

A figure passed by the streetlights.

It was night, and no cars were on the street. Lights were on, but windows were shuttered.

The shadow in the shape of a human moved. It passed by the free-standing residences without a second glance. The shadow maneuvered toward a small apartment complex that stood on very edge of the street, just where the last bits of the neighborhood's respectability vanished. It was not long at all before someone stood in front of an old, discolored door. The shadow knocked.

Will was crouching by the couch. He had seen someone walking through the closed blinds. The world felt as though it was paused for a second. The man could scarcely think.

For a moment, the man's heart pumped harder than it already was pumping. A shadow by Will began to lengthen, covering his entire body after a few seconds. Darkness began to curl about the edges of the man's frame.

Will noticed that the knocking stopped after a few seconds. Despite that, the man did not move. He remained huddled in the corner of his apartment, the darkness that covered him now deeper than before. He waited.

After around a minute, Will heard the door open. The blood in his veins roared even more strongly than it had before, but Will remained silent. There were footsteps coming from behind the couch. A silhouette moved, but the figure was too dark to discern many details about them.

Eventually, the figure passed by the couch. They looked on beyond it, peering into a little corner of the apartment that was shrouded by shadow.

A voice came.

“I can see you.”

A voice inside Will screamed and he buried it.

“Why are you here?” the man spoke, trying to ignore the pounding in his chest.

The figure shrugged, and Will noticed then that some features were actually recognizable. Before him, there was something between a dress and a robe, constructed out of thin, black fabric that swayed slightly. There was a head at the top, Will noticed, but the details of the face were difficult to discern, due to the strange sort of hood that the figure wore and the darkness that settled around them.

“It is good to get to know your neighbors. I noticed someone peeking into Elysium recently, and I decided to follow them home. I apologize for breaking into your apartment, by the way.” the figure spoke.

“What do you want?” Will spoke again, somewhat quickly, this time. There was a word that the person had mentioned that had interested him greatly, but he had spied on these beings for long enough. He knew their ways.

“Perhaps we should start with introductions.” the figure said, and pulled back their hood.

Tangled black hair spilled out into the night. Before Will stood a woman. Her skin was a light brown

shade, although Will did not quite recognize her facial features. Her expression was neutral, but her eyes were fixed upon him, as though she could see through the shadow that he had manifested. Her gaze was intent.

“I am Juliana. What is your name?”

Will stared on into her eyes. He could almost swear that there was a fleck of red to them.

The man thought for a moment.

Giving a name would be inconsequential. She could probably just kill him right at this moment.

“...Will.” the man spoke. The darkness from his form was draining now, shadows moving back into their proper positions and light moving back into its position. There was a man now in the corner, a wiry, swarthy, sad little man, like a marionette with its strings cut. His hair was disheveled and caked in dirt. Juliana thought that it might have been dark brown, but it was difficult to tell due to the lighting. Though she could not see them in their entirety, the man's eyes glinted in the darkness.

A silence filled the room then. After waiting for several seconds, Juliana decided to speak. It was plain that the neonate was afraid, and she could not blame him.

“I doubt that this will allay your concerns, but I am not here to kill you.” Juliana spoke, looking on at the silent man for several seconds before her words returned. “Or to manipulate you, or render you a pawn in some scheme. I do not need you to trust me entirely, but I would hate for a fight to break out tonight.”

The silence hung for a few more seconds. Will was still huddled in the corner, eyeing Juliana. His arms were free and ready. After a few more tense seconds, the voice came.

“Why are you here?” Will asked. There was a certain uneven tone to his voice, but Juliana could not tell if it was anger, fear, hunger, or some mixture of all three.

“As I told you before, I wanted to meet the one who was so recently Embraced.” Juliana spoke. She waited for a little while before speaking again. “I know that you know our terminology. I saw you eavesdropping.” she added.

Juliana heard the sound of fingernails scratching against wood, but the man did not move. Juliana had expected this. She looked off to the man's side, and noticed that his right hand was gripping into the floorboard. Dried blood clung to his fingernails. He must have been turned into a vampire quite recently.

Juliana waited, for she was not afraid. She had seen a fair amount of neonates like him. The ones who were terrified of acknowledging what they had become, but too honest with themselves to act like they could go back to how things were before, and clever enough to know that fighting with an older vampire was a bad idea. The woman just stood silently before the neonate spoke again.

“Why do you want to talk to me? What do you have to gain out of it?” Will spoke strangely, almost measuredly. There was a lightness to his tone that Juliana had not seen before. He did not even appear to be too disbelieving, Juliana thought. It seemed like the man was struggling to speak in a manner that did not come across as hostile, while also trying not to appear weak or gullible. The behavior saddened Juliana, but she understood why he was displaying it. Really, it was good that he was being so careful.

Still, Juliana hoped that she would be able to ease him out of that behavior in time. Alas, the heart was a difficult thing to fish from the depths.

“I would like to talk to you so that I might share your presence, something that is more valuable to our kind than gold.” Juliana said, beginning to pace slightly in her position. She did not approach Will, of course, but she moved around a little, looking around the room while she talked. Normal human behavior could work wonders when it came to calming nerves.

“You must understand that there are some of our kind who are not...distant from humanity.” Juliana spoke measuredly. “I understand why you would be skeptical of me, but you have yourself as an example.” Juliana looked toward the man as she spoke. His eyes narrowed.

“What, what do you-” the vampire was interrupted.

“You're pale. You have some injuries that have not yet healed. It is clear that you have not eaten in a few days.” Juliana spoke softly, but firmly.

Will started to breath faster. Juliana remained in her position, though her mind started to race at his movements. The neonate pushed back up against the wall, but he did not move further. After several seconds of breathing, he looked back at her.

“I. I.” the man stuttered. Juliana thought that she could see his eyes through the mess of his hair. They were a dark brown, like chestnuts. Briefly, Juliana thought of another time, when her grandmother would harvest chestnuts and gift them to her when she visited her house. But that was a long time ago, and Juliana forced her mind back to the present.

“I. Am not a monster.” Will said, breathing in and out heavily after the words left his mouth. His mouth twitched a little for a few seconds, as though he was going to continue, but the man said nothing.

This time, when Juliana looked into his eyes, she saw the desperation.

She thought of smiling then, but she pushed the thought away. This was for him, not herself.

“I know that you are not, Will.” Juliana spoke softly. She looked on at the man until he started to look at her, something hitting him. It was then that Juliana opened her mouth once more.

“There is a way for us to find tranquility in undeath. You do not need to kill anyone just to live. I can guide you.” the woman said.

The neonate was looking at the woman, now, but he did not move. His brow was slightly furrowed. He did not smile.

“...Thank you for the offer, but I am fine. I have gotten this far alone.” Will said. The man's eyes darted between the woman before him and the environment. Will moved his body slightly, obscuring his right hand from view, but Juliana had already seen the fingers of his right hand twitching.

“With all due respect, I would suggest that you accept my offer.” Juliana spoke calmly. Her face was blank. “You are vulnerable, are there are plenty of our kind who would take advantage of such weakness. I think that you have spied on us long enough to know that.”

The room was silent for a few seconds. Juliana focused her eyes upon Will's body, but the man did not

seem like he was going to move. He possessed exceptional self-control for a neonate, she thought. He would need that.

Juliana noticed then that Will was no longer looking at her. The man was looking to his right, now. His gaze was focused upon the cheap wooden floor.

Juliana looked at him for a while, then. Then her gaze turned toward the window. The moon was shining brightly.

“Who is your sire?” Juliana asked almost automatically.

Juliana saw the man freeze up for a moment. He spent several seconds breathing, before his gaze slowly drifted towards the woman.

“I do not know who did this to me.” Will spoke quietly.

“I see.” Juliana said, nodding lightly. She was looking at him, but she was not paying attention to him. Her mind was somewhere else. Juliana realized the situation after a moment, and brought herself back to awareness.

“You will need to learn of our condition.” Juliana said. She was looking at Will in the normal manner, now. “If your sire cannot educate you in the nature of our kind, then it is up to me to do so.”

Will eyed Juliana oddly, then, but before he could say anything, the woman spoke.

“Do you know about the ability that you used in an attempt to hide yourself from me?” Juliana asked.

Will narrowed his eyes, but he did speak.

“I can manipulate shadows, in a way. I figured it out during the first night.” Will said. Juliana noticed that his tone changed toward the end.

“Indeed. Have you done anything else with it?” Juliana asked.

The vampire looked up at her then. There was a slight tilt to his head, one that he did not seem to notice. Juliana delighted in the sight, though she did not change her expression. For all of his pretense of competence, he was still an innocent child.

Of course, her own satisfaction aside, the quizzical look was a good sign. It seemed like he was settling into the conversation.

“...Not exactly.” the neonate admitted. “I mostly just used it for spying.”

“As I have seen.” Juliana nodded to herself, lightly. “Well you have the physical disguise down, actually. You just need to work on cloaking your mind.”

“I mean, I am not sure if I can-” Will was cut off.

“You definitely can, given time. You clearly have an affinity for something that we call Obfuscate, in these parts. If you develop the power further, you should be able to hide your soul as well as you hide your body. Thank you for sharing such information with me, in any case, I think that I might be better able to help you, now.” Juliana said.

Of course, the vampire had really meant that she was able to determine his clan, now. Juliana thought that such knowledge would be able to benefit the neonate.

He was clearly a Mekhet, like her. He was able to use Obfuscate without training and did not possess the tell-tale aura of the Nosferatu. Such a quiet little shadow, she thought...

"...You have the power to see through disguises like mine, do you not?" Will's eyes narrowed, and Juliana was drawn out of her trance.

"I have some facility with Auspex. Though you should know that it has plenty of other uses besides breaking the veil of Obfuscate. I can perceive distant locations, read the past, and perform other such feats." Juliana spoke casually.

"You could have just said that you are good at ESP, you know." Will mumbled. Juliana's gaze quickly snapped back to the neonate, whose expression quickly turned fearful. She was glad, though. He was clearly beginning to settle down. Alas, she figured that she should probably stop looking at him directly. Clearly the poor Shadow feared that he had angered her.

Juliana looked back at the man before her. He was shaking, slightly, but Juliana did not pay attention to that.

"I have brought up the manner of our powers for a reason. I think I have determined your clan, based upon what you have told me. If my suspicions are correct, you are a Mekhet, just like me. Such would be most fortuitous, for I could teach you of our other Disciplines...and our curse. I know that you understand much of what I have just relayed to you." Juliana looked on at Will.

"I...know that clans are the type of vampire that you are. To be honest, though, I do not know much more about them besides that." Will trailed off, his gaze turning away from Juliana and his expression darkening. He did look back at the woman, however.

Silence reigned for a few seconds.

"...I am sorry, Juliana. You can continue." Will said.

"There is no need to apologize, neonate." Juliana said, shaking her head a little. Will's expression eased, then, and for a moment, he forgot about the term of address that Juliana had just used.

"Clans are like family; they are determined by the vitae that the sire passes to their child. Each line of Kindred possesses different talents and different banes. My kind, the Mekhet, are beings of darkness."

"Me, Mekhet..." Will mumbled. "Sounds Egyptian."

"You would be right." the edge of Juliana's mouth rose briefly. "Before you ask, though, I am not Egyptian. I cannot tell you much about the history of the clan."

"That is understandable." Will nodded, his gaze beginning to go elsewhere. Juliana saw Will's expression change, but she did not have much time to observe the shift before the neonate looked back at her.

"Could, could I ask where you are from, then? I mean, in terms of your human form and all, not this

whole clan business.” Will looked off pensively, but he did not seem frightened. “I mean, you could have fooled me with your skin tone alone. It, it kind of sounds like you are old, but I am having a difficult time determining your ethnicity.” Will said, scratching at his dirt-covered hair a little. “Sorry, I am just kind of curious.”

Images of days gone by only flashed by for a little while before Juliana gave her response.

“Well I hate to disappoint you, Will, but I am not that old.” Juliana smirked lightly. “I am a little over a century old. And I just come from southern Europe. I am flattered to hear that you thought that I might be an elder, though.”

For a second, Will's face went flush with blood, and the young vampire looked away from the woman before him for a short while. It was charming, Juliana admitted, but she could spy how pale Will's flesh was, even with the blush. She would need to feed him soon.

“I, uh, sorry, ma'am...” Will trailed off. “I hate to further the stereotype, but I do not really know a lot about Europe.”

“There is no need to apologize. I have seen far worse ignorance from Americans.” Juliana said, her expression softening slightly. Will just looked toward the window, still somewhat embarrassed, though he was recovering.

Juliana stared on at Will's face as it rested in the moonlight. She could spy his eyes more clearly, now. Chestnut rings around black voids. The blood vessels in the whiteness spread out like a web.

“Where are your people from, Will?” Juliana asked.

“Oh, I am just Mexican.” Will looked back at the woman, before looking down and scratching his head slightly. “Racially, that is. I cannot speak a lick of Spanish for the life of me...” Will forced a small laugh.

“I see.” Juliana said.

Curious. The visage was curious. She had had some trouble determining his ethnicity before, but now it seemed clear to her. His face reminded her of a photograph that she had seen long ago, before she had travelled to the Americas. At that time, she had figured that such people were far away.

Juliana came out of her trance after a little while. Will was still standing there, and his gaze was now focused on her, she realized. Juliana immediately started to pace a little bit, not giving Will much time before she spoke once more.

“In any case, I think that we should get back on topic.” Juliana said. “We do not have the whole night, after all.”

Suddenly, Juliana stopped pacing and looked back at Will. Her voice was clear.

“Will, have you eaten yet, tonight?” Juliana asked as though she did not already know the answer.

Almost immediately, the neonate shrank back, his eyes starting to dart around. To his credit, it did not take him long to formulate a response, but Juliana was still disturbed by how disjointed his speech was.

“...I...have not. I, look I-” Will was cut off.

“Do not fear, neonate. I was not suggesting that you go out to hunt at this moment, though that is a skill which you will need to develop.” Juliana spoke measuredly, continuing in her pacing. As she had anticipated, Will's eyes began to follow her movements. The young vampire started to breathe more, now.

“Look, I, I do not know where the nearest hospital is! I am so fucking hungry, sometimes I get, shakes, and, and-”

“I was not suggesting that you get blood bags, Will. Please listen to me carefully.” Juliana stopped moving now, the vampire edging closer toward Will now.

“Then, then what're you fucking suggesting?! I want – God I need that...fucking...”

“I can give you blood, Will.” Juliana spoke forcefully.

Almost immediately, something came over the young vampire before her. He turned toward her, his eyes scanning her body. He looked lost, for a second. It only lasted for a little while, though.

Suddenly, Will pushed his back against the wall.

“Get away.” the man mumbled. His eyes were wild.

Juliana heard the words and felt her heart drop.

“...What? Will, I-”

“GO AWAY.” Will spoke softly, almost automatically. The neonate was moving away from her, now, keeping his back firmly placed against the wall. Juliana saw the man reach for the window with his left hand, while he kept his right hand before himself, ready.

“Please, ju-” Juliana moved forward ever so slightly, and in an instant, the vampire before her leaped into the corner. Darkness was curling about the edges of his body. His eyes were wild and his mouth agape. Before Juliana could really respond, a low, terrible voice sounded.

“I know what drinking the blood of another vampire does. You are not getting a slave.” Will barked. Blood flowed to his extremities, and Juliana saw the neonate's fingers twitch.

“Just kill me.” Will said, harshly. “I am going to give you a fight either way.”

Juliana just stood there. She should have anticipated it, really. But it still hit her like a wave.

To imagine that a man had risen from the cold of the grave into a neon-lit world of wolves and regrets. And such was common. Such was so damnably common. And to think that he thought that she was one of those...

Juliana did not complete the thought.

“I can drink your blood first.” the woman said as though nothing had hit her at all.

Will's hands twitched again. The neonate breathed in and out heavily, even though air no longer

sustained him. Every so often Juliana would notice a twitching to the mouth, the beginnings of a bestial snarl forming. But it never fully formed.

It was after half-a-minute of paralysis that Juliana finally began to realize that the shadows surrounding Will were starting to vanish. The twitching stopped. Juliana's heart eased little.

Will was still staring at the vampire before him. The gaze was cold and there was not a hint of a smile.

Still, though, he spoke.

"...What do you mean?" he asked.

"I can drink your blood." Juliana said as though it was obvious. "I will begin to be bound by your blood. The emotions that the blood will induce will render it unlikely that I will be willing to abuse you should you drink my own blood. The Vinculum will not be fully formed, but you will have the first stage of a bond with an old vampire. That is an opportunity neonates rarely see."

The shadowy cloak that had once surrounded Will had all but evaporated now. His face was still hard, but Juliana noticed that he was not glaring at her anymore. The man looked off into the room, thinking.

"...What do you have to gain out of it?" Will asked, turning his gaze toward Juliana. "I have only been a vampire for a little while. As a pawn, I would have very little utility. Binding yourself to me seems like a terrible idea."

"I told you that there is something that is more valuable to our kind than gold." Juliana said, and waited.

Will looked on at her for a long time, then. His face shifted in strange ways.

Juliana thought that she would have been more frightened by this part. Their relationship for the rest of their Requiems hinged on this moment. She had planned almost every detail of this encounter. And yet, as she watched the neonate before her stand inscrutably, she only felt a numb calmness.

God, he was beautiful...

"...Okay."

It took Juliana a few moments to realize that Will had given his response. Quickly, the woman drew herself out of her previous reverie and met Will's gaze.

"I do not know why would want to endanger yourself like this, but screw it. I am hungry." he said, and sighed.

Immediately, Juliana felt a wonderful rush, like caffeine in the blood and angels in the mind. She carefully kept all sign of emotion away from her face, of course, but doing so took a great deal more concentration now.

"Alright." Juliana nodded, gazing at the neonate's right arm. "Could you extend out your arm for me? I usually prefer to feed from the wrist."

"Oh, that is perfectly fine." Will nodded rather eagerly. His face changed a little bit, briefly, and Juliana



drank in the moment. It would have been awkward for her to drink from his neck, of course. For a moment, perhaps Will had thought that she was interested in a more...prurient relationship. It saddened Juliana to think that the child may have thought that, but she was certain that it would not take long for her to express her intentions to him. He was handling things pretty fine thus far.

Of course, the neonate had no idea that this was to be anything more than a business relationship. And that was perfectly fine at the moment. She had to be careful about revealing her intentions, for she did not want to disturb the child. Given the circumstances, she could not blame him.

Slowly, Will extended out his right arm, turning his wrist so that it faced the female vampire before him. His eyes focused carefully on her, but she said nothing.

“Do not worry. I will only take enough vitae for the bond to form.” Juliana assured him. Gingerly, the woman began to cradle his arm, looking at thoughtfully at thin little veins. Juliana was not hungry, and yet, she had anticipated this moment.

Almost silently, Juliana bent over and bit Will's wrist. The blood was good, Juliana thought, but what she really loved was the *warmth*. She felt a familiar thin cloud begin to settle over her mind, a fog that she had felt on many nights before, nights which had long since passed. She had thought that the child was adorable this entire time, of course, but there was distance. Now, though, her feelings for him were different, more natural. It was only a step, but they were closer, so much closer than Will must have suspected. It was not the kind of love that a monk would expound. It was not real love.

But it was close enough.

Will's arm went limp. Juliana looked up, and saw Will looking on into the room, his eyes unfocused. Once the glow to the world felt solid, Juliana licked up his wound and gently let go of his arm. The appendage flew loosely in the air for a little while, as Will recovered from the ecstasy of the Kiss. Juliana just waited patiently.

“It's...is...is it over?” Will asked.

“Yes.” Juliana spoke, looking over the neonate pensively for a moment before her voice came back. “Did, did you already know about the nature of the Kiss?”

“I, uh...yeah...I just did not not really know what it felt like.” Will spoke, his eyes beginning to turn back towards Juliana. The woman noticed that the twitching had returned.

“It affects Kindred as well as mortals. I apologize, I should have informed you of that beforehand...”

“It, it does not matter. Just, please give me your, blood.” Will only paused for a moment when he said the last word. He was gazing at her right arm.

“Of course.” Juliana nodded, swiftly extending out her right arm. Will's mouth moved then, as though he was about to give a response, but almost immediately, something came over him. He bit into the vampire's wrist, pristine fangs becoming touched with crimson for the first time in his unlife. Juliana could feel the neonate drink deeply, ravenously. And yet, the woman maintained her poise. She swung her left arm over the vampire's shoulder, as though he might fall down, and looked down at him. She could not see his face, of course. With every second more blood flowed out of her body, and entered into the dead corpse of the neonate. Every once in a while, Will would moan a little. He stopped drinking periodically, to give the blood time to go down, but he still fed from the woman ravenously.

Juliana reminded herself to not touch his hair. Not yet.

Eventually, Will's feeding began to slow. Juliana had filled herself completely before meeting with the neonate, and so she did not fear that he would drink too much. But it would still be proper to teach the child manners. In the back of her mind, of course, Juliana also knew that stopping him here would force the child to control his Beast. That lesson would have to be given early.

“There there, Will. That is enough.” Juliana said, slowly pulling back her arm. At first, Will just kept moving his head along with the arm so that he could keep feeding. But eventually, he was pulled out of his trance. The man looked back at her. His mouth was rimmed with smears of blood. It was the eyes that captivated Juliana, though. They just looked on at her, wide. The man looked quizzical, and not like he had just fed from a woman who had been dead for a little over a century. She wondered, briefly, if the vitae was beginning to affect his mind, and if he was beginning to see he-

Juliana collected herself. This was only the first feeding.

Juliana licked closed the wound on her wrist and began to look back at Will.

“How are you feeling?” she asked.

Will just kept staring at her in a stupor for a little while before he gave his response.

“Great...” he said, breathing in and out slowly. It was difficult for his eyes to focus, and his balance seemed uneven.

“That is good.” Juliana nodded, giving a visible smile. “Would you like to take a seat?”

“I...yeah, that would be good...” Will nodded.

Juliana walked over to the couch that Will had once hid behind and sat down on it. The neonate followed her, meandering his way across the room and almost collapsing onto the couch. There was a certain vibrancy to his flesh now, something which actually surprised Juliana. It was not often that neonates were able to properly counterfeit life. Perhaps it was just instinctual, Juliana thought.

Juliana waited for a while before she began to speak. Will was lying down on the couch more than he was sitting on it, his head supported by the armrest. His face was turned toward the ceiling. He was clearly still in some sort of haze, although Juliana could tell that that was disappearing.

“Is there anything that you would like to discuss? I am guessing that you have a lot of questions.” Juliana spoke.

“...Sure.” Will nodded weakly. He was not looking at her, and there was a light smile on his face.

“You, you said that you can teach me more about my powers, right?” he asked.

“Indeed I can. Personally, I am more proficient in Auspex, but I can also teach you about Obfuscate.” Juliana nodded. There was another Discipline in which she was even more proficient, of course, but she did not mention it.

“Right.” Will nodded his head slightly. “Well, if you are still open to this whole mentorship deal, then I would like to learn more about Obfuscate. It is very useful.”

“Indeed.” Juliana spoke, and waited for Will to speak once more.

The two vampires sat with each other on the couch for several minutes. The moon gleamed outside.

Eventually, Will's smile began to fade.

“Have you seen my sire?” he asked. This time, he looked toward Juliana.

“I apologize, but I have not.” Juliana responded. “To be frank, I find it difficult to think of any Mekhet in the area who might be disposed towards giving the Embrace. Then again, our kind are notoriously secretive. There could very well be a Shadow around here who does not participate in the Danse Macabre.”

“Are you sure that I am a Mekhet?” Will asked.

“Yes. Your blood tasted just like that of a Mekhet.” Juliana responded. She was looking off into the room.

Will went silent for a while.

“I do not really care much about my sire, in any case.” Will suddenly spoke up. His eyes were distant. “I just want to have some knowledge about them. There are too many unknowns at the moment for me to feel safe. This is really just a pragmatic concern.”

“That is understandable.” Juliana spoke. “I will provide you with any more information that I find on the matter.”

Juliana waited a little while before she continued to speak.

“Just so you know, you might want to keep remain quiet about your sire.” Juliana said.

“I know that that is the wise course of action.” Will turned toward the woman. “I am no fool.” his brow furrowed. “Without a sire around, I will look like easy pickings.

“Actually, that is not really what you have to worry about.” Juliana replied. “Others will soon learn of your association with me, and they will be reluctant to harm you.”

“...Right.” Will nodded. “What, what is the problem, then?” his head tilted.

“Technically, your Embrace is a violation of the Second Tradition. Obviously, that Tradition is broken all of the time, but it would still be best to not call to much attention to a violation of it. It is not always just the sire who-” Juliana was cut off.

“I understand what you are suggesting.” Will said. His voice was dead, and he was staring off into the darkness.

The room was quiet for a while. Juliana waited uncomfortably for a few minutes. Then, Will spoke up.

“...Why the hell do people even Embrace? And why would anyone actually try to implement a law to ban Embraces?” Will said, and went silent for a few moments.

“I do not need a response to those questions.” he said.

Juliana did not respond to Will's questions, as he had asked. She felt an uneasiness to her chest, but she had grown used to that sort of feeling. Her mind drifted off.

She remembered when she had met a lovely old woman who had lived by the mountains back in Turkey. The people had said that she used to be a midwife, she remembered. It had seemed unusual to the locals, for she was barren, but even back then, Juliana had thought that she could understand the feeling.

One time, when she was young, Juliana found a bird with a broken wing beneath an old oak tree that rested by the fields. She had brought the thing back home, without telling her father or mother, and had fed it with her breakfast leftovers. He constantly tried to escape for the first few days, clawing and biting at the little enclosure that she had constructed out of old chicken wire and wood. The change came gradually. At first he would just not put up a fight when he was actually getting his meals. He would flutter his wings less often and not try to claw at the cage.

Juliana still remembered the day when he let her pick him up for the first time. Even a century later, that day continued to light up her Requiem like few things could.

The bird healed fast, all things considered. By the end of the month, Juliana realized that he was ready to be released back into the wild. He was all shining and healthy, then, not like the injured, frightened little animal she had seen before. She was going to release him, obviously, even as she drew out the process for as long as she could. But she was certain that she was going to release him.

She still remembered the moment when she had been cradling him in her hands. Her fingers had been on his legs, then, pinning him down. He was so small, delicate. Fragile. Innocent.

And sometimes, it almost seemed like he was hers.

Juliana only entertained the thought for a moment. Almost immediately after, the girl released the bird, and he went flying off, and she never saw him again.

The serpent had made its way into the garden long before that point, of course. But that was when she realized that it was present.

Juliana had not feared the *dea nutrix* when she had revealed her undead nature to her. Instead, she feared what the woman must have seen inside of her, to think that she would be a perfect mother to the Damned.

Juliana came back to awareness slowly. When she did, words escaped her lips.

“Do you think that a vampire should be permitted to share their immortality?”

Will did not respond for a few seconds. He looked at Juliana, his eyes narrowing, but Juliana did not see fire in the gaze.

After a few seconds of staring, Will just sighed, letting his head roll back onto the armrest.

“I do not even know if it really matters, honestly.” the man said. “Being a vampire is terrible, of course, that much is obvious. But there's no drama to it. No damnation. You are just going to die one day

anyway. It's not like you're cursed forever.”

Will inclined his head slightly. He was looking off to the side of Juliana.

“Living forever does not fundamentally change the human condition. It is frankly foolish for people to act like it does.”

The man let his head fall back onto the armrest.

Juliana held still. She had been drinking the words as they came. She was not quite sure how she was feeling, honestly. Yet it could not have affected her that much, for Juliana knew that she could continue the conversation if she wanted to.

Almost silently, Juliana sighed.

“So, do you know magic?” Will suddenly asked.

“I am afraid that I am unfamiliar with magic, mortal or Kindred.” Juliana said. She was not lying. She was proficient with some of the Disciplines, not blood magic.

“Hmm. I understand.” Will nodded.

“I am guessing that you are a magician? It would explain why following your trail with Auspex was difficult.” Juliana spoke.

“Yeah.” Will said casually, looking over toward the moon now. “I tend to keep invisibility spells running.”

“That might be why it took me so long to find you.” Juliana said. “I have been trying to track you down for a few days, now.”

“I suppose that I should have guessed that.” Will said. The edges of his mouth curled upwards.

“Indeed.” Juliana said, lightly smiling. “In any case, I am guessing that you are looking for access to Kindred magic?”

“Well, yeah.” Will sort of shrugged. “It is fine if you do not have any contacts, though. I was just curious.”

“I have some connections. Not many, mind you, but I could probably secure you a spot in a magical organization of some sort. In fact, it seemed like you might be a good fit for the Ordo Dracul, but I am not sure if you are interested in blood sorcery or not.”

“You know, I recall hearing about something called Cruac, but I cannot say that I know much about blood sorcery. How is it distinct from normal sorcery?” Will asked.

“Blood sorcery is just sorcery that uses the magical power of vitae. It is generally stronger than mortal magic, but it has its limitations.” Juliana shrugged. “If you want to continue practicing your traditional magical art, though, you might want to go with the Ordo Dracul. I heard that they have a Coil associated with mortal magic, and it seems like they tend to hew more towards the occult anyways.”

“I will continue with my praxis regardless, but this blood sorcery that you have spoken of sounds

intriguing. I will think about it.” Will said. The man was sitting up now, his head looking forward into the room.

Suddenly, Will rose from the couch and walked toward one of the walls. He flicked a switch, and the room was suddenly bathed in fluorescent light. Juliana squinted, but she had dealt with worse.

“Sorry, I just figured that I should turn on the lights.” Will said.

“You are fine.” Juliana said. Inwardly, the woman was glad. It seemed like the man was growing more comfortable.

“You know, you should probably try to practice your Auspex sometime. I bet that you would like it, Mr. Magician.” Juliana smirked.

Will's head shot towards the woman, and for a moment, Juliana felt a knot develop in her chest, but that only lasted for a little while.

“What made you think that I would *not* practice it? Scrying is one of my specialties.” Will quipped. He was smiling.

Juliana enjoyed the moment, for a little while, but as she gazed upon the wonderful, enrapturing neonate before her, she noticed something. There was a small gash on his forehead. She could spy several cuts around the base of his neck, cuts that were only partly obscured by his shirt. She had known that the man had been injured, of course, but for some reason, that only really began to strike her now.

“Will, do you know about how to use the Blood to heal yourself?” Juliana asked.

Will's smile slowly disappeared, replaced by a look of puzzlement.

“I...do not.” Will said. “I only really practiced Obfuscate.”

“I see.” Juliana said, her brow furrowing.

“...I am guessing that you are concerned about the scars.” Will said. The man looked off strangely, briefly, but then he shrugged. “Do not worry, they are not that bad. Really, now that I am dead, I do not really see how they are relevant.”

“Looking presentable is something that can be surprisingly relevant among our kind. You will have a problem if vitae begins to seep from the wound.” Juliana said. “Also, while we may be more resistant to damage, there are ways for use to suffer destruction that do not involve sunlight. It would be best for you to mend those wounds soon.”

“I...alright.” Will looked pensive for a moment. “How do I accomplish that exactly?”

“You need to send some vitae to the site of the injury. The blood should be able to weave some dead flesh to replace that which has been lost. You can think of it like scar tissue. Hopefully, your use of Obfuscate will have given you some experience with manipulating vitae.” Juliana said.

“Well...alright, then. Give me a second.” Will said, and took a breath.

It took a while for Juliana to see the wounds begin to mend, which really did not surprise her, given

how recently the neonate had been Embraced. The use of Disciplines could certainly help a neonate get a better grip on the Blood, but there was still a significant difference between concealing oneself in shadow and healing oneself. Hopefully the neonate would become proficient in the art of mending soon.

It took several minutes for Will to fully close each of the cuts along his body. The man was left smiling at the end, looking over his body multiple times to see the work that had been done. To her, mending was normal, of course, but she remembered the nights when even the most minor powers of the blood had seemed wondrous to her. She enjoyed showing neonates such wonders.

“Well, damn.” Will said, inspecting his left arm. “You were right.”

“Indeed. There are plenty of others things that vitae can do besides just heal you, by the way. And I am not just talking about Disciplines.” Juliana said.

“What are you referring to, then?” Will asked.

“A multitude of things. You can send the Blood coursing through the body to give it a semblance of mortal life. Very useful for when you want to conceal yourself among mortals, or for when you do not want to be a walking corpse all night.” Juliana said. “You can also use the Blood to enhance your physical prowess. It is not as good as Potence for that, but it can be very useful when dealing with the kine.”

“Huh. Indeed.” Will nodded. He was looking at body in a more measured manner, now.

Juliana began to notice a certain redness to Will's flesh. She supposed that she should have expected that, given how the neonate had just mended. Still, it was curious to note. There were little patches of darkness on his body now, areas where the blood had gathered. In some areas, Juliana even noticed a little pinkness to his flesh. Not a lot, for he was inexperienced in the ways of the blood, and he had been fairly swarthy in life anyways. But still Juliana thought that she could make out the tell-tale signs of counterfeiting life. Juliana thought that the neonate must not have been aware that he had been doing it.

He must have been doing it instinctually, he thought.

Juliana briefly looked away to hide her smile. The moon was beautiful, tonight.

Just then, Juliana realized something.

“Will?” the woman quickly turned toward the man. “Are you...hungry?”

Will winced briefly. But there was more than just a wince.

“I...yeah. Kind of.” Will said. “I already know about how a lot of this blood stuff works, though. I am guessing that I used up blood when I healed myself?”

“Yes.” Juliana nodded, her eyes assessing the neonate more carefully now. “I do not know how much blood you may have used, but your injuries seemed to be pretty significant. Plus, as a neonate, I doubt that you can concentrate your vitae very effectively.

“Well...alright, then. What do you propose I do? I, I appreciate all of your help thus far, but I am not

sure if I am...ready to go out there and get...blood.” Will forced the words out towards the end.

Juliana began to open her mouth, but then she closed it. It was after several moments of consideration that she finally began to speak.

“Strictly speaking, that would not be necessary.” the woman said.

Will looked up at Juliana. His eyes were hard.

“I am not going to drink more of your blood.” Will said coldly.

“I could drink your blood before I drank yours. Our bonds would be of the same strength.” Juliana spoke calmly, even as her mind raced.

“I...still do not get what your plan is here...” Will growled, and got off the couch. The man began to pace around the room.

“I am not-” Juliana was interrupted.

“You are planning something! I know it. I just do not know what exactly you are planning...” Will spoke. Juliana noticed that his face was twitching slightly.

Juliana breathed in and out for a little while, her gaze vacant. After a little while, Will's pacing ceased, and his eyes turned toward the old vampire on the couch.

It was not just for her own sake. She swore to God that it was not just for her own sake.

Juliana steadied herself, and began to speak.

“Why is it so hard for you to accept that I am not going to hurt you?”

At first, Will kept looking at Juliana, but then he saw something in her eyes, and he turned away.

“I.” Will's voice sputtered. He mouthed things to himself wordlessly.

“I died last week. I fucking died last week.” Will spoke, almost like he was reciting a mantra. “Do you know what that can do to a man? And now I am surrounded by centuries-old monsters that could destroy me at any moment! So yeah, forgive me if I have some trouble extending trust to vampires right now.”

Will went silent for a long while. The neonate stopped walking, putting his back up against the wall for support. The man slowly slid down, coming to rest on the wooden floor. His arms began to cradle his head.

Juliana winced at the sight, but she forced herself to speak.

“I do know what death can do to someone, Will.” Juliana said. Her voice was weak. It took Will several seconds to realize that, but once he did, he started to look up.

“It is just like you said, Will. It is not really that big.” Juliana muttered, lost somewhere else.

Will was looking at her, now. Splotches of crimson coated his face and hands. The scent of iron hung



in the area.

“There are people like you out there, Will. If you yourself were able to come to the conclusions that you did, what makes you think that others have not come to similar conclusions?”

Will looked on at the woman with teary, wide-eyes. His mouth was ajar.

The sight was beautiful. There was no other way to put it.

Juliana was surprised when Will began to crawl over to her from his position by the wall. He extended an arm to her.

“P...Please...”

Juliana wished that she could have expressed her gratitude in that moment. Instead, the woman wordlessly picked up the arm of the man and bit into his soft, tender flesh. The vampire could scarcely even notice the taste of the blood this time, that crimson glory that had delivered this child to her. No, what Juliana first felt was the *passion*. With every drink that she took, more of Will's became hers, and more of herself became closer to Will. She had been so scared. So frightfully scared this whole night. Of whether or not Will would accept her. Of how great her sins would be in claiming him. But here, now, with the coruscating *love* that flowed through her, Juliana accepted it. She was willing to pay this price, to have a child of her own.

Juliana only drank a little bit, all things considered. The woman pulled herself away from his arm before could drain him of too much blood. Juliana saw the haze in the neonate's eyes. Blood still streamed down his face.

Delicately, Juliana presented her right arm, and rested it upon the lap of the child. Almost immediately, Will bit down on her wrist. Juliana could *feel* the blood course through her arteries. She felt when the blood left her veins, and dripped into the mouth of her awaiting child. She nursed him there, for a good, long while.

A different haze was coming over Will, now. Juliana saw it in his eyes, in his body. In the way he would look at her briefly. In the way that he would not fuss whenever she would brush the hair out of his face. In the way that he clung to her. But the eyes were what entranced Juliana the most. They were so innocent...

When Will finished feeding, Juliana helped him up to the couch, and the two rested there for a long time. Nothing needed to be said.

It was close to 3 AM when Will spoke next.

“What is your...what is this whole...thing...” he asked, blinking languidly. It was just a question.

“I am a Qedeshah, Will.” Juliana admitted. She looked down at the neonate before her. She did not care to hide the smile anymore.

“Qedeshah.” Will repeated the phrase absentmindedly. He was looking at the ceiling. His head was in the lap of Juliana.

“We seek children, Will. I apologize; I should have been forthright with you from the beginning.”

"It's...it's fine. You do not need to apologize for anything." Will said. The world was strange to him. He did not know how to feel.

"Our bonds are only at the second stage. If you do not wish to join me, we can part ways now." Juliana said.

Will's hand gripped into the couch, then. For a moment, the neonate felt something terrible come over him. But then it was gone, and Will was left there in the night once more.

"I see." Will said. There was more emotion to his voice than he was comfortable with.

"The bonds will eventually disappear, given enough time." Juliana said in quiet voice. "We have not yet formed a full Vinculum. I anticipate that if we stop here, both of our bonds will vanish after a few years."

Will just nodded, weakly.

The world was so strange.

"You are a Qedeshah." Will said, almost automatically. "There are other people out there who are like you."

"We are a bloodline, Will." Juliana said. "We are mothers to monsters."

"And you...take in people. You take in vampires." Will said. There was a great fog that filled the world.

"Indeed we do." Juliana nodded. She was forcing back tears, but it only took a little effort to do so. "Sometimes, we Embrace people, but that is a very sinful thing. Much of the time, we simply adopt people."

"Uhuh..." Will muttered.

"That is why we often share the blood bond with our children. Though we may not sire them, our blood and their blood can still be one, in a way." Juliana said.

"This could be the final step." Will said. Suddenly, the significance of things was beginning to hit him.

"Only if you desire it." Juliana said. She raised her voice a little, so that Will was sure to hear her. "It would not involve drinking blood, though. Traditionally, we seal our covenant in a different manner."

Will nodded.

"I. I understand." he said.

Looking at her felt so strange, he thought. There was a radiance behind the visage that he had never expected. How many years had passed before her eyes? How much had she seen? What kind of Hell had she gone through? And how had she ended up like the woman she was now?

Will knew that she was not a real angel. But in a way, she held the image of one.

Will was silent for a long time.

“...I am ready.”

Juliana looked at him when he spoke. Her voice came firmly.

“Are you sure about that? It could be a very long time before you see day or flame, dear.” Juliana joked, but she kept her eyes fixed on the neonate all the same.

Will began to sit up. He moved himself off of Juliana's lap, but he still sat close to the woman. He was looking at her intently, now.

“A long time is not forever. I am not damned.” he said.

The eyes were sparkling.

For Juliana, world went still. She felt blood drip down her face, but she did not care. She stared at Will. She stared at him for a long time.

Juliana did not say anything when she raised her right hand. She did not say anything when blood began to seep from the pores of her fingers, and she did not say anything when she brought her fingers towards his forehead. But she was smiling the whole time.

Juliana traced a circle of blood on Will's forehead. The world felt *wonderful*.

“This is our covenant, drawn in blood. You are my child, but not forever.”

Juliana finished anointing the sparkling little neonate before her. She saw the blood seep through the pores of his skin, and saw the flickering in his eyes.

Before she could see anymore of Will's transformation, Juliana picked up Will's right arm and gently bit into his wrist. She only took a little vitae, but what blood she took was enough to transform her whole world.

They were one in blood, now. Mother and son united in a love only the dead could imagine. Juliana did not know how she could possibly explain the feeling to any other Kindred. Will was like a light in her Requiem, a light that would never fade or dim. And she could see in his eyes that she was just important to him as he was to her.

Will just sort of squealed and hugged her when the process was done. He was a grown man, sure, but he was also in the presence of his mother. Juliana kissed him once, on the forehead, and began to lead the neonate outside. She told him of the Haven that she kept on the outskirts of town, a Haven that he could share in. Juliana laughed a little when Will told her that could no longer properly rent his apartment. They could move the stuff over, in time. But for now, Juliana had to bring her child home.

Will was surprised by how big the house was. It was not a proper mansion, but it was still larger than any house Will had lived in before. Juliana opened the mahogany doors to the place and led her child inside. The neonate practically gasped when he first entered the house. It was pretty and decently luxurious, of course, but more importantly, it seemed like a home. There were portraits on the walls, little knick-knacks scattered about, an altar tucked away, and countless little things that showed that the place was lived in. And it was so big and expansive and free, not like the little apartment that Will had spent so long in. Juliana let her child see much of the house, but she did eventually guide him towards

the bedrooms, for it was almost dawn, and they had had a long night. Juliana looked at some of the doors that they passed by, and remembered the generations of children that she had raised. Each one had grown up and gone on to glorious careers of one kind or another. And yet the part that Juliana cherished the most was that each one had not ended up a monster. Will would have to grow up like them too, she knew. One day, he would wave her goodbye, and go out into the night alone.

But for now, she would raise him.

Juliana stopped at a lacquered oak door at the end of the hallway. The woman carefully opened the door, and led her child into the comfortable little bedroom beyond it. It was plain, all things considered, but it would accrete things over the years, Juliana knew. Her child's Haven would be colored by him and the nights that passed. And when he left, she could still remember nights gone by.

“This is your room.” Juliana said. “I can show you more of the house tomorrow. Dawn is coming, and I would hate for us to fall into daysleep in the middle of the tour.”

“That is understandable.” Will nodded, his eyes dancing across the room.

Will looked off in thought, but then he just smiled, and looked back at Juliana.

“Thank you.”

“Thank you.” Juliana responded.

Juliana checked that the shades on the window were secure, before she left the room. Will started to get into his bed, covering himself up with multiple layers of sheets. Juliana waited for a little while by the doorway. She could spy daysleep begin to come over him.

“Good night, my little shadow.”

Juliana closed the door. She wandered through the house's halls for a long time before she reached her room, thinking and dreaming.

Time would pass. It always did.

She could live with that.

Juliana got into bed, and let day take the night.