

# ~ The Secret History of Vampires ~

by Zee and Windstar

Ah the disclaimer -

This is the part where we warn you were this story may not be suitable for those under 18. Also we tell you there's blood, violence and sex. I'm not sure whose fault this story is, probably mine. We hope you enjoy our Halloween offering this year. Although I think, yet again, that the word Halloween never appears, we'll try and work on that for next year. This story is also very loosely, very loosely, a prequel to Chance. It takes place in the same universe as Chance did but centuries in the past.

Thank you to our beta reader Stacy.

Enjoy and remember to send feedback to [Zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:Zeeamy@gmail.com) and [Adarkbow@yahoo.com](mailto:Adarkbow@yahoo.com)

She hated the winter, the constant cold that seeped into her bones no matter where she was. When she'd been younger, she'd loved the first snowfall. It transformed the city into a beautiful play land for children. She'd never really understood why her father hadn't liked that first sign of winter's coming. Now, now she fully understood that slightly worried look that had always come to her father's eyes when the snows' started. The worry that there wouldn't be enough money to keep the heat on, the all too real fear that they might not make it through the winter.

A bitter wind ruffled the long black great coat that she'd gotten from some army surplus store and the red haired woman shivered, moving faster. It wasn't that far now, just a few more blocks from her job at one of the factories to the room she rented out at the boarding house.

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Alexei strode down the street as if she owned it, and she did. Her factories that pumped smog and pollution into the winter gray skies, provided jobs for people, and kept the armies supplied with weapons. The factories kept the already short days shorter with smog blocking the sun but nobody questioned that.

She walked with purpose and people scrambled to get out of her way. Her black polished shoes slamming into the gray slush on the sidewalks. She stood out with her tailored slacks and shirt, the long wool coat and sunglasses all screamed money. There was a problem, she hated problems as a rule, but this was a huge problem the kind of problem she probably couldn't make go away with money, the kind of problem that could cause a witch-hunt.

She crossed a street glaring as a horse drawn carriage nearly failed to stop in time. Her stride didn't slow she merely turned her head and glared at the horse and the animal began to panic and buck. Alexei finished her way across the street with out any other problems.

Head ducked down, hunched into her coat, trying to hurry through the cold, Katiya's eyes were watering from the cold as she turned the last corner. She was nearly there; so close she wasn't paying attention as she tried to hurry the last of the way. The gas lamps barely lit the area and she navigated the streets by memory alone.

Alexei pushed an old man out of her way and then slammed into something. Surprised she paused and looked down at the woman sprawled in the slush. No wonder humans were where they were in the food chain; they had no sense at all.

With a shriek of surprise, Katiya slammed into something that felt like a rock wall. She bounced backwards, sliding to a stop in the slush, staring up at the slim form she'd bounced off of. "S-sorry!" A gust of wind whipped up the snow and she squinted into the sudden flurry, not able to see who it was she'd hit. "I wasn't looking." She started to get up, grimacing at the wet slush that she was covered in.

In an unconscious gesture the still standing woman ran a hand through her blonde curly hair and sighed. "You might survive longer if you watched where you were going."

"Sorry." Katiya gulped, taking in the exquisite tailoring and obviously cultured Russian voice. She scrambled upright, dripping slush and shivering. "I'll be more careful." She mumbled, feeling her cheeks heating as they always did when she got upset.

Dark eyes behind sunglasses took her in: the second hand clothes, the dark circles under her eyes and the sunken in flesh, and dismissed her. "See that you do." Alexei snapped out, then without bothering to help the young woman in anyway stepped around her, continued down the street, and ducked down some alley.

Shivering from something more than just the cold, Katiya hurried to the simple boarding house and the kind of warm room that waited for her there. It was better than being out in the wind at least.

Alexei continued down the alley like a force of nature, never stopping. At the end of the alley was a hidden door as she reached it she lashed out with her foot smashing through the wards and wood. From her back she produced a gun. A gun filled with bullets melted down from a twice blessed cross.

She could have had anyone of her various thralls or minions do this but no, she had apparently been too hands off lately.

The inside was just as decrepit looking as the outside alleyway the door let in off of. Gas lamps fitfully lit the interior and its occupants. Humans, chained to the walls at regular intervals, some dead, some wishing they were, held where they were to be fed on.

A couple of vampires were still feeding, oblivious to Alexei's entrance or anything other

than the warm blood in front of them.

The door to the front of the place was still swinging back and forth, showing the rapid departure of someone who had been in the back with the meat a moment before.

Alexei raised the gun and fired at the vampires within sight. "Who the fuck told you, you could come here?" She growled out not really caring about an answer.

The head of the nearest one exploded outwards, drenching the homeless person he'd been feeding on in gore. The other one made it almost to the door before a bullet caught him in the spine and he dropped, legs twitching as he tried to claw his way to the door. None of the humans made a sound; they'd learned that to attract attention was to die long before now.

"Ahhh!" He screamed face coated with blood. "Who the hell are you?"

"I am the Angel of Death." She said with a sneer striding over to his crumpled form. "I rule here, and you are not my child." She brought up her knee then brought her foot down crushing his skull.

A door slammed shut somewhere further in the un-sanctioned blood bar as someone tried to get out as quickly as possible, which for a vampire could be very quickly indeed.

She turned with a frown and wiped her foot clean of blood and brain. Her body went still as she listened intently. Turning she fired a bullet piercing the wood of a door and killing the person hiding behind it.

A body with a chunk missing from its head slowly slid down and then slumped out of the hiding spot behind the door, blood pooling around it already. A few of the nearest humans tried to get as far away as their chains would let them.

Not hearing anything else and not caring about the ones that had gotten away she walked to the closest human studying her. The heartbeat was slow, death was coming for this one, and in a quick clean move she reached out snapping the woman's neck. Then she moved on to the next one.

In the end six she set free with growled warnings that if she caught word of this in gossip around the town she'd find them and kill them.

She moved around grabbing the gas lamps and ripping them off the wall, she could smell the gas pouring out into the room filling it. Blood houses were natural, vampires needed blood to feed, but too many deaths made humans nervous and scream for police action. Blood houses were run with willing humans who got paid very well. It was a win win for the vampires and humans. But, some vamps needed the thrill of the kill, for the reason that blood alone wasn't enough.

It didn't take long for gas to start filling up the room. Her dark eyes swept over the room checking for anything she'd missed. She didn't have any clue who was behind this, but perhaps this would be enough of a warning not to piss in her territory. She started towards the broken door. The gas was so thick in the room now it was muffling her senses.

That was a mistake she realized, as a light reflected off a piece of metal from the doorway. She didn't hear the click of the hammer but, she felt the first bullet as it hit her thigh. She fell, her eyes wide in surprise as her leg gave out under her weight, and the second bullet hit her in the abdomen spinning her slightly to the right. In shock she watched the blood, bubble and froth from her gut. How lazy she had become? To be taken out so easily by an assassin hiding in the shadows.

There was a brief flare as a match was struck against the brick of the doorway. A highlighted glimpse of dark skin and hair then the shocking revelation she was going to be in a fireball as she concluded what the match was for. She had been planning the same thing for this place; she just hadn't been planning to be inside when it happened. With a roar of pain that exposed long white canines in her mouth she forced herself to her legs and ran for the door.

Startled the match was hastily thrown into the gas filled room and the figure in the shadows was gone.

Alexei kept her eyes on the door as she pushed herself, hobbled by her wounded leg. Almost there as she felt as if all the oxygen was suddenly sucked out of the room and the last thing she remembered was whooshing noise as she was picked up and hurtled through the air. Her shoulder hit a doorjamb with a loud crunch and she tumbled head over feet into the cobbled ground of the alleyway.

Dazed she looked around not seeing anything. Idly her hand patted at the smoldering remains of her coat while she sat bleeding into the gray slush she had landed in. A ringing other than the ringing in her ears came to her attention and she recognized the sounds of the fire brigade. She attempted to stand and gave a scream of agony as her hand braced against the stonewall dug into the stone.

Blood dribbled down her legs, splashing into the gray and dirty snow disappearing into the filth of the alley. She was losing too much blood. Hunger rose up in her and she wasn't certain she would be able to make it home without feeding.

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Katiya was shivering violently as she hurried up the stairs to her room. The boarding house was just as dreary inside as it was outside, a place for single women to live that were without means or family to live somewhere else. Most of the other women worked as servants or scullery maids in the finer establishments up town. Katiya's evening shift

at the factory kept her off their schedule and she only knew the other girls by sight.

Sometimes she would nod hello to one as they passed, her arriving, them leaving, but that was it. Other than the curt dealings she had with Madame Oullette, the dower looking old maid who owned the house, she seldom talked to anyone. It seemed to her that she passed through this world like a ghost, mostly unseen and often unwanted by those around her.

"Katiya."

She froze in on the steps, swallowing before reluctantly turning to face the owner of that formidable sounding voice. Why couldn't she have remained a ghost for just a little longer?

"Good evening Madame Ouellette."

The old matriarch didn't look happy. She never looked happy as far as Katiya was aware. She'd often wondered if that was due to high tightly Madame Ouellette, who had no first name as far as Katiya knew, had her white hair pulled back into a bun.

"You are late on the boarding fee. Again."

That was true and Katiya winced.

"I'll have it to you by the end of the week. I'm earning more now on the night shift."

Madame Ouellette didn't seem encouraged by that. "I suggest you have it soon girl, or you will no longer have a room here. I'm doing you a favor by letting you stay here, remember that."

A favor, at a ridiculously high price for a room with crumbling plaster, but of course Katiya didn't say that. Instead she ducked her head, nodding. "Yes Madame."

"Good. Now, you have visitors."

Katiya's head shot up at that, blue eyes wide.

"What?"

"Visitors girl, you have them. The one said he was your brother."

"B-brother?"

"Stop babbling girl!" the matron glared at her until Katiya felt her cheeks go red with shame.

"Yes, your brother. I showed him up to your room. Perhaps he could help you cover your rent."

"Yes Madame."

"Good. I informed him that all visitors were required to leave before half an hour was up. He said that would be fine. I will be checking."

With that she turned and left Katiya, frozen, on the stairs, hand gripping the banister so hard her fingers were white. Brother? She had no brother, she had no family, not since the summer when her father

A vicious shake of the head dislodged that particular bad memory before it could start. A visitor, that couldn't be good.

She had made it three steps down the stairs when the door at the top opened and a voice straight from her nightmares called out. "Where you going Katiya? Aren't you coming to see your dear old brother?"

The redhead froze and her shiver wasn't from the cold this time.

"Katiya " when she didn't make any move to come up the stairs. "I'm waiting."

That did get her to turn and her legs mechanically got her moving up the stairs towards him. Ivan hadn't changed at all since the summer, his carefully manicured good looks, devastating smile and expensive clothes were all in force as he watched her climb the stairs towards him.

"Good girl, I would have hated to have to come get you." His fingers clenched around her arm and hauled her towards the room. A shadow inside detached itself from the wall, and Katiya shivered again as she recognized the hulking form that shadow belonged too.

"You remember Boris, don't you?"

She mumbled something that must have been an affirmative, since he shoved her ahead of him and closed the door behind them. Boris caught her, large thick fingers closing around her arm with the ease of someone who knew he could break her in half if he needed to, without breaking a sweat.

"You don't come around anymore Katiya, you hurt Boris's feelings. Ain't that right Boris?"

Boris grunted, his eyes leering down at her. She knew what he was thinking, the same thing he'd thought every time he'd seen her. It wasn't hard to guess by the way those eyes traced down her slim form.

"Boris missed your company and so did I."

"What do you want?" She was proud that it almost came out without a stutter.

"You owe me little Katiya."

"What?" She blinked, surprised. "I don't owe you anything!"

"Of course you do." He smiled. "Your father didn't finish his last job. That means you owe me what he couldn't get."

"But you were the one who wanted to do that job!"

He shrugged, elegantly as always. "Sins of the father and all that."

"I don't do that anymore." Hadn't since the disastrous days of the summer.

"Yes I can see your new legal ways are being good to you." His dark eyes roamed the crumbling plaster walls, sneering at the low class around him. "No matter, you have no choice."

"I won't do it."

"Won't?" He blinked, and then smiled, carefully trimmed mustache and long black hair framing a face that could go from warm to deadly. "Boris here was hoping you would refuse. Weren't you Boris?"

Boris grunted shoving Katiya into a wall and pinning her there with his body while his hands clumsily grabbed her.

"No!" She screamed then grunted in surprise as Ivan slapped her, hard.

"Shut up." He said, almost conversationally. "Now, you are going to get what I want, or your going to be Boris's play thing. Understand?"

She nodded, shivering as those large fingers fumbled at her.

"Good." Ivan smiled. "I knew you would see reason. You have until tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!"

He slapped her again. "What did I say about shutting up?"

When she stayed silent this time the dark haired man smiled again. "Good girl. I knew you could learn. Just like your dear old dad. Now, you have until tomorrow night. I would

get busy if I were you. Let her go Boris."

Boris leaned down, his breath stinking of tobacco as he growled. "You'll be mine soon enough." Then shoved her away into the wall.

"Bye Katiya, see you soon." Ivan said, not bothering to shut the door behind him as he and Boris left.

She stayed where she was, crumpled against the wall, staring at the empty door.

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Quickly, by human standards, slow by vampire ones Alexei limped out of the alley and down the street. The fire illuminated the sky behind her with flames and smoke. Frustrated, as she seemed to slow down with every step. She knew she needed to get off the street, somewhere safe and hidden, if any of her enemies saw her in such a weakened state it wouldn't end well.

Not far away from the alley way another shape slipped out of the back door of one of the boarding houses. The fire lighting a part of the sky was a pleasant diversion, maybe Katiya thought, the chaos she heard as people headed towards the fire, would help her stay hidden.

Gone was the sensible coat from earlier, instead she was dressed in dark gray and black clothes. The pants she wore, which would have caused a scandal if she were seen in them, were the least of her problems tonight. Red hair was bound up under a dark wool cap.

A couple of blocks later Alexei was weaving on the sidewalk. She wasn't going to make it home. Movement stopped and she looked around blinking. She took in the different buildings and settled on an old abandoned looking factory.

She moved into the building. Its dark windows looked down at her like a soulless corpse. The front door was locked and she moved around to the back.

Looking up she spotted a broken window. With a sigh she reached up and started to climb up the wall sliding through the window with a muffled scream of pain. She crawled forward before giving in to the urge to rest and heal.

On the other side of the same factory Katiya huddled in the deepest shadows she could find by a side door. The lockpicks were hidden in a pocket sewed in her pants. Sliding down a little she started to work on the ancient looking pad lock that was barring her entry.

Quickly she worked her way through the pins smiling in satisfaction as she heard the lock click open. "Thanks dad." she whispered, putting the pin away and pushing the



door open.

The place looked empty, which was good as far as Katiya was concerned. Softly she closed the door behind her and flittered from one shadow to another, intent on the rooms upstairs. The managers office would be there she figured and that would be where the safe was.

A group of people ran by outside and the redhead froze, eyes wide, breathing harsh as she waited for them to pass. When it was quiet once again she started up the stairs, easing her weight onto each one, careful not to make any more noise than necessary. Who knew if a night watchman might be sleeping in one of the rooms above?

The door to the office above opened and light from a lantern swept through the room stopping on the crumpled body.

"Private property. Go sleep it off elsewhere." The watchman muttered and with a sadistic grin stepped forward setting the light down and move over to the huddled figure.

"Can't say I didn't give you warning." He mumbled stepping forward and swinging a fist.

Alexei's dark eyes opened in shock and she growled lashing out, instinct taking over she tackled her attacker to the ground a loud crash echoing through the empty building.

Katiya froze, eyes straining against the darkness. She'd heard the crash at the top of the stairs she was on. Rats, maybe it was rats. Any other night and she would have just slipped away, but she didn't have that luxury tonight. Swallowing she slowly continued upwards.

The wounded woman's senses took in the scent of warm flesh and the sound of a frightened heart beating. Her knees pinned his arms like weights as she sat on his chest. Growling canines were exposed, one hand pushed his head to the side drawing his neck into a line. Gleaming white teeth tore into the flesh rearing back a huge chunk of skin, with it spraying blood that spurted with his beating heart.

She lowered her head again and drank, as she swallowed his blood the madness resided, the beast calmed and then disappeared, leaving her with human logic and a very dead body.

Reminding herself that she didn't have any choice, Katiya crept over the top of the stairs. Now, which one was the manager's office? She could do this quickly, she told herself over and over. There was a weak light coming from one of the end offices, so Katiya moved away from there, heading to the largest office in the middle. That should be it.

A quick jimmy and the locked door wasn't anymore. With a slow breath she edged inside, eyes lighting as she spotted the tell tale bulk of a large safe in the corner. There it was.

Alexei stood up ripping a portion of the dead mans shirt and wiped her face and hands. She was feeling better, not a hundred percent. "Fuck." She muttered not sure what to do with the body.

Kneeling down by the front of the safe door she stripped off her fingerless gloves and pressed her ear to the door. Listening intently she started to turn the number dial. The sound of a voice, female she thought, from down the hallway made her pause, then try to move faster.

Limping, Alexei made her way to the door. The bullets burned lodged inside her body, annoying her to no end. She lifted her tinted glasses up to rest on top of her head and looked at the body. Well it could be blamed on a wild dog she supposed. But it would be best to weight the body in a sheet or something and dump it in the river.

She opened the door and moved down the hall looking for stuff she could use. As she opened the forth door she was surprised to find a woman crouched next to a large rusted safe.

Shit. Her evening just couldn't go as she had planned.

"Yes." Katiya hissed, feeling the last of the tumblers click into place. Grabbing the lever she pulled down, unlocking the safe and the heavy door swung open. She stood up to look inside when she froze, staring at the shape in the doorway.

Damnit.

Then the shape registered in the dim light coming in through the windows and Katiya frowned. "You aren't the night watchman."

"No I'm certainly not. And you don't look like one either." Alexei responded.

There was, Katiya thought, something wrong about a person having such a melodic voice. She couldn't see the woman's face in the shadows, but if it was even close to the beauty of her voice, it was a crime. "The owner forgot the combination to the safe." She blindly reached behind her into the safe, grabbing a likely feeling velvet bag and palming it.

Alexei had to chuckle, since she had probably been the owner of this shithole several decades ago before she had moved the factories letting the humans take over these slums.

"Did they now?" She stepped into the room.

The sound of that low smoky chuckle was enough to distract Katiya for a fatal moment. She froze as she saw the dark streaks that covered a face that was otherwise perfect. The dim lighting turned golden hair into a pale white, almost as pale as the skin of the woman looking at her. Even the eyes were colorless, gray or pale enough to look gray in that lighting. She looked like one of those beautiful actresses in the black and white movies that played at the corner theaters. Everything was perfect, except for the dark liquid smeared across her mouth like a grotesque parody.

"Y-yesss..." Katiya gulped, eyes wide as she realized what that probably was. "I should be going. My friends are waiting outside. All of them." She babbled.

Alexei cocked her head for a moment. "There's no one here but you, me, and the dead watchman."

"He's dead?" Katiya swallowed, wondering why she hadn't fled yet, or started screaming. Something told her that she wouldn't make it very far if she did. "You umm have something on your mouth."

The elders had gotten it backwards she thought. They had strove to get them closer to God. In the end they had just made them animals, spun them farther away from the divine. "That would be blood."

"You probably should clean that up before you go outside." Katiya knew she was babbling, but she couldn't think of anything else to do, frozen where she was. "I'll just leave you to your... supper?"

Alexei stepped forward. "I have a need of you I think."

"What?" She pressed herself back against the safe, eyes wide and horrified. "You need a lock picked?" Please, oh please, she prayed, let it be something like that and not a more permanent need.

"A house broken into?" She pressed further back, trying to sink into the wall. "I could work in your factory?"

She was now firmly within the woman's personal space. Impressed, she never heard the woman's heartbeat pick up. She paused their bodies just touching, her eyebrow arched in question. "What an odd thing to say. Work in my factory?"

"My night job." Katiya smiled hopefully, shivering again as she got a better look at the other woman. Maybe the stories were right, vampires were ungodly beautiful. No regular person could look so perfect even with drying blood smeared across his or her chin. Despite the obvious danger or maybe because of it she wasn't sure which; Katiya could feel herself react to the closeness.

"You know me then? How unfortunate." She reached out grabbing the woman's hands pinning them to the wall. Oh yes the elders had made a race farther from God than man. She could hear the heart pick up its pace. Seduction, arousal was good for that, it made the blood sweeter, and Alexei preferred it that way. Others preferred their blood laced with torment, fear and death.

Inhaling she took in the smell of mortality that clung to all humans, the vibrancy of life that flashed like a shooting star burning out so quickly. She sank into the heated flesh. Once she had been like this, to long ago and that woman was gone, a memory, gone faded in time.

"Wait, we can work out a deal right?" She shivered, fear and arousal mixed in equal parts, and feelings that she'd never thought could be felt at one time. The hands holding her might as well have been iron for all the good her tugging did. Boris might have been three times the size of the woman holding her, but she had no doubt who would win in a fight. "I could help you."

She gasped at the sudden press of flesh on her neck. The vampire's lips were warmer than she'd expected and then she wasn't thinking about anything as sharp teeth nipped her flesh. The pain was gone almost quicker than she realized it was there to be replaced by a bliss that was all encompassing. Katiya wouldn't have left even if the statuesque blonde had let go of her arms, her mind simply shut down in response to the wonderful feelings. So this is what it's like to die, was her last coherent thought, it's not bad.

Probably because she had one body already to account for Alexei barely drained the woman at all. Stopping she licked the wound slowly until it healed. A thick knot of angry red scar tissue had formed after a moment and she stopped pulling back with a sigh. "Perhaps it's your lucky day." She said quietly a puzzled look on her face. She really had no need for any more pets, and to bring another one home would only cause strife in her house.

Blue eyes fluttered open, in a haze Katiya stared up at the face hovering over hers. When had she slumped to the ground she wondered, briefly and without much concern. "Who are you?" She tried to ask, but it came out garbled, her tongue feeling too big for her mouth.

Alexei frowned and laid the young woman down. She should just leave her, but then she had done the asinine thing of marking her neck. Now with her hunger truly sated and her wound healed she realized what a mess she had created.

Getting up she moved to the widow, ripped the curtains down, and took them to the other room. For better or worse she thought, as she wrapped the dead man in the heavy curtains the young thing was hers now.

The last few minutes had a dream like quality to them. Something awful had happened she was sure of it, but she didn't seem to feel upset about it. Shaking her head the

redhead stood up, gripping onto the edge of a desk as the room spun alarmingly around her. The light-headedness went away after a moment and Katiya stood upright.

"This is crazy." The black velvet bag was still in her hand, she should run for it, right now.

"What's crazy?" Alexei asked as she walked back in the room to check on the young woman.

"I'm going." There, that sounded reasonable enough. The room had stopped doing a dance around her; now it was just doing a little jig.

"Uh huh." The blonde remarked an amused quirk to her lips. Either the woman was in shock about what had just happened or she was very calm.

"Okay, good." Katiya blinked and then cautiously stepped away from the desk glad when the room didn't decide to do anything really odd like moving. "I'll just leave you to your... body." She was slowly backing away from the statuesque woman.

She had thought long and hard these past couple of minutes about what she was going to do with the woman. Despite what she was killing really wasn't her soul purpose for being.

"I hate to break it to you, but you belong to me now." In the blink of an eye she was standing next to Katiya.

That was far too quick a move for someone who had just donated blood and Katiya swayed dangerously. "I don't belong to anybody." Katiya let go of the stone hard arm she'd just grabbed onto to avoid dropping over.

Alexei reached out grabbing her. One hand pulled down the neck of the shirt she wore while the other hand reached out and gently stroked the new scar on the woman's neck. "Ah, this would beg otherwise."

The touch was electrifying and Katiya swooned a bit more, which was a first for her. "You bit me." The image was sharp again in her mind and she glared at the vampire.

"Yes, I'm sorry about that. Lucky for you the guard found me first, or you two might have swapped places. You saved my life tonight, something I'm sure you'll grow to regret if you don't already." She let go but stayed where she was.

"I need to go." Katiya protested.

"Ah mouse, my sneaky little mouse, do you think I remotely care what you need to do? I think I'm being generous since in reality you just broke into my building and my safe." She chuckled at the confused expression on the young woman's face. "I have always

owned the factories. I built them."

"But they've been here forever..." Katiya trailed off swallowing, as how very bad this was started to sink in.

"So my sneaky mouse I have a task for you, if you do it correctly and prove your worth I will let you live. For now I will even let you keep your life outside my world if that is what you want."

The redhead backed away, eyes wide as she tried, desperately to think of a way out of this. "I get to go free if I do your task?" She hoped.

"No, I'm sorry you can't ever be free with my mark upon your neck. But I'm willing to give you a bit of autonomy for now."

This was very bad. "What task?" Maybe she could figure out a way to escape later. Her father had always said she was a clever little girl.

Alexei's eyes grew hard. "Yes or no? Yes you do the task and go about your way until I have need of you again. Or no, and I take you with me to that lovely huge mansion on the mountainside and put a collar on you. Which is it?"

"The one that doesn't involve the collar." That sounded good.

"I knew you were a clever mouse." Thank goodness, Fiona would never let her hear the end of it if she brought home such a young piece of flesh. Then there was Molly and Shiro, she'd have to endure they're petty jealousies if she brought home another human pet.

"It's a simple task I need you to dispose of the guard's body. He can never be found and if he is found his killing can never be linked to a vampire." That word hung on the air, thick and heavy the first uttering of the truth of the matter.

"What?" She jerked. "A dead body?" That wasn't something she'd ever done before. She was pretty sure she wasn't going to be able to lift a dead person let alone dispose of it.

"Are you deaf?" Alexei frowned, maybe she should just kill her, and cull the weak from the herd.

"No." Katiya answered quickly. "I'll do it." She'd find a way, somehow. "Where is it?"

"Down the hall third door on the left." She stepped back and started to turn before turning back. "You saved my life, if you ever need something - other than your freedom from me- I'm sorry that's not something that can change. I will do what I can to grant it."

Then she did turn walking out of the room.

"Great." A vampire who owed her a favor. That didn't fill her with good feelings. Now to find out how to get rid of a body. Self-consciously she covered the red mark on her neck, tucked away the bag she'd come for and went to find the dead man.

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Dawn was creeping up on the city even if it couldn't be seen with the smoke and smog. Alexei couldn't have been more relieved as she finally made it home; her face sported various bruises, which were already starting to slowly heal.

The gate sensing her opened and the two large stone gargoyles seemed to follow her with hollow black eyes from where they sat on stone pillars framing the orientate metal gate. Quietly the gate closed behind her. She quickly traveled up the cobble stone driveway to the large wooden front doors, these too opened for her. This time however they opened due to a short squat man with the expression that he had smelled something awful affixed firmly to his features.

"Cutting it close My Lady." He said in way of greeting.

"Close I had hours yet until I was in any danger."

"Of course." He closed the door, "Shall I have a bath drawn for you?"

"Yes and send Fiona to my chambers." She saw it, the briefest chink in his armor exposed as he paused before turning around.

"Yes of course. I'll see to it right away."

"Oh and have her come up with the medical kit."

"Of course." This wasn't the first time and probably far from the last time for that.

Alexei made her way slowly up the stairs the bullets inside her refusing to heal up and small bullet hole wounds continued to weep blood. She stepped around a large Siberian tiger that lounged on the stair landing and then climbed over another who was lounging at the top of the stairs blocking the way. He merely opened an eye and closed it again.

Her rooms were at the end of the hall, a massive combination of study, bath, and bedroom. Already she could hear the groaning of the pipes and the sound of water filling up the tub. A mystery still how he always seemed to know what she needed before she said anything.

With a groan she shrugged out of her coat, there really wasn't much of it left now; with

an air of neglect she let it fall to the tiled floor. Limping she made her way to the bedroom the Italian marble giving way to plush red carpeting. One handed she undid her belt and the buttons of her slacks letting them fall down her legs and leave marks of her passing on the carpet. She made it to the bed sinking down into its pleasant plushness as the doors opened.

A short woman with dark wavy red hair came barging in. "Alexei? What have you gone and gotten yourself into now." She muttered.

"Over here." The blonde waved weakly from the bed.

Fiona was still as beautiful as the first time she'd seen her defiant and soaking wet from the sea wreck she had escaped on the rocky coastline. A whore, a slave, a woman kidnapped as plunder from the Emerald Isle's to the west by Viking raiders.

But nothing could escape the passage of time, and Fiona's hair was now starting to get laced with gray and more lines now graced her face.

Fiona sucked in a breath and muttered something in her native Gaelic. "What have you gone and done to yourself now." She settled on the bed next to Alexei opening up the medical bag. "I see the bullet hole in your thigh, the bruising on your face, and blood stain on your gut. Anything else I'm missing?"

The blonde raised her right hand showing the smashed and broken fingers.

"Ah love what am I going to do with you?" The redhead sighed and brought out some gauze and forceps.

"Love me despite the bastard I am."

Fiona chuckled and dug the forceps into the bloodied muscle of Alexei's thigh and rooted around for the bullet. "You're alive and that is blessing enough." She paused sniffing. "You killed tonight."

"Yes, I did. I murdered the dead and dying in an unauthorized blood house, I murdered an unfortunate soul who came upon me while I was trying to rest and heal."

The redhead nodded, "It's been a long time since you were the butcher of Budapest and the Tiger of the Steppes." She reached over smoothing back unruly curls. "I still remember you on the shore rising up and striking those raiders down like the God of Death himself. I remember wanting you to kill me wanting for death to claim me so I would never have to remember what I'd been through. Instead centuries later I find myself at your side." As she spoke she unbuttoned the tailored shirt spreading it open revealing a slim muscled torso and small firm breasts. "So tell me what really happened, I'm betting you didn't kill everyone at that blood bar. Your years as a blood sucking fiend from hell have made you oddly softhearted towards humans."



"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Uh huh." Fiona mumbled while she concentrated on removing the bullet from her Mistress's gut.

Alexei hissed and tore at the bed sheets as the bullet was extracted.

Fiona gently cleaned the wound it was already healing. "The hand will fix itself soon enough. Want to tell me who broke it? Its far more recent than the bullet holes."

"Karl." She said simply.

"Oh."

"Yes." Karl was her Lord even though she was probably far older than him. He wasn't her maker. No, her maker had come across her in tall grass while hunting for a snack. She had learned who she was by herself, it wasn't until nearly two decades later she'd met another like her.

"He was displeased?" The pet questioned.

"He disliked my lack of answers as to who would dare bring such a place here. I don't know yet who is making such waves."

Fiona nodded and started to pull the shirt off her mistress' body. Exposing a stylized tattoo of a serpent its tail started at Alexei's right wrist and wound its way up her arm, around her neck and ended at her knuckles. Fangs dipped down too so when she closed her hand into a fist it looked as if the snake might strike. A symbol of long life and wisdom her tribe's shaman had bestowed it on her after a dream. She was uncertain about the wisdom part but long life seemed accurate.

"Let's get you into the bath."

Alexei sat up and turned her attention to the dress Fiona wore her hand going to what seemed like a thousand small mother of pearl buttons. "Who ever decided these awful fashions were in style."

"Queen Victoria about a century ago. I would love it if a new style came into fashion but certain elements in the world seem to be fixated on the industrial revolution and refuse to let science progress any farther or the world for that matter." Fiona said with disdain knowing how the world of steam and mass production seemed to create a world in which the vampire thrived. The world no longer got up with the sun and went to bed when it was dark. Industry allowed for the world to keep moving long after the sun had gone down. Pollution kept the skies dark blocking out the sun.

"Yes well, some maybe frightened by certain theories coming out of the colleges of Science, and these same frightened vampire lords do their best to see that such voices are silenced." Alexei agreed then went back to undoing buttons. "Why don't we go enjoy a nice long hot, wet soak?" She frowned as her hands were stilled.

"Alexei there's something... well tomorrow..."

The blonde sighed and swallowed past the lump that formed in her throat. "Does this having something to do with the look Lyov gave me at the door when I mentioned your name? And why you smell of Warren my head cook?"

"Yes. Warren and I have been flirting and we've had some innocent lunches. I would never... you are the Master of the house. I've been thinking I'd like to have a family." She held her breath.

"But we're family."

"Alexei, you were what I needed centuries ago. I thank God you found me and gave me a second chance on life but I'm starting to age your blood can't hold off time for ever."

The vampire swallowed. "No. I could.... I would... for you I would."

She didn't say what it was but they both knew.

"Thank you but you know I've never wanted forever. I want kids and a family."

"You'll have to stop taking my blood. You'll go through withdrawal."

"I know and Warren knows. He plans to come in the morrow to speak with you about my hand in marriage. I expect you to be nice."

Alexei snorted. "I should give him a good thrashing for stealing my best girl."

Fiona snorted and slapped the blonde lightly. "You'll do no such thing."

"Fine, take my fun away." She couldn't imagine a life without Fiona in it, without her blood Fiona would start to age like any other human and then in the blink of an eye she'd be gone.

"Come then let us get clean, and spend one last night together." Fiona said with a wicked grin seeing her mistress's mood turn melancholy, and pulled her from the bed.

Later they were in bed Fiona's legs draped over Alexei's hips. Her red hair was unbound and Alexei's gray eyes watched in fascination as Fiona arched back, mouth open gasping for air, as her hair tumbled down her back in the shadowed confines of

her bedroom looking like spilled wine down the pale flesh of her back. Alexei savored the feeling of the swollen, hot wet flesh gripping tightly against her fingers.

As Fiona orgasmed, Alexei rose up leaving one hand still inside the spasming flesh while the other came up wrapping around the woman's back to prevent her from being thrown back. Her mouth lowered to Fiona's ample breasts, fangs exposed she nipped at the flesh making tiny cuts and quickly licking the blood away. A ritual they had shared before the British had formed an empire and this would be the last time. She studied Fiona's face as it melted into ecstasy but instead of pleasure she felt sadness.

As Fiona's orgasm subsided unthinking she reared up trying to bite Alexei's neck to complete the ritual they had shared, until tonight. Alexei reached up stopping her. "No more Fiona unless Warren is not what you really want."

This was her test; Fiona felt the need for Alexei's blood rise up. So long she had been a thrall, for a moment she wasn't certain she could resist. Then after a moment she gained control. "Thank you." She breathed, and stroked Alexei's blood warmed face.

The blonde looked away, "Warren's a lucky man."

Fiona's heart broke a little knowing she was hurting Alexei, they had been with each other for so long and now she was changing that. She was well aware how lucky she was; many a vampire would not let a thrall go like this.

"You're immortal Alexei; you'll find someone who wants that as well. Molly or Shiro, you know they want the complete ritual into everlasting life."

Alexei nodded, her two other pets weren't very discrete about their wants.

"I should go." Fiona said with one last kiss and slid out of the bed.

"I won't throw you and Warren out. You'll always have a place here."

The redhead smiled. "I never doubted it."

With Fiona gone her room seemed massive, huge, and empty. She could seek the warmth and attention of her other pets but she wasn't in the mood for it. Getting up she got dressed flexing her hand she was happy to see she was healed, if only on the outside.

She strode out of her rooms ignoring, beautiful Molly who lurked outside hoping to get her attention. Her long legs carried her down the stairs where she bellowed. "Get Warren up and his fat ass into the game room." The game room was an intimidating enough place with the trophies of her fallen enemies, she would see if Warren were man enough to deserve Fiona's love. Then perhaps she would spend some long hours in her office and factories that should shake things up and relieve her mind of the duty

of dwelling on her crappy home life.

#####

It was well past dawn by the time Katiya blearily returned to her room at the boarding house. She'd done what she could to hide the body, finding a sewer entrance that had been big enough to stuff it down. Hopefully it would find its way out to sea with the rest of the cities refuse.

It wasn't the first dead man she'd ever seen; you couldn't exist in the world she'd tried to leave without seeing more than you wanted to. Her Da had tried to shield her from the worst of it, but he couldn't be there all the time.

Sneaking up the back stairs of the house, Katiya slipped into her room, letting out a sigh of relief that no one had seen her. Being seen in her current clothes would have raised questions, even in this place. The room was just as she'd left it, right down to the cracking and peeling plaster on the walls. Right down to the loose board under the bed under which she placed her rolled up clothes and lock picks.

She didn't so much sleep as much as pass out, on top of the thin quilt that served as her covers. The redhead woke up far later than usual, so late that she had to scramble to get into her dress and down to the factory, wolfing down her food as she did.

The night shift was as dangerous as it always. Being tired working with the huge machines that turned out pots and pans for soldiers was just asking to lose a limb, or something worse. Every couple of weeks someone would lean somewhere they weren't supposed to, or get careless, then there would be a scream and the next day a new face would be on the factory floor.

There was never any lack of people willing to fill an open spot in the factories that filled this part of the city. The hours passed in a blur of mindless work, spent trying to avoid sinking into a trance that could lead to her being careless.

By the time the end of shift whistle blew, Katiya was rubbing sleepily at her eyes. She still felt exhausted from the night before and her mind shuddered away from the scar on her neck. Shivering against more than the cold she bundled up and waved to the few people she kind of knew in the factory around her before stepping out into the cold.

The crowd of workers from the second shift passed the incoming crowd of third shift workers and Katiya started back towards the boarding house. Maybe she could make it in time for the dinner that Madame Oullette served for her boarders every evening.

"What no hello for your dear brother?" Ivan said from behind Boris's hulking mass.

"I don't have a brother." She didn't count Ivan as being a true brother. "My brother

wouldn't hurt his family."

"But a father would?" He said with a snort walking back deeper into the shadows of the alley. Boris following behind, dragging Katiya's slight frame with him.

She followed not given a choice. "Don't you dare talk about Dad." She hissed, angrily.

The whip thin man chuckled. "I think I'm in a position to do what ever I dare." Boris chuckled as well. The larger man's face had a hungry look to it, as his eyes seemed to undress Katiya.

"Let go of me." She tried to yank her arm free, frustrated when it was as useful a move as it had been against the vampire the night before.

"So do you have it?" Ivan was suddenly all business. He had dangerous wealthy people who were interested in that deed.

"Yes." She mumbled, pulling the velvet pouch from under her shirt where she'd kept it with her all day. "It's just paper." She'd peeked inside, nothing interesting there.

He took the bag and then backhanded her. "Did I tell you to look inside it?"

She tasted blood. "You didn't tell me not too." She touched the side of her face, grimacing.

"Lord bless me. A thief who wants to think." He chuckled, and hit her again. "News flash little Katiya, I paid you to steal not ask what was being stolen."

This time her lip was bleeding and she had to blink to clear her eyes from the hit. The mountain of the man didn't loosen his hold on her. "Dad always said you were destined to be a thug."

"I'm going to be a rich thug. Now if you'll excuse me I have a meeting to get to." He strolled down the alley and out on to the street. Boris however, never let go of Katiya's wrist.

"Hey!" She tugged on the wrist. "I did what you wanted!" Fear coiled ugly in her chest.

With a cruel smile he pushed her into the alley wall. "Ivan said we don't need you anymore. We got what we wanted out of you. Well Ivan did. I want other things." His other hand came up stroking her hair.

Katiya kicked, trying to hit a shin or anything soft enough and painful enough to make Boris loosen his hold on her. "Let go of me!" She tried to squirm loose.

There was no sound at all to warn anybody, the bullet smashed into the brick, whizzing

past Boris's fat cauliflower ear.

He blinked and then turned his massive head, looking at the figure in the mouth of the alley. "Fuck off. This doesn't concern you."

The figure stepped deeper into the alley and raised the gun up level with his head. "I think this might concern you. Now let her go."

The redhead tried kicking again; shoving and trying to get free anyway she could, with predictable results. "That's right, let go of me!"

Boris frowned and then let go, he stormed away growling at the woman with the gun as he passed her. "Watch your back, bitch."

The woman was average height was dark skin, dark hair, and liquid brown eyes. Nice, sturdy peasants stock her stepmother use to sneer at her. She holstered the gun inside her coat and made her way to the rather stunned looking woman. "Are you okay?"

"Yes." The redhead answered automatically, blinking at the sudden apparition. "Who are you?" She was meeting all sorts of interesting people these days. The coat alone would have marked the woman as an outsider; no one here wore dark leather like that. The cut of all of the stranger's clothes was different, strange.

"I am Tereza." Her accent thickening as she said her name, she held out her arm "Perhaps I could help you home. Just to make sure he is gone."

"That would be nice." There was no chance Katiya would pass up the offer of an escort from someone with a gun. "Thank you." She rubbed her wrists, smiling. "For stopping him."

"Unfortunately men like him are common." Daylight bathed them as they exited the shadows of the alleyway. "The sun has such a short life up here so far north I'm not sure how you all stand it?"

"We become ghosts." It was only partly a joke and Katiya kept looking sideways at this stranger, marveling at her strangeness. In many ways the woman was stranger than the vampire had been.

"Well here its either ghosts or cattle." Tereza responded her dark eyes glancing over at the other woman to gauge her reaction.

"Cattle?" Katiya frowned, stopping at the edge of the street as a group of soldiers galloped past on horseback, then continuing on when the way was clear. "I don't know what you mean."

"Well humans have very little roles to fill in a town ruled by vampires." Her hand clamped down on the woman's arm preventing her from pulling away.

"Vampires don't exist." The lie came easily to her lips, as it did to all of those who lived in the lower quarters. Talking about the ones who lived in the night was a sure way to disappear and Katiya had to fight to avoid touching the collar of her dress that covered the mark on her neck.

"Right. So in a town like this you're a sheep, a ghost, or a dog. Which is it? I saw you leave that empty factory last night, not long after that vampire."

Katiya stared at the woman, yanking her arm free, eyes wide. "What are you?" She whispered, casting a look around to see if anyone was watching them.

"No the question is what are you. My first guess was a dog doing the bidding of its master, I saw you dump that body. But then today when that bullyboy was pissing on you no vamp would let its property be so abused. I was waiting for her to come and save you, but she didn't. So now I'm curious. What are you?"

"A nobody, that's what I am. Leave me alone." She didn't want this. People who got involved in these things ended up dead. "Go away." The redhead turned and started walking again.

"I can help you." She said at the redhead's retreating back.

"No you can't. Leave me alone!"

"Let me before she really sinks her claws into you. She doesn't own you yet, but she will."

Katiya paused, turning to look over her shoulder. "Do you know where you are?" The redhead shook her head. "Go home. This isn't a good place." Certainly the dark skinned woman could see that.

Tereza smiled. "I'll be seeing you." And then disappeared in a herd of people.

"You'll probably be dead." Katiya whispered, continuing to walk as quickly as she could. What did she care, let the stranger get herself killed, it wasn't any of Katiya's business.

#####

The evening after the attack by the man who had called himself her brother and Boris, Katiya was nervous the entire time she walked to her shift at the factory. She worried about someone following her the entire way there, and spent most of the walk looking over her shoulder or peering worriedly into every shadowed alley. There was no sign of anyone who shouldn't have been there though and she hurried through the front doors

of the factory to start her work.

Ivan was definitely starting to become more than a simple annoyance. He'd always been there, her father's prodigal pupil, learning at the master's feet while she was left to tag along. Then he'd betrayed them and she'd hoped that would be the last time she saw the bastard. Apparently the gods weren't done laughing at her yet.

She took her place on the line, taking a deep breath and trying to focus on the mindless job in front of her. The machines whirled around her, slamming into the thick tin in front of her, forming it into a pot and then shoving it onwards. Her job was to prevent jams from happening, which they did on occasion, by reaching in between forms and jerking the left over tin aside. It was dangerous, and if she didn't focus, a great way to lose an arm.

The factory ran morning, noon and night. It roared, huffed and puffed like a dragon whose belly could never be filled.

Alexei walked up the sidewalk, watching the mid-shift drag themselves away from the stone building, and the night shift swarmed around her trying to get in before the last whistle was blown and they were docked pay.

As the workers noticed her a bubble of space formed around her. Nobody wanted to be the center of her attention.

Alexei ignored the stares and the whispers as she made her way into the factory.

"Did you see who came in tonight?"

"No, why?"

"The owner's here!"

"Really? I thought she never came here!"

Katiya listened with interest to the gossip going on around her, and then had to snatch her hand back quicker than normal as the machine stamped down onto the tin in front of her. Her heart beating a bit faster she scolded herself for letting her attention falter.

"Lunch Break!" An eternity later the foreman yelled from the catwalk above. The machines slowed to a stop, the only time they would take until the end of the shift.

Tiredly, Katiya wiped at the thin layer of powdered tin that always seemed to build up after the shift. She trudged with the rest of the workers towards the small break area. She paused, looking up at the manager's office that overlooked the factory floor. For the first time that she could remember the office was lit.



Alexei stared blankly out from her office windows onto the floor. She watched the workers move like ants away from their machines to the food source.

She was vaguely aware of Sergei coming in and out of her office, his mouth opening then closing puzzled as to what to say, and then he would shake his head and leave.

The redhead stared up at the owner, too stunned to move as she recognized the beautiful pale face looking down at the factory floor.

A flash of red drew her attention. A color out of place, up this far north on the Russian steppes. She thought briefly of Fiona, but this red was more vibrant.

"Who is that?"

"Uh... My Lady? Who?" The short stocky man came over to the window. He shrugged. "A worker."

Down below, Katiya ducked her head and hurried to catch up with the other workers, flushing as she realized she'd been left behind to stare up at the owner.

She looked at him out of the corner of her eye and in a flash she backhanded him. That was the problem, with vampire children they needed constant reminders they were not a Master.

"When I ask a question, Sergei, I expect an answer."

She could see the brief flicker of disdain in his eyes before he hid it. "We were human once. Have you forgotten the rough and tumble young Cossack who tried to rob me on the road? Never forget what you were, it makes you appreciate what you are, and feel pity for those who are not. They may be food but even the poorest rancher knows to take good care of his cattle and to watch out for a stampede."

She stood. "If you know each and everyone of your workers, Sergei, you can prevent a stampede."

"I can find out her name if you wish." It was clear he wasn't happy about the idea.

"Don't bother. My interest is already waning." She walked to the door and paused. "I can tell I've been lazy in my ruling of this family. That ends as of today. Now get out of my factory!" She shouted as she exited the door.

Downstairs, Katiya sat a little apart from the cluster of other workers, eating the small lunch she'd brought with her. She grinned, thinking again how strange it was that they were eating lunch and it was well past what normal people would have considered dinnertime.

The short shift break was quickly over and they all stood up as the Foreman yelled for them to get back up onto the line. Katiya tarried behind the others, staring up at the office windows above, oddly disappointed when she saw no statuesque blonde looking back down at her.

"Been a long time since she's been here." A voice said.

"What?" Katiya flinched and looked towards the sound of that voice.

"Things are so much better when she is here. She's much nicer than Sergei." Sergei's name was whispered, as if saying his name might make him appear.

Katiya shrugged, stepping aside as a group of workers bustled past returning to their jobs. "My names' Katiya." She introduced herself to the older looking woman who's eyes had always seemed so wise, who she'd seen around just never talked to.

"Shush, Fiana." A tired man said at the gossiping woman.

"It's nice to meet you Katiya, never mind Abram."

Katiya waited until he'd moved on before smiling at the other woman. "Nice to meet you Fiana." She nodded towards the now empty windows. "Who is she?"

"She? Oh the owner. Her name is Alexei. She's a vampire you know." She said the last part in a conspiratorial whisper. "I worked in the old factories down by the frozen river, I was young then." Gnarled arthritic fingers primped gray curls.

Katiya pretended to act surprised. "Has she always owned the factories?"

"She pretended to be a man then, I was just a child. Then later she came in as a young woman, pretending to be her own daughter. But I knew it was her."

"Hey, you two!" The foreman yelled. "Breaks over!"

"It was good to meet you Fiana." Katiya whispered, hurrying towards her station on the line.

"It was nice meeting you as well." Fiana nodded at the young girl, happy that she had at least pretended to listen to what she had to say instead of laughing out right.

The machine was just starting back up, billowing a cloud of steam as the coal bellow was stoked into the furnaces again. Katiya had to hurry to get back into place, only just reaching her spot when the first sheet of tin slid into place.

Sergei watched the redhead frowning, unconsciously pulling on the floppy thick mustache that fell down on either side of his mouth. He was tired of being just a lackey. Being a vampire was survival of the fittest and every time she hammered him back into place he felt his chances at being Karl's right hand slipping farther and farther away. He

should live in that mansion and fuck pretty Molly and that Mongolian girl. He would rule the humans in the city with an iron fist instead of this lessee faire attitude his master had.

Humans should fear them, bow before them. Perhaps it was time he made sure things went his way.

Katiya's mind wouldn't focus on the job at hand. She kept going over the old woman, Fiana's, words. She knew, they all knew, although they didn't talk about it, that vampires existed and walked among them. She'd gotten first hand evidence of that; even now the scar on her neck itched a little. There was no doubt that the woman who'd bitten her was Alexei, she wasn't bound to forget her anytime soon.

The redhead was so focused on her thoughts that she wasn't paying attention on the job. A piece of metal got stuck, like a thousand before it. As always before she reached in to grab it free.

Except this time she miss-timed it, the cloth of her arm got caught in one of the massive springs. Fear gripped her as she realized what had happened and she started to tug against the snag. There wasn't much time, only a few seconds, she wasn't going to make it.

An arm shot out, clothed in a tailored dark shirt, pale slim fingers gripping the turning cogs holding them still. Knuckles turned white in an effort to keep the machine from spinning any more, tearing the young woman's arm from its socket. "If you don't mind getting your arm free. I'd hate to have to shut down to clean up all the blood."

The words were whispered into Katiya's ear.

Eyes wide, Katiya numbly dislodged the cloth of her shirtsleeve and stepped away from the machine. Watching incredulously as Alexei kept the machine from turning. That was stronger than she'd ever imagined someone could be.

With a groan the machine wrenched itself from Alexei's grasp and continued doing what it was supposed to.

Alexei turned looking at the redhead. There was something familiar about her. "Why don't you come with me and sit down for a moment?"

"You..." Katiya blinked in amazement, staring at the blonde. "Thank you." She managed at last as her mind caught up with what had just happened. She nodded mutely, still stunned by how close she had just come to losing her arm.

She placed a hand at the small of the redheads back and guided her to the stairs to her office. "Fenton, spread this division out and cover for the young lady for the rest of the

evening."

Fenton blinked in surprise that the owner even knew his name and then nodded gesturing for a young man barely old enough to shave to take Katiya's place.

"Thank you." Katiya said, again, as they walked up the stairs. She was surprisingly nervous about the idea of being in the same room alone with Alexei.

"No need to thank me. It was purely selfish on my part. I hate losing money and we'd have to stop production to clean up the mess."

She led the young woman to her office, easily smelling the woman's nervousness. She busied herself by making some tea to help the young woman relax.

"I haven't seen you around." Katiya said quietly.

"I've been occupied with my other holdings." She finished with the tea and turned handing the woman a cup. "This will help you relax a bit." She leaned back against her desk. "I am Alexei Petrova, I'm the owner of this fine place of industry as well as a few others."

Katiya used the excuse of taking a sip of tea to think through her answer before she responded. There was no way she was going to use her first name, so far it seemed like she hadn't been recognized. "It's good to meet you." she hesitated, then sighed, certain this wasn't going to last much longer. "Again."

"Again?" Alexei blinked in surprise.

"Again." Katiya smiled, taking a sip of tea. She arched an eyebrow, rather enjoying the surprised look on the other woman's face.

"I won't lie, you seem familiar." This could be bad, surprises in her world normally were.

"I'm covered in white dust, not too surprising you don't recognize me. I guess I thought I'd made more of an impression on you than that." She set aside the teacup and pulled down the high-necked collar she'd been wearing to show the scar. "You made an impression on me."

The vampire smiled. "So I did little mouse. So I did. Seems I have returned the favor."

"That makes us even, right?" Katiya rather didn't think so, but she could try at least. Somewhere during the past few minutes she'd forgotten to be afraid.

Alexei was so startled by the presumptuous question that she burst out laughing. Such a ballsy question that nobody would ever do to her.

"Oh well, it was worth a try." The redhead picked up the teacup and sipped, enjoying the warmth. "I'm glad you're better." She realized she actually meant it. "I mean you look better." She frowned. "Then you did."

The blonde studied the woman for a moment and realized she was sincere. "Thank you. I am better."

She took a moment to take in the revelation. "You had your hair hidden under a cap, there's no way I could forget the color of your hair. So mouse, what am I going to do with you?" She pulled out a chair and sat down.

"Let me go back to work?" Katiya felt the first bit of worry. "I can't get fired." That would be the end of her, she didn't have any money, and she'd be forced to go back to her previous talents.

"Is that what you want?" She asked staring into Mouse's blue eyes.

The redhead stared back, captivated by those gray eyes that pierced her thoughts. She'd dreamed about those eyes the past two nights, between nightmares of Ivan and Boris, with the odd appearance of the dark skinned woman tossed in for spice. She thought of Fiana, old before her time, bent by years tending to the machines, a servant to them. Would it be any different to be a servant to a vampire? "Is there another option?"

"There are always options. I bit you, I marked you, I won't lie there are those who can smell me in that bite and hurt you for it. I cannot take the bite away; what is done cannot be undone. But you are a sneaky mouse and one can always use such a creature."

"It can't be worse than being a pick pocket in the city markets." Thieves were killed for stealing when caught. "Will it be better than being down on the factory floor?"

Alexei smiled, the smile was a mix of evil and seduction, "I think it would be."

That little smile decided for her. "Deal." She held out her hand. Hopefully this would convince Ivan to leave her alone as well. She wasn't under any illusions about what would happen if she met the two men again alone.

"Excellent." The blonde stood up, "Finish your tea and we shall go and gather your things." This was going to blow up in her face, but there was something about her mouse here that was intriguing. She showed no fear only the amazing ability to adapt to what was thrown at her.

She turned to her tea set and gathered a small bag of the green tea from China. "So what is your name Mouse? Or shall I just call you mouse?"

"I don't have many things to gather." Her lock picks and maybe one or two sets of clothes. "Mouse is good." Katiya smiled finishing her tea. "But my name is Katiya. What should I call you?"

"Lady, Master, Mistress, when we are with other vampires. Alexei when it is just us or my other pets or servants." She turned back around and handed the small bag of tea to Katiya. "Here you go Katiya, try to have a cup a day. Its good for you."

The idea of a vampire being concerned for her safety was too much and Katiya laughed before she could stop herself. "Sorry. I'm not used to people worrying about my safety." The box was also the first present she'd gotten in a very long time. "Thank you." She'd said that a lot recently.

Her lips curled up as she studied the vampire. "I probably should have asked this before, but what would I be doing for you?" She rather hoped it had something to do with the way Alexei had smiled earlier.

Alexei nodded and looked away uncomfortable, she grabbed her coat and put it on, it was very similar to the one she had destroyed the other night.

"You're mine now. I will care for you and your needs. You have but one task, to serve me. You proved already you can do that." She turned back around holding out her arm.

"Sometimes I will have duties for a sneaky little mouse. Other times I will have other tasks. Come now let us get your things. We have a ritual to complete, the one we started the other night." She reached over and stroked the bite mark on the redhead's neck.

Katiya hesitated to take a hold of the offered arm, worried about getting some of the tin powder on that immaculate jacket. "What kind of ritual?" She wasn't too thrilled with another day of feeling weak and drained, but if that was what it took, so be it. The alternative was the factory floor, or worse.

"I understand it can be very pleasant, if you desire it to be so. But that particular ritual has many forms."

Both eyebrows went up at that. "That sounds interesting." She was well aware that this was a different world she was stepping into. It had to be better than the one she'd spent the last few months in and definitely an improvement over the underground her family had existed in.

As they came down the stairs all eyes were on them. Curiosity, jealousy, and fear; *ah humanity at its best* Alexei mused.

"They hate me now, don't they?" Katiya whispered, feeling the eyes on her as they walked.

The blonde nodded, "Some are afraid for you, afraid what I will do to you. But yes, from the moment you walk out these doors you are no longer one of them." She paused, her hand resting on the metal door, standing before the door before she pushed it open. "Last chance to say no and keep this life."

She looked around, taking in the roar of the machines, the hiss of steam escaping, the tired drawn out look on all of the workers who serviced the never-ending machinery. "This isn't a life." She'd tried to keep her promise, to lead a normal life, she'd tried hard.

"And serving me may not be one either, but once we walk out these doors there is no saying no."

Katiya smiled. "It's either that or end up working for Ivan." That would be a bad way to go. "I'm with you."

"Now my sneaky Mouse, show me to your place and we will gather your things."

The redhead looked behind her one last time, catching Fiana's eyes. She couldn't be sure but she thought the old woman winked at her, before turning back to her work. "It's not far." She followed alongside the elegant woman, trying not to get too much dust on her clothing.

#####3

Alexei had been horrified to see how Katiya had lived. Even growing up on the steppes in a nomadic tribe they hadn't lived like this.

They rode in a carriage back through the town to its outskirts, the houses got larger and farther apart until it was just trees and a large stone structure.

Katiya gave up pretending that she wasn't staring out the window when the houses became larger than anything she'd seen. She was staring open mouth at the private, gated estates that were outside the windows. "Imagine the stuff I could loot from these places." She whispered.

"Yes, imagine. Please try to control yourself." Alexei said amused.

"They're huge. Do you live in something this size?" She tried, and failed, to imagine what that would be like.

The carriage turned and headed up a small hill. "No I live in something bigger." The carriage stopped in front of a stonewall that stretched into the trees around the estate and a metal gate.

"Wow." Katiya's mouth gaped open at the size of the thing that was supposed to be called a house in front of them. It was the size of the factory, maybe bigger. "That's..." She trailed off, lacking the words.

Alexei opened the door and stepped down. She tipped the carriage driver and held out a hand to help Katiya down. "Big?"

"Huge." Katiya stepped out, neck still craned as she peered up at the high arching peaked roofs and multitude of chimney's that lined the roof.

"Hmm. Huge will work. Come on now."

"I hope I'm not going to be scrubbing the floors." That would be a hell of a job.

"No. No scrubbing floors." She led them to the gate the stone gargoyles staring at them from the stone pillars on either side of the gate.

The gate opened after another beat and she led them up the walkway to the house.

"I thought up a new word. Imposing." The gargoyles were nasty looking and even though they were carved from stone, Katiya stayed close to Alexei. The doors at the top of the front steps opened as Alexei approached them, a wizened old hunched over man in a liveried uniform watched them approach, bowing as Alexei topped the stairs.

"Lyov I would like you..." The entrance of two women cut her off; one was tall with long dark hair, blue eyes, and lush curves. The other was smaller with dark hair and Asian features.

"Alexei, darling..." The tall one started in a very British accent, she paused blinking at Katiya. "What the hell is that?"

The woman's voice immediately set Katiya's teeth on edge. "My name's Katiya." She blurted before she thought, which had gotten her in trouble before.

Behind them Lyov grunted and shut the doors, barring them as he did every day before the sun rose.

"Replacing Fiona already?" The woman approached Alexei running her hands over her shoulders and plastered herself to the woman's side. Now with Fiona gone she was supposed to move into the head spot, Alexei wasn't supposed to bring another one home.

The words didn't make much sense to Katiya, but the possessive stance certainly did. She raised an eyebrow at the way the tall one had draped herself across Alexei.

Alexei turned and grabbed Molly by the throat, lifted her, and slammed her into the wall.



"You are a pet and you would do well to remember your place." She let go, letting Molly drop to the floor. "Lyov summon Stepan and have her taken below and locked away until she remembers her place."

Katiya watched, stunned at the sudden ferocity. Alexei's expression was cold, remote, and haughty.

The wizened old man growled something that was probably a curse and stalked over to one of the nearby open doorways, yelling for Stepan as he was bid to do.

Alexei turned walking away and held out her arms, "Shiro, you look lovely." The Asian woman smiled and launched herself into Alexei's arms. Alexei spun her around and then set her down. "How is that violin piece turning out?"

A gust of wind stirred Katiya's clothes, ruffled her long red hair, and then a man was kneeling in front of Alexei. Long black hair was tied up in a loosely behind his head, and wearing elegant clothing. "You bellowed?" He snickered, grinning up at the Mistress of the house.

She set Shiro down and turned to Stepan. "Ah my lively puck." If she had a favored it would be her roguish Stepan. "Molly is in need of some re-education."

"Reaaaally?" He drew out the word, looking over at the sulking woman still curled up on the floor. "How pleasant for me." He stood, sweeping the cloth of his long coat behind him as he did in a move calculated to reveal his stunning physique. "How much re-education would you like her to receive?"

Katiya stepped back away from the appraising look in the vampire, for he had the same ageless beauty that Alexei commanded, had in his hard dark eyes.

"Enough for her to remember her place. I don't like pets who try to do my thinking for me." She stroked his face and kissed his lips briefly. "Take her below, and if she's lucky I won't let the twins loose upon her."

"As you wish." He grabbed the British woman's arm, pulling her up as if she weighed nothing. Then he pulled her into an embrace she did nothing to avoid. Katiya was staring right at them when he blurred, disappearing from view with the same gust of wind that tugged at her clothes. This was definitely a long way from the factory floor.

"Lyov could you..."

"Your bath is drawn and Warren is making some food for the young woman as we speak."

"Right." She said with a chuckle and started up the stairs, and paused, she turned looking at Katiya. "Come on now. You can't go back now."

Swallowing she hurried to keep up, not really wanting to be left alone with the scowling doorkeeper. "I'm not going back." She sounded more nervous than she'd hoped. She smiled hesitantly at the Asian woman who stayed behind, who at least hadn't done anything really strange yet.

Alexei led her up the stairs to her rooms. She shut the doors and then with a sigh took off her coat hanging it up, following it with her shoes.

"They work for you also?" Katiya stood, awkwardly by the door, wondering what was coming next.

"Yes. Stepan is my child, Molly and Shiro are my pets." She rose an eyebrow "Are you going to be a rabbit at the door, or a brave mouse in the room?"

That sounded like a challenge. Katiya raised her head, walking further into the room and looking around curiously. So this is how people who had money lived. "Nice." It was obviously expensive furnishings, but not as glittery as she'd somehow expected.

Alexei sat down in a leather desk chair and gestured to the other one for Katiya to sit in. "Food will be up shortly would you like to take a bath?"

"Yes." She sat down in the offered chair. It would be blissful to remove the dust and grime from the factory. "They're all beautiful. You're servants."

"Well you've seen Lyov, but I suppose he's beautiful to somebody."

Katiya grinned at that, true Lyov wasn't that nice looking. She hesitated, and then figured she might as well ask. "That man, Stepan, he's a vampire also isn't he?"

"Yes, he is. He was an actor in Moscow handsome and puckish. He reminded me of what life has to offer. So selfishly I decided to keep him with me always."

"Does that make you his mother?" Katiya really wasn't sure what someone would call the person who turned him or her into a vampire. Murderer? Savior?

Alexei tried really hard not to laugh or smile, but the corner of her lips quivered with the effort. "I believe the term is Sire. I sired Stepan."

"Sire." The redhead nodded, she'd remember that. "Are there more, that you've sired I mean? Here?" She thought she should probably be careful not to offend anyone who could move that fast.

"A few." A few who crossed her path had caught her attention by surprising her. She was over 1000 years old, it was a hard thing to do, and when it did happen she tended to keep those around her.

Katiya studied the composed looking woman across from her. "A few." She repeated, wondering what exactly that meant. "Should I avoid them?" She wasn't really clear on what she was supposed to do here.

"There is Stepan, Sergei who you know from the factory. Then there is Matvey, and the twins Niki and Nada. No, they won't hurt you unless I tell them to hurt you."

She remembered the dark haired woman who Stepan had taken away and suppressed a shiver. That didn't seem like much fun, she'd have to make sure she didn't do something requiring disciplining then.

Alexei leaned back in her chair. "You my mouse are here to be my pet. As a human pet in the vampire world you are basically my property. I will care for you and see to your needs and in return you will provide me with blood and ah... other tasks as assigned."

She knew why she had picked her mouse. This young woman like her other children had the ability to surprise her with the way she adapted and dealt with the world. Even knowing what she was Katiya barely seemed to flinch.

Just thinking about what some of those other tasks could be caused Katiya's cheeks to redden. "I already said I agreed." She wasn't going to go back on her word, not now.

"Even the blood thing is still better than the life I was trying to live." She tilted her head up.

Alexei raised an eyebrow. "Do you want me to explain things or not?"

Feeling her cheeks redden even more, Katiya nodded. "Sorry."

Alexei chuckled, "I saw your room. The tent I was born in was bigger and cleaner than that place. Such an impatient mouse."

"Hard to live on the wage that Sergei pays workers." She frowned, a little defensive about that room. It had taken her a lot to get that room.

Alexei stretched her legs out in front of her. "Interesting." She would check the books. "The seductive British woman is Molly, she stalked me from the British Empire here under the impression I would be unable to resist her charms and make her into my image. I admit I was still weak and made her a pet instead of booting her back to Britain. The quiet Mongol girl is Shiro; she had her tongue cut out by her father. In an effort to prevent her from talking about his plans to invade Russia once he had found out she had overheard."

"They're very beautiful." Katiya said, when more didn't seem to be coming. Not as beautiful as the mistress of course, but close. "Mongol?" She frowned, not sure she

knew who they were. "Russia was being invaded by Mongols?" When had that happened?

"1240 they sacked Kiev; in 1380 I helped Doniskoi drive them back to Mongolia."

Katiya's mouth opened but no sound came out as she stared at Alexei. After a few seconds she closed her mouth with a snap. "That's hundreds of years ago. I thought you said they weren't vampires?"

"Their not. They're my pets." She said slowly getting to her feet. "Why don't we get you a bath and some food, before we talk any more."

Katiya's stomach rumbled in answer to that and looked ashamed. "That would probably be a good thing." She was under no illusion to the state she was currently in, still clad in her work clothes. The redhead rose to her feet, certain she was leaving some of the dust on the seat behind her.

"Follow me." She led Katiya out of her study across the lush carpeting past her bedroom and to the bath. It was warm with steam coating the air. She was pleased that Lyov had again read her needs before she was aware she had any.

"Oooh, that looks amazing." Katiya tried not to trip in her eagerness to get a look at the steaming bath. She could imagine how nice the hot water would feel.

The tub was more like a sunken pool, rectangle in shape, several people could and had on occasion had a good time in there. "The stairs are here and there are several bottles of smelling things on this lip. Do you need help getting out of your clothes?" It was rare that she was wrong about sexual interest. She'd had thousand years to study it, but she wouldn't force her attention, there were other ways to bond a pet.

The blush was fast and heated as a variety of images flashed their way through Katiya's mind, each progressively more erotic than the previous until she had to forcibly shake her head. "I... I mean " She blinked, staring at Alexei.

"Shush." She stepped closer into Katiya's personal space. "I won't force sex if that is what you're worried about." Her maker had done that, brutalized her, drained her and left her for dead. She'd seen the ravages of rape and assault on Fiona; it had been years before the woman had come to terms with what had happened.

"That's not what I'm worried about." She tried to will away the blush, which of course didn't help. "I'm just covered in dust. I wouldn't want to get you dirty." How could she explain that she didn't want to get the beautiful woman dirty?

"A little dirt isn't going to hurt me. Besides I pay my servants well to clean up after me." She stepped closer her gray eyes looking down at the red-faced woman. Reaching out

she started to undo the buttons. "These fashions just aren't very practical." She muttered.

"Work clothes." Katiya whispered, her breathing fast and shallow. The corset and bone lined fabric was heavy, she always forgot how heavy until it slid off her and she was free again. Her other work clothes, the dark ones, were so much lighter than the ones piled at her feet, and she could run in those. She'd probably kill herself trying to run in her socially acceptable outfit.

Alexei let her hands linger here and there as she undressed her new pet. "Much too thin, no wonder the little bit of blood I took sent you ass over tea kettle." She lowered herself to her knees and took off the woman's shoes and then slowly slipped the stockings down each leg. She smiled up at Katiya "Alright then, into the bath."

The shivering wasn't just due to the cold air, but the hot water was wonderful none-the-less. "I'm not that thin." There were other's who were thinner, just maybe not by all that much. Her long red hair undone floated in the water next to her as she slid into it, groaning with pleasure as the heat washed over her.

"This is blissful!" She ducked her head, washing the water over her hair.

Alexei stayed on her knees for just a moment her hands clenched into fists, as she battled her darker baser urges and then with a deep breath got to her feet. "I think so. When I have the time to enjoy one."

"You could join me." Blue eyes watched carefully and Katiya hesitated, waving a hand at the water around her. "It's big enough." She wasn't sure if she was overstepping her bounds, offering.

Alexei paused in surprise. So her nervous mouse was actually a brave mouse. "Are you sure?"

Katiya nodded, sliding down a little in the water until her shoulders were submerged.

Alexei watched her as she slid out of her shoes and then her shirt, waiting for a sign that the scared mouse was returning.

As the vampire stripped, the mouse in question, was all eyes, and watching intently. "Beautiful." She whispered, trying to remember to breath. No human could be so beautiful, perfect.

Finally she undid the buttons of her pants and let them pool on the floor. Her skin was pale and unmarked except for the tattoo. "Thank you." She said in response to the complement as she slid into the bath.

Katiya traced the tattoo of the snake with her eyes, fingers twitching as she imagined

tracing it with her fingertips. "That is an amazing tattoo." She'd never seen something so artfully done before. The tattoos she'd seen were always crude affairs that were done to denote gang affiliations usually.

It was either stare at the tattoo, or at the perfect skin that covered the rest of the woman's body.

"You don't have to suck up Katiya. I already like you or you wouldn't be here." She said with a chuckle.

"I wasn't sucking up." She blushed though, eyes dropping to those breasts again, before she looked away and decided to work on washing off the grime that covered her.

Alexei chuckled and slid over to the shelf with all the smelly soap things that Fiona had collected for her over the years. "I think you might be a lavender girl." She whispered grabbing a purple bar of soap. "Come here."

"Lavender?" That sounded nice, whatever it was. Katiya went willingly, something she was sure she would do more often as time passed.

Alexei lathered up a cloth and slowly began to wash the young woman in her arms.

The bath and sexual arousal had the blood pumping into the skin just underneath the surface and it was hard to resist taking a taste.

This felt even better than Katiya had thought it would and it didn't take much urging for her to relax into the touches, enjoying the hot water and attention. This was so very nice. "Do you treat all your pets like this? No wonder they stay around so long." She purred, eyes half closed.

"Sometimes. I won't lie there are times when I can be an utter bastard. But the truth of why they stay around so long is in the blood my dear mouse." She kissed a shoulder in front of her, feeling the blood surge underneath and the muscle twitch. Then she kissed up higher.

Automatically Katiya tilted her head sideways, allowing more access to the lips that were pressing against her skin. The water wasn't as hot as her skin suddenly felt. "Blood?" She gasped. Having trouble focusing on anything so simple as words.

"Yes blood." She whispered next to the skin and let her fangs slip out. She teased them against the flesh for a moment cutting up small shallow cuts that she quickly licked clean and sealed. She had fed a lot recently and didn't really need to take a lot.

Distracted by the warm body in her arms the washcloth was forgotten and it slowly sank to the bottom of the tub. Alexei's hands were busy stroking and fondling Katiya's breasts as her teeth nipped at the woman's neck. She teased the nipples until

they were hard like red rubies.

Breathing harsh from her nose she pulled back from the too tempting neck and the pulse that beat there. Pulling one hand away she brought it to her mouth and bit her index finger tearing open the flesh in a deep wound. She brought the bleeding finger to the woman's mouth trailing around her lips painting them with blood before pushing it in past the ring of her lips into her warm moist mouth.

"Shhh." She whispered as she felt the woman go still in surprise. "We are merely finishing what we started the other night."

Alexei let her hand trail down from the breasts over the too prominent ribs, over the flat plane of the stomach to comb lightly through the woman's pubic hair. "A natural redhead I see." She chuckled. Her fingers stroked and teased until she found the hard nub of Katiya's desire and then she focused all her attention there. The woman in her arms relaxed and Alexei could almost hear her eyes flutter shut as she started to suck on the finger in her mouth.

"Anima della mia anima ora siamo limitati insieme." Alexei whispered into the curve of an ear. The ritual was complete.

She continued easing Katiya towards orgasm, she never tried to enter her, they hadn't talked about virginity, and while there was nothing different between the blood of a virgin and a non-virgin despite the Church's fascination on the topic. Alexei was oddly romantic on the issue, preferring such a thing be given away to someone that was truly cared about not to a bloodsucking fiend who was far more interested in your blood.

Katiya's mouth opened and a gasp of pleasure and Alexei took the moment to remove her finger and put her hand to other uses. One hand continued milking the orgasm from Katiya's clit the other moved to her breasts returning attention to their neglected state.

It was a barrage of stimulation. The feel of the fingers moving against her, expertly drawing out the wave of pleasure that was threatening to role through Katiya, the hot water adding slickness to everything, the warm body pressed up against hers. It all was so very good that Katiya didn't want it to end; she wanted it to keep on going. She barely recognized the copper taste in her mouth or the strange flavor the blood from Alexei's cut finger had. All that really mattered was the taller woman's touch and she didn't care about anything else.

"Please " She begged, bucking into those fingers, arching her back into the other hand that stroked her breasts, torturing her.

"Please!" Long red hair shielded some of what was happening from view as it pooled around her in the water, but she could see Alexei's hand buried between her legs, moving in time to her hips.

"Mmmm." Alexei said in response. With the little bit of blood in her system she could feel her own body start to respond, her heart pick up, a blush of arousal dust her cheeks. She increased the pace of her hand buried between Katiya's thighs.

"Beautiful." She whispered, watching as the pleasure overwhelmed the young woman in her arms.

"I have you, go ahead let go. Let go." She urged.

Katiya arched one last time, mouth open but she made no sound, body spasming as she clutched to Alexei. Blue eyes staring up at the blonde woman's face, until the shudders passed and she ducked her head, leaning against the vampire. She needed a moment, not sure she could stand if she didn't have the support.

Alexei leaned back head resting against the cool marble holding the young woman to her. She never understood why females got so embarrassed after sex; they always needed a moment or two. Men sometimes got that way but often not. She blamed the church and their crusade to take away all joy in sex from women. Nobody cared if a boy was a virgin or not only if a girl was.

She stroked the long red hair with one hand while holding her tight with the other. "Now the ritual is complete you are mine and more or less I'm yours." She murmured.

"More or less?" Katiya let out a shaky breath, trying to regain her senses. That had been faster than she'd expected. "Thank you." She whispered against skin warmed by the hot water around them and her own blood.

"I have 2 other pets, mouse. So, yes more or less. To safely keep a vampire stated it can take up to 5 to 6 pets with new vampires, if that vampire is inclined to keep his pets around." She slowly stood up taking Katiya with her, water sluicing off of both their bodies. With great care she carried the young woman and set her on a marble bench. Reaching over she grabbed a towel woven from Turkish cotton and started drying the redhead off.

Eyes half opened, Katiya enjoyed the pampering, a small smile on her lips as she enjoyed the after effects of a wonderful time in the bath. "I didn't get to show you how thankful I was though." Blue eyes darkened as she enjoyed watching the other woman move without her clothes.

Alexei smiled up at Katiya from where she was drying a foot. "What a remarkable woman I have found with you. Everything changes for you in the blink of an eye, and you just go with it." She stood up throwing the towel in the general direction of a hamper and then grabbed a robe off a hook. "But you probably want to hold that thought. Perhaps maybe after you've eaten."



She was well aware someone had entered her study while they were in the bath, more than likely bringing food for Katiya.

The redhead shrugged, taking the offered robe and slipping it on as she considered the vampires words. True, she knew enough people who would have probably gone insane after the first encounter at the warehouse. "My father always taught me to take whatever opportunity I was given." It was either that or die a slow death in a whorehouse or a fast one in the gutters over a piece of food.

"A wise man." A man who probably wanted to kill her after what she had just done to his daughter.

"He was." Katiya swallowed, avoiding thinking about it as much as possible. She jerked in surprise as she realized they weren't alone anymore.

The tiger was just lounging by the door; it's tail flicking idly back and forth as it lazily stretched, yawning to reveal large impressive looking teeth. "What's that?" Katiya's voice went up as she eyed those teeth. Overlooking the tray of food that had been placed discreetly at the side of the door.

Alexei started drying herself off and still vigorously rubbing her wet hair she led them out back to her study. She paused looking up. "That would be a tiger. A male Siberian tiger, if you want to get specific."

"Tiger." Katiya eyed it, moving very slowly, giving the beast a wide berth as she did. "You keep a tiger?"

"Yes, well tigers. His sister is wandering around somewhere. That is Kirill, and his sister is Kira, they protect me and mine. There are also some wolves who have made a den out on the property somewhere, I've just not felt like evicting them." Naked she walked over and grabbed the food and draped her towel over Kirill's head. Unamused the tiger shook his head until he was able to see again.

She brought the tray over and set it on the desk. "Looks like Warren made venison stew and some sort of peasant bread."

Seeing the still worried look in Katiya's eyes she sighed. "Look you are mine, my scent is probably well marked on you now. He won't hurt you. I promise."

Katiya could feel her mouth watering at the smell that filled the room. She stepped over a twitching tiger's tail, earning a bored look from the tiger. When she didn't get tackled she walked over to the food, checking to make sure the tiger hadn't moved as she did. "I hope he knows that." The food looked delicious, the rough bread would go well with the stew.

"Can I?" The redhead's stomach growled in agreement.

"Of course." She pulled out a chair.

The first bite was delicious and Katiya moaned in pleasure. "Warren is the cook?" She had a problem with the W in his name and couldn't not pronounce it as Alexei did, it came out more like 'Varren'. "I need to thank you, this is delicious." The second bite didn't disappoint.

"No need to thank me. If you're still hungry when you finish I can have some more brought up. If you'll excuse me I'll go put on some clothes." She wandered slowly to her bedroom Kirill getting up and following her. Absently she rubbed his head.

The image was enough to keep Katiya staring after her long after the blonde was gone from the room. "Holy shit." She blinked, shook her head and started eating again. Any moment now she was going to wake up and be back in that crummy boarding house worrying about Boris finding her in an alley way somewhere.

Alexei pondered what she was going to do with her new pet. She didn't think Katiya would be happy with the spoiled do nothing life that Molly enjoyed. She slipped into a soft cotton sleep shirt that hit her mid thigh and slipped into some sheep skin slippers. She looked over checking the fireplace and found it crackling merrily. Lyov again. She rarely got cold or hot, but Katiya might.

Tonight the young woman would sleep with her; tomorrow they would find her, her own room in the mansion.

She walked around Kirill who had decided to plop down in the middle of her bedroom for a nap. One just didn't move a 400-pound animal.

"The food is delicious." The human called from the other room, happily sitting back from the table with a pleasantly full stomach. Something she hadn't had in a long time.

"I will let Warren know, he'll be pleased." She said emerging from her room. "Do you want more?"

Katiya licked her lips; eyes drifting to the bare thighs that the shirt that Alexei had put on was showing. "I'm good." She swallowed, feeling her cheeks go red as she remembered the bathtub. Realizing she was staring, the redhead looked down. "I'm sorry."

"I don't mind, it's actually flattering. So don't be sorry." She sat down across from Katiya. "So, is there anything else you want to know?"

"Flattering?" Katiya laughed. "People must stare at you all the time. Beautiful women always get noticed." She shrugged, considering. "Other than..." She made a vague gesture towards the bathroom and then her neck. "What do you want me to do? I'm

going to have to work to do something to earn my place here right?"

Alexei chuckled. "What do you want to do? Providing me with blood is your job, other than that, on occasion I may need things done especially during the daylight hours. Winter time isn't such a problem but in the summer well... it can be difficult for me."

"I guess you don't need a pick pocket or a safe cracker." Katiya frowned down at the empty plate, trying to think of her skills. Most of them seemed fairly trivial compared to what she thought the vampire could do. "I guess I'm not that useful."

Alexei reached out and smoothed the lines that had formed on Katiya's forehead. "Not to worry we will find something for you to do. Things have a way of working out."

The touch relaxed those worry lines and Katiya nodded. She'd figure something out, she'd managed to adapt to everything else so far after all. Now how to figure out a way she could fit into this world and make her own way. She was certain of one thing, whatever happened, she couldn't, go back to where she had been.

"I didn't think you'd be content to be a Molly; and Shiro has her music. You however are a sneaky mouse." She lifted Katiya out of her seat and on to her lap. "So mouse how many languages can you speak?"

"A handful." She admitted. "I can't read them, but I can speak all the dialects of the migrant workers and a few others." They were useful things for a thief to have, and her dad had taught her well.

"That's a start. I can get some one to teach you how to read them. Now, can you handle a weapon? Can you fight?"

"I've used a knife before." A wicked little blade with a sharp edge was a good deterrent for those who thought they could take something that wasn't theirs'.

"Is that it? I'll teach you how to defend yourself." She said smelling the lavender on Katiya's skin. "Yes, a lavender girl." She smiled slightly.

It was nice, Katiya decided as she leaned against Alexei's shoulder her eyes closing, to be full, warm and content. All were feelings she could get used to. "I'd like that." She whispered, trying to hide a yawn.

Alexei smiled into Katiya's red hair. "I would like to teach you. I'm a pretty good wrestler. I can show you throws, grappling and submission holds, but now my sleepy mouse let's get you too bed." She stood up easily carrying Katiya.

"I'm not sleepy." Katiya protested, followed by another yawn. "Well, maybe a little." She didn't want to go to sleep, afraid she'd wake up and it would have been all a dream.

"Wow." Katiya's eyes opened wide, sleep momentarily forgotten as she got a look at the bed. Specifically the size of it: the decadently comfortable looking sheets, and blankets that were drawn over it.

"I know it's a bit much. But I decided when I reached a certain age that sleeping on the floor was a bit much." She set Katiya down on the end of the bed and pulled the covers down.

The bed did, indeed, feel as soft as it looked. It didn't take much urging to get Katiya to lie down, drawing a groan of pleasure from the tired woman. "Do you need sleep?" She asked suddenly as the thought occurred.

Again Alexei laughed as she got into the bed. "What do you know about vampires?"

The redhead laid her head down on a pillow, sighing with pleasure as she squirmed under the covers and they heated up. "Only what I heard in stories."

"Oh, that's all crap. So I am an undead blood-sucking fiend from hell that seduces virgins for their virgin blood, defiling their purity. I sleep in a coffin filled with the dirt of my homeland, I have no image in a mirror, and I can't cross running water. Did I miss anything?"

"Garlic." Katiya smiled, sheepishly at the beautiful woman and head of the household. "You're not supposed to like garlic."

She smiled a slow turning up of her lips.

"That one always seemed silly to me though." Katiya confessed. "I couldn't see why a vampire would care what my breath smelled like."

"Well some herbal remedies say that garlic is a blood purifier, cleanses the blood of harmful humors and what not. I believe people think it will make their blood distasteful."

Her eyebrows scrunching, Katiya looked skeptical. "Wouldn't that make our blood more attractive?"

Alexei rolled over on her side facing Katiya. "It might. Things can make the blood sweeter to us, normally its emotions. Some vampires like to scare their victims, terrify them, they like the taste of fear and death in the blood."

That wasn't something that Katiya had considered before. "What do you like?" She raised an eyebrow.

"I thought it was obvious." She reached out stroking Katiya's neck.

"Oh." She didn't need to look to know that she was turning red again, an unavoidable consequence of her fair skin. "But in the warehouse that night..." Katiya trailed off, not sure how to phrase the question. "You killed that man." she finished lamely. She didn't know how else to ask about that, and she kind of thought it might be relevant to her present situation.

"I never denied that. I killed that man because he was at the wrong place at the wrong time, he died because I was dying and needed blood. Some are not as controlled as I am. Some are bigger bastards than me too, but something you must remember is that we are animals at heart, and when we are hurt or lose too much blood, we will do what we need to survive. Don't forget that."

The hard look in Alexei's eyes caused a ripple of Goosebumps to spread up Katiya's back and she nodded quickly. "I won't forget." She promised. The moment passed and she was glad she'd gotten that question out of the way. Sighing with pleasure she slipped deeper under the blankets, her body feeling heavy with sleep.

"Good don't." Alexei leaned over kissing her lightly on the lips. "To answer your original question, yes I need sleep. I'm not an undead corpse."

"Sleep." That sounded like such a good idea. Even though that kiss had sparked memories of the bathtub.

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## ~ The Secret History of Vampires ~

by Zee and Windstar

Enjoy and remember to send feedback to [Zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:Zeeamy@gmail.com) and [Adarkbow@yahoo.com](mailto:Adarkbow@yahoo.com)

### Part 2

"I'm very disappointed here Boris."

Ivan said, conversationally as he wiped the straight razor blade clean. The dark blood and gore ruined his white handkerchief and he tossed it aside with a scowl of

displeasure. The white cloth fluttered to the ground, landing in a pool of dark liquid that it immediately started to soak up, turning red.

Boris didn't answer, simply stood impassively at the door, as he had throughout the questioning.

"I so hate it when people disappear on me. Especially my dear little sister."

They weren't related by blood of course, but Boris wasn't going to say that.

Ivan stepped over the lifeless corpse that had once been the boarding house owner, her body covered in cuts that he'd taken considerable pleasure in making.

"Not like Katiya at all to run off without leaving a message for me. Makes me worried. I think we should find out where she went, for her sake of course."

Boris grunted.

"I knew you would see things my way." Ivan cast a look around the blood soaked room. How fortunate for him that all of the boarders were away at their day jobs, leaving just the old lady behind. It had been simplicity itself to get in through the front door, being remembered as Katiya's brother after all.

Then she'd informed him that Katiya had left, without a word, and wasn't coming back. That had infuriated him, he'd intended to have Boris break her, as he should have done in the alley, and then use her services for as long as she'd be useful. A safe cracker of her quality was hard to find.

"Make sure you clean this mess up Boris." He wrinkled his nose faintly at the smell and left.

The large man waited until his boss had left, then started to rip the gas lamps off the wall. The hiss of escaping gas followed him as did the smell and he smiled in cold appreciation of the work he was about to do.

#####3##3

It was pleasantly warm when Katiya started to work her way towards wakefulness under the blankets. Passing out next to a vampire probably hadn't been that smart an idea the night before, but then again, if Alexei had wanted her dead she would have been long before now.

"Oh." She blinked, sitting up quickly when she realized she wasn't alone in the bed. Then immediately felt foolish when she realized it was Alexei. Of course the blond would be here, this was her room. Cautiously, Katiya shifted towards the edge of the bed, not sure if it was even possible for the vampire to wake up.

Alexei was awake, sluggish like a bear during hibernation. It was a little past noon the winter sun cutting through the smog and pollution, but since she had designed this place the sun wouldn't hit this room, never directly. She was one of the few vampires she knew that awoke this early.

She could only guess it was due to her age.

"Sneaking off like the sneaky mouse you are?" She joked quietly.

The redhead froze, curly hair in a riotous mass around her face and smiled at what she really hoped was a joke. "I didn't want to wake... er disturb you." Curiosity was gnawing at her also; she wanted to see more of this huge mansion.

"Its okay. You're human and naturally are awake now, while my kind prefers to hide our faces from the Christian God's eyes. I'm not much company for a couple more hours, and since you are such a curious sneaky mouse, go explore. Find a room you like, there are plenty that go unused." She paused trying to gather her thoughts. "But don't go into any rooms if the doors are locked. That is for your protection. Even a sleeping vampire will protect itself."

"No lock picking, right." That sounded smart enough and since Katiya wasn't suicidal she wasn't going to tempt things any further than they already were. Slipping out from under the covers she made sure to pull them back into place, not sure if Alexei could feel cold. "Any place I should go peek in?"

"The kitchen." Was the mumbled reply. "Warren will be up, he can feed you."

"I need to thank him for last nights meal." Katiya picked up a bundle of clothes that someone had left folded up on a nearby chair. They looked roughly her size so she figured she'd use them unless someone said otherwise. "Good night, day, I mean."

Alexei mumbled something but her mind was slipping back into blackness.

The light out in the corridor wasn't direct sunlight, but it was enough to illuminate the halls more than the gaslights that had been lit the night before. Everything was beautiful, from the polished marble floor, the Persian rugs that artfully covered the floor, to the tastefully placed antique vases, statues, and occasional weaponry that filled it. Katiya was terrified to touch anything and break something that was probably older than her grandparents.

Keeping her hands to herself by force of will she explored her way down towards the kitchen, helped by her nose when she got close enough to pick up the scent of cooking.

The wonderfully mouthwatering smells got stronger as she negotiated her way through the hallways. Her stomach rumbled in anticipation of another good meal. "I'm going to

have to be careful I don't become like those fat old rich ladies who can barely waddle." If all of the meals around here were as good as last evenings.

A man's voice was singing something in a language that Katiya recognized from the back alleys of the city, but didn't know herself. The voice was pleasant though, deep, rich, and fitting the tune he was carrying. Quietly she slipped through the doorway, inhaling deeply as she looked around the room. The kitchen was impressive, warm shinning copper pans hung from hooks over large black iron stoves.

Here there was light, streaming in through the large windows that lined one wall letting out onto... Katiya stopped and stared wide eyed. Past those windows was a lush green garden. Only when she looked closer did she understand how such a thing was possible. Glass panes keeping out the bitter cold and letting in the light walled the entire garden in. The cost was beyond anything she could imagine for that much glass alone.

"That's amazing." Katiya moved closer to the glassed in garden, smiling in understanding as she saw the pipes carrying steam to warm the room.

A furry head poked out of the greenery, slightly smaller than Kirill it was still big. Kira's ears were pointing straight up and then her gaze zeroed in on Katiya. In curiosity the great cat tilted its head trying to see better through the glass.

"Two tigers." Katiya shook her head in amusement. Of course there were two. She looked towards the chef, realizing he'd stopped his singing. "Good morning. I'm sorry if I interrupted."

The sturdy looking man stared at her a moment his bushy eyebrows appearing to wiggle and dance on his forehead and he pulled on his closely trimmed beard. "You must be the wee one the Mistress brought home." His dark hair was touched with red and hints of gray. His voice burred slipping uncomfortably around the common tongue of the house.

Katiya blinked, not sure what language that was he had just spoken. It sounded like Russian, probably, but the accent was thickened with a rough edge that it took her a long moment to process his words. "My name is Katiya. Thank you for dinner last night, it was delicious."

She moved closer to the stove, peeking to see what he was doing.

"Good, good, I'm glad you liked it. You'll need lots of protein to keep your strength up. If she's happy, we're happy. Don't forget that." He shook a beefy finger at her to make sure he got his point across.

That sounded like good advice and Katiya wasn't one to ignore good advice. "Who's we?" Last night was still a bit of a blur in her mind, she wasn't sure who was in the



manor besides the few she'd met.

"Okay now, come have a seat, you're too skinny. Not healthy, why my Fiona would be mother henning you if she were here. Guess I should do it for her." He turned back to huge cast iron stoves and fire pits that were blasting away. "I have some ham steaks grilling and some bread that's almost done."

Almost immediately Katiya's mouth watered. "That sounds delicious." She eagerly took the offered seat, enjoying the heavenly scents.

"I'm Warren, by the by. The head and only cook." He muttered and cursed at the food for a bit. "By we, do you mean the humans or the other lot?" He asked sliding a couple of crisp steaks on to wooden plate, and then he opened another oven and quickly grabbed a hot bread loaf out tossing it from hand to hand.

"Humans I guess." She remembered Alexei telling her about the other vampires that were in the manor, but other than the two women who had greeted them as they came into the manor, she wasn't too clear on anyone else.

"Well there's me." He started as he slathered freshly churned butter on the bread and then grabbed a hunk of cheese. He set the plate down in front of Katiya and then sat down next to her.

"The mistress has a few personal aids, which you are now one of, I'm assuming." He stuttered out the last part, his cheeks reddening slightly.

She couldn't help but grin at his discomfort; it was nice to not be the one blushing for once. "I guess so. She hasn't really told me what she wants me to do." Other than provide blood she supposed.

"There's Molly, she's a real English tart all full of piss and vinegar. Shiro, now she's real quite just works on these beautiful violin pieces. My Fiona use to be a... uh... but now she's going to just be head of the household, once she gets better."

"Better?" Katiya gladly took the plate of food that was being offered to her. "Is she sick?" She didn't miss his use of terms for Fiona.

"Kind of." He tugged on his beard and fidgeted. "I shouldn't have said anything. If you're really curious ask the Mistress about it. But my Fiona she'll be fine though." He got up hurrying over to his stoves.

Another mystery Katiya could puzzle over. The first bite of steak was as good as it looked and she moaned in appreciation. "This is delicious!" She took another bite. "Anyone else I should know?"

"Lyov you've met, but I'm not certain he's human. There's Lidiya she takes care of the

horses in the stables and then poor Gregori handles all the grounds. He had a couple of lads helping him but the four of 'em decided to band together and rob the Mistress. Now poor Gregori wanders around trying to keep the place tame. Not too bad now that we're in winter."

Katiya's fork paused on its way to her mouth. "They tried to steal from Alexei?" She didn't see how that would have worked very well. Then she frowned as another thought occurred to her. "The four lads, were they brothers?"

"I believe so. They worked mainly during the day time hours and I don't think they really knew what... well... we know about certain truths."

"Hmmm." She chewed the next piece slowly, considering. "Did they steal a lot?" That was something she could help with. Maybe Gregori would need some help with the outside. That would keep her in shape.

"Yes, we didn't notice for a couple of days. The house is huge. But they stole some old weapons from the Mistress's game room." Warren shivered remembering the last time he'd been in there. "She was furious. Tracked them down and got most of it back."

Most, but not all, Katiya noted. She'd have to find out what wasn't returned and what she could do about getting back the rest. "Do you think that Gregori would like help with his work?" She speared another bite and closed her eyes, enjoying the flavor.

"Probably, but you know wee one, as a favored of the Mistress you really don't have to do anything?"

She shrugged; holding up the last bite on the plate that she had cleared in what she was sure was a record time. "If I keep eating your delicious food I'll need to do something or I won't be useful for anything." Blue eyes twinkled as she grinned mischievously. "Besides, I'd get bored doing nothing. And I usually get into trouble if I get bored."

He shrugged. "Well there's something about you she likes so just do what's in your nature."

"Thank you again for the food. It was delicious." She picked up the empty plate, looking around to see where she should deposit it and grinning as she spotted the tiger stretched out in the garden. "Does she get food too?"

Warren snorted. "A 300 pound tiger gets whatever she wants. But, aye, she and her brother get food. She's stalking a wild tomato plant in my winter garden."

Leaving the plate in a sink where she figured it belonged; Katiya went to the glass wall, staring into the garden. "It's amazing. I've never seen anything like it." Just the glass alone must have been a fortune.

"Aye, the Mistress she takes good care of us. The pollution is bad for us, good for the vampires. She makes sure we drink pure water, and that we have fresh vegetables year round."

She touched the door handle, looking back over her shoulder at the chef. "Can I?"

"Of course you are favored of the mistress you can do almost no wrong."

The redhead frowned for a second, not sure that she liked the way that he'd phrased that. She blinked in astonishment as she stepped into the greenhouse, instantly wrapped with fragrant, hot and steamy air. It felt like summer and quickly closed the door behind her before too much hot air could escape.

She spent more than an hour wandering through the glassed in area, touching and sniffing at every exotic flower and herb that grew in it. The smells were amazing and she knew she'd found one of her favorite spots in the house by the time she stepped over a napping tiger back into the kitchen.

Kira's ears perked up and she made a playful swat at Katiya, but made no move to get out of her sunny spot in the garden.

With a yelp, the woman did a hop-jump over the swat, eyeing the tiger as she closed the door behind her. She'd have to remember that they could be playful, like a big alley cat, even more dangerous though she figured.

With a wave to Warren, she continued on her way, determined to explore more of the house while she had a chance. The sun was still high above the horizon so she figured she wouldn't be seeing any of the vampire occupants in the near future. It was a perfect time to see if she could find out more about the human guests.

She'd started to look for a library to see if she could find any interesting books, but instead she'd found a couple of locked doors. It was, as always, a matter of will power for her to resist trying to open those. A lock seemed like a challenge to try to open.

Thankfully the sound of a violin being expertly played drew her away before she did something that she'd regret later.

It took a little navigating to find, but she managed to come to find the room that the music was coming from. It was something straight out of the silent movies she'd sneaked in to see. A large dance ballroom, the wood floors polished and shining, a full bar set up across one wall and a stage. It was on that raised stage that the slim Asian woman she'd seen greet Alexei stood, violin in hand, eyes closed and playing.

Quietly, Katiya crept closer, not wanting to interrupt the wonderful music.

Shiro frowned as she played a refrain and then she paused and replayed it again and again. Unhappy she stopped and picked up a quill and dipped it in a well of ink and started to scratch out her notes and make new ones.

"That was beautiful." The redhead said from the base of the stage, quietly, trying not to startle the woman who was intent on her musical score.

Shiro gave a small eep, in surprise and turned towards the voice.

"Hi." Katiya gave her best friendly smile.

Her cheeks flushed and she curtsied at Katiya.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you." Katiya said, a little awkwardly when she remembered that Alexei had said Shiro couldn't speak after having her tongue cut out.

Shiro set the quill down and then her violin on its stand. She made a quick series of gestures with her hands and then frowned at Katiya's blank look. Looking around she grabbed a blank piece of parchment and the quill. "We have not been introduced I am Shiro." She wrote in a quick series of fluid strokes.

The almost stylized cursive was beautiful. "I'm Katiya. You play beautifully. I am sorry if I interrupted, I was just curious to see who was playing."

Shiro bowed at Katiya and wrote, "Thank you. The music isn't finished yet, the ending isn't right, but I'm glad you like it." She paused, and seemed to war with herself before writing. "Are you all right? The first time with Alexei can be kind of overwhelming."

Automatically Katiya's hand touched the side of her throat and the small scar there. "Yes, thank you. I was really tired after the first time. Last night was..." She frowned, trying to figure out the words to describe it. Instead she gave a shrug seeing understanding in the other woman's face. "I was going to explore the manor some more. I can leave you to your music if you'd like?"

Shiro nodded and picked up her violin, teasingly she played a few notes that matched Katiya's footsteps out of the room.

The redhead spun in place at the door, bowed and then slipped out, laughing.

#####3#####3

Gregori had turned out to be a gruff old man with a bit of a limp in one leg and a gruff demeanor that explained why he was more comfortable with trees and flowers outside than people. He'd ignored her offer of help and she was pretty sure he'd growled at her a few times when she'd tried to lend a hand.

"Does he hate everyone or just me in particular?" She asked a lounging cat on the floor in the entryway of the manor.

When the cat didn't deign to answer, other than a flip of a tail, she stepped around it, carefully.

It wasn't too long until sunset so she decided to find out if Alexei was awake yet. Would the vampire have to stay sleep until the sun fully set? She'd woken up before, so probably not.

Uneasy at the idea of just stepping inside the Mistress's bedroom without announcing herself, she knocked first.

Alexei's eyes opened at the knock, drowsily she croaked out. "Enter."

"Good evening, almost." Katiya stepped inside, closing the door behind her.

Alexei was more alert this time and she smiled at Katiya. "So my sneaky mouse, did you have fun exploring?"

"You have a beautiful place. Warren's an excellent cook and that glassed in garden is amazing." Moving the chair closer to the bed the redhead took a seat. "I don't know why you would ever leave here."

"Mmmm, thank you." Sluggishly she sat up leaning against the headboard. "Are you being a shy mouse now?" She said a long look between the chair and the bed.

"Wasn't sure..." Katiya gave up and bounded onto the bed, glad to be in the covers after her walk outside. "I met Shiro; she plays better than anyone I've ever heard before. Warren's nice, strange accent though. I think Gregori hates me, I'm not really sure what I did to annoy him though."

Alexei thought her head might explode she wasn't certain she was awake enough to keep up. "Take a breath Katiya." She chuckled and sank back down back under the covers wrapping her now cooler body around the human's warmer one.

"Shiro does have an incredible talent, and Warren is Scottish so don't worry nobody can understand him."

As asked, Katiya took a deep breath before asking a question. "What about Gregori?"

"Ah Gregori. He had his trust horribly abused. It's nothing personal against you. But you'll win him over I have no doubt."

She paused, considering her next question carefully. "What little I understood of

Warren, he said Fiona was sick and that I'd have to ask you about it?"

Alexei went still even for a vampire.

Which was a great imitation of a statue. Katiya raised both eyebrows and watched the sculpted face next to her, waiting to hear what was coming.

Alexei let out a sigh finally deciding what she was going to say. "Fiona has been a favored pet for centuries."

"But she's still human right?" Katiya frowned a little, not sure how this was connected to why she was sick.

"More or less." Alexei rolled them over until she was on her hands and knees over Katiya, staring into her face. "In a week or so she'll be completely human again. As a pet I take your blood and on occasion give you some of mine. Yours gives me life, when you take mine it cements our bond to each other but my blood effects you."

The move brought back enough memories of the bathroom the night before that Katiya's mind got sidetracked for a moment. She blinked, swallowing as she tried to figure out what they had just been talking about. Her cheeks reddening, Katiya nodded. "So she's sick because she's not taking your blood anymore?"

"Yes. She's like one of those opium addicts going through withdrawals. If she survives she will be utterly human again." Alexei's nostril's flared as she picked up the rush of blood under the skin as Katiya's heart rate picked up a bit in desire.

Licking her lips, the redhead focused on the hint of cleavage that was visible from this angle. "Like the people in opium dens?" There were a fair number of them spread throughout the city, pits of despair as far as Katiya was concerned.

"Yes, worse though. Those junkies don't have the slightly added strength of my blood." Alexei watched a tongue come out and lick red lips.

"Strength?" Katiya hadn't felt anything different today. Her fingers twitched as she struggled not to move them up to touch skin. This was an important discussion she reminded herself, which didn't stop her hips from moving.

Alexei grinned. "You probably won't notice anything for a while, and every human pet has different changes." She let her legs slid out, lowering her hips down between the V of Katiya's legs.

"Really." Katiya's voice hitched at the move. She really should be asking more questions; she'd come up with so many of them while she walked outside. Now she couldn't remember any of them except for how quickly she could try to get naked again.

"Yes. Most vampires don't share blood with their pets, most just bleed them dry." The blonde whispered into Katiya's ear and then nipped at the lobe. "So you are a very lucky mouse."

"I have no doubt." Katiya arched up into the nip, pressing her body up into the body above hers.

Three heavy knocks on the door stopped her from doing what she was about to do though. Groaning, Katiya collapsed down on the bed. "But I'm not that lucky right now." She grumbled.

Her attention shifted to the door. "What?" Alexei growled. "You're plenty lucky." Alexei said turning her attention back to Katiya for a moment, she lowered her head kissing the woman tasting the warmth in her lips. Then she got up storming out of the bedroom. "This better be important, I haven't had breakfast yet!"

Lyov was waiting in the sitting room for her. "Sorry Mistress. Mr. Morozov is here. He said it was urgent. He is already waiting in the drawing room." Lyov nodded in confirmation and withdrew, closing the door behind him.

"Of course he is." Alexei muttered at the door the little gnome had just closed. Turning she went back to the bedroom hungrily she eyed the rumpled looking young woman in the bed. It was tempting to make Mr. Morozov wait. Almost surprising since she hadn't really felt this reckless sort of physical desire in decades.

The redhead sat up a bit in the bed she'd been unconsciously lounging in, an eyebrow arched in question. "Do you have to go?"

"I should." Alexei admitted. "My lawyer is a man who hates to be left waiting." She however didn't move from where she was standing, curious because she really didn't need blood.

Katiya smiled when Alexei didn't move from where she was standing. "Did you want something else before going?" The look in the blonde woman's eyes hinted at what that might be.

"I'm not sure." Alexei admitted. This was an odd feeling maybe she wasn't awake yet?

Both eyebrows rose and Katiya studied the other woman speculatively. Sliding up off the bed she stood close to the taller blonde, enjoying this more than she thought possible. Rising up on her toes she just lightly kissed Alexei's cheek.

"Maybe I could help?" She whispered, fingers trailing up the Russian's arm.

Alexei's eyebrows rose in surprise. "Maybe you could? How do you think you can help?"

Katiya flushed and shrugged. "I don't know. I thought you looked like you needed something." Suddenly feeling a little foolish to think she could help a vampire with anything.

Alexei shook her head. "No, no, no, my mouse. Be brave, always be brave; especially when you're dealing with vampires."

That sounded like good advice. Katiya nodded, taking that advice to heart. "Then let me come with you." She decided, going for the brazen approach.

"Not what I was expecting." Pondering the request she turned to her closet and picked out a shirt. "Okay."

"What were you expecting?" Katiya enjoyed the opportunity to watch the naked woman's back.

"Something else." Alexei hedged as she slipped into a black silk shirt and gray trousers.

That was the first time that she'd heard the blonde hedge about anything. Katiya was still trying to think over what had just happened when Alexei had finished dressing, missing part of the show because of it.

Dressed she decided to forgo shoes, running a hand through her curls she looked over at the redhead. Sighing she walked over and reached out smoothing out the shirt and collar. "Someone has chosen tomboy clothes for you I see. I hope that is all right. Mr. Morozov will think I've been doing immoral things with you, and he can be an annoyingly moral man on occasion."

"I like the pants. They're much easier to sneak around in." Not to mention run, hide and ride, all the things that she'd always loved to do. "I like the shirt too. I guess we shouldn't keep your Mr. Morozov waiting then. I can scandalize him, distract him, while you learn what you need to."

That trailing touch made Katiya shiver and her eyes dilated with a sudden surge of desire. Considering her experiences in such thing were limited, she was surprised by the strength of the emotion. Desire, that had to be desire that she'd been feeling. "I just thought up another way I could help." She nearly purred, wanting those fingers back on her again.

"Okay, my mouse, what did you think of to help?"

Nimble fingers started slid up the silk of Alexei's shirt, stopping at the top button, which she started to undo slowly. "I was thinking I could return the favor from last night?" She licked her lips as that one button came undone.



"Ah that." She reached up stilling Katiya's fingers. "You don't have to, we didn't talk about such things. But I don't expect it. It makes the bond nicer, deeper; and the sharing of blood easier."

Her gray eyes stared into Katiya's blues. "I never want anyone with me to feel obligated or forced."

Katiya let her hands drop, frowning. That wasn't at all what she'd been thinking when she'd started to undo the button. "I guess we shouldn't keep your visitor waiting." Was all she said in reply, trying to figure out what she was feeling and thinking.

Alexei sighed feeling frustrated. She grabbed Katiya and kissed her hard on the mouth. "I like your attentions Katiya, I really do. Just make sure its what you want."

"I will." The redhead agreed faintly, swaying as she recovered from that swift kiss. It was really quite frustrating trying to keep track of herself around Alexei she was discovering.

"Vampires are powerful, dangerous; some people are attracted to that power and danger." Alexei whispered.

"Is that what you think I'm attracted to? The power and danger?" There was no doubt that Alexei exuded both, but then again Katiya had known plenty of outlaws who did also.

Alexei almost didn't let her step away; she was feeling hungry but she wasn't. "I think you're confusing me."

"That makes two of us." Katiya whispered, a shake of her head sending red curly hair bouncing.

Alexei chuckled, some master vampire she was, and a human was turning her around ass over teakettle. "Alright let us go meet with my lawyer. Behave."

Katiya smiled, fluttering her eyelashes as the tavern dancers did. "Whatever makes you think I wouldn't?"

Alexei snorted. "Because I'm getting a feel for what I have gotten myself into with you." She redid the top button of her shirt and led the way out of her rooms.

The man waiting for Alexei in one of the downstairs rooms was tall, rather darkly skinned, and had a moustache that must have taken years to groom to the exquisite perfection that it was in now. He rose smoothly from the seat he'd been perched in and bowed right at the waist in a way that Katiya had never seen before.

"Ms. Petrov, you look as beautiful as always." As he stood upright again his eyes flicked to Katiya and then back to Alexei. She recognized that look, a powerful man dismissing her as nothing more than a female in the background, there to serve.

"Mr. Morozov, I wish I could say the same, but you only come see me when my bank account is in trouble of being audited by foreign nationals."

She sat down gesturing for Morozov to do the same at the chair across from her.

Katiya wandered around behind Alexei's chair leaning against the back of it. She had to bite her lip to avoid smiling when Morozov frowned as he saw the pants she was wearing.

Running a hand over his lustrous black beard and making sure the mustache ends were still twirled up he took the indicated seat. "I would not have disturbed your fun " he glanced at Katiya "if it was not important."

"Of course not." She smirked. "So if we can focus less on my fun and more for your reason for being here." She broke in when it appeared he was having a hard time tearing his attention away. It had to be the red hair; it was unusual for this region.

A touch uncomfortably he shifted in his seat. "I received word this evening from friends I maintain in the local constabulary." Reaching into the breast pocket of his hand tailored suite jacket he pulled out a set of papers, which he unfolded. "Apparently a complaint has been lodged against one of your factories." He looked distinctly uncomfortable now. "Stating that it is, in fact, not yours."

"Really." She reached over grabbing the papers and started flipping over the papers. Her face went blank hiding the surprise she was feeling. "Apparently my father had a bastard and left the property deed with this bastard's mother." She said neutrally. Fun, since she'd been pretending to be the ruling Petrov for centuries, and she'd never had any children.

"They purport to have the deed in hand and will prove it in front of a magistrate." He finished for her, having memorized the contents of those papers on the quick trip to the mansion.

Katiya went still on the back of Alexei's chair, eyes widening as she considered the likeliness of her having stolen a deed from a factory a few days earlier having nothing to do with this.

"Well then, my dear Morozov you need to go look at this deed and verify if it's authentic." She handed the papers back. "Anything would have had my father's seal on it to be original."

Katiya watched in fascination as a drop of sweat beaded up on the man's forehead and

slowly started down his face. "My source said that he had seen the document, it is said to have your seal on it. I will of course check myself."

"I'm disappointed, you haven't checked it already. I pay you an outrageous fee, not a source. So get on it. I've left those factories empty for a reason." She wasn't pleased she had left them empty for a reason, once she had realized the damage the pollution was doing to the people and plants.

He bowed his head at the rebuke, wincing. "I am on my way there directly after I leave here, Ms. Petrov. Did you have anything else you wished me to look into while I do that?" He kept reminding himself how very much money she did pay him to take care of these things for her.

"No, not at this time. But I would like a full report of whom you deal with. I'd like to know who exactly I'm dealing with."

"Of course." He rose, smoothing his tailored jacket and offering her a little bow. "You will have my report by dawn." She always disturbed him, just a little bit, no matter how well he tried to hide it.

"You know the way out. I expect your report in the morning." She said not getting up.

He bowed once more and then took his leave, not surprised to find Lyov waiting to escort him to the door, as he always was when Morozov came to visit.

Katiya waited until the door had closed before making a sound in her throat. "I think I know how your deed may have gotten into the hands of who ever it is."

"Do you?"

Moving around from behind the chair to take the seat that Morozov had just vacated she nodded, grimacing. "I was supposed to steal a velvet pouch about this big." She held up her hands. "Then give it to Ivan. I looked inside after I took care of..." She hesitated "The body. It was a deed."

"Oh mouse we barely know each other and already you are stealing from me."

"I didn't know you at all then!" Katiya stiffened, hurt. "I wouldn't steal from you now."

"I'm sorry that was uncalled for. You are right we didn't know each other."

Katiya relaxed, a little. "I can find out what Ivan did with it, who he sold it to." There was no way she would talk with Ivan directly but there were other ways to find such things out.

"I appreciate that." Alexei smiled and rubbed her head. First the blood bar with some

unknown vampires, now this, was there a connection? She didn't know.

"I might need some money to help people remember with." The redhead had a few ideas of whom she could talk to, but they wouldn't give her information from the goodness of their heart.

"Of course." She got up and walked to the door. "Follow me, please."

Katiya was quick to follow. "Alexei? I am sorry I stole the deed from you. I didn't have much choice at the time. I was trying to stop doing that sort of work." She'd promised her father she'd try after all.

Alexei opened the door and started down the hallway to the main stairs. "Katiya, don't apologize. It doesn't matter, it was before... before everything." She started up the stairs going to the third floor.

Katiya obediently trailed along, curious to see where they were going. "The man who I stole it for works for the highest bidder. He has no honor, he wouldn't care who he stole it for."

"Katiya, most people who steal, kill, and other such things have no honor." She winced. "Notice I said most not all." She clarified.

The other woman grinned. "Really? You sure I'm not honorless?" Her eyes kept drifting down to the vampire's backside, she could really get used to following alone behind her.

"It won't have been the first time I've shown poor judgment of character." Once they reached the third floor she moved down the hallway to her game room.

Katiya raised an eyebrow. "You were supposed to say something along the lines of: Why no Katiya, of course I think you have honor."

Exasperated, Alexei stopped and turned around. "Katiya, I let you sleep with me. Vampires are extremely vulnerable during the daylight hours, how much more trust do you want from me. Considering how well we don't know each other."

Katiya smiled. "I know." She was discovering a new game that she really enjoyed; it was called tweaking the vampire.

Alexei growled and her gray eyes narrowed before she turned around and continued down the hallway.

The human followed her smile widening. She was getting the impression that not many people dared poke fun at the Vampire, which was, she supposed, a normal reaction of mere mortals in the presence of someone so imposing.

The blonde opened a door and entered. Lighting the lamps she highlighted the various objects in the room. She had been alive longer than most people could even guess; she had hunted and killed various monsters and demons that had threatened her and her territory.

The younger woman stopped at the door, mouth opening but no sound coming out as she stared at the trophies mounted on all the walls. Tigers, bears, huge reptiles were mounted among animals she couldn't even begin to try to name and things she was pretty certain weren't supposed to exist.

There were shelves filled with things that Alexei didn't even remember anymore. She walked around a large red velvet pool table, she detested the sport it was boring. There were paintings on the walls some were even of her wearing clothes that hadn't been in style in centuries.

Just past the liquor cabinet and some lush, padded leather chairs, was a large steel safe.

The safe drew Katiya away from studying the pictures of Alexei in different period dress and a few of her as a man, which was an interesting image. "Wow. A Wilson Company type E. That's a lot of safe." That was a hard safe to crack, not impossible, no safe was completely break in proof, but this was pretty close without resorting to TNT.

"Really, is that what it's called? I told Stepan to get me a really good one." She crouched down and started spinning the dials, her fingers blurring with speed. At the very end the lock clicked but before the door would open she drew a key out of her pocket and inserted it. The door sprung open.

"How much do you need?"

She really should get used to having her mouth hang open in surprise around this woman, Katiya thought dimly. She had a suspicion that Alexei took some enjoyment out of having her speechless for a moment or two. "Umm." She tried not to drool at the sight of gold bars inside. "A hundred should be more than enough to loosen tongues."

"Easy enough." She pulled out 150 rubles. "The extra is... extra... for what you need."

That was more than a years worth of wages. Katiya took the money blinking and taking the smooth crisp bills automatically as they were offered to her. "I can go find them during the day tomorrow."

"Sounds good." She shut the safe, locking it, and spinning the dial. She stood and gestured to one of the over stuffed chairs. "Would you like to sit and have a drink?"

"That would be nice." The redhead tucked the bills into her waistband. She'd have to

find a better way to carry them during her little trip tomorrow. "I heard Shiro playing earlier, she's very good. She could play in one of those music halls if she wanted to."

"She has on occasion. Not here. We've gone to Britain, Austria, and Italy for her to play." It was hard sometimes people seeing Shiro only as some savage, or a trained monkey doing a trick.

Alexei poured one glass of brandy, and set it down before Katiya, before sitting herself. She stared across the room her eyes lighting briefly on an old tapestry of a knight fighting a horned demon and a pack of flaming hounds. On a shelf underneath of it was a broken fragment of a hunting horn and a pair of what looked like massive stag horns.

Katiya had tried to imagine what the world was like outside of the city; she'd only been out into the countryside once, when her father had needed to meet a fence. The redhead took the offered seat, turning to see what it was that had the blonde woman's attention. "Is that you?"

Alexei frowned in thought shifting through a ton of memories. "Yes. Wearing armor in winter is an awful experience. I can't remember why I was there. It was in Britain when they still had forests, a favor I think. Winter was horrible and Herne the Huntsman had called a debt of blood."

"Herne?" Katiya didn't recognize the reference. Was that one of the gods that people prayed to? Maybe that was one of the things that regular people learned in schools as they grew up.

"Herne the God of the Wild Hunt, he stole the horn of the Hunt from the Goddess Hel as well as her hounds. It was said by peasants if you were out at night in the winter and he came across you he'd call a hunt. Turn his hounds loose on you, tearing the fabric of reality with the dangerous chaos of nature." She shrugged.

"The next day if they found your body stolen of life frozen on the road. Sometimes he let the women go - for a price. This fellow I don't know if he was the original Herne or merely some petty demon who had wrestled the horn of the hunt from the first Herne or if he'd just gotten lazy and sloppy as the decades had rolled by."

Katiya shifted around in her chair so she could get a better look at the tapestry. It could be Alexei in it, the blonde hair was the same, but it was hard to tell. "You stopped him."

"Yes, I owed someone a favor and he called it in. I spent all winter hunting the prick. Stole the horn and smashed it freeing his hounds from its control, they all turned on him. I guess, honestly his own hounds killed him."

That was so far out of Katiya's normal every day world that she turned around to stare at Alexei, just to make sure she wasn't joking. When she didn't smile Katiya assumed she was telling the truth. "Let me make sure I understand this. You killed a demon or

maybe a god of the hunt, because you owed someone a favor? Thereby probably saving unknown numbers of villagers?"

"Yes. Saving human lives didn't matter to me really; it took me centuries to stop being a blood-sucking fiend from hell, to simply be the bastard you see today. Actually it was a book I read a couple of decades ago by a man named Darwin that really started effecting how I viewed what we are, our and our responsibilities to the humans."

"That's the man who got the church all upset isn't it?" She vaguely remembered the preachers screaming about him on the street corners.

"Which one? There are so many who spout ideas that make the church squirm and shout heresy, but no I don't think they were happy with his ideas on evolution, and humans relation to monkeys. He's partially wrong on that part, but he didn't have knowledge of the supernatural world."

"Wrong how?" Katiya asked.

"Some humans are related to wolves, tigers, foxes, and etc, or there would be no shape shifters. So if the monkey isn't your thing don't worry, you may not be one at all." Alexei said with a smirk, "but considering how nimble your fingers are it may be true."

Without her permission, Katiya's cheeks flushed as a completely different mental image inserted itself in her mind. "So shapeshifters exist too?" She struggled to get the topic to something else, tasting the brandy and enjoying the warmth that spread through her.

"Of course, as a general rule we don't get along. They're kind of ticked about the de-forestation and pollution that my kind are big on."

"I can see why they would be upset about that." She frowned as a thought occurred to her. "You're two tigers are just tigers aren't they?"

Alexei chuckled. "Yes, they're just tigers to the best of my knowledge. Their mother died and I found their den, they were the only two left alive, so I kept them with me, raising them. They've decided to stay."

"You don't have to tell me this but I've been wondering, why does a vampire own factories?" Katiya frowned, not quite sure she understood it.

The vampire went still as she thought about her answer. "It seemed like a good idea at the time. Industry and change came and with it stacks of smoke billowing into the skies, blocking the sun." She shrugged, "It gave me something to focus on, and then I lost focus and let Sergei take over."

There was something in that answer that Katiya was missing, she'd have to think about it later. A knock at the door stopped her from her follow up question, and a scowling

Lyov opened the door. "Mistress. A messenger arrived for you." He looked more disgruntled than usual.

Alexei frowned, "A messenger from whom?"

"He would not give me his name." Lyov's face twisted into a deeper scowl. Considering he had an unpleasant look most of the time, Katiya was surprised he could look even more unpleasant.

"But he demanded to see you, alone." He looked towards Katiya and she realized what he meant.

"Bring him here." Alexei growled.

Lyov grunted and closed the door behind him, going to fetch the messenger.

The vampire looked at Katiya, warring a moment about sending her away. "On my lap or at my feet, either way its time to play your part."

Katiya blinked in surprise. "Lap?" Of the two options that one at least sounded comfortable.

Alexei grinned. "You're a pet; I have another vampire's pet coming with a message. I would hate him to report how soft I am on my human's, you don't even have a collar."

The redhead moved closer then gingerly sat on Alexei's lap, her fingers going to her neck. "You weren't kidding about the collar in the warehouse were you?"

"No. I wasn't." She wrapped her arms around Katiya and then stretched out her legs. "I really don't like it, but in vampire society it can be necessary, if not expected." She lowered her face into the redhead's neck and nibbled gently, exposing fangs she made a few shallow cuts to get the scent of blood in the air and then licked the cuts.

Lyov opened the door, turning to the handsome young looking man who followed behind him. "My mistress awaits you in the study." Nodding through the doors to where she sat. The man swept past Lyov without a second look, dressed in red and black suit that matched the ornate collar around his neck.

He smiled as he spotted Katiya stretched out on Alexei's lap, shivering from the nibble she'd just given. "Lady Petrov, I bear you greetings from my Master."

Alexei looked up an eyebrow arched in question. "Did I tell you to speak?" She whispered out her voice dark, unhappy.

The man winced, and went to his knee in front of her chair, head bowed. "No, my apology Mistress."



Alexei kissed Katiya's neck in apology.

Katiya shivered, twisting a bit so that she could look up at the blonde with a raised eyebrow. This was going to take a lot of getting used to.

"So pet, when my servant asked for the name of the messenger and who had sent you. Did you think your bloated life span made you above common curtesy? Above giving my house the respect it is due?" She kept her voice low and menacing while she raised an eyebrow back at the redhead. "He is a pet of the Vampire lord of Russia, play along, he'll report back everything." She whispered softly in Katiya's ear giving the curved pink shell of cartilage a lick as she finished.

Since playing along seemed to involve curling up on the lap of an admittedly gorgeous woman who was doing wonderful things to her ear right now, Katiya figured she could do her best.

"My apology Mistress, but my lord said that my message was to be delivered to you only." He stayed bent over, kneeling.

"Hmmm. Is your Master aware of how arrogant you are?" She was tempted to get up and stomp on him a bit, but that would mean moving Katiya, and she was rather enjoying her warmth and scent.

"Look around you. You aren't even worth my anger, compared to some of the things I've faced you're nothing but an annoying fly. Don't forget that."

Since she'd invited him to, he did raise his head enough to look around at the trophies that were mounted on the walls. They were impressive and he shivered a little at the thought of what this woman would do to him if he displeased her. His master had warned him not to push her. "I won't, Mistress."

Katiya decided this was a rather nice place to be, she could watch the other human without worry from the rather secure spot she was in. It was odd, feeling safe in the arms of a vampire, not something she'd ever counted on happening.

"Good. Now boy, relay your message so I can get back to more important things." She let her hands drift up under Katiya's shirt giving no illusions to what he had interrupted.

The redhead gasped, her hands gripping the fabric of Alexei's pant leg.

"Yes Mistress." He had to really work at not licking his lips and focus on the message. "My Master sends his regards to you, his loyal vassal. He wishes the pleasure of your company in Saint Petersburg in two days time."

Alexei paused, "Did he tell you why? Or is that it?" The fingers on her right hand flexed unconsciously remembering the damage Karl had done to them not to long ago.

"He wishes to discuss matters of importance with you. He has called a meeting of all his vassals." That last part wasn't really part of the message, but he felt like sharing.

Feeling the body beneath hers suddenly tense, Katiya twisted a bit so she could see Alexei's face, not very surprised to find it cold and set. She ran a hand down the arm that was keeping her on the lap.

"Very well. Tell your master I will be there." At least it wasn't more punishment over the blood house. "Lyov!" She shouted.

The door opened instantly. "Mistress?"

"Show this boy out. We are finished."

"With pleasure, Mistress." He let the man get to his feet, barely, before hurrying him out the door and shutting it behind them. They heard the startled yell of the younger man followed by somebody being tossed out the front door.

"Remind me not to bring messages to you." Katiya said and then reached up to touch her neck. "Was that really necessary for the messengers benefit?" She had her doubts about that.

"Yes. Some can smell blood in the air. The primary use of a pet is food. Don't be such a baby I barely bit you."

"True." Katiya tested to see if she could get off Alexei's lap. "Maybe you can do better next time." She did her best to get free, intent on at least making it to the door.

"Are you challenging me, Mouse?" Alexei said trying to be stern but the curl of her lips gave her away.

She'd managed to almost free herself, which she was taking as a victory. "I would never challenge the great all mighty Alexei Petrova." Katiya was already laughing, tugging on her arm that Alexei was still holding onto easily.

"Do you want to leave? Where are you going to go Mouse?" She chuckled and easily pulled the young woman back into her body. "You didn't finish your drink." She whispered into an ear.

Her smile wide, Katiya put both hands on Alexei's chest, shivering as she felt lips against her ear again. "How foolish of me."

"Yes, very foolish." She laughed and then slowly let go. "Sit, finish your drink."

"Why Ms. Petrova, are you trying to get me drunk?" Katiya fluttered her eyelids, not managing to keep a straight face as she went to retake her seat across from Alexei.

"No, maybe I just want to keep your company for a little longer." Alexei said with a charming smile. So far she had done most of the talking telling Katiya about her and the world she had just entered.

"I feel flattered then." Katiya raised her cup to salute and took a drink, thinking she could grow to enjoy brandy quite easily.

"So mouse, how did you feel about what just happened?" The vampire was curious about how the reality of being a pet had set with the young woman.

"About you intimidating him? Or you claiming me as your possession?" To be honest, she wasn't too sure how she felt about both of them.

Her intimidation of the other pet hadn't even occurred to her. "Both, then."

"I felt kind of sorry for him. He tried to be your equal and..." She made a vague gesture. "Couldn't." The brandy was loosening her lips, usually she didn't talk this much about things she saw, but she felt at ease around the vampire. "I don't mind being yours. Better yours than one of the owners of whore houses or gang leaders." As far as she could see so far, Alexei was never mean or vicious simply for the sake of being mean and vicious.

Her mouse was a realist, the world wasn't fair, and despite the gospel the meek didn't inherit anything. "He is an arrogant prick, a pet of the Vampire Lord of eastern Europe, Karl." She watched the woman enjoy her brandy and slowly picked up the cut glass bottle and add a little bit more to the glass. "So mouse, tell me, who do you get your lovely red hair from?"

"My mother. That's what my father used to tell me. He had black hair, and was Russian. She came from somewhere else, he used to tell me tales of how she fled Ireland, but I'm not sure if he was just telling tall tales." She stretched out a bit in the seat, enjoying the moment. How odd, she thought, that some of the more pleasant times of her life were in the company of someone the world considered a blood-sucking monster.

"You didn't know her then?"

Katiya cupped her glass, staring down into the dark red brandy. "She died giving birth to me."

"Sad then not to have known her. Your father and you were close?" She reached out covering one of Katiya's hands with her own cooler one.

The human woman studied those hands, marveling at how long and elegant they looked. "Very. He taught me everything he knew. I tagged along with him everywhere he went."

"He taught you to be a sneaky mouse."

She smiled. "He taught me to open locks, pick pockets, sneak in shadows and anything else he thought would help me survive." The redhead lifted her head proudly. "He couldn't send me to school, but he wanted me to have an education anyway."

Alexei stroked Katiya's hand studying her fingers. "I have no need for a simpering proper lady, I'm afraid she would break too easily in my world."

The combination of the brandy and stroking fingers had her nearly purring as she relaxed. "I'll try not to break too easily." She thought she'd done well so far.

"I doubt you'll break at all." Alexei went silent for a moment although she didn't stop touching Katiya's hand. "Last night in the tub..." She paused uncertain how to phrase what she wanted to say. "Have you been with anyone before?"

The redhead ducked her head, feeling her cheeks already starting to turn red with an impending blush. "Not... fully." She winced, wondering how completely ridiculous that must sound.

"Not fully? A few dates' then, some heavy petting and kissing?" Alexei guessed.

The damn blush just wouldn't go away. "A couple of dates." She agreed, slowly. "And some kissing."

Alexei was amused but did her best to hide it. "Young boys struggling with their spotty facial hair and biological urges? Or perhaps a secret meeting with a pretty girl who in the end chose the proper boy?"

"Both." Katiya admitted, giving up on her attempt at keeping the blush in check. "The boy thing didn't work out too well, but then again, neither did the girl. She was a maid and ended up becoming the mistress of the old man who owned the manor."

"Ah, love and lust a horribly confusing thing; heart rending, feelings torn, the curse of this modern age. Things were simpler before. People just learned to love each other after their arranged marriage."

"Is that what you did?" Katiya let her own fingers do a little tracing on the cool hand covering hers. "An arranged marriage?"

Alexei chuckled. "No I was never married. I'm probably physically around your age maybe a tad younger. We aged quicker back then, little time for childhood, our life

spans weren't very long either. My people were nomadic warriors traveling with the herds. My father had two women, who had consented to share a tent with him, which one was my mother I couldn't tell you, and it didn't matter. I grew up a warrior only a few could best me with the bow and spear." She grinned, "and I had little interest in men."

"What kind of herds?" Katiya leaned forwards, interested in this glimpse into Alexei's former life. "Did you travel far?"

"We traveled all of Russia, hunting the deer and caribou herds. We fought sometimes, with others like us. Some were pale skinned like us others darker of skin." Her eyes instinctively turned to the wall where her bow used to be and found the spot on the wall bare. Sadness and anger warred for a minute remembering it was gone, one of the items not recovered from those boys, probably sold to a museum or private collection. She had made it with her own hands her father proudly watching her.

"I can't even imagine what a life like that would have been like." Katiya tried to picture running under a sky not filled with the smoke of factories or filled with thousands of other humans living together. It was too foreign a concept.

"The world has changed a great deal since my birth." She drew her eyes away from the empty spot on the wall and back to her mouse. She smiled ruefully again they had started speaking about her the conversation having been twisted away from Katiya.

"Well I may be a great many horrible things Katiya, but I won't force you and I won't take your virginity. Some things should be best given to someone you love or care about not a monster who's heart rarely beats." She let her hand slide away missing the heat from Katiya's.

Katiya smiled. "I'm not so sure you're the monster you make yourself out to be." She set aside the empty glass of brandy and stood up, reaching out to take that hand again. "Before Mr. Morozov showed up you said you hadn't even had breakfast yet, you must still be hungry?"

Alexei watched Katiya take her hand. "Katiya, I've already taken blood from you." Truthfully she'd been joking when she had shouted it at Lyov, she really didn't need that much blood anymore.

"Then come bathe with me." The redhead wasn't going to let go of her hand.

For a moment Alexei was stunned at Katiya's sudden bravery. "A bath?"

"A bath." She shifted a touch nervously. "Just to bathe." She clarified.

"Of course, a bath." She answered back as if it were an everyday occurrence that her pets wanted to bathe with her. She stood up never letting go of Katiya's hand.

Katiya flushed a little, but didn't let go either as she moved alongside Alexei towards the vampire's rooms and her bath. "I just thought it would be enjoyable..." She trailed off, not sure how to explain the idea in a way that wouldn't sound insane.

"Don't be timid now. You've invited the vampire to play and doing that is like playing with a predator the moment you hesitate or show weakness triggers the memory of prey, and the predator forgets it was ever playing in the first place." Not that Alexei was concerned she would, she was too old to forget herself, but Katiya needed to understand.

"Right." Katiya took a deep breath. "No being timid." She just had to try to remember that. "I wanted an excuse to get you naked again." There that was easy enough, as long as she ignored the blush that came almost automatically.

Opening the doors to the bathroom she paused in surprise, seeing the bath full of hot water. She looked over at Alexei, puzzled. "How?"

"Lyov." Alexei said simply as she shut the doors to her rooms. She was a little stunned that Katiya wanted her naked, most humans were put off with her otherness, her unnatural stillness, their subconscious sensing of the hungry monster that lurked inside her. It took many of her servants and pets years to be truly comfortable with her.

"Oh." That almost made sense, as long as Katiya didn't think too much about how he could have known they'd be taking a bath. Keeping in mind to avoid being timid, she raised an eyebrow at the beautiful woman and started to undo the buttons on her shirt.

"Do you want privacy? I can turn my back until you're in the tub?" The vampire offered.

"I know my body isn't as perfect as yours, but I don't mind if you look." Katiya whispered, shivering a little at just the thought of being watched.

"Don't compare us, my sneaky mouse. We're two completely different creatures. You're body is very lovely." With an unconscious grace she slipped her shirt over her head not bothering with the buttons and then undid her trousers. She draped them both over the chair in her study.

Since she didn't have to, Katiya didn't pretend to be doing anything other than watching appreciatively as she slipped out of her own clothes and then slipped into the steaming hot water. "Oh God." She groaned, sinking into the hot water with a look of bliss. Now that she knew what she'd been missing she wasn't sure she could ever go back to cold sponge baths.

Alexei shuddered slightly at the moan of pleasure as the younger woman sunk into the hot water, but other than that held herself in check. She slowly walked to the edge of the warm marble and then stepped down into the bathing pool. She liked baths

because it was the only time she was warm, other than when she gorged on a lot of blood. The blood was the only thing that made her pass for truly human, and that required a lot of it.

To make her heart beat and her skin flush; well her heart did beat she wasn't a re-animated corpse, but it had a rhythm near death one nearly inaudible unless you had fancy doctor equipment or supernatural hearing.

"Does this mean you'll be leaving soon on a trip?" Katiya's eyes were half lidded as she enjoyed the pleasant feeling of the hot water.

"Yes, tomorrow, once dusk falls." She wasn't certain yet who she would be taking with her. "I'm not certain how long I'll be gone. Karl is hard to judge."

"You'll be safe though?" Katiya's eyes opened as that occurred to her. Traveling was something that had always seemed dangerous to her.

"As safe as I can be with a castle full of vampires." Her hand twinged with the phantom pain with the memory of her last meeting with Karl. She hated Karl, hated how he lorded over her, when she could snap him like a twig, but she didn't. She stayed her arrogance and rage at him, because she already made the council of vampires nervous.

Moving closer to the beautiful woman, Katiya picked up one of the large sponges and raised an eyebrow. When she was presented with a back she started to wash that perfect skin. "Will there be a lot of them there?"

"Probably, I tend to make Karl nervous." She chuckled. "I make all of them nervous." She sighed in pleasure. "Harder." She mumbled.

As directed, Katiya scrubbed harder, then smiled when she realized that the sponge wasn't really needed. Setting that aside she started to work her fingers across the strong back in front of her. "Who's Karl?" She probably should have asked earlier.

"Mmm, um..." She tried to gather her words. "He's the Lord of Eastern Europe. The vampire council has split the world into territories with lords and fiefs. My fief is lorded over by Karl." She sneered.

The muscles under her fingertips went taught with anger and Katiya frowned, starting all over again with her ministrations. "I take it you don't get along."

"No, he gets off on being more important than I am." She annoyed Karl because she was older and really didn't do what she was told to.

"I'll see what I can find out while you're gone about the deed." Her fingers reached up to firm shoulders and started to try to get those to relax.

"You don't have to, Katiya."

"But I want to. I'm good at finding things out. My father knew a lot of people."

Alexei leaned back against Katiya, enjoying the press of warm flesh against her. "Be careful, then."

"I'm always careful. Remember, sneaky mouse?" Smiling she rubbed up against the other woman's back, rather enjoying the feel of her breasts pressed up against the blonde's skin.

"How could I forget my sneaky mouse?" She chuckled. Slowly, very slowly she felt herself relax against the human.

"I'm sneaky. I like sneaking so much better than factory work." She rested an arm around the vampire's stomach, in a loose hug.

#####3##3

Alexei felt odd as she patted herself dry, maybe it was the relaxed feeling, although underneath that was the slow burn of desire that her mouse was stirring in her. She hung the towel and grabbed her trousers slipping back into them. "So now mouse what would you like to do?"

Reluctantly, Katiya got out of the bath as well, the water had started to cool a bit and she'd started to prune a little. "Do?" She wasn't sure how to answer that, taking a towel and starting to rub herself down.

"Yes, do. Did you find an empty room to claim as your own? Was there something you were looking for and didn't find? Do you need food?" The vampire slid into her dark shirt making her skin look even paler.

Katiya was oddly not too eager to find a room of her own. "What do you usually do every night?"

Alexei blinked in surprise. She use to go over the books on the factories, she use to ride the country side checking her lands, sometimes she roamed the city streets looking for thugs, but now she did nothing. She sat and stared at nothing in the night sky or the flames of a fire, and until this moment it hadn't struck her how much she was retreating from the world. "Um, various things."

"Are any of those various things something you want to do tonight?" Katiya wrapped herself up in a towel, taking peeks at the body Alexei was toweling.

"Do you know how to ride?" She asked finishing the buttons on her shirt and began to



vigorously dry her hair.

"Ride a carriage?"

The vampire chuckled. "I meant a horse, but I'll take that as a no." She re-hung the towel and thought for a moment. "How about I show you the library and introduce you to Matvey?"

"Who's Matvey?" Katiya hurried to dress, smiling, this sounded like fun.

"He's a foundling of mine. I think you two will get along well." She said with a smile.

"Foundling?" Katiya was pretty interested in this. "What's that?"

"Before you were born." Alexei started, as she started to button up Katiya's own shirt. "A powerful vampire tried a power play into my territory, he was brilliant, witty, clever, and fierce. Someone I could have respected and liked. However..." She paused sighing at Katiya's tangled hair, and produced a whalebone comb and started working on the locks.

The redhead closed her eyes in pleasure. Nobody had combed her hair for her in so long she really couldn't remember when it had happened last.

"However," she continued. "This vampire wanted what was mine. A more glorious battle I have not had." She let out a great sigh remembering muscles straining with battle, the smell of blood. "Towns were destroyed, many humans died stuck between our two armies. In the end, I crushed him, tore his throat open and feasted on his blood. I killed all his children and minions, except for one."

Blue eyes opened at that, both eyebrows raised at the look on Alexei's face. Apparently those were the good old days for the vampire. "And this one is Matvey?"

"Yes. A poor peasant boy embraced too young. Greeks and Romans are odd with their boy man dynamic, and the whole tutoring thing."

Katiya decided she didn't want to actually ask any questions about that. "He's young?" She frowned, confused.

"Yes, Embraced, way too young before he could grow hair on his face. The vampire council has rules now about giving our gift to children. Once given the blessing or curse of vampirism the body stops aging, imagine being a child forever while your mind ages." Alexei shuddered remembering some of the young looking vampires she'd met. "Most become unstable and quite mad."

Katiya shivered, even trying to imagine that was enough to give her nightmares. "Is he insane?" She whispered, not sure she wanted to meet an insane young vampire, ever.

"No he's not. He's quiet, thoughtful, resigned to be cute and attractive to pedophiles everywhere, and he's very intelligent. He's the younger brother you never had." Alexei stopped combing, setting the comb down and stroked the suddenly tense shoulders. "No one will hurt you, I won't allow it."

Katiya studied the perfect face, slowly smiling. "I believe you. Let's go meet your younger brother."

They went up one flight and instead of heading towards the game room, went the other way down the hallway. Matvey, she couldn't feel not like her own blood, but she assumed he was there, he was always there, except when the sun streamed in through the large windows.

Yet, another part of the mansion that Katiya hadn't had a chance to poke around in. She really had to spend a few days looking around and investigating everything that there was to see.

The other side of the hall only had two huge double, oriental carved doors. With ease Alexei pushed the doors open.

Rows and rows of wooden bookcases held scrolls, books, and manuscripts; were revealed.

Soft light came from somewhere but the source was not visible. Alexei led her through the stacks. "Can you read, Katiya?"

"A little." She admitted, slowly. "Depends on the language."

"Well feel free to look through everything here, the only time knowledge is dangerous is when it's locked away." She guided them through the stacks to an open space in the middle of the room. There was a blazing fire in a fireplace, several chairs and a few desks.

At one desk a slender figure was bent over a large tome.

"Mistress have you come to sit before the fire and stare into the great nothing again?" Came a quietly spoken voice.

Alexei flushed; true she had been doing that for months.

Besides her, Katiya paused, looking from the stranger at the desk back to the beautiful blonde, not sure who this was. "Stare into nothing, again?" She asked quietly.

The hunched figure sat up, and turned blinking in surprise. His face was young, with

wispy hairs on his cheeks almost ready to shave. His dark eyes seemed huge as they reflected through the round glasses perched on his nose.

"Katiya, this young man is Matvey, a foundling to my house. Not of my blood but my child none-the-less. Matvey, this is Katiya."

So this was Matvey, not what she'd been expecting. A little uncertain how to react to the young man Katiya gave a little curtsy, as if he was one of the gentleman who came to the factory on occasion. "Nice to meet you Matvey."

"She's a pet?" He questioned, wondering why a pet would be here.

Alexei glowered. "Does it matter?"

The young man gulped. He quickly took the glasses off his nose and slipped them into a pocket and stood up away from his precious books. He had features trapped between a boy and a man, and dark curly hair framed his face and fell into his dark brown eyes. "I'm sorry for my rudeness. Your house your will."

Alexei smiled and reached out to ruffle his hair before catching herself remembering he wasn't as young as he looked.

"Matvey this is Katiya, and as you pointed out my new pet. She wishes to learn, and of all my children you are the most knowledgeable one I have. Will you teach her?"

The redhead held herself still, watching the currents of interaction that seemed to swirl between the two. It was interesting to watch them react to one another.

For a moment he looked uncertain, he studied the redhead. Stepping forward he circled. "What would I teach her?"

Alexei did nothing; the two would have to work out their relationship on their own. She could not always be around.

After one pass around her, Katiya turned to keep him in front of her, not particularly liking having a strange vampire in back of her. "About the world you live in." She said, glancing over at Alexei to make sure she wasn't overstepping herself.

"Whatever she wants." Alexei didn't counter anything Katiya had said. She let go of Katiya's hand and made her way to a chair in front of the fire and sat down.

"Teach a woman; reading, writing, and philosophy?"

That tone made Katiya frown though and her eyes narrowed a little. "I can learn whatever you teach, unless of course you aren't a very good teacher." She hated having anyone talk down to her.

Alexei didn't look up from the fire but she chuckled quietly. "It appears you've forgotten what my gender is? Should I be offended?"

Matvey's face got pale and his mouth opened and closed as he looked for something to say. He rushed to her side kneeling next to her. "I'm sorry Mistress my words... there is no excuse."

In a blur of motion she reached out and grabbed a handful of those dark curls and jerked his head to the side, exposing the long column of his pale neck.

Katiya held herself very still, having that feeling of not wanting to be noticed right at the moment.

"Have I made myself seem so weak, by my endless nights of sharing this space with you? Staring into the fire waiting for something to spark within me so I may love the never-ending life I have been cursed with. If you're over-active mind ever held those thoughts, forget them. I am still Mistress of these lands, and if you wish to no longer belong to me, let me know.

"No Mistress, please don't throw me out. I forgot myself and my place."

Alexei held herself for a moment then let go. "Do as I bid, Katiya is your pupil, teach her or prove her words true, for if you cannot teach I will have to find one that can."

The young man stood relief palpable in his stance. "I will teach her to be your tool, and then I will teach her whatever she wants to learn."

The young human woman shifted from one foot to another, trying to figure out if it was safe to breathe again. "I'll be a good student." She said finally, deeming it safe enough to remind the two vampires she existed.

He approached Katiya and bowed. "I am sorry about earlier. I forgot my place."

The redhead offered a wry smile. "I don't even know mine yet, so please don't get offended if I spout off." She really should manage to remember that she couldn't get upset at a vampire.

"Good. That's all settled." Alexei said.

"Come, let us see where we need to start." He guided her to his desk and went in search of some books and a chalk and tablet.

#####33

Hours later Alexei stirred from where she sat in front of fire. "Time to call it a night."

Katiya blinked, rubbing at bleary eyes as her mind swam with what seemed like a sea of new things that Matvey had been starting to teach her. It wasn't just the information; it was the entirely new way of thinking about things that she was trying to fit into her mind. Her earlier bold assurance seemed like a joke now that she was starting to realize how much there was that she didn't know.

Matvey nodded and collected the books. "I have a good idea where we can start. You actually pick up things very quick."

"That was quick?" Katiya looked up in horror. She felt like she was a stupid apprentice again.

"She is a clever mouse." Alexei said standing behind Katiya.

"The clever mouse feels like her head is going to split open." Katiya pushed back from the table and stood up, rubbing at her temple.

Alexei held out a hand for Katiya.

Taking the offered hand, Katiya smiled at the vampire trapped in the body of a young man. "Thank you. I'll try to keep up."

Alexei nodded. "Let's see if Warren left you food. Did you pick a room?"

"Not yet." She followed alongside the blonde woman, giving a goodbye wave to the young man as they left.

Alexei was going to say something, but then remembered she was going to be gone, to see Karl. "That's fine. You'll stay in my room while I'm gone."

"Are you sure?" She looked up at her face. "I can go somewhere else if you don't want me in there while you're gone."

"Yes, I'm not taking you with me. My room will be safe place for you."

"Oh. I'm not going?" She'd kind of hoped that she'd be able to see what lay beyond the city.

"Sorry no. I thought about it. But you're too new to this society or vampires. It would be unsafe for you."

She did a good job, she thought, of trying not to look disappointed by that. "I'll learn fast." She promised, to herself and Alexei.

She led them down the stairs to the kitchen. Alexei paused at a hallway holding Katiya

back as Kira pounced. The tiger looked annoyed at its game being thwarted. Alexei laughed and stroked Kira's head.

Eyes wide at the three hundred pounds of tiger that had just almost pounced on her, Katiya swallowed nervously. That was another thing she was going to have to keep an eye out for around here. The tigers could rip her apart without much effort. "I was thinking that I'd go tomorrow to see what I can find out about the Brothers."

"Hmmm." Alexei thought about what Katiya had said. "What brothers would that be?"

"The four who stole from you? I can look into them at the same time as I try to find out about Ivan and who wanted the deed to your factory."

She led them into the kitchen and sat Katiya down as she started to boil some water and check the pantry.

Finally as she brought Katiya some tea she agreed. "Okay. You will of course be careful."

She sliced some meat and cheese on to a plate with some bread and set it down in front of the redhead, waiting for a response.

"Of course." Katiya smiled brightly. "I'm always careful." Rolling a slice of meat in cheese she bit into it, enjoying the taste of the high quality food.

"Drink your tea, its good for you." She said smiling slightly. "If the brothers are helpful tell them there's a chance you might be able to remove the blood price on their head."

"Thank you." She drank the tea, not too sure she was enjoying the tea yet, and it was a different taste than she was used to. "How long will you be gone?"

"I don't know. I hope not long. Depends if Karl is feeling insecure about me or not." If he does she would feel the sting of his mood in a very physical way.

"You'll be careful too right?" Katiya had a vested interest now in making sure Alexei stayed healthy.

"I will do my best." She promised sitting down as Katiya ate.

The food disappeared just as quickly as her lunch had and then Katiya found herself yawning. Happy, full and warm she was suddenly exhausted. "I'm sorry, I wish I could keep you company all night."

Alexei chuckled. "You did, its nearly dawn. Learning can take a lot out of you." She stood and held out an arm.

Taking the arm, Katiya smiled sleepily. "I did?" That would explain why she was exhausted. "I guess I'm sleeping with you again?" She tried not to look too hopeful.

"You must be tired we already discussed that. But yes, you can." Alexei really didn't mind. "I hope you don't mind."

Having trouble keeping her mind working, she shook her head tiredly, leaning on the vampire. "I don't mind sharing a bed with a beautiful woman." She said sleepily, already half asleep on her feet.

Alexei paused for a moment and then easily lifted Katiya up into her arms. "My you are tired. Your body's not use to these new hours."

"I only just started working the evening shift, I used to work the afternoon shift" She mumbled, tucking her face into the vampire's neck and breathing deeply. "You smell good." The red haired woman smiled lazily, pressing her lips to that tempting skin.

Alexei's nostrils flared. "I should smell good, you bathed me." Very determined she started up the steps, but she could feel the desire it tingled in her fangs.

An appreciative hum was the only answer as the sleepy woman relaxed even further in the embrace of the vampire. It was strange, she thought, this was the safest she'd ever felt; here in the arms of a monster that was carrying her effortlessly towards her bedroom.

"What an odd human you are." Alexei mused as she paused to open the doors to her rooms. She strode through her office to the bedroom. A small slip of a girl was waking her back up from the weight of time, centering her.

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## ~ The Secret History of Vampires ~

by Zee and Windstar

Enjoy and remember to send feedback to [Zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:Zeeamy@gmail.com) and [Adarkbow@yahoo.com](mailto:Adarkbow@yahoo.com)

### Part 3

Alexei walked down the spiraling staircase the night after falling asleep with Katiya; again, it was dark, and smelled of wet earth and musty water. Dug deep into the ground solid stone foundation hid several cells that the rest of the house sat innocently upon. She saw fine in the dark and had left the torch up at the top of the stairs. The air was still and heavy with the weight of silence, on occasion that silence was broken by the skittering of a multi-legged beastie, slithering of scales across the stones, or of tiny claws scampering.

She stepped down off the last step on to a cool packed dirt floor, a single hallway led into the dark; five heavy iron doors rusted set in stone archways. Only three of the doors held anything. In quick silent steps she was at the end of the hallway standing before a door with no lock, only a small pattern engraved on the iron. She ran her fingers over it cleaning out the rust and then just held her hand on the door. Beyond it chained in a casket of stone was her maker. She had pondered on several occasions with just killing him, but fear of the unknown had stilled her hand.

Rumor had it to kill a first made would kill the entire line. Before she had no desire to die, but now, now she was well over a thousand years old and continuing to exist was losing its appeal. Things might change weapons and clothes but the pettiness of human emotion and desire never did. The cruelty and savagery of her kind never did either. But it didn't matter now; the signet ring that was needed to open this door was gone, stolen by four mean spirited boys. There was no way else into the room.

She turned and paused at another door, holding a hand to it she could hear the screams vibrate against the iron. Fiona was on the other side, fighting off 900 years of addiction to her blood. To do this she must truly love Warren, the vampire fought down a wave of rage at the man. She had loved Fiona first and they had shared so much over the years, and yet Fiona had chosen him over her. A century ago she would have probably killed them both out of spite.

A door closest to the stairs was silent, frowning Alexei opened it. The iron door was just as thick and heavy as it looked, but her vampiric strength made it easy. Chained to the far wall, Molly's pale body seemed to glow in the dark. She shivered leaning against the stonewall. The dark matted head shook and she looked up. "Come to gloat." She spat out.

Stepan had stripped her, whipped her and left her chained to the wall.

"No, my pretty Molly, I've come to see if you've learned your lesson." She walked closer standing before the beaten woman.

"I hate you."



"I know." Alexei said crouching down, she reached out a hand stroking Molly's face.

Molly nuzzled into the cool hand.

"It doesn't always have to be like this." Alexei whispered.

"Yes it does. You killed him, and I came all this way, stalked you across Europe to kill you." The woman murmured out.

"Instead you needed my blood more. He had to die Molly. He tortured and raped dozens of women; he left a trail leading clues of our existence. The vampire council couldn't have that."

"He never did that to me, he loved me. I was his pet, he promised me forever. You took that away."

Alexei nodded. "I did, and if I could go back, I wouldn't change anything. He was a dangerous rabid dog that needed to be put down. I found you chained in a closet in his basement hideaway. If I hadn't heard you moan you would have died there. Chains and abuse aren't love Molly."

"They are to me."

"I know that's why we have to do all this every decade or so. So you know I love you."

"Except you don't. You aren't capable of it; you don't love any of us. Cause if you loved anything, I would kill it so you could comprehend how I feel." She spat out.

"I loved Fiona." She croaked out.

"No, you needed Fiona, but you never loved her."

The words were like physical slaps to her, and Alexei growled grabbing Molly by her hair and lifted her up to stare angrily into her blue eyes.

The British woman smiled. "There's my beautiful beast, I've missed you." Her chained hands gripped Alexei's shoulders and she leaned in kissing Alexei's cool, stony face. Leaning back she studied the pale gray eyes that almost seemed to glow in the darkness. "There's a look in your eyes I haven't seen in a while, is your new pet working you up and not putting out. Didn't choose a sapphist? Just picked her up, because she reminded you of Fiona? Or do you secretly just have a thing for redheads?"

Alexei didn't say anything but let go of the woman's dark hair.

Molly dropped to her knees in front of the powerful woman, and nuzzled her face into

the crotch of the woolen pants. The chains clinked softly as she lifted her hands and undid the buttons there. "I can smell your desire. That little slip of a girl really has gotten under your skin in a few days." Molly kept poking, prodding not wanting the mask of humanity Alexei had taken up. She wanted the monster that lurked so close under the skin.

"But instead of taking her, which is your right, you allow her more illusion of freedom which she doesn't have. How long until you shatter and she sees you for what you really are and she breaks like those before?"

Strong hands grabbed pale shoulders and picked her up slamming her against the rough stone growling she bared her fangs. Molly just laughed as they came together, her legs wrapped around the cool body. Sharp teeth pierced her skin at her throat and upper chest. Thrusting against each other, it was rough primal, and quick.

Harsh breathing filled the small room. Alexei leaned against Molly smashing her between her and the wall. Disgusted with herself Alexei stepped back refastening her pants. "It doesn't have to be like this."

Molly laughed. "This is all we are. Human or vampire; we are primal beasts only wanting food or a fuck."

She ran a pale hand through her blonde hair. "That's him speaking Molly not me. I'll send Stepan with the key to let you out. Don't forget your place."

"Don't forget yours." Molly mumbled as the door shut.

#####3##3

It was late afternoon the day after the messenger had visited them that Katiya left the manor for the first time. She waved a goodbye to Warren, who as usual was preparing something delicious smelling in the kitchen, some of which she'd sampled for lunch. Dressed in clothes that had been waiting for her in Alexei's room, since she still hadn't picked out her own bedroom, she made her way to the front door. The clothes were interesting, they didn't look high class, but the fabric was good quality and to her surprise she found it easy to move in compared to normal dresses.

Lyov met her at the door, opening it for her without a word and closing it behind her as she left. She'd expected some sort of questioning, but he'd simply given her a gruff nod in response to her good day and that was that. Alexei had probably warned him that she'd be going out soon she figured.

Glad that the rather simple looking dress she'd found wasn't what would be considered high classed she rode the carriage back into the heart of the city. These were the streets she knew well, with their throngs of factory workers and penniless beggars mixed with a liberal sprinkling of shopkeepers and managers.

"This is perfect!" She called up the trap in the roof to the driver, waiting until the door was opened before stepping out of the carriage. "Thank you." She smiled to the woman who was the head of Alexei's stables.

"Be careful." Was the reply as the woman, dressed in livery no less, hopped back up onto the back of the carriage and with a tsk, got the perfectly matched horses moving again.

They were, Katiya had to admit, beautiful horses. She'd have to go see the stables soon, as Warren had suggested. For now though, she had a job to do. Bundling the dark colored peasants coat closer about her shoulders she merged into the crowds of people with practiced ease.

It took a couple of hours of walking and meeting with old friends of her fathers, along with the use of almost half the money that Alexei had given her, but she finally had an address, along with some rather interesting rumors. Rumors that she was pretty sure Alexei would be interested to hear, if she hadn't already left for St. Petersburg by the time Katiya got back.

The address turned out to be a rather nondescript building tucked into the back yard of a warehouse complex that had seen better days. The sun was starting to slip behind the horizon when she made her approach.

Sticking to the shadows, Katiya paused long enough to tie back her red hair in a dark bandana she'd bought in the market place. The red hair, from her mother's side her father had always told her, wasn't a great thing to have when trying to hide from sight.

Ignoring the front door she slipped around behind the house, smiling as she spotted the back door she'd been told would be there. The lock picks tucked away in her waistband were put to good use on the simple lock.

"I told you it was a bad idea!"

A male voice yelled from inside and Katiya knew she was at the right place.

"No you didn't! You thought it was a great idea, you stupid idiot."

"Hey, don't call me an idiot. You know I hate that!"

The voices were getting angrier by the moment and she sighed. Why couldn't everyone be nice and calm when she arrived? No that would be too simple.

Gently closing the door behind her, but leaving it unlocked in case she needed a quick escape, the redhead moved deeper into the house.

Two men were arguing in the living room, there was a strong family resemblance between them. Both had the same hooked nose, broad shoulders, and dark shaggy hair. One was clean-shaven while the other; younger looking brother, had a decent moustache started.

"We should never have taken the job!" That was the older one, slamming a mug full of what Katiya figured was ale, back onto the rickety table that, along with four wooden chairs, was the only furniture in the small kitchen.

"What choice did we have?" The younger brother snorted, feet up on the table, nursing his own mug.

Katiya stayed in the doorway, considering her options. Finally she simply decided to join the conversation. "You could have walked away."

The younger brother slammed his chair down, hand going to what she had no doubt was a blade of some sort in his pocket. The older brother finished his drink, and then set it back down on the tabletop, dark intelligent eyes watching her intently.

"Who are you?"

She smiled, ignoring the question. "I might be able to help you."

"We don't need help." That was the younger one.

"That's not what I heard." She shifted, keeping a good distance between her and them. "I heard there used to be four brothers, not two and you both are wanted men. A blood price on your heads."

"How did you "

The young one started, to be cut off in mid sentence by the older brother when he held up a hand.

"You seem to know a lot. How could you help us?"

"I can talk to the person who has the blood price out on you."

The men glanced at one another, reading each other's expression.

The older one nodded slightly and looked back at Katiya. "You can get her to back off?"

Katiya had to be careful here; she didn't know what she could promise before talking directly to Alexei. "I can talk to her."

That wasn't the answer he'd been hoping for, but he nodded grimly. "That could help, but even so we won't be able to work in this city ever again."

A purse full of what was left of the money that Alexei had given her landed on the tabletop. "That will get you out of the city and a long way towards wherever you want to go, away from here."

The younger one reached for the bag, stopping when the other brother held up a hand.

"And for all of this generosity what would you expect of us?"

"There were items you stole from her, I want them."

He made a grimace at that. "I'm afraid we can't help you there. We already passed those items on before she came after us."

"Fine, tell me where you sold them, who was your contact?"

She'd work her way up the chain if she had to, it wasn't going to be as fast but she could do it.

"We give you a name and you do what you can to get the blood price off us right?"

"That's the deal."

The younger brother grabbed the sack of coins, letting out a little whistle as he looked inside. He looked up and answered this time. "Our contact was a man named Fenix. He's "

"A fence that lives on the outskirts of the city, not far from the Cathedral." She finished, sighing. She knew whom they were talking about; he'd been the fence that her father had used on more than one occasion.

"You know him?"

"Unfortunately."

"He's the one who should have the blood price on his head. He didn't even pay us for all the stuff we managed to steal."

Katiya opened her mouth to say that she couldn't promise that the price would be dropped from their heads when something heavy hit the roof above them. All three shifted towards the walls, eyes staring up at the sound. Her hand found the handle of the small dagger she'd brought along, not drawing it quite yet though.

"What is that?" The younger one asked.

"Shhh " The older one whispered, crouching as what sounded like footsteps started to walk across the roof above them.

"You!" The younger one hissed, eyes blazing as he glared at Katiya. "You brought them here!"

"Why would I do that?" She hissed back.

"Probably because you're working for them!"

"Just shut up, both of you." The older brother growled, still watching the ceiling. The footsteps had stopped, somewhere above their heads. All three of them were tense, staring up at the peeling kitchen ceiling.

The younger man shifted, looking over at his brother. "Do you think it's gone?"

Ever so quietly, Katiya took a step backwards, then another, slowly moving closer to the back door she'd entered through.

"Maybe." The way he said it, that sounded like a no.

"We should look."

In the shadows of the hallway Katiya shook her head back and forth. That sounded like a terrible idea.

Apparently the older brother agreed. "Are you insane?"

"We should "

Whatever else he was going to say was overwhelmed by the explosion of boards and plaster that erupted from the ceiling above him.

One second the man was standing there, the next second his legs were kicking frantically from a hole in the ceiling and his screaming went on and on.

"Nooooo!" His brother yelled, lunging at the legs and wrapping his arms around them, trying to pull his brother down. There was a terrible cracking sound and the legs stopped kicking.

That was enough for Katiya. She turned and sprinted for the door, ignoring the enraged screaming of the sole remaining brother behind her. "Come and get it you son of a bitch! I'll gut you!"

Since she doubted that was how it was going to work, Katiya hit the door at a run,

busting through it and going right on.

Behind her the yelling died in a gurgling scream.

All of a sudden the night was dead quiet around her, only the sound of her harsh breathing and her feet hitting the ground as she ran as fast as she could towards the warehouses.

From the corner of her eye she saw something make an impossible leap from the top of the house behind her onto the nearest warehouse roof. The shadowy figure lopped along the roof, following her path with deceptive ease on the steep angled roof.

She didn't have time to curse, or to breathe, simply kept running praying that she could make the street. Although why it would be safer out there than in here she wasn't too sure.

The redhead did have time to scream as the figure leapt off the top of the warehouse, hurtling through the darkness towards her. There was a flash of bared fangs, pale skin and long blonde hair before the vampire hit her.

They went tumbling sideways. She managed to curl into a ball, absorbing as much force as she could without breaking anything and bound to her feet. As quick as she was, the vampire was faster. With the unnatural grace she'd come to associate with their kind, he flowed to his feet and grabbed her by her neck, slamming her up against the warehouse wall hard enough that she saw stars.

"Well look at this." The accent was strange, his voice had a pleasant kind of drawl to it, she thought while vainly struggling to get free of his grip. Ignoring her flailing like one would ignore an infant's squirming, he pulled down the high neck of her dress to see the mark on her neck.

Laughing he let go of the fabric. "You're her property aren't you?" The fangs came closer and she kicked, doing more damage to her feet than him she thought.

"Feisty one aren't you? Imagine the message this will send when I drain you dry and everyone finds out that the all powerful Alexei Petrova can't protect her own."

"Go to hell." She managed to wheeze out, trying to pry at the iron like grip on her throat.

He laughed, rearing his head back, and laughed. "How charming. Go to hell. I've been there my sweet, and let me tell you, it's a fun place." His smile got closer and so did those fangs. "Goodbye."

The vampire opened his mouth wider, shoving her head back and to the side to expose the jugular.

Gunpowder roared so close by that Katiya was blinded for a moment by the bright flash in the darkness. A heavy weight slammed into the body holding hers and sent the vampire tumbling sideways.

"Move!" A female voice said, as a hand grabbed her shoulder and helped her back to her feet. Staggering blindly, the redhead followed in the direction the hand was pulling her. Blinking against the after images she blearily made out the person herding her along.

"Tereza?"

"Yes." Came the terse response. Seeing that Katiya could move alone she let go and still moving started to reload the impressive looking rifle she was carrying, sliding what looked like an iron bar into it.

"How did you "

"Run. It's not dead. Contrary to what you think, a wooden stake doesn't kill them, just slows them down. Bullets do nothing."

If she had any doubts that Tereza was telling the truth, that doubt was gone when a scream of pure hatred came from behind them.

They made it as far as the street beyond the warehouse before Katiya glanced over her shoulder and saw the vampire quickly closing towards them. She let loose a yell of warning and Tereza turned and started to raise her rifle to fire.

The vampire was impossibly fast though, slamming into her and swatting the rifle from her hand with pathetic ease. He tried to rip out her throat, but a strong metal collar, hidden by her leather coat, stopped him.

"Get off me you piece of shit!" Tereza yelled, grabbing the hilt of a long silvered blade at her side and swung it at him. He laughed, grabbing her arm and bending it backwards until she screamed in pain and dropped the blade.

"Human." He growled. "Pathetic. Do you seriously think you could hunt me?"

He'd either assumed Katiya was harmless or incapable of harming him.

Usually her response to someone trying to hurt her was to hide, slide into the shadows, and go as far away as possible. Instead she picked up the rifle and pointed it at his head and pulled the trigger.

The foot and a half long black iron bar punched through the back of his skull and



partway out the front with a spray of blood. The vampire toppled sideways off of Tereza, laying still in a pool of expanding dark blood.

Katiya stood where she was, breathing hard, hands shaking, still clutching the rifle she'd just used. The dark skinned woman stared up at her, obviously surprised. With a grunt of pain, and cradling her right arm, she got to her feet.

Automatically Katiya offered her the rifle when she held out a hand for it.

"Is he dead?"

"No, it isn't." Tereza growled, emphasizing it, she was hurt and when she got hurt she got angry. Grunting in pain she slung the rifle over her shoulder. "Come help me."

"Why?" Katiya followed though.

"Because I can't use my right arm." The dark skinned woman fumbled around and picked up the sword she'd dropped. "Here."

Not really sure what she was supposed to do with it, Katiya took the offered blade. Watching curiously as Tereza awkwardly got down on her knees and jerked the blonde haired head backwards, exposing his throat.

"Do it."

"Do what?"

The other woman sighed. "What do you think? You have to take off the head to kill a vampire, don't you know anything?"

Katiya stared at her in horror. "Wait, you want me to cut off his head?"

"Were you not just listening to me? Yes of course I want you to cut off its head!"

"I don't know how I mean I've never ."

"He tried to kill you. He killed the two men in that house, he definitely was going to kill you if he caught you and I think he was going to do away with me too. This" she tugged at the bolt of metal sticking out of the vampire's skull "won't stop him. He will regenerate it. Then he's going to find you and kill you. Probably slowly and painfully before he goes after all of the people around you."

It was the last little bit that decided Katiya. The mental image of this beast going after gentle Shiro, maybe Warren the cook, or causing problems for Alexei.

The blade got stuck on the first swing, cutting only halfway through the vampire's throat.

She had to tug it free, planting a foot on the man's chest to help. Then the second swing, two handed this time, severed the head. Immediately she looked away, trying to swallow down the bile that rose in her throat.

Gentle hands took the sword from her. "It gets easier. Trust me, I know." She gasped in pain as she struggled up to her feet.

"You're hurt." The redhead moved to her side, taking her uninjured arm and slinging it over her shoulders to help her stand.

"It's nothing." Was the accented response, but the vampire hunter leaned against her.

"Umm hmm." Was the dubious answer. "Where are we going?"

"We?"

"You want me to leave you here?"

Tereza struggled with the answer to that. She was the one who rescued people, not the other way around. This wasn't how it was supposed to go at all. She was the vampire hunter, damnit!

"So?"

"Ravenshelm."

Katiya sighed and started walking back towards the slums. She knew Ravenshelm well; most decent people avoided that region of the city for good reason.

"You live in the slums?"

"Rent." Tereza grunted in pain as she tried to use her right arm and gave up. "That's where the attacks happened, so that's where I set up shop."

It wasn't as bad as Katiya had feared it would be. They saw only a few people moving about, shadows within shadows among the mostly dark streets. The vampire hunter had taken up residence in what had, in better times, been a bank.

"Nice." Was Katiya's only comment, as she helped the lagging woman up the stairs to the heavy doors. "Didn't the Treylord's live here?" The local band had owned this part of town.

"I evicted them." Tereza said heavily, her side and shoulder hurting more than she was trying to show.

That must have been a scene that Katiya would have been interested to watch,

considering there'd been five of them to Tereza's one. "Careful, here's the stairs." She started to move them both up the stairs, guiding the faltering vampire hunter.

"You sure you're all right?"

The dark skinned woman slipped, hissing out a curse in a language that Katiya didn't know. "Just fine." She said, through gritted teeth.

"Sure you are." The heavy door banged shut behind them and Katiya took a moment to look around. The interior was empty, draped with dust and cobwebs. "Where to?"

"Second floor."

Now that she knew what to look for she could see the path through the dust up the stairs. "Why the second floor? Wouldn't the basement be safer?"

Tereza laughed, then gasped, as that put pressure on what she was beginning to suspect was a broken rib. "No other way out of the basement."

The redhead nodded. That made sense; it was always good to have a second way to flee in case things went bad. She'd known thieves who'd made mistakes like that, bad things usually happened to them.

Through a door that said bank manager's office she helped Tereza to the single thick sleeping pad in the corner.

"There's a lamp." Tereza pointed to the oil lantern set up on the dust-covered desk. It took a few tries but the woman managed to light the oil wick, casting light throughout the dark wood covered room.

"You travel light." Katiya nodded to the few possessions that lay around the bed pad.

"I travel a lot." A flash of white teeth against darker skin that Katiya found herself responding to in kind, she could relate to that.

After the second attempt by the vampire hunter to remove her shirt, Katiya rolled her eyes and knelt down. "Let me do that." She batted away hands and pulled the shirt up, setting it aside.

"That looks like it hurts." A mottled angry looking bruise was forming across the dark skinned woman's side.

Tereza poked at it, hissing in pain. No question about it, at least one broken rib. "There's a wrap in my bag, help me wrap my ribs?"

Gingerly, since there were many sharp pointy things with long blades or sharp pointy

things that were attached to stakes, the redhead rummaged around until she found a long length of linen wrap. "I'm sorry, but this is going to probably hurt." She started to wrap around the other woman's chest, keeping it tight enough to do some good, but aware of every twitch of pain by the other woman.

"Thank you." Tereza touched Katiya's hands, stilling them as she finished tying off the linen.

Nervous, and not sure why she should be, Katiya smiled. "I still owe you for helping with Boris."

"A bully, that one. I fear he is probably still intent on you."

Katiya shrugged, so be it, she'd just make sure to stay far away.

Dark eyes narrowed suddenly and Tereza's grip on her hands tightened.

"Hey!"

"What is that?" Keeping Katiya's hands held in one of hers, she tugged aside the neckline of her shirt.

Revealing the red looking bite mark that was still healing.

#####3##3

Alexei paced worried and annoyed. Katiya was still not back, everyone was ready to go, Stepan, Sergei, Shiro, and Molly would come with her leaving Matvey and the twins Niki and Nada in charge. Sergei was particularly grumpy at being pulled away from the factories.

Molly had an overly satisfied look on her face that just annoyed her more.

"We're going to be cutting it close." Stepan hinted at carefully.

"I believe a carriage is arriving, Mistress." Lyov announced from the doorway.

"Ahhh, has you pet shaken her leash?" Molly sniped.

Normally Alexei wouldn't have let that go, but considering what had happened earlier between them, she said nothing.

"Here she is Mistress." Lyov announced, pulling open the door before Katiya had a chance to even raise her hand to knock. The redhead blinked in surprise as she saw the gathered people in the entryway, standing for a moment outside. Then she saw Lyov's not so subtle jerk of his head and she moved inside so that he could close the door behind her.

"Where have you..." Her tirade stopped before it even got started, as she smelled the scents coming off of Katiya. "What happened?" She snarled. "Who attacked you?"

The human woman winced; she really shouldn't have been so surprised that Alexei had known so quickly. "I don't know. He didn't say his name." She stayed where she was, near the door, uncomfortable with all eyes upon her.

"Interesting she won't sleep with you, but she'll come home smelling of strange vampires." Molly said grinning nastily from the foot of the stairs.

Katiya flushed red, glaring across the entry hall at the elegant looking woman. "He tried to kill me."

Alexei said nothing but grabbed Katiya and in a blur of motion ran them up to her game room.

"I'm sorry." Katiya whispered into the shirt she was pressed up against, shuddering a little. She hadn't had a chance to feel afraid while it was happening, but now, she felt cold and tired. "I tried to be careful."

Alexei snarled feeling her fangs extend and retract. "Not just the vampire you smell of another woman, strongly." She hissed out. Part of her realized she was over-reacting. First Molly's game and now this, the smell of a vampire and someone else's scent and blood on Katiya.

"Tereza, she saved me." Hesitating to give away anything more

Alexei let go and began pacing. "A human saved you from a vampire?" She didn't know what was more troubling an unknown vampire in her city or a human who could kill her kind.

"Well..." Katiya hesitated. "I guess I helped. I shot him in the head with her gun."

She stopped pacing and roared out. "What?"

Shaken, Katiya took a step back, shivering at the intensity of the look on Alexei's face. Now she did feel like a mouse, in the presence of a large and dangerous feline. "He was going to kill her and then me. He knew who you were. He'd already killed the Brothers that I'd managed to find."

Alexei started pacing again. Her mind was racing this wasn't good she was leaving her territory with a new pet, a vampire that looked like a teenage boy, and a pair of nearly feral vamp twins. This wasn't good.

"I umm found out something's that are interesting. The fence they sold your things to is the one that Ivan uses. His name is Fenix and I heard earlier, while I was looking for the Brothers, that he's the one who brokered the deal with Ivan to get the deed for your factory also."

"Fenix?" She mulled the name over in her head. "I don't think I know him, but you know of him?" She absently began to play with stuff in the room.

"My father used him on occasion to fence things he'd, we'd, stolen."

"So you've met him?"

"Once." She shivered. "He turned us away the night my dad died."

"I'm sorry." Alexei stepped closer sensing Katiya's sadness.

Katiya let a breath pressing on with her thoughts. "I was thinking I could go check into Fenix "

"No! I forbid it. It will have to wait until I'm back." She had no way of knowing if there were more vampires un-invited in her city.

Katiya knew she looked stubborn but she knew she could find out more without getting in trouble. "I'll go during the daylight and only stay out during the day; I'll come back here at night."

Alexei blinked at Katiya dumbstruck, the human had just told her no.

"Then," Katiya continued, oblivious to the look she was getting as she planned it out in her mind "when you get back I'll have all the information for you, maybe I can even get your things back from Fenix if he hasn't sold them already." That last part wasn't very likely, but anything was possible.

Alexei started laughing. "Oh, mouse, do you realize how many people have ever told me no?" She left off the 'and lived'.

"I didn't tell you..." the human trailed off as she realized she had just indeed done that."I mean... that's not what I mean." She looked chagrined. "Sorry?"

The laughter trailed off and Alexei sighed. "You're determined to do this aren't you? No matter what I say?" She walked over to the tapestry of her fighting Herne the Huntsman

and picked up the twisted piece of metal that rested on a shelf under it.

"I can help you." Katiya said, a touch of stubbornness returning to her voice. "I'll be more careful, I'll only go out during the daylight. That should keep me from running into anymore problems." It would make finding Felix more difficult, but she was up for the challenge.

Alexei gripped the metal hard in her hand; despite her vampiric strength it didn't bend. "I don't have the time to teach you what you'll need to survive. You're too new." The timing of this and Karl's summons, she had to wonder if they were related.

"I've survived in the streets before I met you that night in the warehouse." Katiya reminded her, proud, she thought justifiably so, of her abilities. "I made a mistake staying out too late, this time I won't do that."

The blonde smiled a sardonic smile, Katiya didn't understand, for her to have a pet taken from her or killed under her nose was a loss of face, it would promote others to come and chip away at her power.

Mistaking that smile, Katiya smiled in response. "Then when you get back from your trip I'll have more information for you."

"I won't be here to stop you, let Lyov know where you're going when you go out. He'll let the twins and Matvey know so they can look for you."

The redhead nodded, agreeing, and stepped closer to the vampire, studying the lines of tension that showed on her sculpted face. "You're leaving now?"

She turned looking at Katiya. "Yes, as soon as we're done."

"I'm sorry I was late." Katiya had the feeling that she'd held her up, but that was insane, there was no reason for this powerful vampire to wait for her.

Her face showed she still wasn't happy. "Don't be sorry, just be careful." She moved slowly, like a statue coming to life. Her own paranoia blossoming, a great need to reaffirm the bond between Master and Pet. A pale hand reached out grabbing the back of Katiya's neck and pulled her into her body. She leaned her head down, as the scent of the other vampire hit her nose instinctively her lips pulled back in snarl.

There was no point in fighting that incredible strength, so the human let herself be pulled close, wincing as her head was pushed back, exposing her neck.

She rubbed her cheek against the warm flesh feeling the pulse of blood underneath. Gently she kissed the skin. "You're mine." She whispered and then opened her mouth letting her fangs cut the skin, she didn't need blood not after her and Molly earlier, but she needed to make sure the connection was understood.

The body underneath those fangs shuddered, tensing for an instant and then relaxing as blood welled up under Alexei's lips. "Yes." Katiya whispered, her hands sliding up to clutch at the taller woman's back through the fabric of her elegant clothes.

A little bit of blood was taken and then she licked the wounds closed. She kissed up the pale column of neck up to red lips; she spent some time there before she ran her own tongue against one of her fangs slicing it open and forced the bleeding muscle into redhead's mouth. Sending the human off balance, with alternating gentleness and force.

The kiss was so intoxicating that Katiya swayed, eyes closed she moaned in pleasure barely conscious of the copper tang of blood. When the kiss ended she had to stay clinging to Alexei for a little while or fall over. That had been different. "Ummm..." She managed eyes unfocused as she opened them.

One hand was fisted in Katiya's shirt the other still held the piece of metal, and Alexei fought the urge to claim and conquer any more than she already had. The coolness of the metal got her attention and she frowned weighing the pros and cons of it. To use it would mean a favor owed. She untangled her hand from the shirt. She sniffed at Kat happy that she no longer smelled of other things.

Still looking a little dazed, the human woman licked lips that were still tingling. "You..." she blinked, trying to recover from that assault that had ended so nicely.

A discreet knock at the doorway was followed by Lyov's voice. "Mistress, your carriage is ready, whenever you wish to leave." Then he retreated, without opening the door.

"Me?" Alexei supplied feeling better happily she noted, she no longer smelled of Molly. "15 minutes, have everyone in the carriage waiting for me."

"Yes Mistress." The voice trailed back as he continued hobbling down the hall away, as if he'd expected that response.

Taking a breath, Katiya cleared her mind enough to focus again. "Definitely yours." There, she was happy she'd managed a full sentence again as her brain started working again.

Alexei beamed in pride, she straightened up, grasping the metal in her hand harder. "I have to leave soon, but come with me. If I cannot protect you..." and she did not really trust her children to take the care with her pet that she would like, Katiya would be just a human to them, they were young yet. "I will summon a guardian for you." Her free hand grasped one of Katiya's and led her to the door.

"What kind of Guardian?" Katiya followed along, interested in what this guardian thing could be. "Will it have claws? What about see in the dark?" She thought seeing in the



dark and having claws would be a great thing for a guardian to have.

"Yes." Alexei said cryptically as she led the woman down the stairs and out through the green house and into the wilderness behind it.

"I don't think I told you yet, but that is the most amazing thing I've seen." She looked behind her at the green house, still impressed with the warmth and greenery inside it. The redhead shivered in the cold air, she'd rather spend time in there than outside during the winter.

Alexei nodded.

"The industrialized world doesn't allow for humans to spend their time hunting and gathering, so they can hoard food for the winter. Now the factories worldwide make you work: morning, noon, and night. So once winter comes and daylight is a brief three-hour time frame, nothing grows. You grow weak and sick, and some die, when most of that can be prevented with a good diet. That insures the humans that work for me stay healthy."

She held her hand out in front of her and slowly opened her fingers revealing the piece of metal resting there.

The human moved a bit closer, trying to see what the piece of metal was. "Everyone should have a greenhouse." She agreed.

"Yes, they should, but people aren't so wise. Did you know humans are the only animal on the face of this planet that sleep where they shit, they live in the filth of their own creation?"

Katiya blinked, looking up at Alexei's face. "We are?" She knew people could be disgusting.

She closed her eyes and focused on the object in her hand. It had been decades since she's used it, and she wasn't certain that he was still dining on her lands. "Yes you are. Although all vampires were once human so they're not much better."

"That's a depressing thought." She said quietly, recognizing the intent expression on the other woman's face.

She found it, the thread that still connected the metal to the person she was looking for. "Vidar, get your ass over here!" She shouted.

The metal grew warm in her palm.

Something shifted in the darkness of the trees and Katiya instinctively moved closer to Alexei's side, staying close to her.

It was hard to see at first its coat was as white as the snow, the air seemed to grow colder, and after a few seconds a large white hound was seen running towards them. Its coat was as white as a fresh snowfall, except for its ears which both looked as if they had been dipped in blood.

"What is he?" Katiya's eyes were wide as she watched the hound easily lope towards them.

It came to a stop in front of them sitting down on its haunches his breath didn't fog or steam in the cold. Black eyes watched and waited.

"He is Vidar the first hound created by Hel for the hunt, made it is rumored from the first snow fall. When I broke the horn it broke into six pieces. One piece for each hound, each piece holding its freewill and soul. They could not be trusted with freewill just yet so each piece was given to a keeper until such a time they were deemed ready. Three hounds of ice and three of fire and always the pack must remain at six if one dies another will be born to replace it. I keep Vidar's because he is the first and one created from the essence of the wilderness."

"What happened to the other five?" Cautiously she moved closer to the hound, seeing if it was going to growl.

She was still, her own gray eyes' never leaving his black ones. His hackles raised and his lips pulled back in a snarl and she echoed in kind not backing down. "She's mine Vidar, and she is a friend." She said calmly. The hound's fur lay back down and the white teeth covered by lips.

"The other five were given to five of the wisest people I know to guide them into the world of freewill." She replied finally to Katiya's question.

"Oh." Katiya watched the dog warily, having gripped Alexei's arm when his hackles had risen. "He doesn't look very friendly." Maybe she'd be safer with the tigers.

The vampire squared her shoulders. "I have a task for you Vidar." She reached out taking Katiya's hand placing the piece of metal in it and closed her fingers around it.

"Are you really sure..." Katiya started to say, really starting to think that the tigers were a really great idea.

The dog's form shimmered and kneeling in the snow was a great mass of a man: pale as snow, hair whiter than Alexei's except at each temple where blood red strains were braided together framing each side of his face. He was a Norse God made flesh; down each arm were pale markings. "What do you want?" He snarled at the vampire with a thick Norse accent.

Besides these two Katiya felt even more insignificant than before, and she shrunk back tightly against Alexei's side as she stared wide eyed at the man. "Oh." She whispered.

Alexei gave Katiya a comforting squeeze before letting go. "I wish you to protect what is mine. You will be her shadow, her protector, and never forget her life is more important than yours."

The man cocked his head to the side, sizing Katiya up. "She's that important to you? A human. A girl."

Oh yes, Katiya could tell that he was going to be a joy to be around. "He'll be like a dog most of the time right?" she whispered.

The vampire nodded and then eyed the man.

"Stop quibbling, I'm giving you an opportunity to do something perhaps even a hunt or at least the chance to kill something. Or have you grown weak from years of hibernating that this is beyond you?"

The hound scowled. "I'll do as you ask. The girl will be safe." There was a quickening in his blood at the thought of prey.

In the blink of an eye the man was gone and in its place was the hound.

"He'll listen to you right?" Katiya whispered, keeping an eye on the man who was a hound or maybe it was the other way around.

Alexei smiled softly happy Katiya would have a supernatural bodyguard while she was gone. She turned to Katiya. "No he'll listen to you. You have his soul."

"Oh." She kept the little piece of metal in her hand. She'd have to be careful to avoid loosing that. "Is there anything else I should know before you leave?"

"Just remember not to be a timid mouse with him, and most men can be won over by a good meal." She looked behind them back at the house, she needed to go, but was reluctant to do so. "Be careful."

"I will." Katiya hesitated, but then decided not to be timid and stood up on tip toes to give the vampire a kiss. "Be careful." She said, solemnly.

Alexei's eyebrows rose in surprise, but she returned the kiss. "I will try. Now I really need to go." She disengaged herself from the young woman and turned walking quickly towards the house.

"Bye." Katiya watched her go. A whine at her side made her look down at the white

haired dog with red ears. "I know, she'll be safe."

The hound snorted but nudged his head into her empty hand.

"Right, you want to hunt or something right?" She looked up at the sky. There was no way she would be going into the city during the nighttime. "We won't be leaving the manor until the morning."

He huffed in annoyance but nodded. Sitting the large dog looked at her expectantly waiting to shadow her.

"Guess you're coming inside with me." Katiya was comforted with the idea of him near her, especially if any other vampires showed up. She started to walk towards the manor. "Hope you don't mind tigers."

The hound followed silently at her heels moving easily over the snow.

#####3####3

The large steam engine locomotive eased its way into the private train station on the edge of St. Petersburg. The dark engine was in perfect condition, as were the four opulently appointed train cars that it had pulled across the night time countryside. A small group of people waited for it at the station.

A man dressed in a simple black great coat that had the air of being decades out of fashion and with shoulder length blonde hair watched the train arrive without expression. It was his duty to greet the arriving vampire lords; a duty he fulfilled as directed by his own lord, but that didn't make it a pleasant one.

While his underlings got to work unloading the baggage he stepped forward, waiting for Alexei to emerge.

Alexei stood staring out the window into the black of night. She couldn't help but think she might have made a mistake leaving Katiya, but nothing to do about it now. She was aware of Stepan waiting supernaturally still behind her. "Everyone is waiting on me I suppose?" She asked not turning around.

"Karl has sent Timur to greet you." Was his answer, standing perfectly still as if he was content to do so until the train rusted apart around them if he had to.

"Sergei is out bootlicking, Molly is flirting, Shiro waits patiently secure I will rescue her from any harm, and you wait in my shadow. How will we survive trapped in this place among those that only consider living in taking blood?" She turned finally. "They make me want to curl up in the womb of mother earth and sleep until they are dust."

Stepan held out his arm and she took it. "You still burn as brightly as the day I took your

mortality away. Why is that?" She mused as he escorted her to the exit. "Is it because you're an actor and studied the human condition so you can mimic on and off the stage?"

He gave a very human shrug, with a wry grin. "Because I take joy in the world as it is, both good and bad." He escorted her towards the door at the head of the carriage, choosing his words carefully. "You seem more aware of the world around you these days."

She thought about not answering for a moment, but finally said something. "Yes, for too long I've been content to sit and watch the fire burn. Allowing others to do my work for me, in my name. Your tip on the blood house was the wake up call I needed I guess."

Maybe, but he didn't say that out loud of course, instead held the door open for her as she descended to the train platform.

The vampire in the great coat watched impassively as she stepped down, and then gave her a slow bow from the waist. "Alexei." The voice rumbled from somewhere in his chest, low and filled with gravel. Timur was Karl's enforcer in St. Petersburg, responsible for seeing that his lords will was obeyed.

"Timur." Responded with only a nod of her head, which was more respect than she showed any of her kind. Timur was vicious and loyal, a born killer, she could see it in his eyes. She imagined he could have become nothing else than a vampire; he was in harmony with the savage he had become. She had been there when Karl found him, toyed with taking him but while Karl liked monsters she was only drawn to those with a spark of something utterly human in their marrow.

"Any hints for me as to why Karl, desires to hold court?"

He turned, walking alongside her as they moved towards the dark coach that he had brought to carry her back to Karl's manor. Others were pulled up from her children and pets, the first of which he glanced over to see if any could prove a challenge to him, the last he ignored as pieces of meat.

"Trouble in the Americas apparently." He didn't particularly care of course, unless there was something that needed killing in front of him, he seldom did care.

"The Americas are always troubling. They love their notions of democracy and freedom, and they spawn loathsome, lazy, cruel vampires who always shake up the status quo endangering everybody. Although it doesn't help that we exiled our undesirables there."

She paused at the coach waiting for him to open the door.

He did so, holding it for her and ignoring the slight smirk on Stepan's face behind her.

"We should have killed them, then they wouldn't be causing problems." He'd been against the exiling of those vampire lords or children who caused problems, but apparently that hadn't been a politically acceptable alternative. "The shape changers are involved somehow." His eyes glowed a little as he said that. He did so enjoy fighting shape changers.

"Really, that's an interesting twist. But history has shown that eventually the barbarians will rise up when the noble class is drunk on its own debauchery and self-worth." She slid into the carriage.

That got a bit of a blank look from the large man as he sat down across from her along with Stepan. A rap of his fist on the ceiling got the carriage moving through the streets. "Rumor has it you have a blood bar problem." He smiled an expression devoid of any warmth. "I'm sure my lord would allow me to help wipe them out if you wish?"

"I've taken care of it and Karl has already shown me his displeasure of even allowing such a thing to spring up in my town." She looked at him neutrally before saying. "My, my out of the loop with your master. Has he found a new monster in training?"

He scowled a little, which was as much expression as he showed when casually twisting someone's head off and bathing in the blood that spurted from the severed neck. "I have been busy. There have been outcasts in the city." Outcasts were lordless vampire children, scum, to be eradicated on sight.

"Of course, busy." She did it to tweak him, something she must have picked up from Katiya. Of course Timur wasn't going to hurt her, because then he would find out what kind of monster she was.

If it was anyone but one of the vampire lords, he would have ripped out her throat, or at least tried. Instead he sat where he was, as if carved in granite until the urge to wrap his fingers around something faded. By that time they were pulling up in front of the huge mansion and he stepped out, holding open the door for her and her youngster, otherwise ignoring Stepan.

"My lord asked that I escort you to him immediately."

She didn't like that, not at all. Her fingers ached from the last audience she'd had with Karl. She showed nothing though. "Of course."

"Your child isn't invited." He said, turning and leading the way towards the manor.

Stepan raised an eyebrow, lowering his voice to a stage whisper. "I think he doesn't like me."

"He doesn't like anybody he doesn't perceive to be stronger than him. With Timur might make right." She patted Stepan comforting. "You and Shiro wait for me in my rooms I may need more than just human blood after this."

"As you say." The vampire left her side, heading to the other carriage in which her pets rode.

At the top of the steps Timur stopped, holding the door once again, face as blank as ever.

Forcing a smile she followed along behind. "Right behind you Timur."

The inside smelled dusty and dry, as if it was seldom aired out. In comparison Alexei's manor had the sense of being actually lived in. This place did not, it was a house of the dead and even Karl's pets did not stay long here. Timur lead the way towards the back of the house and the Russian master vampires study room. The house was quiet around them as they walked, silent with an almost oppressive sense of age about it.

Knocking once on the wooden door, the killer opened the door for her, staying outside and closing it behind her as she entered.

Some worshipped themselves like the undead creatures they perceived themselves to be out of human myth. Alexei was well aware that her heart still beat in her chest if only at a modified pace, barely detectable.

Karl reveled in the undead arts. Although to her knowledge he wasn't a master of any necromancy or blood magic. He was short squat man, with slicked back hair and large curling mustache, although in her opinion he would have been better off with a beard, his lack of a strong chin made her want to laugh when he got on a tear of shouting and demanding. However what really annoyed her was he wasn't even Russian, he was German. But she could have opposed the council when they appointed him, and she had done nothing.

His voice still had a hint of that German accent when he talked, although it became much more pronounced when he became upset or passionate about something. "Alexei." He smiled, an expression that bared his teeth in a rather unfriendly looking gesture. "Good, good, you came. Of course you had no choice did you?" He chuckled at his own joke.

"There are always choices Karl." She said in a neutral voice as she made her way to a chair.

"Yes, but some are more painful than others." He looked pointedly at her hand; his joviality fading away as shrewd dark eyes watched her. Karl might not have been as old as she was, but he was a master vampire and his exterior hid a deadly intelligence that many underestimated. "I trust that no more blood bars have appeared?"

"Now that we are aware the problem. We are keeping an eye out." She kept the attack on Katiya to herself for now.

"At least that's one thing taken care of." He leaned back in his chair, steepling his fingers as he regarded her. "I've summoned all of the city lords here. You're the closest, but the others should be here soon enough." He tilted his head, almost like a bird would when spotting something curious. "Did Timur tell you why I summoned a full council?"

"It's Timur; he only stops at licking your boots because you won't let him go any higher." She joked, why she didn't admit he'd told her anything she didn't know.

A flicker of something crossed his face, but he was too much a politician to let it show. "Have you heard the rumors coming out of the America's?" Karl asked in what would have been a non-sequitor if Timur hadn't told her something about it in the carriage.

"Not really I've become a bit of an isolationist in the last couple of decades. I would have gone and explored but the council decided to make the new world a dumping ground for our unwanted, and well I'd never want to be lumped in with those."

"Of course not." He waved a dismissive hand as if her going to the Americas was the farthest thing from his mind. "The council may have wanted to reconsider its actions a bit more carefully when it chose to send outcasts there. At the very least we should have seen to it that there was a lord in charge of it." He looked dour, conveniently forgetting he'd voted in favor of the strategy at the time. "They've always caused trouble of course, but now they've gone insane. They have decided to go to war with the humans for control."

"We're fucked. To start a war there, will bring one here."

"Perhaps, possibly, not. There are options available to us. The European council will be meeting soon as well, as will our Asian friends. That may not be the most troubling rumor though. A friend has sent me word that the shape changers may side with the humans."

"I'm not surprised, I'm sure they would find it the lesser of two evils in their mind. They'd be wrong. Humans don't like to feel inferior, any species that does that, well we know how it goes. Remember Troy, Carthage, and others."

"Yes. There is no doubt that the humans would turn on the shape changers once the war ended, if they won of course." He considered her. "Have you had any contact with shape changers recently?"

"We fought over territory..." She paused it seemed like only yesterday but really it had been decades since her factories had wiped out most of the nearby forests. "No not for awhile."



"Tell me immediately if you do. We have an understanding and I don't want them getting any stupid ideas that they can use this situation to their advantage." His accent thickened.

She wanted to say 'No, Karl, you have an agreement, not the shifters. Instead she held her tongue and nodded.

"I'm glad we understand each other. You may go. I expect we will have a full council by tomorrow evening then we shall plan what to do about this vampire war."

"Of course. Tomorrow." She stood and bowed, happy to be leaving with her fingers intact.

"Timur will escort you to your rooms." He raised his voice, just enough that Timur could hear and open the door from the outside.

She only nodded and followed the other man. Happy, for the moment, she wasn't in trouble.

"This way." Timur even made it almost seem like an invitation as he stood aside, near the doorway, waiting for her to pass before closing the door behind her.

She nodded at him and passed through the doorway. It was odd to leave Karl's inner sanctum without some sort of damage to her body.

The killer in the body of a vampire walked alongside her, silent as they moved deeper into the manor. Finally, after they had put a floor or two between themselves and the Russian Master vampire he spoke. "He's worried the shape changers will decide to cause problems here, break the truce." That would be fine as far as Timur would be concerned, more killing.

"It's in both our natures to kill, the fact peace has lasted this long is surprising. But the world is getting smaller and shape shifters need a lot of territory, and man and his machines don't help that problem." She didn't know why she bothered saying anything. Nobody cared or listened.

The blonde man stopped, eyes watching her intently. "Perhaps the vampires in the America's have it right."

She blinked, but made no other sign of her surprise. That was a bit of a traitorous comment. "In which way would violators of our most basic laws have it right?" She asked curious to his reasoning.

"Maybe the humans are getting too powerful." He started moving again though, leading the way towards the rooms that she would be occupying during her stay at the manor.

"I don't know about powerful, but there numbers are increasing, they breed like rabbits." She joked. Always careful to analyze everything she said knowing full well anything she said would get back to Karl.

"There's a rumor that you found a new pet." Unlike others, Alexei was not known to get new pets often and therefore it was news worthy. He personally didn't see the use of pets, but he supposed others liked having humans around.

This wasn't surprising Karl's pet would have blabbed everything he had seen and heard. "Yes, I do have a new pet. You can safely report those rumors as fact."

A momentary slip in the normally impassive face let her see that he had indeed been ordered to ask her questions. "Here are the rooms." He shoved open the door.

She paused looking at him with cold gray eyes, no hint of warmth in them. "Anything else you need to know so you can report back to your master?"

There was fury in his eyes, carefully contained, but fury nonetheless as he ground out. "No."

She bent down and whispered in his ear. "Don't be so mad. Someday you're master will send you to kill me, and we'll finally know who the bigger monster is." She stepped back through the door into her rooms shutting the doors.

"Someday." He agreed, fists clenched so very tightly, staring at the closed doors before turning and leaving.

There was a thrill at the prospect. There was a challenge in Timur, a slight chance of death a failure that made her feel flush with purpose. The rooms were dark and tomb like, and she sighed missing her bright marble and airy home. When had she become so different from the rest of her kind seeking out those things that reminded her of life?

She unbuttoned her coat. "Shiro? Stepan?" She called out. Daylight was coming soon and she preferred those she trusted near her.

Perhaps they were busy, she knew Shiro actually preferred men, and Stepan didn't care as long as they were pretty.

"We're in here." Stepan called from the inner room, where he had been quietly reading. Shiro was curled up on the bed that had obviously not seen use in a great many years.

Again she wished she had brought Katiya, but the young woman was an international incident waiting to happen. She didn't know nearly enough about the new world she had been thrust into. Plus she would not be ready, if ever, for the attention Alexei wanted too and needed too give her here.

She hung the coat up and walked to the archway that revealed the other room. Her face showed her displeasure. "Windowless and stuffy. A reflection of our host I think."

He closed the book, setting it aside next to the oil lamp he'd been reading by. "Shall I wake Shiro?"

"No. Let her sleep. Daylight is coming soon." She didn't need blood herself, quiet full from Katiya and her tryst with Molly. "Is Molly with Sergei?"

"Next door." He agreed, not really having to spell out what it was that the two of them were doing. Rising, he nodded towards the other of the two connecting doors. "My chambers are over there apparently. They are not an improvement over yours."

"Remind me to beat Sergei when we get home. I didn't give him permission to play with any of my pets." She knew he was unhappy about making him come with her, he had wanted to stay to oversee the factories. But with him gone, Matvey was supposed to go in and double-check the ledgers. To take her pet without permission was a powerplay, and she couldn't risk making her household look weak, not here.

Molly apparently wasn't over her need for punishment, and needed Alexei to prove again her love for the pet through pain.

"I think I can remember to do that." He bowed to her. "I'll leave you to your rest."

Beautiful Shiro shifted on the bed, letting out a little sigh as she dreamed.

She laughed, a rare sound. "Stay here with me, and Shiro. Too long have I ignored my children, what kind of Master have I become these last couple of years, a decade of moping in front of the fire."

"You did seem to prefer it to us." He gave a flashing smile and was glad to avoid spending the night in the disaster of a bed next door.

She rolled her eyes, "You pup. You're barely over a 100 years old. When you reach 1000 you can tell me if time still weighs the same on you." She wasn't mad though, a smile gracing her lips. She shed the still formal traveling clothes and slid into the bed automatically attracted to the mute woman's warmth.

He got in on the other side, stretching out on his back and giving a quiet chuckle. "So you're claiming old age as a defense then?" It was good to have her laughing again; it had been a long time, too long, since he'd heard her laugh. Perhaps the new pet had provided her with the diversion she'd needed.

"I suppose I am, my puckish man." She smiled as Shiro curled into her body, and as

always she felt protective, rather than lustful thoughts about the girl. She was quiet for a moment. Then breaking the silence she said. "If something happens to me, help them find a place in the world." The 'them' was her pets, but they knew that.

He was quiet for a moment after she said that, frowning a little. "I'll try." He said finally. Shiro he could, but he wasn't so sure he could help Molly, there was something off in that one and he didn't know the new one yet. "Nothings going to happen to you though."

"You're right but being here makes me think the worse."

"It is a depressing place." He agreed, eyes closing as his body reacted to the rising sun. Being younger than Alexei he couldn't stay conscious as long as she could, or wake up while the sun was up.

Alexei felt him slip into the deep protective sleep, but lay there, awake until well after the sun had rose.

#####3#####3

It was well after sunrise before Katiya was awake enough to make her way down to the kitchen and Warren's lunches. Her sleeping schedule had never been normal, but the longer she spent in the manor with Alexei, the more she found herself sleeping later through the day.

The manor felt even quieter than normal with so many of its residents gone with Alexei. "Morning Warren." She greeted the chef; amused to see the tiger in the garden ignore the white dog that was trailing along behind her with a superior air.

"Morn...ing." He blinked in surprise at the dog. "Found yourself a pet of your own then?" He asked.

The hound growled in annoyance at the words, but did not leave Katiya's side.

"He's my guardian. Alexei thinks I'll get into trouble without him." She slid into what was becoming her normal spot at the table and watched him. "Is Fiona doing better?"

The great man's face fell at the name. "I do not know, with the mistress gone... I made her food, but I couldn't find Matvey or the twins to take food to her."

"Oh." Katiya blinked, not sure why that would be a problem. "I could take it to her if you wanted?" She offered.

He patted her shoulder before turning back to his pots and pans. "That's sweet of you girl, but without a key nobody's taking anything anywhere."

She smiled, this sounded like something she could definitely help with. "I'm good with

getting locks to open if somebody's misplaced the key." The redhead smiled, an innocent expression that had gotten her out of trouble in the past.

The hound whined and bumped his head into Katiya's leg as if trying to stop this bad idea before it could become reality.

Shhh." She whispered, "I'm just trying to help him. Fiona needs food right?" It had nothing at all to do with her curiosity to find out what was going on.

Warren quickly made up a tray, which seemed to be mostly broth and smashed apples. "This way, follow me." He whispered to the redhead.

The hound and the tiger made a great show of ignoring each other.

Happy to be able to be of use, Katiya bounded up, patting the lock picks she'd packed away in a small leather pouch in her pocket. "Don't worry, we'll do this and then go find Fenix." She said, quietly to the hound.

The great white hound just sighed, but followed along behind.

Warren led them to a hidden door off the kitchen; he lit a torch handing it to Katiya. "Careful the steps are kind of steep."

"Is she still recovering from not taking Alexei's blood?" She followed along behind him, careful of the steps and holding the torch aloft.

"I do not know, normally I make up the food and Alexei takes it down to her." That made him jealous, unable to see the woman who would be his wife, because his wife's ex-lover forbade it.

"How long has she been down here?" It seemed like a rather dark and cold place to keep someone who was recovering from being in withdrawals. The redhead stepped off the steps onto the smooth stone of the hallway floor; the only light the torches they carried. She could almost feel the disapproval from the hound following her.

"Too long it feels like, but she went down here four nights before the mistress brought you here." Finally he stepped down on the hard packed earth. A short hallway with five depressing doors spread out before them.

Two of the doors were closed, one at the end of the hallway and one of the ones on the side. The end of the hallway didn't have a lock that she could see; it was just a solid sheet of dark gray metal. The other door had a lock so she hoped that was the one that Fiona was behind.

The heavy metal door looked impressive enough but the lock didn't seem that complicated, as she got closer. "See, here are my keys." She pulled out the little packet

and the slim metal tools inside it. "What's behind that one?" The redhead nodded to the end of the hallway, starting to study the lock on the one in front of her.

"I don't know. Nobody does. Fiona told me before Molly there was another pet; she tried to sneak in there positive there was gold and gems. The mistress found out and had each limb tied to a different horse and then the horses were all sent off in different directions." He swallowed nervously afraid to even look at the door.

Katiya paused, lock picks in hand, poised in front of the door. "She had her quartered?" The redhead looked pale in the torchlight as she looked up at Warren. Well that was one way to send a message.

"That's the story I was told, I was only a babe running around the heather when it would have happened."

"Got it, no trying to go in through the metal door in the scary looking hallway." That sounded reasonable to her and she focused on the lock in front of her. It took a gentle touch to get the tumblers to shift inside but she was a deft hand at it and within a few seconds the lock clicked. "See, my keys are always good." She stood up and grabbed the doorknob.

The hound gave a worried bark that seemed loud in the shadowy light of the hallway.

As the door opened the smell of over ripe humanity snuck out the smell of piss and shit. Warren's face looked green for a moment and then angry. "How can she do this to her?" He growled out shoving the door open.

Chained in the dark corner of the small room, a shape rocked back and forth.

"Fiona? Fiona?" Warren said over and over as he rushed to her side. "This is no place for a beast let alone a woman." He muttered darkly. He set the tray down and tried to grasp Fiona's face. "Honey look at me. Are you okay?"

"Ummm... Warren." Katiya frowned, that didn't look like a good idea. She was pretty sure they should just leave the food and then close the door behind them. There was probably a really good reason that Alexei let Fiona stay here behind that stout heavy door.

A raspy voice began to mumble something.

"What's that love? Speak up I can't hear you."

"Hungry." The word rattled out.

Carefully stepping around a dark smear on the floor, Katiya stepped inside so that she could reach Warren. They should leave; even she could see that this wasn't going to

end well. "Warren, let go, we have to leave her."

"Leave her. No!" He shouted. "Look at her. I can't leave her like this." There were tears in his eyes. "I have food for you love. Right here." He turned reaching for the tray scooping up some broth on a spoon.

He reached for her chin holding it still while he lifted the spoon to her lips. For a moment everything was fine, then the woman seemed to come to life spitting out the liquid.

"Hungry!" She howled out and lunged at Warren.

"Shit!" Katiya yelped. She could only imagine the trouble she'd be in with Alexei if the chef got hurt because she'd opened a door for him. So she slapped Fiona, hard, on the side of the face as she lunged at him.

The big man was taking completely off guard and sat back stunned at the woman he was now seeing.

"A little help here?" Katiya yelled, trying to avoid the snarling, spitting, scratching thing that vaguely resembled a woman, that was trying to get to her throat or Warren, she doubted it mattered which.

"What are you? Some little bit of girl." The mad woman paused sniffing. "You smell like Alexei."

The hound just sat there watching with interest, not doing anything.

Holding, desperately, onto two wrists with claw like fingers that had been scratching for her throat, Katiya swallowed. Throwing a dark glare at the hound who was doing nothing she said "She bit me." She wasn't quite up to saying she was a pet.

"Bit you. Bit you." The woman mumbled, the fight going out of her.

"Bit me." Katiya nodded, gentling the hold on the other woman's wrists.

The big man got his wits back and came up behind his love gently grabbing her arms. "Aye love, Katiya's the Mistress's new pet."

"No, I'm the Mistress's pet." Warren's words spurred the woman's anger, and she tried to claw at Katiya again.

The redhead was shoved down against the floor, using all of her strength to hold off the furious woman who was shrieking something again about being a pet. "Thanks a lot for the help." She yelled at the uninterested hound.

The hurt was visible on Warren's face but he didn't let go of Fiona holding tight to her wrists. He struggled though, Fiona was stronger than he'd realized.

The hound gave a doggie grin very much amused by the three humans wrestling around on the floor.

A wild swing by Fiona drew a thin line of blood on Katiya's arm, at that moment the hound stood up growling.

The temperature seemed to drop in the small cell and exhaled breaths streamed out like white fog. The hound bound over knocking Fiona off of the human he was supposed to protect and stood as a barrier between her and Katiya.

Getting up off the floor Katiya watched the snarling woman warily as she grabbed Warren's arm and pulled him up, not stopping to wonder how she'd gotten strong enough to do that. Giving him a shove towards the door. "Out." She demanded, this wasn't open to negotiation.

The hound backed away slowly until Fiona couldn't follow brought up short by her chains. He scrambled out of the cell and pushed against the door trying to shut it.

"Don't go so hungry. Please don't go." The woman howled.

Katiya joined him, since Warren was still staring at her, worried. "We'll be back Fiona, as soon as you're better." She hoped that would be soon.

Warren just stared at the door, his face pale and his eyes wide. For a long while he said nothing. Finally he croaked out. "I'm sorry Katiya. I had no idea. None. Nobody does. To my knowledge no vampire has ever just let a pet go. I'm so sorry."

Vidar the hound just sighed and marched past them up the stairs. His body language clearly saying, 'I told you so'.

She leaned against the door, watching the hound leave while she caught her breath. "She should probably stay in there until she's better." Katiya said finally, standing upright.

Warren just nodded not saying anything else. It hurt to see her like that. She hadn't even known him, had just wanted Alexei, to be her pet.

Slowly he started up the stairs.

Following behind him, Katiya did her best.

"She'll get better. Don't worry. It's like those people who smoke opium and get sick



when they haven't for a while. She doesn't know what she's saying."

"My head knows that, but they've been together for so long. Alexei's I don't know how old really, over a 1000 if the rumors are correct and Fiona was her first pet. I'm not sure I can compete with that." He entered the doorway that the hound had left open.

"But she's trying right? Just to be with you. That means she's giving up all that time with Alexei to be with you." There was a bitter taste at the back of her throat, which she didn't really want to think about right now. She closed the door behind her.

He nodded and sat down at the table in his kitchen and buried his head in his hands. "I'm sorry again Katiya, for asking you to do that."

"I wanted to go, to see this famous Fiona that Alexei treasures." She sat down next to him.

The hound looked up and yawned.

"She's not like that. She's beautiful and kind. She takes care of all of us. I think you'll like each other once she's better." He said softly.

"I know." She wasn't sure about that, but that would have to wait. "I have to go Warren." There was only so much daylight left and she had to go see Fenix before dark if she was going to hold onto the promise she made to Alexei.

He just nodded. "Do what you need to do."

The hound got up and looked at Katiya expectantly.

"I'll be back before nightfall." Then she'd have to figure out if she should tell Alexei about going to visit Fiona. "Yes, we're going." She said to the dog, getting up and taking a moment to wrap a cloth around the shallow cut along her arm.

He pranced around her happy to be doing something other than watch silly humans ignore common sense.

#####3#####3

"Did you have to spook the horses like that?" Katiya demanded the hound that was trotting along at her side down the cobblestone street. The ride in the carriage from the manor to the edge of the city had been easy enough, but then he'd barked at the horses and spooked them.

For a moment he thought about stopping in the middle of the street to lick his balls. That would probably annoy her some more, all she seemed to be was annoyed. He'd tried to warn her about going down the stairs but she hadn't listened.

She stopped in the middle of the street, ignoring the people passing on either side of them. That mocking look in his eyes had been there ever since the manor.

"Yes! Fine! I admit it! You were right. Is that what you want to hear? I shouldn't have gone into the basement!" Ignoring the very odd looks she was getting for yelling things at a dog, she turned and kept moving, muttering to herself.

Tail wagging he ran and caught up to her shoving his head under her hand. Maybe she was train-able.

It really was hard to stay mad at a dog, no matter how annoying and superior he sometimes acted, when she was scratching behind his ears. Rolling her eyes at how easily she'd just been manipulated, she petted as they walked. She stayed to the side streets, away from the main thoroughfares that ringed the great cathedral. This wasn't her favorite part of the city priests scared her.

"That thing freaks me out a little." She whispered, conspiratorially to the hound, glancing up at the tall cathedral spires that loomed over everything in this part of the city.

He yipped in agreement. No good could come from a religion that forbade its messengers from the pleasures of the flesh. Men got weird when sex was denied. No god could be that cruel.

"Why do I think that you and I don't think the same way about things?" She asked, rhetorically as they kept moving. The redhead relaxed a little when they got further from the cathedral. She felt like something bad was going to happen whenever she was near that place.

"There it is." Ahead of them, tucked away in a narrow side street, was a nondescript looking little place with a used books sign hanging outside.

The hound sighed. That looked like a very unexciting place.

A simple sign was posted up in the doorway that said the shop was closed. Judging by the amount of dust on it, the sign was permanently displaying closed. Ignoring it, Katiya knocked on the door.

When no one appeared to open the door, she knocked again, harder. "I know you're in there Fenix! Open up or I'll just keep knocking until I get an answer, even if I have to use a stone through one of your windows to do it with!"

The hound walked up to the door and cocked his head listening. There was someone inside he could hear their heartbeat, a scared little rabbit beat.

The human woman knocked again, harder. "I'm going to get a rock!" She warned, starting to look around for something hard to throw at a window.

Dark eyes focused on the doorknob and the great dog opened his mouth breathing on the metal lock. Slowly ice began to form in the keyhole, expanding out until the lock shattered.

He turned looking at the human, and barked to get her attention.

"Oh." She dropped the rock she'd found and shook her head. "Nice trick." A shove on the door and it swung open. "I never get neat tricks." she mumbled.

He sighed and moped behind her, he should have at least gotten a biscuit and a good boy out of that.

"Go away!" A man's voice yelled from the back of the dusty book filled shop. "We're closed!"

"You're never closed." Katiya answered, heading towards that voice, navigating her way through the stacks of books that covered the floor.

"I am today." The voice called back. Katiya snorted, rounding a corner and finding the old man that was known as Fenix trying to open a back door to escape through.

The hound growled and tensed ready for the man to bolt. Prey ran. If the man ran that meant he could hunt.

The stooped over little man looked over at that growl and froze. "Oh, Katiya, how nice to see you again." He didn't sound happy, not at all. "And your dog."

"I think he prefers being called a hound." She patted the white head next to her and smiled pleasantly. "You owe me."

"Now Katiya..."

"No, don't you dare now Katiya me. You owe me for my father. You turned us away when we needed your help."

"There was no way I could have..." She kept right on going, overriding his words. "How do you think your contacts would feel if they knew you'd turned someone over to the police?"

He paled. "I did no such thing!"

"No. But I'd tell them you did."

The hound's ears perked up; perhaps he would still get to hunt that man. Revenge was a fun thing.

He stared at her, the hard set of her jaw, the angry blue eyes and felt his shoulders sag. "You're getting as good as your brother at blackmailing people."

That hurt, and Katiya's fingers twitched into a fist around Vidar's fur. "You hired Ivan and four brothers to steal from Alexei Petrov. I need to know who used you to hire them and get back the stuff they stole."

Vidar growled at him. So this was the man who stole Alexei's memories. The room seemed to grow colder as the hound's fangs were exposed.

"Ah...." He stammered a little, wiping beads of perspiration off his forehead. "I don't know who it was. They wanted complete privacy in the deal. You understand?"

She eyed him coldly, remembering how her father had banded and pleaded to be let in on his door that dark night. "I understand that you aren't very useful to me. Right Vidar?"

The old man's eyes grew in terror. "Wait! I can help!"

She watched from behind the stalking hound, crossing her arms over her chest. "How?"

The hound didn't stop; if the man didn't speak quickly enough he could still kill something.

Watching the hound approach with growing terror he spoke quickly. "They didn't take all of the items with him. You can have the ones I still have!" She pretended to consider that, leaning against the doorframe. "Not good enough."

"What?" He asked, desperate.

"I need everything." She smiled, sweetly. "Everything they stole from Alexei."

Vidar circled the old man.

Shuffling as he tried to keep the hound in front of him, Fenix tried to think past the fear of death. "Wait, I know, wait. I have an idea. They left me a drop location, to give them a message, incase I managed to get a hold of the other item they wanted."

"What other item?"

"A cup." He said quickly, stumbling over his words he was speaking so fast. "A cup that she keeps somewhere. I told them that we'd never get another chance to get someone

inside the manor!"

"Why do they want it?" She asked, frowning. So far she could almost understand them wanting the deed to the factory, but the signet ring and a cup?

"I don't know! I swear! They just wanted it badly. Were willing to pay top dollar for it, a lot of money."

Vidar's ruff slowly went down and he looked at Katiya hopefully, maybe she'd still let him kill the old man.

"You're a coward Fenix. I want you to send everything you still have back to the manor and tell me where the drop was supposed to be. Then, you're going out of business. For your health's sake."

At his hurried agreement and statement of where the drop was supposed to take place, she turned and started walking towards the front doors. "Come on Vidar. Let's go."

Vidar whined, but sulked after Katiya.

Once outside of the shop the redhead stopped for a moment to feel the sunshine on her face. Finally she let out a breath and started walking, glad to be away from Fenix and the memories that surrounded him. "We still have a lot of time, we could go see this message drop place. What do you think?" She asked the hound.

The hound perked up a little bit and pranced around her. Anything would be more exciting than going back to the house.

"Good." She changed direction, making sure to skirt around the Cathedral, and headed back towards the center of the city.

#####3#####3

Katiya sat on the edge of the stone bench, legs swinging back and forth and she stared across the small park at the small little office on the ground floor of an unremarkable office building nestled among the factories. They'd spent hours now watching the comings and goings along the street, but no one had gone into the small office that was the address that Fenix had given them.

"You as bored as I am with this?"

Blood red ears perked up from where his snout rested on his paws. He yawned a long pink tongue snaking out from his mouth.

"Yeah me too." It was getting towards dark; she wouldn't be able to stay much longer if she was going to honor her promise to Alexei. "Come on." She stood up and decided to

go see what she could find out.

He quickly got to his feet and shook himself, waking up.

"No telling Alexei that I'm impulsive." She started walking towards the front door of the office. A good thing she was wearing some of the new clothes that kept appearing for her in the mornings at the Manor. She had no doubt that if she were dressed as a factory worker she would be shown the door quickly.

Vidar was almost positive this was going to end badly. Happily he quickly followed her.

A small copper bell dinged once as she opened the door. The sign above the door said it was a contraries' office although the inside was so bare that it could have been anything. A nondescript desk filled most of the back wall, behind which a young man looked up from papers he had been penning. A sidedoor besides the desk led into the back of the building.

"Can I help you?" He asked, a little suspiciously.

She had an answer for that of course, smiling as she stepped closer. "Fenix sent me with a message?"

Vidar quickly got bored. More talking.

"Oh." He sat back in his chair, regarding her evenly. "What message?"

She'd hoped for a bit more of a response than that. "He sent me to negotiate with your employer." There was no way that this man was anything other than a middleman, a doorkeeper to the true power.

He snorted. "Fenix should know better. Messages go through me, you don't see anybody else."

This definitely wasn't going as well as she'd hoped. "Then the message is that I may have a way to get the key that your employer was searching for. But I want a face to face meeting first."

He watched her just as evenly as he had been before. "I will pass it on." His tone made it clear he didn't think highly of her chances. "Is that all?" He looked pointedly at the door.

"Yes. Good day." The ding of the bell saw her out. "Well that didn't go as well as I'd hoped." The redhead grumbled.

No kidding, the human hadn't learned anything by hanging around vampires. The hound pouted and followed, maybe he should have bitten the clerk.

"I wish I could just come back during the night and break in there. I bet I'd find out all sorts of things that way."

But no, she'd promised Alexei that she'd be back to the Manor before nightfall and stay out of trouble.

A block behind them a pair of men stepped out of the office that they had just left and started to walk along, casually, behind the woman and dog.

Vidar stopped and tried to scratch at his ear. He noticed the two men who gave off an aura of danger. Getting up he trotted after Katiya.

He would pause every once in a while pretending to sniff something to check if they were indeed following them.

She was still frowning, trying to figure out how she was going to find out who it was that had hired Fenix. Behind them the two men stayed about a half block back, matching the pace that Katiya set. Even when she turned a handful of corners, they followed.

The hound barked, 'by Hel' was the girl that clueless, trying to get her attention.

"What is it?" She looked down at the dog.

He sat down and barked again but his gaze went to the glass of a storefront looking at the two men following them.

"Who? Them?" She eyed the two who were studiously studying a window display with amusement. "Not the best are they?" Judging by their hefty build they were probably hired muscle sent out to follow her.

The hound rolled his eyes.

"Probably making sure I check out." She kept moving, thinking as they walked. "We can't go back to the manor if they're watching me." This complicated things.

He whined but got up and followed.

#####3#####3

It took a little while longer than it would have to get a carriage back to the Manor, she found herself outside the old bank that Tereza was staying in. "I really hope she's here." She said to the hound, using the heavy wrought iron doorknocker to bang on the door.

Vidar, sniffed around the door and the ruff stood up on his spine.

She didn't have to look over her shoulder to know that their shadows were watching them intently. "Really hope she's here." She banged again, harder.

The door opened a crack revealing the shadow outline of a body and single dark eye. "What?" Came barked out.

The eye blinked. "Oh. Katiya. Come in."

"Evening." Katiya smiled, slipping inside along with the hound. "Are you feeling better?"

Tereza blinked but stepped back; after Katiya and the dog were inside she peaked outside and then shut and locked the door. She set the crossbow down, she was dressed in thin undershirt and underwear and her hair was tangled and messy.

"I was asleep."

"Sorry." She hadn't thought about that. "We were being followed and I didn't want to lead them back to the Manor."

The hunter face became stony. "Let me get this straight, you're in trouble and you don't want to lead them back to a house full of dangerous blood sucking fiends. So instead you bring them here." She snorted. "I'm not certain I should feel flattered or annoyed. You think I'm tougher than your bitch owner. Maybe I feel a little flattered."

"I'm not in trouble." Katiya ignored the hound; certain he had that laughing expression on his face again. "And I don't think you're tougher than Alexei." She frowned.

Vidar growled a slightly and his ruff went back up. Alexei had freed him, he may not show it but he owed her.

"I came here because I can't have them know that I live at the Manor. Besides." She crossed her arms over her chest. "You owe me." There.

Tereza scratched her stomach absently. "Nice dog and how exactly do I owe you."

Katiya blinked. "For saving you from that vampire?" She also realized what exactly the dark skinned woman was wearing and wasn't. "Aren't you cold?"

Tereza shrugged, "No, its warmer in the bed room. And you didn't save me, I let you help."

"What?" The Russian stared at her in confusion. "Were you at a different fight than I was? I clearly remember me using your gun to stop the vampire from ripping your head off."

"Hmmpfh." Tereza said running a hand through her hair trying to get it under control.



"Fine, maybe you saved me. But that makes us equal since I stopped Mr. Creepy."

"Boris." Katiya shivered a little just saying the name. "Fine. We're even. But can we stay here tonight?" She looked hopeful. "Or at least until the guys who followed us go home?" Then maybe they could go back to the manor. She knew Alexei wouldn't be happy with her staying here, she was also a little uncomfortably aware of how thin the other woman's clothing was right now and how well muscled her body was.

"I don't think that's a good idea." Tereza said wandering off to her bedroom. She rifled through a canvas war bag pulling out a long sleeved shirt and heavy, thick, black pants.

"You're just making trouble for yourself. Your master is going to follow you and kill either me, or you, or both. Or on the upside I'll kill it."

"Her." Katiya narrowed her eyes. "Alexei is a she, not an it." Had she somehow missed earlier how annoying this woman was? "And Alexei isn't here right now."

Dark brown eyes narrowed in annoyance. "Did you miss the part where I kill vampires? They're all its, bloodsucking fiends from hell. They shun the day, live off of blood from humans that they treat like cattle. They're sadistic killers." Disdain dripped from her voice.

The redhead and dog shared a look of understanding. "Fine, they're sadistic killers." She knew she wasn't going to dissuade Tereza. "But we still need to hide out here for a little while."

Finished dressing she stepped back out into the main room. "Like I said before I don't think it's a good idea, but fine, if a pack of vampires show up here, I'm going to get upset."

Finding a comfortable chair to sit down and relax in, Katiya smiled. "I thought you'd be happy if they did. Then you wouldn't have to hunt them, they'd come to you."

Tereza blinked and then smiled. "True, that would make my job easier."

Vidar lay down at Katiya's feet and rolled over exposing his belly.

Doing as requested, she leaned over to scratch the hound's belly. "Are you going out hunting tonight?"

The other woman nodded from where she leaned against the wall. "Interesting dog. Is it a vampire dog, a pet, like you?"

Hurt, Katiya patted the dog's stomach, focusing on him. "No. He's special. He also isn't bitchy about things he doesn't understand."

Vidar rolled over and growled at the hunter not liking her tone.

"And he's good at protecting me." She would have to remember to thank Alexei for sending him with her. "By the way, I don't suppose you have any idea where that vampire that attacked us came from?"

Maybe the vampire hunter would know more than she did.

"That vampire, I had been following him. Spotted him as soon as it was dusk, an early riser, the old ones can rise near dark. Its easiest if you can kill them when they're still asleep."

She came into the room and sat down on a dubious looking chair.

"I'm glad you were following him." It probably would have ended badly otherwise. She watched the chair, half expecting it to collapse under the hunter.

"Do you know who he was the child of?" She was getting used to the terminology she thought.

The hound, never took his eyes off of her, he didn't like her kind. People so full of hate, self-righteousness, and killing anything that's different.

She pretended to ignore the dog. "No, I don't. He dressed as a foreigner, I'm seeing more and more of them. He was a blur in the shadows but he was looking for something, and not food. He passed up some easy marks for food."

"He knew where the brothers were somehow then."

"Something here is drawing them. I followed a pack here from Germany. At first I thought your master was calling them, planning a coup or a war. Its rumored there is a very old vampire here." She was fishing trying to judge Katiya's reaction. "Maybe one of the first vampires. It is said if you can kill one of the five that created the vampire lines you kill them and all of their blood."

Katiya blinked, staring at her Tereza in confusion. "First vampires?" That wasn't something that Alexei had talked about. "Who were they?"

"All I know is rumors. It is said that after Christ that a few of his followers took the cup with his blood and studied many horrible and arcane arts to create for themselves never-ending life. They did a ritual of blood and opened doorways to immortality that no human should open, and for this God cursed them. They would never be able to enjoy his gaze and attention so they were cursed to hide from the sun. They were cursed between life and death, welcome in neither. In order to live they must steal the life from the living."

That somewhat made sense. "How many of these first vampires are there supposed to be?"

"Seven. Seven is a magical number I guess you need for most rituals." She shrugged, really not knowing.

That really did sound like a guess to Katiya. She shrugged, not sure how that fit in with everything that had been happening. "So you think there's one of these elders in the city?" Maybe Alexei would know more.

"That's the rumor. The rumor is a very old vampire rules this city. And if its true that to kill the first you kill all that come after, well, you can see my interest, in killing that vampire. Think of how many people would be free."

That was certainly something that Katiya was going to ask Alexei about. "Yes, free to go back to the street and die of starvation or forced to work in one of the factories until you die or get maimed by the machines. Sounds good."

"And who's responsible for the factories. The ones that make humans ghosts up and out during the night. The factories that spew smoke and crap into the air making the night last longer. The vampires. You can blame them for the crappy way we live." She took a breath trying to calm herself.

"Really." Katiya crossed her arms. "I'm pretty sure humans are just as good at making each other miserable and being monsters to one another." She'd seen enough of that to last her for a long time.

"Look obviously you're a vampire lover and I'm not. We're not going to agree on this." Tereza said with a sigh.

"Truce then?"

The hunter scowled, "Fine truce."

"Good." One last scratch at the dog's stomach and Katiya leaned back. "Do you have any food for dinner?" She asked hopefully.

"First you crash my place, now you want food." She rolled her eyes and got up going into the kitchen.

#####3#####3

A heavy knock on the door gave just a few seconds of warning before Timur opened the door and stepped inside. "Alexei. Karl wished for me to escort you to the meeting." He didn't sound happy about that, but he rarely did sound happy after all.

Alexei looked over at him from where she sat reading, she was bored, very bored. She had been awake well before sunset, but had stayed put not wanting to cause more of a ruckus if Karl knew how conscious she was capable of being well before the sun was gone.

"Of course. I'll just be a moment, if you wouldn't mind waiting a second." She stood and raised an eyebrow in annoyance when he just stood there.

He glanced towards the other room where Shiro was playing for an attentive Stepan, disliking music on principle. "Fine." He stepped back outside, closing the door behind him.

She made her way to the closet noting that someone had already unpacked her clothes. She chose a dark shirt and pants, as well as a long coat; hopefully this would somehow make her less of a target for Karl's frustrations. "Stepan, if Shiro is willing for the company you may drink from her. I'm not certain I would trust the cattle they would offer you here. And keep an eye on Molly and Sergei, make sure they stay out of trouble."

He raised a laconic eyebrow at that. "I will do my best, but you know how well Sergei listens to me." Molly could be made to listen, but Sergei was a different story. "We'll await your return."

She looked at him. "Make him listen."

"As you command." He smiled, not too opposed to that.

She smiled, "I do." Walking over she kissed Shiro's cheek. Then she brought her index finger to her mouth and nipped the finger creating a shallow cut. With the blood pooling on the pad of her finger she reached out and painted Stepan's lips. "When's the last time we've solidified the bond between Sire and child?"

He frowned, trying to think even as he licked his lips. "It's been years." Easily years, as far as he could remember.

"Well let that give you strength then." She chuckled. "Keep an eye on all of them Shiro."

The mute woman smiled and kissed Alexei back, signing quickly with her hands.

Alexei laughed and headed to the door. "Alright Timur, lead the way."

"Hey!" Stepan sounded mock affronted to a silently laughing Shiro. "I am not!"

"You have too many pets." Timur growled, shutting the door firmly behind Alexei and starting down the hall.

"Hmm, that may be, but I never have to explain all the dead bodies that leave my estate now do I." She rebutted.

"Who would care?" He answered back, then taking a deep breath. "All of the others are here. Karl mentioned you knew some of them." Which was Timur's way of trying to be subtle.

"Human's get touchy when a lot of their own die. Remember Jack the Ripper, or you still pissy I got sent to take care of him before he gave the human's proof of our existence." She kept her expression neutral. "As to the others I know some of them."

"I still say he should have been made into a vampire. It was a waste to kill someone so talented." He moved to open the door to the room that would be used for the meeting.

"True talent is not getting caught; not leaving butchered carcasses everywhere with clues. The police were going to get him, he was sloppy. You were never caught, so he was no where near your caliber." Jack had been a pet to the same vampire that had owned Molly, but he had been an apprentice waiting to be fully made. Sometimes she wondered if the killing spree had been on purpose to get her attention.

Timur nodded, agreeing that Jack hadn't been in his class, but he could still appreciate true amorality when he saw it. Shoving the door open he stepped aside, he was not invited into what lay beyond. The meeting room was as silent as the rest of the house, but this wasn't the silence of emptiness.

It was a strained quiet, filled with a poisonous tension by the elder vampires staring uneasily at one another. Territorial by nature, bringing them together was always a risky business. Karl had yet to appear, timing it no doubt so that he would enter late, reinforcing his control over them all.

"Have a pleasant evening, Timur." She said quietly and entered the room.

Two of the nearest vampires moved away from her, watching her thoroughly distrustfully as they did so. "I always love these little meetings, don't you Alexei?" The only remaining vampire asked.

He was dressed in an outlandish looking outfit for the north, bright orange and purple cloth wrapped around him in a stylish Indian garb. His head topped by a turban, while a long well kept mustache and beard hid the rest of his face. Giving all the more power to the dark eyes that pierced out of that dark skinned face to study all around him.

Alexei turned and smiled, a slight upturning of her lips.

"Lady Alexei. It is good to see you again. Although I do wish we could stop meeting in

the coldness of the north." He bowed to her with the unnatural grace of a vampire.

"Caliph Dilip how are you, and that horrid piece of sunny baked land you call home." She bowed in return.

"Ah but the warmth there is enough to bring heat to even our cold lives." He smiled, always enjoying a verbal exchange with this one.

Vampires of the east and sunny lands held a sort of magical or mythical awe. They existed in a world that would seem to reject their kind. They were few but powerful, having studied and created arts of blood magic that very few western vampires understood. "As long as that warmth isn't the smell of your burning skin." She chuckled and sat down ignoring the glares and furtive glances their way.

He followed her example, sitting down nearby her and glancing at the others. "We are not popular here I fear." He didn't sound too upset about that.

"Well vampires from the desert countries are rare and sort of have this awe factor. The Asian vampires have it too, because no one has ever met one, if they exist in the Far East they care very little about our council and us. As for me they just don't like me."

"I believe you have a touch of awe about you as well." He arranged the blade that hung at his side in its ornate sheath. "There are few who can claim to be a child of the Elders."

Her eyes narrowed. "I claim nothing. They can assume whatever they want." Her voice was clipped.

He chuckled, ignoring the clipped tone as he looked around the gathering. "It has been centuries since I have been here. I do not mind telling you that I would not have been upset if it were a few more before I had."

"Why are you here? I didn't think Karl had sway over you're clans." Curious indeed.

"He does not." The Caliph's eyes narrowed before he forced himself to relax. "I would not stand for someone such as he to rule over us. No offense meant my friend. I am here because these events in the Americas will affect my people as well. You know how the British get when things seem to threaten them."

"Yes, they call in favors from me and the balance of the world stage shifts." She chuckled.

"Perhaps you could convince them to leave India then." He said wryly.

"Dear man, have you had English food they conquered half the world just to find some decent cooks."

Just as the Caliph was about to say something in response, Timur shoved open both doors with a dramatic flare. Karl walked through them a step behind, ever the confident leader of the pack. "Ladies and Gentleman, let's get started."

Through vast willpower she stopped herself from rolling her eyes.

The Caliph muttered something in an Indian dialect and stayed right where he was, watching with veiled amusement as the others in the room quickly found chairs. They formed a rough circle around the edges of the room, facing the center where Karl stood.

"So why have you summoned us here?" Alexei shouted out, wanting to be done and home, and short-circuited Karl's big entrance.

Karl had opened his mouth to say something, but glared at the woman who'd interrupted him, stealing his grand speech he had memorized that night. Instead he fell back on answering the question.

"The American outcasts have decided to go to war with humanity. Rumors have reached us that the shape shifters will side with the humans. We must decide what to do about it. Do we go to war, do we ignore it?"

She gave no outward sign to the glare she received, her face remained neutral and her eyes shuttered.

"Are the American's aware of us?" She asked, as the others stayed silent.

Reluctantly, Karl turned to face her. This wasn't going as he had planned. "No. Not yet. They are focused on their own problems. Thankfully this isolationist tendency of theirs is holding. The European council is meeting now as well. Caliph here" he gestured to the Indian "Represents our more southern kindred." There was no mention of the African tribes they weren't really vampires.

The Caliph made a motion with his hand, drawing attention to himself. "We will not be bound by your decision of course, but we will listen to the arguments made here."

She was concerned that the humans in America now aware of them would start developing new and interesting ways to kill them.

"What have the American vampires done to break the veil?"

"They haven't done much yet." Karl said, "They've begun targeting the human leaders, but it is still only starting. We believe that they mean to strike hard soon." How soon that would be up to debate of course.

Another vampire, a man with a long thin face and nervous hands that never stopped

moving.

"The local politicians will do whatever we say."

Of that there was no doubt, all of them were paid and bought by the powers that ruled in this room. "It is not the politicians you must fear, it is the common folk." The Caliph responded.

"True. The mass culture will only swallow the crap from the top for so long."

She sorely hated the time he wasted on grandstanding, and how the others stayed silent warily watching only a few brave enough to speak up. Karl was King and they were really nothing more than lowly knights to his dark round table.

She trudged on wading through the crap of dominance and politics using her words like a sword to cut through the crap. "I think the real question is: How much danger are we in, if the Outcasts declare war on the humans in America? Humans have vague notions of us, most of them wrong. Thanks to that whining author and his over-romantized notions of immortality we are viewed as angst ridden sex-gods or by others believe us to be more like our undead cousins the Flesh-eaters, monstrous, unthinking things driven by our need to feed on blood. If the outcasts go to war, will this veil be torn away? And if that happens. There is a very real chance the humans will hunt us with the full-knowledge of what we are. Especially if our cousins, the Skinwalkers join them. Many secrets of the unknown could be revealed to the humans."

Alexei sat back observing Karl. She had too wondered what he really wanted. Did he want war? Perhaps war was inevitable; some theorized that ecosystems often hit points of entropy when predators and prey were out of balance. Young vampires needed a lot of blood, she was old and barely needed any, but very few were as old as her. How many of these masters sitting here had children who numbered into the 10's or 20's? That was too many to exist in one city. They would start to branch out looking for new food sources, putting them into conflict with other cities and other vampires. This made war and conflict the likely outcome, and that wasn't including the other supernatural creatures that fought with them for territory.

Much like her illegal blood bar. Someone, probably one of her children had more than likely started it to make a pretty penny off of those looking for food away from home. That was a distressing thought. She blinked realizing Karl was staring at her. With a sinking feeling in her gut she realized he was waiting for an answer.

"I'm sorry can you repeat that." But she was well aware of the simmering rage lurking in his eyes and resigned herself to the fact that she would be leaving here in a great amount of pain.

She knew she could kill Karl, knew she was stronger and more powerful than he could ever hope to be, but every time she let him hurt her and every time she was forced to



submit others forgot the rumors of how old and powerful she must be. The very last thing she wanted was to be in charge of a nation of vampires.

Then he was upon her, driven to show how he was the one in charge here, the one who ruled over all of them.

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## ~ The Secret History of Vampires ~

by Zee and Windstar

Enjoy and remember to send feedback to [Zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:Zeeamy@gmail.com) and [Adarkbow@yahoo.com](mailto:Adarkbow@yahoo.com)

### Part 4

The redhead stood in front of the burned down house, staring at where the boarding house used to stand. It was ashes and tumbled down bricks streaked with darkness. Here and there bits of furniture remained, a part of the loveseat from the parlor, a part of the dining table that she had sat at.

Katiya stood in front of what was left of Madame Ouellette's house, confused. When had this happened? What had happened to the other women who had worked in the factories there?

"Excuse me miss, do you need help?"

She blinked, turning to the man who stood nearby, watching her with sympathy. "Did you know old lady Oullette?"

"Is she dead?"

He took that for an invitation and stepped closer and immediately stepped back when Vidar growled. He adjusted his hat, a nervous twitch she guessed.

"Yes, it was horrible of course. A gas leak the police said."

She didn't believe that at all.

"And the other girls?"

"Just the old lady they said."

Katiya nodded, ignoring his offer of coffee and started down around the ruins of the house calling her thanks over her shoulder. He might have followed her except that the white haired dog stopped, turning to look at him as if he knew what he was thinking.

"She died because of me Vidar." She said, walking quickly. "Someone came after me and killed her." This was a new thing for Katiya, an unpleasant thing. She had to find out whom, although she already thought she knew.

There was someone who would know, these back alleys always had eyes, even if people didn't see them.

"Hey!" She called out, spotting one of those sets of eyes. The grubby kid froze, half in the trash he was searching through for food. One of the masses, who lived in the city, the cast off of a modern society that prized nothing but productivity.

"I need information." A flash of a coin in her hand coaxed him close enough, although he stood trembling, ready to flee at the slightest suggestion of trouble.

"Wha kind?" He spoke with a lisp. Something, or more probably, someone had scarred the right side of his face bad enough that it twisted his upper lip.

"Anyone see what happened to the house that burned?"

He didn't have to look at where she was pointing to know what she was talking about.

"Yeah." His eyes were fastened on the coin. She flicked it over to him, holding up another before he could disappear with it.

"What do you know?"

He scrubbed a grimy cheek. "A big fella came out, then it burned."

"How big?"

"Huge!"

Boris, then that meant Ivan had been involved. She tossed him the other coin watching him run away down the alley. "Boris and Ivan again." Katiya said to an uncaring Vidar. Turning she moved back out into the street, continuing on the way she'd been going

before her sudden desire to go in front of her old home.

"She was an annoying old woman, but she let me stay there, she didn't have to do that." Katiya clenched her fists, angry again; at the two men whom she had no doubt had killed the old woman. "I don't know how Vidar, but I'm going to pay them back for all the pain they've caused."

It wasn't that much farther down the city streets before she found what she sought. The paupers graves were in a bad part of the city, surrounded on all sides by derelict factories whose empty gaping windows always made her shiver. There was no grave marker of course; neither she nor her father had been able to afford such a thing, just a small wooden epitaph that she'd carved herself. There were thousands of such little grave markers throughout the cemetery.

"Hi Papa." She kneeled next to his grave, ignoring the dirt and mud.

Behind her Vidar yawned, a long tongue licking his chops as he lay down.

"I'm sorry I haven't visited more. A lot of things have changed." She hesitated, trying to phrase her words as she absently patted the dirt. "I swore I'd try to stay out of the shadows, and I tried Papa, just like you wanted. I got a job at one of the factories. I hated it Papa, but it was better than being forced to sell my body or work for Ivan."

She paused, swallowing past a lump in her throat. "I really miss you Papa." She whispered. Shaking her head she brushed away tears angrily. "I said I wouldn't cry and I won't." A deep breath and she could talk again without the threat of tears.

"I'm not working there anymore though. Now I work, or live at least, at this manor for this woman called Alexei. I think you'd like her Papa. She's dangerous, like the panther we saw that one summer at that travel circus. But I don't think she'll hurt me, not on purpose, and she's nice to me. She even has one of her other servants teaching me how to read and write." It was silly to avoid telling a dead man that Alexei was a vampire, but even so, Katiya didn't want to worry him in whatever place he now was. "I'll be back soon Papa and I'll bring flowers next time. Those red ones that you said always reminded you of Mama."

She bent, kissing the simple wood marker and brushed absently at the mud stains on her dress. "All right Vidar, now we can go."

It was getting dark, she'd be cutting it close getting back to the Manor as it was and Alexei had been gone for two days already. She should be due back soon.

#####3#####3

The carriage pulled up to the massive house it was early in the morning but with the pollution and winter the sun was nowhere to be seen yet. The carriage driver quickly got

down and opened the door and kicked down the metal stairs. She held out an arm to help the travelers down. First came smirking Sergei and Molly, with practically a spring to their steps, next a shaken looking Shiro and a sullen Stepan. Without looking back Sergei and Molly made for the front doors.

Last to emerge was pale and grim-faced Alexei. Every step was pain, every shallow breath was mind numbing. She might have little respect for Karl, but she did respect his ability to cause pain. With the help of the driver and a cane she was able to get down. Walking to the house her feet felt like they were on fire the pain crawled up her legs.

Lyov waited patiently, door held open, he said nothing merely shutting out the coming of a new day behind her. The cane echoed hollowly on the tile floor as she moved, stopping she studied those around her: Stepan and Shiro stood, silent heads down. Sergei and Molly were moving up the stairs their body language clear.

Matvey stood wide-eyed in a door way and lurking in the shadows of another were the twins. She inhaled smelling Lyov, Warren, and there was a small down turn of her lips no Katiya. The breath was slowly exhaled. "Sergei " The voice was quiet, commanding, and on the stairs the young Cossack stilled. She could see the play of muscles in his legs and back. He didn't want to stop he wanted to prove he was a master.

"Molly, go to your rooms. Sergei, come here!" The last part was barked out like a master to a disobedient dog.

His eyes flashing he turned marching down the stairs, there was a sneer on his lips, and arrogantly he lifted his head high. When he got close he opened his mouth to shout defiant words.

Instead the words were lost as his jaw was dislocated from the uppercut swing of the cane. With a quick flick of her wrist changing the position of her hand on the polished metal she changed direction bringing the cane swinging back, hitting the man in the face again shattering his jaw.

Blood sprayed against the walls and floor and the thickly built man staggered around for a moment before getting his bearings. Gurgling he tried to curse at her, but only more blood sprayed out.

"It has come to my attention I have been to lax lately in how I rule this household. This changes today! What made you think it was okay to take what was mine? To sully my pet with your touch?" The words were roared out; powerful they seemed to shake the very foundation of the house. In a blur of movement the cane came lashing out again smashing through the muscle, bones and tendons of his left knee. With a wet, muffled howl Sergei landed heavily on the tile.

The pain of her injuries and the smell of blood thick in the air were combining together inside her causing a very dangerous beast to awaken. Her teeth lengthened and her

gray eyes started to burn red. Rage coursed through her making her forget her own pain and she lashed out over and over again. Kicking Sergei's crippled body until he was nothing but a bloody meaty lump.

"Mistress " Stepan whispered trying to get her to calm down, not certain Sergei's death was what she really wanted. Instead the puckish man found himself tossed into the wall his words cut off.

Everyone else went still unsure what to do. This was a sight they had never seen perhaps maybe Fiona, but she was locked away.

Molly laughed and laughed until tears came down her face. "I knew you were no better than the rest. There's the beast I knew lurked in your breast." She collapsed on the stairs.

Luckily for the cackling woman Alexei's attention was brought back to the hurt vampire as he tried to crawl away, and again her rage was unleashed on his body.

Katiya was running back to the house, Vidar at her heels. A driving need that burned in her blood urged her on. She didn't know why, she just knew she had to be home - now.

The gates swung soundlessly open as she approached and after they ran through them they swung soundlessly closed. The two stone gargoyles on top staring out with hollow stone eyes.

They ran up the cobble drive to the front door and Lyov was knowingly opening it for them.

The sound of the door opening stopped Alexei from another powerful kick to Sergei's broken body.

All eyes focused on the redheaded woman.

The silence was brutally heavy hanging in the room waiting to burst in action.

Alexei's foot came down resting on the ground. She pivoted her attention wholly affixed on the woman. "Katiya." She breathed out feeling some of her rage deflate. Her eyes started to lose their redness. She took a step and then another everyone and everything else forgotten.

Everyone else nearly visibly sagged in relief, thinking the storm was over.

"I've missed..." Her nose twitched. Another scent coming off the young woman. Her rage came back burning through her. Faster than anyone could blink her hand lashed out fisting in the shirt Katiya wore. "You whore!" She snarled, growling out the words like a large jungle cat. Effortlessly she lifted Katiya up and slammed her back into the

wall unconcerned with the moan of pain that escaped pink lips.

"You smell of that woman again. Did I not say you were mine?!" Were all in her household so unfaithful. "I can smell her stink upon you."

Her other hand made a fist and with a howl she drew it back and then forward. At the last minute her hand moved a fraction of an inch smashing into the wall next to Katiya's head.

"I am surrounded by laziness and traitors. None of you are worthy of my blood!" Her body was wracked with pain both physical and emotional. How had she let herself become like this? Was it not yesterday that human tribes had prayed to her, hoping to call down her powers of vengeance on unsuspecting enemies. Hadn't she been the Butcher of Budapest? Now she was no better than a human king waking to find the coup at his bedroom door, weak, old, and alone.

Howling out her rage she pulled out her hand to swing it again at the primary focus of her pain. An immovable object grabbed her hand.

Turning she blinked in surprise, seeing a pale skinned man holding her hand. "Vidar what are you doing? Let go."

The large Nordic man looked grim. "You gave up that right to her." He jerked his chin in Katiya's direction. "And gave me the command to protect. So I'll protect her, even from you."

The vampire ripped her hand out of the Hellhound's grip, her other hand letting go of Katiya's shirt. Her eyes narrowed and with a growl she attacked the naked man.

Vidar grinned and gave a growl of his own.

They hit each other with quick brutal blows. They were a blur of pale flesh and dark cloth. There was quick shove followed by a savage uppercut that sent Alexei flying back into the stair banister.

Molly gave a squeal and scampered further up the stairs.

The wood snapped and splintered under the force of action and her weight. The jagged bottom rails gouged up through clothing into the flesh.

Alexei's eyes opened wide as pain registered through her system. Her mouth opened and she released a scream of agony. She tried to scramble up and off the wood but her body was done, from the abuses heaped on her by Karl to her beating of Sergei and then this fight with Vidar. Her body gave out.

"Don't get up, Mistress. Just stop. Please stop this." The hound pleaded.

Alexei coughed blood splattering her lips. Her mouth opened and closed a few times only a ghostly breath whispered out. Finally she gasped out. "Help me up."

Vidar looked at her uncertain and then looked to Stepan in question.

Stepan shook himself feeling as if he were waking from a dream. His gaze darted around the room taking in the damage and shocked look on faces. "Right." He said shakily, and then paused to clear his throat. He could smell her blood see how it pooled under her body. What had happened he wasn't sure? Chaos, the end of the world, he wasn't sure but he'd never seen his Mistress look like this.

"Quickly Stepan, she's bleeding heavily." The strange pale man snapped at him.

He bristled but then saw how her eyes were closed now, as if sleeping. "Fuck. Upstairs, take her upstairs to her rooms." God he wished Fiona were here. "Niki and Nada!"

In a blur twin shadows were there they both short and thin, barely contained bundles of energy, the twins looked at him blue piercing eyes through dark bangs. Their eyes were wild, eyes you would see looking at you from shadows in the forest.

"Take Sergei and chain him in his rooms. I don't want him loose and triggering her rage again."

They looked down at the bloody lump on the floor in question wondering where the hell he was going to go, but nodded and scooped up his limp form.

"Matvey..."

The young man entered his head down.

"Take Molly and Shiro to their rooms, make sure they don't leave."

"What about..." He looked over at Katiya.

Stepan's face went cold. "She can rot in the cold for all I care." He wasn't certain what she had done, but whatever it was had hurt his Mistress.

The young looking vampire swallowed but then went to gather up Shiro and Molly.

"Lyov get rid of..."

The unpleasant looking man cut him off. "I will not kick her out, you are merely playing at being Lord of the Manor, but you are not Lord. Whatever the problem between Katiya and the Mistress it is their problem, not yours." The troll like man sniffed. He turned

looking at Katiya. "Miss, the bath is drawn upstairs. I would take one and wash whatever smell it was that set her off and then see to the Mistress, if I'm not mistaken Molly and Shiro are in no shape to give blood."

Stepan's mouth opened and closed again. "How..."

"Stepan, it is close to dawn. Go rest, I will keep you apprised of any problems."

Lyov walked over to Katiya seemingly to appear out of nowhere in his hands he handed her a medicine kit and a bottle filled with something that might have been red wine. "She'll need these. Remember to bathe, and to be brave."

Her hands moved, in a daze she felt herself take them. She had never seen, had never imagined seeing Alexei like that. She started towards the stairs unsteadily. Stepan was nearby, glaring at her, but she ignored him, focused only on the task that was at hand.

Quickly she leapt up those stairs, cursing the dress she wore that slowed her down. As fast as she could she was out of it, leaving it in a pile somewhere on the bathroom floor. All she cared about was the image of Alexei crumpled; the look in her eyes as she'd stared at Katiya.

Betrayal. That's what that look had been.

The water was hot and scalding and Katiya welcomed it, scrubbing hard until her skin was almost as red as her hair. She'd betrayed Alexei.

More hot water to rinse then she threw on the bathrobe that was hanging inside the door and ran shaking hands through her hair, smoothing it out of her face. She was scared, her stomach twisted in knots. Strangely she wasn't scared of Alexei; she was scared of messing things up again. Of doing something that would cause that look in the blonde woman's eyes again. Soul crushing betrayal, which had stared out at her from bleak eyes.

For a moment all she could do was lean against the doorway, shuddering, fearing that she was not up to this task that she had set herself to.

She could run away, flee into the city. With the gold that Alexei had given her earlier, what little was left, she could leave this city, and go somewhere else. She'd always heard stories about the British and their city of London, or maybe Paris, the beautiful decadent city of Napoleon.

But even as she thought it, she knew she couldn't run away, not from Alexei. Somewhere during the past few days she'd started to care about the other woman. The redhead had tried to put it down to the blood bond that now existed between them.

Now though, standing shivering in the door of the bathroom, water still dripping from her



wet hair, scared to go face the vampire, she knew the truth. She cared deeply, maybe even loved her. A strangled sound somewhere between a laugh and a sob came from deep inside.

So this was what all those other silly girls in the boarding house had spent hours talking about. This feeling that they had so hoped a handsome man would feel in return for them. She couldn't shake imagining what the black clad priests would say about such a feeling for a woman who was also a blood sucking fiend as they saw it.

No, there would be no running from this.

She dried her face, not sure when the tears had started.

So be it. This was her burden to bear then. She had to make this right somehow.

Hoping she seemed braver than the terror she felt, she walked into the bedroom.

Vidar and Stepan were there in the bedroom, from the tone of their body language they were arguing.

"I'm not leaving. You and that whore you're protecting should go."

Vidar pushed Stepan back, out of his face. "You do not rule here. Unless that is what you want. Don't think that I didn't fail to notice, you are the only one to come back unscathed from Karl's."

"Don't you dare, I was there when they tortured her. He had his children hold me down, and then a few of them took Shiro and made us watch. She was stronger than us all." He pointed at Alexei who was unconscious on the bed, "She broke the chains and went to her rescue. Killed two of them before that bastard Timur dragged her back to the fire. I was too weak to protect her then, but I can protect her now."

Vidar sighed. "Stepan let it go. This isn't there, she's safe, no one in this room means her harm. Especially not the girl. And whatever transgressions did occur tonight they are between Katiya and Alexei, they don't concern you. Now go." He pushed the other man again, but more gently.

"But..."

"Go Stepan."

Katiya stood aside, silent, watching the two men, the medicine that Lyov had given her still held in one hand.

Stepan growled in frustration and marched out of the room.

"Thank you Vidar." The look that Stepan sent her way left no doubt about her status in his eyes.

Vidar watched him go. He turned unconcerned with his nakedness, "Katiya, its okay now, he's gone."

She nodded, moving closer to the bed and the still figure on it. Blood had drenched the sheets and she couldn't tell if Alexei was aware. "I need to help her." She tried to make sure her voice didn't waver.

He smiled at her. "Its okay. Nothing has been done that can't be undone."

"I'm not so sure of that." was her quiet reply as she carefully sat down on the edge of the bed. "Alexei?"

"Let's see to her wounds then. What do you have there?"

Getting no response from Alexei she held up the bottle that Lyov had given her downstairs. "Medicine, at least that's what Lyov said."

Vidar took the bottle and cracked the top sniffing. "Yeah this will help. Get her shirt open."

It said a lot, Katiya decided as she opened Alexei's shirt, that she was so calmly taking orders from a naked man who could change shape into a white hound. The wounds across Alexei's body were vicious and she grimaced, trying to be as gentle as she could when peeling away the fabric from the blood stained flesh.

"What should I do?" A human would have been dead long ago.

There were holes in her flesh ragged, jagged things. That looked like they were trying healing but couldn't. He poured the contents of the bottle over the wounds.

"It's her own blood apparently she's been planning for such a horrible occasion." He said softly as he watched the wound bubble and slowly re-knit together.

"Tonight's not your fault, remember that. Her rage was already out of control before we came into the picture." He set the bottle down and grabbed her boots and tried to tug them off her feet.

She didn't believe that, not really, wouldn't unless Alexei said it. "Thank you for stopping her." Katiya watched the vampires face, searching for any sign of consciousness.

Alexei's mouth opened and she gave a wordless cry as the damaged skin on her feet tore and broke open as the leather of the boot scraped against them. He winced in sympathy at her feet. The skin was blackened and burned, and now cracked letting

blood ooze out.

"Stepan mentioned Karl tortured them." He said quietly. "She never was good at having a master." Sighing he said. "Let's see the whole picture, get the rest of her clothes off so we can see what the damage is."

He made quick efficient work in cutting away the rest of the Master Vampire's clothes.

Alexei was mixture of burns from fire and holy water as well as bruising from fists, on top of the most recent wounds from the fight with Vidar.

Katiya just stared sadly at the wounds. "Will she need more blood?"

He looked up at her wondering where her mind was. "She might."

"Then I should give her more." Was her simple answer as she bared her arm from the warmth of the bathrobe.

The big man reached out stopping her. "Wait a second. I'm here to protect you, and I'm not letting you anywhere near her fangs until you're in a better frame of mind."

"But she needs it doesn't she?" She wriggled the arm out of the sleeve, shivering a little, but not because of the cold.

He looked up sharply. "Maybe, maybe not. But right now you're feeling guilty for something you don't understand. I think you might let her take too much to ease your conscious."

That thought had crossed her mind. "What if you pull me away before she takes too much?"

"No, I won't be in the room when you two work things out. I'll be sleeping in front of the door to keep out any nosey vampires." He took the bottle and poured the last little cupful onto her feet smiling as he saw a slight improvement.

"Oh." She blinked, but waited, watching as the slow healing started its work over the wounds on her body. "She's not going to be happy." That probably was an understatement.

"No, but its not all you. She was hurt, and Sergei obviously did something to set her off but..." He looked at the bed uncomfortable. Getting up he walked away from Alexei and the bed motioning her over to him.

Worried, she slipped the cloth robe on and moved over, anxious to hear what he had to say. "What?"

"Katiya I like you, your penchant for getting into trouble has made me feel more needed and alive than I have in centuries. But you did several things you knew she wouldn't like. Things she told you not to do. Yes, she's going to be unhappy. Plus, there's your crush on Tereza, I get it she's fun and exciting in a small-minded, 'everything I don't understand is immoral and evil' sort of way. But you belong to her." He pointed at the bed. "She's never going to let you go, vampires are worse than humans about that sort of thing."

"I don't..." The denial died on her lips as she blinked, considering Tereza. Okay, maybe she had a crush, a small one on the vampire hunter. Just another fact to bring to the table. "Thank you, again. I'll try to be better." It was going to be hard though, she was pretty sure they both knew that.

He laughed, "No you won't, it's who you are. You're like the God Loki, the bringer of change and chaos." His eyes narrowed and he really saw her red hair. "You know Loki was the only Norse god with red hair it was a sign of evil and destruction."

Her eyes narrowed. "I'm not evil." She ignored the destruction part. "Has it been long enough now?" She nodded towards where Alexei lay, trying to change the conversation.

Vidar frowned. "I didn't mean to imply you were evil."

"Good, because I'm not." She was pretty sure she wasn't. A little on the morally flexible side, but that wasn't the same as evil, at least she didn't think so. "Thank you. For all of the help."

He nodded and started back to the bed. He wasn't certain how aware Alexei was but these weren't words he wanted her to hear. "You have a medical kit. Can you handle the rest of her injuries?" He asked more concerned she would do something stupid.

"I know what to do with bandages." She answered, trailing along behind him to the side of the bed. Alexei's looked a little better but she was still deadly white. "I'll be fine. Don't worry."

He looked at her then the bed. "Do me a favor?"

She nodded, cautiously.

"Get in the bed with her." At the look he received he sighed. "I'm not talking sex. Just get in the bed next to her."

She raised an eyebrow at that, but said nothing, eyeing him doubtfully. When he didn't seem to be making a joke, she lifted the covers and slid into the bed next to the still form of the vampire.

He asked. "Did you notice what just happened?"

She went still, turning to study Alexei, not sure what she was looking for. "What?"

"No matter what she says or does remember this." He crouched down. "Vampires are, when asleep more dangerous than when awake. They will lash out ripping the throat of people who are near them when asleep if they feel threatened. She wants you here with her."

Katiya swallowed. Another lesson on something that she didn't know about vampires that could have been dangerous. "I'll remember."

He nodded and in an odd reversal patted her on top of the head before getting up and heading to the door.

"That is one strange man, er, dog guy." She frowned, then shrugged, giving up on trying to figure him out. There were more important things. Carefully she grabbed the open bag of bandages and started to wrap the worst of the visible wounds, removing the last of the blood stained clothes. "I'm sorry Alexei. I'm sorry someone did this to you." She was as gentle as she could be, wincing with every imagined hurt.

#####3#####3

It was late in the afternoon when the vampire rose up into consciousness.

Katiya lay curled up on her side, facing the vampire, breathing slow and even, having fallen asleep waiting for Alexei to heal enough that she could wake up.

Even for a vampire she was pale, the snake tattoo seemed to glow green against her white flesh.

There was someone nearby; the slow regular beat of a heart was maddening.

Hunger consumed her overriding pain and daylight hours. Her eyes snapped open the pupils dilated focusing on the ceiling of her room.

Heat -warmth next to her, the rush of blood under the skin. Memories floated distant in her mind, she ignored them and rolled over on her side facing the source of food.

Something caused Katiya to stir, a change in the room around her. Sleepily she rubbed at eyes that didn't want to open and focused on the injured vampire, seeing eyes open. "Alexei?" The look in those eyes made her shiver. Hunger.

"You should go." Her hunger was sharp and painful, she didn't trust herself. "I don't think I'm safe."

"I won't leave you to suffer here." She'd need blood, from someone, if not Katiya. "I trust you." she whispered, shifting closer.

Her eyes never left the juncture where Katiya's neck and shoulder met. The pulse of blood beating there was teasing her. "You shouldn't trust me. Shouldn't trust any of us. We're all just monsters." But she didn't move she wasn't that noble or strong.

"But I do trust you." Ever so carefully, as if reaching towards a dangerous wild animal, she held out her hand, baring the wrist as she lightly touched Alexei's face, caressing. "I'm sorry I disobeyed you."

The vampire heard the words but said nothing, she would clarify when her wits weren't so scattered. She ignored the wrist, it was too delicate, requiring nibbles and shallow cuts so as not to damage the fine bones and tendons found there.

But she enjoyed the touch it was soothing and welcomed since the last touch she'd had, had been the violence of Karl's.

When that seemed to go all right, Katiya shifted closer, moving so that she could share her warmth with the cold body that had lied next to her during the past few hours. "Tell me what you need." She whispered.

She moved slowly even by human standards, she moved and straddled Katiya's smaller body. Her gray eyes peered down at Katiya's blue ones before she was distracted by the glimpse of flesh by the robe. "I need the pain to go away. I need the half-remembered memories of the last few days to settle in my mind and make sense, but most of all right now, I need you." She said quietly as her cool hands undid the tie of the robe.

The body below those elegant hands shivered, goosebumps rose across her skin and Katiya wanted that more than anything else. Her hands touched the naked skin above her, gentle and careful around the wounds that were still numerous. The robe fell open and Katiya shrugged the fabric off her shoulders, baring white skin. "I'm yours." She stated, reiterating the last thing Alexei had said before her trip.

"A brave mouse indeed." She whispered. Her breathing hitched as she moved the burns from the holy water stretching and pulling on her back. Her body slid down Katiya's as her arms rested on either side of the woman's head. "Your mine, as long as you want to be." She could feel her fangs prick into her bottom lip. Somehow she maintained control.

She kissed the young woman's forehead and cheek, and then down her neck. Alexei's lips stopped; pressed against the pulse point.

It was better than she remembered from the bath, that touch of skin on skin. The press

of lips against her neck caused her body to press up against Alexei's, her head turning to the side, offering herself. She didn't feel brave; she felt a thrill of excitement, a little fear, and arousal.

Alexei couldn't deny her beast any longer, it wanted blood, and so she bit into the skin. Her fangs digging into the skin and muscle barely she resisted the animal like urge to tear the skin away and feast.

The pain was sharp and piercing, but over almost before she could register it. Her hands grabbed at Alexei's back, feeling the strong smooth muscle beneath that usually flawless skin. Then she relaxed her entire body loosening as her blood pulsed through the wound on her neck.

Her weight kept the younger woman from fleeing at the initial pain, and then she was gone caught up in the bliss of feeding. She didn't even feel Katiya's hands when they dug into her back.

It was the sound of Katiya's heart that brought her back to herself it was no longer beating defiantly. Fearful she slipped her fangs out of the flesh and kissed the wounds closed.

"Katiya, are you okay?"

Katiya could feel her arms slip down off Alexei's back; she just didn't have the strength to hold them up there anymore. It took some effort but she nodded, slowly. "Just tired." And she was, suddenly, fighting to keep her eyes open even though she had just been incredibly aroused a moment ago.

She still ached, but the pain was duller now, not as sharp, pricking into her brain. She smelled her blood dried and caked on the sheets and her clothes. She wrinkled her nose but decided to let Katiya sleep before having the sheets changed.

The human woman's eyes were slipping closed, even though she was doing her best to fight the urge to sleep. She managed to stay awake long enough to mumble, "I'm sorry I didn't listen to you."

Alexei cocked her head and looking at the woman. Those words had thoughts mulling her head she went to her closet and threw on a robe and went to the door. Opening it she found Vidar in a staring match with a Tiger. Clearing her throat she hid her smile as the hound jumped. She made no move to open the door further very aware of the setting suns rays that filtered into the master stairwell.

She opened her mouth to bellow, only to be cut off by Lyov. "Warren is already making a hearty meal for the young lady."

"Of course." She mumbled and shut the door.

She went to her study and sat down at her desk, and stared at nothing trying to put her memories of the last evening together in her head.

She wasn't certain how much time had passed until there was a tentative knock at the door. Getting up she saw Warren peak his head in.

"Mistress don't be mad at her, it's my fault really."

She just stared at him, wondering what now.

"I couldn't find anyone to take the food down to Fiona... and the girl has a skill for... ah... unlocking things..." He trailed off.

Alexei sighed and took the food. "Are you happy with what you saw? Is that what you were expecting, proof of my cruelty?"

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done it, but I was concerned..."

She took the tray of food. "Leave Warren, now."

Quickly the Scottish man retreated, and Alexei slammed the door shut.

Taking the tray she went over to the bed and sat down next to Katiya.

"Katiya?"

She said softly, "Come on Katiya. I have some food for you. It will make you feel better. Its beef broth full of things I guess humans need."

"You guess?" The redhead mumbled, not wanting to wake up but her stomach growled, demanding food. She couldn't have been asleep that long, at least it didn't feel like it as she opened her eyes. "Are you mad at me?" She sat up straighter on the bed, remembering her half mumbled apology before she passed out.

"We'll talk about it later. Right now you need food. I took a lot of blood from you." She helped Katiya sit up holding her to her own body that was propped against the headboard.

Closing her eyes, the human rested her head against Alexei's shoulder, very tempted to fall back asleep right there. "That means yes." She sighed.

"No that means we'll talk about it later." She reached up and brushed red strands behind a delicate looking ear.



She still thought that didn't sound good, but her stomach was demanding again and the food smelled so good her mouth was watering. Shifting a little so that she could reach, the redhead picked up the spoon and licked her lips at the first taste of the hearty broth.

The vampire didn't let go continued to hold the young woman as she ate. "You're hands are shaking are you okay... I could help you?"

Her hands were shaking and Katiya smiled sheepishly. "I'm sorry, maybe I should go sit somewhere else? I'm going to spill soup all over your bed."

"It might be an improvement. Did you miss all the blood on the comforter?" She took the spoon from Katiya's hand and dipped it in the broth and brought it back to her lips. "Besides I like you where you are."

There was a lot to be said between them, but for now she was quite content to be where she was, held in the arms of this beautiful dangerous woman and being fed broth.

"Karl did that to you?" She asked, after most of the broth was gone, wanting to know what had happened but not sure if she should ask.

The vampire went still, uncomfortable with the question.

She set the spoon down and leaned back against the headboard of the bed, she didn't let go of Katiya or move her. Absently she started stroking the red hair working her fingers through the strands.

"I'm sorry I shouldn't have asked." Katiya frowned, thinking she'd stumbled over one of those forbidden questions again.

"Seems we have some stuff in common."

"We do?" Katiya asked

"We do. Seems like we both like to cause trouble and have a hard time listening to authority figures."

"Oh." She stayed where she was, enjoying the attention and petting. "Neither of us do it on purpose though. Do we?"

She chuckled. "Maybe you don't, but I hate Karl. Do you hate me is that why you have done just about everything I've asked you not to do?"

"No." Katiya twisted around, blue eyes wide. "No, I don't hate you." It was important that Alexei believe her.

Alexei stared deeply into blue eyes. "It is said that the eyes are the gateway to the soul. I see a lot of things in your eyes, but I believe you, hate isn't there."

She leaned forward and kissed Katiya's forehead before leaning back again.

The human let out a sigh of relief and tucked herself up against Alexei. "I didn't set out to disobey you. It just... happened."

"Of course it did. Do you now understand why I asked you not to open locked doors?" She asked.

Katiya ducked her head. "Yes." She'd only wanted to help Warren, and of course her natural curiosity to see what was behind a locked door. "Will she be all right? Fiona?" The sight of the other woman was still in Katiya's mind.

"Yes. I told you it was like one of those junkies in those dens coming off a drug. Fiona has been living off my blood for a long time, it will take it awhile to purge from her body."

Deciding it would probably be a good idea to change topics to the other thing that had happened while Alexei was gone, Katiya sat up a little. "We went to talk to Fenix. Actually, I talked to him while Vidar scared him. I tried to get in touch with who hired him."

"Did he have my things?"

"Some of it. He's sending everything he had back here." She shrugged. "His employer didn't take everything. I dropped a message off with the frontman for his employer saying I could steal more things from you. They sent people to follow us, to check out where I was going, that's why I couldn't come straight back to the manor." That last bit came tumbling out in a rush.

"Where were you then?" She whispered into Katiya's ear.

Who swallowed, hard. "I couldn't think of anywhere else to go that wouldn't look suspicious to the people following us."

"This is the same woman who helped you kill a vampire?"

"Yes." There was no lying or evading Alexei when those eyes were so piercing.

Alexei's eyes grew distant. "You know I should kill her and you. Do you realize that? Do you know if anyone found out about what you did your death and my punishment would be ordered?"

The redhead felt her heart skip a beat at those matter of fact words. "I'm not sorry I

killed him." She heard herself say, wondering if she was about to die. "He tried to kill me, he did kill the brothers."

"Good, I'm glad you're not sorry. I am disappointed that he's dead, so I didn't get kill him myself." She sighed though the other woman that Katiya had smelled like, twice now, this Tereza, didn't make her happy.

Guessing what that sigh was about Katiya touched Alexei's arm. "I stayed there for shelter, that's all."

"Okay, but know this Katiya, I don't share what's mine." She was silent for a little bit longer. "Is there anything else I need to know?"

The human let out a shaky laugh and shook her head against Alexei's neck. "No. Isn't that enough?"

"Considering I was gone for only a couple of days, I think that's more than enough." She chuckled for a moment. "Life won't be dull."

"That's why you're going to keep me around." Katiya agreed, finding this an enjoyable place to rest, and nice flawless skin to kiss.

Alexei's breathing hitched at the kiss.

"Or maybe you'll keep me around for other reasons?" Katiya smiled against the skin she was pressed against, feeling the other woman's breathing alter.

"Katiya what are you doing?" Of all the things she had expected, that hadn't been one of them.

"It's called kissing. I would have thought an aged old vampire would know that." Katiya teased, finding a nice spot to tease with her tongue then kiss.

Alexei gasped and her grip tightened unconsciously in Katiya's hair. "Brave, brave mouse, to willingly tease a vampire."

"I've been told, repeatedly, to be brave." Katiya was rather enjoying this turn about.

"True, you have." Alexei agreed.

"Then I should be brave." She said quietly, fingering the fabric of the robe that Alexei was wearing.

There was a dim glimmer of pleasure over the pain that was still hovering in her body. A smile tugged her lips, but she did nothing to stop Katiya, curious to see how far the young woman intended to go.

The young woman in question didn't really know how far she could go. Other than the hazy erotic memories of their time in the steam filled bath her previous experiences had been limited to a kiss and a little groping. Still, she went as far as she dared, kissing down to the limit of exposed skin and maybe a little beyond, before rising up to kiss those talented lips.

"Nice." Alexei murmured against the lips on hers.

Katiya pulled back a little, trying not to look at the bloodstains that covered a lot of the bed. "Are you feeling better?"

"I am feeling better. Your blood helped a lot. I'm sorry I took so much."

Katiya shrugged a little, trying not to give into the shyness that was starting to make things a little awkward. "I knew what you needed." She resettled herself against the vampire's side, sliding a hand down to touch still warm skin. "What will you do with Sergei?"

"Sergei..." she sighed. "Depending on what Matvey found while we were gone, Sergei will probably be staked out for the rising sun."

"Will that kill him?" Would they burst into flames like in the stories?

"Yes, it will."

She wasn't happy about that, it meant several things. She had lost control of a child, it was reflection of her as a Master, and it reflected her control of her own household.

"What about Molly?" Katiya had so far managed to avoid the imposing looking woman with the streak of madness in her.

"I don't know what to do about Molly, she rather enjoys being punished, so for a change I think I may just ignore her." Besides she had found something else to give her attention too. She trailed her fingers over Katiya's throat.

Who shivered in response, blue eyes darkening as they closed a little, so much for trying to change the subject. "I wish I knew how to respond when you touch me like that." She whispered.

"You'll figure it out." Alexei whispered back. The vampire looked around at the wrinkled bed sheets and the pool of dried blood on the sheets.

"But this hardly looks like a romantic nest to explore these options."

"No it doesn't." Katiya agreed, sliding out from the bed and away from the devastatingly attractive woman in it. Space was a good thing right now she figured. "Did you want a bath? I can change these." There had to be fresh sheets hidden somewhere around.

Alexei got up, "Join me in the bath, Lyov will see to the bed." She held out a hand in question.

The bath would hurt the almost healed burn wounds, but it would also make her feel clean.

Katiya took Alexei's hand and follow her towards the bathroom where steam was rising from the hot water in the bath. Trying to occupy her mind she started talking again as she watched Alexei's legs. "I'll need to find out if Fenix's employer agreed to a meeting."

She led Katiya into the bath, "And how are you going to know if they set up a meeting?"

Damn, that probably wasn't a good thing to have brought up right now. "I'll have to check at Tereza's." She winced.

Alexei went very still.

"That's where they followed me to, that's where they think I live." The human woman said quickly.

"I see. So you'll have to go back and see that woman?"

Katiya stood almost as still as the vampire, watching her worriedly. "Probably. Unless they leave a message behind that I can find when she goes out."

"I'm not happy about that." She let go of Katiya's hand and strode into the bathroom, as always the bath was hot and full just as she wanted it to be. Lyov was a very good housekeeper.

"I know." Katiya followed, not bothering to hide her appreciative gaze as Alexei disrobed. No wonder the church was up in arms about vampires, she thought, that body was a sin. The thought made her smile, which died a second later at the look on Alexei's face. "I don't know of any other way to find your things or who hired Ivan and Fenix to steal from you."

"I know." Alexei said echoing the redheads' previous words.

"But I have a feeling it's important to know the answer behind my missing stuff." She stepped into the bath and turned raising an eyebrow at the staring woman. "Hurry up my backs not going to clean itself." She said in a tone that could be taken for seductive as she slowly sat down humming in appreciation at the warm water. The hum stopped and she hissed slightly as the water got to her back, holy water always made her skin

so sensitive while it healed.

The robe was off in an instant and Katiya was hurrying into the water, eyes lingering on those perfect breasts and her hands twitched as she imagined touching and stroking them. Mutely she held up the sponge, offering to wash Alexei's back while she tried to compose herself.

Alexei moved forward with a chuckle. "You'll need to be gentle its still a little tender."

"Oh." Katiya hissed, seeing the damaged skin. "I thought you were healed?" She carefully started to clean around the wounds.

"I am mostly. Holy water takes a bit more time and effort. And that is what Karl used on my back."

"I hate him for hurting you." Katiya said hoarsely, gently washing.

"Never, and I mean never say that outside this room, Katiya. Karl would kill you in a heartbeat, and I wouldn't be able to stop him." She said quietly.

"I won't." She promised. Why was it that they kept ending up in the bath together? This was the third time since she was here. Was it because Alexei enjoyed the hot water, or was it something else?

She kept scrubbing, enjoying the chance to touch that firm skin. She did feel a bit guilty though. "Don't be mad at Warren. I made him let me help see Fiona."

"Really, he said it was his fault."

Katiya bit her lip, wondering what to say. "I convinced him she needed food."

She sighed in pleasure enjoying the warmth of the water and the young body behind her. "So should I punish you?"

Something about the way she said it caused pleasant shivers to go up the redheads back. "Depends on the punishment I think." She answered, moving to a full massage of the vampire's shoulders.

Alexei didn't miss the increase in Katiya's heartbeat and breathing. "Interesting." She said with a smile.

"That feel's good." She purred out at the shoulder massage.

It had been a long time since she felt relaxed and pampered.

"I'm trying to figure out what feels good for you." The redhead whispered, rubbing

harder on a spot that seemed to get a good response from the other naked woman.

Alexei blinked surprised, it had been a while since some one had tried to make her feel good. Fiona had for a while but that had changed centuries ago into something else, friends more than lovers. Damn, Molly had been right.

"Well you're doing a good job."

"Is there anywhere else?" She teased, moving her hands down that broad back, trying to find other spots of interest.

Alexei chuckled, brave mouse indeed. She got up slightly and turned around straddling Katiya's legs. She placed her arms on either side bracing them on the marble lip. She looked at Katiya with an evil grin.

"Are you sure you want to go there, because if I let you touch me anymore we are going to head into dangerous territory."

"Dangerous?" She whispered, eyes widened, blue gone darker as she tried to decide if she was brave enough to do what her body wanted her to. "I thought you said I'm under your protection?" Her body hummed with the sudden move and the press of flesh warmed with the bath water was erotic beyond anything she could have thought of before.

"True you are. I can protect you from everyone and everything but myself." She leaned over whispering into Katiya's ear.

Who whimpered as naked flesh pressed up against her front. "I..." she mumbled, not sure she could think any more, let alone talk coherently all of a sudden.

"I can smell you're want, your desire. It pours off your skin, hammers in the rhythm of your heart, and in the blush of your eyes."

The whimper turned into a moan at those whispered words and she pressed her entire body upwards, wanting to feel more of the wet skin, suddenly aching aware of every place they touched. "Please "

"Please what?" She asked nibbling on the earlobe for a moment before sucking it into her mouth.

Her eyes twisted shut and she had to reach up to hold onto the long lean body above her or slip under the water. "More?" She pleaded, licking her lips.

"Are you sure?" Alexei growled out.

One hand came up tangling into Katiya's hair as she kissed the delicate cartilage of her

ear, then to the hollow behind the ear and then down the neck.

"Yessss." she hissed, her hands stroking Alexei's body, trying to coax her into moving closer. Just sliding her breasts against the pale skin above her made her whimper in pleasure.

"Good." She pressed her body against Katiya's, basically trapping the young woman between two immovable objects. Her hands were everywhere mapping the curves and plains of flesh.

She couldn't have moved if she had wanted to, which she didn't. It was an exquisite torture, the hot soapy water, the gorgeous woman doing such talented things with her lips. Katiya was panting, a leg wrapped around Alexei's stronger one, trying to urge her closer without much success.

Alexei leaned back, water sloshing around her. Her eyes narrowed, thinking.

Katiya slowly opened her unfocused eyes, blinking to try to focus on Alexei. "What?" She licked her lips, wondering why that wonderful sensation had stopped.

"Not here I think. Bed." She nodded, "Yes the bed." While she enjoyed the heat and warmth of the bath, the water was a barrier she didn't want right now.

Her eyes never left Katiya's as she stood up out of the bath, water sliding off her body like some sort of fountain statue. Leaning over she picked up the young woman, enjoying the dazed look in her eyes. A sexual awakening was a beautiful thing it was like spring after a horrible winter, the basic hunger that propelled all life was sex, and passion. All things vampires were not. But it didn't mean they had to do without. Sure they existed outside the circle of life and death, even mocked the whole process of birth with their own bloody beginnings when they sired a child. But this, here with Katiya was a gift and she could only revel in its glow like a kitten basking in a sunbeam. This was as close to being a part of nature that she could ever hope to get, to being real, instead of mythical and monstrous.

Holding the redhead she was aware of the way their slick skin heated where they touched and slid against each other. She moved to the bedroom with slow strides not willing to move at her normal vampiric speed because it would take away from this.

The bed was mysteriously made the bloody sheets whisked away for clean ones, Lyov's doing.

Concern nibbled at the back of her mind, that perhaps she was not healed enough to take on such things. It was possible in the heat of things she could go to far and would take to much blood in a frenzy.

She laid them both on the bed, and in a submissive move put herself on the bottom her



body enveloped by the bed and Katiya on top. "The need in your eyes threatens to set me on fire." She whispered softly.

Katiya pressed herself up against the nude form below her, sliding against it with a pleasant shiver as long lean legs slid between hers and she nestled there very nicely. "Then we will burn together." She answered, bracing herself with her arms to take in the sight lying out below her.

If this was the only time she would enjoy the feel of Alexei naked and her passion then she was determined to remember it. A low guttural groan of pleasure forced its way out of her lips as she lowered herself until their chests pressed together and then she was kissing the vampire in a swirl of tongues and teeth.

Katiya was suddenly willing wanton flesh, all heat and passion. She tried to be mindful of her fangs as lips and tongue invaded her quite pleasantly.

The sheets were getting bunched up around them, but Katiya barely noticed, not even having registered that the sheets had been changed. She needed more, she wanted more and she was going to have it.

She let her hands wander enveloping flesh and mapping it, every body was different. Different curves, dips, and spots that brought pleasure.

Trailing up from hip to breasts that she palmed smiling as the nipples rose to her touch becoming hard and excited poking into her flesh. There was taking and then there was guiding ramping up desire with foreplay. She was positive this was farther than Katiya had ever gone including the first time in the tub.

It was well beyond anything that Katiya had ever enjoyed before and she was determined to enjoy every moment. "Please..." she whimpered, not sure how she was going to do what she wanted to so overloaded with sensations that she was reduced to single word pleas. She arched over the pale body, into the touch.

Alexei rolled them over pinning Katiya to the bed.

Leaning her upper body up, her arms pinned both of Katiya's hands to the bed. "Please what?" She smiled seductively. "There are lots of ways to be pleased. I could hold you down, take away all your power and fuck you. I could hold you, stroke you, and whisper beautiful words in your ears. Or I could strap a phallus to my hips and fuck you like a man. And that my dear Katiya, is only the tip of the iceberg. The church did you humans a great disservice when they made you ashamed of your own pleasure."

The seductive words just made Katiya wet and she whimpered again, her hips moving against the lean thigh between her legs. "All of it." She husked, her entire body feeling like it was on fire. "Any of it."

Alexei let go of Katiya's hands and let her body rest on the one below her's, but not fully, knowing she was too dense and heavy. "We will go with sweet for now, I think." She murmured.

She kissed cheeks, lips, and neck. Down to young, rather perky breasts. She teased first one then the other with her lips, teeth and tongue. Letting a hand travel down to explore the wetness being created at the junction of Katiya's thighs.

"Yes."

The redhead would have probably agreed to almost anything right then. She gasped, opening wider, wanting more, urging the vampire on wordlessly with her movements and hips. It was impossible to stay still and she didn't try. It was rather hard though to try and get Alexei to move faster considering how strong the vampire was.

Alexei had her moments, frequently, when she was an utter bastard, this wasn't one of them. She let her fingers play the spots that created absolute pleasure for Katiya. When she judged that the woman couldn't possibly take anymore she let her fingers break through that barrier that sealed away that most intimate of places that lead to the true center of the universe where life was created.

She could smell blood and desire and her fangs lengthened in response and she rested her head on the bed next to Katiya's resisting all her urges to bite and claim, Katiya couldn't lose much more blood. She let her fingers pause inside letting Katiya adjust to the invasion before she started moving her arm again.

There were words or maybe just animal like noises, coming out of Katiya's mouth. She knew she was saying something, maybe screaming it in pleasure, but she wouldn't remember it. All she would remember was the way those fingers felt inside her, the expert way they caressed her, the smell heavy on the air. She would remember the way Alexei was straining next to her, body taut with desire. Then she would remember the feel as those fingers moved and she tipped over the edge into a pleasure so bright it hurt.

The vampire was sweating, that was startling, she rarely did that. How much life and passion must be stolen for her to imitate a living soul? She didn't know.

Katiya was still next to her, passed out from experiencing her first little death. Slowly she eased her fingers out and brought them to her lips cleaning them she tasted passion and blood of innocence shattered. Once clean she smiled softly and kissed her way down Katiya's body to the thighs dotted with blood. Not unusual tearing of the maidenhead sometimes did that. Bending her head she lapped up the blood like a cat with a bowl of cream. It was different, richer of course; this is the blood that would sustain life in the womb.

Very slowly Katiya returned to her senses and even more slowly realized where she was and with whom. She jerked a little, whimpering as a warm tongue licked her skin. Her body felt heavy and warm, sated, pleasantly sore like she'd been doing stretches or practicing climbing walls. "Did I fall asleep?" She asked, a hand raising and stroking through Alexei's luxuriant hair.

"Passed out." Alexei purred from between her legs.

"Sorry." She hadn't even wanted to close her eyes for fear of missing something.

Alexei laughed sitting up. "Nothing to be sorry for, it's a complement really. Some people cannot let go and let pleasure overwhelm them."

"It was beautiful, you're beautiful." She kissed the thigh closest to her.

Katiya gave a little shiver. "I can't think when you do that." She didn't sound upset about it, more like amazed.

"Not thinking is a good complement, I think." The vampire said licking her lips removing all traces of what had just happened.

Shifting so that she was more on level with the blonde woman, Katiya leaned against her side, letting out a little sound of pleasure. She stayed like that for a long time, simply enjoying the moment that she knew couldn't last. Finally she spoke again, remembering the strained look on Stepan's face. "Did he hurt anyone else?" She asked quietly, referring to the vampire prince.

Alexei's face went from relaxed to guarded. "Mouse you can pick some odd bedroom talk."

"Sorry." She winced, why did she keep doing that? "I just realized you might not have been the only one he hurt and was worried."

"Yes, Shiro was hurt. And Stepan was given the worst humiliation a male can suffer; he was made to feel impotent." She reached out stroking Katiya's face, which had started to look upset. Alexei found she was missing the blissful look that had been there a moment ago. "But we survived, and that is what is important."

"Did he..." She hesitated "was Shiro hurt badly?" Another reason to hate this vampire prince.

"They violated her, but not like a human would. They tore into the skin at her wrists. Depending on how she heals she may not play again."

Katiya buried her face in Alexei's shoulder, closing her eyes at the idea of never hearing that beautiful music again. In an attempt to shift the conversation to something,

anything else, she said the first thing that came to mind. "What's a vampire elder?"

Alexei looked puzzled, as she reached up stroking red hair. "An elder, would be an old vampire, really old."

"I heard a rumor earlier that there's one in the city." She had to explain that random question and it was a little too late now to start keeping secrets.

"Interesting. And who told you that?" She asked, feeling she wouldn't like the answer.

Katiya mumbled something that might have been Tereza.

She was right she didn't like the answer. "Just who is this Tereza? Is she some pet here to spy on me?"

"She's a hunter, not a spy." Katiya was pretty sure about that.

That didn't make her happier. "So you've been playing with this woman, who is a Hunter here to kill me?" The vampire got up suddenly; with a growl she went to her closet and started shoving her legs into some pants.

Katiya was right, the moment couldn't last. Cursing her big mouth, she pulled one of the covers up around her bare shoulders and got out of the bed. "Not you, I don't think anyway. She followed new vampires into the city."

"It doesn't matter to hunters. They try to kill us all. And you are hanging out with one." She could feel her temper rising.

This wasn't going well. "She's useful." Katiya tried to reason. "She saved my life before."

"And I can imagine why she did that." Alexei growled out.

The redhead blinked, drawing the white sheets around her a little more closely as she watched Alexei carefully, trying to figure out why this was going bad so fast. "You're jealous?"

Alexei paused. "No. I'm the Master you're the pet. I don't get jealous."

That was asinine and she knew it the moment it came out of her mouth.

"Oh." Katiya's face fell and she shook her head a little. "Of course." Stupid of her to think otherwise. It still hurt though. "Should I go?" She still hadn't chosen her own room.

For the first time in what seemed like forever, Alexei wavered. Torn between what was proper for her status and vampire society, and what she simply wanted.

The hurt deepened with the silence and she swallowed against the sudden foolish urge to cry. So what if she had just given herself to the vampire. She'd known, at some level that would happen so she should just take it for what it was. A service to her master. "I'll see if I can help Shiro." And find a room of her own.

Alexei didn't want Katiya to go. She wanted to go back to bed with Katiya and explore more of that flesh. "Katiya..." She paused changing her mind. "Thank you for checking on Shiro, I'm not certain she wants any of us, vampires," She clarified, "near her just yet."

She'd chosen this path, Katiya reminded herself, firmly ignoring the hurt and giving a shaky nod. "I..." She paused then forced a smile. "Good night then." What little was left of it.

She pulled on a shirt but didn't tuck it in. Something was wrong she didn't feel right. But she would not share, especially with a woman who hunted vampires. "You're excused." She mumbled absent-mindedly. She wasn't jealous, she couldn't be, it was an emotion that had no place in her world.

Katiya didn't, quite, slam the door shut behind her as she left but she certainly closed it harder than normal.

Vidar's great white head perked up and he looked at the obviously upset woman in question. Getting up he went to her side licking her hand.

"I was brave. But I wasn't the only one who had to be." She whispered to him, smiling wryly as she scratched that white-furred head. "Do you know where Shiro is?" She wrapped the thin sheet around herself again as it slipped.

He sighed, humans had such hang ups with sex and emotion and vampires forgot there emotions came from being human once.

He nudged her hand one last time and started to the stairs going up one flight. He sniffed the floor not exactly certain where her room was, tail wagging he caught the scent leading them to a stout wooden door.

"I should choose my own room too, I guess." She mumbled, frowning and feeling the urge to kick and scream at something. Keeping a hand on the sheet dress she followed the white hound. With her free hand she knocked, to give the silent woman a warning before she opened the door.

"Shiro?"

There was no answer.

Feeling like she was trespassing, Katiya edged inside. The room was sparsely decorated, a fur rug with a couple of chairs and a bed. Pride of place was a large desk littered with sheet music and stands holding several different violins. No sign of the other woman though and Katiya started to search for her worriedly. "Shiro?"

There was movement near the dark window curtains and Shiro turned from where she was watching the sunset. Her eyes were shuttered and dark circles were under her eyes.

"Shiro, I'm sorry." Katiya moved closer, worried by the haggard look on the gentle woman's face. "Alexei told me they hurt you."

The woman started to make figures with her hands and fingers, but stopped when she remembered Katiya didn't understand sign language.

"You have to teach me how to understand that." Katiya said, stopping when she was closer, not sure what sort of help Shiro might need.

The Asian woman's wrists were wrapped in fine linen. Shiro nervously pushed a strand of hair behind her ear, as she walked over to the desk and picked up a pen and shakily uncorked an inkwell. Shakily on parchment she wrote, "I'm fine. Do not worry."

Peering over her shoulder, Katiya frowned. "You don't look fine." She touched the woman's shoulder, keeping one hand to hold her makeshift dress on. "Should you be resting? I could go get you food if you want?"

Shiro frowned. "Can't sleep. Not hungry." She shrugged, actually for the first time she was feeling scared. Scared of the darkness, scared of Alexei and scared for Alexei. She's seen her Mistress tortured it was beyond what she had even conceived one could do to another, and that was saying a lot considering how her father had been.

"Do you want me to leave?" Katiya asked slowly, worried about leaving Shiro alone.

Vidar nudged Katiya trying to convey what a bad idea leaving was.

The Asian woman just shrugged. Looking around her desk she spied her music and one of her violins. Suddenly broke down into sobs. She could hold a bow, but she couldn't make her fingers move on the strings, they were like fat sausages, uncoordinated on the strings.

Even without Vidar's nudge there was no way Katiya was leaving now. Immediately she gathered the slim woman into her arms, making hushing comforting sounds as she offered comfort. "It's all right, it'll be all right." She said over and over again, feeling tears wet her shoulder

Vidar whined hating it when women cried.

Katiya gave the dog a look. "Go guard the door then." she grumbled at him, moving Shiro away from the desk and towards the bed.

Grumbling he went to the door and lied down.

Shiro let herself be led to the bed, her sobs were quieter now reduced to sniffles, but she continued to cling to Katiya. She smelled like Alexei, which was comforting with out the terror of having an actual vampire near her. Part of her knew it wasn't Alexei's fault and she had even broken the restraints to stop them, but still it would be a while until teeth coming near her flesh would be welcomed.

"You'll be playing again in no time. You'll see." Katiya comforted her as best she could, managing to coax the silent woman into the bed. Shiro's face was drawn and tired. Katiya would have to make sure that the Asian woman ate something tomorrow morning; whatever Warren could entice her with. This morning actually, considering how late in the night it already was.

She wondered, for an instant, what it was that Alexei was doing. Then the anger came back and she shoved away the worry. The vampire was ancient; certainly she could occupy her nights with something.

"I can stay in the chair if you want?" She didn't want to make Shiro uneasy by getting into the same bed.

Shiro reached out for the redhead not wanting her to go, it was nice to be next to someone and hear the reassuring beat of a heart. She patted the bed trying to convey it was okay.

"Okay." Was Katiya's simple answer as she slipped under the covers. If Shiro had a problem with the fact that she was naked other than the sheet she'd been wearing, she'd have to live with it now. "Rest. I'll keep you company."

The Mongol girl nodded and curled up on her side. It was different than a vampire whose body seemed to steal warmth. But the sound of Katiya breathing, as well as, the hound at the door was comforting and soon she found she couldn't keep her eyes open.

"Shhh... Sleep." Katiya whispered, shifting closer so that she could lightly stroke Shiro's long dark hair, petting it. Quietly she hummed a half remembered lullaby from a mother that was more a foggy ideal than an actual memory.

[Continued.](#)

## ~ The Secret History of Vampires ~

by Zee and Windstar

Enjoy and remember to send feedback to [Zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:Zeeamy@gmail.com) and  
[Adarkbow@yahoo.com](mailto:Adarkbow@yahoo.com)

### Part 5

Alexei didn't understand her inner disquiet when sunrise came and she finally had the solitude a master vampire needed, with all her little pets in their proper places. She didn't understand why the bed that still smelled of her and Katiya in a moment of passion, made her instead go to her desk and sit, even as the rising sun tugged at the edges of her consciousness.

As she sat at her desk she felt the solitude keenly, it felt more like loneliness and isolation.

For a moment the urge to go get Katiya and summon or drag her here by whatever means necessary had her curling her fingers around the armrests to push herself up. Instead she stilled, a Master did not need her pets like this. She made herself focus on other things.

Taking out a quill and ink she smoothed out a piece of parchment to start outlining her problem at hand. Katiya and Karl were nothing but distractions that had pulled her away from the concerns and safety of her city.

She pushed herself past sunrise fighting off its demands for sleep until unconsciousness stole her away from the waking world. And she slumped over as if dead onto her desk.

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Sun set was forcing its way onto the skies moving the world into night when the vampire awoke. Her neck and back hurt from sleeping in such an odd position. Absently she rubbed her neck as she tried to gather her bearing.

She stared listlessly around her. For a moment she warred with the idea of going upstairs to the library to sit in front of the fire to stay warm. Cold was seeping into her



bones and world-weariness, she'd been alive to long seen and done too much. Civilizations she'd grown up with were dust their people not even remembered. She couldn't even remember really where her father and mothers were buried. Fiona had left her, Katiya wanted to leave her; probably for some strapping goodness and light hunter, Shiro probably would never trust her again, and she would never really be what Molly needed. Sergei was working either with Karl or with these mysterious new vampires in her territory, the twins were more animals than human preferring to hunt in the wilderness to the city, and Matvey wanted his books, and Stepan claimed loyalty but really wanted to go back to Moscow and the theatre. Nobody really wanted her or needed her.

That was a weighty conclusion, and it dragged her mind further into the black bleakness. Perhaps she would join her Sire locked in a coffin chained in the bowels of the house and time and history would pass her by.

With a quiet groan she rubbed her face her eyes catching the parchment in front of her. Blinking she stared at it. In her own hand it said "Current Problems". Unknown vampires, missing signet ring, Karl, and Hunters.

She stared at her sprawling script for a moment, and then came to a decision. She would gut the city. If nobody would respect the vampire she was now, she'd remind him or her of the one she had been centuries ago. She was the Butcher and the Tiger of the Steppes; and if they wanted to invade her city she would show them a fight. Not of politics and words but of gunpowder, steel and blood. She would wash the fucking streets in their blood if need be.

Getting up she grabbed a hat, coat, gloves, and dark protective glasses for her eyes; it was still too light for her. Exiting her room she went up the stairs to the library she paused briefly on the third floor. Vidar and she made eye contact. They stared at each other impassively and she wondered why Katiya was in Shiro's room, then she continued up the stairs to her library. She chose carefully of the weapons left there not stolen by four boys who were being used by things they didn't understand, she made her decisions and then made her way down the stairs. Lyov was waiting by the front doors.

"Mistress." He said in greeting.

"When the twins show up, send them into the city to find me." She snapped.

"Of course."

Then she was gone.

#####3#####3

It had been nearly a week since they had returned from Karl's, and Stepan did not like how things had changed in the household. Everyone was miserable and walking on eggshells. Sergei had healed and was gone where he went nobody knew, and since Alexei had never gave a clear directive on what was to be done the rest of them were unsure as to what to do to the vampire.

Stepan did know that he was not working at the factories because a miserable Matvey was doing that. The perpetually young looking vampire was constantly wearing a sorrowful expression. He no longer had time for his books and never ending learning.

Stepan wasn't really sure what the twins were up to they had always come and gone as they pleased, they were second in age only to Fiona. Shiro looked scared and he didn't blame the woman considering what had been done to her. What irritated him though was how she was constantly at Katiya's side, or maybe it was Katiya who just irritated him. To the young vampire the redheaded woman was the source of all their problems. Life had been good, safe, and consistent before she had come into their world.

When the Mistress was home, she looked haunted and gaunt. Other times she looked wild and feral the smell of battle and blood thick in her wake. He suspected she wasn't feeding, and feared she was pushing herself too far. The other humans in the house gave her nervous looks and a wide berth afraid of getting her temper, which seemed to be short.

He had grown to hate that slip of a girl and the simple way she was wrecking the world around them. She was going to be their downfall; she would ruin the paradise they had built here. He had taken to following her, his abilities as an actor really coming to the forefront. Currently he was following Katiya, Shiro, and that stupid hound around the city; they never knew he was following them he blended in like any other smelly human lad out in the evening looking for a drink and a good time.

As they crossed an open market still going strong in the late winter night, he followed through the crush of people getting off work from the factories or going to work stopping for food or talk. As a man walked into him knocking the young vampire slightly off balance, he spun and slipped in the slush and saw her, Alexei. She was hiding in shadows up on the old medieval fortified wall, but he could see her clearly. Her eyes riveted to the redheads form as if drinking in every detail. Then there was a sudden change to her body it went from hungry to withdrawn, sullen, and hurt possibly. Turning he looked across the square to see what had changed and saw another woman talking to Katiya.

The woman had an aura around her of danger, she looked Hungarian or some other peasant stock, but she was dressed like a hunter in thick leather pants and a long leather coat, which probably hid some weapons he wouldn't like to meet. So this was the smell that set his Mistress off, and he hated the redheaded whore even more. He looked back to the wall but Alexei was gone.

He was also jealous he knew she had never looked at any of her children the way she looked at Katiya.

#####3##3

Katiya had been laughing at Shiro's antics as they wandered through the open nighttime market. While she didn't understand a lot of what the slender woman mimed with her hands, she'd quickly realized that Shiro had a wicked ability to mimic people's body language. It was hilarious to see her puff up and pretend to be the last pompous merchant who had tried to force his wares upon them.

She was still giggling over it when a familiar face emerged from the crowds of workers hurrying home or to third shift at the factory. Her sudden tensing made Shiro look at her strangely but she had no time to explain as Tereza walked closer.

"Hi Tereza." She smiled, hopefully normally enough.

"Katiya." Tereza said brightly her face becoming more guarded as she realized Katiya wasn't alone. She liked Katiya, despite being a pet, and it wasn't the girl's fault, not really she was a pet. It was hard for impressionable young women to truly realize the traps they were getting into with vampires they had that dark sensuality, and it was easy to get overwhelmed and taken. Plus she was fairly certain Katiya was a new pet; it would be easy to save her.

"Um Hi." She finished awkwardly as the Asian woman studied her with dark eyes.

The moment ground out, silent as the three of them watched each other. Finally, because she couldn't be rude to this person who had saved her from Boris, Katiya found herself introducing them. "Shiro, this is Tereza. Tereza, this is Shiro, she doesn't talk." That seemed like a good point to get out of the way early on.

She reached out to take Katiya's arm. "Can I talk to you for a minute... alone." The alone part was stammered out as the hound put his body between her and the redhead's, stopping the move before she could make contact.

The redhead touched Shiro's shoulder in apology then patted Vidar on the head and moved around him. "Sure." It had to be something interesting to cause the hunter to seek her out.

Vidar growled low in warning, now was not the time to start making waves of independence; tension in the house was too great. Alexei had all but disappeared from the house nobody really knew what was going on.

"I've been looking for you for a week, not too long after that night you stayed at my place a couple of no neck muscle came around looking for you. Said they were interested in what you were offering."

She was right this was interesting. "Really?" Katiya frowned, thoughtfully. "Did they say how to get in touch with them?" She ignored Vidar this was important this could help Alexei. Wherever she had gone.

"Yeah they gave me a piece of paper with an address..." She frowned. "But I left it at my place." She shrugged. "You and your servant can follow me back and I'll give it to you."

"Shiro's not my servant, she's my friend." Katiya stepped back, away from the hunter, annoyed. "Not everyone is a slave."

"I'm sorry, she's Asian I just assumed. Sorry. Is she another vampire lover like you?"

Katiya crossed her arms over her chest, glaring. "Maybe you should just send the address to me."

Tereza frowned, "Never mind, I don't know why I'm helping you. Either come get the address or don't." She spun on her heels and started stomping through the marketplace.

"Shit." Katiya grumbled, turning to Shiro. "Shiro, I need to go get something from Tereza's place. Would you be all right going home?" She read the hesitation in the woman's face, the fear again. "If Vidar went with you?"

Shiro looked worried, Alexei wouldn't like this if she found out. It wasn't proper. She opened her mouth and again was frustrated that Katiya didn't know her sign language.

Vidar whined but slunk over to Shiro's side as Katiya had asked.

"Don't worry Vidar, as soon as you get her to the mansion, just come find me." She gave Shiro a hug. "Don't worry. This is to help Alexei."

Shiro nodded but still looked uneasy as she turned to follow Vidar.

"Tereza!" She took off after the retreating woman, wondering how she moved so quickly through a crowd if she was only human. "Wait!"

After a little while of silence she asked. "You don't have to be a pet. I can get you away from it, or if you tell me where it sleeps at night I can kill it. You can be free."

Katiya had to hurry to keep up; annoyed with the dress she'd worn today. She really should have worn pants again, but the idea of wearing pants out in public still seemed odd. Katiya rolled her eyes. "Can't you just accept that I want to be with her? Why would I want to be free? I was free and I was starving working night shifts in a factory. Why would I want to go back to that?"

"Being a slave and a food source isn't happiness. I can understand why that might seem like an easy way to have a good life. But they're evil and very seductive in that evil. You could go to the church, they help those in need."

"The church?" Katiya sounded incredulous. "No, I think I'm better off with the vampires." She'd heard what those priests did. "Besides, Alexei's not evil. She can be mean, but she's not evil."

Tereza snorted she didn't believe that for a minute. "The vampire elders were men that went against God and were punished, they're all evil. But regardless of evil, why would you want to be indebted to someone who was mean or cruel to you?"

"What do you mean?" Katiya knew she sounded defensive as she continued to follow Tereza. "She hasn't been cruel to me."

"Vampires are cruel, their needs come before all others; their children, pets and servants. None of their needs matter just the vampires. Why would anybody want to be treated as an afterthought, never mind the other horrible things vampires do."

The redhead could feel herself getting upset and she didn't know how to convince Tereza that Alexei wasn't like that. She shook her head. "What if we agree to disagree on this? I can help you find the vampires who stole from Alexei, but I'm not helping you hurt her."

Tereza mulled it over. "Well I'm always up for killing vampires, but I'm not going to make any promises on your Keeper, I'm going to kill her just like every other vampire, it makes no difference that she's your master."

This wasn't going to work out well, Katiya could just tell. But she needed that information. "Tereza..." she sighed, what could she say to someone who was obviously not going to change. "What made you hate them so much?"

Tereza actually paused mid-stride she was so surprised by the question. "You have to ask. They pollute our skies, our culture, and our leaders. Nothing we think we have we really do, it's just a smoke screen created by the vampires to keep us docile and food. Oh, and speaking of food, we're the menu. I've seen villages wiped out by a pack of vampires. Bodies drained, throats torn out and worse."

She shuddered.

"But the worst is how they seduce our fellow humans to do their dirty work all for the false promise of immortality. People you love change as that root of evil takes them over, and they betray family and friends because they love the vampire more than they love you."

The other woman watched her face carefully, taking in the words and what was behind them as best she could. "Who was it that they seduced away from you?" She asked, touching Tereza's arm to offer comfort to her.

The Hunter's jaw clenched, and she started walking again. "My aunt, she later became my step-mother, it was only at the bitter end when everything came unraveled and destroyed that I found out she murdered her own sister, my mother, to gain favor from her vampire lover."

What could she say to that? There wasn't anything, so instead Katiya hurried to keep up. They weren't far now, a few more blocks until they were there. "So you hunt them. Alone? That sounds dangerous."

"Yes and no, there are others we are The Order of Hunters, I guess. Father Robert trains us and then sends us out to where we are needed to fight."

She bound up the stairs to the place she was staying and fished out the iron key unlocking the door.

"Father?" Katiya moved up the stairs after her, really doing her best not to notice how good her ass looked in those pants. "He's a priest?"

"Yes, a Monk. He is alone now too, the vampires took his brothers away. So he took it upon himself to train those who were marked by loss to fight the plague of vampires." She moved the crossbow and began looking for the piece of parchment.

Another rather creepy reason to distrust the church as far as Katiya was concerned. She closed the door behind her and waited, watching as the hunter searched for the message.

With a frown Tereza moved the gun parts stacked on the shelf for cleaning and then smiled when she found the scrap of paper. Turning she handed it to Katiya. "Will you let me know when your meeting is so I can kill at least some vampires you approve of?"

"Maybe." She took the slip of paper. "The evil ones."

Tereza tried to take the paper back "They're all evil." She said with a smile.

The redhead closed her fingers around it, grinning despite herself. "No. They aren't. Just like not all humans are good."

"I guess I can't argue that." She paused realizing how close they were standing and how Katiya's nose crinkled just a little bit when she smiled. She swallowed nervously realizing how much she liked Katiya and wanted to kiss her, how much she didn't want her to leave to go back to that thing.

The smile faded on the paler skinned woman's face as she watched Tereza's eyes change. "I should go." She said quietly.

"Don't... Katiya... I..." She started and stopped brokenly, before she decided just to go with actions, she was normally better with that than words.

They were kissing suddenly. Katiya wasn't sure how that had happened, or when it really had started, but it was very, very nice. Tereza was warm, almost radiating heat, and she certainly knew how to kiss. Katiya was dazed, enjoying the warm body against hers.

"Wait." she pulled back, lips bruised, eyes wide and her body singing with the press of a warm body against hers. "Wait." Her chest heaving as she remembered a tall cool body that had made her cry out in pleasure.

"What? Are you okay? Did I do something wrong?" Tereza asked.

"You were good, very good." Katiya licked her lips. "I can't."

"You can, stay here with me. You don't have to go back to that thing. We'll leave here, Father Robert can send someone else here to deal with the cup and the Elder." Tereza pleaded.

She smiled gently and moved closer to Tereza, stroking her cheek. "You are a good person, Tereza." Then she gave her a chaste kiss on the cheek. "You should go though. Go where you can be happy."

She walked over and opened the door. "I'm a better kisser, right?"

"You're a very good kisser." Katiya agreed, not really answering the question as she stepped outside.

Tereza didn't fail to notice the answer. "Damn, that bloodsucker is even a better kisser." She kept the smile on her face. "I still want to go kill evil vampires, don't forget." She slowly closed the door as Katiya left. As soon as she was alone her face fell into a scowl, she was more determined now to find this ancient vampire who possessed the cup of Christ.

"I know." Was the answer from the other side of the door.

Amused, Katiya took another look at the scrap of paper in her hand. Shaking her head she turned and started the walk back to where she could get a carriage to the Manor.

#####3#####3

A woman in a dress torn, from gut to gullet, scrambled backwards, in the black filthy snow of the alley. Her ample chest that she was trying to cover with her small hands was covered bleeding scratches and bite marks. At the mouth of the alleyway two figures moved with such speed they were nothing but blurs to her eyes.

Alexei was not impressed the first thing this idiot had tried to do was reach for a pistol as he spotted her. If she was this close to you, you were dead. He would have been better off trying to grapple or run away. He yelled at her in a bastardization of the Queen's English. With a quick flick her short sword was out from where it was hidden in her coat and in a quick efficient slice the hand that had finally gotten the pistol free was lying in the snow.

The vampire howled at her and lunged trying to beat at her with one good hand and a stump. Laughing at the absurdity of the move, she easily dodged the blows. Distracted by the wounded vampire she was taken quiet by surprise when another launched itself to her back. With a soft growl of annoyance she tried to shake it off but the creature was wiry and clung to her like a spider monkey. Scowling she propelled herself backwards smashing the body between her and the stonewall.

Still it held on to her claws and fangs cutting through fabric and skin.

Annoyed she flipped the short sword around and carefully judging the angle ran forward slamming the hilt against the opposite stonewall, into her chest out her back and into the vampire on her back. Feeling it stiffen and the claws retract from her skin she pulled the sword out. The weight fell off her like a tick to fire. In a quick turn she hefted the sword and brought it down. One swift cut and the head separated from the neck.

Bringing the sword up again she refocused on her original target. The one handed vampire wanted no part of this and turned to run. Out of the shadows two forms leapt at him, tearing him apart.

Amused Alexei watched the devastation. "You know, he was my kill."

Twin faces looked back at her from the corpse in the snow. "Sorry Mistress, we wanted to make up for the fact that one slipped through."

They were both whip thin with large, luminous dark blue eyes, and they were otherworldly even for being vampires. The twins Nada and Niki were the children of a werewolf mother and a human father, they were never going to shift and take a form on four legs, and their pack was never going to accept them. Their mother had begged Alexei to turn them wanting them to have a place somewhere. At first she resisted, she had a truce of sorts with her shapeshifting neighbors and didn't want to risk it. At that time it had only been her and Fiona and she had brutally won her hunting territory from the other demons of the Steppes, she had not wanted to risk what had been so hard won.



But when the mother chose seduction, Alexei had proven weak, and after a few mouthfuls of werewolf blood had almost agreed to anything, she had been so intoxicated. Thankfully Fiona had stepped in. She would make them her children but not until they were well into adulthood. They split their time between pack and Alexei, and even though they could not shift they were formidable hunters and as the world changed around them all, they still preferred the wild areas to the cities. So now they roamed the areas outside her town, keeping rogues and bandits away.

"You've hurt yourself." Nada whispered coming close to Alexei sniffing the blood at her chest.

"Don't you think stabbing yourself was a bit much?" Niki asked coming up close as well.

Alexei smiled but stayed on guard as they came close brushing against her, Nada being bolder and more seductive than her sister. She had never taken them to bed, it had always felt wrong despite their interest in her. She had watched them grow up and felt more like a parent than lover. But it was a fine line growing up in a pack with the werewolves. They needed the closeness and reassurance of their pack and alpha on occasion and she had not been giving that to them lately.

"Nada." She warned sharply and the woman went still at her side. Reaching out she touched Nada's face and then Niki's, gently touching them then stepping forward she kissed each forehead before stepping back.

"What about the girl?" Niki asked looking down the alleyway at the woman who was crying in a ball trying to make herself look small.

"What? Oh." She frowned not sure what to do. "I'll take care of it."

"Not like that." Nada pointed at the blood soaked shirt she was wearing.

"It will be fine, I'll just button my coat no one will see it."

"And the hole in the back?"

Alexei just scowled and the twin's grinned and laughed. "We'll get her to her home safe."

"No playing and no biting."

They frowned but Niki, cheekily asked. "What if she asks us too?"

"Then be gentle and if I find out different I'll punish you."

The twins grinned as if that was a very appealing offer, and then set off down the alley

to get the young woman home.

"Hurry home, I let Fiona out this morning, you know she'd love to see you." That was of course if Warren and Fiona were done missing each other.

There was a slight pull to her chest as she started walking home. The flesh in her chest almost healed, defiantly not a move for the weak. She wished there were more to fight but every night she never found more than two or three, but every night there were vampires to take the place of those she had dispatched. Who and where they were coming from she did not know, but something she sorely wanted to find out.

Hunger pricked at her gut but she ignored it, nobody was worth her attention right now, she could go to the one blood bar she sanctioned in the city for her and her children to feed at, but even that wasn't appealing. Soon she would need to eat something but she was still fine for now. Sunrise wasn't far off it would just be easier to go home and get cleaned up, tomorrow there would be more invaders to kill.

#####3##3

The manor was quiet when the carriage deposited Katiya in front of it. The slip of paper was firmly tucked into the band bodice of her dress. There was something to be said for wearing a dress after all apparently. "Good evening Lyov." She greeted the doorman as she entered. "Did Shiro come back?" She hadn't seen Vidar.

"Yes, she came back a while ago, and that damn hound with his muddy footprints went back out to look for you. I'm sure he'll be quite annoyed to find that you're here. There's food in the kitchen if you desire."

Even the mention of Warren's cooking made Katiya's stomach growl and she changed her mind about going to go make sure Shiro was all right. "Thank you." A little food first then she'd go check on Shiro.

Only it wasn't Warren in the kitchen it was short, thin woman with long red hair pulled up into a bun. She was pulling something out of the oven; turning to set the meat pie down on the counter she gave a small squeal of surprise. "Goodness we need to put a bell on you."

Katiya nearly jumped a foot back in surprise as well, staring at the stranger. It took her a moment before she realized who it was that was standing there. She looked a lot different than she had in that basement cell. "Fiona?"

"Yes, and you must be the new pet, everyone thinks has replaced me." She grinned.

"People can have such small leaps in logic. Just because we share hair color doesn't mean you're a replacement pet. Alexei isn't like that. Oh, where are my manors, come

in, come in. Sit and have some food."

This was a completely different woman than the one Katiya had met in that stinking cell down the stairs. She took a seat, smiling hesitantly. "So you're not mad with me?" Best to be clear on this. There were already enough people who didn't like her in this house.

Fiona raised an eyebrow in puzzlement at the question. "Why would I be mad?" She turned grabbing one of the meat pies that had come out of the stove earlier and started to cut it up. Tsking as one of the Tigers had decided to lounge in front of it for warmth.

"I brought food down to you?" Katiya shifted into the seat, her stomach rumbling again as she smelled the food. "You were pretty mad."

"Ah that, I wasn't mad I was well maybe a little bit... but not at you, I was more mad at Alexei, really. That wasn't anger that was madness. Being a pet is easy, being human is hard." She brought the pie over and set it down with a fork. "Do you mind if I sit with you?"

"Poor Warren still is under the illusion women are fragile things, and I think I wore him out. So it was only fair that I take over the kitchen this evening." She smiled a small mischievous smile.

Katiya shared the smile. "I'll make sure to tease him about that next time I see him." She watched, with as much patience as she could muster, as Fiona cut pieces. "Thank you." She immediately started eating, ravenous even though she'd eaten well before leaving the manor earlier. "I've never eaten so well as I do here."

"I know it's a shame really. Human's should care for their own but they don't." Fiona's eyes studied the girl in front of her and almost felt like giving Alexei a piece of her mind. The thing was a babe really. Maybe vampires had mid-life crises, like some of the bloated rulers of Europe and Asia did.

The other woman closed her eyes, groaning in pleasure as she swallowed another mouthful. Scraping the plate clean she licked her lips. "I've never found humans to be very kind or caring." She took the opportunity to watch Fiona eating a bit more leisurely. "You've been with Alexei for a long time?"

"Oh yes, she saved me, although she didn't mean too. Which is ironic because once I realized what she was I just wanted her to kill me. Now however, almost 900 years later I'm glad she didn't or I wouldn't have met Warren."

Sensing a story, Katiya leaned against the table. "How'd she do that?"

"Our meeting isn't a pleasant story. I was born on an island far from here, and when I was but a girl probably younger than you our coasts' were being raided and plundered by mighty warships. These raiders took me as their plunder." The weight of decades

had made the loathing and horror about what had occurred nearly disappear.

"For a month I was on that boat with them passed around, kicked around until one day we got caught up in a storm. The ship wrecked on a rocky coastline in the dark. Alexei was denning in a cave on the coast; she was more brutal and animal at this point. She heard the wreck and came down to investigate and began to kill the hapless raiders on the shore. I remember this creature stalking me in the rain, getting glimpses of it in the lightening covered in blood and furs. And finally between one blink of my eyes and the next she was standing there staring at me, and all I could think was finally, death had come; and all the pain and humiliation would be over. So, I bared my neck and she just looked at me confused." She chuckled now at the memory.

"You knew what she was?"

"No I had no idea, but I had seen in the flashes of light what she had done to those raiders. And Katiya I desperately wanted to die at that moment."

"No wonder she was confused." Katiya could imagine Alexei wild and feral; it lingered below the statuesque woman's surface.

"Yes, vampires aren't use to prey coming to them." She chuckled again, "it's those moments when people and things surprise her that I think she falls in love. It's an extraordinary thing to do to a vampire, and she is the only vampire I've met who appreciates the surprise even when it hurts her."

Katiya's interest ratched up another notch. "She loves you." It wasn't really a question.

"Hmmm, there are so many ways to define love. She needed me, and we have affection, but true love that bards and storytellers speak of, no we don't. That is the harshest lesson we've ever learned in our years together, and that is why she let me go."

Fiona's face took on a sad look. "She had to let me go or nothing would change, and I had fallen in love with Warren and the idea of being a wife and mother."

"He was very worried when you were... recovering." Katiya hesitated over the last, not sure how to put it.

Fiona nodded. "I bet he was, he doesn't understand what severing the ties to vampire can be like. He's human, a servant, not a pet. So he sees slavery and cruelty, without understanding the dynamic that goes on. At least with Alexei, most other vampires that have pets are just mean and cruel. But worst of all he's a man who has to share what he loves with a woman more powerful..." She just grinned though. "But I love him so I will learn to put up with his jealousy."

"Fiona," Katiya paused, considering how to ask what she wanted to. "Alexei, is she

always, so intense?" It was hard to explain what she meant.

Fiona thoughtfully stared at the young woman, "She can feel like that, but some of that is her age it gives her this..." She paused searching for the right word. "Presence, I guess would be a good word for it."

"It's intimidating." The younger woman admitted. "She calls me mouse. I'd never seen anyone like her before. So powerful, beautiful, presence is a good word for it. I have to remind myself to avoid being timid around her. I'm babbling again." She winced as the rush of words tumbled out.

Fiona patted Katiya's arm. "It will be okay, and with all predators it's good to remember not to be timid in their presence it just triggers the wrong response."

"What response is that?" Alexei said as she stepped into the kitchen, she paused seeing Katiya and Fiona sitting at the table obviously in conversation. It felt awkward and a bit self-conscious to have the person you use to fuck and use for food being chummy with the one you were currently... yeah she'd just let that thought go.

Whatever thoughts Alexei was having, it didn't look like one that she enjoyed having. So once again Katiya found herself saying something she wouldn't to anyone else. "The one where you close your eyes and moan." She smiled sweetly at the vampire who had been avoiding her.

Alexei's eyes widened a bit in surprise and so did Fiona's. The vampire's mouth opened and closed but she had no idea what to say to that.

Fiona just started to chuckle tears coming to her eyes. "Ah, she got you there."

The younger woman demurely cut another piece of pie, she felt like she'd earned it.

Gray eyes narrowed and Alexei scowled not in the mood to be mocked she'd seen her tonight, seen Katiya go off with that Hunter. She was positive if she stepped any closer she'd smell the hunter's scent on Katiya's skin. With a frustrated growl she turned and stormed out.

Katiya sighed, watching Alexei leave even though she'd half expected it. "I think she's avoiding me." She took a bite of pie, even though she was suddenly less hungry.

Fiona got the laughing under control, "She can be such a baby sometimes." She got up with a snort and started rummaging around the kitchen, until she found the med kit.

"I've notice a lot of tension in the house since I've been deemed fit to re-enter society."

Katiya forced herself to finish off the piece of pie that she'd cut herself, shrugging. "I think I did something wrong." She was scared that mistake had been in Alexei's bed.

"And what do you think you did wrong?" Fiona asked quietly coming back to the table and setting the kit down.

Fiddling with her plate, Katiya shook her head, not sure what to say to that or even where to start. "There are probably a few things I've done wrong." She sighed, deciding to trust this likeable woman and started retelling the story, or at least most of the big points, from when she'd first met Alexei in the warehouse to the adventure this afternoon.

Fiona didn't say anything but just listened. "Interesting." Was the only thing she could think to say once Katiya had finished.

Mouth dry from the flow of words she'd just strung together, the younger woman took a mouthful of water from the pitcher on the table. "I know I've made a mess of things."

"No, well yes. Spending time with a Hunter wasn't the wisest thing, but it would have been worse if you'd taken the poor girl up on her offer, your guts would have been strung around the city like tinsel. Alexei doesn't do jealousy well, its an emotion she hasn't had a lot of experience with, really who's going to make a vampire over a 1000 years old jealous?" Of course Fiona knew of one small human woman who would, she was staring at her.

"I know." She fiddled with the plate, thinking. "I said I'd get her things back and find out who hired the brothers and Ivan to steal them, and I will. I have a name now and a place, so all I need is to be there, find out who they are, and then she can go hurt them to her hearts content."

Vidar came slinking into the kitchen looking annoyed; he plopped down at Katiya's feet with a groan.

Fiona reached down patting the great white hound, it had been a long time since she'd seen him, and that right there told her a lot of how Alexei felt about Katiya. "So, I'm curious why didn't you take the Hunter up on her offer, I can tell at least a small part of you find's her attractive."

She stiffened a little at that. "I don't betray a trust." She'd agreed to Alexei's terms and she'd follow that agreement even if it hurt. Like the scene they'd had in the bedroom after making love. She'd been sore for days after that and it hurt to have it reaffirmed to her what exactly her position was with the master vampire.

Reaching down she also petted the hound. "Sorry Vidar, I caught a carriage home. Hope you didn't run around too much."

The hound huffed but licked her hand showing he wasn't to upset.

Fiona smiled and then pushed the small kit over to Katiya. "She likes you Katiya, she likes you more than how a vampire normally likes a pet."

Cautiously, Katiya raised her eyes from the hound to meet Fiona's, studying them. "She does?" She had a weird way of showing it then.

"Katiya, a pet would be down stairs in chains, maybe recovering from a beating or two. I know I've seen her do that, I've had her do that to me. You disobeyed her, you smell of someone she finds a direct threat and yet you still get to come and go as you please. Vampires don't act like that towards their pets."

"Oh." She blinked, taking that in. That was how Alexei had treated Molly. Still trying to figure out what that meant she took the offered kit. "I should go see to her?" She guessed.

"She's hurt, and she's probably going to be defensive and a big baby, but patching her up should be a good way to break the ice." She reached out patting Katiya's arm. "Vidar why don't you stay here and keep me company?"

The hound's tail thumped happily against the floor, it was nice and warm and he was sure food would be coming soon, even if he had to share with the tiger.

"She's been avoiding me though." Katiya worried, even as she slid out from the table and stood up, holding onto the kit.

"I told you she's a big baby. And..." she looked at Katiya to see if she understood. "She probably doesn't understand what she feels. When she was human..." She hesitated, "She was from my best guess turned near the same time the Roman Empire fell, and humans were more about survival than emotions."

Katiya nodded slowly. She thought she understood. "Thank you Fiona. It's nice to meet you, again."

"Yes, it's nice to meet you under a better situation."

Squaring her shoulders, and rather feeling like she was going into battle, Katiya started through the house in search for its master. She wasn't keen on meeting anyone else, other than Shiro so she tried to move quickly, not lingering long in the hallways. Alexei felt like a dog chasing its tail, she could see the exit wound on her back but couldn't reach it. It was still bleeding sluggishly. With an annoyed growl she rinsed her hands in the glass bowl of hot water, it was already pink with her blood. Wincing she grabbed a cloth and patted the several scratches on her torso and then the self-inflicted stab wound in her front just under her right breast.

"Well it seemed like a good idea." She muttered

"Alexei?" Katiya paused at the door, staring down at the trail of dark red blood that led through the room. That was a lot of blood.

Alexei snarled, if she had been a cat her ears would have laid back. She grabbed the marble counter in front of her as she watched Katiya approach. "Don't come any closer." She closed her eyes; Katiya did smell like that woman. "I can smell her on you." She whispered.

The redhead stopped kit in hand, torn between wanting to help and self-preservation. "She had a message from the people who stole from you." This wasn't going to work; she could see the tenseness and barely controlled fury. "Would it help if I bathed quickly to remove the smell? Then I can help you."

Alexei swallowed and opened her eyes they were tinged with red. "Yes, please."

"Don't leave. Please?" Katiya placed the kit on the floor and started to back towards the bathroom. This was going to be the fastest bath she'd ever taken.

Alexei watched her set the small bag down and slowly back away, trying so hard to do everything correct so not to make the situation spiral down any further than it already was going. She closed her eyes trying to push away her monster; it was hard to find that piece of the human, and the girl she had once been. A girl destroyed with her last human memories waking up thirsty in the grass too weak to move, feeling her hurt flutter in her chest, as her body slowly gave up on life. A body broken and violated in every way, while the soul inside remained defiant to the eventual outcome.

The meek did not inherit, the good did not vanquish evil, and a young girl from the Steppes did not slay the monster. Fingers touched something smooth, wooden, a cup, fallen, discarded just like her, desperately her fingers clasped around it. Hope bloomed as something sloshed inside, weakly she brought it to her lips as something inky and dark spilled over the sides on to the grass, her torn clothing and flesh, and finally she made it to her lips. She didn't see the grass wither and die. She just drank and drank, drank far more liquid than that one simple cup could hold but she kept drinking and then she burned. Becoming a vampire was a dark evolution; bursting from the cocoon that had once been the flesh of a human girl she was remade and new. Some internal organs were shrunk because she would no longer need them, others were larger, she was an all-together different animal than her fellow humans now.

Her soul was shattered and re-knit and the part of her that once held back all the dark thoughts and deeds no longer voiced the cool logic to stop such desires.

Being vampire she had no idea if her soul was now infused with an evil spirit or demon or if it was merely her own dark desires. She had spent many hours debating it with others. Much like their shapeshifting cousins they were animals, but monstrous creatures created out of human pride and hubris, by five men who wanted to be equal



to God. In some respect vampires were every deep, dark desire mankind wanted they were strong, powerful, seductive, and immortal; but they were beasts. She was no different, although she had striven with her age to be a smarter less bloodthirsty animal.

At this moment though she didn't feel her age. She wanted Katiya, with a hunger that almost burned, why she wasn't sure. Katiya was willful, troublesome, independent, and a whole slew of things that made her a bad pet and would make her an awful child of her blood. But she wanted the redhead nonetheless. Anger burned nearly as bright as her want; when she thought about that other woman with the air of mystery, and dangerous appeal, she'd met hunters before and didn't have to be up close to know, touching her Katiya.

The thought of dark hands on Katiya, made her unconsciously bare her fangs in a snarl. Those jealous thoughts she'd never admit too, pushed her over the edge and she broke away from counter and in a blur of motion had Katiya caught up in her embrace. In a quick move she had the woman spun around both hands pinned behind her back. Alexei's eyes were dark, and glittered dangerously. She liked that, it was a slave pose, one that pushed certain attributes out into the forefront. She walked Katiya backwards into the wall pinning her between two immovable objects, her eyes never leaving the tops of creamy flesh that were being put on display.

"I can smell her on your lips." Her voice was husky, dangerous teetering on a knife's edge. "Did you like it when she touched you? When she kissed you? Or did you just wish it was me touching you kissing you?"

Those glittering predator's eyes glanced up now watching the way Katiya's pulse hammered in her throat and the dilation of the eyes.

A human girl who had never been or had the experience of love could bring no understanding to the dark, razored soul of the vampire she had become.

Alexei had moved so quickly that Katiya's merely human eyes couldn't track her. She was just suddenly captive, hands' clasped behind her in a grip that might as well have been bands of iron. "She kissed me." The redhead gasped, not able to move. "But you're a better kisser."

Alexei gazed at Katiya, her head cocked a little to the left as if judging the truth of her words.

"You are." Katiya's voice was a little louder this time.

She shifted her grip so both of Katiya's were held with one of her hands, giving one of her hands freedom. "Better maybe, but wanted is the question." The fingers of her free hand came up stroking Katiya's eyebrow, down the side of her face and to the red lips that had been so recently kissed.

Blue eyes narrowed and Katiya's lips thinned. "How many more tests am I going to have to pass? I thought I already proved that when I was with you in your bed."

Her fingertips lingered for a moment before wandering down to the front of Katiya's dress. Her eyes narrowed at the harsh words leveled at her. She growled and easily she tore the fabric exposing more of the young woman's breasts to her eyes. "You may have been in my bed but I'm not certain you want to be there. Not five minutes after we're done and you're talking about that hunter."

This was interesting and Katiya wasn't sure yet if she liked it. The scary part was she wasn't sure if that would matter at all to Alexei right now. "I thought you wanted the truth." She whispered, shaking slightly.

"What's the truth then Katiya?" Her eyes came up for a moment before going back down to the flesh before her. She could hear Katiya's heart pick up it's beating, like a rabbit caught in a snare. Corsets were such evil delightful things, to wear one was a pain but to view a lovely woman in one was delightful, it practically served a woman's breasts up to be devoured.

"That I chose to be here." This wasn't the time to tell her about the Tereza's offer to run away, she wasn't suicidal.

Alexei looked up again briefly for a second there was a look of insecurity in her eyes. Her iron grip relaxed but she didn't let go. She leaned down kissing the pulse point on Katiya's neck her naked flesh pressing against Katiya's own flesh and some parts against the soft cloth of her dress.

The human woman tilted her head, baring her neck and her breathing hitched as Alexei's lips touched her skin. She swallowed, knowing this was a bad idea. "You wanted me to bathe and you're still bleeding."

"Even now... now that you can see and understand what kind of monster I am. Do you still choose this?" She went still, like a statue she stood her lips still gently pressed to skin waiting for the answer.

She ignored the question; yes she was still bleeding, staining the floor and Katiya's dress. Yes the young woman still stank of that Hunter, and she wanted that gone replaced with her own scent. But she wanted to know, she didn't know why, because she'd never cared what Molly, Shiro, or even Fiona had wanted.

That wasn't much of a choice to make, even now. "I haven't changed my mind." This was insanity; she should be running from here screaming if she had any sense. Too bad she'd never had much interest in sense.

Alexei nearly sagged in relief with the answer; she kissed Katiya's neck, chin, and then

her lips. Kissed her lips over and over again to remove the stain left by that hunter.

The kisses were nice, nice enough that Katiya found her eyes closing and her lips parting. Encouraging them to deepen as they went. The shower could wait. Testing, she tried to free an arm, finding it really unfair that she couldn't touch when Alexei seemed to be able to do anything she wanted.

Alexei purred as she was allowed entry into Katiya's mouth. She allowed the redhead to pull her arms free, with her own hands now free she brought them up to fondle the breasts practically served up for her pleasure.

Katiya arched her back, pressing up into that touch. "The corset" She gasped, interrupted again kissing. "Off."

Alexei blinked, as the kissing was interrupted, she growled but did as commanded. She enveloped Katiya in her body so she could reach around and rip open the ties. "I'll buy you another one." She growled out.

"Hate them." Katiya gasped, struggling to get her arms out of the cursed thing and was so very happy when it fell aside, torn and tattered. She was going to burn that thing.

A naked Alexei was a wonderful thing, and the smaller woman was taking full advantage of the situation by stroking that wonderful body while she kept Alexei's lips busy. Her mind was shutting down; all that existed was the so very nice press of flesh against flesh. She'd been sore after the first time, now to see if that would happen again.

"I think you're sexy in them." Alexei breathed out, she continued to kiss Katiya her hands shoving the dress down and out of her way. Her hands grasped around Katiya's waist and lifted her up. "Wrap your legs around me." She urged between kisses.

Stepping out of the dress, she did as asked, wrapping her legs around Alexei's waist. Pressing herself up against the bare flesh and shuddering.

Alexei's brain couldn't think beyond what they were doing. She had punished her body too much this past week. She should be slow and gentle, take them back to the bed. But she couldn't get that to sink in to her brain. She still had Katiya trapped between her and the wall, a position of frantic need and want; lovers saying good-bye, saying hello, soldiers and sailors off to fight wars or seeing friendly ports.

This was much more frantic than the last time, different, but good. Katiya shuddered as she was lifted so very easily and pressed between Alexei and the wall. "More." She whispered, hands clutching at Alexei's side. "Please..." she wasn't above begging; she'd do begging.

The vampire easily held Katiya up between her and the wall. She licked and kissed all

the flesh she could get too. She inserted a hand between their bodies finding that Katiya's body did not lie; she wanted this to be here with her. Her fingers found her hot and ready, for a moment her brain betrayed her, whispering this was not for her it was for the hunter. Her eyes clenched shut and she rested her head between Katiya's breasts for a moment.

Something changed and Katiya stopped her own kissing and teasing Alexei's breast with one hand. "What is it?" She whispered, finding an earlobe that she could suck on then nip at. She didn't want to stop, she was so wet and Alexei's fingers so close.

Katiya's whispered words penetrated her ears and she blinked and pushed everything away but the moment she was currently in. "It's nothing." She whispered. "You're so wet and ready." She shivered and let desire overwhelm her again. "Mine." She growled out next to warm flesh as her fingers slid inside.

Alexei said that a lot, Katiya noticed the mine thing. Someday they'd probably have to talk about that, or whatever it was vampires did. "Yours." She moaned, thrusting her hips up to meet the fingers.

#####3###3

Despite her supernatural strength eventually Alexei couldn't keep them both upright and they collapsed onto a heap on the floor. She made sure that she hit first with Katiya falling on top of her.

She was still for a moment, her heart she could feel it actually pounding in her chest and she sucked air into her lungs.

Katiya laid there, her head on a naked breast, still trying to catch her breath. That hadn't exactly been how she'd seen this evening going. "You're still bleeding." Her voice sounded strange even to her, hoarse from exertion and screaming.

"Okay." Alexei agreed.

"Just so we're clear on that." Katiya shifted, trying to get some of the red hair out of the way. She smiled, kissing exposed skin.

She blinked and drew Katiya down to her, wrapping her in her arms; one hand pushed back the damp red hair. "You didn't pass out this time, going to have to try harder next time." She whispered against the scar tissue on Katiya's neck before baring her fangs and letting them slip delicately into the flesh.

"You tried really hard." She murmured before stiffening in reflex, and then relaxed, eyes fluttering shut, as the sharp pain from the bite faded.

Alexei kept the bite shallow only piercing the skin enough to let a small trickle of blood

flow into her mouth. One mouthful then another and she drew out licking the wound like a cat with a saucer of milk until it closed.

"Your back." Katiya whispered. "Lyov gave me a kit; I should try to stop that bleeding."

"Its okay. Better now." She could feel her body growing warm and flush now that she had fed. Her heart rate was reducing but it was still an interesting sensation to have it hammer in her chest almost like she was human again.

"Then are you going to tell me why you were bleeding everywhere?" Katiya wasn't sure how far she could probe, not after the last little while of being out in the cold, exiled.

"Hmmm? I stabbed myself, couldn't get the little bastard off my back, entry wound is a little below your head. Haven't been eating." She murmured still feeling sated and content; her eyes were nearly closed.

There it was again, Katiya shook her head a little, that weird sense of a conversation that was so far out of the ordinary that there really wasn't any polite way to answer. She shifted enough to see the entry wound though, a dark red angry scab, but it was healing.

"What can I do?" She asked instead.

Alexei opened her eyes puzzled, "Do?" She was still stunned when Katiya wanted to help her. Because when she looked at the woman, there was no agenda in her eyes, she generally wanted to help to be helpful.

"Do." Katiya agreed. "I keep trying to tell you, I'm useful." She shifted them around, grinning at the surprised look on Alexei's face as she straddled the vampire, deciding it was her turn to be on the cold marble floor. "I'll find out who stole from you tomorrow. But is there something else I can do?"

Alexei leered, "Oh I can think of a few things." Her mind going into the gutter now that there was a very naked redhead on top of her.

Blue eyes instantly went darker at that leer and she shifted so that more flesh was pressing against naked flesh. "That can be arranged." Sliding a hand up the blonde's chest.

#####3#3

Katiya was very happy that they had made their way to the bed before she'd passed out and Alexei had succumbed to the rising sun. The naked redhead slipped out of the bed, leaving Alexei still in her catatonic state in the middle of the bed.

Once again clothes had been laid out for her near the door. She really wished she

could understand how Lyov always seemed to know what was going on around the manor. She wasn't that happy about the dress that was awaiting her, but since she expected to go into the city during daylight it probably was a good idea.

A little suffering as she got into the corset and the dress, then she made her way downstairs, heading automatically towards the kitchen.

Still enjoying the pleasant hazy happy feeling from the night before, she entered the kitchen, smiling as she spotted Fiona and Warren. "Morning..." she paused, taking in the angle of the sunlight. "Er, afternoon."

Fiona was laughing at something Warren had said to her and she reached out tweaking his beard, but the man didn't mind at all. He quickly blushed though when Katiya came in, somewhat embarrassed to be acting like a school boy.

"Aren't you two cute." She smiled, helping herself to a cup of tea as she made Warren blush more.

"Oh good morning dear heart." Fiona smiled broadly her eyes however, took in all the little details of how Katiya looked. "Honey?" She asked immediately getting the large man's attention. "Why don't you go tend to the green house while I finish up in here?"

"Uh, um, of course dear." He said confused but went out through the door into the hot house.

Katiya looked confused as well. "Is everything all right? I'm sorry I teased you."

"Oh its fine. He's just a man and they have delicate sensibilities when it comes to certain things. And you my dear, look like a woman who has been well and thoroughly..." She paused a moment testing out the right word. "Well, I guess you broke the ice."

Katiya couldn't stop herself from smiling, she tried hiding it by taking a sip of tea, but she was pretty sure she wasn't fooling anybody. "Maybe. She was hurt."

"Thoroughly ravished then." Fiona said with a mischievous grin. "Hurt was she, did you kiss it and make it better?"

The younger redhead flushed almost as red as her hair. She rallied though. "I had to help. Hopefully that means Alexei won't be ignoring me anymore." That would be good.

"Always good to lend a helping hand - or two, and maybe a tongue." She chuckled.

Katiya nearly choked on her tea. "You're in a good mood this morning; I'd have to say I'm not the only one who had a good evening."

Fiona calmed her humor at the poor girl's expense. "It was a far better morning in my case. So are you feeling better about your place in the house?" The older redhead leaned over and gently pulled the neck of the dress down just a tad inspecting the markings there. Alexei couldn't have been that mad the girl only seemed to still have the original scars, and she was up and about obviously not drained to exhaustion.

Care was not something Alexei was good at when she was in one of her destructive moods.

"Yes I am." She let Fiona see her neck. "She only bit a little, she didn't take much. I feel fine, just hungry." She bit her lip, and then decided again to trust her. "I was afraid, she was... on edge when I found her. But she didn't even let me wash before..." Her cheeks went red again.

"Oh, oh." Fiona sat back and looked embarrassed. "I'm so sorry, I should have realized you would have smelled like that woman. I'm so sorry Katiya."

She shrugged, reaching for a piece of scone that had been left out. "She can be scary when she wants to, but she didn't hurt me."

"If she wasn't feeding, yes she can get scary, the longer they go without food, the less and less human they become. It slowly strips away from them. But you're okay? She didn't force you to do anything you didn't want?" Alexei was normally very sensitive to that, but the truth was Alexei was a vampire, and social norms for humans weren't really the standard for vampires.

Memories from the second round of physical activity flashed through her mind and Katiya shook her head fast, before her face could go red again. "No." She smiled, a little shyly. "I enjoyed it. Is that bad?"

Fiona smiled, trying to be reassuring, and set a warm hand down on Katiya's. "No dear, it's not. I bet you've been led to believe that enjoyment of sex is a sin unless it's done a certain way, with your husband, and all that. On the other hand maybe you aren't that girl; you know there's more to life than the surface, because you're a little sneak thief. You've had tastes of the dark side of society. Some of those are brutal and harsh, and other's seductive. Perhaps you were embarrassed how much the hidden world appealed to you?"

The pleasant sexual haze was going and Katiya frowned. She'd been doing such a good job of avoiding thinking of things. "I've always known I wasn't part of what people think of as normal. My father taught me how to survive, but he always said we couldn't trust normal people, they wouldn't understand us, and they'd hurt us. After he died," her voice cracked a little "I tried to be normal."

She shrugged, ignoring the dull ache it always left in her chest when she talked about

her father. "I like women." She whispered, not able to even say that without looking around to see who was listening.

Fiona kept her face neutral but gently patted Katiya's hand. "Is that the first time you've admitted it to yourself?"

Shaking her head, Katiya looked down. "No, I knew." She'd had a quick kiss with that girl in the market before everything had changed. "I just... haven't told anyone else." Even her father, he wouldn't have understood, she'd known that.

"Ah, so this is the first time you've ever said it out loud to another person. Well considering some of the things that have gone on in this house, that is a far smaller sin."

"So you agree with the priests then." Katiya looked up, troubled eyes watching Fiona. "That it's a sin."

"I'm sorry; I could have said that better. No, Katiya, I don't think it's a sin. I was born before the church was even a glimmer in the world's eye. So I don't understand their fascination with sex and the banning of it."

"Oh." She relaxed, relieved. She didn't want this kind woman to think she was a horrible person. "Thank you. That was hard."

"You're very brave woman, I know that wasn't easy. But know no one will judge you here. Besides I completely understand the appeal of the fairer sex." She gave another one of those mysterious smiles.

Katiya blinked and then grinned. "I guess you do." She kept forgetting how long Fiona had been with Alexei. "I should go, I need to get into the city before it gets dark and half the day is already gone."

She set aside the empty teacup and stood, pausing. "Fiona, have you seen Shiro today?"

"Not since she came back with Vidar last night, the poor dear is depressed, I can tell." The older woman got up from the table, "Let me get you some bread and cheese to take with you."

"Thank you that would be delicious." she trailed along behind the other redhead. "Will you look in on her? She was hurt by the vampire master of Alexei's."

"Karl?" Fiona's voice took on a fearful tone.

"You know him?"



"He's a monster." She said firmly. "A real sadist that one, all his children are the same, stay away from them. Alexei may have her moments where her vampiric nature gets the better of her, but he revels in being the master over life and death."

She gathered up a hunk of cheese and bread. "He delights in punishing Alexei, because I think deep down he knows she's better than him in every way, why she lets him hurt her I'll never understand, but then again we mere mortals aren't allowed in on the Vampire Council."

"He hurt Shiro, taking blood from her. She hasn't told me much but she's upset. Will you check on her?" Katiya worried about the quiet woman. She'd think about the vampire council later.

"Of course dear, I'll check in on her." She handed the bundle to Katiya, "Now be careful."

Katiya's grin turned into a teasing smile as she took the bundle. "Yes mother."

"Hopefully someday." Fiona said wistfully.

"Hopefully someday what?" Vidar said looking very human and dressed in a sheet he had borrowed off the bed he had used the night before. He was rumpled and sleepy looking, one of the twins, he had no idea which one, had found him fascinating enough to take for a romp before sunrise.

"Good of you to remember clothes of a sort when you're in man flesh." Fiona teased the Hell Hound.

"Good of you to get up." Katiya chimed in. "We've got things to do."

"It's been pointed out to me that women don't like my manly bits dangling around." He gave a long-suffering sigh. "Of course we do, because you can't just enjoy a fun day of doing nothing."

Fiona chuckled. "Welcome to the modern age."

Vidar muttered something that could have been, 'the modern age sucks'.

"Besides, I'm not as long lived as you, Vidar." Katiya smiled innocently. "Shall we go, or did you want to put on clothes first?"

"Hmmm, probably go as a dog if you show up with another person your shady underworld contact may freak out."

He yawned again. "I'll meet you out front; I'm just going to go put the sheet back."

Katiya watched him go then turned and raised an eyebrow at Fiona. "I'm still not sure what he is, are you?"

"He's a stubborn pain in my ass, but he's a Hell Hound, and he considers you I think like a sister or daughter, regardless you're pack to him, and that is a great complement. Okay now off with you, and do be careful, Alexei will raze the city to the ground if anything were to happen to you."

Katiya gave a disbelieving snort at that. This was a (who knew how old) vampire they were talking about and Katiya knew where she was on the food chain. "I'm sure she would survive."

"She would survive, yes. But doesn't mean she doesn't care about you. Vampires are different from humans they show their caring in brutal and sometimes vicious ways. Okay off with you, and try to be home before dark."

"Thank you Fiona, for everything." She hefted the packet of cheese and bread, impulsively giving her a hug before heading for the door.

Only once she had gone did Warren emerge from his pretend chores in the hothouse. "Everything all right?"

Fiona smiled and walked over hugging him tightly, before giving him a kiss on his bearded cheek. "Yes, I think it might be." Depended on Alexei of course, perhaps the vampire could learn to love. She was capable of caring, but Fiona knew she really didn't understand love.

#####3#3

"I can't believe I'm wearing a dress to this meeting." Katiya grumbled to the hound that was pacing alongside her. It seemed odd to be doing something that wasn't proper work dressed as a proper lady. At least she wasn't getting any odd looks during as she moved through the afternoon crowds. Even Vidar wasn't drawing too many curious glances as they headed towards the notary's office.

"Stupid society dress codes." She mumbled giving a glare to a passing man who blinked in surprise and stepped away.

Vidar didn't care; he only wore clothes because people got weird around him if he didn't. He preferred to go naked himself.

"You probably just walk around naked all the time don't you?" She said to the hound, ignoring a curious look from another passerby.

The hound yipped in response.

"Lucky." The redhead whispered, opening the door to the shop to the sound of the little bell dinging as she did so.

A young man looked up from the ledger he was examining. "Can I help you?"

Katiya paused for a second, she'd been expecting the young man she'd seen here last time she'd visited. There were more people involved than she'd thought. "I have an appointment."

The man just stared at her expecting more, when she remained silent he rolled his eyes in annoyance. "Are you here to see Mr. Onaslava, or Mr. Gorskji?"

Cursing herself for not looking more carefully at the slip of paper, she'd meant to but Alexei had distracted her, Katiya took it out. "Um... Mr. Gorskji."

"Right, I'll let him know you are here, Mrs.?"

"Katiya." She smiled. "It's just Katiya."

Vidar wondered if he could eat the pompous ass of a man, he was a nobody, a pencil pusher.

"Don't even think it." She whispered out of the side of her mouth at the hound as his lips curled up to reveal the tips of fangs. "We're here to play nice."

The hound huffed and lay down

After a moment the young man came back. "Yes, Mr. Gorskji will see you now. Follow me please."

"Thank you." She was on her best behavior as she followed along behind him. Her eyes were constantly moving though, taking in the surroundings and examining potential entry points incase she had to pay a late night visit. Her father's training was, as always, with her as she imagined the best ways to break in.

He stopped in front of a door and then knocked. A muffled, "come in" was heard.

"I have a Katiya, here to see you."

He said softly as he opened the door.

"Very good, please leave us Peter."

With a sniff of disdain the young man left.

Katiya smirked a little as the officious young man left them. "Good afternoon Mr. Gorskji."

The office was shadowed and a thick, heavyset man sat behind the desk. He studied her, unconsciously playing with his thick handle bar mustache. "Nice to meet you Mrs. Katiya, please have a seat." His eyes widened as he spotted Vidar at her heels.

"He's with me." She smiled pleasantly, smoothing out her dress as she took a seat in the offered chair. "Thank you for the invitation."

"Yes. Well, it seems that I cannot get what my client desires, and I pride myself on going above and beyond to make sure the people I serve are happy. I understand you can help make my client happy."

Katiya didn't know the person sitting across from her, which meant either he was new to the fencing and acquisitions, doubtful, or he moved in completely different circles than her father. "For a hefty price I can get what your client wants." She agreed.

"I'm interested in how you came to know of us, normally I don't deal directly with the... uh... workers, we deal with middle men who hire who ever they need to get the job done." He leaned forward as much as his gut would allow.

"I have a lot of friends." Less than when her father was alive, but it was close to the truth. "I make a point of working directly for the people who hire me. Middle men tend to get sloppy and dangerous."

He nodded. "Very well. We will try this." Because he was desperate, if he didn't get the key and cup soon, he had no illusions that everyone in his office would be dead.

This was going to have to be done carefully. "I'd need to know, exactly, what it is that your client wants." Her mind was whirling, trying to figure out how to find out who the client was.

"My client would like a key and a cup from the residence of Alexei Petrova. Will that be a problem?"

"It shouldn't be." She frowned slightly. "What kind of key and cup?"

"The key opens the door where the cup is hidden, that's all I can tell you, the cup is rumored to be simple, unremarkable, and carved from wood, it holds within it a dark black liquid and it never goes empty."

That didn't sound like a normal cup. "That shouldn't be hard to find. What would I get in return?"

"What do you want?"

"To meet your client." She smiled.

He made a face. "I cannot promise that, but I will do what I can."

"Tell your client that's the deal. He gets the cup and key in exchange for a meeting. No meeting, no cup and key."

He steepled his fingers in front of his face. "There is a rumor that Alexei is a follower of Sapho, you may try that route to get close to her. Just a suggestion." He nodded. "I will pass that a long."

The redhead patted Vidar on the head and stood up, smiling at the fat man. Now if only she could sneak in after dark and take a good look around. That would have to wait until she got Alexei to allow her to go out after dark of course; she wasn't going to risk disobeying the vampire on that one. "I'll wait for your client's response then."

"If you would return tomorrow, I will have an answer for you."

"Until then." She left, waiting until they were outside of the office before talking to the white haired hound. "Now to go see if Alexei will let me investigate this place tonight."

She'd mentally mapped out everything she could see and a little breaking and entering might prove informative.

[Continued.](#)

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## ~ The Secret History of Vampires ~

by Zee and Windstar

Enjoy and remember to send feedback to [Zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:Zeeamy@gmail.com) and [Adarkbow@yahoo.com](mailto:Adarkbow@yahoo.com)

### Part 6

Alexei woke a little before sunrise, as was her habit. She lay still in the bed letting her

mind slowly wake up. The space next to her was cold Katiya was long gone. She would have to order the girl to stay in bed and rest; she hadn't missed the dark circles forming under those blue eyes. They hadn't talked about this meeting she was going to, and she wished she had taken the time to talk about it a little bit. It would have been nice to at least know where she would be, but she would have Vidar with her.

She got out of bed with a wince, the muscles aching and throbbing around the self-inflicted stab wound. Thoughts heavy and ponderous in her mind as she got dressed in a soft cotton robe, but she felt more centered and less reactionary. It was amazing, she thought, that she hadn't hurt Katiya. She hadn't been taking care of herself and going without blood so soon after being hurt like Karl had hurt her, had been bad thinking. The longer without blood the more the monster within came out, when fed it was sated and purred sleepily like a kitten inside. She padded silently to the bathroom examining herself critically in the mirror. Gray eyes stared back at her from the mirror, she looked well, human, and her features were soft and her eyes less feral.

The tattoo snake was brilliant green against her pale skin as it peeked out from the robe and, her eyes narrowed, as she looked closer before looking down at her chest. Just to the right of her breastbone over her heart was perfect impression of teeth. The bite mark was almost hidden by the tattoo but not quite. For a moment she felt indignant and angry, how dare a little human girl mark her like that, her face shifted becoming dark and threatening before melting back away as she calmed down.

She reached up and touched the mark, this could insinuate all sorts of things, especially the fact it wasn't healing, and it wasn't healing because she didn't want it too. At least subconsciously she didn't, and she wasn't certain she liked the ramifications of such a thing. She was roughly 1400 years old, give or take, born as the Roman Empire fell. She had fucked all sorts of beautiful women and a few men; had pets more subservient, behaved, and less willful than Katiya could ever hope to be.

She sighed and rubbed her temples, but Katiya adapted never blinking an eye, and in her need to help and be faithful she willfully strode through the world never taking in the factors of risk and danger. That self-sacrificing need to help and that independent willful streak made the young woman, more beautiful than any woman Alexei had met, she admitted to herself. Alexei felt very uncomfortable after the few minutes of self-reflection that she had taken, and moved her mind on to other things. She would take the day off from hunting she needed to work with Katiya, the girl had been running around ill-prepared and under educated for the world in which she was trafficking about in.

Feeling better with a plan in mind she went to the doors of her rooms, and called for Lyov. In a second the man was there.

"Yes, Mistress?"

"When the twins awaken send them up, Stepan as well. I will not be going out this

evening."

"Very good, milady. Anything else?"

Alexei paused, Katiya would surely come back to her rooms, or not. Alexei had dismissed her rather heavily the last time. "Um yes. Send Katiya up as soon as she's returned."

"Of course."

Then the toad like man was back on his way downstairs.

Alexei sighed and went and got a book from her desk to read to help pass the time until Katiya returned.

She found her bloodied and damaged coat and tossed it away and then checked her short sword taking the time to clean it. The markings on the blade gleamed in the soft light, she had no idea what they meant, they were in a language she'd never learned and one now gone from the world. It had been a gift from the demon King Oberon for the killing of the Huntsman. Fiona had once translated it the best she could, 'May your blade always be sharp'. And she'd never had to take a sharpening stone to the metal.

With that done she again scooped up her book and returned to her bed.

#####3##3

The sun had barely disappeared behind the horizon, leaving a scarlet hued sunset, when Katiya knocked on the door to Alexei's room. Lyov had bluntly informed her that the mistress requested her upstairs, so she'd left Vidar to his own devices and hurried up the stairs.

"Alexei?"

"Come in." Alexei said looking at the door wondering why Katiya was knocking, she'd never bothered to do it before.

The human woman came in, obviously pleased with herself and happy in general. "You're looking better."

"Sleep will do that." She waited a moment, and then asked. "So what has you so excited?"

"I had a meeting. If I agree to steal certain items, I will meet the person in charge."

"What if this person is a vampire or some other unworldly creature?" Alexei asked.

Rolling over onto her side, she propped her head up on her hand and watched Katiya climb up onto the bed.

She settled into the spot she'd slept in, enthusiasm dampened a little. "They'll still want me to steal the key and cup that they want. I could find out more if you let me go break into the notary's office later tonight?" She asked, hopefully.

"I'll think about it." She said not promising anything. It was odd to not be frantically moving about, sitting still and waiting for Katiya had been hard. She reached with one hand and pushed a strand of hair back, tucking it behind Katiya's ear.

"So did they give you information on this key and cup they want you to steal?"

Blue eyes focused on that hand and Katiya's cheeks flushed lightly as an errant memory of that hand doing things to her came back. "A key and a cup that's never empty. He couldn't tell me anything else about it."

Alexei's hand froze in surprise for a second. "Interesting, and what about the key, that's kind of vague?"

Shrugging, Katiya shifted closer. "This Mr. Gorskji didn't seem to know much about it, except that the key was needed to get to the cup." She smiled slowly. "He suggested I try to seduce you since you're apparently rumored to be a follower of Sapho."

Alexei laughed. "Really, how interesting. Although, I'm not all that fond of Sapho I find her poetry rather, blah. Of course I find all poetry rather boring. So much for thinking I was discrete in my personal life. Apparently Alexei Petrova is the defiler of virgins, and sullier of all fair dames and damsels." She joked.

"Yes, defiler of virgins who throw themselves at you." Katiya shook her head in mock horror. "What a rough existence."

"It is, but someone has to do it, so I have gladly thrown myself into that cause." She chuckled.

Her face became more serious, "I do have the cup they are talking about and it is impossible to get to without the key. What is even more ironic is that they have the key already, but don't know it."

"What?" Katiya sat up, eyeing Alexei. "When did they get it?"

"The brothers stole it from my office, it's my signet ring, and it's also the key." She gave an embarrassed grin. "I thought I was being clever."

"Oh." Katiya blinked, and then slowly smiled. "If it's not the key that they thought they were getting, it might still be at Mr. Gorskji's office. We could try to find it if you wanted



to go out tonight?"

"Fine we can go out later. But I'm going with you this time, and if that Hunter shows up, I'm breaking her arms." She said firmly.

Katiya winced; she'd have to make sure they stayed away from the hunter's lair. "All right. Maybe this time I won't have to dispose of a night watchman's body?" She dared to tease about the first time she'd met the vampire while breaking and entering.

Alexei rolled her eyes. "You did a good job, besides he was an asshole, attacking me while I was passed out from blood loss."

She sounded rather indignant, about the whole thing, it hadn't been her fault he'd woken the hurt, resting vampire, which needed food badly.

"Yes, I'm sure he regrets it too." It was a struggle to keep her face straight.

"Better him than you." She said and rolled over onto her back stretching.

"True." Katiya watched the stretch with enjoyment. "You remind me of a cat when you do that." A big deadly feline!

Alexei raised an eyebrow in question at that. "Vampire, house cat, vampire, house cat. I'm not certain I see a connection." Actually she saw a lot, but it was rather undignified.

"Aww, did I offend you? I'm sorry." She didn't sound sorry the smile didn't help either. "How about if I said a big cat, like a tiger?" This might explain her tendency to keep two as pets, houseguests, whatever they were.

Alexei smiled at that. "Hmmm, that's okay then. You know I was once known as the Tiger of the Steppes." That had been a long time indeed; time as a petty warlord marauding the grassy plains.

"Was this before or after you became a vampire?" She knew so little about Alexei's past or even the world she lived in.

"After. I was a very boring human girl. I hunted though, because my father had no sons and I was the oldest of his children other than that I sometimes worked with our healer and helped her."

Alexei rolled over onto her side looking at Katiya. "My people were nomads; we followed the herds from hunting ground to hunting ground. For the most part we were peaceful."

"Was it hard?" Katiya frowned, trying to figure out how to ask her question. "Changing into a vampire?" The stories always seemed to skip over that.

"Yes, but I was dying anyways. I was lying in the tall grasses only aware of my heart beating in my chest trying to frantically pump blood I didn't have. It hurt, and it scared me to feel it stagger and jump growing weaker and weaker. Then there was pain at first that was welcomed because it meant I was alive, but it didn't stop. Every part of you is remade and then spat out new."

"That doesn't sound pleasant." Katiya shivered a little trying to imagine feeling her heart slow and stop. "Do you miss being human?"

"At first I did. My father drove me from the tribe, I attacked and killed a little boy when my hunger over came me. I followed them for years hiding in the dark, leaving them animals I had killed. I missed belonging. Then one day they were gone."

"Gone?" Katiya shifted closer until their legs were barely touching.

"During the day while I slept another tribe came upon them and killed them all." That is when she became the monster or tiger of the steppes she had found that clan and killed them all. Left their heads on spears and other gruesome reminders for others to find.

"I'm sorry. It's never easy losing your family." She inched a little bit closer, laying her head down on the pillow.

"No its not. That's when I stopped wanting to be human. The plains were vast and without the population we have now, yet they murdered a whole clan just for a spot of ground when they could have gone anywhere and found an empty hunting ground."

She growled a bit the old hurt of her last ties to the human world being cut from her still stung.

"I guess vampires have a reason for cruelty we're monsters, but humans are blessed with the free will god gave them to do good or bad and most of the time they choose bad."

The human woman placed a hand on Alexei's chest, wondering at the pain that still lingered so many centuries later. "So time doesn't heal everything. I knew that saying was shit." She smiled wanly. "I've always known that humans could be evil just for the sake of being evil. That's how it's always been."

Alexei just nodded in agreement, she felt Katiya's hand on her skin where her robe had fallen open, acutely. "You should go change. I had Lyov bring you some more... comfortable clothes that you can move around in. Also in black, a color I guess you're fond of."

"Black is good. Helps you hide." Her smile was bitter sweet as she heard her father's voice saying the same thing. "I'll go change. It might be too early to go to the notary's

office though." It was only a little after dark, not the deep of night that would help to guarantee an empty office.

"We're not going there yet." She sat up readjusting her robe.

Black pants and a dark gray close knit sweater were waiting for Katiya, both of which were more form fitting than she was used to. "I don't want to know how Lyov knows my sizes so well." She fluffed out her hair after pulling on the sweater and looked expectantly at the beautiful woman, getting used to the way the sight of her was always stunning. "Are we going somewhere else?"

"Lyov knows your size because Lyov knows everything that goes on in this house." Alexei said standing up and walking over to Katiya, she circled the young woman once, slowly, nodding in approval. "I have been lacking in your education of the world you have entered and that will be rectified today."

"I thought that was what Matvey was doing?" She'd had several sessions with the young man, whom she kept forgetting was a vampire until he said something that brought it sharply back into focus.

"Yes, but knowing him, he's spent most of his time teaching you to read and write putting off your other inquiries because they make him uncomfortable. Besides when is the last time you actually had a lesson with him, he's too busy doing Sergei's job."

It had been a few nights since she'd seen him and Katiya nodded, grimacing. "Reading and writing are not my favorites so far." In fact it was maddeningly slow learning.

Alexei nodded as she scanned her wardrobe. She chose some pants and a shirt and started to get dressed. "And since you've already put yourself in bodily harm with the supernatural world... I've been lax in my duty to properly train you."

"I didn't get in trouble on purpose." Firmly she kept her eyes on Alexei's face. Well, mostly anyway.

"Of course not." Alexei readily agreed as she finished buttoning her shirt.

Katiya's face reddened as she found herself staring at those fingers.

Turning she raised an eyebrow at the young woman. "Do I want to know where you're thoughts are?" She teased.

"I could show you?" Katiya replied, eyebrow rising in challenge even as she felt the blush deepen.

"Show me? By all means, Katiya." Alexei said grinning.

Katiya laughed, shaking her head as Alexei called her bluff. She should have known better. "Later?" She wasn't sure she was up for another session so soon after the afternoon together.

"Mmmm, I'm sure you can talk me into later." Alexei said walking over and slowly kissing the young woman. Yes, she definitely liked how Katiya tasted without the stink of that other woman. Pulling back she said quietly, "Although I should make you sleep." The redhead swayed a little, eyes taking a moment to refocus after the enjoyable kiss. "Hmm? Why? I feel good." She probably should feel exhausted, but she felt almost energized.

"I'm keeping you up late and you're running around during the day, so I'm not sure when you're sleeping. Are you sleeping at all?"

Katiya blinked. "I passed out when we..." She trailed off, blushing hard again. "Earlier." That was kind of sleeping. "And I slept some the night before. I just don't feel as tired as I did when I worked in the factory."

"Hmmm." Alexei mused looking at Katiya. "You're getting dark circles but it could be my blood starting to effect you."

"I'll sleep after we go to the notary's office. I promise." Hopefully naked in Alexei's bed, with an equally naked vampire. Katiya's lips curled into a smile at that thought.

"And no rushing off during the day, you'll just stay in bed next to me? Well, I suppose getting food is okay, but you'll rest?"

"As you wish." Katiya tried to look demure and failing.

Alexei snorted in amusement. "Very well." She gave the young woman another quick kiss to her lips before stepping back. "Alright let us teach you how to deal with the monsters in the dark."

"I thought you were against any human killing a vampire?"

Alexei snorted, "Yes, but you're not human, you're my pet. And I view this as you being able to protect me if I'm under attack or something." She said offhand.

That sounded weak to Katiya's ears, although she didn't say so.

There was a knock at the door, and Alexei muttered, "Come in." as she slipped her feet into sturdy black boots.

The twins entered and hovered in the den just outside the bedroom door. "Mistress." They ducked their heads, waiting.

Katiya blinked, almost afraid she was seeing double for an instant. This was the first time she'd seen both together, standing still, in the same room. It was... disconcerting to see two so beautiful women standing so perfectly still, waiting for Alexei's command.

"Nada, and Niki. You know Katiya."

The twin's blinked and nodded hesitantly. "Yes, the chaos bringer. We've heard much about her."

Chaos bringer? The redhead looked over at Alexei, wondering if she really was that much trouble to the vampire.

Alexei raised an eyebrow at the statement but let it go. "Yes, anyways. I will not be joining you tonight in hunting. You'll be on your own, but if you want a third take Stepan."

Nada stepped forward and Alexei mirrored her, stepping forward and she raised a hand stroking Nada's face. "It won't be the same, we've enjoyed the hunt with you Alpha."

Alexei just smiled a quick upturn of her lips. "We'll hunt again, I have a feeling those invaders are just testing us so to speak."

The twin who stayed back nodded. "We will kill any who sniff around our territory tonight."

There was something animalistic in these two, Katiya thought, watching the interaction with keen interest. She shivered a little, imagining both faces filled with the joy of the hunt, running their prey to ground.

"I know you will." Alexei agreed.

Nada tried to press closer to Alexei but the vampire growled and the feral vampire crouched down and then retreated.

"Do as I command. Now go hunt."

Twin heads nodded and then were gone.

"Do they always move so quickly?" Katiya asked, the second she realized the room was empty once again.

"Yes, they are like children probably, vampires that should not have been made. But their mother made a rather, uh, convincing argument."

There was a story there and Katiya's curiosity flared with desire to hear it, but first she

had a more pressing question. "You said you'd been hunting invaders with them. Have there been many?"

"I've found several every night for the last week, but every night there are more to take their place."

Katiya frowned, thinking. "Can these invaders make new vampires so quickly?" She was starting to realize what Alexei meant by her lack of education, she barely knew what she didn't know.

"No, well, you can but those that young are mindless killing machines, I've found. They are so hungry they just attack anyone they can for food, after a week or so with a good sire they can learn to think and react past the hunger."

"I thought you rose from the grave the next night?" She flushed immediately after her outburst. "After you were killed." She finished, figuring she might as well go all the way now.

Alexei frowned, that hadn't occurred to her before. "I guess, I was just special." She started for the door. "Come on let's start your lessons"

Katiya hurried to keep up with her.

"You never told me what the cup was that both Ivan and the brothers were supposed to steal from you?" She asked, wondering where they were going.

Alexei took her down the stairs to the first floor.

"The cup they want is a simple wooden cup. They think it's the cup Christ used at the last supper. One his disciples hid after his crucifixion, one they in turned tried to use to gain immortality."

"Wait. They think you have the Holy Grail?"

They went across the main floor the other side from the kitchen and down a small stairway. "Yes they think I have a bit of vampire folklore."

"So they think that's where vampires came from? Because someone drank from the cup that held the blood of Christ?" She laughed, a little nervously. When Alexei didn't smile she swallowed. "Is it true?"

Alexei shrugged. "I don't know. But if it is I've held on to it to prevent it from making anymore of the first."

Good, Katiya thought, looking around with interest as they entered a part of the house that was new to her. Good, because she wasn't sure she wanted to believe that the

church was right.

The room was a wide circle there were different weapons on a rack most of them wooden.

She recognized some of the swords, but others were completely alien to Katiya.

"Now silly vampire hunters will tell you to use a wooden stake to dispatch you're average vampire, but I disagree." She stated slamming the spear butt down next to her foot.

"If you're a human, weak where a vampire is strong, why the fuck would you want to be that close?"

"Tereza had a gun, it fired silver bolts." Katiya really needed to think through her thoughts before saying them to Alexei she realized, the moment after she'd said the vampire hunter's name.

Alexei made an unhappy face at the mention of the Hunter.

"Sorry. No more interrupting." Katiya made a shutting up motion.

"Anyways I would recommend the spear it will give you distance and having it blessed and or coated with silver will help if you happen to go up against things other than a vampire."

Katiya bit her lip, not saying anything, but regarding the spear dubiously. It was at least six inches taller than she was and the thick wooden shaft and sharp head looked heavy. How was she going to handle that thing?

"Come on, come here and give it a try." She held it out. Seeing the look on her face. "I think you'll be surprised."

"I'm good at climbing and sneaking, not so much on the heavy lifting though." Katiya stepped forwards dubiously, taking the offered weapon.

"My blood doesn't make weaklings." Alexei said jokingly.

Katiya stood there, holding the weapon at arms length, eyeing it uncertainly. "So you just stick the sharp pointy end into the people who want to hurt you?" That seemed easy enough.

"Yes." Alexei said amused. She walked around Katiya and then once behind her came in close so her body molded against the other woman's. Gently she started to adjust her grip and stance.

The redhead's throat worked as she swallowed as she adjusted to the press of the body against hers from behind. How was she supposed to concentrate on the lessons? "Like this?" Her voice was lower than usual as she held the spear across her chest, both hands on the shaft.

"Yes. Now I have found that the myth of the heart is true. If you pierce it the vampire will become inert. However if you remove it the vampire will start to heal and probably once it is better be really pissed at you." She demonstrated a clean, quick jab forward, about where someone's heart would be.

Katiya tried it on her own, the spear was easier to handle than she thought, although she was definitely less smooth about her thrust than Alexei had been. "So leave the spear in the heart?" That didn't seem very practical.

"No. Depending on the vampire's age it will take him hours if not days to heal and wake up. If you were only armed with a spear I would then pull it out and pierce the vampires' skull, through the eye is the easiest. No monster, no matter how tough or immortal has a hard time getting back up with their brains scrambled by a sharp stick. If you have a sword, the strength, and the time, I would cut off the head. Killing it. But in a pinch scrambling its brains will keep it down for hours."

The redhead grimaced, feeling a little sick to her stomach. "Through the eye?" She tried not to picture that. "What about holy water?" That always played a part in the stories and movies.

It was Alexei's turn to grimace remembering the torture at Karl's hand. "Yes, vampires do not like holy water and holy places. You can take sanctuary in a church, temple or mosque of course that leaves you vulnerable to other monsters."

Practicing the smooth thrust again, the redhead did her best to try and emulate the powerful lunge that Alexei had just showed her. "And garlic?" That one had never made very much sense to her.

"No, garlic does nothing." Alexei frowned and took the spear away from Katiya. "Come here, behind me, and feel how I do it. You have good natural balance, but it's actually your hips that start the momentum not the shoulders."

Licking her lips, Katiya did as bid, sliding her arms around Alexei and swallowing again as she did her level best not to feel up the gorgeous woman. It was hard. "Here?" She laid both hands on the tall woman's hips.

Alexei nodded and demonstrated the move again. "Did you feel it coil there and unwind up through the shoulders?"

"Yessss..." Katiya whispered. How wrong was it, she wondered, to be turned on by



that? Clearing her throat she tried that again. "I think I understand. But I can't just walk around all the time with a spear."

Alexei blinked. That hadn't occurred to her. She had forgotten how much the world had change. "That is unfortunate that society has changed so much humans can no longer carry around weapons that could save them."

"Yes, how odd we can't carry spears down the street anymore, or wear animal hides." Katiya teased, taking the spear and trying again. This, she could tell, was going to take a lot of practice.

Alexei watched her practice for a little while longer.

The hefty spear slowly started to make her arms burn and finally Katiya set it down, skin flush, breath harder and shaking her head. "Your blood might not make weaklings, but I'm not as strong as you."

Alexei chuckled but tried not to focus on how Katiya smelled, or the sound of her heart beating hard in her chest. She stepped into the center of the ring. "True you are not."

She let Katiya rest for a moment. "I'm going to attack you now, try and stop me."

Blue eyes widened in worry. "How? You vampires can move faster than I can follow?" She took up the spear though, trying to keep it between her and Alexei.

"Good question. Hope you can figure it out." Alexei didn't laugh though, she barred her fangs and rushed Katiya.

"WHAT?" Katiya yelped, leaping back and trying to block the vampire with a thrust of the sharp pointy end.

Alexei growled and swatted the clumsy blow away and had Katiya pinned to the wall her fangs at the woman's throat.

"Right. That didn't work." Katiya grunted, not going anywhere with that iron grip on her arms holding her in place.

Alexei pulled back calming her features. "Actually that wasn't too bad."

"Really? Because from where I just was it seemed like I just became dinner."

"You didn't run away. Staying still would confuse most vampires; once they reveal what they are they expect you to run away in terror. And... you managed to get a blow in." It was actually better than what she was expecting.

"I did?" There hadn't been much time between Alexei's warning and her finding herself

pushed up against the wall. "I didn't hurt you did I?"

"No, if I bruised it's already healed." Katiya smelled really good, so she stepped back. "Let's, uh, try it again. I'll go slower."

"Great, that means I get to be pushed into the wall again, just slower this time." She held out the spear, steadying herself against the attack to come.

Alexei smiled for a moment at the comment then wiped the smile off her face becoming serious. This was serious, a matter of life and death. She slowed her movements to that of a human.

This was better; Katiya could at least follow Alexei's movements this time. She managed to bring up the spear, hitting Alexei on the side once. That was as good as it got though, with the vampire ducking under her follow up swing and grabbing Katiya.

Alexei merely held Katiya for a moment and then said. "Good." She let go and walked away, without warning she turned and sprang at Katiya with a growl. Katiya's reaction was almost surprising, her unthinking gut response was good, and the vampire caught the spear at her chest. Both hands slapping against the wooden spear tip stopping its movement.

Blue eyes were wide as Katiya stared at Alexei's chest, and the steel tip that was a few inches away from it. "Oh God, I'm sorry. I didn't... I mean..." She stopped, confused by the smile on Alexei's face. "Was that good?"

Alexei laughed. "Yes it was very good. You're much better when you stop thinking and just do."

"Right. No thinking." She was pretty sure she could do that. "Although that's how I get in trouble usually."

"Well, if you're at this point with a vampire attacking you, you're already in trouble." Alexei pointed out letting go of the spear.

"True." She let the point drop. Smiling she batted her eyes "Any more lessons for tonight?"

Alexei's nostrils flared, and wondered what it was about Katiya that made her desire pursuits of the flesh. "I'm sure there are lots of things you need to know about this world you've entered."

Alexei turned her back walking in a random line pretending to think.

"Does that mean you'll be teaching me other things then?" The smile turned wicked.

Alexei missed the evil grin on the human's face, "Of course there's a lot to be learned I'm sure." She said seriously. "I want you to keep practicing with the spear, I'm sure I have some weapon you can use that would be similar, somewhere."

Katiya sighed. "Not really what I meant. What kind of weapon?"

Now safely on the other side of the room Alexei turned around. "Maybe a cane or I might have some magical weapon that hides itself, of course if it's in a mood to hide itself I'll never find it then."

"A cane sounds good." The redhead wasn't sure what was going on, but Alexei was behaving oddly for a vampire even. "Are you going to start avoiding me again?" She asked, deciding to go with the bold approach.

Alexei frowned at the question, "I was never avoiding you." She said defensively. "I was busy. And I'm not avoiding you now I just can't think, apparently it's worse when you're all sweaty. Your heartbeat increases and so do the level of pheromones you give off."

"That means I smell, right?" Katiya tilted her head to one side, watching Alexei. "So you were just busy, not avoiding me all those days?"

Alexei looked puzzled. "Smell? Yes, but it's not a bad smell it's actually a rather nice one." Her head bent down a little bit and she walked in a little half circle. "I might have been slightly avoiding you, more to try and get some focus back."

The human moved closer, slowly. "I was worried you regretted taking me in."

"No, sometimes you're frustrating, but you really don't have any guile for a thief, actually you're pretty trusting too. And you generally seem to like me, despite me. I can't change Katiya, I'm a vampire."

"Good thing I already knew that." Katiya moved a little closer. "Besides, I was only really good at sneaking into places. Ivan was the good one at stealing from people." A little closer and she could see the way Alexei's nostrils flared.

Alexei gave a half-hearted chuckle. "I kind hearted thief." She mused, "We should..." She blinked realizing how close Katiya was.

"We should?" Katiya prompted, reaching up to place her hands on both of Alexei's shoulders and look up into her face. "We should what?"

"Practice some more." Originally she meant weapons work but now she wasn't so sure.

"Oh good. I've decided I like practice." Katiya nearly purred. Reaching up she could lace her hands together behind Alexei's head and it put her in good position to brush her lips against the vampire's. "What should we practice?" She whispered, pressing her body

closer.

"I was thinking more spear work, but this will do." Alexei said. Hopefully after their pheromones mixed a little they could do more productive things. She returned the kiss, gently, and brought her hands down to rest on Katiya's hips. She was aroused but not in a possessive way or territorial, it just sort of flowed and ebbed through her.

Perhaps sometimes she was more like the human woman she'd once been, than the undying monster she now was. More philosophy to debate with Matvey, if she ever got her city and her home life straightened out.

For now though there were better things to occupy her thoughts, like the warm, beautiful and willing human woman in her arms.

#####3#####3

Naked in a nest of their clothes Alexei stared over Katiya's shoulder at the wall of the training room. Her body was curled around Katiya's warmer one, her hand resting over the woman's side her hand splayed out over her belly. "You bit me again." She commented.

"Hmmm?" Katiya made a little mewling sound, burrowing a little deeper in the circle of arms around her. If she concentrated enough she thought she could feel Alexei's breathing, slow and regular against her back.

The bite wasn't quite over her heart; it was up a bit this time closer to the collarbone. Still, to bite unless given leave was something only shared among lovers or taken by masters over slaves in vampire culture. "Nothing." Alexei said kissing the skin of the shoulder blade closest to her lips.

Katiya yawned, feeling content, warm and pleasantly achy in interesting places. This was a very nice way to spend the evening. Which was going to make getting up really hard. "Want to do a little breaking and entering with me?" Surely there was still enough night left.

"We can do that. Lucky for you that whole thing about having to invite a vampire in is a myth. You actually need a complex spell that involves killing a few goats and a chicken."

Shifting so that she could see Alexei's face, Katiya looked dubious. "A chicken?"

"Well you can sacrifice a human then you don't have to go through the trouble of the goats and the chickens, but its up to you, really either way will work." The vampire rolled on her back and stretched and then winced as the bite on her chest pulled. She stared at it and willed it to heal and when it stubbornly did nothing she just sighed. As long as Karl never found out or saw it, everything would be fine.

"Alexei? Could we avoid talking about sacrificing things for now?" There were things that she really didn't want to know, she decided. Sitting up she enjoyed the naked woman stretched out next to her. "Oh. Did I do that?" Gently touching the bite mark.

"Yes." Alexei said catching Katiya's hand before she could touch it. "You like to bite me, I've discovered, you bit me the other day too."

"I'm sorry!" Katiya looked horrified. "I didn't... I mean I don't really remember doing that." Her face was rapidly going red. "Does it hurt?" It didn't look too deep.

Alexei looked a little insulted. "I'm a vampire, no it doesn't hurt." Finally she relented from her grumpy attitude as she saw how upset Katiya was getting. "Its okay, take a breath."

"I'll get the kit." She started to push up off the floor, remembering the discarded kit she'd been given that was somewhere back in Alexei's room.

"Katiya, its fine." She said reaching out and grabbing on to the other woman preventing her from getting up.

"I didn't mean to hurt you." She relented though, staying draped across Alexei's chest. "I'm guessing I'm probably not supposed to bite the big bad vampire." She said quietly.

"No, pets shouldn't bite their masters its general seen as a bad thing." Alexei said softly, she wasn't upset, well, not anymore.

Katiya was silent for a moment at that, and then sighed. "I really don't try to cause you problems, it just... happens." That was pretty much true.

"I know." The vampire said stroking Katiya's hair. She was quiet for a long while. Finally she said. "I like that you're so passionate when were together. Never think that's a bad thing." She really wasn't certain how to explain certain aspects of vampire culture to the woman.

The redhead mutely nodded, enjoying the feel of those elegant fingers stroking through her hair. "I won't tell." She was pretty sure she was only talking about the biting part.

The human woman tilted her head up so that she could see Alexei's beautiful face. "Are you still interested in a little breaking and entering?"

"That's probably best." She agreed, then softly kissed Katiya. Untangling herself from the redhead she got up. "Yes let's go break and enter as you put it."

"Yes!" She bounced up onto her feet and started searching for her clothes.

#####3#####3

It was well after midnight by the time the two of them made their way towards the relatively non-descript building that housed the notary office of Mr. Gorskji and partners. Katiya was happy to be out in the city wearing something other than a corset, especially the comfortable black pants and shirt she'd found waiting for her.

"Do I get to pick the lock or are you going to do some vampire thing and go through the wall or something?" She asked, only half teasing.

"Go through the wall? Really where do you humans get such ideas?" Alexei said in amusement.

"Probably the same place we picked up that thing about hanging garlic everywhere."

"Sorry to disappoint but I can't walk through walls. I can however rip the lock out of the door if you want?"

"Ummm... won't that tell them we've been here?" She was pretty sure they would notice.

"I was trying to be helpful." Alexei held up her hands and let her do what she thought was best.

Giving the dark shape next to her a wry look, Katiya knelt next to the back door. Her prized lock picks were tucked into her belt and she carefully used them to coax the lock open. It took a few minutes but there was never a doubt in her mind that she wouldn't get the door open.

"See, I'm useful." The human whispered, standing up and swinging open the door with a flourish.

"Yes, I'm well aware of you're uses." The vampire teased as she quietly entered.

It was dark thankfully, which meant Katiya didn't try to cover up the reddening of her cheeks. "Other uses." She mumbled, following along behind with Vidar a step behind her.

"His office is through there." She pointed down the dark corridor, glad to see that her assumption was right, the humans had all gone home for the evening and there was no sign of things that were not quite human.

Alexei walked down the hall examining the walls and then the door. "The door is Hexed wouldn't you say Vidar?"

The white hound padded silently down the hallway and sniffed at the door and then growled.

"What does that mean?" *Another thing for me to learn*, Katiya thought. Peering curiously at the door and not seeing anything odd.

"Cursed. Surely you've heard the stories coming out of Egypt, the Mummies curse, and all that? Same thing, whoever opens this door is hit with a rather painful hex or curse."

She'd been about to reach for the doorknob, but decided against it. "Can you un-hex it?"

"Yes. Vidar, you want the honors or should I?"

The hound looked up at her as if she were crazy. With a sigh she reached out grasping the door.

There was a spark of green energy it flowed over her hand and disappeared in to the skin. The vampire gagged and doubled over boils burst over her skin her skin writhed and split leaking blood and puss and then it passed as her inhuman immune system purged it from her body.

Katiya stared at her, wide eyed, one hand lifted as if to touch her, but she let that slowly drop when Alexei straightened up. "That's how you un-hex it, by activating it?"

Alexei stood up and reached into her pocket grabbing a white cloth and spat dark blood into it before putting it back in her pocket. "Do I look like a witch to you? Besides its set-up for humans, you would have died."

Katiya stared at her for a moment and decided against asking anything about witches. "Is it safe to go in now?"

"Unless Vidar senses anything, it looks fine to me."

The hound yawned.

Katiya snorted at him and pushed the door open. The office looked the same as it had in the day, maybe a few less papers on the desk, but that was it. Quickly the redhead moved around it, kneeling so that she could start work on the locked drawers.

"I'll take that as the all clear. Is he always this... this... this much fun when you're out."

"He loved it when he got to terrorize Fenix." Katiya grinned in satisfaction as the first lock gave way. Leaving the drawer be she started on the one under it.

Another few moment's work and the lock softly clicked open. "Let's see what you have

been doing Mr. Gorsjki." Taking the papers that were neatly piled inside she offered half the stack to Alexei.

Alexei thumbed through the papers. "Anything interesting in yours?" She asked.

Carefully setting aside every paper she went through, Katiya shook her head. "No these all seem like shipping..." she paused, frowning at one set. "It's pretty late in the year for a shipment of cotton from America." She offered the manifest to Alexei. "Good way to smuggle something into the city though."

"America? We don't allow any goods from America it's forbidden in Vampire controlled cities." She reached out picking up the papers.

"A full load of cotton was offloaded from that ship two weeks ago." Katiya kept sorting through the papers, looking for anything else of interest.

"So that was about the same time those brothers stole from me." Her own fault really for letting the weight of the years get to her, making her lazy.

"It fits." Setting down the pile of papers, the redhead shook her head. "That's it, the rest are even longer ago."

"I'll take a look at those later. Is there an address where the cotton was delivered?"

"Hmm. No, not an address. Just a note here scribbled on the edge of the paper. Does 1st C mean anything to you?"

Alexei smiled at the irony. "It's a cemetery."

"First Cemetery?" Katiya felt a little chill go up her back. "That's next to the pauper's grave yard." Not far from the grand cathedral, in it's shadow almost.

"You know it occurs to me Mr. Morozov has not returned with information on my long lost bastard brother who is in possession of my old factories on the docks. Perhaps we should go visit him and see why he's failed to follow up?"

Katiya blinked. She'd honestly forgotten about him in everything that had happened. "Now?"

"You have something better to do? Besides I thought you liked running around at night, getting into trouble."

"I do, but I thought you were against that sort of thing." Returning all of the papers other than the one that Alexei still had, she carefully relocked both of the desk drawers.

"Yes, that's why we're not going to get into trouble." She said opening the door. Vidar's



growl let her know that something was wrong. Turning she looked out into the hallway there was a vague human shape cloaked in the darkness and the smell of dirt was overwhelming.

"Damn it." Alexei muttered, apparently the hex wasn't the only protection they used.

"What's wrong?" Katiya peered around her. It took longer for her human vision to make out the shape. "What is that?" The smell made her almost gag as it wafted in through the open door.

It moved down the hallway towards them strong and sturdy it never made a sound.

"A protector of some kind." Alexei said and then she was moving quickly, she lashed out with a punch only to have her hand absorbed by the creature trapped inside its chest. It felt like she had dug into sand or dirt. Growling she tried to pull her hand out.

The creature had only two eyes carved like slits on its otherwise empty face. Soundlessly it lifted a hand and pummeled into Alexei's back.

The vampire groaned feeling like a mountain had come down on top of her.

"Stop just growling at it and do something Vidar!" Katiya scrambled through the office, trying to find something that would be useful. She rather doubted that the pistol she came up with was going to do anything but irritate it. Better than nothing though and she aimed down the hallway, hoping she wasn't about to hit Alexei and pulled the trigger.

Alexei jumped. "What the hell was that?"

"Sorry!" Katiya yelled, looking for something else to use.

Alexei kept trying to pull backwards out of the creature's grip not getting very far at all before she was hit again. She cried out pretty certain one of her ribs just cracked.

Vidar continued to growl, his hair standing on end, legs stiff, as the thing continued to try to engulf Alexei into itself.

"Katiya come here!" Alexei shouted, she wasn't positive but she thought she saw something on its forehead.

"I didn't find anything else!" The human jumped over Vidar, pistol still in hand. "Want me to shoot it?" She was pretty sure she could do better this time.

"NO! No shooting." Alexei shouted.

"Is there a word on the things forehead?"

"Word?" She had to try and squirm past Alexei to peer closer; it was hard in the dark hallway to see anything. Ever so slowly Alexei's arms were being engulfed into the thing's chest. "I think so."

"Can you climb up my back and erase the first letter of that word?"

As she moved to climb up onto Alexei, she was sure she heard a canine equivalent of a snicker from Vidar. "I can't reach." She struggled to lean over Alexei's head, arm outreached to the thing's head. "You have to lean closer!"

Alexei took a breath holding it and leaned in closer to the creature. She lifted up a hand catching a descending blow grunting to absorb the pressure.

There was a scary moment when Katiya nearly fell over into the thing, but she managed to stick her finger into that first letter and wipe it away.

As if it were a puppet, the thing collapsed in on itself, turning into a pile of moldy leaves, dirt and a mess of centipedes and cockroaches that scurried off into the dark hallway. Katiya was left clutching Alexei's back, trying to wipe away the muck on her hand.

Alexei groaned and rolled over. "Vidar why didn't you smell that thing?"

The hound just sat looking at them, managing to look superior.

"Thanks Vidar." Katiya untangled herself from Alexei, looking at her worriedly. "Are you all right?"

Alexei pushed herself off the floor and vigorously wiped her face and brushed hands through her curls to get all the dirt and general crap out. "Bah. Pputttht." She spat.

The redhead bit her lip, doing her level best to avoid grinning at the normally perfectly kept vampire covered in dirt and grime. "You missed some." So she was only human.

Alexei paused and looked at Katiya balefully through thick blonde lashes. "Thank you."

"I am to please." She turned a laugh into a cough. "Did you still want to go visit Mr. Morozov?"

"Yes, but you can go back to the manor if you like." Alexei offered. She had a good idea she wasn't going to like what she found at his house, the man was never late to report back and now he was really late, her visit to Karl had been to much of a distraction, to much time lost getting her mind back on track.

"I'll come with you." She wasn't going to pass up the opportunity to trail along behind

Alexei. "What about that though?" The human gestured to the pile of dirt and leaves on the ground. It was going to be hard to cover up the missing guardian.

Vidar's voice came from behind them. "I really am amazed sometimes that you made it as long as you have, Alexei. They're going to know that someone was here you broke the Hex and you destroyed their Golem. Which, I might add was probably activated after the hex went off."

Alexei made a face in annoyance. "I guess we leave it then." She said stiffly.

"They won't know who it was at least." She'd have to figure out if they could blame it on someone else.

Vidar just huffed and shifted back into his animal form.

Alexei sighed "You could have spoken up sooner." She snapped at the hound.

"I think he's enjoying being mysterious." Katiya whispered, as they headed out the door.

"He enjoys being a pain in my ass." She grumbled exiting the business.

#####3#####3

"That's a bad sign." Katiya whispered from her spot slightly behind and to the right of Alexei. In front of them was the back door to an impressive looking manor that the blonde woman had said was Mr. Morozov's. It wasn't quite as grand as Alexei's manor, but it was definitely impressive. The human had enjoyed his money and power that was clear. Unfortunately for him, his back door was open, swinging slightly in the light evening wind. Far in the distance a winter storm was building, the air smelled of the coming snow.

"No lights on either." She whispered again, wondering if she should have just gone back to the manor.

"Katiya, maybe you and Vidar should wait out here." She said quietly. Already she could smell blood, its tangy iron scent thick and choking on the stale puffs of air that came from the house.

Mr. Morozov was married, and being a very traditional sort of man his wife ruled the house when she wasn't popping out another baby.

"Is it that bad?" Katiya asked just as quietly, staring at the darkness inside the doorway and shivering.

Vidar just looked at Katiya, waiting to follow whatever it was she wanted to do.

"Probably. He had a wife and 5 kids..." She trailed off. "Probably."

"I..." Katiya hesitated and shook her head. "I'm staying here." There was something bad inside that house that she had no desire to see.

Alexei nodded, surprised for a moment, but happy Katiya had decided to stay outside.

She pushed open the door, entering the house. It was cold, when she took a deep breath and breathed out the air turned white, no human would live in here.

She stepped through the house listening. In the kitchen dishes were rinsed and stacked waiting to be put away, odd because she couldn't see that being okay with Mr. Morozov. The wife was dead half way up the stairs her skirt pushed up over her face making her an object and not a human being. There was no blood and she softly walked up the stairs and pulled the long cloth down covering her as best she could, so in death she could have what little dignity she could. Her face was revealed, a pretty woman, with wholesome features, and a neck broken. The bruise were large, a big man with big hands had done this.

Alexei continued up the stairs happy that it was cold and the flies weren't swarming, each bedroom was splashed in red no gentle goodnight had been given to the spawn of Mr. Morozov.

In the cold she couldn't tell how long they had been dead the blood was now ice, glittering darkly off of the sheets and rugs. The master bedroom was empty and she made her way back down the stairs, finally finding her lawyer in the den. His body had been cut in a series of shallow painful cuts, torture.

Had he been first? She hoped so, but more than likely he had been made to listen to the horrors unleashed on his family before those hands had twisted his own neck around so he now saw where he had once been, instead of where he was going.

Outside the back door Katiya wrapped her arms around her chest, the shivering having nothing to do with the cold air. "They're all dead aren't they Vidar?" She asked the white hound sitting next to her.

The hound whined and nudged her hand with his head. They were, he could smell death, it clung to the house, and not a peaceful death, no this was violence horrible things had been done.

After a while Alexei's pale form appeared in the doorway. She didn't say anything just stepped out stopping next to Katiya.

The human scratched the hound's head lightly, giving him a tightlipped grimace of a grin in thanks for the diversion. Alexei's sudden appearance nearly startled her out of her skin; it was eerie how quietly the vampire moved. "Did you find him?" She asked

quietly.

Alexei nodded. "I did. He's dead and his office ransacked. On his calendar he had a meeting with an Ivan Dreier three days ago."

The other woman didn't ask what condition she'd found Mr. Morozov in, she couldn't think past the roaring in her ears. "Ivan." She swallowed, leaning sideways against Alexei's solid strength. "Boris must have been here too then." He would have enjoyed something like that; she could see the large man taking pleasure in killing an entire family.

"I see that name is familiar." Alexei easily supported Katiya, lifting her up she held her. "I think I remember you mentioning an Ivan, he's the one that made you steal the deed from me."

The redhead nodded, pressing her face against Alexei's chest. "He has a partner, Boris, the muscle for Ivan. He's huge."

Alexei started walking, putting as much distance between them and the house. "He was there too then." Yes a big man to leave those marks.

Katiya was glad to get away from that house become tomb, forcing herself to think. "If it was Ivan then he's doing more than just stealing for whoever wants your things."

"So he's not normally a serial killer?"

She shivered again and looked over her shoulder at the empty house. "He's killed before." She was proud that her voice didn't crack. "But no, normally he's a thief. He's a good one, my father trained him." The last was reluctantly admitted.

"Then you'll know how he thinks, operates and even his weakness. He's only a man after all." Alexei said reassuringly.

"A bad one." Katiya whispered.

A man with a trained psychopath following at his heels, like a dog. One who probably knew the secrets to killing vampires, because she was positive this Ivan and Boris were human agents of her invaders.

"Good thing I'm even more evil." She said with a smile. "Now hold on. Its going to start snowing I can feel the weather shift, and I don't want to be caught in it. I'm going to run us home."

The redhead nodded again, relaxing into Alexei's arms and closing her eyes. She'd known, deep down, that Ivan had been deeper involved in this than she'd admitted to herself. She just didn't want to deal with him or Boris they scared her. "I know where

they go to drink." A part of the city she'd avoided at all costs.

Alexei started sprinting becoming a blur a human would catch out of the corner of their eye only to turn and find it gone.

"You are not to go there or meet with them in any way." Alexei shouted fiercely, as the Mr. Morozov's broken wife burst into her mind.

Katiya said nothing, holding on tightly as the outside world blurred past at speeds that were faster than anything she'd experienced before.

#####3#####3

Katiya trailed along behind Alexei as they walked through the manor. It wasn't long now before sunrise and she found herself yawning hugely and thoroughly un-ladylike. She'd already promised to rest during the daylight thankfully. "Fenix didn't deliver your things back here yet has he?"

"Hmmm... No, at least I don't think so I'll check with Lyov later." Alexei said starting up the stairs.

"He's probably dead then." The other woman knew she was tired when she didn't even ogle Alexei's rear. "Someone probably got Ivan to tie up loose ends for them."

"Seems like it. Killing off human agents isn't that unheard of. Poor Mr. Morozov, his family didn't deserve that. A message to me that I'm not as in control of my city and my human agents as I think." She opened the door to her rooms and entered.

"What time do you meet with Mr. Gorsjki?"

"I don't know. He was going to contact his employers to see about me meeting them. I assume he will send a message through Tereza." That meant she'd have to go visit the vampire hunter later, before sunset maybe.

Alexei made a face but didn't say anything.

Stopping just inside the door, Katiya hesitated as she realized she'd just assumed she was going to rest with Alexei. "I still haven't found my own room."

"That's okay you can sleep here. Unless..." It occurred to her, that Katiya had been spending her time with Shiro. "You'd like to sleep with Shiro."

"Shiro?" Katiya looked confused. "Did you want me to go check on her?" Hopefully Fiona had made sure the quiet woman was all right.

"Only if you want too. I noticed Vidar outside Shiro's door I assumed that you were sleeping there."

"A few times. I think she was scared of the dark, or being alone." It probably was a combination of both.

"Time will heal her. I should check on her but..." She let it go; Shiro didn't trust her any more. "In or out, Mouse?"

"In." Was the instant answer and she closed the door behind her, hiding another yawn behind her hand. "Sleep time?" Gone was her energy from earlier, now she felt slow and heavy.

"Do you need me to have food sent up?" Alexei asked as she guided Katiya to the bed. She lifted the gray sweater over the young woman's head and undid the ties of the pants before making her sit on the edge of the bed.

Then she knelt down and unlaced the boots and tugged them off before removing the pants.

"No." She mumbled through another yawn. In truth she probably would fall asleep in mid bite. It was oddly comforting letting the vampire undress her like this. Lifting up her hips she let her pants slide off. "I'll eat later when it's daylight."

"Okay." Alexei got up and pulled out a soft sleep shirt from her dresser. "Hands up." And slowly pulled it down over the slim woman's body. Done she started undressing herself. "So tomorrow I think we will go out to dinner and see a play. Is that the proper thing to do now a day when young couples are courting?"

Alexei Petrova had never dated really, Alexander Petrov had, pretending to be a man came with a lot of complications, if one didn't date allsorts of rumors sprung up, and to be seen as a lover of other men was far worse for business to be seen now as a woman who loved other women. The world was a strange place.

"Courting?" Katiya suddenly didn't feel quite so tired, especially when she realized she could enjoy watching Alexei undress. "You want to court me?"

Alexei blinked. "Isn't that what the man wanted? For you to seduce me and steal the cup?" Maybe she hadn't understood. "I thought if you were seen in public with me showing interest that would make them agree to your demands because you were 'in' so to speak."

She turned pants in hand, shirt unbuttoned. "Did I misunderstand?"

"Oh. Yes." Katiya winced. Of course that was the reason that Alexei wanted to go out in public with her. "No, not at all."

"Good. Or do you think that will work with them?" She turned back around she dropped the pants in a basket and slipped off her shirt.

Katiya stared, swallowing dryly. "Huh?" She managed, licking her lips. "Oh. Umm, yes it should work. Mr. Gorsjki suggested it after all. If I'm seen with you it will definitely prove that I can deliver the cup to them."

"Ah good. It's settled then." She slipped on her own sleep shirt, grabbing the book she had been reading earlier, she turned towards the bed and paused for a moment it was odd to have someone there when she wasn't going to have sex or food from them.

She cleared her throat. "Come on then, before you fall over asleep." She pulled the covers down.

This was going to be interesting. The human slipped under the covers, wondering how she'd gone from sleepy to wanting to touch Alexei's body. Thankfully she was tired enough that she was going to probably fall asleep immediately. "Is this all right?"

"It's new but I'm sure it will be fine." Alexei said getting into the bed. A small grin tugged at her lips, as she smelled Katiya's arousal, perhaps not so new.

"I'll try not to steal the blankets." Sleeping alongside someone was a new experience. That the somebody was a vampire was just another new thing.

"It's okay, in a few hours I'll be dead to the world and won't even notice." She settled down opening her book and started to read.

Katiya curled up on her side; settling in and feeling her eyes start to close. "Do vampires dream?"

"Sometimes. When I was a younger vampire I did, but now I think my mind enjoys the solitude from the weight of memories."

"Mmm." Katiya mumbled, eyes closing and followed by a soft sigh as she finally gave into sleep.

Alexei set her book down and turned watching Katiya sleep. Leaning over almost hesitantly she kissed the woman's red lips softly. "May your dreams be pleasant."

#####3####3

It was late in the afternoon when the redhead made her way down the stairs and towards the kitchen. The demands of her body for the use of the bathroom and food, in that order, had finally roused her out of the bed she'd shared with Alexei. First she'd stopped by Shiro's room, but the Asian woman hadn't been there, so she'd continued



on to the kitchen. The grumblings of her stomach accompanied her and she sniffed appreciatively at the smells in the air.

"My god, whatever that is, it smells delicious." Her stomach growled in agreement.

Warren looked up from the pot he was stirring with a beaming smile. "Ah lass, just what a cook loves to hear." His hair was unruly sticking up as if he'd been in a rush to get ready. "I'm making my lentil stew, got some fresh bread baking. Fiona's out in the green house tending the plants."

"Mmmm fresh bread." She nearly drooled at the thought, trying not to blush as her stomach growled again. "Is there anything that I could eat now to tame the beast?"

Warren scratched his chin for a moment and then his eyes lit up, he turned rummaging around and then tossed a crisp apple to Katiya. "Alexei got a barrel in, from where I don't ask, just happy we got em."

The redhead was too busy taking a bite to answer, but she nodded. "I'll let you be." she managed when she'd chewed and swallowed. "I wanted to say hi to Fiona."

"Okay then. Food will be ready shortly." He said turning back to his pots.

The damp heat of the green house was nice and Katiya closed the door quickly behind her to keep out the cold. "Good afternoon Fiona." The fading light was pleasant to enjoy.

Fiona looked up with a smile. "Afternoon Katiya. Quite the snow storm going on it's been like this since the wee hours of the morning, but you can't tell at all being inside here." There were mounds of white pressed up against the outside of the glass.

The glass was cold against the other woman's finger tips as she peered at the snowstorm raging outside. "Alexei wanted to go to the opera; I wonder if this means we won't be going?"

"Really the opera?" Fiona said surprised. "She hates the opera."

"She does?" Katiya turned in surprise to look at Fiona, and then shook her head. "She's just going so that the people who stole from her can see that I'm with her and let me get closer to them." She'd accepted that.

"Sounds complicated." Fiona said kneeling back down to tend to the soil of some of the herb plants. "I think it would be more tolerable for her just to take you out to dinner and wine and dine you than to do something she hates. She likes music though, and sporting events she goes down to the docks and bets on the wharf rats who fight."

"What else does she enjoy?" Katiya perched on the edge of a stone bench, watching.

Eager to hear whatever she could about Alexei.

"She likes to hunt, not so much the kill, but I've seen her take great pleasure in hunting someone. She likes horses, people pay a lot of money to let them breed with her horses." Fiona said looking up with a wicked smile. "In bed she likes it if you're rough and she likes it if you're on top to be pressed down between your body and the mattress."

Katiya flushed a little. "I figured that one out." She studied her fingers, to avoid seeing that wicked smile. "Has she ever loved someone?"

The smile flickered and disappeared. "Not that I know of. She might have loved me, but I couldn't return it so it withered and died into a deep affection."

"Oh." Katiya nodded, she thought as much. "I should leave you to your gardening."

"You don't have too, but it's not terribly exciting I know." Fiona said digging into the soil again.

"If it doesn't bother you, I don't mind watching." It was peaceful here. "Have you seen Shiro? I looked in her bedroom but she wasn't there."

"We had dinner last night. She's depressed because of the damage to her wrists she can't hold a bow or do finger work correctly with the violin. I'm not sure where she'd be."

"Will she heal?"

Fiona thought about it. "Maybe, if she'd let Alexei help her but she freaks out anytime the Mistress goes near her with her fangs bared. I understand I do, but if she won't except help then no it's unlikely."

"Maybe I can try and talk to her." She didn't sound too hopeful of that though, if Fiona couldn't and she'd known Shiro for much longer than Katiya had. "What does one wear for an Opera?"

Fiona looked up a smudge of dirt on her cheek. "Oh dear. You're going to need clothes. Alexei didn't mention a thing to us. Go grab a light snack, I'm sure you'll be eating very well tonight and I'll go speak with Lyov."

#####3#####3

Alexei was frowning as she exited her rooms. Katiya had not been there when she had woke up and had continued to stay gone until Alexei had finally gotten dressed in what she assumed people wore to boring displays of cultural superiority. "Fiona, where is Katiya?" She bellowed.

"I'm over here." Katiya stepped out of a room further down the hallway draped in the dress that Fiona had found for her. The older woman stood behind her, looking justifiably happy with the results of her and Lyov's efforts.

Alexei paused as if rooted to the ground, her mouth opened and then closed, surprised.

Fiona hid her grin. "You surprised her, she loves being surprised." Fiona whispered to the young woman. "Now remember what Lyov and I told you but just relax and have fun."

"Right. Relax. Have fun." Katiya nodded, trying not to reach up and touch the hair that had been styled upon her head. The emerald green dress was silky against her skin and she felt incredibly self-conscious about the skin she was showing.

"Thank you Fiona." She gave the other redhead a hug.

"No problem." The woman said a little teary eyed but did her best to hide it, Alexei wasn't hers any more. She had given it up; she knew it had been her choice. But still to see that look given to someone other than her it was hard to let go.

Releasing her, Katiya turned and smiled at the vampire still standing stock still in her doorway. "Is it all right?" She smoothed her hands down the front of the dress. The neckline was something she'd thought wouldn't be out of place on streetwalkers, but both Fiona and Lyov had assured her it was high fashion.

Alexei blinked and let out a ragged breath. "You're beautiful."

Katiya needed no help from the light makeup to tinge her cheeks red. "You look very handsome." She stepped closer, placing a hand on the fitted dinner jacket that Alexei was wearing.

Alexei's gray eyes took in Katiya so enraptured that she didn't even notice Fiona leave them. "The green it does amazing things to your eyes." She said softly.

Katiya smiled up at the blonde woman, fingering the lapel of the dinner jacket. "I like this on you. It makes you look very..." She trailed off not sure how to explain it.

"Very... silly, noble, pompous, aristocratic..." Alexei fished as she gently took the hand on the lapel of her jacket and brought it to her lips. She brushed her lips softly over the skin of the knuckles.

"Noble fits." The human licked her lips, shifting a little as she felt that kiss radiate from her knuckles, up her arm, and down her body. "Are you sure we need to go to the opera?"

Alexei raised an eyebrow, but grinned against the skin still at her lips. "Hmmm, it would be a waste of that green dress on you if we didn't."

"Fiona did go to a lot of trouble." Remembering the other woman, Katiya looked for her. "Did she leave already?" She'd meant to thank Fiona for all the help in getting dressed.

Alexei's eyes flicked up to where Fiona had been standing. "Yes I guess she's left." Odd she hadn't heard her leave.

"Then I will thank her later." Slipping her arm under Alexei's she smiled. "Shall we?"

"The carriage awaits." Alexei murmured leading her downstairs.

Lyov cleared his throat getting Alexei's attention. "The Lady's coat." He said drolly.

"Ah... right." The vampire said almost sheepishly, taking the coat she held it open for Katiya to slip into.

Since it was bitter cold outside and snowing, Katiya thought she probably should have realized it wouldn't have been a good idea to go out without a coat. Instead she'd been about to blindly follow Alexei wherever the vampire led. "Thank you Lyov." She said, sliding into the thick fur lined coat that he'd gotten for her from wherever it was he got such things.

Alexei tucked Katiya's arm into the crook of hers, and Lyov opened the door for them. The carriage was waiting two sturdy brown, shaggy horses stood to take them where they wanted to go.

#####3#####3

The restaurant was extravagant in its understated elegance. A place that Katiya had never expected to actually step foot in, let alone eat in as a guest. The food was exquisite, although she found herself privately thinking that she preferred Warren's. Again she found herself raising her eyes to find Alexei's smoldering look on her and decided to talk about something, anything, to avoid burning up. "Can you even eat real food?"

Alexei just grinned and lifted her wine glass sipping its contents. "No, not really. Blood I absorb and it never has to be... ah... expelled. Food I can fake as long as it's liquid, but it wakes up parts of my internal organs that aren't normally used and it's painful to get rid of. Probably not that best dinner conversation to have."

The soup she was lazily eating wasn't really tomato bisque, but she knew the owner and most of the staff was a family of half-breed demons, minor things who only wanted a place in the world, so she had allowed them one.

Katiya agreed, probably not the best dinner conversation. "They didn't have a reservation for you but they made sure they had a table ready for you. Do they know who you are?" It had been amazing to see the maître stumble over himself to find them a prize table.

"Yes, they're a family. They came here running away from something and were trying to find a place in the world. I gave them this, well, not this exactly. I gave them the building and some funds. They made this with hard work. So yes, I always get a table if I want one. Not even the mayor can say that." She said with a grin.

"A fact that I'm sure he hates." Katiya licked her lips, setting down her fork and sighing with pleasure. "This is where you take all your servants?"

Alexei set down the soup spoon. "No. And you're not a servant you're a pet." Which Alexei was beginning to wonder if that was even true. "But I don't bring anyone here except for maybe the mayor and the occasion Czar or royal family member."

She didn't know why it should, but Katiya stared in surprise at Alexei. "You know the royal family?"

"Mmmm, not the current ones I don't think. But many play in vampire politics as puppets because they have power and want to keep their toys past death. Many a vampire has dangled that in front of royalty to gain inroads into the human power structure."

She picked up her spoon stirring the red liquid in the bowl in front of her. They were in a private corner giving them space yet they could be seen. Many eyes glanced their way and she hoped this would not backfire and hurt Katiya.

A server seemingly magically appeared to sweep away Katiya's plate and replaced it with a small salad, which would be her last course. "So it's true then, the rumors about the politicians and vampires?" She'd suspected it of course.

"Of course, vampires like power, and control. Plus I think of any of the demons out there they are closely tied to humanity, shapeshifters maybe being second. To keep the human race in the dark they infected those in control, if humans realized what kind of sheep they are they could turn the tables quickly."

It was on the tip of Katiya's tongue to say 'like Tereza?' but she managed to avoid saying anything so silly. "Are there a lot of different demons?" That was a disquieting thought.

"I don't really know how many demons there are." Alexei said. "I've met quite a few. Some look human and blend in others don't look like anything you can comprehend."

The finished salad plate was whisked away just as efficiently as her previous plate and replaced with her main course, the night's special. Katiya stared down at the strange

looking contraption on her plate, trying to figure out how to eat it. "So that's a delicacy?" She didn't sound so sure about it.

"Yes, not a traditional Russian dish, unless you're by the docks or a seafaring people. It's called a crab."

She tried to hide her smile at Katiya's puzzled look. "It's the rage I guess in France and that normally trickles over to us here." Crabs were ugly looking things, and she had no idea how they tasted.

The waiter discreetly left a silver torture looking instrument to crack the shell with and withdrew. Frowning in concentration, Katiya started to try and disassemble it.

It was thankfully, unlike a lobster not staring at them with beady little eyes. It was on a bed of rice and potatoes in a sauce of onion, tomatoes, garlic and butter. Some sort of new recipe that was all the fashion somewhere Alexei was sure. The top shell had been removed exposing the meat. "You take the little tiny fork, which looks useless..." She said picking it up.

"Spear the meat, and dip it in the butter..." she did so. "And then eat." She brought the small chunk of dripping meat to Katiya's lips.

Automatically Katiya opened her mouth, lips curling in a smile as Alexei fed her. The meat was like nothing else she'd eaten before, melting in her mouth with the butter. "Hmmm..." She purred, closing her eyes and savoring the taste. "It's good."

At Katiya's expression she was tempted to try, but knew she would just end up regretting it. "I'll have to take your word on that."

Opening her eyes, the redhead looked past Alexei, catching another pair of eyes looking their way. "Alexei, why does everyone keep watching you? Every time I look someone's looking this way." With a wicked grin she speared another piece and made a show of slowly eating it.

Alexei shrugged. "Could be any numerous reasons. I'm rich, I own most of the city, I'm with a very attractive woman and I'm a woman myself, or they're waiting to see if I debauch you on the table."

She went back to her blood soup, for the first time regretting she couldn't eat food if Katiya's face was any indication she was missing out.

"Mmmm." Making a show of enjoying it, Katiya licked her lips, watching her dining companion. "And are you?" A mischievous look in her eyes.

"A woman. Most certainly." She said jokingly.

Katiya laughed. "No debauching then?"

Alexei's smile became mischievous and her eyes hooded as she stared at Katiya. "Maybe later. I might have to entertain myself somehow at the opera."

"I still don't know what an Opera is like. I hope I'm not going to embarrass you there." There was less meat in the shell than she would have guessed based on the size of the thing.

Alexei just made a dismissive noise. "You can't embarrass me, well you can try but I have a private box for some reason. I think Fiona's idea so I could wine and dine important people who use to visit me."

"A private box?" Katiya eyed her a little confused. "Why would you need a box for this?"

"I don't know. It shows off status and wealth, says to everybody else that I'm more important than they are."

"A box does that?" Katiya looked a little more confused, trying to picture a box that would do that. Maybe they covered it in something precious, like gold. "And you hold this box?"

Alexei's lips started to twitch and finally she couldn't hold it in any longer and she started laughing.

"No, no, no. Not a box, box. A private box is more like a private seating area."

"Oh! That makes a lot more sense." Katiya grinned. "I was picturing them handing you this gold leaf box that you'd carry around all night as your private box."

Alexei started laughing again.

"Hilarious. My own little tiny private box."

"Well... it could happen." Katiya's laughed, realizing how silly it sounded. More than a few eyes swung there way at Alexei's laughter.

"Desert Madame?" The waiter asked, almost seeming to appear next to Katiya as she set aside the plate of crab.

"No, no thank you." She smiled up at him. "We have a private box to go see." He didn't even pretend to understand, but he didn't have to as he cleared the dishes and swept away.

Looking at Katiya Alexei asked. "Finished then?"

"Yes, I want to see this private box of yours." She looked coyly over at the blonde.

Alexei smiled again at the joke and got up retrieving Katiya's coat she held it open for the other woman.

Aware of all the eyes watching them, Katiya slipped her arms into the coat, very aware of the taller body next to hers. "Thank you."

"My pleasure." Alexei purred out into Katiya's ear holding out an arm. "Let's go explore my private box." It was hard but she kept a straight face.

Katiya's face heated, but she managed not to laugh as she left, well aware of the jealous and intense looks that followed them.

#####3#####3

Alexei and Katiya entered the house; sexual energy seemed to crackle between them. The vampire was grinning at the subtle teasing Katiya loved to do on her account.

"Mistress." Lyov's bleak tone broke through gathering her attention. She gave the man her full attention; he was distressed his normally stoic demeanor shattered.

"What is wrong?" She asked her hands dropping from Katiya's body. When he didn't answer quickly enough, she yelled. "What has happened?"

"Its Shiro, she's... well there's been an accident. Fiona and Vidar are with her now. Gregori and Warren went into the city to find you." He sputtered.

"Where is she?" Alexei asked dread pooling into her stomach, choking her veins in ice.

"In the music room."

Alexei turned and ran to the music room, it was on the first floor, thankfully not far away. She smelled the blood, knew it was Shiro's from years of tasting it on her tongue. There were frantic whispered words, three bodies on the floor stained in red and pale flesh.

Shiro was cradled in Fiona's lap as Vidar now a man clothed in simple woolen trousers, tried to staunch the flow of blood that now no longer gushed from her wrists but oozed out from the frantic vicious cuts on to the floor.

She scrambled to the woman's side, falling to her knees, her black slacks soaking up the blood. "Shiro? Shiro." She cried out.

Fiona and Vidar looked up at her surprised, Shiro's eyes opened and she smiled at the



vampire. She lifted up a hand but the wrist hung loosely no longer controlled by the nerves and tendons that had been severed. The woman frowned and tried to speak.

"We found her too late." Vidar said frantically trying to grab back the hand Shiro was moving so he could again cover the wounds.

"Will she be okay?" Alexei asked looking frantically from Fiona to Vidar. At their grim expressions she knew the outcome wasn't what she wanted. Looking around she found the letter opener that Shiro had used and scrambled to it. Picking it up she scrambled back, she rolled up her shirtsleeve she lifted up the blunt edge to the soft underside of her arm and pressed down.

Shiro began to cry and try to get away. She didn't want Alexei's blood to heal her, she just wanted to go, the music was overwhelming her without an outlet to release it and now it could escape back into the universe. To die would release her from the music and from being the plaything of vampires. She didn't blame Alexei she had been a good Master, treated her far better than her family had but that was a long time ago. She has seen what Karl had done to Alexei, seen her struggle to help her and come to late to stop the brutalization of her body. That had shattered her faith in Alexei and that could never be healed. She kicked out desperately with her legs catching everyone by surprise.

The vampire grunted as Shiro kicked her away the letter opener gouging into her skin and then slide away as she hit the tile floor. From the floor she looked over in shock at Shiro.

Shiro looked at Alexei and smiled happy to be moving on, she could feel the music swell inside her at each struggling beat of her heart. She mouthed to Alexei. "I forgive you."

Then weakly her head rested against Fiona's legs, her eyes closing, she was too tired to keep them open.

So tired.

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# ~ The Secret History of Vampires ~

by Zee and Windstar

Enjoy and remember to send feedback to [Zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:Zeeamy@gmail.com) and [Adarkbow@yahoo.com](mailto:Adarkbow@yahoo.com)

## Part 7

These were the dark times. The evening before had been filled with light, artificial of course, but light nonetheless. In her memories that night would always be filled with sparkling light, laughter and a sensual haze. Katiya had loved every minute of it, the beautiful dress, and the expensive dinner with the attentive waiters, and then the Opera.

Oh how she'd loved the Opera!

The beautiful voices lifted in song with such pure sweet notes had been a revelation. Leaving the redhead stunned and breathless, leaning forward in her chair for every note. She'd never heard music like that before. Music itself was not something that had often entered her world. Rough lyrics sung in a drunken slur behind the bar and a few times she had heard the cathedral choir sing.

Nothing could compare to the sopranos, altos, and baritones she'd heard last night all off set with the magnificent orchestra. Alexei had laughed a rare thing in itself, at her wide-eyed stunned look as the first act began. The vampire hadn't made fun of her though; instead she'd sat next to her, even offering a handkerchief when the redhead had burst into tears at the death of a character.

Now though, there was only darkness and silence. Shiro's music was silent in the manor and Katiya missed it and her dearly.

Alexei's wordless howl of grief and anger had stunned everyone. Katiya had stood, rooted in place, at the entrance to the hall as Alexei had brushed past her, leaving Shiro's body behind. That had been the last she'd seen of the vampire that night, and the next.

This was the third night after Shiro's death and she sat in the room she'd taken after finding Alexei's door locked. No one had been able to get the vampire to come out; even Fiona had been forced to give up.

Darkness ruled the house again.

It was almost dawn outside; Katiya could see the dawn light starting to brighten the smog filled sky outside the window. She'd kept watch from here all night, her dreams when she slept fitfully, filled with Shiro's lovely face covered in blood. Today was the

third day after that awful night and she could wait no longer she told herself. It was time to see Tereza and find out if she'd gotten an answer from Mr. Gorsjki.

Tonight maybe she would be able to see Alexei again, but a part of her feared that she'd never see the vampire again.

That the dark silence, had swallowed her whole.

#####3#####3

It was just after sunrise when Katiya arrived at the front of the bank building that was Tereza's temporary home, Vidar trailing along behind her. As before she banged hard on the door, waited a few seconds and then did it again.

There was a string of words spoken angrily in Hungarian, and then the door was opened. "I paid the fucking rent to your lazy cow of a wife..." Tereza blinked her sleep-encrusted eyes opening. "Oh, uh, Katiya. Come in."

"Good morning to you too Tereza." Katiya had to grin at the sleep-tousled look. "Rough night?"

"No a long boring one, all the vampires I've been hunting have disappeared." She said in a clipped tone. "Oh by the way you really need to get your own place some no-necks came by to see you yesterday."

"But I like yours so much." She followed along behind the hunter, trying to sound like everything was as normal as possible. "Did they leave something for me?" If she could get whatever they had left quickly and leave maybe she could get away with it.

"Maybe. I heard the mysterious Alexei Petrova was seen out on a date, and even more scandalous it was another woman with red hair and a sinful green dress."

"It was a very nice dress." Katiya agreed, swallowing a little at the thought of how nice that dinner had been. "She even took me to the Opera." The way up the stairs to Tereza's rooms seemed longer than before.

"Some of the more interesting rumors are that she and her date disappeared from view in her private box at the opera and probably scandalously had sex in the theater." Tereza's voice was light but there was a hint of anger behind it.

"Only if you believe rumors of course." Katiya eyed the other woman as they entered her rooms. "Which you wouldn't of course."

"Me? Never." But she looked a little relieved. "So she's your puppet master, huh?" Now she had a name and face to put to the vampire she needed to kill.

Katiya's eyes narrowed slightly. "I'm not a puppet." This wasn't going as planned. "Just give me whatever the men left here for me."

"Whatever, maybe I'm wrong and she gives you freewill to do as you please." She went over to the bookshelf and retrieved a piece of paper.

The way the other woman phrased that set Katiya's teeth on edge, coupled with the sleepless nights eroded her already thin control. Behind her Vidar huffed as he lay down, watching. "I do whatever I want to do, get it in your thick hunter skull. What I'm doing, I'm doing because I want to do it. Not because she makes me."

"Then stay here with me."

Vidar's ears pricked up at that.

Katiya stopped, blinking and turned towards Tereza, hesitating. "I can't."

The hunter gave her a triumphant look. "What were you saying about freewill."

The redhead made an annoyed sound. "That's not it!" Well it was part of it. "I have to go see Mr. Gorsjki if he sent me that note."

Tereza frowned; she was hoping if Katiya stayed, the hunter could use the redhead to lure Alexei into her own territory.

"Go, but remember I still think you're wrong about vampires."

She held out her hand for the paper Tereza was still holding. "I know you think that." Katiya smiled tiredly.

Tereza handed over the paper. "I'm consistent."

"True." Katiya smiled and looked quickly at the paper. It was, as she'd hoped, an invitation to meet with Gorsjki. "I'll leave you to your rest. Be careful in your hunting."

"I will. You be careful too, sooner or later she'll get bored with you."

"Maybe." Shiro's face flashed in front of her mind. "But not today." Katiya waved and turned to leave, Vidar coming to his feet to follow her out.

Tereza watched her go, always seemed to be watching her go. So far Katiya came back, but she was still worried for the woman. She didn't like her being with that thing, and Katiya was seriously misguided about vampires. "She can't love you. Vampires are incapable of that emotion; she'll never give you security or a relationship. She'll just use you up until you're a dried up husk." She said bitterly to the woman's retreating back.

She turned and then kept walking. "I'll let you know what I find!" Katiya called back.

"Can't wait." The hunter stared at the doorway, angry that she'd just let Katiya walk out again.

#####3#####33

The notary looked just as innocuous during the daylight as it had during the night. Katiya was pretty sure there was no way Gorsjki could know it was her and Alexei that had broken in, at least she hoped so. She and Vidar were shown down the hallway towards his office. There was no sign of the guardian in the hallway, no left over pieces of leaves or stray dirt left. It was as if it never happened.

"Good morning Mr. Gorsjki." The man was, as usual, behind the desk.

The portly man looked up at her, one hand nervously played with his mustache. "And good afternoon to you Ms, eh, Katiya." He did not get up but he did stop fiddling with the ends of his mustache to gesture for her to take a seat.

"Thank you." She took the offered seat, looking at him expectantly.

"After seeing you out with Ms. Petrova the other night my employer is impressed and feels that he can meet your requirement of a face to face meeting. If you still desire one?"

Katiya kept her expression schooled. "Yes, I do. When do I get this meeting?"

"When you get the Cup. Once you have the Cup you may deliver it to my employer yourself. Merely send me a message that you have it and I will set up a meeting place and time. Is that acceptable?" He watched her closely.

That wasn't what she had been hoping for but she hoped her expression didn't reveal that. "If that's the only way, then yes, I'll take it." Now how was she going to get Alexei to give her the cup?

Vidar watched the man intently, waiting to see if he would try anything. He did not smell magic so he doubted Gorsjki was the creator of the Golem and the Hex, which meant another player. But as far as he could tell they were the only ones in the room.

"Very good. I hope you prove more reliable than Fenix." He said in a quiet warning.

Her eyes narrowed slightly. "What happened to Fenix?"

"I have no idea, but I'm sure it's unpleasant. My client doesn't like failure. Trust me when I say Katiya, I hope you are successful for both our sakes."

The portly man was quite aware this slip of a girl was more than likely his last chance.

"I don't fail when I set my mind to it." She rose from her seat. "I'll be in touch Mr. Gorsjki."

He watched her leave his office and only then did he get up and move to the window. Opening the blinds he gave the signal to the two men across the way that she had just left.

"We're almost there Vidar. Just a little more and we'll have a name and face of this person." She started walking quickly down the street away from the business. "Not sure how we are going to talk Alexei into this, but it's going to work out I think." Far better to focus on this then what had happened to Shiro.

Vidar didn't know how they were going to talk to Alexei either. He was surprised the vampire had taken Shiro's death as hard as she had. Maybe he should have Katiya pick the lock before Alexei went without food for too much longer.

The hound noticed first they were being followed again. He whined softly not liking the looks of the creepy thin man and the large giant they stared too intently at Katiya.

"She's really upset isn't she Vidar?" She sighed, knowing she wasn't going to be able to keep from thinking about it no matter how hard she tried.

"Hmm?" The redhead looked around, not sure what had Vidar whining.

His hackles raised but kept them moving, prevented Katiya from taking risky shortcuts and kept them in crowded city blocks.

The storm had left large snowdrifts, which were now dirty and gray from pollution, which made it hard to maneuver down the streets.

"What is it... oh." She stumbled a little, catching sight of the large man towering over the rest of the crowded street "Boris." That meant Ivan wasn't far behind. She nearly tripped over the snow bank, recovered, and tried to move faster.

Vidar didn't like the sound of Katiya's voice, when she said the man's name. He wasn't certain where to take them, they didn't have much of the weak winter light left, and the two men didn't seem to want to stop following.

Licking dry lips, Katiya tried to force herself to think past the fear. "Crap." She couldn't very well lead them back to the Manor. There weren't many other places to go. "We're going back to Tereza's, Vidar."

The hound whined but knew they were out of options right now. Those men had an

aura of menace around them and it was too far to the manor.

"Tereza's going to be thrilled." Katiya mumbled, changing direction and heading back towards the vampire hunters house. She lost sight of Boris and Ivan about halfway there, but judging by Vidar's low growl, they were still trailing them.

She moved up the steps to the old bank well into the afternoon, frowning. Depending how long they were going to skulk around she might break her promise to Alexei. Not that the vampire was likely to notice, she thought darkly.

So once again she found herself banging on the front door to the old bank, hoping the vampire hunter was home.

#####3#####3

Alexei awoke groggy a sense of panic. It wasn't her panic, someone else's... Katiya's. She'd been feeding almost exclusively from Katiya so they were more in tune sensing extreme emotions that was the connection of the blood. Had to find Katiya she thought, but the daylight lighting the hazy winter sky made her thoughts slow and getting up hard.

Tereza opened the door her expression changing to a smirk. "Missed me already?"

"Desperately." Katiya pushed past Tereza, looking down the street to make sure that she couldn't see any sign of Boris and Ivan. "Just have to lose some friends."

"You are a trouble magnet." She looked outside. "Oh him again. Want me to shoot them?"

"Yes?" Katiya sighed. "No. He's my problem. I guess." One she'd enjoy avoiding forever if she could. "Where are they?" Curious, the redhead moved behind Tereza peering around her shoulder.

"Watching. They're pretending to choose a pub to drink at."

"Where?" Pressing closer, Katiya spotted them. "Oh. Who knew Boris could fit in that well. I hope they won't stick around long. Ivan gets bored easily so hopefully he'll go away."

"Hopefully. You know you're problems never go away if you hide from them. You have to face them head on."

"One of those problems can crush my head with one abnormally large muscular hand." Katiya knew she sounded annoyed but Tereza seemed to bring out the best in her. Pushing away from her Katiya turned to go upstairs towards Tereza's rooms.

"Come on in." Tereza said with a sigh.

Tereza followed inside shutting the door. "I made some oatmeal if you want some she gestured to the simple kitchen.

Her stomach reminded Katiya that she hadn't eaten since the morning. "Hmmm, oatmeal." Katiya felt better once the doors were closed. "I'll try to leave before nightfall."

"I think you should stay its already late go back to your master in the morning. It will be safer then." Tereza said sitting down.

Taking a bowl of the offered oatmeal Katiya took a spoonful. She sighed in appreciation. "If I stay I'd break my promise to Alexei. Besides, aren't you going out hunting or whatever it is you do every night?"

"Yeah, but you can stay here its safe with your pet dog. At least until sunrise. Vampires can't enter I've sealed it against them."

She didn't have to look over at the white hound to know that his lips had curled up over his canines. "He really doesn't like it when people think he's my pet." She took another mouthful. "Or a dog."

The hunter shrugged. "He looks like a dog and he acts like a pet following you around."

Vidar was growing less and less fond of the woman. She made a lot of assumptions and lived her world through stereotypes, it was a wonder she was a good hunter at all.

He looked up at Katiya pleading to be allowed to bite the arrogant woman.

"No hurting her." Was the response, although Katiya's lips twitched in the beginning of a smile. She wasn't sure why, but Tereza always seemed to make her grin at her.

"He's definitely not a pet." She said louder, stretching out in the chair with a sigh of pleasure.

Tereza just shrugged and moved to an old worn desk and started taking apart one of her guns to clean it. She would make Katiya stay. She had thought about that a lot recently, because the thought of that monster putting her hands on Katiya made her see red. But she hadn't forcibly detained Katiya because of that dog. She had no idea what kind it was, but it was huge and fiercely protective of Katiya. She wondered if it was some sort of vamp hound, perhaps given vamp blood to make it scarier but that would imply a sort of caring on the part of Katiya's master and Tereza couldn't believe that.

"So what kind of dog is he?" She asked casually.



"The special kind." Was the teasing answer as Katiya watched Tereza work curiously. She wasn't about to tell a Vampire Hunter that Vidar could change shape into a man that probably wouldn't go over very well.

Tereza huffed; she sort of expected that answer. Smoothly she disassembled the gun and began to clean and oil its parts. "Was he a gift from your Master?" That would make it easier on her to kill it.

Katiya sighed and stood up. "Do you think of anything other than hunting? Is that all you are, a zealot that hunts from city to city?"

"No. I work at the Monastery of my order sometimes. I like to garden and I think about you." Tereza said not looking up from her work.

"What Monastery?" Katiya leaned against the wall, watching the dark skinned woman clean the gun, ignoring the last part of her statement.

"It's in the Austrian mountains, the Monastery of St. Thomas. It's so green there and you can see the stars at night, unlike here where the pollution is so bad."

"The stars..." Katiya said wistfully. They were almost a dim memory; the sky here was always covered with manmade clouds. "So is that where they train future vampire hunters?"

"Some do follow that calling, others become friars with the order following passive calling to God. Women who do not become Hunters are sent to a Nunnery. They make good mead there and sell it to make money for repairs and other good works." The hunter was feeling almost homesick she had only returned for a few days before being sent out here.

"So you're not this solo madwoman bent on fanatically hunting down vampires all by yourself." That was interesting. "Someone trained you to do what you do." Whatever it took to take talk away from Vidar, who thankfully wasn't looking as annoyed as he had before.

"No and my offer to steal you away from that undead, blood sucking fiend still stands. Father Thomas will know what to do to help you, besides Vampires can't enter holy ground."

"Just like they don't like garlic?" Moving a little closer, Katiya watched curiously as Tereza did something to the inner workings of the gun. "Who's Father Thomas?"

Tereza made a face, "Garlic doesn't bother them at all. He's in charge of the Monistary; he taught me everything I know."

The redhead made a face. "Am I the only one who thought they hated garlic?"

"No probably most of the normal people you use to work with in that factory probably think that as well."

Moving over to one of the windows, Katiya peered down into the street beyond, grimacing as she spotted the large man lurking nearby. "Boris's still outside. I guess I'm staying a while." The sun was setting fast. "I'm going to break my promise to Alexei."

"My offer still stands." Tereza said as she smoothly put the gun back together. "You're nothing but a possession to that thing; it is not capable of caring about you or loving you."

"Would you stop saying that?" Katiya whirled angrily. "You don't know that." She realized how insane that sounded. "She cares. She worries about me."

"No she doesn't. She's worried about losing face and losing a possession." Tereza stood up and yelled back. "Monsters can't love."

"She's not a monster!" Katiya snarled back.

Tereza wanted to throttle the woman, God how could she love that thing, when she was here flesh and blood, human? Capable of the things that monster wasn't, yet Katiya couldn't see the truth. "When the truth hits you I'll be here for you Katiya, and I'll try to save you." The hunter turned walking quickly into the bedroom to change into clothes more suited for hunting. She needed to leave and hunt before she did something stupid.

"I don't need saving." Even to her own ears, Katiya's words sounded a little uncertain.

#####3#####3

It was well past nightfall by the time Boris and Ivan gave up on watching Tereza's place. The hunter was long gone, taking her weapons with her. Leaving Katiya and Vidar to lock the door behind them as they left.

"Alexei's going to be upset." The redhead said, looking around before starting to a part of the city where they could get a coach to take them to the manor. "If she realizes I'm gone."

The hound whined in sympathy and butted his head against her thigh in understanding.

"Stupid of me, I know, Tereza's right, I'm just a servant." She patted his head though.

The shadowy figure followed her around the city, seething with hate. She had changed everything; their world had started to unravel the moment Alexei had spotted her from

the window in her office. He clearly remembered her feigned disinterest in the woman.

He'd lost his place in the factories and in the household because of her, it was easier to make it her fault, she was just a pet a human, and how he hated humans. Hated that Alexei loved them, looked out for them, instead of treating them like the food source they were. The factories gave him an outlet for his hatred, by treating them poorly and cruelly it fed some of that dark need in him. Now it was gone and he had no outlet.

He would have just jumped her and ripped her apart and left her on the cobbled drive to the manor house for Alexei to find, but there was the hound to consider. It had taken him a while in a lot of dark places. Places of witches, gypsies, and magic users; to get what he needed. Now he followed and waited. Waited for her to take herself someplace unsafe, it shouldn't be too much longer now.

The moment she ducked down an alley to take a short cut he grinned cruelly and followed. He brought the blowgun to his lips and took aim with a quick exhale the dart silently sailed out and embedded into skin hidden beneath white fur.

Vidar gave a whine and turned biting and nipping at the patch of skin that currently stung.

His smile larger now, Sergei stepped out of the shadows and made himself known. "You cannot ever take the safe path for long can you?"

He didn't wait for an answer just kept moving forward.

Vidar growled and took a step to block his path only to find his legs would no longer keep himself upright.

"Do you know how much chaos and ruin you have sowed in your brief time with us? You've changed our world and we do not thank you for it."

The hound willed Katiya to run even as his jaws feebly snapped at the madman. This wasn't good; Alexei should have followed up on Sergei instead of assuming the vampire had left the city.

"Vidar?" Katiya, eyes wide in the darkness, backed away from the advancing vampire. She reached into her dress, palming the dagger that she had carried ever since her father had given it to her. "What did you do to Vidar?"

"Made sure he didn't get in the way of our little moment." He said with a sneer. "You're going to be my little message to Alexei that she's not as powerful as she'd like us all to think. Life was good before you. She slept the nights away in front of the fire and left us alone. You woke her up and made her stick her nose into my business at the factories."

"Oh poor Sergei can't even be master of the factories he oversaw." Katiya kept backing

up even though she refused to back down verbally. "You probably enjoyed watching the machines hurt the workers didn't you?" Her palm was damp as she held the dagger in her waistband.

"Of course, it's no different than leading cattle to slaughter houses. Only you do a little more work before becoming food. I saw her interest in you that night, and you're lucky because if she hadn't taken you then I had plans to follow you home and make sure you had a nasty accident." He chuckled. "A little delayed but now I get to finally follow through on that. I might even leave a little note on your body so Alexei knows how much time you were spending with that bitch hunter. I'll definitely tell Karl, he'll love to know how traitorous one of Alexei's pets was. I'll be a hero for killing you."

"Karl." Every moment that Katiya kept him talking, the longer she stayed alive. "You work for him don't you? No wonder Alexei thinks you're useless." She didn't know that, but it was a good guess. "I bet you helped him hurt Shiro, you bastard." Fear was battling with anger for dominance as a primordial part of her mind screamed at her to run as the Vampire approached.

"The Asian girl was a nothing but a trained animal that could do tricks, but no, I didn't hurt her. But yes, I threw my lot in with Karl he's promised me Alexei's place as head of this town, and poor Alexei will be staked and buried for centuries."

He stalked her savoring her fear, inhaling it made him nearly swoon. Alexei may enjoy desire from her food but he had a darker appetite.

Fear was making it hard to move as she backed away, knowing she was running out of space behind her. He was taunting her; she could tell he was enjoying the fear and almost numbing terror that was filling her. "Alexei's going to kill you. She'll hunt you down to the ends of the world."

"She may try but I have powerful allies now. I will chain her in the basement of her own house. I will have this city and Karl will have his war." He growled out surging forward in a blur of movement.

Katiya had a second to picture the metal door in the basement before Sergei did that blur movement trick that she'd scene vampires do. It confused the eyes, nothing should move that fast, and she desperately tried to toss herself sideways already knowing she wasn't fast enough and slashing wildly with her dagger.

He ignored the stinging slice of the blade; he slammed her back into the icy brick of the building. One hand tore open her shirt while the other pushed her head back. He tore into the long column of flesh now exposed with no kindness.

Those fingers were like bands of iron around her and no matter how much she thrashed, Katiya couldn't even loosen his hold on her. Then his teeth were at her neck

and her scream turned into a gasp as she felt the blood welling and leaving her.

Streaking across the rooftops Alexei ran, cold night air blowing by her, unfelt. She was looking for Katiya. She had felt her distress but that was it, frustrated she couldn't pinpoint her pet any further than that she was in the city.

Skidding to a stop in the black snow on top of a bank building she felt mind-numbing fear and pain. Taking a deep breath she tried to push it away so she could think and act. This was why she shouldn't feed so exclusively off of just one pet. It bonded them too close; it was overwhelming in times of extreme emotional outbursts. Getting control she looked around and leapt to another building running across she didn't stop merely made the leap to yet another building then when she reached the end of that one she let herself fall from the roof to the alley below. Catching Sergei with his fangs in Katiya made her vision coat red in rage.

With a roar that made people shift nervously in their sleep, she was on him tearing him away. She pummeled him with her fists. Blow after blow rained down on him. The young vampire was shocked she had found them; he thought he'd planned this out so well. With the Asian pet's death Alexei was holed up in her room with grief.

Katiya's vision was starting to blur and darken. She'd beat her fist against Sergei's shoulder at first, now she was down to what felt like slowly taping it. Her strength was flowing out of her, so fast she knew she would die soon if he kept drinking. Her eyes fluttered and lethargy settled on her limbs, now Sergei had to hold her up to keep her from collapsing.

Then suddenly he was gone and Katiya collapsed like a puppet without its strings.

Coughing up blood Sergei gasped out not for mercy, for that wouldn't do him any good, but a warning. "You're pet's dying."

Eyes flashing she turned her head looking at Katiya's slumped body in the cold snow of the alley, and she dropped Sergei letting him crawl away as she rushed to the young woman's side.

The wound on her neck was bad. No delicate lovers bite. "Ah, Katiya." She whispered, as she gently raised the woman up into her arms.

Dark blood pooled around the area where Katiya lay in the snow bank, her breathing shallow and her eyes fluttered open as strong arms picked her up again.

"Alexei?" She whispered, not daring to hope.

The vampire began to lick the wound but already she could tell her saliva wouldn't be enough to start the healing of the torn flesh.

She pulled back. "I'm here. It's going to be okay." She spoke quietly before turning her attention back to the still bleeding wound. Blood covered her and the snow. Biting her tongue so it now bled she went back to licking the wound now with her saliva and blood perhaps it would heal.

Katiya's eyes rolled back in her head and her body went limp in Alexei's arms as she passed out.

There was a soft click that reached Alexei's ears and she pulled away from Katiya just in time to reach out and catch the crossbow bolt.

Quiet cursing came from the mouth of the alleyway and Tereza tossed aside the empty crossbow and pulled out the gun. "Get away from her you monster!" She raised the specially modified rifle to her shoulder, hesitating since Alexei was still holding Katiya.

Alexei bared her fangs and growled. She was in a bad position with Katiya being so badly hurt; she needed at least one hand to hold Katiya.

"Now monster!" The dark skinned hunter slid her finger until it touched the trigger. "I warned her you'd hurt her."

This all seemed very familiar to Alexei. Then it came to her, "You!" She roared. "You shot me in that blood bar." She snarled, "Fucking hunter you're in the wrong place at the wrong time again. Jumping to conclusions you do more harm than good. Keep this up your god will forsake you as well."

"I'll see you in hell before I let you hurt her again. I'm just sorry I didn't shoot you in the head and then stake you." Tereza took a slow step forward, trying to angle so that she could get a clear shot at the vampire without hitting the human woman she was holding.

Alexei started to get up, hauling Katiya up, easily with her. She needed to move this stand off was getting dangerous for Katiya. As she moved Katiya moaned in pain and Alexei's eyes shifted from the Hunter to her pet.

It wasn't much of an opening, but the Hunter had used slimmer one's before. The angle was bad, and it wasn't a killing headshot that she wanted, but she took it. The rifle bucked at her shoulder as she pulled the trigger, sending the solid black iron stake hurtling through the air between them.

The iron stake hit the vampire in the shoulder and the velocity made her stagger back Katiya slipping from her hands. For a moment she stood stunned and then the pain hit roaring from the point of impact through her body.

Holy water blazed through her system and she screamed dropping to her hands and knees as her arteries and veins bulged and writhed like electricity under her skin.

There wasn't enough time to save Katiya and try to kill the monster. It was a tough decision and one that Tereza knew Father Robert would have disapproved of, but the hunter sprinted towards the bleeding human. Time to get Katiya away from the monster once and for all.

Convulsing in the snow Alexei was unable to do anything but watch the hunter take Katiya away.

"I'll be back for you later vampire!" Tereza yelled, struggling to hold up Katiya. There was still blood sluggishly pulsing from the wound at her neck, but it didn't look as bad as she'd feared from the amount of blood everywhere.

Decades, years, months, days, minutes, she was unsure of the time frame as the last of the poison worked its way out of her system. Blood and spittle frothed from Alexei's lips as she finished vomiting again. She had pulled the stake from her arm and it laid smoking in the snow, one arm hung useless at her side. She sniffed the ground. The hunter would not best her, and take her prize.

Finding the scent she set out following it.

#####3#####3

Everything hurt, her head, her neck, even her toes ached. But since it all hurt that probably meant she wasn't dead, since everyone kept on saying the dead couldn't feel pain. Someone nearby moaned. Then they did it again and she realized it was her. Swallowing against a mouth that tasted like she'd gargled in sand, Katiya eyes opened into slit. The last thing she remembered was thinking she was dying. "Hello?" She tried to say, but it came out more like a wheezy gasp.

"Hey don't move." Tereza said from where she was washing out the cloth she had torn into strips for bandages. "That vamp did a lot of damage. It's taken me forever to get the bleeding to stop altogether."

She was confused, why was Tereza there, where was Alexei? She had a dim memory of the beautiful blonde vampire in the alleyway. "Water?" She croaked, desperately thirsty.

"Right." Tereza dropped the bandages into the small ceramic tub and frantically looked for a clean glass. Finding one, she filled it with water and took it to Katiya.

"Easy, just sip it."

She ran her fingers through Katiya's hair. "I told you she'd hurt you. Why didn't you listen?" She said mostly to herself.

The water was the most delicious thing the redhead had ever tasted. She greedily

drank what she could, then sagged back against the bundle of clothes on Tereza's bed that served as a pillow. "She didn't." Katiya's voice sounded a little better.

"I saw her Katiya. She was covered in blood and feasting on your neck."

Tiredly the redhead shook her head. "No. It was Sergei. He wanted to send a message."

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Alexei sniffed around the building, it was in a shitty part of town. Human trash littered this place, a feeding ground for the desperate and the out of luck. Daylight wasn't too far off and she had to be sure this was the right building she would not get another chance.

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"Katiya, there was no guy there only a female vamp, she had blonde hair and her fangs in you neck."

Just like the last time they had met, Katiya found herself glaring at Tereza. The hunter always seemed to be pushing her. "I know what happened, I was there after all." Grimacing she reached up to touch the bandage on her neck. "He..." She shuddered remembering the cold embrace "bit me. Not Alexei."

"I think you need to rest more, you're confused. You've lost a lot of blood. Once the sun rises I'll go into the market and try and find you some liver to eat. You're going to be weak and vulnerable to sickness for a while."

Tereza was annoyed that Katiya was still protecting that vampire; the hunter knew what she had seen.

"Liver?" Katiya looked dubious about that. Trying to get up resulted in a wave of dizziness and she collapsed back down on the bed, sweating and had to wait for the room to stop spinning. "I need to go back to the manor." She gasped, when the room stopped doing wave like motions around her.

Alexei was as positive as she was ever going to be this was where Katiya had been taken too. Lifting her foot she brought it crashing down on the door shattering the lock.

"You're not going back..." Tereza was cut off by the sound of smashing wood. "Fuck." She grumbled running for a weapon.

The vampire growled in annoyance as a barrier prevented her from entering. She should have expected it.



Eyes wide, Katiya managed to sit up. The room even stayed put this time, except for around the edges. "What if it's Sergei?" The redhead went another shade paler, which considering how pale she normally was.

Biting her lip the vampire spat blood on to the barrier and started to recite the counterspell; it helped that Katiya was inside, blood of her blood, and all that.

Tereza didn't say anything, but she doubted it was this Sergei person. "This close to sunrise, it's probably a very human predator. A vampire wouldn't risk getting caught in the sun, besides I have a spell up so vampires can only enter if invited." She hefted her gun and silently walked out into the hallway.

Alexei pressed her hand against the barrier pushing until it gave way and her hand slid through followed by her arm, and then the rest of her body.

"Wait..." Katiya tried to get up, shivering, not wanting to be left alone.

Alexei ducked as the wood over the doorjamb exploded as a bullet slammed into it.

"Stay put." The vampire hunter growled back at the redhead, not taking her eyes off the door below. She aimed the pistol down at the door, watching closely. "Come on scum, give me a shot." She whispered.

Alexei growled out. "I want my pet, Hunter. So either give her to me or I'll take her over your dead body." Her eyes searched the rundown flat for a weapon; she needed something to give her an edge now that she had only one good arm.

"And here I thought you were just some stupid human. This is great; the prey is coming to me now!" Behind her Katiya called out Alexei's name. "Stop it." Tereza sighed, reaching behind her and slamming the door shut, just for good measure she barred it from the outside. "This is for your own good Katiya."

Inching along the landing she kept an eye on the floor below with a feral smile. "Glad you came Alexei, we've got unfinished business."

Tensing her legs the vampire surged forward running into the kitchen.

From her vantage point Tereza pulled the trigger in rapid succession, swearing as she missed.

"You took what's mine; I'm not going to ignore that." Her eyebrows rose at the repeating gun, she was going to have to look into that. A weapon she didn't need to pause to reload after every shot would come in handy. She growled out her eyes scanning the rusted pots and pans. "Not one for cooking I see."

"She's better off without you. You're just going to end up killing her, monster." Breaking open the revolver the copper cartridges rained down onto the ground. Quickly she thumbed more into the empty holes and snapped it closed again. "It's almost light outside vampire, you have no where to run now!" Carefully she edged to the stairs, aiming at the kitchen doorway.

Alexei ignored that, because it was true and she had no answer for why she had put herself in a stupid dangerous position, only that it seemed to happen a lot since she'd brought Katiya into her life. She studied the cast iron stove for a moment, and then bent down.

"What's wrong vampire? You know it's true, you're just going to get her killed or kill her yourself." The second step from the top squeaked, she eased over it, switching pistol hands so that she could hold a stake in her other hand. "I won't let you hurt her again."

"I find that trouble finds Katiya regardless if I'm in the equation or not?" Alexei said in response.

There was a crash from inside the kitchen. "But you're not being honest. I could say the same for you. You'll get her killed, put her in danger. You're a hunter; you probably have a league of demons and monsters wanting your blood. But the truth is you want her and it pisses you off that I'm what she wants."

"She just thinks she wants you." The hunter stepped onto the landing of the stairs. "I can take her somewhere safe." A few more steps and she was on the ground floor, focused entirely on the hunt.

"Katiya, I find is quiet stubborn about having her own mind, despite my tries to influence what she does." Alexei said grinning in anticipation.

"She is stubborn." Grudgingly Tereza agreed. Above them Katiya's yelling could barely be heard followed by the slam of something against the door. "And feisty." Eyes narrowing she took a step towards the door, considering her options and trying to judge how far away the vampire was by her voice.

She heard her now, down on her level. She took a breath and slowly let it out and then charged out of the kitchen, straight at the hunter.

With a yell, the hunter emptied her pistol, firing as quickly as she could pull the trigger at the moving blur. Even as she shot she moved sideways, thrusting out with the stake in her other hand, trying to use the vampire's momentum against her.

Each bullet slammed into the cast iron door she had removed from the stove. Her eyes never left the hunter adjusting her make shift shield, she slammed it into the hunter.

Clever vampire, Tereza thought, flying sideways into a wall. The old plaster exploded in

a cloud of dust and the dark skinned woman bared her teeth, coming up into a crouch. "I'm going to enjoy staking you." No time to reload so she tossed the gun aside.

Alexei gritted her teeth and tried to follow up with another body slam, this had to end quickly she wouldn't last long once the sun rose.

There was no way that she was going to last long against a vampire this had to end fast. Twisting she grabbed at the glass vial at her belt and smashed it on Alexei's shoulder. She'd aimed for the vampire's face, but she was damned fast.

"Eat holy water, vampire!" She snarled.

Alexei howled as the holy water saturated her shirt and down on to her skin. She slammed the hunter again and let go of the heavy iron door.

Plaster once again exploded as Tereza slammed into it and slid down the wall, coughing. It felt like being kicked in the chest by a horse.

With her one good arm she hit the hunter again and again, until a good leg sweep had her on her back and had her struggling on her back. Her one good arm was trying too slow the decent of a stake to her heart.

"Why won't you just die, again?" Tereza pushed down with her entire being on the stake, willing it to sink into the vampire's chest.

She hissed as the wood pressed into her flesh and the skin parted. Miles away Stepan, the twins and even closer Sergei clutched at their own chests as pain burned there.

Upstairs Katiya screamed, loud and on and on and filled with pain. Tereza frowned, hesitating for a split second and glancing upwards at the bared doorway.

That pause was all Alexei needed she brought her legs up scissoring around Tereza and pulling the hunter down and Alexei up. Wrestling, her people had always been big on wrestling, she was thankful now. Now upright she punched Tereza soundly in the temple.

Something vaguely resembling a sledgehammer hit her in the side of the head and the world went black. The hunter slumped over Alexei's lap, unconscious.

Shakily she got up and staggered up the steps. She found the barred door and removed the board. "Katiya?" She croaked.

"Alexei?" Katiya's called, thin and tired, but alive. "You came for me."

The vampire just nodded tired. "Does she have shackles, chains, or rope? I need to make sure if she wakes up once the sun rises she won't kill me."

"Rope on the chair." The redhead tried to get up, but swayed and didn't make it very far up. "I told her it wasn't you. I swear I tried."

"Doesn't matter she wants me to be guilty." She grabbed the rope then sighed, "Damnit." She muttered, it was going to be very near impossible to tie the woman up with one hand.

"You're not going to hurt her?" Katiya asked.

Alexei shot Katiya a dirty look, "She tried to kill me and you don't want me to hurt her?" She hadn't been planning on it but now, now she wanted to.

"But she was just trying to save me." Katiya smiled wanly. "From you, but she was trying to save me."

Alexei didn't say anything she just stormed out and down the stairs. The hunter was still unconscious as she looped the rope around the woman's hands and using her teeth to help tighten it into a knot. Then she strung the rope down to the woman's ankles and repeated the process. Her body ached as she tried to barricade the door, before heading back up stairs.

The human was still in the bed, looking worried and trying to figure out how to stop saying the wrong thing as the vampire came back up the stairs. For a second she didn't know what to say then winced remembering the sharp pain in her chest. "Are you all right?"

Alexei just looked at Katiya for a moment.

"I've been shot with an iron bolt coated in holy water, had said holy water infect my whole system nearly killing me, I feel like my veins have been scrubbed out with tiny bubbles. Then, I've been shot at, had holy water smashed on me again, and nearly staked through the heart, and now I'm trapped in a house with a hunter until night falls again. I've been better." She grumbled out as she inspected the small room. There was thankfully one small window and she took her jacket off and nailed it over the window with a couple of stakes she found lying around the room.

"And there's only one bed." Katiya smiled wanly. "Thank you for saving me from Sergei."

"You're welcome." She sighed looking at the bed and kicked off her boots. She sat on the edge of the bed and with her good hand reached over and brushed hair out of Katiya's face. "I'd never let anything happen to you and I wish I wasn't so hurt or I'd give you more blood to help you heal."

"You gave me blood?" Katiya blinked, the last moments in that alley were fuzzy.

"Sergei, he really hates you I think." She shifted closer to the beautiful blonde and when nothing happened she leaned against her.

"Yes, I'd say he does. I should have done something sooner about him, but I assumed he'd come back. Can't spy on me for Karl if he's not near me." She leaned over slightly and kissed the top of Katiya's head. "Scoot over, sun rise is coming I'm not long for consciousness. I trust you to protect me from the big bad hunter." She smiled into the red hair and kissed it once more; happy she had been in time.

"I get to protect you this time huh?" Katiya scooted and yawned, resting her head on Alexei's shoulder. She was going to take a little nap while the hunter was out. This was going to be a long day.

"I'd appreciate that, very much." It was hard to move around and get comfortable with only the use of one hand but finally she managed. She was hungry and she'd have to go feed soon but tomorrow would have to be soon enough. As the sun climbed higher into the sky Alexei's eyelids drooped lower and lower until they closed.

Feeling the vampire go still, Katiya leaned up to give her a light kiss. "I'll protect you my vicious vampire." Then she leaned her head down and closed her eyes.

#####3#####3

Tereza awoke feeling like a train had parked on her skull, then when she tried to move and found herself trussed like a fatted calf for dinner she lost it.

"God Damn it! Where are you... you... vile, unholy, virgin defiling piece of filth!" She howled out, struggling in her bonds.

The noise woke up Katiya. Groggily she pulled away from the vampire she'd been using as a pillow. "Ugh." Rubbing at grimy eyes she sighed. "That time I guess." Fantastic. Trying not to disturb Alexei she crawled over the vampire and started down the stairs.

"Stop it; you're just cutting yourself up on the rope."

"Katiya?" Tereza went still. "Is that you?"

"Unfortunately." She grumbled, taking the steps one at a time and stopping to keep the room from spinning at every other one. At least she'd managed to get out of bed though. "Stop hurting yourself."

Tereza mumbled a quick prayer. "Help me get untied."

The other woman made it to the ground floor and pulled over a dust covered chair to sit in before she fell over. "Sorry about the ropes."

Tereza looked at Katiya. "Sorry, you're sorry and I sense a but in there."

"I can't untie you. You'd try to stake Alexei, or cut off her head, probably both actually."

"She's a vampire of course I will!" She just stared in shock at the young woman. "You can't leave me defenseless; she'll kill me when she wakes up." Tereza tried to play on Katiya's sympathies.

"No she won't." Katiya leaned forward. "I promise, I won't let her do that." That was a big promise, but she'd find a way.

The hunter growled in frustration. "Why choose them over you're own kind? She attacked you, she doesn't care about you."

But even the Hunter was having a hard time believing her words to risk being caught in daylight that was more than she would ever expect from a vampire to risk for a human.

"Stop saying she attacked me! She saved me, why won't you believe that?" Angrily Katiya got up again. "I'm going to find you some water." Once again Tereza was getting her upset.

The hunter let her head thump against the wall. "I have some money go to the market and get a goat or a couple of chicken's she's going to need blood when she wakes up and I rather it wasn't mine or yours. She'd kill us."

Katiya knew she couldn't give blood again so soon, she was still too weak, but she didn't like the idea of leaving. "You just want me to leave you here alone with Alexei."

Tereza raised an eyebrow, "Do I look like I'm going anywhere?"

"You're a vampire hunter! You probably have knives hidden all over the place to cut yourself free with."

"True, but your lover," She spat the word lover. "Found them all and removed them." She jutted her chin to a corner of the room where several weapons were piled up out of reach.

"Oh." Katiya blinked. "That's an impressive pile."

Tereza just made a face. "Thanks, be more impressive if she hadn't found them all."

"And of course you'd tell me if she'd missed one or two. Right?" Katiya smiled.

"Of course." She gave an innocent grin.

"Of course." Katiya laughed, shifting to get comfortable in the chair. She didn't trust Tereza not to get herself into trouble.

The grin dropped. "I don't understand something. Why didn't she kill me?"

"Hmmm..." Katiya pretended to think. "I guess it's because she isn't as much of a monster as you think she is."

The hunter snorted, "She is a monster. She's not natural to the order of the world; her and her kind don't belong. And it's my job to kill them and bring order."

The redhead studied her. With a sigh she got up and found a clean glass to fetch water for her. "Here." Kneeling beside her she held the glass up to her lips. "There are all sorts of monsters in the world. I think there have always been."

She drank the water. "Thank you." She let her head lean back as she again tested the ropes.

"Stop doing that. You'll hurt yourself." Pulling the chair closer she sat down again, drinking for herself.

"If you were in my place would you stop testing your bonds?"

"Probably not." Blue eyes studied her. "I'm sorry. Are you hurt?"

"Not really, just a headache. Look, the sun is going to be setting soon, will you please go get your Mistress some food, I promise I won't attack her."

"Do you swear you won't?" Katiya was torn. Alexei would need blood, but to leave Tereza here alone?

"May God strike me down." Tereza said earnestly.

"I'm not kidding here Tereza, if you hurt her I'll..." She struggled to find a threat. "I'll never forgive you."

"Whoa, I promise. I won't hurt her."

"All right." Tugging up her dress collar the other woman frowned. "Does this hide the wound?"

Tereza nodded.

"All right." Katiya eyed the door, nervously. "I hope Vidar is all right." She hadn't seen any sign of the hound. "Did you see him when you came to rescue me?"

"I don't remember, I was pretty focused on getting rid of that thing attached to your

neck."

"Thanks." Katiya smiled. "For trying to save me that is, not for trying to kill Alexei." She was nervous to leave without Vidar she realized. "I'll be back soon."

"I'll be here."

As soon as the door shut she gritted her teeth and fell over to her side and started inching towards the pile of weapons. She would keep her word, she convinced herself she was just going to cut herself loose and make a run for it.

Alexei sat down on the top step of the stairs, staring at the struggling woman. Her eyes were large and hungry and the only thing that stopped her was a beam of weak sunlight that slashed through the room.

Tereza tensed as she heard a board creak.

"Please keep going, food is so much better when it's recently had the blood pumping through its veins." Her fangs were exposed as she spoke. She was so very hungry.

"How the fuck are you awake? The sun hasn't even set yet." This was very very, bad.

#####3#####3

It was just after sundown by the time that Katiya made her way back to the hunter's place. She hurried as quickly as she could, but the animal she was tugging along with her wasn't too amused to be dragged along. "Oh god, please let them both still be alive, or at least in one piece!"

Shoving the door opened she had to pull the stubborn animal inside with her. "Alexei? Tereza?"

Tereza was afraid to move a muscle she'd lost count of the minutes but she was well aware of the moment the sunlight had faded. The vampire had seemed to forget about her, although she wasn't certain and she wasn't about to remind her.

"Katiya thank god."

That was Tereza's voice; well at least she was still alive. "Is Alexei there?" She struggled with the stupid animal, trying to get further inside.

"I'm here." The vampire said from where she was perched on the step in the dark.

Good, nobody had staked or bitten anyone else. That was a success. "I have something for you." She really hoped Alexei wasn't about to be insulted as she finally managed to get the goat into the main room. It was the largest animal she'd been able



to find.

"It's a goat." She said getting up. She could hear all the little human heart beats around her. Struggling to pump blood through their frail little bodies.

"Um. Yes a goat. I couldn't find anyone to donate." She grimaced as soon as she'd said it.

"Katiya, I think maybe you should come over here near me." Tereza said quietly. The vampire was unnerving her.

"Tereza, you probably shouldn't talk right now. Or move." Katiya was staring up the stairs, shivering a little as she met Alexei's eyes.

Alexei made her way down the steps, she hurt, the holy water still burned her skin, and hunger gnawed at her belly. She smiled slightly as Katiya didn't flinch when she stopped toe to toe with her. "Such a brave mouse."

"You told me to be brave." Katiya looked up into her eyes. The hunger in the vampire's eyes drew her in. "Do you need human blood?" Standing there, she realized she would offer it if Alexei needed it, no matter what.

"It's preferable." She leaned in nibbling at those pale lips, tempting them to open as her tongue sought entry.

Forgetting about the hunter laying on the floor nearby tensing against her bonds, Katiya opened her mouth enjoying the kiss.

Katiya's skin was cool and her pulse weak telling her a lot about the woman's health. Katiya needed her too much for her to be a monster, despite how her hunger weakened her. Pulling back she took the rope from Katiya and dragged the animal into the kitchen. "Give me a moment, and I'll make you some roasted goat."

"You cook?" She didn't know why but that astounded the human woman.

"How hard can it be to roast a goat?" Came the quiet response from the kitchen.

Katiya sat down again and shook her head in amusement and looked at the hunter. "Stop glaring at me."

"Did you fucking have to suck her face off? I'm right here. And how in the hell is she able to move around before the sunsets?"

"It was just a kiss." Katiya licked her lips she liked those kisses. "She's special." The grin turned mischievous. "Jealous?"

"Of a monster? Untie me and I'll show you how jealous I am." The hunter promised, baring her teeth.

Alexei dragged the stubborn animal into the kitchen, away from curious and prying human eyes. She was almost so hungry she wasn't insulted by the gesture. Although the deepest, darkest part of herself was horrified especially when there was a trussed up hunter and a pet out there to give her blood. But, Katiya was still too weak and then there was Katiya's disappointment if she hurt the hunter, and there was another part of her that didn't want Katiya's disappointment.

And that right there was why her empire was crumbling around her, because she cared too much what one human girl thought, than being a proper vampire. The whole purpose of having a pet was to be food and the hunter should die. Of course, when had she ever been a proper vampire? The council had to force her into her role and educate her on the world of the vampires. She had never had a Sire, a teacher; she had made her own rules since the moment she woke up changed.

With a sardonic smile gracing her lips she patted the goats hard head and then in a blur of motion snapped its neck and hefted it to her mouth biting through the fur and skin. The blood was gamy and not the best, but it fed her. After a few moments the animal was drained and she flopped it down to the counter staring around the kitchen. Katiya needed food and rest she wasn't happy about the young woman going off to get her food. She stretched her arms happy that she now had mobility in both of them, wincing as the shoulder joint gave a loud crack as the bone and ligaments resettled back into the socket. Grabbing a knife she skinned the poor animal and set about gutting it and removing the head and other body parts so it would fit into the cast iron stove. Dropping the mostly bloodless organs into a bucket on the floor and scavenging around the kitchen she found some scrawny greens and herbs that she chopped up and stuffed inside the open cavity.

Turning she frowned remembering how she had used the door as a makeshift shield. Looking around she found a small box with a blue diamond on the outside she grabbed it and soon had a lit match in her hand and was starting the stove heating. Now too find the door.

Katiya and the Hunter seemed to be hard at work ignoring each other. "Trouble in Paradise?" She asked coming up behind where Katiya sat and slowly began to rub her shoulders and neck.

Alexei was very conscious of the damage done to the young woman's neck and shoulder. The vampire could feel the heat coming off the skin where the damaged flesh fought off infection and tried to heal. Bending over she kissed the scarred and scabbed over skin not liking Sergei's scent there; overriding hers.

Katiya winced a little at the touch, more an anticipation of pain than actual hurt. The

kiss felt nice though and her shoulders relaxed, humming a little with pleasure at the touch. "It's healing faster than it should, is that because of you?"

Tereza was upset, that was obvious. She could feel the hunter's glare from nearby.

"Yes, vampire saliva and blood can heal. This was what I was trying to do before I was rudely interrupted by an iron bolt coated with holy water." She murmured against Katiya's skin. "That's why it's so rare to find a victim of a vampire bite; we lick the wound to hide the evidence."

Part of her wanted to gloat at the hunter but she ignored that, instead kissing the wound once more, and then licked the hurt skin and muscle for a moment before she remembered she had come out here looking for the door to the stove. With one last kiss to the back of Katiya's neck she shifted her gaze around the room until with a smile she found the door. She went over and picked it chuckling at the bullet holes. "No matter how I feel about you hunter, you're a good shot." With that she went back to the kitchen.

"Not good enough." Tereza struggled again against her bonds, snarling with frustration when they, again, didn't budge. "You should have let me stake her while she was sleeping. Are you sure this is what you want? To be a pet for that thing?"

The unbound woman slid her shirt up to cover the still healing wound on her neck and eyed Tereza, considering how truthful to be. "I know you won't understand this, but she makes me feel safe." Katiya grinned, knowing how insane that was. "Yes, I know, she's a vampire, before you tell me again. She uses humans for food. You know what Tereza? I'm not sure I care very much anymore. She could have just let me die in that alleyway. She doesn't need me."

The hunter shook her head. "You're being controlled by her mind. I've encountered it before with human slaves who think they owe their masters something. You don't owe her anything."

Laughing came from the kitchen. "I don't have any mind control skills. If I did Katiya wouldn't get into all the trouble that she does. She'd just stay in my bed naked and willing."

Alexei could just imagine the blushing going on in the other room. She frowned at the door, she'd broken one of the bolts and it hung crooked, but it was on and the goat was cooking.

Indeed, Katiya was blushing and blushing hard. "I don't get into trouble." The human mumbled, looking anywhere but at the expression on the hunter's face.

"I don't believe you!" Tereza yelled back at the kitchen door, frowning. "Fucking vampires and their hearing." She had to remember not to underestimate a vampire's

ability to hear.

"Why not, she hasn't lied to you yet has she?" Katiya asked, feeling the blush fade at least a little as she looked at the bound woman.

"I don't know, have you lied to me, vampire?"

Alexei came out wiping her hands on her pants. "I don't think I've had time to lie to you. Besides if I could do mind control, the last place Katiya would be spending anytime is here with you. And when you kissed her I would have forced her to show me where you lived so I could rip your spine out through your ass." She growled the last statement feeling a little possessive.

"I think I'm being very good considering I am a vampire, and I don't like to have the things I value coveted by another. Besides isn't coveting a sin?"

"Murder is a sin also." Tereza growled, twisting this way and that in the ropes.

Katiya was watching them both, surprised with herself as she realized she found their bickering amusing. "Alexei..." she shook her head. "Stop baiting the vampire hunter. She was only trying to keep me safe from you. The kiss didn't mean anything."

Alexei's eyes narrowed but she didn't say anything else. She turned her attention to Katiya crouching down at her side. "How are you feeling?" She asked resting her hands on Katiya's lap enjoying the warmth radiating up into them.

"Tired. My neck hurts, but not as much as I thought it would." Leaning sideways, Katiya smiled as she rested her head against the blonde woman's shoulder. The faint scent of burning wood still lingered from her time in the kitchen, mixing with Alexei's personal scent. "Are you all right?" She asked quietly, remembering Alexei's anguish as she held Shiro's body.

Alexei knew what Katiya was referring too. "I'm sorry I didn't mean shut you out. But it felt like... Shiro had been my pet for so long, to have her suddenly gone was like a hole ripping open in my chest. Then it hurt more because she chose to die, I could have helped her, but she rejected that help." Embarrassed about her feelings she buried her face in Katiya's lap hiding her face from view.

Shooting the hunter a look, daring her to respond, Katiya ran her fingers through Alexei's hair. She loved the feel of those long strands sliding through her fingers. Gently she scratched her nails over the other woman's scalp, smiling as the motion got a sigh. "I'm sorry. I didn't know she would I didn't think " Words wouldn't help so the human gave up on them and instead pressed a kiss to the top of the vampire's head.

Tereza felt like she was intruding, she'd never seen a vampire be so caring, so human. It had to be a trick, some game the monster was playing. She swallowed really wanting

to be some place else, instead of here, this was challenging everything she had been taught.

Alexei sighed enjoying the attention. Looking up her eyes were moist but she didn't hide it. "Its okay, nobody thought she would. Nobody realized Karl's attack had hurt her that bad. We thought she'd work through it."

"I knew she was hurt." Katiya said quietly. "I should have known she was really hurt. We could have done something, helped somehow." Even as she said it she wasn't sure what she could have done though. "Is Fiona all right?"

Alexei looked away guilty, she hadn't checked with anyone else to see how they were doing after Shiro's death.

"It's all right." Katiya ran her fingers through that beautiful blonde hair. She looked over at Tereza, meeting the hunter's curious gaze squarely. "We could just go back to the manor."

"But I'm making you goat." She looked up with grin.

Katiya laughed. "It's starting to smell good." Then she sobered, still watching Tereza. "What about her?"

Alexei for a brief moment had forgotten about the hunter. "Nothing. She's more than capable of getting loose. She was squirming her way over to her weapons when I woke up this afternoon. I'm sure she'll get loose in an hour or so."

It was another in a line of surreal moments as Katiya ate the goat that Alexei had cooked. It was surprisingly quite good, although she wasn't sure when the last time the vampire had ever cooked anything. She'd even torn pieces of the meat to offer to the bound woman. "It's good, you sure you don't want any?"

Alexei just tried really hard to hide her smirk at the hunter.

The bound woman just stared at Katiya. "You're all just insane. A vampire cooked dinner in my house and you're trying to feed me."

"You look hungry." She offered Tereza another piece of meat, stubbornly trying to get the hunter to at least eat something.

Alexei smirked again. "Alright maybe we should go. I admit I'm getting a small joy out of tormenting her." She got up walking over to the woman and picked her up and set her none too gently next to her pile of weapons.

She walked back to Katiya and held out her arm. "Ready to go? I'm sure everyone is worried. I never stay out during the day."

Leaving a large pile of meat where it was, Katiya got up, feeling better than she thought possible. The wound hardly hurt anymore and a full stomach of food certainly helped. Taking the offered arm she gave a wave to the furious looking hunter. "Bye Tereza. I'm sure I'll see you later."

Loud cursing could be heard as they left.

"You're such a heart breaker Ms. Katiya." Alexei teased.

#####3#####3

"Gorsjki agreed to my terms. I can meet his employer, but only when I bring them the cup. They wouldn't agree to anything else." Katiya watched Alexei prowling around the library room, pausing every circuit to stare at the fire, and then the pacing would resume.

"Only we can't get the cup without the key. But I don't want them to know they have the key, because they'll just kill you because they won't need you anymore."

"But they don't know they have the key." Katiya frowned. "And it wasn't in Gorsjki's place." She tilted her head. "Fenix never sent the things he promised. Could it still be there?" It was a long shot.

"Perhaps, but not tonight, and you're not going by yourself. We'll go tomorrow night and go through his things." Alexei bit her bottom lip for a moment. "I'm serious, no going by yourself tomorrow."

The image of Sergei, fangs bared, coming towards her in the alley made Katiya shiver and she agreed quickly. "No going alone." There was another option though, the signet ring was something that Ivan might have enjoyed keeping, in memory of a heist.

Alexei started to pace again. She paced because she wanted to have sex, she wanted to have sex because it was a kneejerk reaction to having lost and almost lost things that are important to her. To remind her she's alive, a human response, and she's not human. "Fiona says Vidar is going to be fine. Warren and Gregori found him early in the morning." It was inane conversation.

She stopped pacing. "I'm going to go bathe. I stink of holy water, goat, and that hunter." She murmured. Part of her knew she wasn't making a lot of sense.

Blue eyes studied her from where Katiya sat by the fire, considering the tense set of the vampire's shoulders, the stiff way she moved compared to her normal liquid grace. "Do you want company?"

"Yes, but I don't think I'm good company right now." The vampire said as she fled the room.

She had heard Katiya's words about feeling safe with her, but she'd almost gotten her killed.

Katiya watched her go, torn between following and staying where she was. Standing she took a step towards the door, and then paused, hesitating. Should she follow? This was another of those moments where things could forever change.

A second opinion, that's what she needed, another opinion other than the ideas in her head. Downstairs she found Fiona enjoying a cup of tea. "I need advice." She said by way of greeting, taking the seat opposite her.

Fiona raised an eyebrow and looked at Katiya. "I take it you're fine after you're ordeal?"

"Mostly." Rubbing the side of her neck. "Thanks to Alexei, and Tereza, but mostly Alexei." Remembering herself she winced, ashamed. "I'm sorry. Are you all right?"

"We're fine, there's some strong emotions going on in the house but..." She waved off her concerns. "So what do you need my advice on?"

"Alexei." Katiya smiled wryly. "But are you sure you're all right? Shiro..." She trailed off.

"Shiro lived four lifetimes. She chose a bad way to go, but she made that choice. I was there and she wouldn't change her mind for any of us." She reached over and patted Katiya's hand. "Now what has Alexei done now?"

"Nothing. I mean, everything." Katiya frowned; this wasn't coming out like she'd hoped. "She was fine earlier but when we got back here she suddenly got all tense. She went to take a bath, I was going to follow, but she said she wasn't very good company."

Fiona sighed. "Are you asking me permission to go jump Alexei in the bath?" She drummed her fingers on her teacup, wondering if she understood the question correctly.

The blush was only to be expected so Katiya did her best not to look sheepish. "Not permission, I guess. I just don't know if it's a good idea or not and I'm not thinking straight."

"Did she tell you no, she didn't want company?" Fiona fished for information.

"She said she was bad company and then I think she fled. Does that mean she wants company?"

"Means she's having a crisis of conscious. It happens when she thinks too much. Go jump her in the bath. Unless she growls and snaps at you or says no, you're normally

safe to take advantage of the big bad vampire."

Katiya laughed. "I can take advantage of her?" It had a certain appeal though. "So is that what you think I should do?"

Fiona muttered something that could have been a prayer. "I think you should do whatever it is you want to do."

Katiya studied the tabletop, running her fingers along the wood grain. "I think I need to take a bath." She stood up and smiled, red faced. "Thank you Fiona."

"Don't thank me. You two are the ones horny for each other." The older woman said with a laugh, maybe she should go wake Warren up.

Katiya's laughter followed her out of the room and as she raced up the stairs. She burst through the doors of Alexei's rooms and slid to a stop on the tiled floor of the bathroom, a little out of breath.

Alexei looked up from where she sat sulking in the bath. "Are we under attack?"

"No." Katiya smiled, starting to undo her dress. She really wished she could go out during the day wearing pants and get away with it like Alexei did. "But I decided I didn't care if you were bad company, I need a bath too."

Alexei blinked and then opened her mouth and then shut it. Trying again she parroted. "You don't care?"

"I don't care." Katiya's voice was muffled as she pulled the dress up over her head and tossed it aside. Now for the corset, god curse whoever came up with that thing.

"Katiya. I'm a vampire, a master vampire I think you should care a little bit about my moods." She stood up getting angry.

"All right." Katiya said, not taking her eyes off the stupid straps that held it together. "I do care, but just because your bad company that doesn't mean you don't want company, right?"

Alexei's forehead crinkled as she tried to follow Katiya's question.

"There." She tossed aside the corset, smiling up at Alexei. Only then did she realize the other woman was standing and her eyes wandered south while her smile grew.

"You know you're incredibly frustrating, and I'm not certain why that stupid hunter could ever conceive the idea I was controlling you're mind."

"She obviously doesn't know me as well as she thinks." The rest of her clothing slid off



her with a little wiggle of her hips. "Do I get to take a bath?"

"I guess since you're naked and everything." Alexei smiled and sat back down in the warm water. "It would be a shame to make you get dressed again."

"See, you did want company, even if you're bad company." The hot water felt amazing and Katiya suddenly realized she wanted to scrub away any memory of Sergei's attack.

Alexei reached out and pulled her into her body making the water slosh. Her hands stayed tight around her for a moment. Making sure she was real, and safe, that rescue hadn't been a pleasant dream.

"I thought you were bad company?" Katiya gasped.

"I am, because I want to do bad things to you." She mumbled into the skin of Katiya's back. Finally she eased her grip after a moment of searching started washing her back.

"What sort of bad things?" Katiya smiled, she arched her back up into the washing, enjoying it.

"Things that shouldn't make you feel safe with me." Alexei responded. She lifted up the red hair and squeezed the soaked cloth, letting the water run down her neck over the healing wound.

That got a moan of pleasure. "What sort of things?" She pressed, turning around so that she could see Alexei's face.

"Things that reassure me that you're alright, that I did get there in time to save you." She didn't stop her washing of Katiya's body merely started on her front. "You're right I did want company."

"Actually I wasn't sure; I had to double check with Fiona." Katiya purred as Alexei took her time with the washcloth. "You seemed upset."

Could a vampire be needy? She didn't know, couldn't remember needing anyone or anything other than her family, her tribe. Through trial and error she had made her way in the world, learned what she was. The council hated her because she was not one of them, only gave the minimum of service to their world, but even she wasn't foolish to think she could take on the councils army. So she did their tasks, went to their meetings, and for the most part bent to their wills, and they left her alone. They made her Karl's problem really.

She continued to wash the woman in front of her, serious in her task. Katiya looked okay, solid, real. Her skin was flush and pink, Sergei's bite had verged on deadly but she had been there in time. Bruises had faded and so would the bite mark on that pale neck.

"The reason most vampires don't have pets or have them for very long is that this bond we create through the sharing of blood, is just that a bond." She stopped her washing, setting the water soaked wet cloth on the marble behind her. She pulled Katiya forward until they were intimately locked together, groin and breast. As Katiya straddled her hips, Alexei studied guileless blue eyes that shone brightly with arousal and curiosity.

"I felt your fear, it woke me from sleep. I had to wait until the sunset enough for me to get into the city to find you. I'm not use to feeling fear. I needed you to be okay. I'm not use to needing things." She probably wasn't making herself clear.

Reaching a hand up she smoothed the red hair out of Katiya's face and kissed her, and then kissed her again. Hungry, wet, open kisses. "I need sex, to physically reassure myself you're here and okay. I don't... shouldn't need that, because that is a human thing." She said between kisses, still not sure she was making any sense. With a growl of frustration she lifted Katiya up and turned setting her on the marble lip, while she stayed kneeling in the tub, that made them unequal, a shift in power.

Leaning forward her hands rested on either side of slim hips as her head came forward capturing a nipple between warm lips. She kissed down and then back up in a V to the other breast giving it some attention as well, before she kissed her way down Katiya's belly. She spread legs covered in goose flesh inserting her body between them. Grinning in delight she lifted one leg and kissed along its length until she could get no further and then set it on her shoulder. Reaching one arm around to support Katiya's back she eased the woman down onto the steam warmed tile before lifting the other leg and repeating the kisses and then put it on her other shoulder.

This was another thing vampires didn't do.

They didn't give up control, although it could be argued that she was still taking it, but such a position even sexually, was seen in her culture as giving mastery of another over her, and she didn't care. She could smell Katiya's desire; feel the way the muscle trembled under the gliding touch of her fingers. As she leaned down she took time to kiss and nip at the legs on either side. A long time she mused since she had been intimate with anyone like this. With one hand she spread Katiya open enjoying the tangible evidence of her desire wet on her lips and upper thighs. Gently at first she licked and nibbled at Katiya's most intimate of places before letting her lips surround the pulsing bundle of need as she let her fingers dwell inside, seeking and retreating against those silky walls.

Only when Katiya gave her release with almost startled cry did Alexei feel at ease.

"Please " Katiya whispered, once she could think again, something she didn't want to do. Thoughts would just get in the way. Remind her of what she really was to this beautiful woman who had just strummed her nerves with knowing fingers.

Instead she let the moment wash away those thoughts. The steam rising around them gave the scene an otherworldly feel to it. She clung to that feel as she climbed up, urging Alexei backwards.

How could anyone be that perfect? She was a goddess, pale and hot water warmed. Wet hair spread out in disarray on the tiled floor. Katiya paused, drinking in the sight, memorizing it for the cold winter days when she wouldn't have this in front of her.

The blonde tensed as she reached down for her, and Katiya paused, lightly trailing fingertips down a flexing thigh.

"Please " She whispered again, watching those ancient eyes as Alexei struggled with some internal dilemma.

It passed though and those eyes darkened with passion and the vampire nodded, ever so slightly. Katiya moved, slowly at first, feeling strangely protective of this predator in front of her. The predator trembled though as Katiya pressed herself up against her, arching up into her as their bodies pressed skin to skin.

"Yessssss."

Katiya wasn't sure who said it, didn't care either as she moved down, worshiping that perfect body. Seeking out every spot she could find that elicited a sigh or moan. Every sound was a victory.

Then she was between those strong thighs, fingers swirling through wetness, tongue-tasting sweetness that drew her back again and again. Fingers grabbed her hair, not hard, but there, tensing and flexing as Katiya sought out more sounds, using teeth, tongue, lips and fingers.

Alexei didn't scream when she finally came, but her entire body arched up off the floor, tensing as a low growl was wrung from her.

The vampire laid there on the tile feeling warm and sated, almost like she was lying on a hill in the tall grass in the sun. That was her last memory of the sun, and she cherished it.

The silence was comforting; Katiya laid her head on Alexei's thigh, resting her hand on her abdomen, content to stay there.

Internal stillness was hard to come by and Alexei enjoyed the moment while it lasted but finally she grew restless. Sitting up she stared down at Katiya and started running her fingers through the wet red locks.

The human smiled, sleepily, enjoying the touch and stretched like a cat. "I really like

taking baths with you."

"I've always enjoyed baths, and not just for the sex parts. The warm, wet heat raises my internal temperature almost as if I've drunk blood. Not that the sex parts' aren't good in the bath." She said with a grin.

"Was that all right?" Katiya asked a little worriedly, watching Alexei's eyes, aware that had been different then the last few times.

Alexei raised an eyebrow someday perhaps Katiya would know, understand what Alexei had done. Made her a human queen to her inhuman vampire heart. "It was wonderful Katiya." She eased out from under Katiya and got to her feet picking up the young woman with her.

Walking out of the bath, through her office, she asked. "Are you okay? Not too much with your wound?"

Leaning her head against Alexei's chest, Katiya closed her eyes savoring the sensations. "Yes. Just sleepy now." What time was it? What day was it? She should have been scared to realize she didn't know.

"Need to work on your stamina; I plan on having you for centuries yet to come." Alexei said kissing the top of Katiya's head before laying her down on the bed.

The idea of living that long was so far beyond anything she knew that Katiya could only shake her head in amusement at it. "Tomorrow we find your key then?" Sleep was calling and her exhausted body wouldn't let her stay awake much longer now.

"Tomorrow." Alexei agreed. She looked at Katiya and then got up on the bed straddling Katiya. Hands on either side of red hair she lowered her mouth. Kissing the wound a few times before biting down reopening it, she took only a mouthful or two of blood before she bit deep into her own tongue and started licking the wound, erasing Sergei.

The move surprised Katiya whose eyes opened wide and then closed just as quickly as she felt the vampire's fangs slide into her flesh. The sharp bite of pain faded quickly though and she shivered in sudden arousal, the sleep from a moment before burned out of her system.

"You're still naked."

"Mmmhmmm." Was all Alexei said, concentrating on her task.

Katiya pressed her hips upwards, grinning as she did so, squirming under the gentle assault on her neck.

Pulling back Alexei looked down in question. "I thought you were tired? I'm trying to help

your body heal. Or are you implying you'd like a different type of healing method?"

Blue eyes sparkled as Katiya smiled up at her unrepentantly. "It's hard to stay tired when you do this." Using her hands to grip Alexei's hips.

"Ah, but when I did that I wasn't attending for this." She sat back letting Katiya have her way.

"I know." She let her hands rest where they were though; wondering if that meant Alexei wanted her to stop.

The vampire read her expression. "It's up to you mouse. We can go again if you want?" She leaned her body to the left and let gravity do the rest rolling her over and Katiya was now on top.

"So what do you want to do, Mouse?" She teased.

"If I'm the Mouse, then what does that make you?" The redhead leaned forward, splaying her fingers across the blonde woman's chest, smiling as she brushed her hair across Alexei's still hard nipples.

Alexei shrugged. "Cheese."

"Cheese?" Katiya laughed, shifting over so that she could slide a thigh between Alexei's and intertwine their legs. "There are so many bad jokes I could make." She hungrily kissed the other woman, pricking her tongue on a sharp fang so it bled just a little.

Alexei growled a bit at that move her hands pulling Katiya down into her body so she could grind into her. "Mine." The vampire said between kisses, as she let her hands gently and roughly in some places explore Katiya's flesh.

The friction was very nice, Katiya thought as she slid up and down the length of Alexei's thigh. "Mine." She echoed, nipping at an elegant exposed neck.

Alexei's nostrils flared at that and she quickly inserted her hand between their bodies and slipped inside of Katiya, she teased for a moment looking for that certain place. She smiled when she found the spot she was searching for and Katiya gasped and shuddered, holding tightly to the body that couldn't decide if it wanted more or to retreat.

"It's okay." She whispered over. "It's worth all the intensity." She promised as well.

Katiya gave a wordless cry, shuddering as her body jerked. Determination to return at least some of the favor made her shift, sliding her own hand down next to Alexei's and cupping the vampire's mound. "More." The redhead whimpered.

The vampire threw her head back into the pillows and laughed, the action made her feel light as if the stress of her life were gone. That was ridiculous and she laughed even harder. "As much as you want my beautiful Katiya."

"Less laughing, more thrusting." Katiya smiled, happy to hear Alexei's laugh, it was a nice laugh. It did good things to her and she hoped she could hear it again.

"Your wish is my command." Alexei said rolling them over. Katiya's legs wrapped around her and she started thrusting as commanded.

#####3#3

"It's not here." Katiya sat in the middle of Fenix's room, staring at the pile of stolen goods that they had dumped out onto the floor. Everything from small items that pickpockets had taken, too large pieces of artwork from cat burglars. Fenix had been a prolific fence.

In the hallway outside she could just make out Vidar, the hound had refused to be left behind when they left that evening, although it was obvious he was moving slower.

"Are you sure this is everything. Maybe he had a place to hide more, um, questionable items, he may have been trying to get a bigger piece of profit for?" Alexei asked from where she stood looking through a few boxes.

"This is everything. I already emptied his two 'secret' stashes. The old fool wasn't quite as sneaky as he thought he was." There was no sign of Fenix, but the trail of blood they'd found in the front of the shop told its own story about what had probably happened to the old man. Unhappily, Katiya stood up and looked at Alexei, trying to ignore the pleasant ache as she walked.

"That leaves Ivan. If he doesn't have it then I don't know where else to look." She had no desire to meet Ivan or Boris again, but they were the best chance now.

"Hmmm, I'm not sure I like that. They've left a bloody trail through the city tying up loose ends." Actually she very much wanted to meet this Ivan. She still hadn't forgotten Mr. Morozov and his family.

"If there was another way, any other way, I'd never suggest it." Katiya wrapped her arms around herself, remembering how close Boris had come to her before Tereza had saved her. "They're evil."

Alexei moved silently over to the redhead and set her hands on Katiya's shoulders, trying to give comfort without seeming too overly concerned. Last night's behavior still... well she wasn't certain she was comfortable with how she had acted, not that she regretted it but still it was sort of exposing, not that Katiya had understood.

"Well, then I'll have to be more evil."

She smiled wryly up at Alexei. "I just have to remember that I'm with someone who's worse than Ivan right?" Katiya had to force the smile.

"In my own way, yes." She stared around the warehouse. "I'll send Stepan back to gather my things out of all this junk, the rest we'll sell or donate."

"So I guess we just go find Ivan." Katiya swallowed, this was going to be unpleasant. "I know where to find them. It's not a good place."

"No, you tell me where to find him and what he and his friend look like, and you go home." Alexei said firmly.

"No. They're my problem too. I'll come with you." She looked back stubbornly.

"Katiya, if you lead me to them then they will know I'm not just defiling you because you caught my attention at the opera. It will kind of give away the fact you belong to me."

"You just had to bring logic into this didn't you?" The human sighed and reluctantly nodded. "Fine, but I'll have to show you where they are, it's hard to find."

Alexei eyed Katiya for a moment. "Okay but after that you and Vidar will go right home?"

"Promise."

#####3#####3#3

Alexei slowed her pace on the icy cobbled streets, for Vidar and Katiya. She did her best not to wrinkle her nose at the horrible stench of this place. "I think my factories are cleaner than this."

"They are." Katiya stepped around something that was better left unseen on the dark street. "Slaughter houses." There were tanners nearby too; the stench was something that kept even the most diligent of inspectors out of the area. She wrinkled her nose against the stench.

"They have a place, in the back row, gambling and other things."

"This is a good place for vampires to hide it already smells of blood and death." She murmured.

Katiya stopped, running her hands along Vidar's fur, glad he was back and apparently all right. "They have tunnels underneath it, part of some old ruin or something. I think

that's where Ivan keeps most of his stuff."

"There was an earthquake a small one but enough to destroy the town. We just built on top of it, underneath are still a few old homes made of stone." Alexei said absently as she searched for whatever was causing the prickling feeling on the back of her neck.

"You sure I can't come with you?" She wanted to see Ivan hurt she owed him some pain.

"Yes." She said absently not having to really think about the answer.

She could feel Vidar's fur stand up on end, a low growl starting from him. "Vidar?"

Alexei eased her hand inside her coat gripping the handle of the short sword. The buildings were close together a hazard of fire and disease. When the attack came they fell from the rooftops.

They moved with that deadly silence and swiftness that Katiya had come to associate with vampires. A pack of them moving with deadly intent; as they dropped down from the rooftops landing in crouches around them. "Oh Shit."

Her sword was out in a flash and in the upstroke one was beheaded spraying her with blood as the corpse fell it shriveled in on itself.

One of them growled something in a strangely accented language that Katiya didn't recognize as three of them blurred towards Alexei. Two more came for Katiya and she shrank back, hand on her dagger.

Alexei didn't move letting the one charge her. Twisting she hooked one of its outstretched arms and flipped it over her shoulder and down to the ground impaling it with her sword, then she was rushing forward to attack the other two.

The fight was too fast for Katiya to watch, just a blur of fangs and the glint of light on Alexei's sword. She could only spare a glance though she had other problems. Vidar's form blurred as the vampires attacked. Once again he was a man. A man who was laughing as he charged into battle, relishing it.

Another splash of red and Alexei was down to one last opponent. It was a good fight as she traded blows with her final attacker. He was quick and agile, lithe like a dancer and it was annoying her the way he danced away from her strikes'.

Vidar seemed to relish the fight. Any other place it would have been strange to see a naked Nordic man attacking vampires who were surprised that he was attacking them and not the other way around. Katiya kept her back to the wall, dagger in hand, eyes wide.



A well-placed kick deadened the nerves of Alexei's hand losing her grip on the sword and it tumbled to the ground. He grinned at her, feeling superior and Alexei just growled charging. They traded blows Alexei catching her in the thigh with a well placed kick on anything other than another vampire the leg would have shattered, on the vampire however it caused him to lose feeling in that leg and it buckled. Not missing her opening she grabbed his hair and yanked his head as she brought her knee up. The two meeting with a hollow 'thunk'.

"This is more fun." Vidar laughed, ducking a wild swing. "Fine. Take away all my fun!" He grabbed the vampire's arm, breaking it backwards, then grabbed his head and pulled hard, ripping it free.

"Always having to play with your food." She joked as she placed the sword back under her jacket and bent over picking up her unconscious new friend. "Change of plans." She said turning around and starting back to the manor.

"No visiting Ivan?" Katiya slipped the dagger away, not at all upset to be leaving right now though.

"No I'm afraid I'm going to be busy torturing my new friend for information."

"Oh." Katiya hurried to keep up, Vidar in hound form trailing behind, tail wagging. "Do you know what language that was they were talking in?"

"It's American, a cultural divergence of English. Which you would be learning if we'd stop having sex all the time and you actually studied."

"I'm sure Matvey isn't too upset I'm not bugging him all the time."

"Actually Matvey is really upset because he has to look after the factories, instead of his library."

"So he doesn't have time anyway." Katiya smiled, giddy with the aftermath of the attack.

She huffed as they hiked back the way they came. "In fact I think everyone is upset with me. Molly's jealous because I give you all my attention. Stepan is put out over something, and Matvey wants his library. I really need to do more around the house." She muttered.

It was hard to tell, but the human thought that the hound behind them snickered at that.

#####3#####3

The trek back was annoying the captured vampire kept regaining consciousness and tried to escape and Alexei would have to knock him out again.

Finally they reached the manor. Lyov as if he'd been watching swung the door open his face as dour as ever. "Early evening Mistress." He remarked and then upon seeing Alexei's new toy said. "I take it you won't be in the bath tonight."

"Depends on how long it takes him to tell me what I want to know."

Katiya made a face, not liking the mental image that popped into her mind at that. "Hi Lyov." Vidar yawned besides them, tongue long and lolling as he stretched.

"Hello Young Miss, doing alright after your altercation?" He asked in his monotone way.

"Better." She smiled, really hoping that the gnarled gnome of a man didn't know what kept happening in the bath.

There were steps on the stairs and a sullen Stepan and Matvey came down and into view an insanely grinning Molly followed behind perched on the landing.

Stepan's gaze cut into Katiya staring at her coldly before looking to his Sire. "We want to talk to you." He demanded.

Vidar stopped his stretching, standing up and watching the male vampire with intent eyes, licking his chops.

Alexei went still tamping down her natural first reaction to rip his head off at such a display. Sure he was her mischievous puck who got away with a lot, but not this disrespect.

She tossed the foreigner on to the floor. "Lyov, take our guest below into one of the holding cells."

The wizened man nodded and the floor creaked, groaned and after a few seconds split open a stone hand grasping the man and taking him below.

"What the hell " Katiya stared at the floor in surprise as it closed back up.

Alexei didn't move she stood as still as a statue looking at the two men, studying them.

Uncomfortable with the scrutiny two pairs of eyes darted away from Alexei's simmering gray.

At that moment she said. "Take them as well."

Katiya jerked her gaze up at those cold words, watching Matvey's worried look before the stone opened below them. "How does he do that?" The human whispered to Vidar. The hound was thoroughly unimpressed, sitting down on his haunches and watching.

Alexei stepped into the foyer and took off her coat bellowing. "Fiona!"

"Don't yell at me." Came the yelled response. "You're legs work just fine, and I'm in the kitchen."

Alexei sighed and then looked over at Katiya and Vidar. She held out her arm for Katiya.

It took an effort, but Katiya was hopeful that she kept her face neutral as she took that outstretched arm.

Alexei leaned over and gave her a quick kiss to the temple. "I will let you know a secret about Lyov but first you have to promise not to tell anyone."

"I promise." She swore solemnly.

"Very well..." She trailed off looking up at Molly's intent face and then moved them down the hall towards the kitchen and out of earshot.

"Lyov is the house." She said simply.

The redhead looked up at the vampire, not sure she understood. "He is the house?" It didn't make more sense when she said it out loud either.

"Lyov... is... the house." She said slower.

"The house is alive?" That was really disturbing. Katiya had a sudden urge to apologize for stepping on him.

"Well in a manner of speaking. Not alive like you or... me. He might have once actually been a man, who died here on this spot. I'm not really sure if he's a ghost or just magical, and he's not either. So that is how he knows everything that goes on inside. He'll tell me things if I ask but for the most part I like to be surprised."

Katiya stared up at her, mouth opening then closing. "A ghost?" She swallowed and looked behind her a little nervously. Out of everything that she'd come across, this was one of the creepiest. "Or a magical thing." She finished weakly as they entered the kitchen.

"Mmmhmmm, anymore he's basically the house, Lyov is just a physical manifestation that we can comprehend with our minds. Plus he's useful." She stopped and stared at Fiona. "Were you aware that Stepan and Matvey were conspiring against me?"

The woman looked up from her sewing and Warren took an even greater interest in his

cooking.

"Evening Fiona." Katiya gave a little wave, still looking a little stunned.

"I know they're not happy. Stepan doesn't like all the attention Katiya's getting he's use to being the favorite, a spoiled puppy and since you've had him you haven't taken any new pets. He doesn't know about the bonding and attention you have to give them so they work well in your household. Matvey is spoiled too, you let him do as he pleased studying his books and now you've made him do something he doesn't want. What did you expect? You never beat anyone anymore; tamper down on their more vile urges. Alexei in the 900 years we've been together you've changed a lot your moods aren't as bloody and violent anymore, I might say you're almost human in your manners. They're still young. They need the constant reminder of who is Alpha so for the love of God show them."

Alexei shut her mouth and stood very quietly mulling over Fiona's words.

Vidar gave a low bark, agreeing as he lay down on his stomach, watching the scene. This was the most interesting that he'd seen in a long time.

Beside her, Katiya stood still, reminded again of the bloody beating she'd given Sergei when she'd first come to the manor. She had an idea that was going to happen again.

Alexei finally sighed and started rolling back the sleeves of her shirt. "I hate it that you're right. What a horrible vampire master I've become." She walked over and kissed the top of Fiona's head the woman looked up and gave her a fond look.

For a moment they shared a mutual understanding before the woman looked to her soon to be husband and Alexei retreated back to Katiya.

"I'd prefer you didn't see me like this but it's the truth of what it means to be a vampire so you can come down if you want." She said quietly.

"I saw enough blood this evening." Katiya squeezed the blonde woman's hand, seeing the darkness lurking behind those eyes. "Unless you want me there?" She didn't want to see Alexei like that.

"No, I'd rather you didn't come down stairs this time. It's my fault and I have to fix it." She leaned in close. "You may want to sleep somewhere else blood and violence can have a... ah... effect I may not be gentle when I come to bed."

Katiya smirked ever so slightly as she went up on her tiptoes to press her lips to Alexei's quickly. "I can handle not so gentle."

Alexei kissed her back. "I stand by my word, I won't force anything say no and I'll stop." She murmured into those lips before breaking away avoiding Fiona's smirk. "Come on

Vidar you can help if you like." The vampire said walking to the hidden door. Katiya watched them go, the hound wagging his tail as he did so. She really, really didn't want to know what was about to go on in the basement of the manor. Which, somehow, was also Lyov. She shook her head, red hair bouncing around her head.

"It's been a strange day Fiona."

The woman looked up from her sewing. "Are you okay?"

That was an interesting question. "Yes." She frowned. "Maybe." She eyed the door to the basement again. "I think I'm just going to go upstairs and wait for her."

"Probably best." The older woman leaned over and patted the tiger under the table it sleepily crawled out from under the table and shook itself. "Kira why don't you go sleep in front of Alexei's door."

The tiger flicked its ears but took off for the stairs.

Fiona looked up. "Molly's been stirring up trouble again. I can feel it. But she'll clear the stairs; she's scared of the tigers. She doesn't like the fact Alexei's not spending any time with her. Only two pets in the house and Alexei would rather drink animal blood than go to Molly. It's not sitting well with that tart."

"I already didn't trust her." She smiled weakly. "Thank you Fiona. For everything."

"Be safe." Was all the woman said returning to her sewing.

#####3#####3

Alexei had spent an hour with the American. Blood and gore washed the walls, and stained her white shirt. He'd stopped screaming 10 minutes ago. Proudly he looked at her, brown eyes shining in the faint light of the torch, thinking himself tough, more than able to withstand what she would dish out. But what he didn't know is that she hadn't even started yet, not really with the torture, this was for the two in the room next to this one. His screams were for them cranking up their fear of what was to come. Tomorrow she would start on the American in earnest. She walked over and wiped her hands on his shirt.

"Not a bad screamer, we'll see how you do tomorrow, when I really begin the torture." She grinned as she saw the cracks in his armor, she'd put him off balance. "Oh yes, this was just foreplay, really it was for the other two next door. Now you can listen to their screams, and imagine what awaits you tomorrow."

She left shutting the door. She looked to Vidar who stood outside the door with Matvey and Stepan. "Why don't you go make our guest comfortable he looks too hot."

The Hellhound nodded trying to hide his grin. "Matvey was easy, Stepan was a pain but I always like to smack his pretty boy ass around." He whispered as they passed each other.

She nodded then fixed a scowl firmly to her features as she opened the door. The room was cold from Vidar's touch and looked at Matvey and Stepan. "I will not house traitors. Either you are loyal without question or I have no use for you."

"I won't stay another moment in this house with that woman. She's wrecking everything, destroying you and this house..."

He was cut off slammed against the wall his chains clinking at the sudden movement. He'd never seen her move in such a way.

"You are either loyal or you are not. Which is it?"

"That woman has you thinking with your cunt." He spat out.

"There can only be one master Stepan and you're not it." Alexei casually said as she reached one hand into his mouth grasping the left fang and slowly began to pull. "Am I too soft, maybe? I seem to have forgotten we are monsters and should treat you as such." Blood began to pour out from where the tooth was slowly being ripped out by the root.

"Please. Please." Matvey chattered over and over as he cowered. "I hate the factories can someone else please take them over. It doesn't have to be right away, I just can't take all those people staring and whispering, they're always needing things, and wanting things."

He cut off as Alexei backhanded him. "Do you think I care what you want? Do you think either of you matter? I see I have been way too lax."

#####3#####3

Later, near dawn she made her way upstairs to the kitchen. Her shirt was now sticky and red. She felt the calling of the blood hunt and she would like nothing better to run through the town killing until the streets ran red. The dark feelings uncoiled through her body craving violence and blood. Hands shaking slightly she dipped them into the tub of water left out by Fiona washing them the best she could. She lifted them out dried them, unbuttoned her shirt peeling it off her body, and dropped it into the tub. It was probably beyond saving. She took a deep breath and exhaled leaning over grabbing the edge of the table and stretched trying to gain control of herself. She would not, could not go upstairs near like this.

There was the touch of a warm hand on her back. "At a time like this your precious Katiya can't be what you need but I can." Came Molly's seductive purr. "I like your

monster, would she still love you if she could see you or what you left down stairs?" Her hands trailed over the taut back enjoying the copper smell of blood.

Alexei's hands gripped deeply into the wood of the table.

"You can hurt me Alexei. I like to be hurt. Can Katiya say the same?"

#####3##3

Katiya stood in Alexei's bedroom, staring at herself in the single ornate mirror that decorated one wall. She undid her dress, draping it over one of the nearby chairs and smiling as she spotted a nightdress already neatly folded up on it.

"Thank you Lyov." She'd decided there were too many other problems right now for her to worry about the fact that the wizened old man was the house, or the house was him, she wasn't really clear on that.

For now though she left the nightdress where it was, turning back to the mirror to study her reflection. She didn't look that different than she did before meeting Alexei. Certainly she was cleaner, no longer covered in factory grime and she was better fed. Warren saw to that, making sure she ate well.

But other than that, she looked the same, red hair, blue eyes, perky breasts that always seemed a little too large to her, pale skin and rounded hips she'd been told were shapely. Then why, she wondered, did she feel so different then before? Nothing was the same as it had been and she hoped it was for the best. At least she wasn't starving anymore.

Gingerly she touched the red scab on her neck, studying it intently. Sergei had been killing her, draining her of her blood through that wound only a day before. Now it was almost healed, only red and angry looking.

That was new, she thought wryly. She'd never healed that quickly before. That was Alexei's doing she bet.

"Alexei." She whispered, afraid for the vampire. The irony of the fact that she was scared for the tall blonde and not of her wasn't lost on the human.

"There's time." Her reflection didn't look like it believed her.

"I hope." She turned, leaving the nightgown where it was and went to the bed. How long would it be before Alexei returned? She had no way to know, but she'd wait for her.

#####3#####3

Alexei paced back and forth in front of the door to her rooms. She was feeling something odd, it was like guilt, but she never felt guilt. Guilt was a thing no vampire could have because they spent most of their new lives killing. So to mope around feeling guilty all the time was... well, silly.

Molly had a point she was a pet, and one who fulfilled very specific needs without making her a rapist or sexual predator, and she had been ignoring her like she had with Shiro, that caused a twinge of guilt. Ignoring her like Stepan and Matvey, so in essence she hadn't done anything wrong.

So why did she feel like she had?

A very annoyed tiger looked up from where it was sleeping in front of the doors its tail flicking back and forth.

Finally she decided to sneak into her own rooms, Katiya had to be asleep and in a while she could succumb to the sunlight hours and sleep avoiding any questions. Because the thought of any questions right now was making her... nervous, which was also something she hadn't felt in a long time. Blowing out a breath she opened the door and stepped over the tiger.

"Alexei?" Katiya looked up sleepily from where she'd curled up under the covers on the vampire's bed. She didn't know how long she'd waited before sleep had claimed her.

"Ah... Katiya." The vampire stuttered as she shut the door.

The naked woman shifted up in the bed so that she was sitting, loosely covered by the top sheet and rubbed her eyes to try and wake up a little. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. I'm fine, everything's fine. Ah, just go back to sleep I'll be there in a bit." Maybe she should wash.

Katiya woke up a little more, studying Alexei curiously. The beautiful blonde was acting strangely, even for a vampire. "You're certain you're all right?"

Alexei hesitantly said. "I'm... fine." As she scurried into the bathroom only to find Lyov had not left her any hot water to wash up in.

That didn't sound fine at all. Worried now, Katiya got up and followed after her. At least there wasn't any blood on the floor. Did the American vampire manage to hurt her?

"Did something happen when you talked with the American vampire?"

"Katiya." Alexei said jumping. "Why aren't you sleeping?" She cleared her throat, "I'm fine. The American hasn't said anything yet that I know of Vidar will spend some time with him during the daylight. That should help speed things up."



The redhead stepped closer, scanning the other woman for any sign of a wound. When she didn't find any she looked up at Alexei, confused. "I was sleeping, but I was waiting to make sure you were all right also." It had been a fitful sleep. "You're acting strange." She wasn't sure what was going on, but something was.

"I'm sorry I don't mean to act strange." She had no reference for what was going on with her. She nibbled unconsciously on her bottom lip as she tried to figure out what to say or do.

The human stared at her, feeling suddenly self-conscious as she realized she was naked and getting cold. "I'm going back to the bed." She decided.

"Okay. Now you're being odd." She padded silently behind following.

"I'm being odd? You just spent the last few minutes staring at an empty bathtub repeatedly telling me nothing was wrong." Shivering, Katiya climbed under the blankets.

"Well, yeah... okay, that was odd. But we were talking and then you suddenly ran away to the bed, so in a sense you were being odd too."

Katiya stared at her, lips curling into a smile. "Are we arguing about which one of us is acting odder? Because if we are, you are definitely the strangest one in this bedroom."

Alexei chuckled at that, and then bent down kissing Katiya's pale red lips. "I really wish you weren't still healing from that bite." Was all she said before she got up moving to the other side of the bed and slipped naked under the covers.

"I'm feeling better though. It's almost healed. That's your doing isn't it?" Katiya shifted closer, yawning and pressing up close. The vampire's body was warm.

"Yeah, my blood, it makes you stronger and the stuff I did later after he bit you that helped to." She murmured

"Thank you for that then." She leaned up and kissed Alexei, ignoring the scent that she could smell coming off her. Alexei had warned her after all that she was just one of several pets.

"You're welcome."

Alexei was silent staring at the ceiling. "Being human, how do you deal with all the petty little emotions that bog you down?" She asked disturbing the silence.

On the edge of sleep, Katiya pushed a leg over Alexei's, getting herself comfortable. "What kind of feelings?" She asked quietly, enjoying the intimate feeling of sliding her skin across Alexei's.

"Um, guilt. Its useless to vampires because if the person before they were a vampire was any sort of decent human being what they have to do to survive as a vampire and the vampiric culture, guilt, would crush them." She was silent and then added. "In theory."

The human was quiet for a few minutes, tracing idle patterns on Alexei's stomach with her fingertips. "I used to get guilty when I first learned how to break into places. Ivan would always make fun of me for it." She looked up, meeting the other woman's eyes. "I realized I couldn't feel guilty for doing what I had to do to survive."

Alexei nodded, "So you adapt change your philosophy so it doesn't effect you..." She trailed off so what had changed in her philosophy to make her feel guilty about what her and Molly just did?

"You decide what's important to you, I guess." Katiya closed her eyes, spreading her palm on the warm skin beneath her hand.

Normally Katiya's touch was welcomed, encouraged, but now, now it just made her feel even guiltier. She nibbled on her bottom lip for a moment

The stiff set of Alexei's body caused the human to open her eyes once more and she watched the play of emotions play across her face. So that was what a guilty vampire looked like. Katiya thought she vastly preferred the sleek powerful look Alexei usually wore.

"It's all right." She whispered, lips just brushing the blonde's earlobe. "You warned me how it would be." And if she felt upset about it, Katiya kept telling herself it didn't matter.

"You know?" Alexei always suspected she was a bad liar, but then being as old a vampire that she was she rarely needed to lie about anything.

"You're warm." Best to keep the scent to herself for now.

"Ah, well, yes. Molly was downstairs and..." She trailed off not really wanting or needing to finish she realized. Molly had played her, which she knew, manipulated the situation as she always did because Alexei didn't want to be monstrous. She kept trying to convince herself that by her age she no longer needed to be that way much like she didn't need to sleep in a musty basement.

Molly again, Katiya thought to herself, running her fingers through that beautiful blonde hair. Yet another reason to dislike the unstable, but stunningly beautiful pet. Would she end up having to compete for Alexei's attention with Molly now that there were just two of them? The thought caused her stomach to clench.

"You warned me, told me there were other pets." Katiya was proud her voice sounded

normal, even reasonable.

"True I did." She sighed in enjoyment as the fingers brushed through her hair. "It's not healthy for me to feed off of you all the time, you'll grow anemic and eventually die, no matter how much of my blood might strengthen you." She blew out a breath and continued. "Yet I feel guilt over it, that's a new thing." Alexei said taking Katiya's free hand and kissing it before setting it between her breasts. "I don't think that's happened before." She yawned, feeling the sun start to rise, normally she could fight it off but she had exerted herself too much.

"I've been experiencing all sorts of new things. Only fair that you get one or two new things also." Katiya whispered, shifting just a bit closer and letting her eyes close. Sleep now, later she would try to figure out what was going on and why it disturbed her so much.

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## ~ The Secret History of Vampires ~

by Zee and Windstar

Enjoy and remember to send feedback to [Zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:Zeeamy@gmail.com) and [Adarkbow@yahoo.com](mailto:Adarkbow@yahoo.com)

### Part 8

It was well past noon by the time Katiya felt up to getting out of the bed. She readjusted the blankets around Alexei, feeling a little foolish for doing so. The vampire didn't need to stay warm, but she did it anyway. Vidar wasn't present at the door this morning, keeping the American Vampire company she guessed. Quickly the redhead dressed and closed the door behind her quietly.

"Good morning Fiona, Warren." She called out as she entered the kitchen, feeling good despite the day before.

Fiona and Warren were in their usual places in the kitchen, life revolved on its stomach, as Warren was apt to say frequently. Warren pattered at the butcher block preparing a pig for a roast, while Fiona worked on mending various shirts, a pile was on her right,

and currently she was working on one of Alexei's with a gaping hole in the back.

"Morning lass." Warren boomed out.

"Morning Katiya." Fiona said with a smile. "Everything alright?" She was slightly concerned Katiya hadn't seen Alexei at her most horrible yet.

"Fine." Last night had been troubling, but Katiya kept telling herself she had to accept it. Sliding into a chair across from Fiona she took one of the apples from the bowl in the center of the table. "How are you doing this morning?"

"Well en..."

"She was horribly sick this morning." Warren cut in. "Maybe you can convince her to take it easy."

"Sick?" Katiya looked at Fiona worriedly.

Fiona just scowled at her husband to be. "I feel fine now. Besides who is going to mend your shorts, you?" Fiona snorted and Warren wisely paid extra attention to the pig he was cutting

"But you feel all right now?" Katiya was still watching the other redhead worriedly.

Fiona nodded, as she continued to work on the shirt.

"Good." That was good, Katiya realized. "I don't have many friends, would be good if the few I have stick around."

"Not to worry, Warren and I will always be here for you." She smiled trying to keep the sadness out of it, for someone so young to say such a thing was terrible.

A pair of pants sailed through the room and landed in a heap at Fiona's feet. They were caked with blood and other things.

Katiya flinched back, eyeing the disgusting fabric then the doorway they had come from.

The moment broken Fiona looked up to the doorway. Molly stood there smirking, a low cut top showed off a savagery of bites to her neck and upper chest, which she proudly flaunted.

"Molly..." The older woman started in warning.

Katiya could feel her lip curling back in disgust as she spotted the other pet. Not that

there had been much doubt of what Alexei had done the night before, but having it rubbed in her face was more than she wanted to deal with.

"What? Alexei left her pants in my room I knew she would want them clean so I brought them to you. Isn't that what you do now? Oversee the household chores?" The tone was innocent, but none of that innocence was in the woman's cold blue eyes.

"Odd she didn't take them with her when she came back to bed with me." Katiya spoke up, not caring if it was a bad idea to cross paths with Molly or not. How dare the woman treat Fiona like that?

"My, my. The new pet has some teeth." Molly mocked coming into the kitchen.

Warren wisely chose to leave muttering something about an errand.

The other pet glared at Molly. So much for trying to get along with her and her dislike wasn't just motivated by jealousy.

"Don't feel special, none of us are. You're just getting all the attention because it takes time and a firm hand to mold someone into a proper vampire's pet. Obviously there are things you just can't do for the Mistress." The English woman snipped.

Fiona calmly picked up the pants and studied them with a sigh she got up and placed them in the laundry. "And there are quite a number of things you can't and don't do for the mistress." Fiona said as she calmly sat down and picked up her sewing.

Flushing, Katiya put the apple back in the bowl on the table, not hungry anymore after Molly's words. "I guess I just don't enjoy pain as much as you do." She pointedly looked at a few of the vivid red scars on Molly's chest.

Molly stepped up seductively into Katiya's personal space. "I could teach you to enjoy it."

"That's enough Molly!" Fiona shouted.

Disgusted, Katiya pulled back until she had no further to go with the wall behind her.

The English woman instinctively pulled back from years of living with Fiona as the favored pet and more than strong enough to put her in her place. Flushing as she realized what she had done she snapped. "You're just a servant now you have no right to speak to me that way."

"Really?" Fiona said and evil twinkle in her eye. "Kira."

The tiger bounded in from the green house looking at Fiona. On seeing Molly the tiger growled and started to stalk forward.

"That means I can do whatever and say whatever I want." Fiona shouted at Molly's fleeing form.

Feeling like she needed a bath after that visit, Katiya slowly sat back down. "I really don't like her."

"You shouldn't like her." Fiona said setting down the shirt. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Picking up the apple again, the younger woman spun it on the table top, watching it spin. "Maybe... maybe she's right."

"About what?" Fiona watched Katiya carefully

The apple spun again, wobbling about the tabletop. "I'm the new pet right? I shouldn't feel special."

"True you are a new pet."

Fiona hesitated; if she were wrong Katiya could set herself up for being really hurt both physical and emotional.

"Where did you sleep last night?"

Katiya looked up from the apple, face uncertain. "In Alexei's room. Why?" The apple spun again.

"Do you have your own room?"

"I could..." She frowned a little. "Alexei said I could choose one." Somehow she just hadn't managed to yet.

"But you don't have one. You've been sleeping in Alexei's room with Alexei, for what two months now?"

Was it that long already? Katiya blinked and quickly did the math before nodding. "Just under two months." She agreed. "That's a good thing?"

"Yes, Molly and Shiro never slept with her in her room."

"But you did." Katiya said quietly, stopping the apple in mid spin.

"On occasion. Never when she was younger. When we roamed around like nomads, I think she might have even dug her way into the dirt and slept until night fell. But once the modern age hit with its houses and comforts on occasion I would spend the night

but I had my own rooms I enjoyed going back to."

She reached over stilling the apple and Katiya's hand. "Has she ever punished you? Whipped you? Or chained you down in the dungeon?"

Blue eyes widened at the idea of that. "No." She'd yelled at her, but that was it.

"Trust me Katiya you've done a lot of things that she should have would have done that, especially that Hunter. She pouted for days not eating, merely stalking from room to room, when she thought you preferred the hunter to her. In fact the only reason why your little Hunter isn't dead is probably because Alexei thinks it would upset you. Those aren't thoughts that a vampire has towards its pets."

Katiya nodded thinking over Fiona's words before deciding a change of topic. "Can I help with anything?"

"Can you sew?"

"I can learn." She smiled hopefully.

Fiona sighed. "Sure, I can teach you the basics. We'll start with socks; nobody sees them anyways and won't care if the stitching looks funny." She picked up one with a hole in the toe. "Oh and don't feel too bad about Alexei's lapses, its hard to swallow to know that she goes to that woman. I bet if you press her on it you'll find Molly was waiting to pounce the moment Alexei came up the stairs full of dark energy that woman seems to crave. I'm not condoning her weakness at that moment."

Concentrating on the needle, Katiya slowly tried to copy the movements that Fiona was showing her. It quickly proved more difficult then she'd thought trying to sew in a straight line, but she tried her best. "I know she needs more blood than I can give her." It was just the other parts that made her feel upset.

"That's true with Shiro gone she should really take another pet, three humans, if the vampire is an elder and is concerned at all with their well being is enough to keep a vampire happy. Five to 10 humans if the vampire is younger. She could use the blood bar that Stepan and the others go too. She's a little paranoid though about it."

"Why?" Katiya didn't know much about the blood bars, other than they existed.

"With pets there's the bond she knows where you've been, if you've used drugs or been poisoned. Get a bad bleeder that's been paid a little to inject himself or herself and she'd be an easy target to kill. Its no secret Karl hates her."

Karl. The reason Shiro was dead as far as Katiya was concerned. She nodded quickly, swearing as she pricked her finger with the needle. "I wish he'd pay for what he did to Shiro." She said it quietly though.

"I do too. If the world was a younger more violent place, Alexei would have gathered an army and destroyed him. Now vampires are bent by rules of the council, and Alexei is no master of diplomacy."

Sticking herself again with the needle, Katiya grimaced and held up her finger watching a small bead of blood well up. "So she'll need another pet eventually." Katiya wasn't happy about that.

"Yes she'll need another pet, or you and Molly will start to get anemic."

Katiya licked her finger clean and managed a wry grin. "That wouldn't be good." So be it, she'd figure out something. Whoever they were, they couldn't be as bad as Molly. Trying again at repairing the ripped socks she decided to change topics. "Why do you think the American Vampires are here?"

"I don't know. To risk breaking exile I would assume their fleeing something more horrible in America than what they face here."

Yawning Alexei woke blinking until her eyes cracked open; it was still afternoon with the accursed sun still up. She sensed Katiya was upset although not the life threatening fear that had been felt, and frowned; the woman was probably upset about her and Molly. But that was silly she was only a pet and had no right to feel that way. But if that were true why did she feel bad still?

Alexei focused her sleepy mind and sent out a thought, a compulsion, a request that Katiya should come up stairs to her. Considering how willful Katiya was it would probably be easier to get up and go to her.

In the kitchen, Katiya frowned, losing the thread of what she wanted to ask. Something about the exiles, and she thought it would be an important question. "I think Alexei's awake." She said slowly, trying to figure out why she suddenly wanted to go upstairs.

"Ah, it's the blood. The more you two share the closer, I guess you could call it, you become. It's how she found you in the city, knew you were in trouble."

Blue eyes narrowed as she stared at Fiona. "So she's trying to get me to go upstairs right now?"

"She's trying by asking. She can't really make you do anything. You didn't jump up and run up stairs did you?"

Katiya smiled. "Not yet." She offered back the oddly stitched socks. "I'm sorry, I tried."

"It's more than anyone else does around here. Now go have fun with the vampire before she has to come downstairs and be a mean vampire."



"Yes ma'am." Katiya grinned, hopping up from her seat and taking a last bite of apple. With a wave she was gone, bounding up the stairs to see what was going on.

Closing the door behind her, Katiya moved towards the bed and vampire. "I was told to come up before you came down and were a mean vampire."

"Really? And here I thought I was just a big cat." She grinned sleepily referencing another conversation.

"That too." The redhead settled up on the bed, watching the relaxed sleepy look on Alexei's face. "Did you just want some early evening company?"

Alexei hesitated, realizing she might be seen as needy, and vampires were not needy, they created need in others but generally did not want or need. They were more, take and have, sort of creatures.

"Yes?" It came out as a question.

"Good." Katiya kicked off her slippers and squirmed in under the blankets, grinning. "So that's the vampire equivalent to shouting out my name?"

"Yes, well, the bond is tighter the more blood you share. It is rumored that the eastern vampires are very close because they share blood among each other within clans or with a very favored pet. Western vampires as a rule don't like to have that sort of dependence, or maybe we're just more paranoid."

Katiya hesitantly shifting closer and when there was no objection sighed in pleasure as she leaned into the vampire's body. "Do western vampires ever share a household?" She asked, curious.

Alexei frowned a little hurt. "I thought I have one. Do you not think I have one?"

Blue eyes looked up, a little confused by the answer. "Of course I think you have a household." Maybe she'd phrased the question wrong. "I meant, do master vampires ever share a household?"

"Oh, well..." She went silent letting her sleepy brain reflect on the question. "Some have tried, it doesn't work out. Lover quarrels have decimated Europe. Most, scorned lovers not all probably caused a number of wars. Most of us are big on plotting, conniving and backstabbing."

That made sense and Katiya used Alexei's shoulder as a pillow, trying to put Molly's words out of her mind.

Alexei sleepily burrowed her nose into Katiya's hair sniffing, while her hands wandered under the shirt the woman wore stroking the warm skin. "The crusades" she muttered "were because a French noble took a Middle Eastern woman as a lover, they were vampires, he made her one of us and in the end she fled him to return home. He thought she left him for another. To my knowledge she had not, but we went to war over it." She confided, "Over and over, and over."

The idea of vampires controlling wars on the scale of something like what she understood the Crusades to be made the redhead shiver a little. "Are you going to talk to the American again?"

"Yes. Vidar should have kept him up off and on during the day, which should leave him off kilter." Talking probably was a loose description of what she was going to do.

"We still have to visit Ivan and Boris." She slid a hand over Alexei's stomach.

"Mmmm, yes. Tomorrow evening if my new friend hasn't told me anything useful."

"I can't go meet this mysterious employer without the cup." She started slowly rubbing her stomach smiling as she watched the blonde woman's muscles flex a little.

Alexei lost her train of thought. "Cup?"

Katiya's smile widened as she enjoyed the idea of being able to distract the always beautiful and collected vampire. "Yes, that cup of yours." She drawled, lazily tracing patterns on exposed skin wondering how far she could push.

"Oh yes that cup." She trailed off not really able to keep her thoughts coherent it was harder to collect herself while the sun was still up. "I like that you really seem to enjoy touching me. That it's not because you feel you have too." It was a statement her more alert brain would have never allowed.

The human laughed a little, sliding up and over so that she could straddle the tall woman, enjoying the position. "Do I look like I'm doing this because you want me to?"

"Mmmm no. Thought you might be mad about Molly. It's not personal though, I prefer being with you." The last part was said quietly almost as if she were sharing a secret. But now she was sleepy and aroused two very conflicting things.

Katiya's fingers stilled for a moment at the mention of Molly. It was getting harder and harder to pretend the dislike wasn't due to jealousy. "The sun's still up." She said, noticing Alexei's eyes closing slowly.

"The American will still be there when you wake up." She lay down, stretching her full body out almost on top of the longer body of Alexei's, changing her stroking to light soothing touches.

"No sex?" Alexei murmured.

"Sex later." She whispered, nuzzling her neck and pressing a kiss to the skin there.

"Good." She let her hands drift over the skin of Katiya's back as the warmth of the human's body heat and the sound of her heartbeat lulled her back to sleep.

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Alexei was happy with Vidar. The Hell Hound had kept waking the vampire up during the day, and he was disoriented and starving.

"Now I think we will start with the questions. Let's try something easy. What is your name?"

She sat in a plush sitting chair, amongst the dried blood and gore, in the flickering torch light. She was dressed again in a white shirt and dark trousers.

"Joshua." The man groaned, half delirious from blood lust and the torture he'd gone through the day.

"Very good Joshua." She got up a small knife in hand. The sharp tip was lifted up to her index finger pricking the skin. She let a single drop to fall from her finger on to his lips. "See I'm not so bad. You answer a question you get some food."

He desperately licked his lips, trying to get every last trace of blood. It wasn't anywhere near enough and he growled in frustration.

"Now Joshua, you are American, correct?"

"San Francisco." He licked his lips, remembering the easy hunting, the nights full of life to choose from. The immigrants whom no one cared about and no one would miss if they disappeared.

"Very good." She let another drop fall on to his lips. "You're too young to be an exile, so you were sired in America."

Greedy he licked his lips. "Yes." Anything for another drop of blood.

"Why come over the ocean? Why take all that risk to end up here?"

He shrugged. "They don't tell me." He swallowed dryly. "Just said we were to come here, smuggled on that goddamn ship and cause you problems."

"I see." She didn't let another drop of blood fall, however. "So you're worthless. Just a

pawn with no knowledge to impart to me." She turned heading to the door.

"No! Wait " He was so hungry. "My sire, he said we wouldn't be opposed. Said we could do what we want and no one would come down on us."

She stopped and turned and stared at the man. "Now why would he say that do you think?"

He shook his head, mangy hair flying. "I don't know, I swear, I don't know. He just said we wouldn't have to worry. No one would come after us, you know? We'd be free to do what we wanted against you."

"Against me, specifically or just who ever was here?" She walked over to him holding up her bloody finger.

"You. You specifically. He said your name." His eyes were fixed on that finger, licking his fangs.

"Interesting." She murmured squeezing her finger and grinning evil as it missed his lips and hit the collar of his shirt. "Where is your Sire?"

He groaned in frustration. "His lair's near where we found you. Please... I'm so hungry!"

"So who's in my old factory?" She let another drop fall it too missed.

"My Sire, a couple others from America and those two humans." He nearly whimpered, so desperate for food.

"Good boy." She turned and walked to the door and left.

"Nooo!!" His scream was shut off as the door swung shut behind her. Outside in the hallway Vidar lounged, the nearly naked man watching her with amusement.

Near daylight she would stake him out for the sun to finish. "Nice work with him, he broke easily."

"Of course." As if there was any doubt. "Want me to take care of him?"

"Yes, near dawn stake him and lay him out for the sun to finish. Until then give him some pig's blood."

"Cruel." Giving him blood so he would know what was happening when he was staked out. "I like it." He turned away to go find the blood.

She headed up the stairs. "Drag Matvey and Stepan with you when you do it. That should hammer home the lesson. Then send them to meet with me."

A grunt followed after her in acknowledgement.

"You're much more bearable now that you're not pouting out in my forest." She said with a laugh as she disappeared up the steps

The kitchen was empty, unusual but not surprising considering that there had been a good chance of more screams.

"You're not all bloody this time." Molly said poutingly as she slunk into the kitchen.

Alexei stiffened. "You had last night, but not tonight."

The pet came up to the vampire sliding her hand across Alexei's back, "Don't sound so bitter lover. I did, after all do you a favor, spared your lovely Katiya from your brutality."

"How nice of you." Katiya said, dryly, as she watched from the entrance to the hothouse where she'd been enjoying the warmth. "To spare me."

Molly stiffened. "Feeling brave little Katiya. Willing to withstand the appetites of a monster?"

"I don't really care about your appetites." The redhead stepped out of the doorway, watching Molly's face with an expression of disdain as she moved closer to where Alexei was standing, frozen.

This was an unusual situation for the Vampire, her eyes darted between the two women. Curious she stayed silent to see what the other would do.

"You're nothing special little girl, just a pet like me." Molly snapped.

"Really? Just like you?" She smiled, innocently as she walked closer, a quick glance up at Alexei to see the vampire's face then she looked back at the British woman. "How many nights have you spent sleeping in Alexei's bed?" She asked, smiling.

Molly stiffened. "We've all had our moments of favor. Soon we'll all be replaced with a new pet and you'll spend no nights in Alexei's bed."

"Oh, poor Molly. That's right; you've never spent nights in Alexei's bed." Katiya smiled dangerously, half astounded at her own audacity. "I guess that means I'm not just like you."

Blue eyes narrowed and Molly took a menacing step toward Katiya.

"Try." She wanted to hurt Molly, which was shocking.

"Molly!" Alexei barked out. "I still rule here. Go now before I exile you from the house."

The English woman stiffened but turned and left the kitchen.

As soon as she was gone, Katiya's shoulders slumped a little as she let out a breath. Her hands were shaking a little from the burst of adrenaline. "I'm sorry I just... really don't like her."

Alexei just stared at Katiya silent for a moment.

A little worried by the silence, the human looked up, shifting from foot to foot and wondering if she'd finally gone too far.

"I don't like her much most of the time either." Alexei said, trying to figure how she felt. She was a little off-kilter to have someone fight over her, that she was pretty certain was a first, and she was a little turned on, but that wasn't surprising, the two of them had sex a lot.

"Then why did you take her as a pet?" Katiya frowned. "Wouldn't you want people you like, people like Fiona?"

Alexei ran a hand through her hair and sighed. "Guilt. I slew her Master. He was a violent, rapist murdering sack of shit. I found her days later in one of his lairs chained in a secret room. I freed her and she followed me here. To kill me I think. She loved him. Pain is love; torture is a lover's promise. It makes no sense I know."

She looked uncomfortable. "She wouldn't fit in anywhere so I took her in."

Katiya relaxed a little when it looked like Alexei wasn't upset over her earlier verbal assault on Molly. "Oh." She looked towards the door down to the cellar. "Are we going to get the key now?" Best maybe to just move right on from the earlier scene.

"Not to night. We will go tomorrow night. I have to finish with Stepan and Matvey."

Another night of not getting to the bottom of who was behind the attacks and stealing from Alexei. Katiya tried her best to avoid looking disappointed by the delay. "I could go."

"We discussed that already." Alexei said trying to hide her amusement.

"But we're just giving Ivan more time to do something." Katiya frowned.

"Katiya." Alexei sighed.

"I know." She patted Alexei's stomach. "You have to take care of this and you don't

want me going out alone."

"Since we can't leave tonight, let's go to my study and do some planning. Is that a good compromise?"

"Compromise?" Blue eyes blinked as Katiya looked up in surprise. That was the first time she'd heard the vampire say that word. "That sounds good." She could live with that.

"You seem surprised." Alexei said pushing away from the table her hip rested against.

"A little. I didn't think you liked to compromise?"

The vampire blinked. "I really don't have anything against it in theory, but this might be my first time using it, so we'll see how it goes." She started out of the kitchen.

Katiya stared after her, then jerked and had to rush to keep up with the blonde and her long legs. "I'll try not to mess it up." She mumbled, mostly to herself.

"Good." They headed down the hall. "I have to admit seeing you stand up to Molly, that was sexy." She stopped in front of her study doors and opened them.

"Sexy?" Katiya smiled. She rather liked that. "What part of it was sexy?" Just to make sure she could do it again.

"I think the aggressive, not backing down part." Alexei said entering the room. She wandered over to the small bar and gestured. "You want a drink?"

Following along behind her, Katiya studied the varied bottles that were set out. None of them looked like anything she'd seen available in the few bars she'd visited. "Yes, but..." She wasn't sure how to explain she didn't know one wine from whiskey.

Alexei waited a moment then caught on. "Do you want something, sweet, sour, smoky, smooth, and etc? Vodka we have a lot of I can mix it with fruit juice, and there's always bourbon."

"Whatever we had during dinner before the Opera, could I have that again?" She'd enjoyed that sweet drink.

"One port coming up." She rifled through the bottles until she found the one she was looking for. She poured a small amount into a tiny glass. "There you go. Remember to sip it."

"I remember." She'd been half out of her mind watching Alexei in that elegant suit across from her, but she remember that much. Taking that small glass, for some reason called a snifter, she enjoyed the rich sweet flavor. "What did you want to plan?"

Blinking the vampire stopped staring at the woman. "Plan, right..." She went over to a small desk and looked through the papers there until she found an old map. She brought it over to the table and laid it out.

"Here is my old factory." She pointed at a square, "and this is the river its next too. Our guest tells me his sire has made that his lair, but everytime the twins have been out to inspect it, nothing is there. Thoughts?"

Katiya moved over closer, leaning up against the taller woman and smiling at surprised twitch she felt in response. "Did they check the tunnels underneath?"

She watched as Katiya's mind took in the map. "A quick look they didn't go in too deep, it would cut them off and trap them. I'm thinking they have lookouts to alert them."

"Probably." Ivan was smart, disturbingly smart. "Ivan is working for the Americans?"

"That's my guess. So let me ask you, sneaky mouse, where is the best place to put guards."

"Here." She pointed to one of the outlying factories. "Here." Another of the other factory. "They'd see anyone coming up the road or the river from there." She studied the map a bit more. "Another set here, inside the tunnels."

Alexei nodded and grabbed a piece of charcoal to circle each place Katiya had pointed out. "Excellent."

"Ivan must know they're vampires." She didn't quite make it a question. "He must know and he doesn't care. Do you think he's a pet also?"

"I don't know, I doubt it, the way you talk about him, I don't think he'd make a good one. Too independent." Alexei realized that could also be said of Katiya.

"Then he must be getting a lot of money." He'd always been greedy for more. She leaned against Alexei's solid strength smiling. "Too independent?"

The vampire just grunted. "Willful people make horrible pets. They're always asking questions."

"Why's that?" Katiya gave a little poke to her side, eyes dancing with mischief.

"Vampires are control freaks." Alexei said with a straight face.

"I hadn't noticed." Katiya laughed, stepping away. "Tomorrow night we go get your key back?"



"Yes we go play with your Ivan and Boris. While the Twins and Stepan kill the lookouts."

Killing. Katiya winced, of course there would be killing. "Can I stay here while you go deal with Stepan and Matvey?" She liked the fire and it had been a few days since she'd had her last chance to try and puzzle her way through a part of a book.

"Oh I'm done with those two. Vidar is going to do a demonstration later and then bring them to me, near sunrise. If you want time alone I can leave."

"No." She said quickly and flushed a little. "I mean, what do you want to do until sunrise?"

"An excellent question." Her first instinct was to have sex, but perhaps they could be higher functioning mammals, if just for tonight.

"We could play a game."

Katiya smiled slowly her mind immediately jumping to a game she would enjoy playing, although a bed would be involved. "What kind of game?"

A blond eyebrow rose over a blue eye. "What kind of game did you have in mind?"

The redhead crossed her arms over her chest, indulging herself in a leer at the other woman's body, from long infinite legs up to her chest and then lips. "Something with less clothes?"

"Less clothes?" She repeated.

"Less clothes." She nodded. "Unless you think you'd lose?"

"I'm not sure I'd necessarily lose by losing clothes, but okay let's play your game."

Katiya paused. Great, now she had to come up with a game.

"It's...." She looked around wildly, trying to come up with a game. "Cards?"

#####3#3

Alexei wasn't really annoyed that she was losing. She did enjoy cards and dice, opposed to more highbrow upper crust games like chess, at heart she did always feel like she would be an uncouth barbarian. Her annoyance came not from the fact that she had been divested of her shoes, socks, and pants and now sat in the plush chair in only her shirt. It was the fact that Katiya was cheating somehow. She couldn't figure out how though, because in the very first round Katiya had lost, and taken off her shirt. Probably a wise move because the vampire couldn't stop staring at the woman's breasts long enough to watch her hands. Katiya was a card cheat and those nibble little fingers were

stacking the deck against the vampire.

Katiya cleared her throat and Alexei idly dragged her eyes away from the globes of flesh teasing her from across the small table.

Her eyes darted to her cards and sighed, another crap hand.

"How did you talk me into this again?"

Katiya raised an eyebrow, leaning forwards just enough for Alexei's eyes to go down her chest. There'd been a few minutes there where she'd been certain the vampire was going to just throw the table aside. But Alexei had managed to restrain herself to smoldering looks and staring at her bared breasts. It had been strange at first sitting there without her shirt on, but she'd gotten used to it.

"I suggested it and you agreed?" The redhead set out her cards; smile growing as she saw the hand Alexei had. Not that she really had any doubt that she was going to win the hand. After all, her father had taught her other things than just breaking and entering.

Distracting her opponent with bared breasts helped a lot too.

"I think I win." Leaning back in her chair, Katiya's smile widened. "I guess that means you loose your shirt."

For a moment the vampire's lips pursed together in annoyance at losing. It was something she hadn't done a lot in her life. Then Katiya took a deep breath making her breasts move and the vampire forgot that she had lost, it had been her idea to play a game and she'd agreed to the rules.

"I guess you're right." She pushed back from the table and stood. Poised she started to unbutton her shirt, slowly. Her eyes locked on Katiya's she never once looked away as her shirt came undone.

"So does the winner, win anything, in particular? You weren't really clear on that part."

Watching those long fingers undo the shirt made Katiya lick her lips remembering what other talented things those fingers could do. Finally the shirt slipped down off Alexei's shoulders and she had to remember to breathe as she took in the full beauty seated across from her. It made her fingers itch to touch and stroke that naked flesh.

"I guess I get to decide what I win?" How far was it from the study to Alexei's bedroom? Too far, but there had to be a bed closer in one of the unused bedrooms.

Alexei unconcerned with her nakedness sprawled back into the chair. Watching the

woman look at her body she forgot she'd lost at all. She'd seen that look before people through the ages had given it too her, but oddly from Katiya it was appreciated. She rested her chin on the palm of her hand and looked at her sneaky, card cheating mouse.

"So what is it that you desire to win?" She asked her voice low and husky.

Somehow along the way Katiya had lost control of the situation, again. That happened a lot around Alexei. That low and husky voice made her shift uncomfortably in the seat.

"You." She whispered. There was surely time before sunrise.

"A very expensive prize indeed." Alexei replied. "But fitting since you did beat me after all." She paused looking Katiya up and down if deciding if the woman was worthy.

"Okay, Katiya, you won me. Now where would you like me?"

The look on the vampires face was full of allsorts of promises.

Katiya's mouth went dry as all of her moisture decided to go somewhere else.

"Here. Now." The anticipation was almost as good as the actual deed. She wasn't going to make it to the nearest bedroom if Alexei touched her first.

Alexei was enjoying this game. This was one she could win. Normally she wasn't one for the seduction scene. Starting off she had been the warrior king, later off she viewed herself more like the philosopher king, and seduction came very low on getting her way. It was somewhere behind her wisdom and the sword.

Slowly she sat up on the chair, placing her elbows on her knees and then her chin on her clasped hands. "If you're going to have me, you need to put us a more even playing field. I think its time you finished loosing the rest of your clothes.

The tension in the room was drawn tight, anticipation was thick in each inhale and exhale.

Seemingly without her conscious volition, Katiya stood up from the table. Eyes still locked with Alexei's, she slid her fingers down to the waist of the skirt that she'd found waiting for her this morning. She paused as Alexei's eyes flickered to the skin she had just started to reveal.

"Actually," She stilled her fingers. "As winner, shouldn't you have to undress me?"

"As you wish."

Alexei got up from the chair and crossed silently over to Katiya. She didn't say anything, stood for a moment behind the redhead, not touching but close enough to smell her

and feel the heat of her body. Then she circled around the front and lowered herself to her knees. She picked up the left foot and slipped the shoe off, then set it back down. Silently she repeated the actions for the right foot. Shoes gone she let her hands trace up one leg, pausing to finger the garter, letting her fingers slip between the fabric and the warm flesh. After a moment of that she slowly removed the stocking letting her fingers trace over the skin, she smiled to herself as she felt the skin tremble. One side done she mirrored those actions with the other leg.

Rising up on her knees she hooked her fingers into the waistband of the skirt. Feeling her own version of puckishness she leaned forward and kissed Katiya's belly. The muscles jumped and quaked and she couldn't resist a nip to follow up the kiss.

Katiya let out a little sound, knee shaking so much she had to grab onto Alexei's shoulders to keep herself from falling over. The sight of Alexei kneeling in front of her was doing all sorts of wonderful things to her and her desire. Daringly, she slid her fingers through that silky blonde hair. A little tug let her see the vampire's eyes, dark and powerful.

"Did you forget something?" She whispered voice husky with want as she shifted in the skirt that was her only piece of remaining clothing.

Alexei just smirked but she didn't say anything. Perhaps a little role reversal was good for the soul. She had no doubt the problems her brethren would have if they ever found out but since it was just her and Katiya no one would.

She nodded and started to undo the ties of the skirt and then she slid it oh so slow down Katiya's body.

Goosebumps raised as a trail everywhere that Alexei's fingers touched. The redhead's fingers clenched hard on her shoulders and her nostrils flared in arousal. She could feel the warmth of the nearby fire radiating from the fireplace. "What else should I have you do?" She wondered out loud.

With the skirt now down around Katiya's feet the vampire placed her hands on the woman's hips, she just shrugged and stayed silent. If she spoke, she was afraid she'd assert reality and this would all have to end.

"I think I should have you kiss me." Katiya wanted, needed, those lips on her skin. Anything to get Alexei to touch her. She added a slight tug to the hair she still had her fingers in to show where the vampire should kiss her.

Alexei got her feet under her and kissed Katiya's lips careful to make sure the only places they touched were lips and where Katiya's hands tangled in her hair.

It wasn't enough the human wanted more. So she silently directed Alexei's head downwards, arching her back upwards as she managed to direct the blonde's head to

one of her breasts. She hissed out a low "Yesssss." The entire scene felt surreal. She couldn't understand why Alexei was letting her do this.

Alexei teased with her teeth and tongue, until the nipple was red and pebble hard. Her hands stayed at Katiya's hips her fingers flexing every now and then showing her restraint from taking this all away.

Katiya really didn't know how much longer she was going to be able to stand. When Alexei nipped, again, she nearly fell over. "Floor, now." She demanded. There was a rug in front of the fireplace that would do better than the solid wood floor. How much further was Alexei going to let this go she wondered?

It was hard for a moment Alexei didn't move her jaw flexed as instinct rebelled, but then she moved to the rug in front of the fireplace. She laid down on her side enjoying the heat of the fire and looked at Katiya waiting, watching, still silent.

This was playing with fire and Katiya knew it was going to burn her, but it was oh so much fun. She knelt down next to the long lanky body, trailing her hand from thigh up to shoulder, with a detour for a breast. "Touch me." Katiya was happy she managed to not beg.

Alexei's nostrils flared, but she reached out and drew Katiya down to her, rolling over so she was completely on her back. She lightly at first trailed her hands over Katiya's thighs, stomach and up to her breasts. She avoided the wet apex between the young woman's thighs; she could feel it on her abs as unconsciously Katiya ground down into her. Slowly she let her touch get firmer.

"Harder." Katiya demanded, hips rocking against the taut body below hers, bracing her hands on either side of Alexei's shoulders and watching the firelight reflected in the vampire's eyes. "Lower." The last was a low moan as she trembled at the skilled fingers touching her.

Finally Alexei spoke. "As you desire." She whispered out and let her fingers enter the warm wetness. At the first touch she couldn't maintain control anymore and rolled them over away from the fire. Her hand roughly moving between Katiya's legs. She growled and gritted her teeth.

That was more than she'd thought Alexei would let her get away with, she thought faintly, suddenly finding herself on her back. She arched up her hips, crying out as she felt Alexei's fingers enter her. The fire warmed them both and the tall blonde's body was warm pressed against hers. Urgently she grabbed at the blonde's arms, moving them faster.

"Yes." She hissed again, urging Alexei on.

Katiya was grabbing at her, murmuring and pleading, and then she was cresting and

those fingers weren't grabbing they where latched onto her digging into her tough vampiric flesh. She didn't even blink when Katiya turned her head into the crook of Alexei's arm crying out and then biting her. She growled in response and bit the young woman in return teeth and fangs piercing into the meaty flesh of her shoulder.

Katiya screamed in pleasure and pain. She wasn't sure what happened but she might have passed out for a minute or two. When she was aware again, they were a tangle of limbs in front of the fire, still catching her breath and Alexei licking close a bite on her shoulder. A little embarrassed she closed her eyes and pressed her face into the crook of the blonde's neck when she was done.

Once the wound she made was healed she kissed the exposed skin she was getting a little worried, when Katiya kept her face hidden. "Did I hurt you?" She asked concerned.

Hair still slick with sweat, Katiya shook her head. "No." She stayed where she was though, not sure if she could face the world right away.

The vampire frowned puzzled. "Did you not like what we did?" They'd had sex lots of times each time was a little different but Katiya had been a virgin, and new to the world of sexuality, didn't know what she yet preferred. "Just tell me what you didn't like and I promise I'll never do it again." She said seriously.

At that Katiya laughed, and pulled back enough so that she could see the vampire's face. "I loved it." That maybe was the problem she thought. "I just..." She flushed a little. "It was very good." She finished lamely, not sure how to explain.

That did little to ease Alexei's worry. She rolled them over back towards the fire, Katiya on top cradled against her chest. "You loved it but you have the body posture of someone who is ashamed or uncertain." There was an odd emotion circulating inside, one the vampire wasn't sure she liked... hurt that she had not given Katiya what she wanted.

This was nice, Katiya decided, sighing in pleasure as she stretched out on top of Alexei.

"It was amazing." She laid out her palm on the center of Alexei's chest. "I wasn't really supposed to do that though was I? I'm your pet."

Alexei shrugged. "I liked it." She said instead of answering.

The smaller woman opened her mouth to say something, then sighed and settled into the embrace. Why should she talk about things that were obviously not going to change.

"Thank you for playing cards." She said instead, ignoring the tumultuous feelings inside.

Alexei frowned and then reached up easing the lines of worry on Katiya's forehead and sighed as well. "No pets aren't in control... sexually. But you surprised me tonight with Molly and then with the Card game. I very much enjoyed that surprise and wouldn't trade it for anything. But outside these doors no one can know or Karl would demand your life and mine."

"I know." Was the whispered response. She really was getting good at avoiding giving names to things she was feeling. "I won't tell anyone." She grinned though. "I'm glad I surprised you."

"I like surprises; they make me remember that life, even an unnatural one, is worth living."

"Good thing I keep surprising you then." Otherwise she probably still wouldn't be around.

Alexei chuckled, "You my mouse are a never ending stream of surprises. Now my nimble little mouse perhaps you would do your honorary body slave the honor of putting those card-cheating fingers to work. That is if you feel I am worthy of release."

"I don't know." Katiya grinned, enjoying using her fingers to stroke the nearest exposed breast. "You might have to say please."

Alexei made a face of distaste, but after a moment of teasing relented. "Please."

"See? Was that so very hard?" Katiya whispered, pressing kisses to the side of her neck as her fingers continued to stroke and caress their way down her body.

"Says you." The vampire joked, cutting off in a moan as Katiya hit a sensitive spot.

"You talk a lot." Katiya teased, claiming her lips as she put her fingers to better use than cheating at cards.

#####3#####3#3

They were still lying on the rug in front of the fire, probably not the most productive night she'd ever had, well depended on your view of productive. Katiya was dozing, not quite asleep, but not awake either. Alexei was fascinated with the play of light and shadows from the fire over the woman's pale skin. Gently she stroked the fire-warmed skin, occasionally leaning over to sniff the drying sweat. She could smell the changes to the young woman's body, how her blood was ever so slightly changing tissue and bone.

Katiya would be stronger than most humans now, quicker, and healthier. Not immortal, just hardier.

She felt the disquiet in the prenatal other part of herself that by tenuous and not so tenuous threads linked her to her pets and childer.

"Is it time?" Katiya murmured, not wanting to move from the spot she'd curled up in, but feeling the tensing of Alexei's body. She'd long ago lost track of what time it was.

It must be near sunrise and Vidar was demonstrating what happened to vampires that she felt were a threat to her household. "Mmm, I believe it is. Do you think you can be a convincing pet?" Alexei murmured into Katiya's ear.

"Did you want me to wear a collar?" The human answered, stretching against Alexei's body feeling a pleasant soreness, as she teased. It seemed like an age ago that the vampire had threatened her with wearing a collar.

She'd never actually made her pets wear collars unless they were travelling outside her small territory. "Can you behave?"

"I thought I always behaved?" Katiya smiled, unrepentantly and sat up, missing Alexei's touch immediately.

Alexei chuckled, "I think you're misbehaving right now." She got up and went over picking up her pants and slid into them.

"I could suggest a few things you could do to stop me from misbehaving, too badly but we don't have time." She found her skirt where Alexei had dropped it and went in search of the rest of her clothing.

Alexei raised an eyebrow at that. "Not such the shy mouse anymore are we?" She found her shirt and slipped it on leaving it unbuttoned and sat down in a chair. "You know I think a greater impression would be made on my wayward sons if you stayed naked."

Katiya paused reaching for her shirt, feeling her face start to heat. "You want me to be naked? In front of Matvey and Stepan?"

"Yes."

Katiya licked dry lips. "Why?" She really didn't like that idea.

Alexei thought about being offended for a moment that she was being questioned, but let it go, seeing how acutely Katiya was embarrassed by the idea. "Part of the problem is you, they feel their place is threatened by you." She held out a hand.

Katiya still held onto her shirt, biting her lip. "If you want me naked, I can be naked." She had to trust Alexei knew what she was doing.



"Of course I want you naked; we have the most fun that way." She joked. However, seeing no smile grace Katiya's lips she became serious and pulled her down onto her lap.

"Naked makes them feel superior to you, and lets them see how human and vulnerable you are. It will honestly put you in a better position with them. Trust me, no one will harm you or touch you. Well, except for me."

It was a hard thing to do, trust her that much. Watching her eyes, Katiya nodded slowly. "All right." A little shimmy of her hips and she shoved off her skirt. "Naked it is." This was going to be interesting.

Alexei placed one hand across Katiya's lap on her hip, keeping her in place on her lap; with the other she cupped a cheek letting her thumb stroke red lips.

She heard the footsteps first down the hall, three different steps: one forceful and sure, the other two shaky and hesitant.

Katiya relaxed into the touch, trying to ignore the urge to bolt and snatch up her clothes as the doorknob turned.

Vidar came in first, his eyes widening and then narrowing at the display not happy at all.

For some reason that obvious displeasure on the Nordic man's expression made it easier for Katiya to face the next two.

"The American has been staked out for the coming sun as you commanded." He grumbled out. "These two would beg forgiveness I believe."

Matvey and Stepan were grabbed and hauled forward into the room. They stood only in torn and bloody pants, their skin sported burns and cuts a testament to Alexei's displeasure and lack of food.

Stepan's eyes took them in and then darted away trying to look anywhere but at the couple on the chair. The room stank of sex and blood. Matvey, older slightly than Stepan looked at Katiya, hungrily and openly, forgetting he was allowed to live by Alexei's good graces, not that he shared any blood ties.

The human made the mistake of meeting Matvey's eyes and she shrank back against Alexei's comforting form, away from that insane hunger that glowed within his eyes. There was no doubt in her mind that if he could he would rip her apart to get every drop of blood out of her that he could. She also knew she'd never think the same of the absent minded boy-man who'd taught her reading.

"I have not given you leave to look at me or mine. You gave up rights to this household

the moment treason sprang from your lips." Alexei said quietly, but each word issued dread warning. She moved one hand so it reassuringly stroked Katiya's back.

It was better, Katiya decided relaxing again at that touch, to avoid looking the vampires in the eye.

Instantly both men's eyes looked to the floor, Matvey's Adams' apple bobbed as he nervously swallowed.

"Vidar remind these creatures how to grovel and bow in front of their master."

"I thought you'd never ask." He really did enjoy putting vampires in their place; it was something of a hobby. A punch to both of their backs sent them to the floor and he ground his heel into the small of both of their backs. He looked up hopefully at Alexei to see if she'd want more done to them.

"Thank you Vidar. If you would wait outside the door, I'll call you if they need another reminder."

Grumbling, he cast one last look at Katiya and gave the two groveling vampires a little kick to remember him by before going outside and closing the door behind him.

"Now Matvey, can you please tell us what I do to people who try to usurp my power. Remember your Sire."

Wordlessly the young man lay on the floor for a bit, then said not looking up. "You disemboweled him and hung him from a tree in your garden with his own guts to see his last sunrise."

"And our American friend is waiting a similar fate only with stakes instead of guts. So why shouldn't I do the same to you two?"

That certainly sounded like a bad way to go, Katiya thought.

Alexei paused then continued. "Whatever jealousies you feel over each other or my pets, get over it. I don't have time to deal with your insecurities, nor do I care about them. The only persons whose needs matter in this house are mine. If I want to say for example, yell and threaten my pet one minute and then fuck her senseless the next is it any of your concerns? No!"

Both men flinched.

Katiya joined them, glad that she wasn't on the receiving end of this anger. She could feel the muscles tensing in Alexei's arms and shoulders. She had no doubt that the Master of the house was on edge.

"If I tell you to oversee the factories, you oversee the fucking factories. If I tell you to leave a possible traitor alone so he can lead me to the nest of traitors you do it. Because what I want is the only thing that matters. I don't care what you want." Alexei smiled and leaned forward nipping at Katiya's neck, letting her fangs tease the skin all the way up to her earlobe, but never pierced the skin.

From Katiya's neck she murmured "Are you two clear?"

Stepan didn't dare look up, knowing death would await him if he did. "Clear." He growled.

"There is a nest of foreign vampires in my city, nesting, waiting to kill us all, and you're insecure, petty bullshit could have gotten us killed. What if they'd tried to sweep the house while you two were chained below? Everyone could have died and you'd be a trussed Christmas goose for them to kill at their leisure. So this is your last chance. Fuck it up and you'll join the American."

Stepan stewed, he knew she was right, but damnit she had to see that they were right also. He had no choice but to agree though. "What do you want from us?" He said, knowing Matvey was staying quiet.

"Nothing, why would I want anything from you? You merely have to do what any good childer would do, I gave you this life, and you two owe me everything."

Matvey clenched his jaw, but he forced himself to talk. "I'll go back to the factories." He hated that place so much.

"Thank you Matvey. A suggestion. You do know if everything is working smoothly and correctly, and that the workers are happy, you could probably study for a few hours in the office?"

He dared jerk his head up at that, eyes glowing with sudden hope. "I could... bring books with me?" He wanted to be clear on this.

"Yes, but keep in mind you're first responsibility is the factories."

"I will." He lowered his head, the hatred of being at the factories easing a little.

"And Stepan while you're concern for my well being is... quaint. Perhaps if you were more serious about it you would join with the twins in rooting the American's out of the tunnels by the old factories by the rivers. On the bookshelf is a map with areas where we believe there are lookouts watching to warn the Americans."

He wasn't, nor had he ever been as blood lust crazed as the twins. He wasn't about to risk her ire again though. "I'll go with the twins."

"Good choice, then when you worry about my well being you'll have a better idea how I've managed to keep myself alive for over a thousand years without your help."

He winced, but nodded silently.

"And perhaps you'll learn not to be afraid of a human pet but the bigger and badder things out there that can really hurt you."

She looked at them both for a moment. "Vidar." She called out finally.

The door opened and he leaned in, hopeful for a little bloodshed. "Yes?"

"Take them out of here; give them pig's blood to eat. They'll have to prove they're not treasonous creatures to earn human. If they fail me again, you can do a repeat of the American on them."

He grunted and grabbed them both by the arm, lifting them up off the floor and putting them not too gently onto their feet. A shove sent them out the door, which he shoved, closed behind him.

"Did that go well?" Katiya asked after the door was closed, not really sure if that had been good or bad.

Alexei was still for a moment then let out a breath. "Matvey got it. Stepan was willful until I played the age card, reminding how long I've walked this earth. I think took the air out of his sails."

"Took the air out of his sails?" Katiya grinned, amused by the saying. "Can I get dressed now?"

"I don't know." Alexei pretended to think about it. "What if I like you naked?"

"Then I guess you'll just have to undress me more often." Katiya tried to squirm out of her grip.

With a chuckle Alexei let Katiya get up. Although she didn't even pretend not to watch her get dressed.

#####3#####3

It felt like old times again, slipping along the streets trying to stay within the shadows that cloaked the dark corners. All that was missing was her father behind her, whispering instructions and Ivan ahead of them, doing as he pleased. Instead she was trailing along somewhere behind Alexei, with Vidar not far away, the white hound keeping pace with her. Stepan and the twins, who still gave her the chills, had

disappeared several blocks ago, going to take care of the lookouts, hopefully.

Winter may last longer in the northern parts of Russia but it wouldn't last forever, Alexei noted the signs that spring was on its way. As the black snow melted some during the day leaving black ice at night once the temperature had lowered again.

She also wondered if she should have given Katiya a weapon other than that small little blade she carried, well and Vidar.

She paused coming out of an alleyway and pointed at a dubious looking shack. "Is that the bar?"

"Yes." Katiya shivered, not liking the memories from her brief visits there.

"Smells like a hobo's armpit."

"You should see what they serve to drink." Katiya wrinkled her nose in distaste. She nodded to the farthest empty shell of a warehouse. "Did they get the lookouts?"

"We'll find out." She took a step and then paused looking back at Katiya. "Would it do any good to ask you to stay put?"

"Probably not." Katiya smiled, red hair hidden under a black knit cap, which matched the dark shirt and pants she'd found waiting her this evening.

Alexei just sighed and started towards the bar. "Vidar, go watch the back door, if anyone leaves, well you know."

The hound growled, which had a happy sound to it. "He really likes doing this doesn't he?" Katiya asked, hurrying to keep up with Alexei's longer legs.

With a predators grace she crossed to the door and pushed it open entering the smoky, dark pit of humanity. The smell of human bodies sweating, having gone who knows how long without a bath caused her to make a face at the stench.

The drinkers, most of them were far past caring that Alexei had entered the bar. Most of those sat with long pipes hooked up to a strange water filled device smoking something. A few of the more aware of their surroundings drunks looked up and let out catcalls as they spotted the vampire at the door.

Alexei walked over to a table near the back and picked up the two men sitting there and easily threw them towards the door. When they got up with angry glares she calmly looked at them and said. "No matter how bad you are or tough I'm 10 times that."

Katiya lingered by the door, biting her lip as she tried not to laugh at the confused angry looks on the two men's faces. They ended up backing away, still confused, but deciding

to not push things. "I think I like coming to bars with you." She said, watching them as they yelled curses back at them but kept moving. A few of the other patrons, who were still aware of their surroundings, watched Alexei warily now.

"I do have certain... presence. Remember to keep your face in the shadows and don't speak. I don't want your friend to realize you're working with me."

Katiya winced, she'd almost forgotten about the point of the evening.

"Hey, what the hell do you think your doing?" A voice from the back shouted at Alexei as its owner spotted the damage she'd just done to the door.

"Airing out the place." Alexei growled out but didn't get up.

"Girl, you owe me for driving away business." The man had an odd accent, Katiya thought, staying as deep in the shadows as possible. He shoved a table aside, sending a man who'd been smoking opiates tumbling to the floor.

The vampire watched him come, but didn't even look concerned. "You can join them." She replied in an even tone.

"Are you deaf?" He grabbed the pistol in the strange looking holster at his side and Katiya realized where she'd heard that strange accent before. He spoke Russian better than the other American, but it was there nonetheless. "I run this bar; you owe me money, Girl."

"Actually at my age I think I've gained the right to be called a woman." Under the table she kicked out at foot letting it connect with an unused chair and sent it hurtling back straight into the oncoming man. In a blur she was up out of her own chair and had a dagger at his throat.

"Who the...?" He started to yell, then growled in pain as she grabbed him and slammed him back, the dagger sharp on skin. He wasn't a vampire, only a pet, and the elder moved faster than he could track.

Nearby one of the drunks wasn't quite as drunk as Katiya had thought. She watched him intently as a hand started to creep towards the folds of his coat. Silently as she could, she started to sidle along the wall towards him as he focused on Alexei.

"You smell of vampires, and since I own this city, and am the only one allowed to have pets, that leaves us with one simple conclusion... you're going to have to die."

He struggled in her grip, trying to get the pistol he was holding up out of the holster so he could pull the trigger repeatedly against her head. He was used to being stronger than most, but he was starting to panic as he realized her grip wasn't even budging.

His struggling got more desperate, legs flailing about as he tried to shake her grip. "You're going to die!" He yelled, eyes wild. "My Master's going to stake you out in the sun!"

Alexei had to admit she rather liked his fear. She smiled, "You mean like I did this morning with your comrade, Joshua."

He went limp in her grip, staring at her in astonishment. "You're lying."

Behind them, Katiya slipped the sharp little dagger of hers out into the palm of her hand, watching the drunk aim the pistol towards the two standing in the center of the room. Everyone's attention was on Alexei now, all watching her with horrified fascination.

Alexei laughed, "I don't have to lie." She frowned looking into his eyes trying to make out what was being reflected there. Her own eyes widening a bit she reached out grabbing the pet and in a quick move twirled them so his body was between hers and the man with the gun.

The drunk jerked, hand clenching around the pistol and the shot going wild up into the ceiling as he screamed. Katiya danced back, her sharp little blade red with blood from the side of his chest where she'd stabbed.

In a swift, somewhat blurred motion Alexei pinned the pet with her dagger to the bar and then ran over to Katiya. A normal man would be dying; this however was another pet, fed long on vampiric blood. She hit him once in the kidneys, a solid bone crushing punch that would make someone piss blood. Then as he staggered to his knees she reached down and with more than enough pressure snapped his neck.

Unconcerned if he was dead or paralyzed she went to Katiya. "Are you okay?"

The human gave her a shaky smile, waving the red dagger and trying not to show the shaking in her hands. "I'm good. He missed you right?"

"He shot the ceiling. I'm fine." She reached out, but hesitated, instead made do with a pat to the shoulder before turning back to the man attached to the bar.

Disappointed not to have gotten a hug, Katiya stayed where she was, not really wanting to get close to the screaming pet at the bar.

Alexei frowned; this wasn't really how she had seen the night going. Reaching out she ripped her dagger out of the man's hand and then dragged him to the door. They'd made enough noise for one night.

Vidar was waiting by the door, watching her with amusement. "Maybe you could shout out that we're here?"

With a sigh, Alexei said. "All I wanted was a table and a drink. This guy had to blow everything out of proportion." She tossed the man at Vidar.

He caught the moaning pet, grinning. "That mean you're giving him to me?"

"Sure, he pissed me off enough you can do whatever you want with him."

The smile turned evil and Vidar dragged the screaming man off into the darkness. Katiya watched it all with wide eyes. She shook her head once and looked at the people who were now trying very hard to pretend that Alexei didn't exist.

"I'd leave you at home but I need you to identify Ivan." She reached out an arm and pulled Katiya along after her into a different set of shadows that Vidar had gone.

"Well now there's been a fight here, something not that uncommon, but if we're lucky those drunks in there won't remember what I look like." She reached out lifting up Katiya's face studying the woman for a moment.

Serious blue eyes stared up at her, waiting to see what it was that she wanted. "He'll be here." What would happen when he came she didn't know, but it wouldn't be good.

"Are you okay?" Alexei asked, Katiya had tried to protect her, something she wasn't use too.

"Shaky." She tried to put on a brave face. "I've only used the dagger twice before." She admitted, slowly. Once she'd only cut a guy trying to rob her, the second time though she'd stabbed it into the neck of a drunk who had been certain she was a whore.

The vampire nodded, she pulled the human woman into her body holding her. "Have you ever killed someone?"

Gratefully, Katiya sank into the embrace, hiding her face against the blonde woman's shoulder. "The second time." There'd been a lot of blood. "I think." She hadn't waited to see though.

"I killed him, you didn't. He was a pet, or he would have died right away." It had been a good shot.

"I know." She'd stabbed him only wanting to keep him from shooting Alexei.

One of the twins ghosted out of the darkness, wide dark eyes taking in the embrace. "Humans are coming."



The vampire bent her head down and whispered into Katiya's ear. "Thank you for what you did. No ones really... thank you." She stood back up and peered out of the shadows.

Katiya met the dark knowing eyes of the twin, before the vampires slipped back into the darkness. It was eerie watching them move in and out of the darkness like that. "What are you going to do to him, if it's Ivan and Boris?"

"I'm not sure really. Part of me wants to hurt them like they hurt Mr. Morozov and his family. Nobody deserves that. But I suppose I'll ask them questions."

Katiya didn't know how to feel about that. She didn't like Ivan, feared him, hated him, but they'd grown up together. He wasn't her brother by blood, but he might as well have been.

Katiya didn't need Alexei's acute senses to hear the approaching humans. Ivan was talking loud enough to carry through the evening. Boris was being his normal silent, hulking self, trailing behind Ivan as the two headed to the front door of the bar.

"That is a big man." Was Alexei's only comment in the dark.

"A nasty man." Katiya agreed. Watching the two from their shadows as Ivan started to climb the steps to the door.

Then she followed it up with. "Somewhere in that family tree there must be a troll."

Katiya shifted next to her. "Trolls?" She wasn't sure she wanted to know if they were real.

"A tale for another time. Let's wait a minute and see if they come back out."

"Is Vidar keeping an eye on the back?"

"He's playing with his new chew toy, but the twins are probably there."

"Why did he look upset when he saw me on your lap earlier?"

Alexei blew out a breath; she was actually surprised Vidar was still being nice to her, after that. She hadn't taken in to account his feelings about Katiya. "Let's say you had a younger sister, would you like to see her frolicking naked on someone's lap?"

"I probably wouldn't like that." Katiya said after a moment.

"He thinks of you as family, you're his responsibility and he watches out for you, and I think he really cares for you, and my stunt yesterday crossed a line between us." She was silent for a moment, and then finally said. "I made a mistake."

Katiya was silent, thinking of the look in Vidar's eyes as he'd seen her naked on Alexei's lap. She watched the front of the building, seeing no sign of Ivan or Boris coming back out of the bar. "I don't think they're coming back out."

"I think you're right. Stay out of sight, don't want to tip them off that you're with me."

She started walking back to the front door.

Unhappily, Katiya stayed where she was. "Be careful." She whispered into the night.

Alexei yet again entered the bar, and looked around. She didn't really have a plan; plans were for people who possessed subtly, which she did not. She spotted the duo shaking down some street rat by the bar.

"I don't have the money! I swear..." The miserable wretch was shaking. Ivan studied him over a knife he was using to pick clean his nails. Boris stood motionless behind them. "I don't care if you don't have the money. You owe me. You know what that means."

The man wrung his hands together, babbling excuses. "A waste of time. Wouldn't you agree Boris?" The large man grunted flexing impressive muscles. "I hate wastes of time."

At that the large man stepped up to the quaking man, grabbing him with one large hand and then slamming him, repeatedly into the bar top until he stopped moaning and crying.

Ivan watched with a faint smile. "Let that be a lesson to all you miserable fuckers who don't pay on time!" He yelled at everyone who was watching.

"Tough man to beat on a scrawny thing like that. Why he's not even a third of your size." Alexei said filling the silence.

"Who..." Ivan stopped in mid question, staring at Alexei, before starting to laugh. "You must be insane to come here!"

"You really shouldn't be concerned about my sanity; you should be more concerned about how I got here without one of your little lookouts warning you. But that's really a small concern too, what should really trouble you Ivan, is the murdering of my lawyer and his family. For all his annoying morality, I was rather fond of Mr. Morozov."

A flicker of something crossed the man's face; it might have been fear or anger. "He screamed all the way into his death." Was his answer though as he leaned against the bar top. "Boris, get me a drink will you?"

The large man watched Alexei, but nodded and started around the bar to fetch a drink.

"How's my darling Katiya doing? I hear you've taken a fondness to her?" Ivan drawled.

"Your Katiya?" Alexei asked as she calmly sauntered over to the bar and casually sat down next to Ivan. Acting as if she had nothing at all to be worried about. In truth she was not worried about these two at all.

"Actually, I did promise her to Boris." He smiled maliciously, as Boris reached beneath the bar top and pulled out a bottle. Fixing a whiskey he slid it over to Ivan.

"Well if you did, she's not really disappointed by the fact that she sleeps in my bed and not his. So I'd say Boris is rather forgettable."

"Poor Boris didn't get a chance." Ivan took a sip of the whiskey, making a face at it. "He'll get another chance." Boris nodded, a glint coming to his eyes as he considered that next chance.

Alexei snorted. "Highly unlikely considering you'll both be dead."

Ivan smiled. "I'm on the winning side, so I doubt that."

"Really? You did notice you're friends, those pets are gone. Nobody in this place will have your back once I start with the bloodletting, in fact they may help once I tell them they can take anything off your dead bodies."

"Please." He smirked, sipping the whiskey again. "That's the thing with you vampires. You're all rooted in the past. Do you really think those lookouts were the only way I kept an eye on things here?" Boris folded his arms over his large chest, lips moving into something that probably was supposed to mimic a smile.

"So tell me Ivan. If you're so smart how are you going to stop me from killing you?"

"Actually..." He smiled as he heard the start of yells from outside. "I think you have to choose between killing me and letting your friends outside get killed." It was a gamble, one he wasn't happy with, but he hadn't been given an option this time. Boris started around the bar top.

"Oh my friends can take care of themselves." She reached over and grabbed Ivan shoulder shoving him back down on to the chair. "If they can't they don't deserve to be of my blood. Perhaps it's you who doesn't really understand what you're playing with. Childer and pets are disposable, but what's even lower than that is - human cattle. Guess what you are?"

Alexei had to trust those outside could do their job, it was hard, but she had to push just a little longer. If not all this was for nothing.

He grimaced in pain as dug her fingers into his shoulder. Boris started to reach for her, but a tightening of her grip on Ivan's shoulder caused him to yell out, stopping the large man. "You'll never get out of here without me!" Ivan was sweating; the Master had sworn he wouldn't have to face Alexei for long.

Alexei chuckled smelling his fear. "I don't care how many are out there; those American's are young and stupid. My blood is older than their country, and it doesn't make weaklings. They are nothing. You may live, if you give me something."

"Their Master would kill me for helping you."

She clenched her fingers and he swore he felt bone grind against bone as he yelled in pain. "All right! All right!" Boris stayed where he was, staring at Alexei, fingers flexing.

Nothing but a bully, Alexei thought. "My signet ring, I want it back."

He bared his teeth in a grimace. "What signet ring?"

"The one that Fenix's men stole from me. It has a carving of a horse on it. I want it back"

Boris's eyes flicked to Ivan then back to Alexei.

Ivan, for his part, was having trouble not screaming. "Oh that ring."

The fighting outside was mostly silent. There were occasional snarling screams or desperate yells, which sometimes ended in gurgling silence.

"Yes, that ring." She reached over grabbing a finger. "Seems to me Ivan that you might be stalling for time. Let me jog your memory." She easily snapped his pinky finger.

His scream was high and sharp. Boris moved forward, stopping again when she ground her fingers into his shoulder hard enough to draw blood this time. Gasping for breath, Ivan swallowed. "Yes. Fine, take your stupid ring." With his remaining good hand he fumbled at a necklace around his neck with the ring hanging from it.

"See that wasn't so hard." She reached up and snapped the necklace off his neck and then patted him on the back. "Nice doing business with you."

She walked past Boris and then in a blur of motion stopped and turned slitting the large man's throat with a hidden dagger. "Oh, and Ivan I said you'd live, I said nothing about Boris."

"Boris?" He stared at the large man who was grabbing at his throat, trying to force the blood back into his body as he sank to his knees.

"I don't like people to covet what is mine. Katiya is mine." She said in parting.

#####3#####3

The space between the warehouses outside was littered with bloodied bodies. The blood was black in the feeble flickering light from the few gas lamps. Stepan was standing by the bottom step, his right arm held at a strange angle from his body, but he was standing as Alexei emerged from the bar.

"The twins are trying to hunt down a few that got away." He said without preamble.

"Good boy, maybe I'll let you have human blood." She mused. "So it was a trap? Does that mean I owe Vidar money?"

"They came out of the cellar of that warehouse." He nodded to the closest one. "Used manure to cover their scent." He wrinkled his nose in disgust at that tactic.

She walked down to him, "That is just beyond disgusting." She stopped next to him and then leaned over kissing his forehead. "You did well, I'm very happy with you. I had faith you could hold them off. He tried to use it as a tactic to escape, thought I would run out here to protect you. But I knew these weaklings would be nothing to you." She praised him now, because she had been cruel, and at heart Stepan was an actor and needed his ego stroked.

"Come summer I think perhaps its time for you to return to the stage in Moscow, perhaps start your own house."

He was too much of a seasoned actor to obviously bask in the praise, but he bowed in response, eyes glowing with pleasure. "Moscow in the summer." He sighed in pleasure at that thought, and of his own house.

"I will talk to the Master of the city. Moscow is big enough if you kept your household small, perhaps a childer in time and a few pets I don't think he'd have a problem. Dmitri and I go back a ways."

She reached out as they talked and in a quick move snapped his arm back into place.

He had to work to stop from smiling at her words, which turned into a yell of pain. "Ah! Damnit! Couldn't you have warned me?" Eyes watering with pain he held the broken arm to his chest.

"Maybe, but then you would have fought me. Now it's over with."

He grimaced, the pain slowly fading to something that didn't make him want to bare his fangs, which would have ended badly in front of Alexei.

She chuckled and then kissed him lightly on the lips. "And when you find your own Katiya, I will give you hell about it. Just to return the favor. Jealousy destroys us in our world; she never replaced any of you in my heart, just made it bigger." She whispered to him, before pulling away.

He looked at her in confusion, not even sure how to begin to answer that. Instead he nodded to the far set of warehouses. "Vidar was protecting her I think." He watched her turn to go. "Maybe someday I will find my own." He didn't know if that idea thrilled or scared him.

She nodded. "Let's go home people. It's been a great night, my bloods pumping with victory and I'd like to have sex in my own bed."

#####3#####3

Katiya stayed inside, where she'd been shoved by Vidar when the vampires had erupted from wherever they had been hiding. The small dagger in her hand had felt impossibly inadequate compared to the dozen vampires that had suddenly appeared. Vidar had bounded out, laughing as he joined the fray, happy to finally be fighting.

"I guess I owe you again." Katiya said to Tereza .

The Hunter shrugged. "I think we're even, I was tracking them here to you and your 'friends'," she used the term loosely. "I have a feeling if you hadn't been here I wouldn't have had the chance to kill vampires."

There were a series of bodies showing where Tereza had come in through a window and started her killing. Too bad, Katiya thought, vampires didn't turn into ash when they died, unless they burned in the sunlight. "Thank you, again." The last vampire had gotten uncomfortably close.

Tereza chuckled. "No thank you. Anything for a damsel in distress."

Alexei's voice came from outside. "What do you mean she's not with you?"

Tereza winced.

Katiya winced at the same time. "Time for you to go I think."

The hunter nodded and turned to go before pausing and turned back. "I still don't like her, but..." She shrugged not having any words for how that night had changed her world view and she still wasn't happy about the shift in perspective.

The redhead stepped closer, touching her shoulder with a small smile. "I know. It's hard to look at things differently." She could hear Vidar's grumbled answer from outside and

gave the hunter a push.

"Better go." Alexei was not a big fan of the dark skinned woman.

Tereza nodded. "I'm sure I'll see you later. Try and stay out of trouble."

"I try." Katiya smiled, watching the hunter go out the same way she'd come in.

Alexei kicked the door in breaking one of the hinges, so it hung at an angle.

"She's fine."

She turned around glaring at Vidar. "Do you see all those dead vamps? Fine my ass."

The vampire took a step inside and sniffed her eyes narrowing. She crossed her arms over her chest and said. "So how many did you actually kill?"

Katiya put away the unused dagger, sighing as she realized this probably wasn't going to be good. "None of them."

The vampires lips pursed into a thin line. "The hunter?" She asked tersely.

Vidar wisely slunk back outside seeing that Alexei was now focused on Katiya.

The human gave his retreating form a dark look as he abandoned her to deal with Alexei. "Coward." She whispered, looking back at the angry vampire. "Yes." she quickly continued as Alexei tensed "She saved me." That was starting to become routine.

Alexei ground her teeth a little and then turned. "Let's go." She said tersely.

Katiya blinked and then hurried to catch up. "Did you get it?"

"Yes. With a little pain and violence and ignoring the trap they'd set up, I got my ring." Her tone was still a little clipped. Part of her was insecure about the hunter; afraid Katiya actually would prefer a human's attentions to hers.

"Are we jogging all the way home?" Katiya huffed, trying to keep up.

Alexei sighed and slowed down. "Sorry, I... she just..." The vampire made a face in frustration. "She just bugs me."

"Does it help to know that you bug her?" Katiya grabbed a hand and squeezed it before letting go, wincing again as she remembered they were out in public. She didn't dare look to see where Stepan was.

Alexei stopped and looked at Katiya. "It does." Then she reached out pulling Katiya into

her and kissed her thoroughly. Pulling back she mumbled. "It helps that I can do that and she can't, as well."

A little breathless, Katiya smiled. "There's more than that, that you can do and she can't."

Alexei smiled. "I like the way you think." She took Katiya's hand and started walking again. They emerged out of an alleyway on to a street and Alexei's carriage was waiting. On seeing them the driver opened the door.

"And no we're not walking or jogging back to the manor."

Alexei watched the city go by, her fingers rotating her signet ring over and over. Finally she looked over at Katiya and asked. "Did Boris, or Ivan ever..." She trailed off that was silly question Alexei herself had taken Katiya's virginity, and suddenly she didn't feel any better than Boris.

Katiya blinked; looking up from the signet ring she'd been watching flip around Alexei's elegant fingers. "Did Boris or Ivan ever what?" There was a long list of what those two had done.

"Ivan said he'd promised you to Boris when I was dead. Did he ever hurt you?"

Flinching, Katiya shook her head. "Not like that. Boris tried..." She trailed off, not really wanting to bring Tereza up again. "But he didn't."

Alexei nodded. "Good, I'm glad he didn't, and he won't ever hurt you again." She'd made sure of that, the dagger hidden in her coat was probably still coated with his blood.

It didn't take much to realize what that meant. "What happened?" Katiya asked, slowly, not sure she really wanted to know.

"I killed him." Was the blunt reply.

"Both of them?"

"No just Boris, I promised Ivan I wouldn't kill him if he gave me my ring."

Katiya nodded, turning to watch the street outside. Her reflection frowned back at her and she wondered what she was feeling. She should be upset that Ivan was still alive.

"I'm glad you have your ring back." The woman in the window didn't look like she was that happy.

Alexei leaned back against the seat and sighed. "You're upset with me."



"No." She hesitated. "Yes. I don't know." She turned to look at the blonde. "I'm not really sure what I feel." She admitted slowly.

"What's wrong?" Alexei watched Katiya's face for any clues, but her face was closed to her.

"I should want him dead, Ivan." She was happy that Boris was dead. "He's evil; he killed Madame Oullette, burned down her house just because I wasn't there anymore. He let my father die."

"I thought Fenix let your father die." Human emotions were confusing.

"They both did." Katiya took a breath to calm herself. "Fenix didn't give us shelter, turned us away. But Ivan..." She shook her head. "He helped them find dad."

"Next time I see Ivan, I'll kill him for you." She shrugged, it wasn't like she didn't want to kill him; it just hadn't worked out this time.

"No." Katiya blinked in surprise as she said it, confused.

"No?" Alexei asked slowly, confused.

"Maybe." Katiya said slowly. "I don't know." She sighed, slumping into her seat.

"Ah," Alexei said sliding to the carriage floor on her knees, resting her hands on Katiya's thighs. "You are conflicted." Her own rather nimble fingers undid the buttons of Katiya's pants and pulled them down. "He was raised as a sibling, a brother to you" She leaned forward kissing and nibbling the flesh of the redhead's thighs trading the left for right and then traded again. She blew out a breath on the glistening curls.

"And when he reached manhood he proved himself a man and master of his trade in a violent way, by usurping his teacher. Unfortunately that master teacher was your father." She leaned forward even more between the young woman's warm trembling thighs and let her tongue sneak a taste of what was hidden at the apex of those thighs.

Katiya's hips rose up off the leather seat as she gasped in surprise at Alexei's sudden movements. "Yes." She said, loudly. To both the actions and the words.

"You had a closeness growing up; perhaps he actually acted like a brother. Beat up bullies who teased you, patched up a wound on a knee when you fell down, or was proud of you when you picked your first lock."

"It was the first time I picked a pocket." Katiya gasped, it was really hard having a conversation like this.

On her knees Alexei licked and sucked teasing Katiya but not giving her release, all the while pausing here and there to keep up the conversation. "Then he changed and he wasn't the boy you knew growing up, but a stranger wearing his flesh."

"Yes." Katiya whimpered, she'd agree to anything right then, trying to urge her on and groaning in frustration when Alexei continued to tease. "Please..."

"And when your father died, he acted like he was now in charge taking your father's place. But his ideas were darker and twisted, polluted and wrong sickening the core of who you are and the two can't exist without one of you withering and dying."

Her hands reached out grabbing warm flesh and pulled Katiya down to the edge of the seat giving her better access, she spread the redhead's lips open with one hand and grinning took the blood engorged clit into her mouth alternating sucking at it and nibbling gently with her teeth.

Katiya gave one buck with her hips then screamed, not caring who heard right then just that Alexei had finally managed to give her release. Reducing her to a shaking mess on the seat, hands still wrapped in Alexei's hair as she tried to catch her breath. "See, you already know the full story." She shuddered as Alexei pressed a kiss to her thigh and moaned when a tongue licked her.

Alexei chuckled. "I guessed. Although I do listen when you say things. I was just trying to ease you're internal conflict." She looked up at the woman from where she rested her head against Katiya's thigh.

Swallowing past the lump in her throat, Katiya managed a shaky grin. Stroking her fingers through her hair. "Big bad vampire." She whispered.

"Who ever Ivan was when you were growing up, he isn't that anymore. He's a man who felt it was his right to give your body to a rapist and a murderer." Alexei still remembered the broken and shattered body of Mrs. Morozov.

"I know he isn't. I know what he is now. How many people he's hurt, what he would do if he could to me. But he used to almost be my brother." She shook her head, managing to twist out of Alexei's embrace so that she could kiss her long and thoroughly. "Thank you for that."

The vampire grinned. "My pleasure." She sat back in her seat pulling Katiya with her into her lap. Her face took on a wicked look. "Now this time." Her fingers now trailed through Katiya's wet curls. "Is for my own selfish desires'."

#####3#3

Alexei exited the carriage a rather smug look on her face. She winked up at the driver,

who did her best to hide a knowing smile. Holding out her arm she helped a rather wrinkled looking Katiya out of the carriage.

The dark clothes she was wearing were in bad shape, as she had to hold onto Alexei's hand to avoid losing her balance. She was also pretty sure at least one or two buttons weren't really buttoned properly. She'd panicked a little when she realized they were pulling up to the manor. "You look pleased with yourself." She whispered.

Alexei just smiled. "Do you have any complaints about what I just did to you repeatedly? And I'm smug, definitely feeling smug."

"No complaints, just wish I didn't look so thoroughly " She paused for a second, searching for the word. "Ravished?" That would work as they walked up to the front door.

"I think it's rather becoming myself. Now if you're good, perhaps I'll let you ravish me later." The door opened as they approached.

"Evening, I take it the evening was a success, Mistress." Lyov merely raised an eyebrow at Katiya's clothes.

Who turned red at the silent look. She really had to get changed before they saw anyone else.

"It was rather smashing, and bloody, oh Lyov was there blood." Alexei said entering the house.

Alexei let go of Katiya's arm and handed her coat to Lyov as well as a lethal looking dagger.

"As I can see, Mistress." He said dryly, looking at the blood stains across some of that clothing. "I'll see to these." He took the dagger as well and stepped away.

Alexei took Katiya's arm again leading her to the kitchen. "Let's get that cup."

"Right now?" Katiya went a little unwillingly, hoping that Warren and Fiona were sleeping by now.

"Yes, now." She stopped and looked at Katiya. "Are you seriously getting shy about the way you look? Most people should be so lucky as to look like they had just received a good hard, marathon of sex." Alexei really didn't get what the problem was.

There were times when Alexei could be so very startlingly perceptive about human feelings, and then others which just confused Katiya. This time she patted the vampire on the arm and gave up. "It just takes getting used to."

Alexei nodded, "I can understand that, I didn't really like sex at first. Seduction was a complete mystery. But after a few hundred years I finally caught on to what other's knew, sex is fun if done right. I'm sorry I assumed you enjoyed it, well you seemed too."

"What?" Katiya's startled yell was definitely louder than she meant it to be. Grabbing onto Alexei's arm she managed to get her to stop and turn to look at her. "Of course I liked it. Do you really need me to say it?" At the blank look she was getting, Katiya sighed.

"I loved having sex with you! It was amazing, you were amazing, and all of it was great."

Alexei smiled at the admission. "Then did I misunderstand the problem?"

Fiona called from the kitchen. "I think she's embarrassed. It's not normal having sex with another woman."

Katiya groaned and buried her face in Alexei's shoulder. Of course Fiona was in the kitchen.

Alexei turned shouting back. "I'm well aware of the churches views on such things."

"Then stop embarrassing the poor girl!" Fiona yelled back. Katiya closed her eyes as she heard Warren say something next door also.

She kissed Katiya's hair and said. "We can go upstairs and you can make yourself look like we didn't have sex three times in the carriage."

"Four." Katiya corrected her and shook her head, laughing now. "No, it's too late. Let's just go get this cup of yours."

Alexei shrugged confused, Katiya didn't want people to see her, now she didn't care. "Okay, the cup it is."

She led them into the kitchen past Fiona and Warren; the cook was studiously studying the hunk of meat he was carving into different cuts.

Fiona smiled and gave Katiya a wink.

Katiya threw up her hands, shaking her head. "Hi Fiona, Warren." Following after Alexei again.

She could hear Fiona's laughter as they continued down the stairs into the basement. "So I'm allowed down here now?" She hesitated on the top set of steps.

"Of course I'm with you." She stated matter of fact. She paused to light a torch and carried it down the stairs. The smell of blood still lingered on the stale air currents. All

that remained of their unfortunate guest.

"Oh. Of course." Keeping a wide berth around the door that had held Fiona during her detoxification. "Where are we going?" This entire basement made her nervous, for good reason she thought.

Once at the bottom she led them to the door with no lock or handle, it was just a solid slab of stone. She paused in front of it.

"What you see inside you must never, and I mean never share with another soul. We've done a lot of things that shake the convention of vampiric tradition, but I'm deadly serious here, inside this room are things no one must know. I'm trusting you with things that Fiona doesn't even know of." She didn't turn around just stayed still looking at the door.

Katiya sucked in a surprised breath. Things that even Fiona didn't know about? That made her skin crawl with nervousness. How bad could whatever it was actually be? Judging by Alexei's tone of voice, pretty damn bad. "I won't say anything." She promised.

"I didn't think you would. You are surprising loyal despite my behavior on occasion." Alexei's shoulders relaxed. She set the torch in a holder and then pulled the signet ring out of a pocket; she fingered it for a moment then lifted it so the stylized figure of a horse rearing lined up with the indentation hidden at the top of the door.

There was a soft click and then Alexei turned it to the left and there was a louder click. Reaching out she pushed open the door.

"Nice." Katiya whispered, staring in fascination at the locking mechanism that was revealed as the stone slab was pushed aside. She really wanted to see who had designed that. Shaking her head she looked around Alexei to peer into the room.

As if reading Katiya's thoughts Alexei said. "The man who designed this is dead, I killed him." She stepped forward into the small room.

"Oh." That was one way to make sure no one knew how to open a door. "What is this place?"

There was a large coffin made of stone and wrapped in chains, a stone pedestal that held a simple wooden cup and a few other odds and ends; a spear, a shattered sword, and simple horn made of bone.

"This is a room where I have hidden things that no one should have possession of."

Katiya stopped just inside, eyeing the coffin. "Is that..." She paused a little. "Is that

yours?" She'd thought the legend of vampires needing coffins was just that, a legend.

Alexei smiled, "No, I have never slept in a coffin I leave that to my more gothic and religiously tortured brethren."

"So some vampires do sleep in coffins?" That was just weird. Katiya stepped closer, curious to see what some of the things were.

"Yes, they feel that they are the reanimated dead, now while the change from human to vampire may feel like one is dying, I do not actually think I am walking corpse. Besides would you want to be having sex in something like that?"

Katiya wrinkled her nose. "No." She would not be having sex in a coffin, ever. "Besides, not much room to maneuver in that." She grinned, taking a step up next to Alexei's side and looked at the coffin, her smile fading as another question occurred to her. "Then why did you hide a coffin down here?"

Alexei's face turned to stone as her attention focused on the coffin. "It's not the coffin I'm hiding, it's what's inside."

Katiya looked up from the coffin to Alexei's face, then back at the coffin. "Oh." She didn't think it would be a good idea to ask what was inside. "You don't have to tell me. We can just take the cup and go."

Alexei pondered a moment whether or not to say anything else. She went over and shook the chains. "He's an elder, one of the first ones. From stories and legends I have put together he was taking the cup to the east to hide it. So no one would ever find it. The thinking is if the cup could make them immortals, someone could use the cup to undo it. Crossing the steppes he decided to..." Her anger flared for a moment. "To dally with a young girl he found hunting in the tall grasses. He hunted her and while she put up a good fight she was no match for the creature out of the darkness. He raped her and then bled her, leaving her to die."

Ever so cautiously, Katiya slipped her hand into Alexei's cold fingers, gripping them. "I'm sorry." What else could she say to that?

She let her finger drum against the coffin. "Most people would assume he was my sire, leaving me to die. But the cup made me a vampire. I was so thirsty as I lay dying in the grass, my heart unable to find any blood to pump through my veins. That Katiya is the truth behind my creation, I am only slightly younger than the Elders who rule us, but I have learned wisely to down play my age and my history in the world."

Giving those fingers a squeeze, Katiya stared at the coffin. "Why don't you just kill him then?"

"Because... Because killing him would have been a momentary flash of pain. This way

his pain is eternal trapped inside his own body unable to move, paralyzed by a stick of wood in his heart. Someday I'll open the coffin up and finish what I started." She grinned savagely, remembering the years hunting the bastard.

She kept having to remind herself that Alexei was from a different age. That savage look on her face reminded Katiya. She shivered at that dark look. "Where's the cup?"

"Over here." She was careful to avoid touching the spear. "Here." She went to pick it up and frowned when it wouldn't move.

"That's what all this is about?" It didn't look like much, a simple cup carved from some sort of dark wood. For some reason Katiya had half expected something adorned with jewels and gold. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. It apparently is done with me." They could have a problem if they couldn't pick it up.

"It's done with you?" Katiya looked at her strangely.

"Well there are stories that when the elders did the ritual they woke up a sort of consciousness in the cup. So it has a will, of sorts."

Katiya stared at Alexei for a full minute, trying to see if she was joking. "A cup that has its own will." She sighed. "That's going to make it hard to bring it to the notary's place."

"About that, Ivan knew you were with me, which means they probably know you're with me not against me. So it could be a trap."

Katiya looked back at the cup, shoulders slumping. "It's still the best way to find out who's behind all this. Isn't it?"

"Yes, but now we know it's a trap just like Ivan was a trap. He was waiting for me to strike at him." She gently squeezed Katiya's hand.

"Oh good, at least we know I'll be going into a trap." Katiya said a little sarcastically. "But we need to bring the cup, either way."

"True." She let go of Katiya's hand and tried again.

It remained unmoving.

"What if we both try?"

Alexei chuckled. "Sure why not." But if the thing didn't want to move, it wouldn't move.

"I know I'm not as strong as you are." Katiya grinned, but took hold of one side of the

cup anyway.

Alexei mimicked the action on the other side of the cup, their fingers overlapping.

Katiya stroked a fingertip along Alexei's finger, smiling up at her. "Ready?" When the vampire nodded, she lifted hard. Expecting resistance of some sort she hauled back on the suddenly light cup, whacking Alexei with it and staggering backwards, still holding the light cup. "Sorry!"

The vampire staggered back, and held a hand up to her mouth and pulled it away red with blood. She glared over at Katiya, grumpily.

"Sorry!" Katiya repeated, wincing. "You said it was heavy." Holding onto the cup in one hand she wiped away the trace of blood on Alexei's lower lip. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, I, you smacked me in the mouth with that thing." She grumbled.

"Poor big tough Alexei." Using her free hand, Alexei urged her to lower her head so she could kiss the vampire and make it all better.

"Mmm, that was nice." Alexei said.

Katiya studied the cup, "Who made it? It's rather plain."

"Not that I ever met the man but I understand he was a rather humble carpenter before the Son of God stuff started. I don't think he was into flashy." Alexei said.

"Are all vampires from people who drank blood from this?" Katiya wasn't really sure she wanted to be holding the cup that she was pretty sure most priests would kill to have.

"I don't know for certain. I know an eastern vampire, he always seems oddly patient with us and he never really talks about a sire or of any childer he may have. We debate all sorts of things but he's always sidestepped talking about his origins. But most Western vampires can trace their origins to this cup."

"So I probably shouldn't lose it then." Katiya gave a weak smile, eyeing the simple wooden cup a little askance. "Tomorrow I'll go see the Mr. Gorskji?" She managed to remind herself to ask it as a question at the last instant.

"No you probably shouldn't." She paused as she turned heading for the door. "We should probably make a plan about Mr. Gorskji, although I think he's not aware of the trap. I think he's a pawn like Fenix."

"I should have asked around to find out more about him." Katiya grimaced, realizing her mistake there. There'd been plenty of time before to find out whatever she could about the man, but she'd been distracted. With another look at the chained coffin, she



followed Alexei.

Alexei exited and shut the door. The metal ground against the stone and then with a click the door was locked again. Leading the way with the torch she said. "Don't look back, your life will be too long now to get mired in regret and should haves."

Switching the cup to her other hand, Katiya nodded in the darkness of the hall lit only by Alexei's torch. "Will you come with me, tomorrow night?"

"Of course. Can't have anything happen to my most prized..." She fumbled for a word, "pet." She was silent while they went up the stairs.

The teasing comment that was on the tip of the redhead's tongue died at that last word along with her grin. They both emerged into the kitchen silent, to Fiona's curious look. Which sharpened as she saw what it was that Katiya was carrying.

Alexei could feel the shift in Katiya's mood; she'd done something again to make the woman unhappy. She ignored Fiona and Warren, deep in her own thought. Part of her tried to figure out what to do to make Katiya happy again, while the other part tried to figure out how to spring the trap that Ivan and the American's had planned with a trap of her own.

Not paying attention she slammed into a figure coming into the kitchen.

Alexei instinctively reached out catching the person before they could hit the floor. "Where's the fire, lover?" Molly cooed from Alexei's arms and wrapped herself seductively around the vampire.

At Fiona's questioning look, Katiya just silently shook her head and gave her a tight smile. That smile tightened further into a little snarl as she turned to see Molly draped over Alexei's body. It made her want to do something vicious to the other pet.

The English woman looked around the vampire smirking at Katiya, her expression changed though to almost wonderment at seeing the cup. The look was gone in a second.

"A plain cup for a plain girl." She snipped.

"At least I'm not a complete whore." Katiya really, really wanted to slap that blonde, hard. It made her even angrier to once again realize how stunning a pair the two of them looked. She couldn't understand why Alexei was still standing stock-still.

"Don't throw stones Katiya. You became a whore for survival here with Alexei. So you and I are not really that different." At that Alexei dropped Molly and stood up straight, glaring down at the Englishwoman. "Enough!" She barked out.

Katiya had to bite her tongue to stop from yelling back at the Englishwoman. She settled for a dark glare, clutching the cup to her chest for fear that she was going to reach for her dagger instead.

"Molly you will either have a civil tongue or no tongue, but I will have a peaceful household. So think carefully before you open your mouth and use that tongue of yours."

Molly just grinned and pushed. "But you enjoy what I do with my tongue."

Katiya made a low sound in the back of her throat, but when she opened her mouth she caught sight of Fiona frantically shaking her head and closed it again.

Alexei's face turned red in anger, and she reached down grabbing Molly and threw her back into the room she came from. Molly didn't look scared; in fact she looked like she was on the verge of an orgasm as she got exactly what she wanted out of Alexei.

There was a crash as a vase broke in the other room and Alexei stomped off after the woman she had just hurt.

Fiona sighed. "Alexei's too easy sometimes, and Molly is good in manipulating those dark parts of Alexei to come to the surface."

Leaving Katiya standing in the kitchen holding the cup to her chest, not sure if she should go after Alexei or not. "I hate her Fiona. I really hate her." She winced at another crash from the other room.

"Then stop Alexei before that bitch wins, and Alexei loses herself to those dark parts. I was never able too, but I think you can reach her."

"Hold onto this for me?" She offered the other woman the cup she was holding, relieved when she could let go of the cup without anything strange happening.

Leaving the cup in capable hands, she followed the crashes that were coming from the next room. The room was already a disaster area. Vases and mirrors had been shattered. Drops of what she assumed was Molly's blood stained the floor. "Alexei?" A door was hanging off its hinges and Katiya slowly approached the next room though.

Alexei was crouched over Molly her fangs exposed, one hand wrapped around the woman's pale throat. Blood was splattered on both of them. The vampire looked as if she couldn't decide whether to strangle the woman or rip her clothes off.

Molly laughed. "That's my beautiful monster, you try to hide her away but it's a lie you give the world."

At the sound of her name the vampire turned her head looking at Katiya, her eyes were storm clouds full of heavy dark promises.

In that moment, Katiya wanted Alexei to kill her. To rip out her throat and leave her body bleeding on the floor.

Somehow she moved past it though, captured in Alexei's dark gaze. Every instinct in her wanted her to run screaming from the predator that looked out through Alexei's eyes. Instead she walked towards her, slowly, carefully.

"Alexei." She repeated her name, ignoring Molly. "This is what she wants."

The vampire's lips pulled back in a snarl, but her fingers unwound from Molly's throat.

The Englishwoman shot a glare at the redhead.

"She's playing you." Katiya stepped closer. "That's not what you want." Still looking into those eyes, she edged within arms reach. "Is it?"

Alexei stood up and closed her eyes. "No, it's not."

The human let out the breath she'd been holding, shaking a little. Finally she looked at Molly seeing the poisonous look directed back at her. "Come with me?" She offered her hand, proud she kept it from shaking.

Alexei opened her eyes again, they were still dark, dangerous, but they had softened just a bit. She took a step away from Molly then another and took Katiya's hand. "Lyov."

The man was there, suddenly. "Mistress?"

"Show Molly the door. She may spend the rest of the night and tomorrow out of this house. Perhaps then she will appreciate the luxuries that she has. She may be let back in at sunset, until then she is not to have one foot on my property."

"As you wish, Madam."

Katiya really had to work to avoid grinning at Molly's cursing and screaming as Lyov grabbed onto her arm and half carried, half dragged the woman out the door. "She's really good at making people angry."

"Yes, and I almost feel sorry for her."

"I'm not." Well she was a little sorry that Alexei hadn't kicked the British woman out for good. "I'm glad you stopped though."

"I'm supposed to be the Master Vampire, yet sometimes I feel like I have no control

over my own household." She paused. "Tell me you didn't lose the cup so soon after we retrieved it?"

"Cup?" Katiya blinked then shook her head. "No, it's with Fiona. I'll go get it."

The vampire gave a sigh of relief. "Good, I was worried for a second."

"Only a second?" Katiya teased, heading back to the kitchen.

Fiona looked up from the table where she was working. "Everything get sorted out?"

Katiya shrugged, not really sure if it actually was sorted out. "Maybe?" She looked around for the cup.

"Ah the cup." She bent over and dug it out of the laundry. "Must be important then."

"So you hid it in the laundry?" Katiya raised an eyebrow.

"Well I could have put it in the cabinet with the other cups but I didn't feel like moving."

With a snort, Katiya took the cup back. "I'll remember that the next time I wonder where you've hidden something. Just look in the laundry." She looked back towards the door where she'd left Alexei. "I should go. G'night Fiona."

"Night Katiya." The woman smiled, then said. "I'm proud of you, standing up for Alexei like that. If I could have done that maybe things would be different, but I suspect that things happened just the way they were supposed too. She may never tell you Katiya but she'll tell you with her actions if you can listen."

Katiya looked at her in confusion at that last bit, but gave her a wave good night. "Alexei?" She looked into the shattered room.

"Right here." The vampire said from the shadow of the stairs. Suddenly she was feeling drained and tired. "I know you are young and insatiable when it comes to sex," She teased. "But I am suddenly feeling all my centuries on earth, do you mind if we go to bed."

"That sounds lovely." Katiya moved over and took her arm, a little worried by the odd look on the blonde woman's face. "If you're good I'll even sing you a lullaby." If she didn't know better, she'd swear that the vampire looked lost.

Alexei blinked. "I don't think I've ever had anyone do that for me. Is that what mother's do for their young."

"The good ones. My dad sang for me." She gently led Alexei towards the stairs and up them, passing a drowsy tiger lounging on the first landing.

"Then I must have been extra good today." She said following along next to the redhead.

"Very good." She agreed, opening the door to her room and leading Alexei to the bed. Setting the cup down on the table next to the bed. Hands free she started to slowly undress the vampire.

For a moment Alexei almost protested the attention, but let it go. It was nice.

"Shhh." Katiya whispered. "Let me." She tenderly removed the last of the clothes. "Raise your arms?" There was a silk nightgown left on the bed. She'd have to thank Lyov for that later.

Alexei did as she was told without question. There was a bemused look on her face, but she raised her arms.

"See, you can let me take care of you sometimes." Katiya fingered the material, enjoying the way it felt before sliding it over Alexei's body. She was still sore from the four rounds of sex in the carriage, but she suddenly wanted to feel that naked body pressed against hers again. Firmly tamping down that instinct for now, she flipped back the blankets. "In you go."

Alexei got in to the bed and then looked up at Katiya, "You're sleeping here, with me?" Insecure that her earlier actions with Molly may have scared the woman.

"Since I don't have my own bed." Katiya teased and hurriedly corrected herself when she saw the insecure look in Alexei's eyes. "Yes. I'm sleeping here. Because I want too."

She pulled the blankets up over the vampire, tucking her under the covers. Before going around to the other side of the bed and slipping under the blankets as well.

The vampire sighed contentedly. "Good. I'm glad you want to be here. I'd hate for this to be unbearable for you."

"It's far from being unbearable." Katiya inched closer until she could rest against the long body next to hers in the bed and suddenly yawned so hard she thought she'd almost cracked her jaw. "Guess I'm tired too." She mumbled against Alexei's shoulder.

Alexei rolled over and blew out the lamp next to her bed; rolling back she smiled up into the dark. One hand wrapped around Katiya's body her hand playing with the woman's red hair. "Sleep, I've got you."

"Sleep." Katiya liked the sound of that as she closed her eyes and slid an arm across Alexei's stomach.

#####3###3

Night had fallen when Vidar found Alexei in the library. For once he was in his man shape inside the manor walls, not his preferred form but for this task he would have to put up with it. "Alexei." He waited by the door. It was a bad idea to surprise a master vampire, even for someone like himself.

She looked up from the maps she was studying. "Vidar?" She asked surprised to see him. "What can I do for you?"

"I've come about Katiya." He entered, scratching with annoyance at the loin cloth he was wearing. Clothes another stupid human invention as far as he was concerned.

"Is there something wrong?" She looked worried. "Has something happened? I swear she was only supposed to go set up a meeting with Mr. Gorsjki's employer."

He snorted. "She's fine, that Vampire hunter of hers is trailing her. She's safe enough." He scowled. "No, I'm here about you treating her as one of your slaves."

"Ah, that." Alexei sat down heavily in the chair behind her. "I'm sorry you saw that I wasn't thinking about, well I didn't take your feelings for her into account."

"I'm fond of her." He jutted out his jaw. "There aren't many humans I can say that about. You and I are alike, Alexei. I respect that darkness in you because it's in me too. She deserves better than that darkness I think." That was the most he'd talked in a human language in a long time and his voice was gravely with disuse.

"What do you want me to say? I'm sorry? I won't do that Vidar. I did what was necessary to make her look like less of a threat to the household. I did it to help keep her alive." She felt defensive about making Katiya lounge on her lap like a slave. He made a low growling sound and paced back and forth along the wall. It was hard to put into something as inexact as words what he was feeling.

"It's degrading." But she was a human and he shook his head as he tried to figure out how to say it. "She's like clan to me." There that was better.

"I know!" She shouted, her booted feet stomped down loudly onto the floor and she stood up.

He tensed, corded muscle standing out on his forearms and shoulders as he considered if she was going to attack him or not.

"I know it was degrading. But if I hadn't done it, Stepan would have kept pushing

because I don't treat her like a pet. Then others would target her because I don't treat her like a pet."

Giving voice to the problem that was plaguing her, didn't make her feel any better. With a tortured growl she kicked the chair she had been sitting in, splintering it.

Vidar didn't like it. He shook his head. There was no good way to end this. "This is why I like fighting better. Everything is simpler then." He dodged sideways, ducking a spinning slab of wood from the back of the chair. "It won't protect her forever."

"I know." She said sadly. "Perhaps I should....should... send her away, make her like me." Neither one of those options appealed to her.

Something changed in the relationship when she sired a child. They started to test and push and eventually leave her and strike out on their own.

She didn't want Katiya to leave and that brought her full circle to her problem.

He snorted. "I shouldn't have said anything." He scratched his arm. "I'll watch her as long as I can." That was all he could offer.

She nodded absently, "Good, that's good."

This was why he didn't like being in human form, these emotions and interactions were annoying. "She should be on the way back. I'll make sure Tereza doesn't decide to come see you."

That got a grin from the vampire. "She really doesn't like me does she?"

"She sees you as her competition." Vidar said, wryly. With a stiff nod he stepped outside. A moment later he was in hound form, bounding through the hallways and then outside the manor.

Alexei sat down in an unbroken chair with a grin. Then she thought about what he'd said. "Competition? There is no competition." She groused.

It wasn't that much longer before Katiya returned to the manor. "Evening Lyov." She called to the man who opened the door, running up the stairs to the library. A little out of breath she shoved open the door, smiling as she spotted Alexei inside by the fireplace.

"It's all set. Mr. Gorskji set up the meeting once I proved I had the key and told him that I had the cup." She stopped as she stepped over a piece of broken chair and looked at the vampire curiously.

Alexei looked up from the book she was reading. "Excellent." She followed Katiya's gaze. "Ah never mind that Vidar and I just had some verbal sparring earlier."

"Verbal?" The redhead eyed the remnants of the chair. "The meetings set for tonight."

"Tonight? That's faster than I thought. Did he seem different to you? Like he knew you really worked on my team."

Katiya shook her head, slowly. "He seemed the same. Happy to know I'd succeeded. I think it was his last chance also, just like Fenix's."

"So he's not in on it." She rearranged herself in the chair she was lounging in. "I wonder if your Ivan told me about you not because he knew you were with me, but because he wanted to blow your cover so I'd kill you for betraying me."

"I try not to think like Ivan." She made a face as she came to stand next to the chair. "It makes me feel like I need to take a bath." Which was confusing, considering she still wasn't sure if she really wanted him dead

"Good point. I like that you don't think like him either."

"Can I ask what happened with the chair?" She'd been a little surprised to find Vidar abandoning her just as she was going into the city that evening. Since they were alone she dared to run her fingers through some of Alexei's silky blonde hair.

"Vidar took me to task over my treatment of you the other day. I think it did him some good to get it off his chest." She let her eyes close at the touch, enjoying it.

The human knelt down by the side of the chair, waiting until Alexei looked at her again. "It's all right now then?" She liked the white hound.

"Yes. You should feel privileged, he thinks of you as clan."

"I like him too." She inched up so that she could press a kiss to Alexei's lips. "I was worried when he didn't follow me into the city tonight."

Somewhere deeper in the mansion a grandfather clock started to chime out the hour and Katiya sighed as she realized they didn't have much more time. "We only have another hour before I have to be at the meeting."

"Do we need to do anything before the meeting?"

Blue eyes sparkled with mischief, but Katiya kept her idea of what they could do for an hour to herself, instead saying. "I just have to bring the cup and key with me. Do you have anything you want to do first?"

"I'm in charge, I can call Stepan whatever I like." She grinned and stood up going to the door. She opened it and stuck her head outside and bellowed for Stepan.



"Do I have to strip naked now?" Katiya asked, raising an eyebrow in amusement.

Alexei winced the incident a little too raw still, especially after her and Vidar's talk.

Seeing that, Katiya touched her arm, sighing at her poor taste. "I'm sorry; I didn't mean it that way."

"You bellowed?" Stepan asked, to Katiya's eyes just suddenly appearing in the door of the room with that odd blurring motion that always accompanied him when he moved fast.

"As a matter of fact I did. Stepan, I need you and the twins to go scout out the cemetery next to the Cathedral. We have a meet and greet in an hour. Want to make sure we're setting the trap not the other way around."

"That's a large cemetery." He hurriedly continued seeing her expression shift. "We'll scout through it of course. Anything else?"

"If it's going to be beyond you take Vidar and Matvey, and meet me back here in an hour."

"No we can handle it." He gave that little bow of his and closed the door behind him, not once daring to look at Katiya as he did.

Alexei shut the door and turned looking back at Katiya. "Now we'll see if it's a trap." She walked back over to her chair and sat down. "So in your opinion did Ivan out you to me, so to speak, because he wanted me to get mad cause you were using me to get to the cup. Or... because he knew you were working for me all along? Thoughts."

Katiya blinked; surprised that Alexei was actually asking her for an opinion on this. "Ivan is good at making you believe whatever he wants you to believe. He always was good at that." She bit her lip, thinking. "You could ask him?" She said, hopefully.

"There you go all being logical." Katiya perched on the edge of the chair, grumbling.

"Ivan wants us to believe whatever he wants." She kept her eyes closed her mind replaying the conversation over and over.

"He wants the cup." She stopped, frowning. "Wait, no he doesn't. He doesn't care about the cup. He wants whatever he was promised to get the cup." She turned a bit to look at Alexei, picturing her as enraged as she must have been in the bar. "It must be something big for him to risk lying to you, either way."

"Money's always good." But she couldn't picture him lying to an enraged vampire for just money. It would have to be money and power. What else could he want?

"Immortality." She looked down at Alexei, eyes widening a little. "He'd do it for a chance to live forever."

Her eyelids opened and her gray eyes looked up at Katiya. "Ah ha, skip the pet part and go right to the bite."

"Someone promised him immortality." Katiya swallowed past her suddenly dry throat. "Can they do that?"

Alexei chuckled. "Hell yes, we do it all the time. Why do you think most politicians look the other way when dealing with us? We promise them they can live forever and keep all their toys."

"Oh." She blinked in surprise. "I thought it was because they were afraid of you."

"Maybe that too. However, we vampires rarely keep our promises. A horrible cultural trait of our species."

Alexei grinned. "So he probably got lied to." That made her feel better. "So in that case." She leaned sideways against Alexei's shoulder, thinking. "I really don't see how he could have known I was working for you all along."

"So by outing that you're his, he wants me to kill you for lying to me? Which makes no sense because they wouldn't get the cup. Was he mad that you were able to steal something he couldn't?" She opened her eyes again looking at Katiya.

Katiya let out a frustrated sigh. "But if he didn't get the cup he wouldn't get his reward, which he would never do. So he must have known I was working for you all along. But how the hell did he know that? Nobody knows that!" Well, not nobody.

"Hmm, and who would that be." Alexei wasn't really paying attention anymore, she was watching Katiya's lips purse and move as she spoke, and her throat as she swallowed and talked.

Katiya paused, watching with amusement as Alexei's eyes stayed watching her lips. She smiled slowly. "Alexei?"

"Hmm?" The vampire's gaze shifted reluctantly to the young woman's eyes.

"Was there something you wanted?" The smile widened as she forgot the train of thought she'd just been on in favor of Alexei.

"Sex." She said throatily, "For some reason since you've allowed me to debauch you I can't stop. I want you nearly all the time. Honestly I can say that's never happened before."

Somewhere, deeper in the house, the grandfather clock chimed once, marking a quarter of an hour as having passed. Katiya stood up off the side of the chair, watching Alexei's face as she started to undo the buttons that held her shirt, one at a time. "That's a good thing isn't it?" There was time, she hoped.

"Time enough." Alexei echoed, she sat up and pulled her shirt over her head not bothering with the buttons, her arms got stuck for a moment then she was free. "Stop teasing we don't have that much time."

"But teasing is fun." Katiya laughed, quickly skimming out of the rest of her clothes.

"Where's the shy little mouse I brought home months ago." She joked standing up out of the chair, Katiya had been anything but shy, hesitant maybe not shy. She kicked off her shoes and stepped out of her pants.

"She's still here." The redhead stepped closer, needing to touch the revealed body. "She's very, very lucky to be here." Sliding her fingers down along Alexei's side she pressed closer. "We don't have much time." She whispered, biting an earlobe she managed to rise up and reach.

Alexei shuddered at that, she wrapped her arms around Katiya and picked her up and moved her to the couch. "You know I don't think I've had sex in the library yet." She mused as she started to kiss her way down Katiya's body.

"Oh good." She gasped as those lips found a sensitive spot. "New experiences are good, right?" Thankfully it was a large couch.

"Very good." The vampire agreed.

Katiya started to say something but the words changed into a moan as Alexei moved lower. Talking was overrated anyway.

#####3####3

Sweat was drying on their skin, cooling the overheated flesh. It was calm the moment filled with lassitude and Alexei was running her hands through Katiya's red hair, she was lying between the young woman and the couch, a position she was rather fond of.

Sometime a little while ago the clock had gonged three quarters of an hour. That meant there wasn't much time left and Katiya was greedily soaking in every moment of it that she could. If she'd been a cat she would have been purring non-stop at the petting, as it was she tried to burrow closer in Alexei's arms.

She found the position settling, she had no outside concerns than that of her lover and their needs. It helped her drown out her thoughts and focus. Besides everyone had

preferences in the bedroom and that was hers. She was aware of Stepan creeping up the hallway and heard his awkward hesitation as he debated whether or not to enter.

"We should get dressed. Time is not with us." She said softly lifting her head to kiss Katiya's face.

Katiya groaned, shaking her head. She didn't want to move. Finally though she relented and slowly peeled herself off Alexei's long frame, immediately missing the contact. "I don't have to like it though."

At least their clothes weren't thrown everywhere this time. Helpfully she handed Alexei the pile of her clothes and then started on her own. She really didn't want to know how Lyov had managed to put a fresh pile of clothes in the room without her noticing.

Alexei smiled sitting up she slipped her now black shirt on and stood up working on the pants. "Katiya," she started her voice taking on a serious tone. "If things go bad I want you to go to Tereza's no questions, no playing the hero. Can you do that for me?"

"Tereza's?" The human looked over in surprise as she pulled up form fitting black pants that she'd found in her pile. "I thought you didn't like her?" She avoided promising.

"I don't, but I trust her to keep you safe." Alexei said putting on thick heavy boots.

"It won't come to that." Katiya pulled on thinner, calfskin boots lined with mink fur to provide insulation against the cold.

Alexei wasn't so sure. Once they were dressed she shouted at Stepan to come in.

He entered and the smell of sex assaulted his nose but he kept all comments about such things to himself and his eyes stayed focused on Alexei. "We did a fair amount of damage to them the other night. But it's a trap, 10 young ones are hiding in the cold and snow with weapons. Vidar found them easily with his nose."

"Good, are you ready then?" She asked.

He nodded and then blinked. "Ah, a messenger brought this today Lyov wanted me to bring it up to you." He handed her the crumpled message.

"Thank you, we'll meet you downstairs in a minute."

The redhead tucked away her small pouch of lock picks and then carefully put the dagger and sheath in her belt. Where it was easier to reach, just in case. Picking up the cup she looked to Alexei curious about the message that had been brought. "So it's a trap. That means Ivan knew I'm working for you."

Alexei read the message her forehead crinkling into a frown. The words on the paper

weren't really a surprise, though she had hoped that she was wrong. The words merely confirmed what she had started to suspect.

She crumpled the paper up and threw it into the fire. "Its nothing. An old friend warning me that Karl boarded a train this evening headed to my lovely little village. This means we will have visitors tomorrow night, most inconvenient."

"Karl's coming here?" Katiya immediately thought of Shiro, bleeding on the floor. "You can't keep him away can you?" She asked, hopefully.

She played with the ring again; it felt awkward and heavy on her finger. "No, he is the Prince. He's probably coming to check on the rumors of the American vampires." She said the last part almost too casually.

Katiya looked up from the cup she'd been tracing her finger along, curious at the strange tone in her voice. "You don't believe that do you?" She said with a sudden rush of insight.

"Katiya, I..." She hesitated then reached out taking Katiya's hand and placed the ring in her palm and closed the woman's fingers around it. "If anything happens to me take this, so you don't forget me."

"Your signet ring?" She stared up at the blonde woman. "I'd never forget you, but nothings going to happen. You don't have to give this to me."

"It's a trap Katiya, anything could happen. The ring, there are other secret doors it opens; the most important one in this age is probably the lockbox at the Bank of London."

"Alexei..." She stopped, seeing the look on the vampire's face. She wouldn't take the ring back. "I'll hold onto it for you." She wouldn't wear it though.

Alexei's face brightened and she leaned forward kissing Katiya sweetly on the lips. "Thank you. Now I need to grab a few things from my study and we'll be on our way."

"I'll wait for you." Using a leather strip she slipped the ring onto it and then tied it around her neck in a makeshift necklace.

Alexei just nodded and made her way to the door.

#####3###3

Katiya paced back and forth in front of the doorway to the manor, waiting for Alexei to come down from her study. She was nervous about what was about to happen. She didn't want to see Alexei hurt or see anymore vampire fights.

Maybe they should just not go, certainly Alexei could get them to slip away, hide. Almost instantly she rejected the idea though, Alexei wouldn't hide, it wasn't in her nature.

"Got the cup?" Alexei said coming outside.

Forcing a smile she patted a side satchel that Lyov had offered her on the way out. "Yes."

"Excellent. Let's get started so we can put this evening behind us."

Katiya nodded, and reluctantly started towards the waiting carriage, her stomach knotted. "We could go away." She said suddenly. "Take everyone and leave."

Alexei smiled sadly. "Life is not supposed to be lived in hiding."

That's what she'd been almost sure that Alexei would say, but she'd had to try. "You'll be careful though? Promise me?"

"Katiya, I really love having sex with you, I plan on continuing to ravish you into the next century, so yes I'll be careful."

That didn't help though; the dread was still there as she stepped up into the carriage. "As long as you remember that."

"I will." She promised.

#####3#####3

Mr. Gorskji was standing shivering in the cold next to a large ornate family crypt. Two men were bookending him, one was Ivan, the other was tall, well built man with black hair and a thick mustache that was waxed so it curled up on both sides.

The wind was kicking up around her feet as Katiya walked slowly through the rows of mausoleums and gravestones, Vidar looping alongside her. Somewhere out there Alexei was keeping watch on her, as was the twins, Matvey and Stepan. It didn't make walking towards Ivan any easier though. Even from this far away she could almost feel the dark look in his eyes. The only good news was that Boris wasn't with him anymore.

Alexei watched Katiya and Vidar approach them, her senses were stretched to their limits. She kept tuned to what was going on with Katiya as she moved like a ghost finding hidden pets and vampires. The first kill was easy, a quick thrust of her sword through his back and out the front piercing the heart.

The heavy winter coat was a comfort against the bitter winter wind that kept whirling around her. It was very nice to have Vidar next to her, even in hound form.

"Mr. Gorskji. I didn't know you would be here as well." She stopped at the last row of tombstones before the family crypt.

The heavyset man was sweating looking visibly nervous, "Ms Katiya, I felt it would be in my best interest to make sure everything went smoothly."

She ignored Ivan and the smirk on his face to look at the mustached man. His clothing was different than what she was used to, the jacket oddly cut and his boots were definitely strange. "Are you Mr. Gorskji's employer?"

The man was studying her with cold brown eyes.

It was hard to stay there. This one was dangerous, the type she would have fled from in a heartbeat before. "Are you?" She repeated, touching the bag slung over her shoulder.

He nodded and said, "I am." If he was affected by the cold and the re-frozen snow that had melted during the warmer day and then frozen again once night fell that stood on, his body showed no discomfort. "And you are the young thief who managed the impossible."

"I'm talented." She glanced to the sneering face of her, what? What was Ivan to her? Enemy? She glanced over at Gorskji and the heavy sweating, despite the freezing temperature. "Who are you?" Vidar nudged her leg and she was glad for the reminder of his presence.

"I'm the one that pays." He said curtly. "The cup."

She had to give Alexei time. "I don't believe you." Katiya tried to look skeptical. "I don't think you're the boss. The deal was the cup in exchange for getting to meet the boss."

He snorted. "My you're distrustful. Let me ask you, why do you think I am not the boss?"

"The mustache." She nodded to the other two next to him. "That and they're standing with you instead of your pets. Alexei would never be standing there with two humans and not even one pet."

"My... mustache? I can't be the boss because I have a mustache?" He had a hard time wrapping his mind around that logic. "As for pets you seem to have a far better understanding about the dark world that mirrors and hides within your own pathetic human one."

"That means I'm right, doesn't it?" She smiled, just a little. "You're the pet."

He was looking unnerved just a little. Frozen not sure what to say his mouth opened

then shut.

"Very astute, little girl." The voice was quiet yet it seemed to carry all around the graveyard.

Vidar's hackles went up.

"See, now that sounds like the boss." Shivers raced each other up her back and she moved closer to Vidar's side. "Who are you?" She called out, wondering where he was also.

The mausoleum door they were standing next to opened and thin cadaverous looking man exited. "You may call me Paul."

The pet let his head bow down, looking at the ground in shame.

If the pet had made Katiya want to run, this one made her want to collapse in on herself in a gibbering mass of sobbing terror, begging for her life. "Paul." Her voice wavered and shattered a little saying it. "You wanted the cup?" Her instincts were gibbering, screaming, at her to go, run, do something anything other than stand there and talk.

"Yes, child I do." He was approaching her steadily, almost gliding across the dirty snow.

His movements were strange. Too smooth, inhuman. The eyes were very bright, she felt trapped by those shining orbs in the sunken in face. "I have it." She couldn't move, even when she tried to back away, she stood still.

"You made a wise move hiring this one Mr. Gorskji." The vampire said in complement. He was next to her now holding out a hand. "The cup, Katiya."

Her hand moved without her wanting it to, taking the sack down off her shoulder. He hadn't blurred when he moved, just one moment he was there the next he was next to her. A part of her still was her own and she kept her fingers curled around the sack. "Why do you want it?"

He smiled a ghastly mockery of a human expression. His hand wrapped around hers. "Child, I don't want the thing at all." In a blindingly fast move he twirled her around and into his arms. "You are the bait for Alexei. I was so very happy when Sergei discovered what you were doing and tipped us off. So this became a trap to get you and the cup. What I really want is Alexei's head."

Vidar growled and lunged at the vampire only to be knocked back several feet by a backhand.

"Remember our deal." Ivan shoved his way past Gorskji, was really doing his best to become a hole in the air. "I delivered them both to you, like I promised."



Katiya kicked her feet, doing about as much damage to the vampire who was negligently holding her like a rag doll as if she'd kicked one of the large steel machines.

"That you did Ivan." The vampire agreed.

Katiya struggled, her screams muffled by the hand clamped over her mouth. Where was Vidar? Where was Alexei for that reason?

"Then I'll just go back to my office now that you have, er, everything you need." Mr. Gorskji said nervously, backing away.

Chuckling seemed to echo around the graveyard.

Everyone froze staring out into the darkness.

"Well, the human puppet is half-right. Do you really think I would let her hand the cup over to you? You think I wouldn't know? This is my city after all."

"It doesn't matter." Paul lifted Katiya up another inch or two by her head. "It got you here, out of that manor of yours."

"True. But how does the saying go... be careful what you wish for." Out of the black of night something came sailing out of it and crashed into the snow, followed by another and another. Staring up at them were six severed heads staining the snow red where blood still pumped out of the cleanly cut stumps.

"They were disappointments as pets." Katiya let out a strangled scream as she got dangled around. "Now I think you should come forward before I snap her little neck."

"Okay." Alexei whispered in his ear as her sword sliced cleanly through his arm, at the elbow. She had moved so fast, and everyone had been so intent on staring into the night where the heads had come from they never noticed her moving around them to the back.

Besides she had Stepan launch the heads.

Paul's arm, hand and Katiya fell to the ground as he grunted in surprise. He reacted as quickly as she'd moved, whiplash fast, kicking her in the side with enough strength to lift her up off the ground and send her tumbling backwards. "How good of you to join the party."

He growled, lips pulled back from fangs as he grabbed up his arm. Katiya scurried backwards watching in sick fascination as he shoved it up into the empty wound Alexei's sword had left.

"I'm going to enjoy this." He started walking towards where Alexei had tumbled, flexing his reattached hand.

His pet started to follow him, only to have Vidar grab him from behind, grinning wildly. "Where are you going?" The Nordic man laughed, dragging him away. Ivan and Gorsjki stared in surprise, and then looked at each other in shock.

Alexi said nothing, she merely shed the long coat wrapped around her frame and then stood, sword held loosely in her hand. Her eyes were focused solely on Paul, while her senses stretched out all around her, hyper aware of everything around her.

He didn't have a sword, only those strange luminous eyes glowing in the sunken face as he walked slowly towards her. "Where is he, Alexei? Where did you hide him?"

Alexei's face shifted as if she were bothered by something. Her eyes stared into his, even though she tried to turn her face away. "Fucking vampire stare." She muttered.

"Where is he? Where is Judas?" The words had a weight to them. Even from where she was, crouched near where she'd fallen, Katiya wanted to answer him. Not far away she could see Ivan and Gorsjki, they're jaws slack as they stared at the master vampire in fascination.

The sword trembled and then her hand lowered. "I don't know what you're talking about." She spat out.

"Judas. The one who made you. The one you staked. Where is he?" Every word was followed by another step, the eyes glowing in the darkness, seeming to fill his face.

Katiya trembled, realizing whom he was talking about. Her mouth moved, trying to say what she knew. She had to cover her mouth with both hands, biting her lip to stop from saying anything.

The moment he stepped into the circle of her sword she smiled, and in a stunningly swift movement her hand moved, her sword ripping through his chest. "I have no sire, and you should not play games with those older than you can even imagine, Exile." She grinned savagely at the shock in his eyes until it bled away into blankness of stupor.

"Oh God." Katiya gasped, shuddering as she let her arms drop. The weight of that compulsion to talk dying away as the vampire spasmed on the ground in front of Alexei. She flinched in revulsion as she realized that despite the massive wounds, he wasn't dead yet. Mouth gasping as he stared up at Alexei.

Alexei lifted the sword again and sliced cleanly through his neck severing his head. The remaining of Paul's childer in the graveyard began to scream and writhe in pain as blood began to pool out of their bodies. As air hit the liquid it began to steam and burn until nothing was left.

Alexei looked at the head with a sneer. "Stepan, take this away and burn it."

"With pleasure." He grimaced, picking up the head.

Katiya whipped around as she realized she'd taken her eyes off Ivan. The spot next to Gorski was empty as the balding man stared at Alexei in terror. "Damnit."

She turned back to look at Alexei, watching her clean off the sword she'd just used. "What was that? His eyes, they were glowing."

"I'm not sure what the correct term is, I call it the 'Vampire stare', basically their gaze becomes hypnotic and they use their will and their voice to coerce you into becoming their puppet."

She wiped her sword clean on the corpse below her. "I can't do it, I'm not certain why some vampires can do it and others can't. Perhaps because he was such a horrible fighter, and Paul has always been a horrible fighter, his body developed other ways to survive over the years. I don't really remember why he was exiled; perhaps he used his stare on the wrong vampire."

"I'll ah, just leave you to your business then." Gorski spoke up, mopping at his sweating forehead with a monogrammed handkerchief.

The vampire looked up at the man and in a single glance dismissed him, "You may go, but next time you help traitors in my town you will die in the most painful way you can imagine." She warned.

"Yes of course. I understand." He babbled, tripping over himself as he backed away and then yelling in surprise as he stumbled over Vidar and his kill.

"Good. Now run away as fast as you can before I change my mind." She sheathed the sword and held out her hand to Katiya.

It was surprising how fast the fat man could run through the snow.

"Ivan got away again." The redhead stepped around the dead body to take the hand. "Are you all right?" She was covered in small scratches, nothing looked bad but she couldn't be sure.

"I'm tired, it actually drained me a lot to resist him. He'd grown stronger since the last time we'd faced off." Alexei leaned down and kissed Katiya tasting the young woman's fear and worry.

"But that's it?" She whispered, needing to be sure.

"Yes, that is it." She looked at Katiya. "Is the cup safe?"

The redhead dared to steal another kiss, just for the pleasure of it, before patting the sack that she still held onto. "All here." The signet ring was still hanging from her neck also.

"Good," The vampire said against Katiya's lips. She then hefted Katiya easily into her arms and looked at the bruise forming around her throat. "Sorry about that."

"He was fast." The human tried not to think about the hand that could have so easily crushed her throat. "Not as fast as you though." She smiled as she got easily picked up, reminded again that Alexei was in fact stronger.

Alexei called out to Stepan, "Any of ours hurt?"

"One of the twins got a bite." He called back, still trying to figure out where he was going to burn the head in his hands. "Vidar's off doing... something to that other vampire still."

"Best to let him do what he wants. Kill the pets too; I have no time for the insanity of withdrawal." She didn't worry about any of Paul's children surviving, the death of the sire would kill the others of his line.

"Want us to meet you back at the Manor?" He didn't have to look behind him to know that the twins were already taking off, eager to go back to the hunt. They seemed to live for the hunt.

"Yes, be quick." She said as she walked off, out of the cemetery with Katiya in her arms.

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## ~ The Secret History of Vampires ~

by Zee and Windstar

Enjoy and remember to send feedback to [Zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:Zeeamy@gmail.com) and [Adarkbow@yahoo.com](mailto:Adarkbow@yahoo.com)

## Part 9

"Is it over then?" Katiya sat on one of the chairs, watching Alexei sort through things on her desktop. "That's it? The American's are gone." She absently rubbed at the slight bruising around her neck where Paul had grabbed her.

"I doubt it." Alexei said looking up as she sorted papers and older parchments into piles. Satisfied with what she had she rolled them up and tied them with a piece of leather. "Katiya, I..." She was cut off by a knock.

"Yes." She bellowed.

Lyov opened the door looking nervous a piece of paper in his hand.

"Before another century goes by." Alexei said to get the man started.

"A note was dropped off for you." The words were hazy; he had been stunned by the man's appearance.

"It's about time." Alexei muttered taking the note from Lyov. "Thank you, you may go." She said dismissing Lyov absently as she opened the note.

A frown marred her features as she read the note and then she threw it into the fireplace.

"Something's wrong." That was rather obvious from the expression on Alexei's face. "Is Karl still coming here?"

"Yes, Karl is on his way here. He'll be here with in the hour. You will not be here."

"In an hour?" Katiya blinked in surprise. "Wasn't he coming tomorrow night?" She stood up, moving closer.

"His train didn't stop took a direct route here, with no stops. That means bad things." She walked over to Katiya and handed her the papers. "These are important."

Automatically Katiya took them, frowning at them and then up at Alexei. "Important for what?" She didn't understand what Alexei was doing.

The vampire sighed. "Stop asking questions and just take them. When you finally learn to read you'll understand."

"What aren't you telling me?" She took them though, folding them carefully to put them into the bag where she still had the cup. The writing on them was nothing more than squiggles to her.

Alexei grunted and swept the rest of the paper on her desk into the fire. "That more than likely we will not see each other again." She did not give herself time to think on the words, because then that odd ache in her chest would start again.

"What?" Katiya yelped, grabbing Alexei's arm to get her to look at her. "No. That's..." She'd just been about to say not fair, but of course the world wasn't fair and she stopped herself short. "I'm not leaving you."

"Yes, you are. Because if Karl plans anything it's to take you away from me, because that would hurt me more than anything else." She pushed Katiya away. "Now go grab what you need, you're leaving as soon as you can."

Katiya stood there, staring at Alexei. "But..." She'd thought there was time, a lot of time, to get to spend with the vampire. They'd just won! This couldn't be happening.

"Katiya, Ivan was working for Karl, not the American; he set up a trap for both of us so Karl could swoop in and tie up loose ends while the victor was still recovering. I have a spy in Karl's household and I'm sure there is one in my own household, although who I could not tell you. Trust me when I say there is no more time."

"There has to be more time!" She didn't understand why it had to end so soon.

Alexei growled and grabbed Katiya's arm pulling her to the door. Opening it she bellowed for Fiona.

In the aftermath of the yell the house was silent and then the sound of footsteps was heard.

"No. No, Alexei, don't." Katiya pleaded, trying to twist away from the arm that was gripping her. "Alexei don't send me away. I can help!"

The vampire's eyes were blazing. "For once stop fighting me, stop being willful and please do just one thing for me." Her voice was soft an odd counterpoint to her fierce expression. "Please live for me."

"Please, don't..." She begged, searching Alexei's face for any sign of yielding.

There was none though and she bowed her head finally, tears tracing her cheeks as Fiona came up the stairs. Looking back and forth between the two of them, not sure what she was seeing.

Alexei leaned forward kissing Katiya's face, kissing up her tears, her lips, and kissed her way to Katiya's ear. "In these few months you have brought me back to life and filled it with emotions and events I have no language for. Do not give up, nothing is ever certain." She whispered into that ear words for only Katiya to hear.

The redhead hugged her tight, desperately, not wanting to let go. This was too sudden; she'd thought there would be time, more time.

"Alexei?" Fiona stood nearby, watching them uncertainly.

Composing herself she turned and looked at Fiona, "Take Katiya upstairs and pack a bag, then you, Warren, and Katiya must flee to the train station. The Caliph's train will be waiting until sunrise."

She hoped, she had no way of knowing if the Caliph got her message let alone would help.

"No." Katiya pleaded, trying to hold onto the vampire even as she disentangled herself and pushed her to Fiona.

Alexei stroked Katiya's hair and then her back, and then pushed her away. "I'm sorry but we cannot stand still."

"Come on." Fiona tugged, pulling her down the hallway away from Alexei.

She turned away striding down the hallway. It looked like she and Timur would finally find out who the bigger monster was. "Stepan, Niki, and Nada; to me! We have a guest to prepare for."

"Come on." Fiona repeated again pulling Katiya towards the stairs.

Still silently crying, Katiya leaned against Fiona, stumbling blindly down the hall to the stairs and then up them. "I don't want to leave." She didn't have a choice though.

"She's our home, I don't want to leave either, but don't dishonor her like this. This may be her last wish, so let her have it." Fiona tried not to be too harsh but she was scared, scared for them all.

"But she could fight. She can win." She'd seen Alexei fight, seen the way she battled through the odds. "She can win." Katiya repeated, even as they started to frantically pack.

"Yes, don't lose hope. I'll be right back, I'll grab Warren and a few things and then we'll go."

"Hope." Katiya nodded, shakily, wiping the tears from her eyes. Quickly she grabbed a few dresses that she'd liked and shoved them into a bag that she'd found so very conveniently by the door. "Thank you Lyov." She called into the air.

"Looks like you're not the favored anymore." The cold voice cut through silence.

Turning in surprise Katiya found Molly leaning arrogantly against the door. "I thought you were banished." Katiya spat out barely able to hold back her anger.

"Just for the day. Anyways, not that I don't like you're company, but I'm here on an errand. Alexei says to drink it. It's a going away present; at least you get some of her blood for the road. If you drink it all up it will stave off the withdrawals until you can find a safe place to go through them." The English woman tossed the bottle at the redhead. "Nice knowing you." She said slinking out of the room

"Withdrawals." Shit. She'd forgotten all about that. The vial was full of blood. "She must be busy preparing to send Molly." Popping the cork she tilted it upwards, drinking. It tasted like blood but there was something different, an aftertaste she didn't remember from Alexei's.

No time for that now though she quickly finished packing and pulled the pack up over her shoulders.

After a moment of thought she ended up slinging the bag with the cup under her own coat. She'd keep it safe for now.

"Fiona?" The redhead called, hurrying down the steps. Where had Vidar gone too?

Fiona came inside the door, looking frazzled, and winded. "Are you ready..." She was cut off by Vidar, now in his human shape.

"Fiona, may I have a moment with Katiya." The big man asked.

"I.. well... just a moment we have to go."

"I know." He said pushing past Fiona.

"Thank you Fiona." Katiya looked at the Nordic man curiously as she stepped aside as well. "What's wrong?" Other than the obvious.

"Nothing is wrong. I just wished to say good-bye for now." He stood uncertainly for a moment, then opened up his arms and engulfed her in a hug.

Katiya nodded, slowly and let go. "I'll see you again Vidar. Fight well?"

"Of course, also if I do fall in battle do not fear. I'm not sure if I can explain, the Hound's of Hel were created from Wild Magic old as the world's birth. If I die it's very likely I will not remain so." He shrugged, not really understanding, he had yet to die. "As long as the world endures so do the hounds." Although, their purpose before Hel was gone lost too time and memory.



"I'll see you again." She promised this time, seeing Fiona waiting nervously by the door. "Help Alexei? Promise me?"

"Of course." He clasped her chin, looking into her eyes. "Karl comes for blood; there is no diplomacy, no words. He wants blood and battle. I plan to give him one and then stake him out for the sun to destroy."

"Good. Make him scream." She grimaced a little, her stomach feeling off. What had she eaten last? She couldn't even remember now.

"Enjoy your battle." It wasn't hers and that was hard to admit, but how could she fight in a battle between vampires? A human, even a pet, would be nothing but chafe in something like that.

"I will Katiya." Vidar, promised solemnly. "You stay out of trouble." He said before turning and leaving.

"I know." She said to Fiona's worried expression. "Time to go."

Fiona cleared her throat as she passed Vidar and re-entered the room. "Ready?" Seeing the look on the young woman's face she gently patted her on the arm. "As ready as you can be?"

"It's happening to fast." Katiya rubbed her stomach, wondering if she was getting cramps. "Let's go find Warren." She wanted to find Alexei, desperately, but instead she went with Fiona down towards the kitchen.

"I'm right here." He said bustling into the room with bags in both hands. "Not sure I have a clue what's got everyone's knickers in a twist."

"Shut the door dear, or the secret passage won't open."

"Karl's coming." Katiya answered, looking at Fiona questioningly. "Secret passage?"

The Scottish man sighed looking at his full hands and then toed the heavy door shut.

"Of course, there's a secret passage, every drafty old manor and castle has one." She moved to the closet and opened one of the doors and began knocking on the back wall of the thing.

"Where is it?" She muttered. "We've never used it but once to make sure it worked." There was a hollow thump and Fiona smiled and pulled up the small fake panel and pulled a lever. The back of the closet swung open.

"Did Alexei tell us to bring her?" Warren asked hesitating.

Fiona sighed at the top of some steps as she picked up the matches next to a torch in the wall. She stuck a match and held it to the torch until it lit. "Alexei didn't tell us to bring Molly with us. In fact she told Molly she was kicking you out of the house."

"Why did she do that?" Warren asked confused.

That was news to Katiya as well. Picking up two of the bags she wondered if Warren had packed the entire kitchen's worth of pots and pans in them. The steps inside the closet were, thankfully, dry and by the light of Fiona's torch they started down into the darkness.

"She said it because obviously she's not as blind to Molly's behavior as we all thought and she doesn't trust her. Now shut the closet door dear so they won't notice the secret passage way."

"Uh, yes dear." He quickly complied.

#####3#####3#3

Vidar was still in human shape as he went down the main stairs to the entryway. Alexei was already there, as still as a statue. It was going to be a pleasure fighting alongside her again. "I knew it was a good night to fight." he called, grinning widely. "As long as it is not a good night too die." True while she might have welcomed it months ago, now she found her desire to slip into the black void of nothing not appealing at all.

"It will be a good night for their deaths." He pledged, feeling that delicious tension before the start of a battle building. "Shall I wait with you here, or catch them by surprise when it starts?"

"Surprise my friend; we can use all the advantages we can get so fresh off an earlier battle." She motioned for him to go before the others in the household arrived.

He started for a side doorway, already stripping in preparation for changing his shape again. "Whatever happens, it has been enjoyable, like the old times."

She turned smiling. "That it has. But have you learned what it means now to have freewill?"

"Annoying!" He yelled back, the last syllables turning into a growl as he shifted and the white hound bounded around the corner.

She chuckled. "She has your portion of the horn, without freewill you would be with her and not here." Part of her wished Vidar would have remained at Katiya's side but he'd made his choice and that was what she had wanted him to do for centuries; make a

choice.

Lyov was suddenly next to the door, the gnarled old man looking the same as he always did. "He is almost here mistress. You have freewill as well." It was as close to second-guessing her, as he would get.

She took a deep breath and then slowly let it out. "No Lyov, history shows that those with too much power are not allowed to simply slip away in the night. They are given one final test to live or die the outcome written by the winner. This is my moment."

She stared at her children, pets, and servants as they came into the entryway. "Everyone Karl comes to us tonight; he will bare an olive branch hiding a sword. You all have been faithful and loyal, so I will not lie. If he comes here to brandish that sword all our lives are forfeit. You may run if you wish, flee, but I have no doubt he plans to burn and sow salt into all that bare the burden of my house. If you wish to run, know that I will bare you no ill will, in fact will applaud you for your common sense."

The hunched over gnome of a man at the door grumbled as he took the door handle and pulled it open. A line of carriages was pulled up outside in the driveway. Even as Lyov opened the door, figures sprang out of them into the night. A group of them went to the middle carriage, attending circling around the man who emerged from it.

Karl strode towards the door, ringed by his children. Timur lumbering alongside him, eyes eerily bright in the darkness as they started up the steps towards the house. "Alexei. How nice to see you again." It didn't sound like he was happy to see her at all.

"Karl." Alexei said with a brief nod of her head. "Imagine my surprise when I received word you were arriving tonight, and so close to sunset. I'm not prepared at all to receive guests."

"I have a new train. It's faster than the old one." A lie of course. He wanted to be there before she'd gotten back from the attack in the cemetery. "Are you going to invite us in?" They stood waiting just in front of the door.

"Of course, of course. You are the Lord while I am but a vassal. If you don't mind a short wait I'm sure we can prepare a simple meal and drinks for all."

"Good of you to remember your place." Karl stepped past Lyov and into the manor itself. The younger vampires followed him inside, there were a lot of them and the grand hall suddenly felt smaller. Timur waited, watching Alexei with a bloodthirsty look in his eyes.

"I've never forgotten my place; I always have you to remind me of it. Now if you'll follow me I will show you to the dining hall." She walked past Karl's pets and vampires unconcerned, because they were little more than bugs to her.

Karl's glance took in those gathered in the hall as he followed after her. "Your household has gotten smaller it seems."

"Well the oddest thing happened. I found a whole nest of exiled American vampires in my territory." She replied walking down the hallway and pushed open the doors to the dining hall, the torches flared to life filling it with light.

"You allowed exiles into your city? Tsk tsk Alexei. That sounds... careless of you." The others filed into the room behind them.

"Oh I didn't allow it, so don't worry. They're all dead now. Please have a seat and I'll see what we have in the kitchen, and then you can tell me why you're here." The longer she talked the closer to sunrise they got.

"We didn't come all this way for you to bring us refreshments. I think we should, talk, first." He too knew how close the sunrise was.

"Very well then." She went to the head of the table and sat down. "Let us talk, please have a seat."

Timur growled a low rumbling in his massive chest, annoyed with these pointless pleasantries. Karl gave her a mocking smile and moved to the chair at the foot of the table, staring across its long length at her. "It seems to me you've been careless a lot recently, Alexei."

"I have, have I?" She lifted her feet up onto the table and crossed her feet looking as if she didn't have a care in the world. "Well I'll admit for awhile I was debating on whether or not to take a few decades long nap, but I seem to have snapped out of that."

A flash of annoyance crossed his eyes and was just as quickly hidden. Stepan shifted a little from behind her, not quite as relaxed as his mistress was. They were significantly outnumbered although the Twins didn't seem to care too much.

"Yes you have." Karl leaned forward a little. "Let's dispense with the bullshit. I know you have the cup. Give it to me and you can keep your manor." That was a lie too of course, they both knew that.

Alexei looked at Karl bemused and then laughed. "You came all this way for a cup. Well go check my kitchen there are a lot in there, take whichever one that you want."

"Do not toy with me!" The veneer of sophistication slipped, his fingernails gouging her table top. "You know what I'm talking about!" Timur smiled behind his master. This was much better.

"No I don't. You're going to have to be more specific." She stayed relaxed; it was hard to get stressed at this moment, because now she saw that all the paths had lead here

for some reason so what was to occur was inevitable.

"You know what I'm talking about." He stood up, the chair scrapping as he pushed it back. "The Grail. The one that the priests are so obsessed with finding. This is your last chance Alexei."

Alexei started laughing; laughing so hard her feet fell from the table, hitting the floor with a loud, thump. "You're going to kill me over a legend."

"Not all of it's a legend. But you knew that already." He spoke through clenched teeth, furious with her laughter at him. "Timur." The large man unfolded his arms. "Would love to take your manor apart to look for it." The sunrise was near; he wouldn't let this go much longer.

Alexei got her chuckling under control. "Actually Karl, that's the last thing Timur wants to do. What he really wants to do is fight me. Prove he's the bigger monster, that all the stories about me are just that, stories. Isn't that right Timur?"

Her tone had shifted dipping into the dark seductive evil that was her vampiric nature, something she tried to overcome for the most part. But then again you can never really hide your true nature.

Karl stared at her, all expression gone from his face. All around them his pets and children tensed, knowing what was coming, what had been inevitable since they had arrived at the manor. For a moment they all hung there, held still by the instant before violence. Then Karl spoke, his words ripping that moment apart.

"Kill them."

Alexei leaned forward in her chair her hands hidden under the table. She breathed out as everything seemed to slow as Karl's minions roared towards her. She smiled this she understood. She was born in an age of survival, of war and struggle as humans tried to carve their way up into the pinnacle of the food chain. She was not born in an age of words and diplomacy.

They were outnumbered and tired having just fought the Americans but they would not go down easily. They were in her territory. And while other vampires got older they developed mental powers like the voice and the stare that weakened a person will she had developed immunity to the sun as would her children she suspected.

They had to last until sunrise and then, then as they fell into slumber she would have the advantage.

Her heartbeat increased, and briefly she wished she had taken one last sip of Katiya's blood, but now was not the time for regret. In a blink the world sped up again and she

stood her hand grabbing the sword from the sheath, where it had been strapped to the underside of the table. Her other hand grabbed her chair lifting and smashing it into a pet while the sword slashed up severing a head from its body.

#####3#####3

The inhuman scream caused Katiya to twist around, looking behind her down the secret passageway back towards the manor. It had happened exactly as Alexei had feared it would then. "Stay safe Alexei. Please." She whispered in the night, turning and hurrying to catch back up with Fiona and Warren.

"I don't know. I've never taken it before. Alexei showed me once every five years to make sure I didn't forget it was there. But I think it comes out near the road just out of town. So we could easily leave by boat or train."

"We have to make it to the train station. Alexei said that the Caliph had a train there, waiting for us until sunrise. I don't know where he'll take us, she didn't say." A touch to the pack on her shoulders reassured her that she was still carrying the cup and important papers the blonde vampire had sent her away with.

"It will be tight sunrise isn't that far off. Karl is taking a huge risk." Fiona muttered as she picked up the pace.

"He must be desperate." Warren muttered, still mourning the kitchen he had just abandoned to who knew what.

The passageway ended abruptly in a solid wall with a rusting iron worked ladder attached to the blocks ascending up into the darkness above them.

"There is no love lost between them. He's a bastard that wants' not to just be Prince over a few territories, he wants to be King, but to do that he'd need to usurp the council, those vampires are way too old for him to tangle with. I just don't understand what he's doing." Fiona said in exasperation and then started to climb, silent now to focus on getting up the cold slick ladder.

Water had dripped down from above, freezing as it struck the iron rungs and making the way up dangerous. Katiya nearly slid off the first step, swearing as she grabbed hold and took a breath. Carefully she followed Warren up, glad that it wasn't that far to the top.

"It's stuck." Fiona said, her voice loud in the cold darkness. "There's a lever of some sort but it's..."

She was cut off as the metal groaned and then the darkness changed lightening a little as natural light from the stars and moon could be seen through the small opening.

"I'm not sure you could make any more noise. Good thing I'm here to help you." Came Tereza's quiet voice.

"Tereza." Katiya smiled up past Warren's backside, giving him a shove to get him moving again. For a terrible second she'd thought it had been one of Karl's minions who had found them.

"Quietly, there are vampires all over the city." The hunter said as she helped Fiona, Warren and then Katiya out of the passage.

For a second Katiya didn't recognize where they were, then she realized they weren't that far from the river. The quiet neighborhood was composed of clerk and shipping offices that coordinated the flow of goods between the river and rails. Not many found a reason to be here after dark.

"Thank you." The redhead whispered to the hunter, touching her arm in thanks as she helped her up. "Fiona, Warren, this is Tereza." She said, mindful to stay quiet.

Fiona just gave the woman a once over, "So this is what had Alexei's knickers in a twist, I swear she becomes more human as she gets older. No offense."

Tereza bristled but ignored the older woman. "I got a note from the fanged wonder asking me to meet you here and wait until sunrise. What's going on?"

"She sent you a note?" Katiya blinked in surprise. When had Alexei had time to coordinate this with the Caliph and Tereza? "Karl's attacking the manor. She's sending us to get to safety at the train station." Not much point in lying to the hunter.

The hunter's face looked wistful for a moment at the words; she was missing an opportunity to kill vampires. "I'll help you to the station and then I'm going to the manor." Defensively she added. "She spared my life and I'll not stay indebted to her." "Thank you." Katiya said, again. Ignoring Fiona's amused look at the two of them. She had no doubt that there was going to be teasing now that the other redhead had finally met the dark skinned hunter.

"We need to move, the train will only wait until sunrise." Fiona said as she began to walk.

"I hope we know which train it is." Katiya mumbled, starting to walk a little faster. It wouldn't be that long until sunrise.

A few feet they were cutting between two houses and then on the road. It was quiet, but in the distance the factory rumbled like a hungry beast that would never get its fill.

Tereza lifted her crossbow as the train station came into sight. "I feel a buzzing of anticipation; I think we are being followed." She whispered.

"It's the train that is huffing and puffing, if it was a horse it would be chomping on the bit to exit the starting gate." Fiona said quietly not wanting to give away their ultimate goal.

True, the steam engine already was puffing, but that wasn't all. Katiya frowned slowly, turning to look behind them, listening. "No, she's right. I don't think they're vampires, but there are at least a few pets behind us."

The set to their shoulders became tense; their walk was forced casualness as they made their way closer to the train platform.

"Katiya, how nice to see you again." The voice was cold, and quiet like falling through the ice on a pond. Sergei emerged in a blur from the shadows. "I knew she would spare her favorites from the bitter truth."

Every few steps Katiya had to grit her teeth as her stomach twisted in pain. Whatever had started to bug her in the escape passage was getting worse. The redhead wasn't really that surprised when Sergei appeared. "Sergei. You're working for Karl." It wasn't really a question.

"Of course I am. It's always better to belong to the winning side. She could have taken him down, and been the Prince. But she didn't, content to molder away in a manor in the middle of nowhere." He growled out.

"She lacked drive ambition, but I don't. Her blood is strong and someday I'll replace Karl." He smiled at that liking the taste of the words, 'Prince Sergei'.

The thugs, or whoever they were, weren't far behind them now. Maybe if she distracted Sergei, Tereza could handle them.

"Oh he's not going to kill her. He promised me that, for my loyalty. Just imprisonment for eternity."

"We're going to finish what we started in that alley, Katiya. Then the rest of you will die and be nothing but a memory on my tongue. Or maybe I'll keep you around and see what Alexei's fascination was perhaps you are a sweet little piece."

"Tereza, the goons are almost here." This was going to be messy. Katiya wondered how much of her lessons with Alexei were going to make a difference.

He lunged in a move too quick for Warren to follow, and threw the Scotsman into a wall and kept going for Katiya.

She'd gotten used to watching him blur. There was nothing she could do for Warren, but she braced herself, suddenly wishing she was carrying around the long spear that Alexei had taught her with. She stabbed with the dagger, trying to judge his movement



as he came and look past that odd blurring.

"On it." Tereza said turning to deal with the pack of pets. She pulled out a glass vile from the pockets of her coat and struck a match. The rag stuffed in the opening caught fire and she tossed it. It hit the ground near the approaching shadowy figures making them scatter as the fire leapt along the ground looking for a source of fuel to keep going.

Sergei had her and grinned in triumph, just as easy as it was the first time, only this time Alexei wouldn't be coming to her rescue.

He could taste blood on his tongue and then realized it wasn't the memory of the first time he'd bitten her, no he was tasting his own blood in his mouth.

Blue eyes stared into Sergei's, both of them with the same shocked expression in them. Katiya's arm trembled from the blow of the solid body slamming into it moving so fast. The dagger was buried to the hilt.

He took a step back. Shock quickly changed to anger, and he ripped the blade out, opened his mouth to bellow but only more blood poured out. It wasn't fatal just annoying.

Alexei's training shook her out of her surprise as Sergei pulled away, dagger going with him. "Tereza, I need a sword!"

"I know I'm going to regret this." The hunter mumbled and then without turning pulled her short sword out of its sheath, dropped it to the ground and kicked it over towards Katiya's voice, as she loaded another bolt and fired it at the others.

"Not like our last meeting is it Sergei?" Katiya asked, trying to sound more confident than she felt. Hooking a foot under the hilt of the long curved blade she kicked it up enough that she could snatch it out of the air.

"Now maybe I see what she see's in you. Why she loves you when she never loved anyone else?" He whispered out a hoarse sucking noise punctuating his words. One hand on his throat. "She may have blessed us with this life but she never cared for us like she does for you, and we all hate you for it."

He bared his fangs and attacked.

There was no time for an answer, even if Katiya had wanted too. Death came at her in a blur of fangs and slashing claw like hands for her throat. The sword was heavier than her dagger, but she was stronger than she'd been. She was bleeding from a slash across her cheek where he'd nearly gotten her, but still alive as she panted for air, circling one another.

"You're slower than you were." She goaded, dimly aware of Fiona helping Warren to his feet while Tereza battled wave after wave of pets and hired help.

He answered with a growl, it was nearly daylight, and he could feel it prickling at his skin, making his limbs grow heavy with its coming.

"Too bad." She tried to sound happy, but thought she probably failed. The coming of day might be slowing him, but if they missed the train they might die in the city anyway. This had to end fast.

"Alexei always told me you were a coward." Taunting a vampire, a small part of her mind gibbered in terror, was a sure way to get killed.

"Not worthy of her gift. She said you were weak."

Rage sparked in his belly. "Bitch!" He howled and charged her intent in tearing her apart.

He never reached her his legs giving out he stared at her in shock, then down at the bolt blooming from his chest, as he collapsed to the ground.

Tereza snapped at them. "Stop playing with the fucking vampire and get on your train."

The sky was starting to turn gray, dawn was moments away.

"Made you forget the hunter." Katiya said grimly. "Going!" She yelled back. First things first though, she pulled back on the blade and brought it down on Sergei's neck, severing it from his head. "You coming?" She hobbled towards Fiona and Warren.

She turned back to the oncoming hoard and fired again and then drew her other long sword. The crossbow broke smashed into the face of an oncoming pet.

Warren and Fiona nodded, pale and trembling they gathered up the bags and started sprinting to the train.

"Tereza! Thank you, again." She called, pushing past the nausea to run after Warren and Fiona.

Tereza heard the words but didn't respond, too busy fighting off the wave of oncoming threatening to drown her.

The door to the train opened, a young male stood gesturing for them to hurry, his eyes glancing to the sky. They would start moving the moment the sky turned pink.

There was nothing Katiya could do for Tereza, but she knew the hunter was good at

what she did. "Alexei sent us." She called, coming up behind Fiona and Warren. Her stomach roiling.

He seemed to ignore her words. "We do not take sides, your ways or not ours, but we can give you shelter from the storm, and do our best to keep you safe until it passes." He ushered them all on board and shut the door locking it.

Blinds started closing all over the train blocking out the rising sun and the train lurched into forward motion.

Fiona gripped Warren and nearly tumbled forward.

It was warm inside, and Katiya closed her eyes against sudden claustrophobic feeling that rose inside her. "Fiona..." She started to say, as the world suddenly turned sideways and she slumped slowly to the floor.

#####3#####3

Alexei existed off the memory that Katiya lived, that she had taken that victory away from Karl. It warmed her through the pointless tortures; they were just for the sake of violence because Karl never asked her any questions. She was more nervous when the torture stopped. Now she had spent days chained to a stone table where for several hours a day she was kept awake by the small hole that let sunlight through, right on to her flesh. Madness fingered at her brain as lack of food and pain swallowed all rational thoughts leaving her nothing to cling to.

How many days had passed? Was it Spring? Summer? She mused as her head was thrown back in pain her teeth gritted so hard she'd already cracked several teeth. As the sun burned a small stripe of skin as it moved along its celestial pattern.

"I told you I'd take away everything you loved."

At first she thought she'd imagined Molly's voice, but then the woman giggled insanely on the other side of the door.

"Molly?" She gasped, spittle flying as she cracked her jaws only enough to let air escape and form that single word.

"I destroyed your world, just like you destroyed mine. I was always a traitor nesting in your house, but you're too softhearted. You felt bad for poor Molly, never occurred to you I was sent to destroy you."

"What?" She was having a hard time comprehending. "Sergei was the traitor."

"And whom do you think spent years stroking his ego? Making him think he should be in

charge. But you made it so easy when you brought that girl into the house. Gave her all your time and energy, it was easy to make the others jealous to twist their thoughts against you. Vampires think they're above all the human complexities of emotions but you're not... well, unless you're like Karl. You're bloodline isn't. You're an abomination for your own kind. So easy to make sweet Shiro take her life." Molly giggled again. "Make her fear your vampiric strength instead of going to you with her fears. And you were too busy making a new pet you failed to notice your house crumbling around your ears."

"The American vampires? What... I don't..."

"Karl's plot not mine. I did my part, and beautifully and for my reward I get to be Karl's pet and then his child."

Alexei tried to push the pain away to follow what Molly was saying.

"Oh Alexei, you're precious little Katiya, is dead. I poisoned her before Warren and Fiona could smuggle her out of the house. There's nobody left but me."

Alexei's brain snapped and she lunged again and again against the chains that held her. Primitive thoughts of ripping Molly's throat fueling her. One of the metal links groaned and then snapped. Howling she through herself at the door pounding into it with the flesh of her body, making it shake and bend.

Molly's giggling turned into a scream of fear and Alexei smiled enjoying that fear.

#####3#####3

Karl glared at her from the door way. Enjoying her pain and suffering. He took a moment to soak it in and then he entered shutting the door behind him. He was alone, no minions. But he didn't want anyone but him to hear this conversation, there was a chance things could be said he didn't want anyone to know about.

"Where's the cup?" He asked.

Alexei blinked licking shriveled dry lips, and croaked out "Did you try the kitchen? There were a lot of cups in there."

Karl made a face at the words. "Don't push me Alexei. You're already going to die now the question is how. If I had known how many skeletons were in your closet or basement really, I wouldn't have bothered with this game."

"Molly?"

Karl stepped forward unscrewing a dropper from the top of a small glass bottle.

Unconsciously Alexei flinched knowing very well what was inside.

"Molly was because I hated you. My spy, to get dirt on destroying you. You disgust me. You were the council's dog, when you should have been its master. You wasted your power and for what? Then there was the little matter of Terrance being my child.

Terrance, the sadistic murderer, rapist, and Molly's master. The one who nearly exposed their secret world. The one the council had sent her to kill.

"Then there's the cup. The very cup used by Christ at the last supper, the one containing his blood. Later our Elders used it in a rite to give them life beyond death to make them immortal, thus making the first vampires when the rite opened dark powers and giving them their wish for immortality at a blood price. The cup has been missing since Judas took the cup to the east to hide it so it could never be used to make more Elders or fall into the hands of some Knight of Light who could try to wipe us out. I have spent my lifetime studying stories of the cup tracing it to the Tiger of the Steppes, to you."

"Karl you'll have to be more specific. I have a lot of cups most of them in the kitchen." Alexei said with a raspy chuckle.

Angrily the male vampire lifted the dropper and squeezed out several drops out over Alexei's chest.

She writhed and screamed as each drop burned deep into her skin.

"Give me the cup and I'll convince the council to just exile you to the Americas instead of killing you."

Stubbornly Alexei remained silent.

"I tore your house apart looking for that cup. It took me a month to get through that sealed door in your basement. Imagine my surprise and delight to find that coffin with your sire bound and staked inside. You know the punishment for staking one's Sire. Then there are the Elders; they were none too pleased to find you had Judas their brother."

Alexei just closed her eyes.

He grabbed her chin. "Why take that risk? You know the danger, especially the danger of staking you're own sire. You could have killed yourself. Once you destroy the source all who came after die. As the stories say happened to Saul."

"He is not my Sire!" Alexei opened her eyes roaring at Karl. "He is my rapist and my murderer but he did not give me immortality. My hatred for him is so cold I stalked him into the east of Byzantium to destroy him."

Karl quickly retracted his hand swallowing. She had trapped an elder hunted him into the hot sunny deserts and ruthlessly stopped his heart.

"When I was dying I found the cup and drank from it to ease my thirst." She paused to watch his eyes go wide with understanding. "When I captured... Judas did you say his name was, we never shared our names. When I captured Judas I placed him in that coffin a stake in his heart and sealed him off in the bottom of my manor with the cup. If it was not there then perhaps the cup has its own plan."

"You lie, you can't be an Elder."

"Believe what you want." She said with a shrug.

In a rage he smashed the bottle against her chest grinding the glass and holy water into both their flesh. "I want that cup."

"I don't have it." She hissed out.

"Then you'll die like your bitch pet." He spat out cradling his hand to his chest and stalking out.

Alexei said nothing watching him leave. She didn't think Katiya was dead, it was just a feeling but it was the same one that helped her feel Molly and Niki. The others she could no longer feel. Sergei, Stepan, Matvey and the others were all gone victim to politics and her pride. If she lived through this she vowed to never again give into the melancholy of time and sire children.

Still she didn't understand why the Americans had been here. Had they too heard of the cup and had traveled here to steal it for their war, would its mystic properties somehow help them win. But Molly had said they were Karl's plan. So if Karl was working with the American exiles it meant that he wanted war with the humans. Again why expose them, unless he thought he could win or there was something he would get out of a war. Karl was all about power. She still didn't understand the motivation for wanting war. But she was pretty certain now Karl wanted two things the cup and war, but she didn't see what either would bring him.

#####3#####3

She felt cold, so very cold. Her limbs felt numb and heavy, her thoughts were just as slow. They formed slowly, congealing in the darkness that hung over her mind. At first she didn't know where she was, didn't care either. All that she really knew was that terrible coldness.

Eventually she realized that the place she was in was moving. It rocked back and forth

and there was a clacking sound from somewhere beneath her feet. In the distance she'd hear, occasionally, a lone whistle blowing.

A train then. She realized with the same slow thoughts as before, she was on a train.

It took longer to realize that she wasn't alone in this darkness.

"Who are you?" Her voice sounded odd, hollow to herself.

The man watched her evenly, studying her as the train moved towards whatever destination they were going to. Katiya found she didn't care where they were going.

"My name is Caliph Dilip."

They sat in the darkness for a bit, her eyes closed as she thought. His Russian was oddly accented but she could understand it well enough.

"Are you a friend of Alexei's?"

The stranger made a slight sound, not really agreeing or disagreeing.

"We have known one another for a long time, Alexei and I."

Katiya swallowed. "She's gone isn't she?"

"Yes." He shook his head, looking out the window of the comfortable train car they were sitting in, watching the world outside rush past. She watched his hand close over the hilt of the ornate sword at his side, dark skinned fingers clenching tightly.

"Then Karl won."

Dark eyes turned to pin her where she sat.

"No. You are still alive."

The redhead laughed, closing her eyes and leaning back against the pillow behind her. "I don't feel alive." Cold, she pulled the blanket up higher.

"Karl poisoned you. The blood of an Elder is deadly to any mortal who it touches."

She knew that, she thought she knew that. "So he won."

"Not yet." The Caliph answered those ancient dark eyes on her. "They do not dare destroy Alexei. She is too powerful. They are going to exile her to the Americas. Bury her with an iron stake through her heart and leave her to rot."

"Can you stop them?" For the first time her eyes lifted to his with something approaching hope.

"No. It is too late; they have already sent her by ship."

Cold was joined by another feeling, sadness. When she didn't say anything else he spoke again.

"You haven't asked where we are going."

Mutely the redhead shook her head, not really caring.

"This train is called the Orient Express. It will take us to India and my home. There you will have to choose how you will die."

Blue eyes blinked and Katiya frowned, her slow thoughts trying to keep up. "Die?"

He leaned forwards, face grave. "There is no cure to the poison that is in you. You will die, your fate is sealed."

"Then Karl will win."

"If you stay dead."

It took forever for her mind to slog its way through those simple words and the almost endless repercussions they invoked.

"Yes." He nodded, seeing the light of understanding dawning in her eyes. "You must choose. Do you love Alexei enough to follow her in death? Or will you float away into whatever afterlife awaits you?"

"I don't "

He chuckled. "You may not have said it, she probably has not even thought it, but you love her. I know she cared for you, she would not have sent word to me if she did not. But you must decide. The poison will kill you soon."

"How long?" She knew it would not be long; the coldness was seeping throughout her.

"Two, maybe three days. You must choose by the end of this train ride."

When she tried to sit up, questions only now starting to percolate through her poison addled mind he stood from his seat. "Rest. You must conserve yourself until then. Rest and think. Sunrise is not far now and I must retire to my room. I will speak to you again tomorrow night."



With that he left her to watch the sun rise and think about her death.

#####3#####3

Fiona found her there, watching the sunrise above the mountains in the distance. The coldness wasn't as bad with the sunlight. How much worse would it get she wondered before the poison ran its course?

"Warren's making you breakfast."

Katiya didn't say anything, trying to memorize the colors of the sunrise. Would there be sunrises wherever it was that she was going to go? If she agreed with the Caliph there would never again be a sunrise for her. But if she died, would that be any different? She'd never really believed that the priests told the truth with their pledges of an afterlife.

"You have to eat Katiya."

She looked at the other redhead, seeing the strain on her face even as Fiona tried to stay strong throughout all that had happened. No wonder she'd been Alexei's favorite all those years. The one that the vampire had loved.

"Why?"

Fiona stared at her, surprised by the question.

"Why Fiona? Everyone is dead. Matvey, Stepan, Sergei and Shiro. They're all gone. Even Alexei. She's not dead, but Karl's won. She might as well be gone. I told her I'd help, but all I did was make things worse." She didn't know what had happened to Lyov, but she doubted it was good. Had Karl burned down the house when he'd finished in it? What about Vidar she wondered. Nothing really seemed to matter anymore. Her slow thoughts were weighed down under the poison, the coldness in her bones.

"Katiya don't you dare give up now!" The fierce words jerked her out of her stupor and she stared at the furious woman across from her.

"Don't you dare survive everything and now decide you're just going to slip away. Alexei's not dead, you said it yourself, and so she's still out there. It might take a while, it might take a long while, but we'll find her. Are you just going to lie down and let Karl win? Are you going to give up on Alexei?"

"No." Katiya nodded, feeling some of the coldness lift a little. "You're right of course. I'll eat."

"Good. We need you strong. Warren and I will need you to stay strong. So will our child."

It took a moment but Katiya smiled when she realized what Fiona had said. "You're pregnant?" That would explain some of the stressed look.

"Yes and you better be around when I give birth." Fiona stood up, wiping at her eyes. "I'll get you some food."

Karl wouldn't give up. He'd know that he hadn't gotten Alexei's entire household. That was something she could hold onto, that thought, that promise.

"I'll protect them Alexei. I swear." She closed her eyes and felt the warmth of the sun on her skin.

#####3##3

It was after night that a touch on her shoulder jerked her out of the uneasy sleep she'd slipped into. Her dreams had been filled with dreams of ice and dark shadows waiting for her. She woke up sweating and feverish.

Across from her sat the Caliph again, watching her with those ageless dark eyes.

"How do you feel?"

"Cold." She gave a mocking smile, pulling blankets around her closer. "Guess that's what happens when you're poisoned."

His lips curled slightly in a grin. "I think I see why Alexei chose you."

Katiya didn't know what to say to that so she just looked at him in confusion.

"Do you know how many humans would answer me as you have?"

"Sarcastically you mean?"

"That is part of it." He smiled, revealing long incisors in a quick flash of teeth. "Have you thought about what we talked about earlier?"

"Yes." She shivered, trying to organize her disjointed thoughts. "I can't let it end like this. I want to see Alexei again; I don't want Karl to win."

There was that quick smile again. "Are you scared?"

She laughed shakily. "Terrified."

"Good."

He leaned forward slightly, fixing her with those dark eyes. "There are two things I must tell you then."

This was important; she tried to focus to ignore the cold for a little while longer.

"First. The cup will either choose you, or it will not. If it does not you will die." He looked at her intently and she frowned slowly.

"If it doesn't why couldn't you?"

"Make you one of my children?" He sighed and leaned back. "There have been vampires in India long before your Christ came and went. This is true in other parts of Asia and Japan as well. We are not the same as Alexei and her fellow elders. We will not take anyone who is not from our family that is our law. I will not break for anyone."

"What's the second?" She'd take her chances with the cup. She wouldn't let Alexei or Fiona down.

"If you survive, you won't be going to find Alexei right away."

She met his eyes. "Why not?" If she survived, why wouldn't she go right now?

"This is not up for discussion. If you are changed, you will remain with me until you have been taught everything I have to teach you."

She frowned, not sure she understood. "But I have to go save Alexei!"

"No." His tone deepened and those dark eyes glared at her. "If you are changed, you will be different. A new vampire will hunt for blood without thought, without reason. You will be like a beast. You must be taught to control yourself or be useless to Alexei."

She started to argue and he continued, overriding her words. "You would attack Fiona, or Warren. You would kill them for their blood."

Katiya blinked, sat back and closed her eyes. "How long would I have to stay?"

"Until you are ready. It could be months or years."

There was no other way. "I'll stay until I'm ready."

"Good." He stood, touching her shoulder briefly. "Rest. You will need your strength."

He left her there, staring out the window in the dark.

#####3#####3

With every day that passed, Katiya grew weaker and weaker. She spent most of her time by the window, watching the world passing by. By the last day she had to get Fiona to wake her up for the sunrise and sunset, wanting to watch colors bring the world alive.

During the times she was awake either Fiona, Warren or the Caliph were there to keep her company depending on the time of day it was. The cold was a permanent part of her now. Her fingers and arms were always numb now; she could no longer pick up anything with them.

"Allow me." Strong arms picked her up and she fuzzily opened her eyes. The train had stopped she dully realized, the first time it had stopped in what felt like forever. Letting her head roll back a little she spotted Fiona nearby, watching her with a worried look that she tried to hide with a smile.

"We're here Katiya." The night air was warm on her cold skin as the Caliph carried her outside and carefully set her down in a waiting open air carriage.

"She's so thin." The words seemed to come from a distance but she thought it was Warren talking.

"The poison has spread. She does not have much time now." The Caliph's accented Russian replied even as the carriage started moving again. She wished she could have asked to sit up, she wanted to see where they were going but it was just too much effort to talk. So she lay there, staring up at the night sky and the bright stars.

Sometime later another set of hands picked her up, carrying her through a doorway into a room brightly lit with what seemed like thousands of candles. Off in the distance voices were chanting something in a language she didn't know.

"Katiya?" When she didn't answer Fiona cupped her face in both her hands, staring intently. "Katiya!" Slowly she focused on the red haired woman's face. "The Caliph says that Warren and I can't stay here with you for this. It might be a while before we can see you again." Gently the older woman brushed back unruly red hair. "Remember Alexei. We'll be here when you come back to us."

Then she was gone and Katiya tried to call out, to ask her to come back, to tell her she was scared she didn't want to die. But her voice failed her and she couldn't move anymore, everything was cold.

"Katiya." The Caliph helped her sit up. Behind him there were other people moving, she couldn't make them out though they were just dark blurs against the light of the candles.

"You must choose. Your life is leaving you. Die now or become something else."

Death was tempting. The cold would go away then and she'd see her father again.

But then she thought of Alexei, alone, exiled with a stake through her heart somewhere in the America's. She remembered Fiona and the baby she was now carrying and Warren's face as he tried to keep her entertained on the long train ride here.

Her voice didn't want to work but the Caliph seemed to understand as he reached out of her line of sight and took up the cup. It looked like it had the first time she saw it, although now it was filled with dark liquid she knew was blood.

"Drink." He said softly, raising it to her lips.

She thought of Alexei, of her beautiful blonde hair and how it had felt to lay with her in bed. The feel of her body warmed by the bath and blood pressed up urgently in passion against her own.

Then she opened her mouth taking in some of the dark liquid. The Caliph was saying something and the chanting was still going on but she heard none of it.

Darkness flowed from the dark liquid, coursing through her and she felt herself ripped apart from the inside. Katiya screamed or at least she thought she did. The screaming went on and on, her entire world was that never-ending scream.

#####3#####3#3

Fiona stared out of the train car as they moved through the darkening afternoon light, night was coming and soon they'd be back in Russia. She was older now gray liberally sprinkled in her hair. So much was different then when they had last been here fleeing in the opposite direction.

War had come; the American vampires rising up in revolt. At first the world had held a shocked breath then moved into action. The war hadn't just stayed in America it had flared up around the world most not happy with the knowledge supernatural beings roamed among them. The Tsars of the Russian Empire had fallen many King and Queens had found themselves on the end of bitter battles, as the people they ruled were not happy with weak results in keeping them safe. Most royalty owed their souls to vampires or demons.

Oddly India and parts of Asia they had traveled to had been free of strife. There they accepted the unknown and supernatural creatures as part of their life philosophy. They had seen many wondrous things, her new family. It helped ease the ache of Alexei's being absent.

They had kept up with the news many elders in Europe had been overwhelmed and

burned their households staked out in the sun. In America the battles were bloody, the Weres teaming up with the humans. She wasn't certain of the wisdom of that. Once done with the vampires, the humans she was sure would see their once allies as a threat.

Vampires had gone underground in Europe leaving their human puppets swinging in the wind to suffer a decade now gone an uneasy peace was stretching out over the land as the last of the fighting of the First great World War flared in America.

"Mom?"

Fiona drew her attention away from the darkening window to her now willful 10 year-old daughter. "Yes, Allsun." The girl was going to have Warren's height and his blue eyes, but she had Fiona's fair skin even after so much time in the warm deserts and tropical climates they had lived in, and her red hair.

"May I go see to Katiya?" She gave her best puppy dog eyes the ones she knew worked on dad.

Fiona wasn't certain the wisdom of letting her daughter grow up in this world, she had no fear of the creatures she should instinctively fear.

"Please." She pleaded.

"Only if she's awake, if she's not you must not..."

"Wake her up or go near the bed." The young girl recited.

Fiona sighed "I should swat you're cheeky behind."

Allsun giggled and then scampered off with the gangly grace that most pre-teens lacked as their bodies started to change. But once all those changes were done, her daughter was going to be quite the looker, and Warren would be having fits with the boys that much she knew.

She went back to looking out the window, her mind wondering if there was anything left of Alexei's manor, they would certainly know in a few hours. She knew it was unlikely anyone had survived but that didn't stop hope that perhaps Stepan, Matvey, the Twins or even the grumpy Gregori had survived. So much lost and now they would see the truth of it and have a place to start their search for Alexei.

#####3#####3

"Stay here Allsun."

Katiya lifted the sleepy girl up off her lap and plopped her down onto the seat next to

her father and mother. She looked around cautiously as she stepped outside. It wasn't safe for them to be here, any of them.

"I'll be right back." Katiya opened the door and stepped out. Even though she'd known what to expect, it was hard to see the burned out shell of the manor. It had been almost ten years since she'd seen this place, but her memories of it were still clear.

Gingerly she picked her way through the crumbling entryway, hoping from one exposed beam to another, looking for anything that might have survived all this time. There wasn't much, a few books crumbling to dust piled in one corner.

It was cold the fall wind whipping through the trees had a taste of frost on its sting. And from the overgrown gardens that the forest was reclaiming came a mournful howl, which sounded like a wolf.

There were skeletons, human and at the base of the broken and burned stairs the bones of a tiger.

Katiya dropped the half burned book, her head jerking at the wolf howl. Was it possible that Vidar had survived somehow? The small piece of horn still was around her neck, on the same chain that held Alexei's signet ring.

She paused, seeing the tiger skeleton. Was it Kirill or Kira?

"Katiya?" Came a rasping voice sounding like rock grating against rock.

She whirled, looking for the source of the voice. Her hand sliding to the hilt of the sword that she never went without these days. "Yes?"

Lyov appeared looking as cracked and broken as the manor. He wobbled and blinked as if trying to see her. "It's been so long, nobody comes, cursed.... cursed, only ghosts tread here." He babbled.

Ghost's indeed. Her fingers uncurled from the hilt, as she looked at Lyov and through parts of him. He was there and not there, fading back and forth from view. "Lyov." She had to leap over a hole in the floor, which she did much easier than she ever could have when human, landing gracefully on the other side.

"What happened?" Finally, after ten years, she could find out what happened here!

"Ah, girl it is you. If I was capable of crying I would." He reached out and patted her arm, seeming to grow more solid as he reassured himself she was really here.

"They fought bravely; even outnumbered they held against Karl and his horde. As daylight came Alexei revealed her skill of pushing past the limitations of sunrise and

swung to cleave Karl's head from his neck, only it was a trick. A spell. He'd never been here only his shadow filled with his essence on his death it returned to Karl. But Alexei can't stave off the sun forever and while they slept his human pets stormed in. I tried to keep them out barred the windows and the doors. Gregori and the other humans and the tigers fought well but we were too few."

She'd known it went bad, but it was still hard for Katiya to hear. "What about Vidar?"

"Dead, all dead. Except for Alexei. They brought a steel coffin and sealed her inside and took her only the devil knows where."

"All dead?" Katiya's closed her eyes in pain. She'd hoped, that somehow, somewhere some of them could have lived through everything.

He nodded. "Please, when you leave, finish the job. I cannot take this. Burn me all to the ground so that I might finally rest. I'm so alone." He begged.

"No." She wouldn't be adding to the death here. "You're coming with me." How she could do that, she had no idea, but she'd figure out something.

"I don't know, maybe. If it doesn't work, please then do not leave me alone. Please." He looked hopeful an odd expression on his troll like face.

"If it doesn't work." She relented, a little.

"I want to check the forest and then we'll see what we can do for you." There wasn't much time. The instant they were done here they would go back to the train and head east, across the Alps and into France. From there they would take the ferry across the channel, stopping in London to gather things from Alexei's lockbox and then passage on one of the grand steamers across the ocean to the America's.

"Fair enough." He nodded looking around. "They took or destroyed everything, looking for a cup. So much history gone." He murmured.

There wasn't much she could say to that, so she simply patted his arm. "We'll get Alexei back Lyov." There wasn't much of a door left so she just ducked through it and out through the burnt out remains of the kitchen. The hot house was an empty skeleton of empty windowless frames. The sight made her sad and she hurried past the empty place to the tree line. "Vidar?" She called, hoping against reason that Lyov might have been wrong.

There were wolves denning on the estate now without any humans around they had grown bold, but even they sensed Katiya was a predator to respect and stay away from. Their golden eyes watched her through the trees.

A figure padded silently to the right mirroring Katiya.



The redhead moved through the trees, watching the shape flit through the forest. When she couldn't see the Manor anymore, she stopped, waiting to see what the figure would do, if it would come any closer.

It went still when Katiya went still. "Haven't you taken enough?" The voice rasped out. "You've already destroyed everything once now he sends more to find what he does not have."

The last word ended shivering into an animalistic growl.

Katiya watched, trying to figure out who it was. The voice sounded familiar, but she couldn't place it yet. "I didn't cause this. Karl did." She called back. The voice was scratchy with disuse.

A whip thin woman appeared out of the darkness, her once short hair long and tangled, her dark eyes haunted. She was gaunt a thick scar glared palely from her throat, where a sword had nearly severed her head from her neck but not quite.

"Alexei's gone." the woman rasped out. She paused and took a long look at the redhead in front of her. "You, I know you." Her lips pulled back in a warning growl uncertain if she was before a friend or foe.

"Niki?" Katiya took a step forwards, forcing herself to stop from going to close. "You remember me. It's Katiya, I was one of Alexei's pets." The woman looked like hell; the thin ragged clothes she was wearing were smeared with mud and other darker things.

"Ah the lover, Nada was so jealous of you." Her face slipped into a mask of sorrow as she mentioned her twin's name. "She's gone, all gone." She might have cried but there was no extra moisture in her body to give.

"I'm sorry." Katiya glided closer, taking that brief moment of distraction to move. "What happened?"

She shook herself bringing to mind a dog that had gotten wet, and threw off the memories that threatened to drown her. She reached forward and touched Katiya's face. "Cold now, you're humanities fled buried in blood. Like me like the Mistress. She lives still, you know, or I would be dead too."

"I know." Katiya smiled a little, catching Niki's hand before she dropped it. "I'm still Katiya though. And I'm going to find her Niki. I'm going to bring Alexei back from wherever they sent her. Will you come with me?" She couldn't leave her here, like this, alone.

The wild vampire went still. "Yes, I'm not a good vampire; I'm not good without a pack. I do not like to be alone. Alexei would approve I think." She nodded as if decided and

sank to her knees in front of Katiya. "I pledge my life and my loyalty to you."

"What are you doing?" Katiya stared down at the kneeling woman in surprise.

Niki looked up blinking. "Giving you my pledge." And waited expectantly.

"Your pledge." The Caliph had failed to mention anything about pledges. "Right." Katiya frowned a little. "What should I do next?"

Niki giggled, "We're vampires, its all about blood. Give me your hand."

"Blood, of course." She offered the kneeling woman her left hand, a good idea of what would come next.

The vampire took Katiya's hand and bit Katiya's finger drawing just a taste of blood. It was strong almost making Niki reel and fall over; she hadn't expected it from one so young. It reminded her of Alexei's and she wondered if she had turned Katiya shortly before the Mistress had sent the pet away. "By giving me blood and I excepting shows that I accept your mastery and rule over me."

The woman stood clutching at Katiya for a moment. "I've been hiding and existing off of the blood of animals. Karl's given the town to a new child, called Ivan. He doesn't come here, nobody comes here. But I know better than to go into town. I did that once and they had a hunt for my head."

"Ivan?" Katiya's fangs bared. "He gave it to Ivan?" She thrummed with sudden rage. She wanted to go out and rip him apart and bathe in his blood. Instead she let out a slow breath, drawing on the decade of the Caliph's training. "We're going somewhere better."

"I will follow." The vampire said simply. She stared back into the forest where she had buried the bones of her sister, Matvey, Stepan, and Vidar. The hound's grave remained covered in a layer of ice even in summer. "I buried them all and with each one my sanity disappeared, now you have come back and given me hope."

A tug on her hand and she pulled Niki to her feet, smiling at the grime covered woman.

"Help me figure out a way to get Lyov out of the house. We have to leave before it gets much closer to dawn." Now was not the time to deal with Ivan.

Someday though, she vowed, she'd settle her debts with him. First though, she had a family to take care of and Alexei to find.

#####3####3

London wasn't that different than the cities in Russia that they had left just a few days

ago. The cold might not be as extreme, but the coal fire's that cloaked the sky and the factories that lined the wharves and docks were exactly the same. It might be dressed up a bit more, less obvious crime and more alert police, or Bobbies as they were apparently called, but to Katiya it felt similar at its core.

The bank wasn't normally open at night, but Alexei's name had guaranteed that the manager would wait for her with several of his clerks to attend to her needs. She'd had an idea what the lock box and bank notes would be worth, but it was impressive even so. There was more than enough there to get them settled in the new world, very comfortably settled, and to start the search for Alexei.

"Thank you Mr. Bancroft." The man smiled, shaking fawning over her hand as he said goodbye. She'd been amused to find that British men were as easily swayed by a young woman in a flattering dress as Russian men were. He'd been a little scared at first, obviously his first meeting with Alexei had not been a pleasant one, but she'd charmed him into relaxing.

"I could get you an escort Miss?" The gray haired man asked.

She smiled in amusement, quickly tempering it as she saw a hint of unease cross his face. "No, that won't be necessary. Thank you."

"Very well. I'm sorry to hear about Ms. Petrova, her family is long standing members. But now that the war has swept the Americas humans are finding a lot opportunity, please travel safely."

"Thank you, for everything. Please make sure that the funds are waiting for us with the Royal Bank's branch in Canada." She had no desire to travel in the United States if she could avoid it, considering the hints of news coming from there these days.

Stepping outside, she started down the street towards the private house she'd rented for her family to stay in. How odd to think of them that way, it still amused her.

"You look just as pretty as the day you left on that train." A voice said quietly out of the darkness.

Even though it should have worried her, Katiya was happy to hear that voice. "I worried you died getting us to that train." She stepped out of the street, lingering in the shadows nearby.

"It was close. Broke my leg in two places had to drag myself to the church to heal. Sorry I didn't manage to get back to help your vampire." Tereza limped out of the shadows a pistol clenched in one hand. She didn't really look older but there were more scars and her right leg hadn't healed right.

The redhead watched, well aware of who that pistol might be for. "Thank you. For everything you did. I don't think I got to tell you that before I made the train." The entire run to the train was a blur in her mind as the poison had burned its way through her body.

"I should kill you. It's what I do, I am a hunter after all." She snorted in an amusement. "The world is full of fucking hunters now. The vampires had to go blow their super secret gothic broody we don't exist mantra."

"Karl." Katiya's lips twisted in fury. "And the other Elders." The war had burned through Europe already, but the America's were the new battleground. "So did you save me just to kill me now?" Katiya asked, standing still as only a vampire could.

Tereza stared at the gun then back up at Katiya. "I was going to kill you at first. But that was before I realized it was you. Now I don't know, seems like a waste, I did almost die for you."

Katiya's lips twitched. "Too bad I had to go and die after that anyway." She held out a hand for the hunter. "Lot's of vampires to hunt in the America's."

Tereza put the gun away, and laughed. "It's a pisser though. I almost die for a girl and she's in love with someone else."

She reached out and with a limping step took Katiya's arm.

"The Caliph kept telling me that life's not fair." She slid an arm around the hunter's waist, surprised to find how light she felt.

"How did you find us?" She led the way towards the hotel.

"Not you I was looking for. I was assigned here after the fiasco in Russia. That pretty much was the start of the war. All the supernatural creatures came out of the woodwork once the Vampires revealed themselves in the United States. The church didn't need us so bad then. People suddenly found religion and a gun." Her and her fellow hunters had been slowly ignored or sent off to more and more dangerous assignments.

"Karl engineered the entire thing." Katiya grimaced. "The Caliph could tell me what was happening, but neither of us could figure out why he helped start the war." She glanced sideways at the hunter who was limping alongside her. "I would have come sooner, but I wasn't safe around others." Ten long years of learning to control and accept the darkness.

"The European vampires have been oddly quiet, there were some revolts early on and some cities burned. Not that I was there in the thick of things." She sighed in regret at what she'd missed. "But it wasn't all bad, a pretty little peasant girl nursed me back to health."

"That's all she did of course." Katiya teased, as they turned a corner onto a busier street. "Any news from the America's?" Everything she'd heard in India had been hopelessly out of date by the time the information had reached them.

"Well you know the Americans, once they came to term with the fact there were vampires, werewolves, and mummies... oh my. They became very unhappy that they were not top of the food chain and set upon righting that wrong. They have a deal with the shapeshifters, an alliance of sorts. And the vampires are losing ground. I suspect the war will wind down within the year."

That would make it over eleven years of a war unlike any other that the world had seen. Soldiers with rifles and the newer deadly machine guns fighting pets and humans allied to the vampires, while the vampires themselves terrorized the night. No wonder cities had burned.

"Will you come with me? We're going to Canada." As close as she could get, for now.

Tereza stiffened. "I won't be a pet. Some of my morals may have relaxed a bit, thanks to you, but I won't be a pet."

"Did I ask you to be my pet? I am allowed to have friends you know." She stopped, looking at her fully, seeing that familiar fire in the hunter's eyes. "But friends don't stake friends."

Tereza chuckled, "You're no fun." But her hand stopped its move to her coat.

"I have things to do. Maybe after that I'll be fun again." She waited, watching the hunter as people moved around them on the dark streets. "Will you come or stay here?" It was a risk, bringing a hunter, but despite everything she liked Tereza. She owed her also, for getting her to the train station.

The hunter's shoulders slumped. "You sure? I'm pretty much washed up as a hunter."

"Who says?" Katiya grinned, taking her hand and helping her down the street. "Just because you can't fight doesn't mean you aren't useful. You know how to hunt them, I don't. I need that knowledge Tereza. I need to know how to find Karl's spies and children and kill them."

"You do know you're a vampire?" Tereza said joking.

"Really? That explains the fangs." Katiya smiled, remembering to avoid baring her teeth. She sobered though as she kept talking.

"Karl got Alexei, staked her and then banished her to the America's. The Caliph's men found out what ship she was being loaded on, but the ship sank somewhere near the

coast of Alaska. I'm going to find her Tereza, but Karl's going to try to stop me. It's going to be dangerous."

"Not really making your case, remember that Alexei and I hate each other." She chuckled. "Don't look like that. You know it's true."

"Maybe." Katiya stopped again as they came to the front of the small luxury hotel that was there home while in London. "I still need your help though. You know she's better than Karl. I don't know what he's planned, but this war can't be all of it."

"Vampires worked best in secret, their world unknown. So I don't understand the war myself." She let go of Katiya's arm and walked around in a circle, thinking.

Katiya watched her, wondering why she was working so hard to get Tereza to agree to this. Fiona wouldn't agree, she was almost certain and Niki, well the woman was feral as it was. "But you know how to hunt vampires. That's something the Caliph didn't know how to teach me."

"Well, vampires are actually rather weak. You have a lot of weaknesses, sunlight being the big one. Your kind is kind of squeamish about giving away secrets on destruction." She stopped moving and looked at Katiya.

"My kind." It still took a little getting used to, but Katiya nodded in acceptance.

She frowned, she didn't know why she was dragging feet, the church had all but thrown them away for the glut of new believers. "Fine." She nodded her face firm. "You have yourself a human servant. I won't give up my faith, or Sundays. I go to church."

"I don't really want a servant. I'll take a friend though." Katiya raised an eyebrow, hopeful. "Friend's get to do what they want." She wasn't Alexei; she couldn't handle things the way the tall blonde could, so she'd decided a while ago that she wasn't even going to try.

Tereza snorted. "You sure you're a vampire?"

"I'm not Alexei." She met the hunter's eyes with her own, needing her to understand this. "She could demand obedience and enforce it. I can't." The sword at her side wasn't for show, but she was nowhere near as good as Alexei had been. "I have to have a different way."

The world was tipping on its head, but it had been doing that for a while now. The vampires breaking their code of secrecy had pushed the world into hyper drive and now governments all over the world were pushing the boundaries of what they had known and technology. If she didn't adapt didn't try to change herself, she was lost.

The hunter knew that. "Very well Katiya, you have yourself a friend and a hunter." Her

mentor would be horrified, but she would continue this way to do the only thing she was good at in life. "I still will get to kill vampires, right?"

The redhead smiled a little, letting the tips of long fangs show. "Yes. Just not mine." That had to be a clear rule. "No one in the House develops a sudden stake in the heart problem. All right?"

"Well I can't promise that, but I promise not to stake them as long as they don't kill innocents and try to overthrow you. I won't be able not too if they attack some poor bumpkin on the side of the road."

That was, Katiya allowed, probably as much as she could ask for. "I have another favor to ask for then." She hesitated; studying the new lines that hadn't been there the last time she'd seen the hunter, the new weariness in those dark eyes. Who hesitated, then slightly shrugged her shoulders. "Maybe. There's..." She stopped, trying to think on how to explain. "Darkness. An urge?" No, both of them were wrong. "Hunger." That was closer. "The Caliph taught me how to avoid giving into it. But, sometimes..." She trailed off, eyes flicking to the pulse point in the hunter's neck. "It's hard. I need help." Fiona could do it, but Tereza was better suited to this task.

"Need help with what exactly?" Tereza's eyes became guarded and she resisted covering her throat.

"Keeping me here. Keeping me myself." She licked her lips. "And stopping me if I let the bloodlust take me."

Tereza nodded. "You seem like a much older vampire. I won't forget and I'll restrain you when it gets too much. But you have to let the others know I can do that. Or I will hurt them if they try to stop me."

"Deal." She held out her hand, offering a slightly challenging look to the hunter.

The hunter just smirked and took it. "Deal."

##### Epilogue #####

1982

The man was sweating as he watched the red haired woman by the windows. She wasn't that tall, barely coming to his shoulders, but she terrified him. It was the look in her eyes that had forced him into the chair, legs shaking and sweat dampening his shaved scalp.

"Mr. LaPierre, may I call you Marcus?"

With a start he realized she was actually waiting for an answer. At his shaky nod she

smiled briefly. Her accent was odd, he'd thought she was Irish, but he'd been wrong about that. It sounded Russian he thought.

"I apologize for the unusual circumstances surrounding our meeting."

He laughed. "Unusual? Lady, you're " he glanced to the other red head lurking in the corner and the amused look on her face. What were these two, sisters? "Friend there dragged me out of my boat in the dead of night!"

"Actually, I asked you to come with me first. Then I dragged you out of your boat house." The one in the corner spoke up. She had the same accent he noticed.

"Alsun." The first one sighed. "My apology for that. I asked Alsun to invite you for a meeting."

"And I did." The one called Alsun laughed, shoving off from the wall she'd been leaning against. If he wasn't so terrified of them both, he would have been enjoying certain fantasies about the two of them.

"If there aren't any other little errands for me tonight?"

The red head by the window smiled a little, and he tried really hard to not notice the slightly elongated fangs. "Go have fun. Don't burn down the city."

"Aw, you're no fun." Alsun laughed, picking up the dark leather jacket she'd been wearing when she'd kidnapped him out of his house.

After she'd gone, the first one walked over to a heavy crystal decanter. "I believe you enjoy whiskey? Straight?"

Automatically he took the offered cut crystal glass.

At his suspicious look at the amber liquid she laughed. It was a nice laugh he noticed, although the severe looking tailored suite she was wearing was definitely not what he liked his women in.

"It's not poisoned. Rest assured that if I wanted to harm you I would not have brought you all the way here to do it."

True enough and he really could use something to steady his nerves with. The whiskey was very good and he let out a little sound of appreciation.

She moved back over to the windows, overlooking the Pacific Ocean and the harbor below. It was an amazing view, the entire city of Vancouver spread out below, the streets alive with traffic and lights.



"You have a problem, Marcus. Your family firm is almost bankrupt. In fact" She turned to look at him over her shoulder. "I know that the Royal Bank is going to force you into bankruptcy next week."

"What? Those bastards told me they'd give me more time! We have another entire zone of sea bed to prospect in!"

"They lied." She bared her teeth again in a smile. He really wished she would stop doing that.

"They can't do this to me! Don't they know who I am?"

She crossed over around the desk, the smile reduced to a faint grin. "I believe they know exactly who you are. They also know you are the head of one of the largest underwater salvage and oil exploration firms on the west coast. Your company will be worth a lot sold in pieces."

He glared at her, but she dared him to disagree with any of her words.

"I'm offering you a chance to save your family business, Marcus." She walked closer, still smiling faintly. "Make sure that son of yours can inherit the business from his father when you decide to retire."

He looked at her like a dying man would a lifeline. Which wasn't too far from the truth she allowed.

"What do you want?"

Katiya leaned against her desk, happy that he wasn't going to deny the way that things were anymore.

"I'm proposing a silent partnership. With my funds your company will become one of the largest underwater salvage firms in the world."

"What's in it for me?"

"Very astute of you Marcus. Of course I would require something in return." She watched him speculatively, measuring him. Whatever it was that she was looking for he prayed that she found him worthy. He was uncomfortably certain that he knew what would happen to him if he failed her test.

She nodded finally and stood up again. "I need your company to look for something for me. It was dumped in the ocean a long time ago, somewhere off the coast."

"Somewhere off the coast?" Marcus barked a laugh. "Lady I really hope you have more

to go off of than that."

"I'm under no illusion about how long it could take for you to find what I'm looking for. I can be patient." She smiled again and his balls tried to crawl there way up into his body as she leaned forwards, making sure he saw her fangs. "But do not doubt what would happen to you and yours if you are not loyal."

He swallowed, hard. There was still a choice to be made. He could tell her he wouldn't accept. Maybe he'd even live through the experience. But the banks would take his family business apart, piece-by-piece to repay his debts.

"What do you want to find?"

That simple question bound him and his family to her. She let her lips cover her fangs again, although those blue eyes now danced with amusement.

"I know this is going to be horrible cliché, but I'm looking for a coffin."

The End for now

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