did not care for and the one that brought back Nypers to confront them about the missing Mary. The Pearson that Nathan saw in his dream standing over Ava’s dead body.

Pearson being at Garrett’s that now long ago night was no coincidence. That evening when he met Nathan, he was not there just for social pleasantries. He had encountered a group of vampires looking

for their lost friend and who was last known to be travelling with Martin and Lisella. When he realized that Martin and Lisella were at Garrett's he only went to talk to them. He really didn't care at that point about this Mary. But when he first met Nathan, there was something different about him that made him extremely uncomfortable; he was not like the other vampires. Pearson knew the missing Mary was somehow related to him. He left immediately to find the others and telling them where Martin and Lisella were, gladly took them there. He had hoped to somehow trip them up and reveal something about this 'Newling'.

Then when the explanations given about Mary's demise were accepted he was not happy about it and did not believe it. But a Pire of Enale's standing was not to be disrespected and not questioned on what or why he did something, especially by a group of Nypers as young as they were. He knew they were holding something back and he was determined to find out what it was. Pearson immediately began his own investigation into Nathan. He began asking around and gathering as much information as he could and started his own surveillance of Nathan and the others. He followed the group of young Pires to the bar one night keeping well hidden from them. He overheard a human female talking to Nathan and the comment that they dated three years ago. This of course could not be possible for a Newling that had only just left its Sanctuary less than two years ago and was still being mentored by Enale and Ava.

Upon hearing this, Pearson knew why Nathan was different and what he first suspected was confirmed. There was no doubt in his mind what Nathan was and unlike the others, he would not suffer a half-blood to live. He would end this atrocity and make certain all those involved paid for breaking a death law regardless of their status in Pire society.

He followed them home when they left the city, always watching and ready for the right moment to act. He watched each time Nathan went hunting; who he was with, how often, and where they went. Ava was never far from him and the rare times he went hunting without her, he was never gone long, anxious to get back to her. It did not take him long to see that Ava stopped coming and seeing the change in Nathan he quickly surmised that she slept. Then a few weeks later Garrett and Charisa are there but no sign of the others. That meant they all slept. Pearson was no fool. He might be in his right to exact justice on those that broke a death law but these Pires were not to be trifled with. One alone was formidable; all of them together were an army that one vampire alone could not possibly stand against.

But as was his way, he planned carefully. He knew he would need help and it was not hard to recruit others to his cause. He shared a like-mindedness with Nypers and their disdain of humans was all that was needed for him to gain their aid and support. The others would have cringed if they had known exactly how many prowled the surrounding area. He made sure they stayed far enough away as to not expose themselves. He hadn't counted on Garrett and Nathan travelling to hunt as far away as they did. But still they did not catch on. Luckily they never saw Pearson or it might have been different. He could not afford to wait any longer. Who knew how long they would all sleep? He had to move now.

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Nathan sat staring at the painting. This did not make sense. Five hundred years ago – this was Ava, five hundred years ago? *“So how long do you live for?” “Long enough as to appear forever.”* Those long ago words echoed in his memory. She was at least five hundred years old and Enale was even older than her, and Serille, and Delonde older still. Humans lived on average eighty years at most. How much time did he have with her before he became old and died? Certainly not five hundred years! He looked at the figure that was Ava. She was young and beautiful and had wings of

gossamer; wings as big as she was. “So like, how do you know when you’re grown up?” “Our wings fall off.” He wondered even then if she was joking. Then he looked at the winged gargoyles. They were ugly with razor sharp teeth and large leathery wings. There was one with its tongue sticking out, split at its tip. “Let me split your tongue and you can make that sound. It would only be at the tip and would quickly heal.” Martin had said, again wondering even then if he was joking. He realized there had been other hints and innuendos alluding to vampire children, none of which he picked up on. Then he remembered the conversation with Lisella; too late understanding that she too was trying to lead him to ask long unasked questions.

This was all so surreal! He didn’t belong here, he wasn’t one of them! He leaned his head back, resting it against the table he sat in front of. So if not vampire, then what; human? It’s not that his life as a human had been all that great. He always knew he was different, he never felt like he belonged. Hell, his own mother must have known this and threw him away as soon as he was born!

He looked at the ceiling and muttered what now? He had never felt so horrible in all his life! He hung his head, a single tear fell from his eye.

For everything he had learned he now felt he was missing so much more that he would never understand about vampires, about humans, about himself.

There comes a time in everyone’s life when we must confront our nightmares. We can no longer run away; no longer hide. Nathan had to return to the dream world. He had to understand his nightmares. He had to face the monsters.

Nathan fell asleep and once again entered his dream world.

If he thought his other dreams couldn’t get any worse, he was wrong. It was horrible enough experiencing events all over again that he had just lived through now he experienced not only the memories of others, but their emotions as well. He felt each joy and sorrow, each fear, each heartache.

*He was standing on a dirt road watching a person walking ahead. It was dark and the bent figure carried a torch to light the way. Suddenly something jumped out and knocked the person to the ground, their torch falling and its flame extinguished. Then other people came with more torches and shined it on the figure dead on the ground, a pool of blood around his head and two puncture wounds on his neck. He wanted to call out and warn them there were vampires about, but it was too late as the others were attacked in the same manner and within a few moments lay dead drained of their blood. He felt the fear of the humans and the hunger of the vampires.*

*Then he was in a room full of people arguing and fighting, women were weeping, children crying. “We must kill them before they kill all of us!” one of them cried, and the others cheered agreement. “First we must find them and there is no use hunting in the night – they are monsters and night belongs to them! We will hunt them in the day when it is easier to kill them.” It’s daytime and an angry mob carrying weapons and fire moves towards a home in the woods. He wants to warn those inside that humans are coming, but it is too late as some rush in and screams are heard and those outside set the house ablaze killing everyone inside. He felt the agony of all those within as they died.*

*Another dream; a group of rogue Pires attacked an isolated farm house killing the young couple as their child cowered in the corner; he felt the child’s terror. Then a vampire came for the child but another Pire stepped in “No” he cried with such ferocity the other vampire fell to his knees. “Never feed on a child!” and turning to the little boy he leaned in and*

*breathed the black breath into his face and the child fell into a nightmare filled sleep. Picking him up the vampire carried him out ordering the others to set the house ablaze. He carried the child to the nearest farm house and laid him on the steps, he pounded only once on the door; the sound reverberated through the woods. He went only so far as not to be seen and watched until those inside heeded the knock and took the child in.*

Scene after scene plays before him. Humans killing vampires, vampires killing humans in endless conflict; wars, burnings, torture, hatred, fear. The humans are only trying to protect themselves; the vampires are only trying to survive. He felt the victory and defeat of all.

Then vampires learn how to hide, they try not to kill but learn how to cover it up when they do. They become legends to the humans. They are make-believe. They are not real. It is better that way.

*Now another scene; he sees a figure standing there. It is a Monev like him! Then he sees the rest of the scene. He sees the human corpses strewn about and blood splattered everywhere. He feels the uncontrollable urge that compelled the Monev to do this. The vampires kill the Monev; they have to, he is a monster.*

*Another scene; another Monev silently creeping down a darkened alleyway in the middle of the night. He leads humans to the home of vampires and they rush in and slaughter those within. He feels the hatred toward vampires felt by this Monev; they made him what he was. They were responsible for his misery and they would pay. Then the humans learn what he is. The humans kill the Monev; they have to, he is a monster.*

*Another Monev, another betrayal and whether to human or vampire, the result is the same; the Monev dies and he feels each death.*

*Another Monev, a female, only she is different, she is much like the vampires, in fact no one knows otherwise except those that are closest to her. Her life as vampire quickly unfolds and she, like him, experiences the challenges to her human half and the angst of adapting to vampire life. And then he sees her all alone in a dark room, crying. Consumed by loneliness because she was not like the others and no one understood. No longer human and never completely vampire; she was a monster no matter which world she walked in. There was no one else like her, she was all alone. He wanted to cry out to her that she wasn't alone, he was like her, he understood! She raises her head and it's as if she is looking at him as she whispers "I'm sorry, I can't live like this." He feels her anguish as she puts a gun to her head and pulls the trigger.*

What he perceived as his entire vampire existence unravelled in front of him and he couldn't help but wonder why he was ever born.

*Another scene; he sees a young women kneeling on the ground clutching her round belly, clearly in pain as she gives birth to a baby. She quickly cuts and ties the cord, and wraps the infant in her sweater and picking it up, tries to run again. He can feel her utter fear, not only for her own life, but for that of the infant in her arms and the one still to come. They are coming after her and she knows they will not suffer her or the babes to live. She has no time – she must save the baby! She is in a back alley and sees a box and kissing the babe whispers 'I will always love you' as she places the newborn into it. Closing the flap she takes it to the garbage bin and gently sets it inside. She tries to flee because they are coming and once again she falls to her knees as another contraction hits. The twin is coming but it is too late, they found her. The Nypers kill her and the yet unborn child. Thinking they are done they*

*take the body away to dispose of it where it will never be found. The last Pire in the group pauses and listens thinking he heard a noise and turns toward the dumpster. He begins to walk to where the baby is but just before reaching it there is a call from one of the other Pires and he leaves.*

With a heartbreaking realization, Nathan knows the woman was his mother and he is the infant in the box that was later found by a homeless guy. A lifetime spent thinking that his own mother thought him no better than trash was in fact her trying to save him. He was now part of those that murdered his mother and his twin.

What he perceived as his entire human existence unravelled in front of him.

He wants this to stop, he wants to wake up, but it doesn't stop, he can't wake up.

*He is now a boy and he knows he is different but when he tries to talk to his brother about it he teases him and tells him he's stupid and his parents tolerate his behaviour at first but then start to tell him it's time to grow up and stop living in a fantasy world. A fantasy world filled with dreams of winged gargoyles, and fairies, and vampires.*

*He relives those moments that defined him as vampire; the many times he snuck raw meat to eat, that he could see better in the dark than his brother, that he could hear his parents speak even when they were downstairs whispering, the teeth that cut his tongue. All these pushed deep into his psyche as they weren't normal and he knew that people that weren't normal were taken away and he didn't want to be taken away.*

*He's growing up he sees time and time again his brother get sick with colds and flus and measles and mumps; he breaks his arm in grade school, his leg in high school. His parents get sick; his father dies of cancer, his mother, heart disease. But Nathan never gets sick, never breaks a bone, never has a cavity.*

*He grows up, he's in high school, he goes to a bush party with his friends and he sees a vampire. No one else saw the vampire, only him. He hates vampires! They killed his mother; they are monsters that kill humans.*

*He drifts through the next few years; he relives the encounters with the other vampires until he is at the time when he meets Ava.*

*Ava.*

*From the moment he saw her he loved her though he never told her that. He knew she was going to bite him and he tried to tell her not to but she didn't listen! He is groggy after the kiss and feels as she bites and watches as she got very, very sick and collapses on the kitchen floor and he carried her to bed. Gently laying her down, he cradled her head and stroked her hair and whispered 'please don't die' though he didn't know why it mattered so much.*

*She lived, and not only did she live, she began to tell him all about vampires. Things he never imagined to be so. Then she took him to meet Enale. Then Martin and Lisella and Mary came. Mary – a Nyper, though he didn't know it then. Just like he didn't know what would happen when she followed him upstairs intending only to feed. The pain was excruciating! And he wakes up to a new world where he is no longer a human in a vampire world, but a vampire in a Pire world. The others are kind to him. They help him and teach him.*

He flashes through every event with them and he recognized each turning point; each time, when his own life was in danger should he betray the Pires.

So this was his life; always at risk of death for being too human?

Then he dreamed the dream that haunted him the most; the dream about the painting that he was now slumped before. The dream where he watched the scene of carnage play over and over again. Only this time it was worse; this time he touched on the memory of one of them. This time he was the Tender.

*He watches as the enemy advances and cheers as humans are ripped apart by the Guardians, but all too soon there are less and less vampires until there are only two and the humans swarm and kill them and they start attacking the babies and it is as if his very heart is being torn out watching them die. He fights – oh, how he fights! Fifty humans fall before him in a bloody heap within a matter of minutes, but there are too many enemies and too few of them.*

*And he does what he has never done before; what he thought he would never have to do – what no vampire ever wanted to have to do. A sound so heinous emanates from him that every human still alive within the Sanctuary is rendered deaf as eardrums burst in a gush of blood. A sound so hideous, it makes others that are still outside fall to their knees quivering in fear. A sound so vile, people miles away weep upon hearing it.*

*It is a final battle cry and though it sounds as only one noise, it conveys a message that is heard by every vampire still alive including those that are still days away trying to reach them.*

*The brood has fallen, the battle is lost. The babes that are still alive are ordered to flee and hide until they are found by adults. Vampires still alive outside are ordered to find the children and save all they can.*

*The call continues until he knows that all that can leave are gone and all that can hear, heard. Only then does he stop. For the humans that thought this was the worst part; they are dead wrong. His wrath is unstoppable. He tears his way through the humans but they are relentless in their attack against him. His last vision of this life is the humans standing over his limbless body as they finally manage to sever his head from his body.*

Darkness then and then...it was yet another's memories he sees. It was Ava's memories.

*She's a child playing and jumping and flying about the castle, chasing and being chased. She is happy and content. Then the sleeping time comes and she wraps her wings about her like a cocoon and when she wakes, she is different. Her wings were softer and translucent; she cannot fly as high or as long as she could before and this makes her sad. But what she lost is replaced by new and wonderful things. She is learning more and she is allowed to go outside. Only for a little bit, only on the darkest night, only with a Guardian. It is beautiful seeing the sky and seeing a world beyond the stone enclosure that is her home. Someday, she will change once again and will go permanently to this outside world. First, she has much to learn. She is learning lots and playing lots with the younger children. She helps with the younger children's care. She especially likes the babies. She tosses them into the air and watches as they fly about and she laughs as they laugh! One day Keepers bring a female and she stays until the time her baby is born. All the Pires watch. At first it looks like an egg with a soft membrane shell. One of the children moves towards it but Tender makes a hiss sound and holds up its hand. "It must not be touched yet." Then slight bulges begin to appear at*

various spots, something is moving inside. Everyone watches, mesmerized by the scene. Down the length of the egg two ridges are visible and these slowly begin to separate. The egg is opening. Slowly the gap spreads wider until finally it opens completely. The egg is the babe's wings and as they spread open it reveals the newborn vampire. The wings that encapsulated it are larger than the rest of its body. Its skin is dark grey, its arms and legs skinny sticks, its fingers and toes webbed ending in tiny little claws; its limbs begin to flay about. It has a rounded head with a flattened nose and wide mouth that opens revealing pointed teeth. Then the eyes open and the group gaze upon it with wonderment. They are blood red and fill half of its face. The baby is beautiful! It lets out a high pitched squeal; it is crying and Tender picks it up.

Tender makes a clicking sound and they all repeat it; they are saying hello. The babe mimics it; it is saying hello back and everyone smiles and cheers. Joy, pride, and love fill each of them as a new one joins them!

Ava is very happy and content.

Then one day it changes.

Lots of adults come and she along with the other children are sent to the very back of the castle that is built into the mountain side. Tender and some of the other Guardians wait with them. They hear noises outside and Ava and the children are frightened. Something very bad is happening. The noise is getting closer and closer and Tender changes; no longer the nurturer, now the protector and it is terrifying to see!

Blows on the other side of the door reverberate through the chamber they are now in. Ava is near the back with two younger children and a Guardian. The blows became louder, then a loud crack. The door breaks open. The Guardians standing there immediately attack those on the other side. Bodies of the intruders are flung about then two of the Guardians fall and then more of the intruders come in. 'Who are they' cries out Ava to the Guardian closest to her 'They are humans' she says. Ava didn't know humans could do that. Despite the number of humans that were killed by Guardians, more kept coming until the last Guardian falls. Then she watches as the babies she helped care for are slaughtered before her eyes and her heart is broken witnessing this and helpless to stop it! Then Tender cries out and she trembles in fear moving only because Guardian is ordering her to follow her! She grabs hold of two children and pushes them ahead of her. Turning one last time, she sees Tender standing on a heap of human carcasses while being swarmed by even more humans; all the others are dead. She runs, following the rest, she can see light at the end of the darkened causeway. She has been outside only briefly herself, the children never. The Guardian Pire is first to reach outside and when Ava and the children come out they are faced with yet another horror. Humans are swarming the Guardian and she cries out to them to run and they do, but to Ava's dismay the children run in different directions! So frightened and confused they don't know better. She calls out to them and screams as one child is swarmed by another group of humans and she makes a devastating choice and runs after the other child leaving that one to its gruesome fate! Then she herself is rushed by humans and in sheer panic she fights and destroys those around her. She runs to find the other child but is too late as she watches this child suffer the same fate as the first.

Ava runs, all alone with no idea of where to go. She is tired and scared and soon it will be

daylight. Then someone grabs her and she tries to fight but can't get away. A voice says "It's ok! You are safe." And she knows it is an adult and she cries in relief and collapses in his arms and he carries her away. It is Enale and he takes care of her.

This is why Ava has little to do with humans; they are monsters to her.

Ava's growing up. Enale never leaves her side. Where he goes she goes; she becomes his shadow. He teaches her the rest of the things that she has not had the chance to learn. Then one day the sleep time comes again and she again wraps her wings around herself like a cocoon. When she wakes her wings are gone. She is a Newling. Enale is the first one she sees and she smiles seeing the look of relief on his face. Father.

She is grown up now but still has lots to learn. She doesn't want to be around humans but she has to eat and though at first she doesn't understand why she just can't kill them, Enale teaches her the how and why of humans. They need humans to survive and the more they kill, the more they are killed by them. They are legends in the human world. Make-believe, not real.

Years pass and Enale fears that Ava may become nothing more than a Nyper and forces her to interact in the human world. She resists at first; hates it, fears it. But she is getting older and wiser and soon is able to move about the human world.

Then another Newling comes to be taught by Enale. Garrett. She is absolutely delighted with him and helps Enale take care of him. They spend a lot of time together and once he becomes a full adult they travel together. Friend.

More came but she spends more time away from Enale. Then one day she returns to Enale and Martin comes and she is absolutely delighted with him! She stays with Enale and as with Garrett, helps teach him things. And once he becomes a full adult they travel together. Brother.

Then more years pass and once again Ava returns to Enale and Lisella comes. Like with Martin, she is absolutely delighted by her! She stays with Enale and as with Garrett and Martin, helps teach her things. And once she becomes a full adult they travel together. Sister.

Ava is getting older now; the human world is changing so quickly. There are far more humans than vampires. Though she lives among the humans, she never associates with them beyond what is necessary and everyone accepts this of her.

Then one night she meets Nathan. She takes him to her den intending only to feed; she isn't that hungry but better to eat in times of feast for famine always followed. They have sex, and it is great! Then she leans in to kiss him one more time so she can feed. She hears him say "No wait" but it's too late. Luckily she doesn't swallow his poisonous blood though she is very, very sick.

She almost dies because of him. She should kill him. She doesn't. She was absolutely fascinated by him. She breaks Pire death law. She takes him to Enale putting all their lives in danger. Then Martin and Lisella come with Mary. Mary is a Nyper. Mary attacks her Nathan and as he lay dying she holds his hand, heartbroken believing he is going to die. And the others come and she says "If you have come to kill him, I doubt that will be necessary for he is dying. If you have come to kill me, I only ask that you wait until he goes; I will not fight

*you, just take me quickly so I may follow him.” Soulmate.*

Just as Ava never knew that Nathan picked her up and carried her to bed and cradled her head, whispering to her not die; so did he not know that Ava wanted to die should he himself die.

He wants desperately to wake up, but not yet. He hears Lisella telling him about vampire dreams. He’s having a vampire dream! He’s touching on the vampire conscious and there is still more!

*He is at the house and he sees Enale with Serille and Delonde and they confront him about Nathan and tell Enale “There is only one blood-brood left.” Then he hears Delonde speak “The irony of our existence; a Monev is death to a single Pire yet they may hold the key to saving our entire species.”*

And Nathan knew why he existed. He knew why he was vampire. He knew why he was human. But there is still one more dream he needs to dream.

*Now it’s him again and the next few years flash by, the time spent with Ava, Enale, Martin, and Lisella. This was the best time of his life. He had never felt as close to others especially Ava. Enale, who was more like a father to him than his own had been. Martin who became his best friend and Lisella became a sister. They were his life and he couldn’t imagine not being a part of that. And he felt love.*

*Then they go to meet other Pires. Garrett and Charisa; new friends. Then he’s hunting with others and everything is going well until someone calls his name and he’s horrified to see an ex-girlfriend from his human past, then Martin is there and suddenly things seemed to stop. Lisella was beside him ready to lead him away, but wait! He turns and like the tide pulling back from the shore, the people about move away and he sees Pearson. And suddenly he understands. Pearson heard! Pearson knows what he is and he is not going to tolerate this atrocity! He will make sure that Nathan is dealt with, and that everyone that suffered him to live will pay for breaking vampire law regardless their standing in Pire society. Everyone is asleep; they are all at their most vulnerable time!*

He learned what he needed to know. He knows that his mother really did love him and gave up her life to save his. He knows why humans hunted vampires he knows why vampires killed humans. He knows they were not monsters; he is not a monster. He knows that he is vampire and human. He knows the Pires that are now his family and friends. He knows that Ava feels for him as he feels for her and he knows what he must do and he wakes up.

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While Nathan dreamed and Garrett and Charisa waited to see what he would do and for the others to wake, they came.

As soon as Garrett saw Pearson with the Nypers he understood everything. He did not know how Pearson found out about Nathan but he had and he knew everyone involved. The lair party was no coincidence; it was a cover to bring the Nypers closer. He knew Pearson had been waiting for just the right opportunity. He suddenly understood that everyone sleeping at the same time was not the coincidence they first thought it was either. Nothing ever was with Pearson.

Garrett and Charisa were outraged and if Pearson thought they would go down without a fight – he was wrong! But before either one could make a move they were surrounded by Nypers and...

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Ava woke up. She was surprised as she remembered coming upstairs to sit with Nathan while he slept and like she often did, laid down beside him and fell asleep! She smiled remembering her

dreams. The first was Nathan calling her. She knew he was looking for her and couldn't see her and she laughed at him. He was so worried! She was alright and finally she called to him and told him she was ok and would be home soon. The last dream was of the first night they met only she saw it through Nathan's memory! She watches as he cradles her head and whispered into her ear asking her to please not die!

She smiles and as she always does when Nathan is away from her, she focuses on him until she knows where he is. But she can't find him and is suddenly overwhelmed with a feeling of dread. She immediately ran downstairs but instead of finding Nathan and the others, it was Garrett and Charisa surrounded by Nypers and the vampire Pearson.

With sickening realization she knew what was happening. They had been found out. But where were the others? Surely they weren't gone? Where was her Nathan? There was only one place he could be. He would have been the first they killed. Frantic she tried to speak but before any words could be said Nypers grabbed her and forced her to her knees. Pearson was speaking in a loud voice, declaring her crime of allowing a Monev to live and teaching him about vampires and that having broken a death law, her own life was now forfeit. Towering over her, he raised his hand ready to deliver a death blow when suddenly there was a horrific crash and a figure leapt over Ava's kneeling form and crashed into Pearson. Everyone looked on in shocked disbelief – it was Nathan and he had gone into Frenzy!

Both figures crashed on top of a large wooden table that sat in the middle of the room, breaking it in half. Pearson instantly went into Frenzy and was first on his feet before Nathan. He pounced on Nathan who rolled away just in time as Pearson's hand came down with such force that his now elongated, razor sharp nails dug deep into the floor where Nathan had lain but a second ago. Before he could extract his embedded hand, Nathan managed to get up and kicked Pearson in the mid-section. A kick like that would have killed a human; Pearson barely felt it. He quickly freed himself, grabbed Nathan and threw him into a bookcase shattering it and causing all the books to become airborne. Though the impact knocked the wind out of Nathan he recovered quickly and was able to step aside as Pearson charged him. Nathan then grabbed Pearson from behind and hurled him into the wall where the now shattered bookcase had stood. Running after him, he jumped on top of Pearson's fallen form and tried to rip out his throat remembering what Martin had taught him, but Pearson protected himself well.

Pearson was able to get his legs up underneath Nathan and kicked him back across the room and as Nathan just tried to do with him, he was now on top of Nathan trying to rip his heart out. Nathan was able to defend himself and get out from beneath Pearson.

None of the others interfered as the two vampires battled each other. Anyone that dared to obstruct them now would be perceived by both as an enemy and as they were not in Frenzy, would easily be killed by them.

Pearson slashed Nathan across the face; Nathan slashed him across his legs. Each delivered brutal blows to the other but still neither was able to gain the upper hand. Nathan however was beginning to lose momentum. He lacked the same strength as Pearson and had to make up for this in agility. This exerted a great deal of energy and put him in a position where he was defending himself more than he was attacking and in the end, agility alone was not enough. He was still too new a vampire. He simply did not have the strength and experience that Pearson had and when Pearson grabbed him and smashed him into a marble table with such force the stone shattered, it was more than he could bear.

Nathan felt nothing more as he surrendered to the darkness. There was only victory or death; victory was not his.

Pearson was once again in position to deliver a death blow only this time to Nathan. Towering over him, he raised his hand when suddenly another vampire in Frenzy leapt over Nathans prone form and crashed into Pearson. This time however, Pearson was dead before his body hit the ground, his heart ripped from his chest. This vampire was older and stronger and far more experienced then Pearson could ever hope to be and for the Nypers that still remained; the last thing they saw was the most powerful vampire of their time before they too were dealt their own death blows.

Enale stood in victory over the dead vampires. A Pire of Enale's stature was not challenged on how or why he did something. He was not disrespected and not disobeyed. He certainly would not tolerate any harm to his family especially in his own home!

Ava in the meantime scrambled to Nathan's body grabbing him, calling to him. The brief moment of joy at realizing he was still alive quickly vanished. She cradled his head and whispered in his ear "Please don't die."

*One more dream - would he ever be done dreaming? He hears a child's voice and he slowly opens his eyes. A little girl with rosy cheeks and black ringlets in her hair is laughing and running towards him holding a flower. "Look! Look!" she calls excitedly as her blood red eyes sparkle and her gossamer wings spread out behind her. "Look Daddy! Isn't it beautiful!" she exclaims as she hands him the flower.*

Nathan wakes up lying in Ava's arms and smiles at her. She hugs him laughing and crying in absolute relief. Nathan then sees Garrett and Charisa standing there smiling at him. He sees all the dead vampires and finally sees Enale still in Frenzy, though no longer fighting. There really was more to Enale than he first believed and he knew he wanted to spend a lot more time with him. Sitting up he looked around and said "Martin is going to be super pissed when he wakes up and finds out he missed this!" Everyone laughed.

~\*~

And so vampire and human enter into a new nightmare. No longer a half-blood, Nathan is an entirely new blood.

\*\*\*\*\*

### [Author's Note](#)

Merry Go Round is based on the very first nightmare I remember having as child. I was about 4 years old. I went to the fair with my family; Mom said we weren't allowed on the merry-go-round, I went on it and everything around me disappeared. I was surrounded by a dark nothingness and all I could hear was a man laughing as I went round and round all alone.

Mr. Wincottes Grave evolved from a nighmare I had as a teenager. I leaned against a grassy bank and all of sudden I was being pulled back into the ground and kept falling backward trying to grab hold of something to break my fall but there was nothing there.

Bloody Day is revenge for every female's nightmare of being alone in an isloated park.

Cruel World - I really don't know what inspired that.

His Darkest Moment, I won't tell what inspired that.

Hour Glass came about when my nightmares could no longer be contained in my sleeping and began haunting my waking.

Monev began as a simple, short vampire story. One thing led to another and it began to take on a life of its own. The story then went through a major re-write as the original story line didn't fit with the characters. There are still things I simply could not work into this story such as why vampires don't feed off of children and despite Pire children being protected by all, they do not hesitate to destroy a half-blood infant.

There are still more stories to tell as well. There is Enale, who is the most powerful Pire of modern day though he himself does not know this. Pearson, who was not like other vampires is his own story that may be worth telling. And what of Nathan, the 'new-blood'? There is far more to him than any of the others ever imagined.

And yes, Martin really is pissed he missed the battle with Pearson and the Nypers! And not to forget Ava, Lisella, Garrett, and Charisa and the little girl with black hair, blood red red eyes, and gossamer wings....