

**TATSEL**

**I AM A CAT.** I am a dog. I am a human being. Only one of these is a lie.

I have two arms, two legs, a head, a torso. I listen to music and watch TV. I have dreams, fears, quirky personality traits.

I have fangs.

I do not burn in the sunlight.

I wish I did.

Then, I'd never have to attend Darkbright Academy. Then, I would be more like the monsters they said we once were and not this domesticated unexotic version of the killer my ancestors were.

I can still try, though. Still try and make old Vlad proud. As I look around the limousine carrying three of my kin and two armed guards with assault rifles and suicide vest that could take out half a mile radius, I realize just because I'm not cold and gray and gnarled and ugly like Nosferatu or Dracula were, doesn't mean I can't be scary. I can still be a version of the legendary monster. I look straight into the eyes of one of the guards, the biggest one who keeps a hand on his baton as if he'd rather beat one of us to death then shoot us and end the fun quickly.

I look him in those baby blue eyes of his and fucking *hiss*. I let the smell of his blood awaken the primal inside me that all us Gen V vampires keep vacant because hunger has the ability to make us full forever and who the hell only wants to eat once in their lifetime?

I hiss and break the end of the *ssssssss* into a *grrrrrrrrr!* and you know what this fucking meathead does? He laughs. He laughs at a frickin' vampire, right in my face. He's laughing so hard, his partner cracks a smile. He's laughing so goddamn hard, my comrades turn to stare out the windows, their pale skin awakening with a fireside blush that says *please stop, you're embarrassing us. And this situation is plenty embarrassing enough.*

My scalp dances; my ears burn. I shut my mouth and stare at my lap as the laughter grows more unhinged.

"The little fucker hissed at me, Bryan! Did ya' see that? AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!  
AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

I pray to Lestat and Selene; I pray to Alucard and Vlad. Give me the power to murder this punk without getting addicted to his stupid blood. I even consider going through with it knowing I'll be Bloodlinked to his corpse, Bloodlinked to dead blood, meaning certain death. At least I'll die with the satisfaction of seeing those eyes roll.

But the car stops and the doors are being flung open by chauffeurs who don't flinch at teenage maneaters mere inches from them. The other four can't get out fast enough. I slowly collect my things as the guards wheeze, trying to collect themselves.

I perch my ass on the edge of the seat and look back at giggles.

"Stephanie, right? That your daughter? I'm going to eat her heart."

And then I'm out, using vampire speed to catch up to the others as the man curses and screams and has to be held back by his partner who is now stone faced, sweating, thinking, *did he read my mind too? Does he know about little Christopher?* Fuck yeah I do, blood bag. Fuck yeah, I do.

Arune gives a little nod to me and I nod back. I wanna do so much more. Hug the little sucker, ruffle his hair, tell him how grateful I am that he beamed those idiots' thoughts inside my head. But the gratitude dies in my throat, slows to a quiet roll rather than the boil of goodwill that had been brewing in my gut.

We've stopped in front of what I swear has to be the filming location for the Harry Potter movies. This place looks exactly like Hogwarts; grand spires, towering archways, stained windows. A little piece of me feels at home and I wonder if I can steal a crypt and park the bad boy in the basement. And then that blasted sun peaks from behind a cloud cover and the shitty Georgia summer heat is barreling hate crimes straight on top of my cold head. I look at my siblings; they look back at me. Nobody says a word, not even that idiot Phelix who always has something smart or wise to say.

The rest of the school seemed to slow in time at our arrival; the students shuffle about, flashing astonished eyes and gaping fish mouths at us, gossiping about the newly arrived demigods. Some don't look as happy or excited, though. A group of students in navy blue

blazers are gathered by a giant water fountain in the middle of the courtyard, sneering and scowling at us. Some, even laughing. Phelix spots them too, smiles prettily, waves with two fingers.

“Don’t rile the Scions.” Youha sounds bored, his cool voice carrying an extra hint of sleepiness as if the prospect of our immortal fate being tied to one of these pimply juveniles was entirely disinteresting.

“I’m being friendly, big brother,” Phelix replies back. Youha’s mouth twitches, the only physical sign you’ll get contradicting his absurd uncaringness and means he’s thinking hard or annoyed.

“I told you not to call me that.” He’s frowning now as if the idea of being related to us is upsetting. But then again, he always looks slightly annoyed so maybe it doesn’t bother him anymore than how blue the sky is out here in this southern hellscape.

“Besides,” Arune says, speaking up, stepping out in front of us. He’s a tiny thing, sleight as a magic trick and tricky as a fox. “I’m actually the oldest. By about three thousand years, too. Come on. Let’s go find our soulmates.”

Rune's wry amusement is comforting. He has a plan to get us out of this. How—who the fuck knows. But the man-boy has seen the rise and fall of the greatest human empires to walk the earth. He has to be cooking something. No way the little vampire prince is about to become a slave to a bunch of TikTok dancing idiots.

We shuffle forward towards a woman who has been waving dramatically as if we could miss her purple colored wig and white powder face. I take a deep breath. It smells like teen spirit in the worst possible way.

