

Let Us In

a sequel

Preface

When I saw the american film "Let me in" many years ago, I was fascinated and excited: a vampire story that doesn't use the usual clichés at all, and actually only formed the basis for the friendship, romance, deep connection between two outcast souls. It instantly became my favorite vampire film. I learned little later that it was a remake based on the swedish original. However, I had no interest in the remake because of my passion for non-american films wasn't particularly developed at this young age, and after a brief glimpse, the original seemed too cold, sterile and foreign to me.

Now, about a year ago, I accidentally got involved with the vampire theme again and then caught up on 'Let the right one in' again. This time, my deep fascination for this story reached its climax, almost turning into an obsession. I was obsessed with the two main characters and what happens next for them. Let the right one in touched me in every way the film intended. For a long time I thought about whether I found the remake or the original was better because both films are so fundamentally different. There is now no doubt in my mind that the Swedish original is by far the better work. "Let me in" is a very good film and a successful remake. Let the right one in is a masterwork. And that's why I was so obsessed with finding out what happened to the two main characters in the end.

With these thoughts and the swedish original in mind, I wrote this fan sequel. As therapy for myself, to be able to finish the story, obsession and move on. I was so impressed by the film that while I was writing "Let Us In" I got the original book by Author John Ajvide Lindqvist and quickly read it. However, it was too late to include it here and after finishing the book I have to say that I'm glad about that. The book is significantly more complex than both films and covers a lot of background information about the characters and the 'infection'. Maybe a little too much. I really appreciate the book, but I prefer the movie.

Furthermore, while writing, I learned that the author himself had published a short story sequel to his story in a follow-up book. I haven't read 'Let the old dreams die' yet, but I looked into the relevant content and was very happy about it. Nevertheless, I hope that my short story will serve as a fan fantasy of its own, next to the author's canon, for you who is now reading this.

One last thing: you'll notice that the two main characters in this short story have different names than you might expect. This was a simple measure to address various copyright issues that might one day arise in the unlikely event of a short story publication from my side, and that's one of the reasons why I remained very vague in other respects too. Even if all that was perhaps destroyed again by this preface. Oh well.

Thank you for reading this long preface and perhaps doing the same with "Let us in". If you have seen one of the two films, you are well prepared. If not, I'm even more curious to hear what you think of the journey ahead of you.

- Yoraiko / P.Zirkel

The train had left just a few moments ago, the conductor had just passed by, but it felt like an eternity to me. As the white, blurry landscapes passed by beyond my window, thoughts of what I had left behind and what I would probably never see again occurred to me. Not much. And then I thought about what I had chosen. Everything.

As if to confirm these thoughts, a quiet, gentle knock came from the suitcase right next to me.

I had to smile a moment later and pretended to be just a little happy, until I remembered that we were alone in the compartment. I knocked back.

Little kiss.

I hoped that was okay.

Night had fallen when the train pulled into the small station of an insignificant town, where I was almost the only one getting off - with my coat, my bag and the bulky suitcase. I was breathing heavily as I stood on the track and saw ice crystals dancing in the air in front of me. Luckily there weren't many people here, it was very late and really in the middle of nowhere. So I quickly rolled my luggage towards the train station, away from the platform and away from prying eyes. There was a park right next to the building which looked quite large to me, and which probably wasn't the place to jog or rob kids. My boots dug deep into the snow that covered the park's thin sidewalks, and I

heard nothing except for the distant noise of cars and the creaking suitcase behind me. I liked that, this peace, this darkness, this distance from everything that worried us. But it was also important to keep thinking and not feeling too safe. There was a bench close by, which I decided to mark as the temporary end of our journey. When I reached it, I carefully set the suitcase down, tossed the bag up and knelt down to quickly unlock it. She shouldn't be in there any longer than she had to.

I sat on the bench and she climbed out, wearing her gray turtleneck and plain pants. Barefoot. Her black-brown curls were a little disheveled from the hours in there, but it didn't bother me. To me, she was beautiful. Her pale skin glowed a little against the snow and she looked around briefly before sitting down next to me without saying a word. We were silent for a while and I tried to think of something clever to say, but Yia beat me to it.

"Are you very cold?"

Her voice was calm and almost expressionless, as I was used to it, but I knew she was worried. And I wanted - needed - to be strong, even if I was maybe a little cold.

"*Mh-mh*. I'm fine."

I wasn't sure if that answer satisfied her, cause Yia kept looking at me. I decided to change the subject.

"What do we do now?"

My blue eyes found hers. Green. Quiet. She looked down, using her toes to draw circles in the snow, and she did so very slowly. She did, however, answer quickly.

"Usually, Fél had always bought a house at this point. It's been a long time since I was alone..." she looked at me, "...or without an adult. I don't remember exactly what I did back then."

We and our bench, our island at night, getting buried under a cold blanket by the constant snowfall. Yia didn't seem to mind, but I kept pushing the flakes out of my face because it was annoying. My bottom was freezing. I sniffed wisely, having thought properly during the journey after all.

"We are far away, but they are definitely looking for us for a while. People saw us. I think we need a house. But we can't go to an orphanage or something because then they'll find us."

Yia neither nodded nor responded in any other way. She looked at me and also my bottom.

"And you're cold. We should find a warm home for a few weeks before we move on. The town is small and you said it was far away. We'll find something."

Sniffing. I didn't want to look stupid with my nose running.

"How are we supposed to do it?"

Yia looked at me very calmly for a long time. Of course I already knew what was in the air between us and that it was actually the only way for us to find a place to stay without any problems. The thought made me feel a little colder and I wrapped my arms around myself without meaning to. Yia hung her head. She had already apologized the other day when... yeah. She had apologized for something she did because she had to. And now I was the reason she felt bad. But I had made this decision, and now I would stand by it.

"Do you have a plan where you want to do it?"

White toes above white snow. Circles, and maybe a Yia who was thinking, or just pretending.

"There's probably some house outside of town with a lonely person."

She didn't say anything else before lifting her chin and looking directly at me again, but not like she did before. Her eyes looked tired, which accentuated the dark circles under her eyes, her lips looked crooked, and in the way her eyebrows arched, I could tell she was ashamed to ask me for permission. This has been Yia's life for... a long, long time. It would remain hers and I wanted to be a part of it. I couldn't let her feel bad every time she had to drink or do something for us that I was too weak for. After all, I was the one who forced her to kill the three boys yesterday. Because I couldn't put her advice to action and be strong. It was enough. I tried to smile and nodded.

"Yeah, sure. Please don't be gone too long, okay?"

Maybe I just thought so, but I saw the corners of Yia's mouth lift for the briefest of moments. She nodded, stood up and took a step away from the bench.

"I will hurry. Now please close your eyes and count to 10, Aster."

Although I didn't know exactly why Yia wanted this, I saw no reason not to listen to her. I closed my eyes, turning the now dark night pitch-black, blocking out the snow, the distant gray-white trees and her small back.

One.

Two.

Three.

I remembered that Yia didn't know where I was. So I continued counting out loud.

"Four.

Five.

Six."

I heard a short, scraping noise.

"Seven.

Eight.

Nine.

Ten."

The nighttime park was back, as was the snow and the trees, which looked more like spindly witch arms. Yia's back was missing. All by myself, I looked up into the sky and saw a full moon behind thick, gray clouds.

I really hoped she would be back soon.

And that the person Yia found was a bad, horrible person with no family or friends. Some crook who no one liked and no one would miss.

I glanced at my watch every now and then, guessing that about forty minutes had passed, when Yia gently placed her hands on my shoulders. It didn't scare me, I even smiled broadly. Somehow I was worried about her, when it should have been the other way around. Her voice sounded soft and light.

"You were brave."

Even though it felt strange to hear it - I was a big boy after all - my heart beat a little faster now.

"Can I turn around?"

"I would prefer if not."

I almost looked at her fingertips on my shoulders, but I controlled myself and preferred to eye the witch's arms somewhere back there. The smell that I now noticed was enough for me, and Yia's voice was very quiet again during that sentence just now. She sounded like someone trying not to sound sad.

"I wanted to get back here quickly, so I... didn't clean myself. Do you think you can walk for a few minutes? I can't carry you like this."

It was really painfully cold, but I had walked a few laps around the bench to avoid freezing solid. Still, I was shaking very badly, and of course Yia knew that. But she had had a harder time. I got up to grab my suitcase and bag without turning around. I marched off with the confidence of a knight in shining armor. It was only after a moment that I heard Yia's quiet voice.

"Aster, the other direction."

I stopped and wanted to sink into the ground. Instead, I turned around, ignoring Yia in the corner of my eye, and walked forward. She followed me calmly, at a distance from which I could still hear her feet in the snow. We managed to wander along some empty

streets, past small and old houses, through a dense patch of forest and near a highway without much trouble or meeting anyone. Maybe Yia had just made sure of that, at least we suddenly turned or changed direction a few times. Finally, she said 'Stop' and we stood there, in plain sight, in front of the only house for miles around. It was a really, really old, crooked three-story building that must have been renovated at least five times. The second and third floors were slightly offset from the first, so the building bent to the left. It looked like the house of only one family, and there was just one light all the way up at the top-window. Yia sneaked next to me.

"It was an old woman who appeared to be very sick. She let me in and coughed heavily. I didn't hurt her. She's gone now and she lived here alone."

I looked up, looked further up into the small, glowing window between the crumbling, gray-brown facade. That window was a life we had taken tonight. A life that happened to have lived in the wrong place. Hopefully the woman would forgive us. I decided to not let it show and walked towards the entrance, not without hearing Yia behind me.

"Leave the suitcase there."

I did so and entered. There was a tall, dark stairwell with no working lights, which I followed all the way to the top, not caring what was on the ground floor and others. The woman must have lived at the top. When I pushed open the ajar door, the suitcase was already on the inside and I could hear running water, probably a shower, somewhere back there. Very carefully, as if I were still sneaking, I went in and pushed the door shut behind me. I wanted to use the time to look around, while I undressed and enjoyed the warmth, the absence of the now painful cold that felt like hundreds of needle pricks on my feet and face.

The apartment apparently only consisted of two rooms. The entrance area where I stood, which was separated from the rest by a partition, had a shoe rack to the right and a few smaller cupboards in front of me. Then the room on the left opened into a large living room, which was somehow also a bedroom and kitchen. In the middle there was a table with two chairs, to the left of it a single bed and in front of it, in the left corner, a television. I took a quiet step to the left and got a better look at the small kitchen behind the table that ran along the wall. Behind the partition there was only a window, a few more cupboards and next to the kitchen the door to the bathroom. And of course there was the crackling fireplace behind the bed. It was small, but I found it cozy here, more comfortable than my old apartment or any other place I could think of. The fireplace was the only light, so Yia must have turned it off. I sat down at the table and looked around for signs of a fight. It took a moment or two, but I found a few drops of blood on the

floor just in front of the stove. There was a large, still steaming pot on it, which I didn't care about. I went to the kitchen counter, searched through the drawers and found a rag that I used to wipe away the drops, then threw the rag into the sink. The bathroom door opened and Yia came towards me wearing a white bathrobe that was far too big for her, not covering her wet hair. She moved right next to me, looked at me, then at the pot. She smelled good, like flowers and vanilla.

"The woman was cooking stew. You should eat."

Yia had naturally placed a small, already filled bowl with a spoon on the table, which had probably been intended for her, and I sat down on the chair like she did, looking at her and the kitchen behind her. Analyzed the meal. Vegetables, fine. I took a sip and immediately enjoyed the warmth that flooded me, and the shiver that reached my shoulders. So I ate in silence for a few minutes with Yia just watching me, feeling a little guilty that I couldn't offer her anything. But she had probably already eaten.

Still, I felt uncomfortable, so I wanted to start a conversation. No, that wasn't the only reason for my question, it didn't leave me alone either - this single bed, this cozy fireplace, the small bowl and the bathrobe that was too big.

"How did you do it?" I asked without looking up from my stew, trying to sound casual. Yia took her time to answer.

"She was upset at how emaciated and sickly I looked and wanted to give me some of her stew before she called the police. A quick strike to the neck. She didn't feel anything and now she's in the basement."

I nodded, took a full spoonful of broccoli, a red bean and broth. Yummy. If I had to describe the taste, I would have said it was 'kind'. Yia's honest answer and the thick silence between us gave me the courage to be more curious. There were more questions that have been simmering inside me for a long time.

"Can I ask things about your past? I won't be mad if not."

No response, I ate and still nothing, so I looked up, Yia's half-open eyes were staring at the small bowl, and she was perhaps in thought. Then she looked at me.

"We're going steady, right? Then I don't want to keep any more secrets from you. If I know the answer, I'll tell you."

I smiled, I was proud that Yia trusted me so much now. And that made Yia smile too. The orange-gold light emanating from the fire to the left split her face in half, the left side engulfed in shadows, the right one brightly lit. My first question wouldn't be a smart one, and yet it was the one that needed to get out the most.

“How long have you been alive? And how did it happen?”

Now she actually twitched her lips several times, looked to the right, out of the window, and looked at me again with crooked eyebrows.

“I'm not sure... there's a scream, I think it's my mother's, at night, and then just silence and a man above me. Tearing pain in my neck, and when I woke up again, a burning sensation on my skin that drove me into the shadows.”

Yia seemed less sad as she talked about it and more thoughtful, as if I had given her a school assignment.

“Can you still remember your mother?”

Yia's eyebrows remained crooked as her green eyes sank into my bowl. She shook her head.

“How long I've been 12... what my mother's face looked like, or who I sucked the blood from for the first time... those are things you forget at some point. I think I've been around for a few centuries. But that's more of a feeling.” Yia ran her index finger over her mouth and continued to ponder while I ate, careful not to interrupt her.

“I've certainly seen a lot of places... and killed a lot of people. But most of them are memories from a life far, far away.”

The thought of forgetting my mother and father, even if I didn't always like them, was strange. If you forgot your parents and your home, what was left of you?

“Don't you remember what you did a hundred or two hundred years ago?”

Yia stood up, walked over to my red bag and took out the Rubik's Cube, which of course we had taken with us. Then she sat cross-legged in front of me again and immersed herself in it.

“Aster, do you know what you were doing on this exact day last year, and where you were?”

Her voice sounded a little sharper when she asked that, but not angry. I thought about it and came to the conclusion that there wasn't much I could say.

“Not really. I probably did something at home.”

The clacking of the cube came in quick succession. Yia was good at it, better than me.

“That's a guess from you, a feeling. It's the same with me, you know? If you live long enough, decades become just days in which you were somewhere and did something

without later knowing exactly what. If I concentrate, I can pick out individual people or events, but very few of them still matter to me.”

She looked at me, her eyes wide, as if to ask if that answer was enough for me. I nodded as I thought about Yia's words. You couldn't reverse eternity because it was, well, eternal. I got a lump in my throat as I tried to say the next words.

“Then what did you live for?”

Every now and then the fire would reach parts of the left side of her face, and in such a moment it helped me to better interpret her expression with both eyes, like now, for example, when it turned sad. This time it took the shortest time for her to answer.

“I didn't want to die because I'm afraid of it.”

She held out the cube to me. One color on each side. I put the spoon down and picked it up to twist it and try my hand at it too. I was glad to be able to distract myself because otherwise I might have cried like a weakling.

“I don't want you to die either, Yia.”

I spun it slowly, it clicked, but I made progress, managed to catch up little by little and at least match Yia's pace a tiny bit. I wanted to be better, for her. I looked up and saw a smile on her golden side. Very warm, with her dark curls all around her, and green glitter in her eyes. It wasn't just the fire that made me feel so comfortable at that moment.

We spent the rest of the night covering the only window with towels, looking through the closets for useful items, and in my case, taking a shower. Then we went to bed, me in my pajamas, Yia in her oversized bathrobe. It wasn't until she crawled under the covers behind my back that I could feel her taking it off. Her fingertips wandered over my shoulders, and it was a feeling I liked. Again, I wanted to use my curiosity to say something and not just lie there like a stone.

"Do vampires have to sleep?"

Yia's fingers moved down, under my left arm, and picked up speed. I giggled, and very quietly, she giggled too. Then she rested her hand on my arm.

"No. But it feels good, you know? Being able to take breaks. Not always being awake...alone."

If she whispered like that, it meant she didn't like to speak. I gathered my courage and turned to Yia, who was watching me intently but with a tired look. I placed my hand on her pale cheek, under her deep green eyes, which sometimes changed shape and sharpened for a brief moment. Once, just once, I stroked her face with my thumb and it felt cold and soft.

"You're not alone anymore, Yia."

We looked into each other's eyes, and for a vampire who never needed to sleep, Yia seemed very tired even now, with her half-open eyes and pale lips, but that was to be expected when the body had been dead for centuries. Then she smiled. She smiled at me and also put her fingers on my cheek and I was as happy as I was relieved that I might have cheered her up. Her face came closer to mine and she whispered.

"No, I'm not."

That night I had dreamed, images and sounds had passed before me like a creeping fog that didn't quite stop you but was too thick to ignore. Through it I saw things that may or may not have been real. The sight of a little girl screaming and sobbing under a huge, growling man, and then the same girl jumping on a grown man's shoulders and ripping his neck open with her teeth. I saw the girl as she had aged, aged horribly, until she had

become an old, shrunken woman, sitting in the corner, covered in blood, clutching her knees weeping.

The next moment, she was again a young girl with black curls, right in front of me, smiling at me. Behind her, the sun shone on both of us.

“Aster.”

I didn't wake up from the sun's rays, that wasn't possible, not at this time of year and not with the window covered up. But I heard something, very faintly at first, and then more clearly. The turning of pages. With difficulty I managed to open my eyelids and at least turn away from the wall. The glowing fireplace light was joined by two very old-fashioned looking wall lamps with glass shades, which colored the black room even more intensely orange-gold. I found it so much cozier than letting in blue, dim light from outside. Yia sat on the kitchen chair with a book in her hand. I was too tired and the room was too dark to read the title, I only recognized one word on the spine, Godwin. Yia had noticed me and gave me a friendly, smiling look.

“Good morning, Aster.”

I blinked a few times before smiling back.

“Do you like reading?”

Yia looked back at her book, let her eyes wander for a moment and turned the page before she answered.

“I'm able to, and that's one thing you don't forget.”

It was said that you don't forget to ride a bike, maybe it was the same with reading. Although a lot of older people couldn't do it that well, and Yia was older than anyone I knew, so maybe that was just her own skill. I sat up, yawned long and let my feet dangle over the edge of the bed. The first morning on the run, far away, just Yia and me. Without looking at me, she picked something up from the table and threw it into my lap.

“The postman came. I thought you might be interested.”

I didn't have to study the newspaper for long to be overwhelmed by the front page.

Bestial swimming pool mass murder still unsolved - witnesses blame little girl

The Witness, I thought to myself. Not the witnesses. And the article only said what an outsider probably already knew anyway. That the three boys were literally torn apart, as if by a wild animal. That a little girl was supposed to be responsible for this, but one would have to assume that this statement would just be a side effect of the shock. That the murders were definitely linked to the previous blood murders, if only the main suspect responsible wasn't already dead. Then there was something new: the pattern of blood spatter suggested that whatever had done this to the boys must have flown. This confused experts. Not me. At the very bottom, in a few sentences, it was stated that residents of a nearby complex of houses had stated that a girl matching the description had lived with the suspect and had now disappeared - almost at the same time as the son of the neighbor, who appeared completely distraught to the authorities, despite a farewell letter from the boy. Then there was an old photo of me.

My heart beat a little faster and a sinking feeling crawled through my stomach like a hungry wolf gnawing everything it found in there. I looked up from the newspaper and Yia's eyes were right on me. I shrugged casually.

"No one important has seen us."

Yia nodded, although she thought about it for a while longer, without looking at her book or at me. Finally she nodded again.

"Such news sometimes occur in places I have been. It will pass. We should be safe here for at least a few more days." Then she looked me in the eyes.

"But Aster, are *you* still completely sure?"

The question lingered between us for a moment in which I didn't know exactly why Yia was asking me that. My decision had long been rock-solid and irreversible. But she probably wanted to make sure.

"I can still bring you back. I wouldn't be mad."

I shook my head slowly but firmly, put the newspaper aside and sat at the table with Yia, who followed me with her eyes. I started spinning the cube.

"What will we do when you get hungry again? Then the whole apartment might smell."

It wasn't particularly nice of me to say something like that to Yia to distract from myself, but I also meant it more as a joke. As I was turning the pages, I looked over at her at some point, only to be startled by how low her eyebrows were drawn into her face and how crooked her lips seemed. She didn't think it was funny, of course not. It was stupid of me. We sat there like that for probably five seconds before she kicked me in the leg so badly that I moaned "Ouch" loudly and almost fell off my chair. I held the painful spot and looked at her blankly for a few moments before we both started laughing. A stupid, childish, goofy cackle from two people who perhaps weren't entirely normal. I didn't realize until later that I had just joked about killing people and what kind of person that actually made me. But it had made Yia laugh, so it couldn't be that wrong. As soon as we had calmed down, we both looked thoughtfully at our things, she at her book, I at my cube. Yia resumed the conversation.

"I drank yesterday and that should last me at least three days. Then I'll look for someone lonely, like this woman."

Of course, I wasn't an adult, I couldn't have helped Yia, she was on her own for the first time in a long time. And she would do it because she was strong. But then I remembered what it had caused the last time she had to hunt, and I felt the taste of metal on my lips. Yia must have noticed that I had stopped using the cube because she looked at my hands and then into my eyes. She shook her head.

"Don't worry, Aster. I'll be more careful this time."

She hadn't finished the sentence when I shook my head vehemently and turned it to show my neck between my pajamas and blonde hair.

"You can drink a little of my blood."

"That's out of the question." Yia answered me immediately with an emphasis and a sharpness in her voice that I had never heard before. Her green eyes were stern and grim as she looked at me and I lowered my gaze like a naive schoolboy.

"I'm sorry..."

"I know why you said that. You're worried about me, right?"

I was glad that her voice became lighter again at the end. Then I nodded without looking at her. If I couldn't be strong for Yia, I wanted to at least take that weight off her shoulders.

"Thanks. That's kind of you, Aster. But I would turn you in the process, and I don't know if I could stop even after that."

I had unconsciously started turning again and was staring at the red side of my cube. Turn.

Be like Yia. Immortal. Blooddrinking. Strong. Together. My eyes found hers. Yia looked at me really badly, her eyebrows deep, her eyes narrow, like a wolf's.

"No."

I nodded, understanding why Yia was so vocally against it. And we were only together for a short time. I had better grow up and be damn strong so I could be of use to her.

"You're right. I don't want to become a vampire. I want to be taller than you so I can put you to bed every night and read to you."

I also looked at her very seriously, lifted my chin, and certainly exuded all the confidence in the world at that moment. Yia tilted her head, wrinkled her eyes in irritation, and raised an eyebrow. Then, another kick. I groaned and fell off the chair. Laying on the floor, a gray-orange blanket in view. Then Yia's face, surrounded by brown curls, directly above me. And a smile.

"That's a promise. Grow up quickly and remember, Aster."

We lived in the old lady's house for another three weeks. During the day, I went shopping regularly, to explore the small town and get some fresh air; we had enough money thanks to Yia's accumulated treasures. She disappeared a total of two times during the nights and returned an hour or two later, each time with me pretending to sleep while she crawled behind me. I think she always noticed. We told each other a lot about our lives, me about my parents' divorce, the many moves and how much I liked riddles and puzzles, Yia about some of the countries she had been to and which she still remembered, or about books, which she loved. I also really enjoyed reading, so we could talk about it for hours. Sometimes when I asked a question about something in her life, her face would momentarily lose its luster and she would begin to whisper. I knew then that I had to change the subject quickly, and I got better at it over time. Yia also told me what blood tasted like - It depended on the human, but mostly sweet - told me that her ability to fly had strong limits, and that vampires weren't as powerful as in the movies, but still stronger than most , adult men. She had never met another vampire and didn't want to, because she didn't know how she would deal with it and whether it would remind her of her transformation. I understood that; sometimes, when I visited my father, I also had to think about my parents' divorce. Everyone had their demons, whether human or vampire. Eventually, the news about us and the murders had died down a bit, and people in town were starting to give me strange looks, so we decided to move on. Every now and then during this time, Yia would ask me if I was really sure, always whispering, but then I would take her hand and squeeze it, or just smile and nod. I don't think Yia was afraid of much. She was quite possibly the most dangerous predator on the planet and there wasn't much that could threaten her. But the thought of being

abandoned and left alone, forgotten and insignificant... I saw that insecurity in those questions of hers, as if I was looking in a mirror. And I would always answer that I would stay with her. That she was my everything.

My mother wasn't a bad person, and some nights I missed her as well as my father, but I knew they were okay and Yia needed me. Or I needed Yia. And nothing was more important to me than that Yia truly trusted me to never leave her. She was my soulmate, and so there was a purpose to my existence.

About six months later we had reached another country whose language I didn't speak, but Yia spoke fluently. We had a lot of money thanks to a few valuable things that Yia had taken with her and that we were able to sell in second-hand shops, so we managed to find a small village far away from the busy cities. We also found an uninhabited hut near a forest lake. We read on a sign that it was the forester's hut and hoped he wasn't planning a visit any time soon. I really liked summer here, especially because where I came from didn't really have too many warm summers. There was something very hopeful about the sun's rays that turned the lake into a brilliant diamond mirror during the day and made the treetops shine, giving me courage. Yia had less of that, but the nighttime moonlight lit up the lake just as well, and I liked sitting on the shore with her and looking into the distance so much better than doing it alone.

As dark as the night was at times, with the two of us holding hands, it was no longer frightening at all.

One particular summer evening, after we had already lived here for several days, we were sitting right next to the sea, our feet in the water, throwing stones. Yia had some unfair advantages as a vampire, but she promised not to use them, which she did. I kept punching her shoulder lightly, and she kept giggling and promising that it would be the last time. It was never the last time. That was fine with me. As a bigger, responsible boy, I was happy to let her win. Especially since I had something very difficult planned for tonight.

The sun had already disappeared behind the horizon for some time, but still colored the sky violet-purple in its phase of change. By now Yia had won stone-throwing enough times to be satisfied with herself, and she leaned her head against my chest, looking out at the lake with me as we enjoyed the peace and quiet. I tried as hard as I could to calm my beating heart and really hoped that Yia didn't hear it. Still, I couldn't help but stroke her dark hair. It was warm and soft, like a silk blanket. I shook internally. I had to keep a cool head for what followed.

"Yia, I've been thinking."

She slipped from my caressing grasp, turned and looked up at me, a thin smile on her lips.

"That's a good thing, right?"

Even if I wanted to be happy that she was now rarely but noticeably joking, this was the wrong time, so I held back the grin. The corners of Yia's mouth fell. I couldn't quite hold

her gaze, looked down at my knees, took a deep breath, then looked straight into her green, worried eyes.

"Turn me."

"Aster-"

"I know." I said a touch louder than I wanted to.

"I know you don't want to. That I become like you and suffer because of it, and regret it, and hate you. But I've thought about it long and often, and I want this. I'm sure, because that's my deepest wish, to protect you and stay with you, and that will never change."

My voice got a little louder with every word, and Yia moved away a little with every word. I could see what she was thinking in her fierce eyes.

"'Never' is a very long time, and wishes die. I don't. You don't know what eternity is because you can't imagine it." Yia stood up and took a step towards me, her face above mine.

"If in a thousand years you regret no longer being able to see the sun, no longer knowing who you are, or no longer having anyone, then it will be too late. Because eternity does not end and one can never return from it, only exchange it for the eternity of death."

I stood up too, also angry, or rather determined. Stubborn? Strong-willed? Desperate.

"But I will have you. And you'll still know who I am, won't you? I want to protect you, but I can do that better as a vampire than as an adult. If I remain human, in 50 or 60 years you will be alone again and I will lose you. I don't want that. Please Yia, I don't want that."

Tearful, almost whining. Like a child. That's how I was. The traces of the sun had disappeared, leaving the blue darkness on Yia's face. Sharp eyes. The thought of losing her or growing old alongside her terrified me. I knew I wanted to spend eternity with her. I tried to put all of that into my expression. Yia's lips were pressed together and she was glaring at me, but she said nothing, and that gave me hope. Then another shake of her head, the anger gone.

"I understand that..." whisper. She looked away. Sad.

"...but you will be a monster who has to kill people. And you'll never be able to eat your sweets again. And you will never be able to enjoy summer again. And you'll stink if you don't eat. Smell disgusting, Aster."

This time it was Yia's voice that became more pitiful towards the end, as if she was looking for more reasons not to consider it. Like she was trying to convince herself

rather than me. I knew Yia liked the idea too. But she was afraid of hurting me. Afraid of being abandoned. I grabbed her head, wrapped my hands around her hair, brought my face close to hers, as I had planned for a long time. Looked into her big, round eyes.

"You are not a monster. You are my friend, Yia. And summer, delicious sweets, other people and my smell are not as important to me as you are. Nothing is as important to me as you are."

She blinked slowly, once and twice. Her mouth opened and closed before her eyes moistened. She shook her head as much as she could with my hands, then smiled, but not happily.

"It wouldn't be right to take advantage of your feelings like that. We're together...can't it stay like that?"

I took a step away from Yia and nodded.

"I don't want to force you. If you don't want it, then I accept that. But I really want it, this life as a vampire, with you. Think about it for a while, okay?"

It was difficult for me to sound both confident and reliable, when in fact I was just terribly scared and despairing at the thought of one day not being able to be with Yia like I was now, yesterday, and the day before. And I had the feeling that Yia saw through that, as she usually did with me. Her eyes had become more tired again as she looked out at the lake, without any particular expression. A while of silence passed and I felt a pressure in my chest that I identified as a guilty conscience. I had this naive idea of being good enough for Yia, forever, and of putting pressure on her now like I had done at my apartment door back then. That wasn't right. It was my wish, not ours. I carefully stepped next to her, gently reached for her hand, and she let me.

"Please don't be mad at me. I won't mention it again."

Yia didn't need two seconds.

"You want to be a vampire? Really and definitely be a vampire?"

She looked at me the way she had looked at me when I decided to come with her. Uncertain and strict, but also hopeful. I shook my head.

"No, I want to be with you forever."

Yia let go of me and her expression darkened even further.

"You can't have one without the other, Aster. We have to be clear about that."

I nodded, had no doubts, hadn't had them for a long time. What did being human give me? It wasn't until I met Yia that I could breathe. With her I felt alive. Yia's eyes were still slightly wet and her lips were trembling more than usual. She looked away from me, away from everything. Whispered.

"I never had a choice..."

I reached for her hand again. It was important, so she could understand me.

"But I do. And I made it. Please, Yia."

My last words were slurred and strained because on the one hand I didn't want to put any further pressure on her, but on the other hand I was afraid of being left alone as an old, useless man. Yia looked deep into my eyes again, for a long time, just like when we first met. She sighed and eyed me with a fierce, determined look.

"Show me your neck."

Without thinking about it, I looked far to the left, at the edges of the forest in the distance, behind which people who knew nothing about vampires were sleeping somewhere. Would I suck one of them dry one day?

I released my neck, even pulling my blonde hair away. My heart pounded painfully against my chest, but Yia's hand calmed me as she came closer. I felt her hair on my nose, which smelled of vanilla. Her breath on my neck gave me goosebumps.

"Aster..." she whispered in my ear, "...this is the last chance to change your mind."

My mouth remained closed and my heart excited. Then I said something else.

"I'm breaking my promise... but I will stay with you. Please forgive me. "

Yia's breathing on me remained calm and even. She didn't say anything else until I felt a pulling, then burning and finally cramping pain in my throat and neck. My hands were jerking back and forth uncontrollably, it felt like a huge animal was trying to rip my head off. Yia held my hand tightly in hers, supporting me with the other as I felt dizzy and the forest began to spin, becoming one with the stars above and the black-blue, smooth surface of the lake. Maybe a minute later I heard a soft smacking sound, felt the pain subside and Yia pressed her sleeve against my neck. The strength had gone from my legs and I sank onto the grass with the help of my friend, who sat down in front of me. Her mouth, no, half her face was smeared crimson. Her pupils had become wild slits, but the soft green calmed me. Yia wanted to turn away, hide her face behind her arm, but I managed to raise my arms and touch her hair.

"Thank you, Yia."

She looked at me for a long time, her eyes trembling, unsure whether she had made the right decision, or rather whether I had made the right decision, but I had no doubts. And there was only one way for me to seal our relationship. I pulled something small, shiny from my right pants pocket so she could see it - my knife. Under her attentive gaze, I brought it to my right hand, all the while looking into her eyes. A short cut, a slight burn that was nothing compared to the pain of becoming a vampire. Then I gave her the knife.

"Let's mix it up."

After a long moment of silence, Yia blew out air through her nose and almost smiled. Just as slowly as I did, she brought the blade to her hand and cut herself. As if in a trance, with dizziness and flickering eyes, I brought my bleeding hand to her lips - and caressed them with my fingers. Looking uncertain, she did the same with her fingers - her blood tasted really sweet, even though she wasn't human.

With my very last strength, I lifted myself up by her shoulders, smiled and kissed Yia.

Just like before, we sat head to head, hands clasped together, by the pleasant water of the lake and let our feet dangle in it. I felt the cold, the warmth of the grass, the wind on my skin.

“So far everything feels the same.”

I muttered. Yia smiled wryly.

“It will take a few hours before you notice the changes. But sunlight and food would already be unbearable for you.”

I gave a casual shrug to show how cold it all left me. How cold I would soon be.

“I never liked food anyway. But I do have one concern...”

And just like that, Yia's smile disappeared, her eyebrows lowered. But that was fine. I would fix that. She tilted her head.

"What would that be?"

"Do I have to sleep in a coffin from now on?"

Yia's genuine confusion, the twitching of her eyebrows and the repeated blinking into realization, just as the first angry, then grinning expression as I started to giggle felt incredibly warm and beautiful. She threw her head back onto my chest rather roughly.

"If you make a few more jokes like that, I might consider it."

The years passed and my life changed, but then again it wasn't that different from my previous time with Yia. I could only see the sun on TV or in pictures anymore, all right, and I had to get used to drinking blood for a long time - coughing and spitting it out, throwing up on it, becoming hungry and weak. For the first few weeks, Yia gave me blood to drink with her mouth, which I found kind of romantic but also really pathetic of me. She teased me about it a few times, but I deserved it. She took a lot of time teaching me how to hunt and kill humans, because it was surprisingly difficult to kill an adult human when you were tied to the body of a thirteen-year-old, vampire or not. But over time I got the hang of it, and then two vampires were much more effective than one. The jumping and flying, like the strength, was really exciting, and Yia had had to talk me out of climbing skyscrapers in the middle of the city several times. It was too much fun. Our journey wasn't made any easier by the fact that neither of us could move around during the day - but we made up for it through our collaboration and the ever-deepening trust between the two of us. I never got bored getting to know different countries and a wide variety of people with my girlfriend, who were mostly very friendly to us. Soon I didn't find it so difficult to learn new languages, or anything really - vampires just seemed to be great students. I missed my parents every now and then and hoped that they had been able to get over my disappearance and maybe even grow together again. But frankly, at some point it stopped being important to me, just like everything else from my previous life.

Yia was with me, and that was really all that mattered.

It's such a dark night out there. The train is so bright in here. My face leaned against the window and I dully watched the fields, towns and animals we passed and which Aster and I left behind, perhaps forever. From the corner of my eye I kept glancing at him as he slept sitting up, blissfully like a baby. I had to smile every time, but I couldn't let him know that. It would make him too self-satisfied. His sleeping habits hadn't changed much after his rebirth, and otherwise too, he had remained largely the same. I envied him for that, but who knew what time would have in store for both of us and how it would shape us.

When he blinked a few times, looked around wearily and his eyes found me, a smile immediately crept to his lips and I smiled back. In doing so, he repeatedly showed me that he was happy to be with me, and that strengthened my hope that our decisions had not been wrong. We were watching the night out there together, and I found it slightly less oppressive now that we were sharing it again.

A while passed in our quiet carriage before Aster turned up his nose and leaned towards me.

"I was recently thinking back to the time we met."

I smiled, looked out into the distance of the night, to a small town far up north, to a neighborhood of high-rise buildings, to a courtyard with a small metal frame full of snow. Then I looked into his blue eyes, my eternal companion.

"It's been a long time."

He nodded without expression, lacing his fingers together, and I knew he wanted to talk about something potentially unpleasant. Aster was really sweet, but also quite transparent.

"Tell me."

He sat back and looked at me expressionlessly, and I perhaps saw a hint of doubt there. Then he whispered.

"That man you moved into the apartment with back then..."

Not so transparent after all. I wasn't expecting that, not anymore, and it didn't fail to have its effect. Aster couldn't help but notice the uncomfortable concern on my face, because he immediately leaned towards me with a softer expression.

"It's okay, it's not important, Yia. Forget it again."

It was true; I tended to forget or threw most of my twelve-years life off a mental cliff. However, this quality had its limits, which topics like Fél easily transcended. But really, from the moment he fell down the hospital, he no longer mattered, and there was no reason to keep our relationship from Aster. There was no reason to hide anything from Aster, except perhaps how much it pleased me and made my insides blaze when he smiled at me. So I shook my head encouragingly.

"No, just ask. It just surprised me. It's been a really long time."

Aster bit his lower lip, looked at me expressionlessly, turned down his nose. Hesitated because he was such a sweet boy. But my face remained, as he would say, calm and tired. Then his gaze slid outside and I suspected that he was getting himself ready.

"If I had decided differently... if I would have remained human and gotten older-"

"No."

I was a little surprised at how clearly and decisively I had interrupted Aster, but he couldn't even begin such a thought.

"Our relationship was completely different, Aster. It always has been, and I would never have let you hunt for me."

He looked away from the window, let his blue eyes meet mine and forbade his face to have a specific expression. But there was something there, the inevitable, innocent spark of curiosity. I closed my eyes for a long moment, opened them again and nodded.

"I'll tell you."

And I did that to bridge our long night journey and to give Aster certainty. I told him how I met Fél. It had happened in some small town somewhere in Italy. He was four years old, barely up to my waist, and sitting on a playground, sobbing miserably. When I joined him, he told me that he had run away from his orphanage because they had done disgusting

things to him there. That his parents had died in a fire and he had no one left, yet didn't know where to go now. As I listened to him swing by swing, I saw fragments of my past in him. I saw a small, vulnerable chick about to be shattered by the world. I should have known better, knew better, should have been stronger willed, but I offered to accompany him. He squeezed me so hard that I got a sore throat, and he almost soaked my entire T-shirt with tears. As naive and trusting as a duckling.

From then on I not only had to worry about my own nutrition, but also that of a small child. And clothing, toiletries and the like. The run-down apartments I lived in were no home for a child, but that never seemed to bother him. Every morning when I returned with food, he stood in the doorway and fell into my arms. Called me big sister. This ancient memory made me smile, and so did Aster.

Then there was Fél's education. I couldn't send him to school, so I had to take care of it. When I told Aster this, he couldn't help but grin maliciously, but I let him get away with it because, looking back, I also found it difficult to see myself as a teacher. Somehow it must have worked out, because Fél had been many things, but certainly not stupid. I made no particular effort to hide my nature, and my clever Fél had recognized what I really was before he was seven years old. Bat-Sister, as he called me. It was silly, but I kind of liked it. He understood that I was only doing what I absolutely had to, and over the years perhaps became a little... too understanding of my actions. I couldn't remember exactly when he stopped calling me sister. Sometime between fourteen and sixteen, when he became taller than me. The way he looked at me had completely changed, and it took me too long to understand the feelings behind it. Feelings that I couldn't reciprocate because Fél was my little chick worthy of protection. Yet he tried to make me understand his emotions, again and again, and all I could do was sit there like a rotting, heart-numbed ruin and tell him I was sorry. I really was. Nobody chose his feelings, and I saw how Fél suffered from his. But that passed, and once Fél accepted the facts, he no longer seemed to me like a chick, but like a wolf from a time far, far away. I still remembered his intimidating look as he assured me that he would dedicate his entire life to me and support me. As a thank you for giving his life meaning and because he loved me from the bottom of his heart. In my mind, I had done nothing of the sort, merely following a spontaneous lapse in judgment and an eons-old emotion. I loved him too, back then, somehow. I was even more against it, but his decision stood. Just like yours, I murmured to Aster. He looked at me thoughtfully and seemed sad. I could imagine why and continued to talk so as not to fall into the same thought. I assured Aster truthfully that I had spent hours, days, weeks trying in vain to convince Fél that this was a waste of

his precious life and that I would be happier if he went his own way. That an existence at my side would bring him nothing but frustration and emptiness. In the end I may have even begged him not to do this. Threw terrible things at him that I hoped would hurt him and drive him away. But they didn't do that, on the contrary, when I screamed at him with tears in my eyes, he just smiled and said that I was still beautiful to him.

Eventually, like Fél before me, I accepted his feelings and that he couldn't and wouldn't change them. And so the years went by in which we moved through the countries, he trained himself to hunt people more and more effectively, and we both distanced ourselves further and further from each other, without me being able to really say why. In his last ten years, we only exchanged a few words, and I also blame myself for eventually growing completely cold on Fél. To have only seen him as my breadwinner. I had forgotten who he was and why he did what he did.

I looked up from my knees, Fél's face blurred into Aster's for a brief, hideous moment, and I had to blink several times before the illusion passed.

Aster bit his lip and slowly let his gaze wander over the dark landscape outside. Finally he looked at me with sad eyebrows.

“What happened to Fél?”

Shrugging my shoulders, I sat up and slid into the comfortable bench of the first class compartment.

“One of his trips had gone wrong and he had burned his face to avoid being recognized. To protect me.

I visited him in the hospital and he asked me to end his life. I drank his blood and let him fall into the depths.”

I would have liked to add more pain to the dry monotone of my voice, but there was none. There was simply none left in me. I couldn't say whether Aster knew that and that's why he asked the following question.

“Were you... sad about his death? When you saw him fall down? ”

For a long moment I thought about this question, thinking about how I was back then and how I might have felt when the phase of Fél's life came to an end. One or two moments from days long ago flashed, a memory of the time I bought him an ice cream and he grinned at me with a smeared face, or the day I taught him chess. But then other images forced their way into my perception, images of Fél, who watched me sadly for hours without saying anything, who, in all his calm and balance, had to overcome occasional fits of rage and realizations of a wasted life, which he rightly took out on me.

In the end, I chose what I thought was the approximate truth to Aster, but I found it difficult to say the words.

"I was sad about not being sad."

My almost whispered sentence hung heavily in the air between us, and even the steady rattle of the train couldn't distract from it. I still felt an emptiness that had been pent up over many years when I thought of Fél, but at that moment I also felt inner pangs.

Aster's eyelids were lower than usual and the rest of his face was wrinkled. He obviously felt more pain for my chick, my lone wolf, than I could right now. He nodded slowly, as if to show that his train of thought was complete.

"Poor Fél."

His eyes avoided mine, his gaze lost in his knees, his voice barely more than a breath. I nodded too, not that Aster would see it, and threw the needles that were stabbing me into the deep, dark chasm where so many things had already disappeared.

"Yeah. Poor Fél."

So our conversation came to a quiet end, in a heavy mood that left us just watching the night out there and dwelling on our own thoughts.

Wherever you are, Fél.

I hope you don't hate me.

And that you are happy.

I really hope so.

If I ever wrote a book about my time as a human, my encounter with Yia, and my years as a vampire, we would probably have reached the final chapter by now. So much time had now passed that we had become completely different people and hardly gave any thought to what once made us who we were. What mattered to us more than before was the here and now, and in this, as far as I could tell, we were happy. As a couple, Yia and I found many strategies to reconcile our bloodlust and our childish bodies with a life among humans, for example through useful facilities such as blood banks. And the Internet. Oh, the internet. You could actually get everything there, especially fresh blood from people who obviously no longer needed it.

Our bodies could be aged at least a few years with some skillful makeup and the right clothes, and while I took care of the latter, Yia had some women at a nightclub teach her how to do makeup and style.

Because in the end, that was almost the most important criterion for our everyday life at night - a place that only really came to life after the sunset. A place like Barcelona.

Yia and I sat on a broken wall on a busy and light-filled main street, surrounded by dozens of people on corners, in parks and nearby shops, laughing together, drinking beer and paying no attention to us. For a moment I thought I saw someone with a camera, but then the person had already disappeared. It was our favorite place in the city, here in a sea of golden lantern light, with a wave of car and party noise that never subsided, offering us protection from inquiring looks. The ecstatic and exciting nightlife of Barcelona offered plenty of space for two strange teenagers who wanted to be part of a mood, a collective emotion, but wanted to be left in peace. Yia's hand rested on mine, like it did every night, and we indulged in our ritual of simply watching the cars go by and listening to the conversations of the people who gathered here from all over the world. Every now and then, we might take a sip of imported blood from the leather flasks we carried on our belts and envied the Spaniards for not being able to enjoy the delicacies of the surrounding restaurants with them. All with a smile and curious eyes.

I felt Yia's hand press harder on mine and looked at her questioningly. She showed me her teeth in a mischievous cat grin and pointed her nose at the large, glowing blue building across the main street. The nightclub. Our nightclub.

"Today? Somehow I don't feel like it." I muttered, smiling and reaching for my bottle again. Then Yia also grabbed my second hand.

"You have a drinking problem, Aster. We're going to dance now."

Her grin remained, and unfortunately I couldn't and didn't want to refuse Yia's playful, reprimanding voice. I rolled my eyes and jumped off the wall with her.

Getting into nocturnal dance clubs wasn't exactly easy for us, even in Barcelona, so after a few initial attempts we gave up on it altogether. But this one had a tempting maintenance grid right under the roof, which was easy to reach through the windows above. All we had to do was ask any drunk employee standing outside the club or

smoking a cigarette, "Are we allowed in?" and most of the time the answer was "*Well, suure.*"

As we climbed through the roof, a barred floor spanning the entire dance floor far below awaited us, way too high for us to be noticed, but low enough for the light and music to reach our senses.

Our own carefree refuge.

Yia jumped down and wasted no time, throwing off her jacket and shoes and slowly, rhythmically, starting to spin around herself, her arms outstretched, a bright smile on her lips. I also threw off my coat and shoes, grabbed her hand and twisted it gently, reached for her other hand to push her away from me and pull her back in. Her deep green eyes shone in the moving spotlights that now and then brushed her. We both really liked the music they were playing.

... Whenever I'm alone

with you

... You make me feel like I am

home again

... Whenever I'm alone

with you

... You make me feel like I am

whole again

The dance floor below us was bathed in a glittering silvery white as blue spotlights flew over it in slow, dreamy movements. The bright shimmer below us, the endless darkness above us, just the two of us, gave us both the feeling, without us having to say it, that we were there again, in the courtyard where we had met. I saw Yia's eyes thinking about it, and she didn't miss the opportunity to acknowledge me by whispering.

"What are you staring at...well? Are you looking at me? Well then, scream!"

I giggled, drowned out by the music, but Yia giggled too, and we danced, step by step, foot by foot, through the cold, glowing snow.

...Whenever I'm alone

with you

... You make me feel like I am

young again

... Whenever I'm alone

with you

...You make me feel like I am

free again

The many hundreds of people dancing below us blurred into a distant, silent mass as we did the same, the white of the ground and the blue of the lights blending into a blurry haze that only emphasized Yia's black curls and her beautiful, green eyes even more. She fell back and, arms outstretched, we spun across the bars, turning the world around us into an insignificant but pleasant whirlpool.

However far away

I will always

love you

However long I stay

I will always

love you

Whatever words I say

I will always

love you

I will always

love you

Yia pulled me in for a hug, a slow waltz before her feet picked up speed again. She touched my hair with both hands and brought her smiling face within inches of mine as we danced. So close to me that I could smell her lips and her hair, she just looked at me

and I was afraid I'd blink and ruin the moment. It could have lasted forever. Would last forever. Yia put her forehead against mine and whispered.

"Stay with me, Aster. For all eternity."

We spun. Our feet, our bodies in harmony after so many years of trust and togetherness, an inseparable unity that could only exist together. I smiled, my heart still beating. Fierce and unbending, happy and alive. I laughed quietly before nodding.

"Yes. Promised."

Yia, my beloved Yia, pulled the corners of her mouth a little higher, before closing her eyes dreamily and swaying along to the music. I did the same. As soon as I had closed my eyelids and banished everything but her from my perception, I felt a warm, complete feeling on my lips that, with a gentle finality, let any old dreams die that I might have had at some point, to make my promise to Yia true and always carry it in my heart.

The End.