

VTM Atlanta by Night 2021

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Part 1

"What does it mean to be human?" You see it all the time in fantasy movies. The villain makes a monolog on how pathetic humans are and questions why they should live when there are superior races in the world. Some brave soul dares to stand up and defend humanity. How unique human experiences are. The way they will always persevere regardless of struggles against them. Their ability to love and savor each moment like it's their last. Because it could be. Human life is fragile. I suppose you don't really know that feeling until fate toys with you a bit. A near miss car accident. An illness. Maybe it's not even your life in the balance but someone else. Regardless of what it is, there comes a point where you're reminded how little control you have of your own delicate existence. I learned that lesson very early on.

My life was never noteworthy in any way in the beginning. I had loving parents and was an only child. We weren't rich or poor. Right in the middle where we could have takeout once in a while but still collected coupons for Sam's Club. Holidays were small, but we'd splurge on a trip to a museum. It wasn't a bad life at all. Boring maybe for some people. But it was mine. At least until my mom died. I was 10 at the time. We'd been getting ready for the day when a man broke into the house. My mom shut me in a closet to keep me out of sight, but I heard the man demand something. She didn't know what he wanted. Then I heard the gunshots. My mom's body fell to the floor blocking the closet. I covered my mouth with my hands and held my breath watching her blood seep under the door. The man left after that. I wasn't found until the next day. When I hadn't come to school and my mom hadn't come to work, someone came to check on us. It felt like an eternity in that closet with my mother's body blocking me in. Protecting me in case the man came back again. I was in a daze when the police arrived. When her body moved I thought she'd woken up. You know how traumatized kids are. Despite the evidence she was long dead of course I thought she was suddenly awake. I cried out to her and the officer opened the closet seeing me inside. I think he had kids my age. The look in his eyes was one of sympathy. He didn't want to have to explain to me my mom hadn't gotten up on her own.

Dad had been on a business trip and flew home as soon as he was given the news. I had been taken to the hospital to get checked out. The officers couldn't question me without a guardian present. Not that I was talking to anyone. Not even the case worker assigned to me until my dad could get there. I remember laying in the hospital bed waiting to wake up and it all would be a terrible nightmare. Such a fragile thing the human mind is.

The case still remains unsolved. There was no evidence left behind to lead to any arrests. Another cold case for the books. Dad never quite recovered from the shock. Neither did I really. A fun and extroverted child full of questions and wonder of the world became introverted and reclusive. I had few friends and avoided school clubs. I spent my time in the local library losing

myself to books fictional and non. My interests turned to photography and film. Preserving life in the moment. Because we never knew when it would be changed or be snuffed out. With that focus I went to study at a local arts school for digital media before going to Hollins University for film and cinematography classes. My goal wasn't to be a director or producer but instead to work on large scale projects. To be one of the million names in the credits no one stayed to watch unless there was an after credits scene.

That was the thing with me. After everything about me changed as a kid, I never really found myself again as a teen or an adult. I existed but I didn't live. Something in me died that day and remained dead. I was a ghost floating through the crowd no one noticed. Once people started questioning their identities, both gender and sexual, my few friends wondered if that was my problem. I hadn't discovered my true self yet and needed to broaden my view of myself like some of them had. Since they felt more fulfilled, maybe I could too. They didn't understand I knew 'who' I was. Just not 'why' I was. It's a weird feeling to go through life wondering what your place in it is. I had no real direction in life. No calling. I was just... there. A side character in my own story. I couldn't even say it really bothered me on a daily basis. Just every once in a while I'd feel myself slipping into the aether a little more than normal then find a project to work on until it went away. I'm not the only one that happened to, right?

Once I graduated from HU, I made the bold decision to move to Atlanta. There are two big film industry areas in the United States. California and Georgia. Of the two, I picked Georgia. For one, it was closer to family. Second, Atlanta boasted many blockbuster movies and award winning TV shows. So, I moved in with my aunt that hosted Air BnBs which I promised to help keep clean while I applied to film studios in the city. It wasn't long before I fell into another routine. Get up, clean one of the homes, go to an interview to be told I didn't have enough experience, and go back home. If it wasn't late, I would walk around and take pictures to upload to my blog. That eventually allowed me to earn some income as a freelance photographer. Who knew candid shots of the city from someone who was basically invisible could connect to people. Perhaps reading those comments was one of the first times I felt a connection to something. It was the beginning of a little sense of hope I'd done the right thing.

Part 2

I was at home looking through my latest round of night life footage when I saw something I hadn't expected. What had appeared to be lovers having a moment to the side of a busy bar for a moment looked different. Not that it was my business what they were doing, but zooming in I had to tell myself I was seeing things. A man had a woman up against the wall and appeared to be kissing her neck and she was definitely into it. But the next shot he was back a little and there was... blood? The next shot he was turned a little and I swore I saw blood around his mouth and... No. Not fangs. There was no way. This had to be a couple people playing around. Larp. Right? Though I told myself that a few times, I went through previous night shoots and found that same man with someone else a week before. More than once.

Wanting to put this to rest, I did the only sane thing a person could do. Google vampire larp groups in Atlanta. To my surprise there was more than one. So that was the reason. People out in the world playing vampires. Both women were clearly going for whatever he was doing so consenting adults doing vampire things. Case closed.... but didn't larp groups do things in designated areas for story purposes and not alone? Why was I like this? Maybe my mom's cold case made me my own worst detective to never have anything be so mysterious again. How far was I willing to pursue this?

As much as I hated to admit it, the fact my mother's death was tragic and unsolved weighed heavily on me. I hated mysteries that couldn't be solved. Growing up I couldn't watch unsolved crime shows or even fantasies where there was no resolution. Something about the unknown made me crawl inside. Someone was out there guilty and lying about it and not getting caught. Anything like that didn't sit well with me. Even now 20 years later. I'd done years of therapy and each therapist said it was some manifestation of my trauma. I didn't need a degree to know that, but it didn't make things any easier. Now I had this weird mystery that should be a breeze to dismiss. And yet, something about the pictures stayed with me. I'd seen plays and productions. Worked behind the scenes in the local theater group. When you are acting, you have to be aware of the camera or the audience. These two had no idea they were being watched. There was something completely organic about the moments I caught on film. If this was foreplay, they were really into it and made it as real as they could. Now I was curious.

Knowing it was a bad idea, I collected my equipment and waited for the sun to start to set before I set out into the heart of Atlanta again. As I walked along the sidewalk, I couldn't help but glance around for the man in the photos. No, vampires can't be in the sun. He wouldn't be out yet. If he was full immersion he'd wait anyway to play the part. I had time to get into position. Both times I caught him on film I was in a specific spot. The balcony of a local coffee shop. I followed my usual route around the back and up the fire escape. From there it was a step over the upper air conditioning unit and over onto the balcony. After covid it was shut down and no one came up here. Only the lower floor was open to patrons. No one ever noticed me here. I took a seat and looked around at the busy city. The orange rays of the setting sun bounced off the sea of glass windows all around me. The noise of the street below seemed to fade a little with distant sirens carrying on the wind. There was a certain ambiance to Atlanta like most big cities you just got used to living there long enough. It was almost comforting.

I pulled out my camera and took some shots of the area as the sun set and darkness settled upon the city for only a moment. That's when another sense came alive. Neon lights blazed one by one calling commuters to stay a little longer. One more drink. A pizza for the road. Southern desserts to take home. Call your friends, this bar is open until 3am. Daytime Atlanta was one thing. Night time Atlanta was another. It was darker and a little more dangerous. The business suits walking around turned to baggy jeans and gang symbols. The fashionistas turned into tough street girls who'd seen a thing or two. Fancy cars with lights blared music with lyrics I'd never utter cruising the roads. Every once in a while you'd hear someone shouting and another siren. Those who lived here knew when and where to be and how to avoid danger for the most part. One reason why I picked places out of the way.

I continued to take some pictures as one image of the city blurred and became another. As I was looking through my shots, I saw him. *Him*. He was with another woman leading her to the same spot as before. A routine. Different girl. This guy got around with the same tricks. Maybe that was a dating thing. I wouldn't know. I had very little experience when it came to boys. Someone once asked me out in college but stood me up. Apparently it had been a dare or something. Fun times. Back to this guy though, he might be a player but he at least showed up. I took a few more shots watching through the lens of my camera as he did his vampire act. What struck me was the look in the woman's eyes. She was an amazing actress to appear to glaze over as he spoke to her. He kissed her neck with the biting and seemed to be into it like the others. Another willing partner. Just as I was about to lower the camera, I saw blood. Blood on his mouth. He licked his lips seductively and I knew for sure I saw fangs this time through the lense. He then licked the woman's neck and I didn't see any wound. Was I expecting one? Good lord this was a larp thing! What was I hoping to see? I shook my head and put my camera away. I'd seen enough and knew if I did any more digging it would be considered stalking. That was something I didn't want to be accused of.

Making my way down the fire escape, I heard noise in the alley below me. I looked around but didn't see anything. I felt... uneasy though. That feeling you're being watched. I didn't like it and climbed back up and onto the cafe balcony again hoping the feeling would pass. Atlanta's usually warm air chilled a little and I pulled my hoodie sleeves lower to cover my hands. I didn't like this at all. Turning around I tried the balcony doors but they were locked from the inside.

"Of course," I sighed and walked around the other side of the balcony area to see if there was a way down. There was another building right up against the cafe on that side. It was going down the fire escape or being stuck up here all night. Part of me wanted to stay. This kind of uneasiness gripped my heart. I couldn't explain it. But I had to get down from here and go home. I'd seen what I set out to and the mystery wasn't mine to explore anymore.

Suddenly, the feeling lifted and I released a breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding. I quickly moved to the other side of the building and climbed down the fire escape. My steps took me to the sidewalk in record time. Only then did I feel at all safe. Safe for Atlanta anyway. The man and his friend were gone and I walked the opposite direction of where they'd been. Thankfully, I reached my home safely. As usual, I uploaded the images and started going through them. Everything was as I saw until one of the images caught my attention.

"No... why are your eyes glowing?" I whispered realizing there was yet another layer to this mystery I had no reason to be trying to solve.

The image in question was him 'savoring' the blood around his mouth. His eyes were an unnaturally pale shade of yellow and reflected the neon light of the bar. I sat there in my chair staring at the image trying to think of any rational explanation. Contacts? There was no tell tale sign of an opening for the pupil like cosmetic contacts. And no contacts reflected light like a cat. This was not normal or natural. I needed to drop it but I couldn't. I just couldn't. I wanted to know the truth. Special FX makeup or... wait was the alternative? Real vampires? That was

crazy. Not even possible. Not. Possible. So it had to be a movie thing. Maybe an actor in town showing off with stolen accessories.

With that in mind, I texted a couple connections I'd made down here asking about any vampire films. I'd just said I'd seen someone with an impressive get up and thought maybe a shop was missing some FX items. With the texts fired off. It was time for bed.

Part 3

Over the next few days I made contact with some people in the makeup artist business with no leads. Maybe the guy made things himself. So off to YouTube I went. There was no way to make safe custom contacts, but fangs were easily made. Especially with what was available around the city. Fake blood obviously was also easy. Biting a small gel filled pellet is an easy way to fake biting a person. The more I tried to explain away what I had seen, the more doubt started nagging in the back of my mind. And what do I do when my brain won't leave me alone with little details? Google.

When you type vampire into Google, you get over 407,000,000 results in an instant. From Dracula, to Spike, to Blade, to Twilight, to Moonlight, to the Vampire Chronicles, media has every possible genre you could want. Vampires as sexy lovers to mindless monsters. The lore is also divided. Garlic, holy water, crosses, stakes made out of ash, sunlight, beheading, there are a million ways to kill a vampire. Does a bite turn or do you have to drink blood? They can enter at will, no they have to be invited in. Hypnotism. Coffins are necessary, any dark place is fine, there must be soil from their native land or they can't sleep. Nothing is consistent when you try to figure out what is 'real' or 'fake' in the mythos of the undead.

What surprised me was almost every country and culture has a version of vampires. It's world wide and ancient despite these cultures never meeting. That oddly fascinated me. Consistency in some respect around the world. And at different periods there seemed to be booms of vampire sightings. Europe especially. Most could be explained away with burial customs and illness but some... some were just weird. And people took it so seriously they'd mutilate bodies in order to keep them from becoming a vampire. One story of a grave discovered in Romania showed a skeleton that had been prepped to keep a vampire at bay. In recent history a remote village dug up a man's body and took his heart out because they feared he would rise. True story. Medieval legends claimed redheads would turn to vampires when they died.

A soft smirk turned my lips as I twisted a copper lock of hair around my fingers as I read that. "Oh no."

The more I read the more calm I became. While a fascinating subject, the man I saw must have been enthralled by the media portrayal of vampires and decided he wanted to live it. There was a whole subculture about it. I'd discovered that too. The pictures were worth a thousand words on the topic. Some of these folks went all out too. Not quite to the realism this guy did but close enough. It was possible and many people did it. I was not interested in experiencing the dark

culture of the vampires though. It was often hypersexualized and that was not my thing. But the topic was fascinating and worth reading up on.

With that in mind, I scheduled an Uber and took a trip to a local branch of the library. To be honest, I could spend days here. It was usually quiet and relaxing. Plus amazing wifi. I tend to upload and blog here when possible. My current fascination of course was not going online for the sake of safety. Today's visit was strange though. I had that same feeling like... I was being watched. No matter how subtly I looked around, there was no one. Hoping to block the feeling out, I put in my ear buds as I wandered the isles of books looking for vampire references that weren't adult romance books. I wanted facts darnit. Finally, with an armful of random volumes, I took a seat on a couch to read.

Suddenly, I heard a voice behind me. Faint through the music in my ear buds.

"Caroline?"

I ignored the voice until I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around and was face to face with a woman about the age my mother would have been were she alive. The woman stared at me for several long moments and I felt my heart skip a couple times. There was something in her expression. Sorrow. Grief maybe. I knew that look. It was the same look in my father's eyes. In mine often. Why was she looking at me like that though?

I slowly pulled out an ear bud. "I'm sorry, were you talking to me?" I asked, still unable to look away from her gaze.

The woman's expression softened a little. "I'm so sorry. You.. you look like my daughter I guess I thought I'd seen a ghost," she said, her tone smooth like flowing water. It was almost hypnotizing. She gracefully took a seat near me but not too close.

It was then I removed my other earbud. "A ghost? She... passed away? I'm sorry," I replied with understanding in my tone.

The woman nodded. "An illness doctors couldn't cure at the time. You understand loss too. It weighs on your heart. I can tell by your eyes."

I slowly nodded. "My mom. It was a long time ago."

"But it never leaves you. Not quite," she said and primly placed her hands in her lap.

Her posture was definitely of someone of higher class than me. Atlanta boasted of American royalty of sorts. Her eloquent speech pattern helped drive home that idea. Pale skin and blond hair so fair it was almost white neatly coiled back into a twist. Her clothes were odd for the time of year and Atlanta in general. She wore pressed slacks and a long sleeved shirt with a high collar. In the center of her collar was an emerald brooch with some kind of ornate design on it.

Family crest maybe? In all she seemed out of place like one of those old movie stars who got lost on the way to a party.

“You’re right. I’m sorry I reminded you of your daughter. Must have been a shock,” I said, trying to pull my mind back to the moment.

“It was, but sometimes a little reminder isn’t bad,” the woman said with a smile that felt a little... rehearsed. Like she knew she should smile to make me feel less awkward and so she did. There was little warmth behind it but still felt sincere. Enough. She glanced at my book selection and raised a delicate brow. “Research or casual study?”

“Oh,” I laughed almost nervously and closed the book I’d been reading. “I saw some folks dressed as vampires and it led me down a whole Google rabbit trail starting with costume makeup down to lore.”

Time froze for a moment as she seemed to try to decide what to say next. Again, her interaction was calculated. Precise. She didn’t blink as she studied me and I started to feel that sensation again. A cold sensation that gave me goosebumps.

“All myths have a grain of truth in them. Especially the ones that persevere through time,” she finally said. “But it’s hard to find facts from fiction sometimes when there are so many false leads.”

“I’ve noticed that. I’m sure I’ll find something else to study soon enough and it won’t matter,” I said and stood up gathering my books to decide which I wanted to check out and which I would put back. “Thanks for the advice and I hope the rest of your evening goes well.”

“Where did you say you saw the vampires?” the woman asked. Her tone took on a slight edge that made me stop.

“Oh... downtown. I can’t remember where exactly,” I replied not wanting to get anyone in trouble.

She studied me and nodded. “My name is Gloria DeRochelle,” she said. “I should have introduced myself earlier after calling you the wrong name.”

“Eve,” I replied, not wanting to give her my whole name. Just in case...

“Eve,” Gloria said slowly. “Beautiful name. Enjoy your books and thank you for indulging me with conversation.”

I nodded and returned a couple books to their shelves before checking out the ones I had in hand. My Uber couldn’t come quickly enough. I needed to get out of there. Something about Gloria was off and I couldn’t quite put my finger on it.

Part 4

The next few days just felt off. I couldn't explain it. Trying to ignore the creeping sensation within me, I worked extra hard cleaning the Air BnB units and spent some time out at the Atlanta Zoo to take pictures in broad daylight for a change. Something told me to avoid the city for now. I did notice the feeling of being watched didn't happen during the day, but if I was out at night... Sure you're surrounded by people in the city all the time. This feeling though was different, and I couldn't quite shake it.

I spent my evening home alone in my upstairs 'apartment' editing photos when a breaking story caught my attention on the news. A man had been found murdered and strung up on the side of a building. He'd been tied and drained of blood. I looked up from my work. The name didn't sound familiar but the picture they showed...

"It's him," I whispered in shock.

The man I'd taken the pictures of was the victim. Of course they used a normal looking picture of him for the news story. It was horrifying to think of what he suffered. I couldn't help but wonder if some of his larp friends went too far in their game play and decided to make a scene out of it. I started googling the story and found some pictures people had taken at the scene before the police covered it up. He was just hanging there on the fire escape wrapped in a chain. His clothes were soaked in blood from a wound to his neck. He looked...more dead than I expected. Not just dead but almost shriveled up. His skin was gray and the look on his face was contorted. It was horrible.

"Where did you say you saw the vampires?" I heard Gloria's question replay in my head. My reply had been vague. Was this a coincidence? It had to be. There was no way that glamorous woman was strong enough to do any of what was being reported.

"I guess that's one mystery that will remain unsolved," I said, knowing better than to get involved in such a mess.

Still, I felt bad. I'd spent days trying to figure out this person and dug way too deeply for my own good. Now I had vampire books on my desk and a search history that would make my therapist question my sanity. Now he was dead and honestly I knew no more about him than before. Death was tragic enough. Sudden, unknown death was even worse.

I looked at the dozen or so images of the 'vampire' I'd been hunting and one by one deleted them. I didn't need those images being the remaining evidence of his life. He should be recognized as who he was and not the image he portrayed. Whatever his reasons. Tomorrow, I would return the books too. The topic of vampires needed to be laid to rest for good. That would be the end of it.

Part 5

Though I had hoped to get to the library early, an unexpected issue with one of the units my aunt owned took up most of my day. I didn't get to my destination until evening. The library was quieter than usual today. I shook off the spookiness and returned the books to the front desk.

"Finished already?" the librarian asked, looking at the books. "You must be a fast reader."

"I lost interest part way through," I replied with a shrug.

"Well, the good thing about the library is there's always something else to read," she said with a kind smile.

"Thanks, Angela," I said, and wandered off to find something else to take home.

It was easy to get lost in a library. There was something hypnotic about the rows of shelves and colored volumes. Being surrounded by knowledge was addicting when you had a lot of time on your hands. I had no social life so my free time was taken by diving into various topics. Whatever my current obsession was with. Right now, I needed a new one.

"Eve, how good to see you again," came a smooth voice from behind me that sent a shiver down my spine. Gloria.

I slowly turned around and attempted to avoid her gaze, but I couldn't. Her pale eyes caught mine and I was a prisoner to them. Like some force was holding me. The look in her gaze was more intent today. Like she'd made up her mind about something, and I was included in whatever it was. I felt this sinking feeling in my soul that something wasn't right.

"It's dangerous in the city right now. You didn't walk alone did you?" she asked in a silky tone, and took a step closer to me.

"I got an Uber," I replied. "There's a murderer out there right now. That guy on the news dying like that. That's what you mean, right?"

Gloria's red lips turned upward into a subtle smile that seemed a lot more natural than her previous attempts at our last meeting. There was something sinister behind this one. I took in a quick breath and her demeanor changed immediately. The predatory look softened. Was she trying to put me at ease? Again, calculated. I didn't like it.

"Why don't we have a chat at my place?" she suggested. Her gaze became more intense and I felt myself nod even though my mind was screaming no. My answer was no! "Good," Gloria offered her hand to me and I slowly reached out to her against my will. Her hand was like ice and strong like iron. I could only imagine how it would feel to hold a cyborg's hand. Soft fake flesh hiding a metal skeleton. What was going on?!

Gloria led me out of the library where a car was waiting. One of those old cars from the mobster movies. If I wasn't so scared about being freaking kidnapped I might have admired it more. What I didn't understand was why I couldn't control myself. My mind was mine, but my body wasn't. It felt like being a puppet. Her will overpowered my movements.

"I know you're scared," she said once we were inside in the back seat. Gloria stroked my cheek with her frigid fingers and tucked some of my auburn hair behind my ear like a mother would a small child. "But you don't need to be. You're safe with me. Safer than out there with kindred feeding in the open for you to see," she said with a hint of disgust in her tone.

"What are you?" I whispered as fear settled into my voice. This woman was mad. She had to be.

She smiled at me like I should have known better then turned her gaze to the window. "All in good time, my dear."

I leaned back against the seat and stared out the window. The city was alive as it always was around us as we inched our way in evening traffic. This was the city I'd come to to maybe feel alive. To find my place somewhere in the world even if it was only in the background. Suddenly, I wondered if I was even going to live at all. If something happened to me, my dad would crumble. It was already hard for him being states away. If I died...

In that moment I felt her hold on me break as my will to live surged. I pushed the car door open and ran. The one good thing about traffic in Atlanta was it crawled at times. Me leaping out of a car was less action movie and more really easy once I had control of my own body. If I was going down, it wouldn't be without at least an attempt at survival. The streets were lined with homeless people and drunk partiers. They would be no help. I ran as quickly as I could towards one of the busy restaurants. Public areas were the safest from kidnappers. Just as my hand reached the handle, I was yanked back with considerable force.

"Let me go!" I screamed as a giant hand covered my nose and mouth.

I was dragged back to the car. The onlookers wanted nothing to do with what was happening, and did nothing. They did nothing! Not their problem. Now I realized why so many people got away with murder here. No one wanted to get involved. I prayed at least one person would call 911 for me. Just as my lungs began burning to air, I was tossed into the back seat with Gloria and the man that grabbed me returned to the driver's seat. The doors locked. I lay gasping on the seat and trembling in fear. What did this woman want with me?

"I didn't expect such spirit, Caroline," Gloria said in a slightly scolding tone.

"I'm not Caroline," I replied.

"Right," she sighed.

“Who are you? Why are you kidnapping me?” I asked. If I was going to die, I may as well get answers.

Gloria looked at me and captured my gaze. This time I went numb. My whole body. I couldn’t move at all like I’d been frozen in ice. “You just have to know everything don’t you? So many questions. First vampires and now me? All will be answered when we get home.”

Home? Her home I assumed. Not mine. I felt dizzy and so very cold. I felt my mind slip and I passed out as the car continued driving who knew where.

Part 6

When I woke, I was stretched out on a couch in an old luxury apartment. The architecture hadn’t been touched but well maintained over the years. Not a new build. It was decorated in an eclectic style of various eras gone by. Somehow it all worked together. There were paintings and old photographs and Gloria in period dress. The biggest was over the mantle of the fireplace. A family portrait. Of her, a man, and... oh good lord. Me. Well, a girl who looked like me. Younger than me but still a grown woman. Her hair was darker than mine and her eyes were blue not green like mine were. But if you saw a glance of her and then at me, the resemblance was uncanny. They looked like the picture perfect Victorian family.

“You see how I could have mistaken you?” Gloria asked, seeing me awake and staring at the portrait.

“Yeah, but you didn’t have to kidnap me,” I said.

She laughed. Laghed! I didn’t see what was so funny about this whole situation. My expression must have told her so.

“My dear, you’re just a human. Of course you don’t understand,” she said and set down a tray with a warm drink and some kind of sweets.

‘Just a human’. I stared at her for several long moments then shook my head. “No. No, this is a dream. This isn’t real. You’re not what my brain is saying you are.”

“You’re a smart woman, Eve,” she said and took a seat beside me. “You’ve seen behind the masquerade and will soon be part of it. I’ll explain everything after you’ve been embraced.”

“Embraced? What are you talking about?” I asked, feeling my anxiety starting to kick in. My eyes darted around the room for an escape but there was none. We were up too high from the view out the window and the driver stood by the door.

Gloria cupped my face in her frigid hands and kissed my forehead. “When I lost my daughter I was told by a medium I would see her again someday. I gave my very soul for that opportunity

and searched for her until I found you. It only took a couple hundred years, but now we can be a family again. My Caroline...”

Tears fell from my eyes as true fear gripped my heart and soul. This woman was mad. Truly insane. She was going to keep me here and pretend I was her daughter?!

“Please let me go. I won’t tell anyone about you, I promise. Just let me go back to my life. I’m sorry for your loss, I really am. I lost my mom and-” I was cut off by her finger on my lips.

“You see? It’s fate. I am your mother now,” Gloria said. Her eyes started to gleam and suddenly I saw her fangs. Her whole ethereal appearance shifted and she wasn’t quite the woman she was before. Like a distorted mirror. Suddenly I was horrified at the monster before me. I didn’t even have time to scream before her fangs were at my throat. I couldn’t move, I couldn’t speak. She held me down on the couch and my body betrayed me, unmoving, overtaken by the sensations flooding my senses. Tears fell from my eyes as I stared at the ceiling feeling the life draining out of me. The numbness in my limbs turned to a deeper chill like being submerged into ice water. The feeling slithered through me inch by inch until I was overwhelmed by it. Was this what death felt like? Was I dying? I was so scared. Mom..

“Drink,” a distant voice told me as my consciousness floated in the cold darkness that surrounded me. “Drink and you’ll live.”

The command was strong and I was unable to disobey. Something rich tasting passed my lips and I drank it deeply. I wanted to live. If this would help me, I would take it. Not that any of it made sense. It was a dream. It had to be. Too many late nights reading those books. Vampires weren’t real. My imagination had just run away with me. I’d wake up and it would all be over. It would all be over...

Part 7

When I awoke next, it was like someone was slowly turning up the volume in my head. But not just near me. Everything was louder and clearer. Remember when you put on headphones for the first time and suddenly you heard things you never had before in a video? The ambiance of a room. All the small creaks and moans of the building settling, the faint whistle of wind, and distant voices of people in other apartments. But it was more than that. I could hear the fabric of the sheets around me rustle against itself as I began to stir. The slick satin sounded very different than the cotton of my hoodie or the thick jeans I wore. Details I’d never noticed before.

I sighed groggily and sat up. I was in another room. An elegant bedroom simply decorated with dark wall paper. Like the living room there was a fireplace though an electric one. It’s light cast shadows around the room. It was the only light source and yet, the room was perfectly visible to me. No shadow concealed anything. It was an odd feeling. To be honest, I felt odd too. Kind of like waking up after having a really bad cold and you finally feel better. Stronger. Like you forgot what it was like to feel healthy after being sick for so long. Exactly like that.

Then the memories of just before I passed out came flooding back. Was I still kidnapped by Gloria? I rushed for the door and actually crashed into it. Hard. Somehow I'd gone faster than I anticipated. But hitting the old wooden door didn't hurt. I reached for the handle and heard it click. Locked. Looking around the room again I realized something else strange. The window was heavily draped. Not just blackout blinds. I pulled back the curtain and gasped seeing the entire window was actually bricked up. Who would do that?

I marched over to the door and started pounding on it. "Let me out!" I screamed.

"I'm sorry, Miss Eve, but it's not sundown yet. You must remain confined until it's safe," a man's voice replied from outside the door. The driver no doubt.

"Safe?" I asked.

"Safe," he replied and said no more.

Returning to the bed, I laid back down. What could he possibly mean? With a heavy sigh I got up again and opened the other door in the room that led to the ensuite bathroom. There were towels laid out and a dress. An old timey one that reminded me of the picture of Caroline. Definitely wasn't going to wear that for my captor. I did shower though. I felt... gross. Shedding my clothes, I cleansed myself thoroughly and dried off with the towels provided. The first time I saw my reflection I was a bit taken aback. It was me but... not me. I stared at my reflection hard. It was like someone had put one of those beauty filters on. Not the crazy Snapchat ones, but the Instagram ones that alter you just enough you look like the best version of yourself but you know it's a lie. I touched my flawless skin as if every acne mark I'd ever had never existed. My hair, even damp, had some volume and my long copper waves had lost their frizz. My eyes were the biggest change. My dark green had turned a much paler shade. Unnatural and kinda creepy the more I looked at myself. Then last of all, I saw the fangs. Subtle double canine and incisors like some of the references I'd seen in media while doing my research.

"No no no... this is a joke. This is an absolute joke. I'm hallucinating or still dreaming," I said to myself and backed away from my reflection in the mirror.

I grabbed my clothes and saw the blood on the collar of my hoodie. Bringing it to my nose I breathed in deeply of the smell. The act was completely a compulsion I didn't understand. The smell of it, even my own blood, caused a burning in my throat. I released a slow breath trying to come back to my senses and put on the clothes even though there was a faint smell of death on them. I refused to play dressup for Gloria.

"This game has gone on long enough!" I shouted and reached for the door to yank it off its hinges when the driver opened the door voluntarily.

"It's safe now, Miss Eve," he said and stepped aside.

My burst of rage quelled for now and I walked down a long corridor before finding myself in the living room once again. Gloria was there playing an old piano in the corner of the room. She stood up and looked me over.

“Oh how beautiful you are,” she said in approval. “Being one of the kindred suits you.”

“I don’t understand,” I said. “What happened to me? What did you do?”

“Wasn’t it obvious?” Gloria asked, amusement teasing her tone. “I made you like me. Like that boy you were following.”

“Like...” I stood silent for several long moments. The ‘fake’ vampire who ended up dead. He was a real one. This was all real. I felt the room spin and I sat down on the floor, my hand going to my throat as the burn intensified with my heightened stress.

“Of course, I should have expected this. You read so much about us I assumed it would have made a little more sense. Though I suppose knowing fact from fiction is rather hard,” she said and glided over to me as if her feet never touched the ground. She wasn’t even pretending to be human now. Gloria was a vampire. Now I was too. “Come,” she said, her command and offered hand made me take it and she assisted me to the couch. “We have much to discuss.”

Part 8

That night she explained the basic principles of the vampire way of life. Though she only used the word ‘vampire’ once. The rest of the time she used the term ‘kindred’. There were so many other terms I was trying to process. Gloria explained the most important rule was never to reveal yourself to a human. Something she obviously ignored then tried to fix by turning me. Her desire for a replacement Caroline had driven this woman mad with grief. As soon as she’d seen me, her decision to turn me had been cemented.

“Aren’t there some kind of rules about turning? I didn’t want this. You didn’t even ask me,” I said.

Gloria smiled softly and stroked my cheek. I pulled away and her expression became a little more sad. “The order I am aligned with leaves it to our discretion. You’re the first I’ve turned in a century. The current overlords frown upon it without permission but I was owed a favor,” she explained. “Your little project started because a vampire exposed themselves. He broke the masquerade even if it wasn’t intentional. I took care of their little problem. The Camarilla will spare me for making a vampire I fully intend to train and keep on the correct path.”

“You’re insane,” I whispered, not believing what I was hearing.

“No, I’m... dedicated to my family’s memory,” she replied and stood. “Now.. we must get you fed.”

The human in me gagged at the thought. "You mean blood?" I asked.

"Of course. What else did you think we fed from?" she asked like I was a silly child asking a stupid question. "I promise. The first taste will change your mind."

The thought of drinking blood created a conflict within me. My two selves that would battle for the rest of time. The human side of me was of course disgusted. My humanity was still fresh being only hours dead. Good lord that sounded odd thinking it so directly. The vampire side of me knew blood would be the only thing that could quench this thirst and was eager for it. Gloria saw the look on my face and the slightest hint of pity touched her expression but not for long.

"I won't make you drink fresh blood just yet," she said. "As much as I'd love to take you out and let you hunt. That will come later once you have more of an understanding of yourself. Can't have you go the way of your little friend."

Gloria left the room and I heard her rustling around in the kitchen. I was still trying to get used to this hearing. Now that I was out of my quiet room, there was so much more to take in. I could hear the city around us despite the windows being shut and the heavy draperies concealing them. I was surrounded by noise near and far but it all registered. The scents were another thing. All of the old artifacts in the house carried a myriad of smells themselves, but I could smell what the neighbors were cooking. It really was incredible. Then I smelled something else. Blood. Gloria returned from the kitchen with two glasses filled with dark red liquid. Again the human within me wanted to vomit at the thought of drinking it. The vampire though wanted to down the whole thing. This would be my life. The only good thing was this wasn't from a person. Well, it was, but I wasn't attacking and hurting anyone. She handed me the glass.

"Take a very small sip. The beast inside of you will want to rush it. Feeding can cause a frenzy especially for a fledgling like you. You have to be careful not to allow the beast to rise. An eternal struggle we all must face and find our personal ways to cope," she said and elegantly took a seat.

I stared at the glass for several long moments before bringing it to my lips. Gloria watched me carefully as she sipped hers casually like one would a martini. Closing my eyes, I took my first drink. As much as I expected it to be awful, it was the opposite. A breath of relief escaped my throat as I took another drink. It was the most delicious thing I'd ever tasted in my life. I could see why she gave me the warning. I wanted to gulp it down immediately. The savage need clawing in my throat demanded it, but I'd heed her warning. Perhaps it was still a little too fast, but I managed to stay as calm as I could. Once it was gone, I sat in silence letting its strength work through my freshly undead body.

"Well?" Gloria asked with an amused expression on her face.

"I want more," I whispered before I could stop myself from speaking.

"Later. Let that settle, my darling," she cooed as if talking to a small child. "There is a world full of it. One night at a time."

I sat there quietly as the beast within grew quieter. I couldn't explain the sensation honestly. Satisfaction wasn't the right word but the closest I could come to one. Not quite having your fill at Thanksgiving but pretty darn close. This was my life now. Blood to survive. Humans were prey. In my mind I still was a human and that thought frightened me. Would I someday view humans as nothing more than sheep for the slaughter? I hoped to my very core the answer was no. I didn't want to be a monster. Not like her.

The night was one of the longest I'd ever had. My senses were exploding and I was still processing the fact I wasn't alive anymore. I didn't blink, I didn't breathe, and I had no heartbeat. I was... cold. Not cold like a human felt where it was uncomfortable. I was just keenly aware of it. Then there was the fact I was still a prisoner of this woman. My sire. The fact I was currently bonded to her felt like a betrayal. My mother had died protecting me. Gloria had killed me to be a mother again after losing her daughter. Her madness allowed her to take the life of a motherless human because I looked like her Caroline. Didn't that feel like killing Caroline to her? I still couldn't figure out the woman's mind. But that sense of mistrust and betrayal seeped into my dead heart.

Gloria didn't want to overload my fledgling brain with all the rules and history of the Kindred tonight, so she only shared the basics with me so I wouldn't be killed doing something wrong. I knew a group called the Camarilla ruled the area. They didn't like Kindred turning humans without permission. Killing humans was frowned upon and revealing yourself to humans was the big no no. Other than that, the details were fuzzy.

The other thing I knew was I could live on donated blood. Fresh was always better according to Gloria, but what she fed me had worked. If I could do that forever then maybe my existence wouldn't feel so... monstrous. My concern now was getting back to my life to some degree. I was not going to stay with this mad woman. I had to escape. How I would pretend to be mortal was one question I'd answer later. If I could manage to be calm around humans, living a night life in Atlanta was easy. I'd make some excuse about being diagnosed with an allergy to the sun or something. A legit disease that can happen. As dumb as it sounded, watching various vampire media might help with ways to cope and fake being what I no longer was. At least I hoped so.

Once morning threatened to break, I was escorted back to my room by Gloria's bodyguard and locked in. 'For your safety' I was reminded so I wouldn't accidentally be exposed to sunlight and become a human torch. As I sat on the bed, I heard a neighbor's TV running the morning news. The story was about me. I'd been reported missing by my aunt and some people had come forward to say they'd seen me taken. No good description of the man could be offered though. No one had seen enough to be of help, but I was a known kidnapping victim. It was something at least, but I feared for my dad. No doubt he was worried sick right now and having flashbacks of Mom in the morgue.

With a heavy sigh, I flopped back on my bed wondering what Gloria would do once she found out I was on the news. Her idea of a perfect undead life with her Caroline clone was about to be shattered.

Part 9

Over the next few nights, Gloria was very careful to not let me out of the apartment. She would send her body guard to run her errands while she watched me. My story had spread around Atlanta. A kidnapping in a public place with a dozen witnesses and no real leads? Scandalous. If I were to venture out, someone would see me and call the cops. Though she tried to hide it, I knew she was planning on moving. Taking me somewhere the story wasn't so well known. I had to act quickly.

One of the things I wanted when asked for 'essentials' was a camera. I gave a very specific camera too. My excuse was it was like the one I left behind and wanted to take up my hobby again. There were windows open at night so I could still do photography. I even teased my captor with a new family portrait. She relented and had one purchased. What she did know was, the camera had wifi. I couldn't use it like a cell phone, but I could still connect to a smart device nearby and share pictures. That was going to be my ticket out of here. Or at least I hoped so. It was worth a shot.

During the times I was alone in my room, I'd take pictures of myself with information written on the back lining of my drapes asking for help. Those I kept on an SD card I kept in my pocket so when Gloria looked through my camera she only saw the cityscapes I captured or things around the apartment that were interesting. I'd taken a picture of her at her piano and I noticed something odd. Her image was a little blurry. Something about it didn't sit right with me. It was like when she revealed herself as a vampire and the distorted mirror appearance between her true self and the image projected didn't match. I didn't trust her for a multitude of reasons, but that photo reminded me she was dishonest. Even if she didn't believe so, she was. Dishonest and a betrayer.

Confident I wasn't planning a full escape like I was, I was given permission to set up some of my shots on the balcony. That little bit of freedom was all I needed. I loaded the SD card and searched for an open wifi signal. I found one. A smart TV somewhere close enough to broadcast. One of the neighbors above or below perhaps? I took the risk and sent the images of myself and my view from the balcony. I could only hope whoever received it for one wasn't a vampire and would actually call the cops. If they did, I prayed the cops were smart enough to keep that information quiet and come to the rescue without showing anything on the news. If anything leaked I was in major trouble.

Part 10

The following night when I woke, I prayed whoever I'd sent the pictures to had done something about it. Someone had to be on their way right? Gloria was getting antsy and still making preparations to leave Atlanta. She just had to get permission from whoever she answered to. Would she tell them the truth about me or attempt to keep me a secret? She didn't have permission to turn me. She'd simply created a situation with the other vampire that would give her a favor. It could still blow up in her face. If it did, would I be killed too? Then the nagging thought in the back of my mind whispered again, how was I going to survive on my own?

I sat down against the wall and rested my head upon my bent knees. With all my might I wished I could just disappear. Just then, the door opened revealing James, the driver and Gloria's bodyguard. He was a man of few words. Obvious military training and some life debt to my sire given his complete submission to her. He ran the place while she was asleep or away, drove her around, did errands, etc. Always packing heat too even if he hid it well under his jacket. Sometimes I saw his pistol peek out. His hand went to it any time he went to the door. I wonder if they'd had intruders in the past.

"Miss Eve, it's safe now," he said and looked around. His eyes never rested upon me even though I was within his view. "Miss Eve?" He turned quickly and left the room calling my name. I stood up and walked out of the room confused as to why he was reacting that way. He turned around and saw me. "Miss Eve! Where were you?"

"In my room," I replied.

He looked a little disturbed and tried to calm the panic from himself. The thought of losing me terrified him. No doubt Gloria would have his head on a platter. I kind of felt bad for him. As he went about his business tidying up, I thought about what I had wished before he came in. To disappear. Again I focused on that feeling and the next time he looked my way, he looked confused again and headed to my room, walking right by me. Was I... invisible to humans? Gloria had mentioned supernatural powers that vampires could manifest. This was not a bad one to have. While cloaked I had this feeling around me like a sheer fabric. As I moved to follow James I felt it slip. Okay. In place good. Moving would take work. I could work with that.

"Where's Gloria?" I asked and made James jump out of his skin.

"Where were you?" he demanded, his hand had almost gone for his gun in fright.

"I have vampire speed. I moved. Look, I'm bored. Sorry for scaring you," I said and he seemed to believe it. He visibly relaxed.

"To answer your question, she's out making arrangements," he said. "I've been instructed to serve your meal."

"Thank you," I said. "Where do the bags come from anyway?"

“A blood bank. One owned by vampires. It’s the easiest way to have an emergency supply. For those who can drink it. Not all can. Some need fresh and only good quality,” he said and walked me to the kitchen to get me something to drink.

“Makes sense. Better than hunting if you don’t have to. Being exposed and all,” I said and accepted the bag. Without thinking, I bit into the top and began to drink it like a juice bag. Capri Sun without the straw. I still wasn’t used to how normal it felt to the vampire side of me and how freaking delicious it was. I missed eating though. Had I known I was going to die the other day I would have eaten better stuff for a last meal. “Do you know when she’ll be back?”

“No,” he said, having a feeling I was trying to possibly get out of the apartment on his watch. “But a delivery came in for you. Clothing and such. You can’t wear that hoodie all the time.”

“You washed it for me. It’s fine,” I replied and drained the rest of the bag.

James looked annoyed. “Miss Gloria would like you to adjust your style.”

“Fine,” I sighed and zipped over to the table in the blink of an eye for mortal vision. I wanted him to think it’s what I did earlier. I looked through the high fashion clothes my sire wished me to wear to better fit in with her. This woman really didn’t see me as anyone but her beloved Caroline. To her I was a doll to be displayed and kept by her in memorial. It was sad. And crazy. I reaffirmed my need to get out of here.

The longer Gloria was away the less time I had. She could return any minute. As much as I wanted to grab supplies before attempting an escape, I couldn’t without being caught. It was now or never to make some kind of attempt. For all I knew the next time my sire went out I would be taken with her away from Atlanta where no one would find me.

“I’m going to go take a shower,” I told James and headed back to my room. I turned on the water and waited a bit before willing myself to be invisible. Very slowly, I began to inch my way out of my room and down the hallway. My aim was to get to the balcony and find a way onto one of the other apartment ledges. Someone would let a kidnapped girl in right? That was my hope anyway. James was by the door keeping an eye on things but also glancing at his phone watching a football game.

Every step I made I waited to make sure my power was still around me. I was new to this whole thing and it was starting to get a little taxing to hold it up. I started taking slightly bigger steps and paused when needed. So far so good. The closer to the balcony I got the more I wished I could just throw myself through the glass and off the railing and hoped I healed from the fall damage, but I didn’t know how all that worked yet. Patience, Eve, patience.

Once I reached the sliding glass door hidden by heavy drapes, I looked back at James who was pleased at his team’s progress in the game. I grasped the door handle and gave a little pull. Locked. Taking my eyes off the body guard for a moment I carefully unlatched the bolt and held

my breath. I pulled again and felt it move. A breeze came through and I winced hoping James didn't notice. He didn't. So I moved it more and more until it was wide enough for me to squeeze through. Then I closed the door and moved quickly to the other end of the balcony in the shadows releasing my 'cloak of invisibility'. I was tired. So very tired. My head hurt from the concentration.

The sliding door opened and James looked out. I didn't move a muscle. He was suspicious now and closed the door, locking it as he went down the hall no doubt to check on me. Taking the chance, I ran as fast as I could and leaped from our balcony to the next. Only the momentum of my superhuman speed got me over and I tumbled onto the floor. Not wanting to be immediately caught, I raced across that one and jumped onto the next. It was like an action movie. I didn't have a plan, but I was out. It was a step in the right direction. I knocked on the door several times but got no answer. The owners weren't home or they were asleep. I decided it was up or down instead of across now and leaned over the railing to see if anyone had lights on. The apartment below had lights. Hoisting myself over the side, I lowered myself until I was hanging by my hands. This wasn't anything I'd do if I was human. Maybe to save my life, but I had a much less chance of dying if I fell because I was already dead. Taking a risk wasn't as scary without the worst outcome being all that bad.

Just as I swung my legs a little and released my grip, I saw the door to Gloria's balcony open. Oh crap. He knew I was gone. I dropped onto the floor and stayed down as he shined a flashlight around trying to see where I'd gone. I crawled under a table and stayed put. The beam didn't quite reach me, but he was looking. His job and possibly life was on the line. Sorry, James, I wasn't going to stay a captive for all eternity. As soon as he went back inside, I started knocking on the sliding door frantically. A confused woman pulled the curtain back and saw me.

"Please help me. I'm Eve Claymore. The kidnapped girl on the news," I pleaded.

The woman gasped and opened the door. I tried to enter but I felt a barrier of some kind. I couldn't go inside. Looking up at Gloria's apartment, I worried how I was going to get away fully if I couldn't go into someone's apartment.

"Is he out there?" she asked and reached for my arm. "Come inside quickly."

As if by magic I felt the barrier drop and I walked into the home. The woman closed the door and locked it. "Henry! Call the cops! It's the girl from the news. She's escaped!"

The woman's boyfriend was quick to call 911 as I was guided to a guest room. I sat on the floor and covered my face with my hands. "Thank you," was all I could utter as the weight of the situation I was in started to fully sink in. I'd escaped but... now what did I do? And what if Gloria or James found me? Was I ever going to be safe again?

Part 11

Seconds felt like hours and minutes like days as I sat in the guest room waiting for the cops. How was I going to explain what happened to me? Did I fake too much trauma to remember? What if they wanted to do an exam on me? I had no heartbeat. What was I going to do?

The woman who had helped me offered me some water but I refused, unsure what it would do to me. Could vampires eat or drink? That part was kinda vague though typically the answer was no. Henry was still on the phone with the dispatcher and passed the door now and then to check on his girlfriend and me.

“I can’t believe you’ve been in this building all this time. How did you get onto the balcony?” she asked me to try to keep my mind present instead of turning inward.

“I jumped,” I replied softly.

It was hard to focus. Her heartbeat was so loud and it... called to me. Her boyfriend’s too. Both were like thunder in my ears and the smell of blood rushing under their skin sang like a siren’s song. Though I’d fed before escaping, using my vampire abilities apparently was very draining. Enough so I was hungry again. The beast clawing within wanting to escape. It would be easy to feed upon these two and run away. Easy, sure, but wrong. I didn’t want to hurt anyone if I could help it.

“The cops are coming,” Henry said, though he stayed on the line to keep in contact with the department. This was a big case. People disappeared or died every day in Atlanta. I didn’t know why my story in particular struck a nerve but it did. Maybe because people saw it happen and did nothing. Not that anyone could have against a vampire orchestrating it. Not sure if any of those partiers could have taken on James either. Man was like the Rock but with hair and a smart suit.

No doubt due to traffic, it took a while for the cops to arrive. There were four of them. Probably just in case they met with any trouble getting me to safety or to eventually go to the location I’d been kidnapped in for evidence. I still wasn’t sure how much information I was going to give. Humans wouldn’t stand a chance against Gloria and I didn’t want to send them to their deaths.

One of the cops walked over to the room and confirmed with dispatch they’d arrived and had sight of me. “Hey, Eve, you’re a brave woman for being able to get away. Henry here told the dispatcher you jumped onto the balcony from somewhere. Like some kind of action hero.” He wasn’t trying to get me smiling, but I was too focused on the other heartbeats in the room. The smell of fresh blood everywhere. He frowned and looked at his buddies. “Yeah, she’s traumatized. Make sure we get a case worker and room set up downtown.”

“Can someone tell my dad I’m okay?” I asked.

He looked back at me. "Of course. We just need to get you to safety and calls can be made. You were held in this building right?" I nodded. "Do you know what apartment number?" I shook my head in response. "Okay." He was obviously disappointed, but he wasn't going to get anywhere with me right now. "Let's go. And say nothing to anyone until we officially release information," he warned the concerned couple.

The cop and two of his buddies walked me down the hallway to the elevator while one stayed behind to ask the couple questions and poke around a little to figure out where I'd dropped from. I remained quiet the whole way. If I spoke in the empty hallway I worried Gloria might somehow hear me. Miraculously we made it to the car and I breathed a sigh of relief once in the back seat with the man that had been trying to make conversation with me. I curled up towards the window and closed my eyes. To him, it was a trauma reaction. For me it partially was, but also being in a car with healthy humans was driving the beast within me crazy.

"I don't want to ask this, but will a rape kit be necessary?" he asked gently.

"No. I wasn't raped," I answered honestly. Just killed and made into a vampire. A much worse outcome in my opinion.

"Okay," he accepted my answer. "Can you tell me how many people were involved?"

"Two," I replied. "A woman and a man. He worked for her. But she was planning to leave with me. I'm sure she's left by now since I escaped. I don't know where she was going."

He slowly nodded. "I'm Lt. Wyse by the way. I know it's hard right now, but everything is fresh and the most helpful while you can recall things."

I tucked my hands into my hoodie and tightened up a little more in my seat. Lt. Wyse sighed and wrote down what he knew already. There would be more questions later, but I was done talking right now. I needed to focus on not losing it and draining these guys.

I was driven to the police station and escorted inside quickly. Though I looked like who I claimed to be and said who I was, they took my fingerprints anyway just to confirm. Lt. Wyse apologized more than once about it. He didn't want me to feel like a criminal when I was a victim. Then I was taken to a back room where a doctor was going to do a quick exam. This was the part I was nervous about. The woman introduced herself and explained what she was going to do. Her job was to document my condition and take pictures of any wounds. Collect samples too just in case it connected to my captors. Then she took my clothes for analysis and offered me a jumpsuit. Not the same as prisoners but might as well be. She was amazed I didn't have a blemish on me given what I'd gone through.

"Only on my soul," I replied darkly. That shut her up.

As I sat on the table having refused the rape kit again, the doctor tried to get my pulse. Of course it wasn't reading right.

“When I’m under stress my blood pressure drops. Machines have a hard time reading anything,” I said quickly as she attempted for a third time.

“What’s going on? No pulse?” a man asked and leaned against the doorway.

“Yeah it’s weird. Like that guy we picked up three weeks ago,” the doctor said.

“Let me try. If I may,” he said and nudged the curtain to the side. His eyes met mine and I realized he wasn’t human. The same pale gaze and no heartbeat was enough. Then a whisper of something teased my mind. I couldn’t hear words directly but it was a feeling of... safety? I couldn’t describe it, but I knew I could trust him. He wasn’t like Gloria.

The doctor gave him the wrist cuff and he started it up. We both knew it wasn’t going to work, but might as well pretend. It beeped and he read off a number before turning it off before the doctor could see it. She took his word for it and wrote it down. Low but not dead.

“Thanks, Grey,” she said and took the wrist cuff and walked over to the desk to make some notes and bag my clothes. I was going to miss that hoodie

“So you’re the media darling,” he said as he studied me then took a seat a little distance away to give me space. “I’ve seen your face posted everywhere. We didn’t have any clues other than what some people said about seeing you grabbed by a big dude in an old car. If someone isn’t found in the first 24 hours, there isn’t a lot of hope.”

“I’m surprised they said anything at all. No one helped. They just watched,” I replied quietly.

“Most don’t want to get involved with a big guy with an old car. It’s Atlanta. Not that it’s right. I just get it working with a lot of those people,” he said.

This guy wasn’t quite like the other cop. He was being nice, sure, but he was more honest. He wore an almost threadbare suit and slightly newer duster type jacket. Honestly he kinda looked like one of your classic 1940’s detectives who was down on his luck. His shoes weren’t dressy though. Some kind of black steel toe boot. Not sure why a vampire would need to protect his feet unless he made a habit of kicking down doors. His dark but slightly graying hair and blue eyes suited his scruffy appearance. As I took his presence in, he was studying me just as closely.

“How old are you, Eve?” he asked.

“30,” I replied.

He tilted his head and mouthed ‘how old are you’ again.

‘A few days,’ I mouthed back and a sadness came to his eyes.

‘Your choice?’ he mouthed silently again.

I shook my head. He sighed heavily and stood up. “Doc, I’m going to get this girl something to drink, okay? Lt. Wyse is letting me take over questioning so when she’s done can you take her to my office?”

“Uuuuhhh shouldn’t that be done in a regular room?” she asked.

“She’s not a prisoner. Give the girl a break,” he said and walked out of the room.

Part 12

“Detectives think they know everything. But what do I know? I’m just the doctor,” the doctor rolled her eyes and finished up her work with me and escorted me to an office.

Detective Matthias Grey was on the door. She’d just called him Grey. Maybe he didn’t like his first time. I took a seat and waited for him to return. He did but this time with a woman. Also no heartbeat. Another vampire. Her presence I wasn’t sure of. Neither good nor bad. My senses were a little confused by her.

“Here,” he said and offered me a coffee cup with a lid on it.

“I can’t..” I stared and he insisted. Once I took the cup and got a smell of what was inside I gave him a look of gratitude. Blood. It was all I could do to keep myself from drowning myself in it. Using my abilities had drained me more than I had expected. I didn’t speak again until I’d drunk every last drop. Finally the beast calmed. Not entirely, but enough.

The woman closed the door and leaned back against it. “Police policy to have a female officer while a woman is being questioned. Especially in a private office,” she said. “And because Camarilla law needs witnesses.”

“Witnesses..?” I asked.

“You were turned against your will. Turning someone without permission is breaking our laws. Big ones. It can’t be a ‘my word against yours’ thing about what is said in here,” Grey said seriously. “Whoever kidnapped you and turned you is going to be hearing from the authorities. Not the human kind.”

“I just want to go home,” I said with desperation tinting my tone.

“Oh, and how will that go? You’re a few days old with hardly a grasp of what happened. You trying to pretend it didn’t will end in you dying or someone you care about dying. Your aunt reported you missing. If she disturbs you while you’re sleeping and calls to report you died in the night? You’re caught. You wake up with no way to get blood and she’s the only one in the house? You’ll attack her. Your life is going to be very different from now on, kid,” he said seriously.

“We need to know who turned you,” the woman said. “You want justice right?”

I wanted to cry. There was so much bubbling up within me I didn’t know how else to respond. I wanted to go home and just ‘live’. I knew part of it would be a lie but I could fake it right? All these vampires did so why couldn’t I? It wasn’t fair. I didn’t choose this.

“Gloria DeRochelle,” I finally said after a long silence. “I looked like her dead daughter. She said she helped eliminate someone who broke the masquerade so if she was caught she would be spared for turning me. Embracing. Whatever the term is.”

“That crazy witch really couldn’t let it go,” Grey sighed and sat back in his seat. Obviously he’d heard of her.

“What do you expect from Malkavians?” the woman scoffed.

“What?” I asked.

“She didn’t tell you much I suppose. Malkav is one of the 13 clans. They tend to not be right in the head,” Grey explained. “Something to watch out for.”

“Am I going to be like that too?” I asked softly, feeling a sense of dread wash over me at the thought of not only being dead but crazy too. Forever.

“You’ll be your own version of crazy someday. Each is different. Not much time to go into that now. Once we catch Gloria, we’ll have to see what the Prince wants to do with you both,” he said.

I stood up quickly. “Wait, I’m the victim here! I was turned against my will. Why would I have to face royal judgment?”

“Because your sire broke the rules and leaving you, a defenseless baby Malkavian, would be dangerous. You’d probably break the laws and need to be executed anyway,” the woman said like she’d just told me she’d checked her email.

“I really don’t like you,” I said without thinking. This seemed to amuse Detective Grey.

“Eve, we try to help people in your situation, but once it goes to the Camarilla higher ups, it’s out of our hands. I will vouch for you as much as I can,” Grey said.

“Matthias, you’re an idiot to promise that,” the woman snapped.

“Shut up for once, Margerie,” he replied and bared his fangs a little. “Not every new kindred is a liability. I called you because Devin was out of town. She’d be a little more sympathetic.”

Margerie hissed. “You don’t get to my position for being sympathetic. You’ve grown soft in your years.”

“Do I get a lawyer or something for this?” I asked, watching the banter. “Because I want one.”

The detective sat back in his chair and folded his hands. “I promise, we’ll pursue this and get the best outcome we can. The favor Gloria pulled may work and you’re returned to her for training,” he said and held up his hand when I was about to protest. “Or it may blow up in her face and lead to her execution. That being said, they could decide to kill you with her and wipe their hands of the whole thing. Or... they may assign you to someone else for training. There are a lot of options to this, Eve. I’m going to be honest with you, it all lies in her connections and who’s favoring who the night it all comes down.”

“What happens to me in the meantime?” I asked softly.

“We’ll put you in a ‘witness protection’ program of sorts. Keep an eye on you and your progress, let the higher ups do their things. We’ll explain to your family you were found and in care while we find the criminals. For your safety,” he said. “You can’t go home. Not yet.”

“Maybe not ever,” Margerie reminded me. Okay yeah, I really didn’t like her. It wasn’t the same skin crawling like Gloria. She was just a b***h.

Part 13

Detective Grey wrote down my ‘statement’ that would be in the police records of my abduction. They spun it as a trafficking attempt. I’d been lured by the proposition of work in my field by a woman and had been abducted during the ‘interview’. I escaped the car briefly only to be captured again by the man witnesses saw. After being held for a few days while the couple made arrangements, I escaped while one was out of the apartment. I now suffered from PTSD and my memory of the event was cloudy. For my protection, I was being sent to a safehouse while the cops looked for my abductors. It was an easy enough tale to believe and I signed off on it. Meanwhile, the real story was working its way through the ranks of the Camarilla.

Not wanting to risk my true nature being exposed, I was driven to a house just on the outskirts of the city. The suburbs of Atlanta. It was a nice enough area. Not too rich, not too poor. It reminded me of home honestly. The drive had been quiet. Just me, Grey, and the bad radio reception. He stopped the car and turned to look back at me.

“Kid, I know this is a lot to take in,” he said. “We all start somewhere and this is one of the roughest ways to start. But better this than being a mindless puppet for a crazy woman, right?”

I turned my gaze to him. “I guess.”

He got out of the car and opened my door. The sun would be rising soon and I could feel the need for sleep a little more strongly tonight than before. I stepped out and looked at the house before following Grey to the door. He unlocked it and stepped inside. I attempted but couldn’t pass the threshold.

“Um... can I come in?” I asked.

“Let me wake Ellen. I can’t give you the permission you need,” he said and headed down the hallway. I heard him speak to someone then returned with an older woman.

“Come in, dear,” she said in a sweet southern accent.

The barrier disappeared and I entered. “Do I have to do that everywhere I go?” I asked.

“Just residences. Public buildings won’t be a problem. Hospitality bound ‘curses’ are common among the kindred so we have kine to help with the safehouses,” he explained. “This will be your home for as long as this takes. Clothes and food will be provided and you’ll have regular check-ins. And reading material about your new life.”

“Will my check-ins be with you?” I asked with perhaps a little more hope in my tone than I intended to reveal.

Grey looked confused at my question. “Do you want them to be?”

I shifted a little looking down at the floor then back up at him. “You’re the only one who’s made an effort for me in all this. I’d like to be talking to someone in my corner.”

He slowly nodded. “Alright. I’ll be your contact.”

“Thank you, Detective Grey,” I said. “Please... please call my dad. We lost Mom when I was 10. Losing me now will kill him. Give him something to hold on to.”

Another slow nod. My story was a tragic one. He’d seen worse before I’m sure, but the fact my fate was so unknown and up to the whim of the prince didn’t help. I’d done nothing wrong and wasn’t a threat if trained properly. “I will. Take care, kid.” He walked away from the house and sat in his car for a few minutes before driving away.

I watched him go until Ellen gently closed the door and blocked the windows. “Almost morning, dear,” she said. “A room is ready for you and anything else you need will arrive by night time. You need your rest.”

“Thank you,” I said softly and followed her to the simple bedroom. There was a bed with gingham linens and horse shaped accent pillow, a dresser with a large doily on the top where a package of toiletries sat ready to be used, a nightstand boasting enough space for a book and one of those gas lantern looking lights, and a small TV on a desk across the room. If it was in color I’d be surprised.

The whole house was the complete opposite of Gloria’s opulent lifestyle. I was pretty sure the house hadn’t been remodeled since the 60’s if this room was any indication. But it was comfortable. And I was safe. At least for now. I closed the door and kicked off my shoes before

laying down on the bed. Part of me still hoped to wake up and this all be a wild dream, but I knew it wasn't. My only comfort was knowing Grey would tell my dad I was alive. It was a lie technically, but maybe if things ruled in my favor I could keep a relationship with him going for a while longer. Especially long distance. Maybe he wouldn't notice I wasn't aging over zoom. The video quality was crap enough. My aunt was another story. Staying in Atlanta may not even be possible after this. There was so much up in the air right now it made my head spin just trying to think of what I was going to do. I had to live first.

Evelyn Noel Claymore
Birth- September 13th 1991
Embraced- November 1st 2021
Sired by Gloria DeRochelle
Malkavian Clan

