

## Out With the Old, In With the New

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**Warnings:** rape (non-graphic), twincest, vampires

**Summary:** There are things that many people do not see and are never supposed to see, but when one of these takes Bill from his hotel room, by force, everything changes for him and Tom.

**Author's Notes:** Thanks to Soph for the beta. The second scene of this fic is based on an original fic I wrote a very long time ago; it seemed to fit. The rest is all new :).

**Word Count:** 122,140

## Prologue: Missing

Sitting in the van watching the city go by, Tom had hoped that he could put his worry to the back of his mind. Bill was back at the hotel, lying in the dark with a cold pack on his forehead because he had a migraine. It wasn't anything stupendously odd; lots of people had migraines, but Bill had never had one before and it had been so sudden that Tom couldn't help worrying.

They had been in the restaurant before going to the industry event for some charity or other and Bill had been late down. Tom had seen Bill enter the restaurant, wave and smile, then Bill had all but bumped into a man leaving and had to stand, talk a little and apologise, and then, by the time Bill had made it to the table, Tom had been able to tell his twin was not right. When Bill had failed to eat anything except the first mouthful of food, Tom had started to worry, and his worry had only increased since.

For Bill to cancel on an event like the one they were going to there had to be something seriously wrong and Tom hadn't wanted to leave at all. It was only that it was a charity do and the band had promised to be there that had made him leave the hotel. He was fretting so much that even Georg had given up trying to cheer him up, which meant the van was all but silent.

They were waiting at traffic lights when it felt as if someone threw a bucket of ice water over him. His worry morphed into outright fear and he knew without a shadow of a doubt that something was wrong.

"Take me back," he said without even trying to rationalise what he was feeling.

"What?" David asked, turning in the front seat.

"Take me back to the hotel now," Tom reiterated and looked down at his hands.

It was then that he realised he was shaking.

"Tom, we can't just ditch this event," David said in a reasonable tone, ever the diplomat.

At that moment in time Tom was not in the mood for diplomacy.

"Turn this fucking van around and take me back to the hotel now or I get out and catch a cab," he was so completely sure that he needed to get back to Bill that he didn't care what he was saying or whom he was talking to.

Silence descended over the van as David stared at him like he'd grown another head.

"Turn us around," it was Gustav who broke the silence. "Look at him, get us back to the hotel, now!"

Tom was very glad he had some support, because he was a breath away from losing it completely.

"Do it," was all David said and, as the lights changed, Saki pulled down a side road and turned the van around.

Tom spent the whole trip back hoping that he was imagining things or someone had slipped something into his drink at dinner, but the feeling of dread just became heavier and heavier.

There were fans outside the hotel who looked incredibly surprised to see them back so soon and even more surprised as Tom completely ignored them. He heard David stop to explain something or other as he disappeared into the hotel and he all but ran to the lifts and pushed the button. By the time the lift actually arrived, everyone was at his shoulder and they piled in together. Tom hit the button for their floor so hard he heard the plastic complain, but all he could think about was Bill. Bill needed him and that was all that mattered.

Saki tried to hold him back as they reached the correct floor, but he slipped past their security chief and ran down the corridor towards Bill's room. He could see that the door was open before he even reached it and the dread in his heart began to turn to panic.

The first thing he saw as he burst into the room was Tobi sprawled on the floor; the second was the complete mess that the bed was in; and the third was spots of blood on the crumpled white pillow. Bill was nowhere in the room and Tom froze. Nothing else consciously registered; Bill was gone, Tobi was hurt and that added up to so many nasty possibilities that Tom just couldn't think about it. Bill, his Bill, his little brother was in danger and he was too late to help. There was no other thought in his mind.

End of Prologue

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## Chapter 1 Not Dead

He didn't want to wake up; with consciousness came pain and humiliation and he had been so sure the last time that when he passed out he would never wake up again. He had been dying, he had just known it, and it had been so sweet, but someone must have dragged him back from the jaws of death. For a while he just lay there waiting for the hands to touch him, to drag him to where they wanted him to be. He knew they would know he was awake, they always did no matter how still he tried to stay and it was just a matter of time.

When the violating touches did not come, he slowly opened his eyes. The fact that he was cold and not lying on soft sheets had not really made it into his mind as he huddled in dread, but now it did. It took his befuddled mind a long time to realise he was not in the room he had come to know as his prison; in fact he was outside. He was lying on a plastic sheet on uneven ground and his hands were bound and attached to a post. Looking around, he could see old warehouses a short way away and the sky on the horizon was just beginning to lighten.

It all confused him more; he didn't understand what was happening. His mind was so mixed up that all he knew was what was supposed to be happening, no matter how unpleasant, and this wasn't it. He was still naked, that much hadn't changed, but everything else was different. Afraid that at any moment it might turn out to be untrue, he moved slowly, lifting his head and doing his best to bring an elbow under him so he could partially sit up. He had given up moving of his own volition days ago and it was difficult; he was weak and every move increased the ache that seemed to permeate every cell.

It was as he managed to half sit himself up that he realised he was not alone. There was a girl lying behind him, a girl with completely white hair and pale skin, as naked as he was, also bound to the pole. She still appeared to be unconscious and he didn't remember her at all, but she was clearly a prisoner like he was.

Nothing was making any sense; he didn't know why he was there or what was going to happen next. The sky was lightening and it was beginning to hurt his eyes, but he barely had the strength to remain where he was, let alone free himself from the ropes on his wrists. As the dawn approached, it was almost as if the light was taking away even more of his strength and his body began to feel heavier and heavier.

As the first rays of sun began to creep over the ground, his companion moved. She woke with a start, sitting up almost instantly and not quite managing it where her arms were tied. Her eyes were bright red and staring and she gave him only the briefest glance before squinting at the growing sun. He saw fear flood through her features and she began pulling frantically at her bonds. Her efforts were strong; she was clearly not as debilitated as he was, but she seemed frenzied and the ropes were not giving.

The sun touched her foot first, flowing in as the rays broke over the horizon and she screamed. Smoke rose from her skin and she pulled her legs up as he watched, totally fascinated and horrified by what he was seeing. Images flashed through his mind, memories of fangs and blood and he tried to shy away as they became momentarily real to him. He knew what was happening now and all he could think of was that at least it would be over.

Because of the buildings, he was further in shadow and it took longer for the sun to reach him and he watched the light creep across the earth until it finally touched his naked skin. It was warm, very warm, almost uncomfortably so, but

he didn't burn, not like the girl did when she could move away no further. Smoke rose from her flesh and her skin turned black as she screamed, sounding more like an animal than a human being.

His skin turned pink as the light crept over him, but there was no smoke and it filled him with despair. If he had burned it would have been over, but he wasn't allowed that mercy and as his companion writhed and struggled and screamed he curled in on himself, trying to shut it out, to make it go away. The screaming went on for minutes, but it wasn't really a relief when it stopped, because then all he had were the thoughts in his head. He pushed them away, sinking as far from reality as he could, but when someone touched his shoulder he still cried out and tried to move away.

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Tom was out of the car so fast that no one could keep up with him. When the call had come that Bill had been found and was still alive he had almost passed out as the knot inside him had released.

Three weeks he had been waiting; three weeks with no information from the police, no sign of Bill and it had almost killed him. The previous night he had woken up screaming, the worst feeling he had ever felt welling up in his chest and he had been almost sure Bill was dead. It had been the most terrible night of his life and the phone call that day had been like a reprieve for a condemned man. He had spent every day just waiting for news and the fact that Bill was alive was all he cared about.

For the first time in about a week he had actually had the energy to throw on some clean clothes and step outside the house. Nothing mattered more to him the reaching Bill and he was barely taking any notice of anyone else. Because of the media attention David and Saki were there to deal with anything that needed their intervention and Tom knew his mum and Gordon were on his heels as well as he shot into the hospital.

He didn't even need to go up to the desk and ask; the hospital must have arranged to have someone waiting for them, because the moment he stepped inside he was intercepted by a young woman in a suit.

"Hello, my name is Gabrielle," the woman introduced herself, "the director asked me to meet you. If you need anything while you are here, please ask for me. If you would like to come this way."

Tom wasn't about to argue and he didn't have the mental capacity for pleasantries at the moment, so he simply nodded.

"Thank you," he heard his mother say, but he was completely focused on reaching Bill.

When they were led into a small room, Tom was pleased to be out of the main hospital area, but there was one definite thing missing; Bill wasn't there and Gabrielle was gone before he could ask her anything.

"Good evening," a woman in a white coat said as soon as the door closed.

"Where's Bill?" Tom interrupted, since there was only one thing he cared about.

"In a private room just down the corridor," the woman said as if she had been expecting his reaction, "and I will be very happy to take you to him shortly. I'm

Doctor Brucker; I've been looking after Bill since just after he was brought in. I asked the staff to show you in here first so I could explain a few things."

He didn't like the sound of that, but Dr Brucker looked sincere, so he just about managed to hold himself still. He wanted to see Bill and he wanted to see him right then and he could barely contain the need.

"Please could you just tell us so I can see my son," his mother said in as calm a voice as anyone was capable of.

She placed a gentle hand on his arm and he was sure she knew what he was thinking.

"Of course, I'm sorry to have had to delay you. Firstly, I would advise that as few men as possible go in to begin with," Dr Brucker explained and Tom felt himself going cold; "until we're sure Bill recognises you. He reacted very badly to the first male doctor who tried to examine him and all subsequent male members of staff, which is why I was called in. We have kept any male contact to a bare minimum. He's very severely traumatised and we've had to restrain him for his own safety. Before we did that, we found him under the bed twice and we don't want him to hurt himself."

Tom had to take a long deep breath and use every ounce of self control he possessed not to lash out. Someone had hurt Bill and that made him more angry than he could possibly explain.

"What did they do to my little boy?" his mother asked in a very tight, brittle voice.

"There were signs of prolonged sexual abuse," Dr Brucker said and Tom just wanted to punch her sympathetic features, mostly because she was the only target in range. "We're awaiting toxicology results to see if he was exposed to any substances, but given his somewhat unique physical state, we believe he might have been."

"Unique, unique how?" Tom asked, needing some outlet for his anger and channelling it into words seemed like a good idea.

"Your brother was found at dawn this morning," Dr Brucker said which made Tom open his mouth, but the doctor held up her hand as if she knew what he was going to say, "you were not notified until two hours ago because he was not identified until then."

Tom wanted to know why the hell not since Bill was one of the best known faces in Germany, but he held his tongue.

"When he was brought in, Bill's blood pressure and other vital signs were virtually non-existent," Dr Brucker explained, "and stabilising him was our first priority. Even so, had he been as he is now, someone would have recognised him, but when Bill arrived here he was classed as an albino because he looked like this."

The doctor passed over a Polaroid photograph and Tom leant in as his mother took it. All his anger melted away as he saw what Bill looked like, even he could barely recognise his twin. Bill's hair had no colour at all, it was pure white and Bill's skin was so pale it was almost translucent.

"What you can't see in this picture is that his eyes were also red. We began a transfusion straight away," Dr Brucker continued, "and it was shortly after this he woke up. It was also then that his hair began to turn black, his eyes turned brown and several hours later one of the nurses noticed the tattoos."

"But Bill's hair is naturally blond like mine," Tom said, completely confused, "why did it turn black, and how can tattoos disappear and reappear?"

"We don't know," Dr Brucker said honestly, "and we can't explain his condition. We're working on the theory that an unusual chemical reaction caused a skin condition and his symptoms. We're hoping the lab tests we're waiting for will give us more of an idea what happened to him. As soon as we know, we will of course tell you."

Tom just stared at the photo.

"Can we see Bill now, please?" his mother finally said.

The doctor nodded and Tom followed her out of the room as shock sent his thoughts all over the place. What Dr Brucker had described seemed impossible, but the evidence had been right in front of him. He walked down the corridor after the doctor, mind filled with images of what he wanted to do to the person or persons who had caused harm to Bill. It wasn't the healthiest of subjects to dwell on, but it stopped him yelling at anyone and everyone about the injustice of it all.

When they reached a closed door about halfway down the corridor, he put the thoughts aside and tried to mentally prepare himself for seeing Bill.

"Perhaps just you first, Mrs Kaulitz-Trumper?" Dr Brucker suggested and Tom stiffened.

"If Bill will recognise anyone it will be Tom," his mother said before he could respond. "We'll both go in, thank you."

Dr Brucker looked him straight in the eye and he looked right back; he needed to see Bill no matter what any doctor said.

"All right," Dr Brucker said and took hold of the door handle, "but remember that sudden movements are likely to scare him. The lights are down quite low because he seems to be photosensitive."

Tom nodded, more so she would just open the damn door than anything else. The moment it was open, he followed his mother through, fully intent on finding Bill. What he saw made him pause for a moment as the reality sank in.

Bill was lying there staring off to the left with empty eyes and Tom felt the almost overwhelming desire to scream very loudly at the world for reducing his twin to this. Bill wrists and ankles were secured in leather padded cuffs and there were two straps across Bill's body. He looked so small and pale in the hospital bed and Tom stepped round his mother where she had frozen just inside the doorway. He needed to reach Bill, it was the only thing in his mind and only Dr Brucker's warning brought him up short beside the bed.

At least Bill looked like Bill now; the staring eyes were light brown and, although some of Bill's hair was white, it looked liked someone had streaked it that way. There was a blood bag attached to Bill's right arm and the slow beeping of a heart monitor was the only sound in the room. It was, at the same time, such a relief

and so difficult to see as Tom looked at his twin. For a moment he didn't know what to do, since Bill didn't even seem to know he was there.

"Bill," he finally said in little more than a whisper.

"He..." Dr Brucker began to say, but her voice stopped as Bill actually moved.

Bill's head turned very slowly and Tom could see that his twin was terrified, but he didn't know of what, and so he stayed perfectly still. He stood there as Bill's eyes slowly fixed on him and the fear gradually dissolved into confusion. The frown was almost worse than the terror; Bill looked as if he didn't know what was real.

"I'm here," Tom said quietly, moving a little closer, "I'm here."

It was in that moment that they reconnected; Tom saw recognition in Bill and it felt like life had suddenly started again. Bill tried to reach for him and came up short against the restraints and the distressed noise Bill made was almost too much for Tom. He didn't think about anything else, all that he cared about was Bill and he reached for the nearest buckle.

Bill was pulling against the restraints, but somehow Tom managed to get them undone and then he had an arm full of sobbing, clinging Bill. The IV went flying and crashed to the floor, but that was completely irrelevant and Tom cradled his sobbing twin in his arms, holding Bill as tightly as he dared.

"It's okay," he said, stroking Bill's hair and automatically rocking gently where he stood, "I've got you."

If he ever got his hands on the person who had done this to his little brother there wouldn't be enough of them left in one piece to fill a small bucket.

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They'd had to lower the metal bars on the side of the bed so that Tom could sit down, because Bill wouldn't let go of him. Just getting Bill to loosen his hold long enough for that had been difficult, but Tom had ended up propped up against the pillows with his twin still in his arms. It didn't even remotely occur to Tom to let go and he knew he needed this as much as Bill did.

He'd been sitting there for nearly an hour already and Bill's face was buried in his shoulder. With his help the nurses had set the blood bag back up, but all Bill seemed to care about was hanging on. The crying had stopped after about fifteen minutes, but Tom had continued to gently stroke Bill's hair and whisper comforting words. Bill didn't seem to notice anyone else, not even their mother, but he had flinched away when she tried to touch him. Contact with anyone but Tom seemed to upset him, so Tom was taking his position as bodyguard very seriously.

His mother had spoken to the police, but there were no details about the investigation forthcoming and it was more frustrating than anything. Part of him wanted to know what the police were doing and when they were going to catch the person responsible for hurting his little brother, but the rest of him was just so completely relieved to have Bill back that he couldn't think about anything else.

Looking down, he tucked a stray piece of hair behind Bill's ear and studied his twin's face for a little while. He wasn't sure if Bill was asleep or just lying there



with his eyes closed, since Bill had always been very good at pretending to be asleep when he wasn't, but it didn't make a huge amount of difference really. He was going to look after Bill now and he could do that no matter Bill's consciousness level.

"You look almost peaceful together," his mum said quietly, from where she was sitting next to the bed; "I haven't seen you like this since you were small. When you were little I used to find you curled up together all over the house."

Tom gave a small smile at that, because it was easier to remember the past than it was to face the present. He and Bill had been inseparable for a large percentage of their lives; they still were for many things and he remembered those times fondly.

"Remember when we hid in the airing cupboard and said we were running away?" he asked, recalling how they had built a nest of towels in the bottom of the cupboard in question.

His mother smiled at that as well.

"How could I forget?" she replied, eyes suspiciously bright as she looked at him and Bill. "I had told Bill off for going into the fridge for strawberries and you weren't having any of it. That cupboard smelled of strawberries for years."

"Well I asked him to get me a strawberry," Tom confessed for the first time ever; it had always been his and Bill's secret, "so I couldn't let you punish him. We had our own little kingdom for a few hours there."

It had been a grand adventure that day.

"How long did it really take you to find us?" he asked, going over what he could recall in his head.

"About ten minutes," his mother confessed with a smile, "but I decided to let you come out on your own. Of course you out-waited me and I had to pretend to find you."

Tom felt a lump forming in his throat.

"I wish I could have found Bill in ten minutes," he said, as the guilt rose up to claim him.

He just about kept the tears back, but it was a very close thing.

"Oh, Sweetheart," his mother said, reaching out and taking the hand that wasn't wrapped around Bill, "none of this is your fault. Just be glad we have him back now."

"I am," he replied, his voice cracking, "but I should have followed my instincts; I knew something wasn't right, I never should have left him."

His mother's face hardened a little and her grip became very firm.

"Stop blaming yourself, Tom," she said in a no-nonsense tone; "blame isn't going to help you or Bill or me. We will get through this together, like we always do and that is the end of it. Am I understood, Young Man?"

Tom found himself smiling despite what he was feeling; their mother had never been very good at the stern thing. Order had always been kept in the household by underlying respect and the dread of upsetting their mother, very rarely by shouting, and so their mum was far better at the 'I'm disappointed in you' expression than her current one. It did a halfway good job, however, since his mother could always make him realise when he was being an idiot.

"Yes, Mama," he said and tried to believe it himself.

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Bill held to Tom, needing to feel his twin close. Nothing else made any sense; it was like he was walking through a dream. One minute there would be no one there and the next someone would be looming over him. It scared him and the only thing he had that was constant was Tom. With Tom he felt safe; he knew his twin would hold him and protect him and his muddled mind didn't seem able to lose track of Tom.

When he had first turned and seen this angel in the complete confusion that his reality had become, he had been terrified that it was another trick. So many things he had seen and heard while in captivity had been illusions that had shattered the moment he had tried to touch them and Tom had looked so real, but he hadn't been able to let himself believe. Only when Tom had spoken to him had he known and that was because Tom's voice cut through everything. Looking into Tom's eyes had been like finding sanctuary in a world that had gone to hell, and he had reached for his twin with everything he had.

Now he could not let go, and it wasn't because he feared Tom would leave him, it was because Tom was his anchor. He could not keep track of anything else and just about everything frightened him; everything except Tom. His courage was gone, beaten out of him, and Tom was the only strength he had left.

When someone gently touched his shoulder, he flinched away, trying to bury himself in Tom's side. Hands were only ever a prelude to something worse and only Tom's were safe.

"It's okay," Tom whispered to him, quietly and gently, "no one is going to hurt you, Bill. I won't let them."

Every fibre of his being trusted Tom, but that didn't stop him being afraid.

"Bill," Tom gently took hold of his chin and urged him to look up.

He didn't want to and he knew Tom wouldn't make him, but Tom seemed to want him to, so he did. Looking into eyes identical to his own, he felt safe, but that didn't stop there being the other presence behind him; the person who had touched his shoulder, and he was afraid to look round.

"Dr Brucker needs to take another blood sample," Tom told him slowly and calmly; "they need to find out what was done to you so they can help you get better."

Bill didn't want anyone else to touch him.

"I know you're afraid, Billi," Tom told him as he almost buried his head again, "but this is important. I won't leave you. They need your arm, the one without the IV in it."

Bill looked down at himself, seeing the tube and bandage in the crook of one arm. His other arm was hidden by Tom's shirt and he didn't want to let go, but if they wanted his arm, he was going to have to turn.

"I won't let you go," Tom promised him while slowly urging him to move.

He let himself be turned, because it was Tom asking him to, but he stared at the bed, not wanting to look up. Tom's arms were still around him, holding him, just as promised, but that didn't mean there weren't frightening things in the world around him.

"Hello, Bill," a woman's voice greeted him, one he thought he had heard before, but it was difficult to remember, "thank you for agreeing. I'm going to take your arm now."

He wanted to pull away when her warm fingers touched his skin, but Tom was rubbing the top of his arm soothingly, so he only moved a little.

"It won't take long," Tom told him quietly, holding him gently and giving him at least that security, "try and concentrate on me."

"This might sting a little," the woman said, but he was trying not to think about her.

He felt the needle go in, but it was nothing compared to what he had had to endure at the hands of his captors and he barely reacted at all. Only when he looked down to see the needle and capsule hanging from his arm did anything change. The red of his blood grabbed his whole attention and his muddled neurons began firing instantly.

Bill couldn't take his eyes off the slowly filling container and the sight of the blood sent his mind racing. The hand which was now holding his wrist morphed into another hand with ornate rings and carefully manicured finger nails and where the syringe had been all he could see was two puncture marks. He looked up and saw not the person a tiny part of his mind knew was still standing there, but a man with long bloody fangs and an evil smile.

Fighting never worked, they would just hold him tighter and all he could do was sit there and stare. He began to shake, frozen in his fear.

"Bill," Tom's voice barely made it past the wall of terror that was slowly building in his mind.

It took every ounce of will he had just to make a tiny sound.

"Finish, now!" he heard Tom say, but he was too trapped in his own recollections to know what was happening.

He could barely breathe he was so afraid and it was incredibly difficult to drag air into his lungs. Folding up and hiding was what he wanted to do, but he didn't dare pull away; not from him; it just brought worse later. When the hand released his wrist, he whimpered quietly in relief, but he still couldn't make himself move.

"Bill," he almost couldn't hear Tom speaking to him, but his twin's voice just made it through, "you're safe, Billi. Look at me; I won't let anyone hurt you."

There were hands on his cheeks and he blinked several times as the face of his attacker hovered in front of his eye. It seemed to take an age as Tom continued to talk to him, but finally he blinked one last time and Tom was looking back at him, not the amorphous features of the person who had held him captive. He was so relieved he gave a huge, shuddering gasp and reached for Tom. His twin welcomed him into his arms and he took the comfort for all it was worth, hiding his face from the world and pushing reality as far away as he could.

Everything around him was unpredictable and scary and he would have disappeared into Tom if he could. He could barely tell what was real and what was in his mind and sometimes he totally failed and all he had was Tom. His thoughts seemed to be completely out of his control and all he desperately wanted was to feel safe.

"I've got you," Tom whispered to him, petting his hair and stroking his back, "everything will be okay."

He couldn't speak, but he needed to communicate with Tom and so he held tighter. He knew Tom would understand, Tom had to, it was all he had left.

End of Part 1

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## Chapter 2 Beyond Reality

There was no way Tom was leaving Bill and when it became later and what Tom suspected the hospital thought was time to head to a hotel and sleep, he was prepared for a fight. He remembered being separated from Bill when they were young and Bill had been in hospital and he had been able to do nothing about it then, but he wasn't going to let it happen again.

"Bill needs to rest," Dr Brucker said as she came in to check on them again. "Simone," Tom's mother had insisted that the doctor use her given name earlier, "I believe Mr Jost has arranged a hotel for you and your husband. I promise we will call if there are any changes."

The first thing Tom noticed was that he had not been mentioned at all in the conversation.

"What time may we come back in the morning?" his mother asked, standing up and gathering her things.

"Visiting hours start at ten," Dr Brucker replied with a smile, "but you may arrive earlier if you wish. Arrangements have been made so it won't be a problem, but I would suggest you get as much rest as possible."

Nodding, his mother prepared to leave.

"And Tom," Dr Brucker said, turning to him for the first time.

He tensed ready with his arguments.

"We can bring another bed in here if you would like, or we can just see about making you and Bill comfortable as you are," Dr Brucker told him and he was sure his mouth fell open in shock.

"You're not trying to kick me out?" he asked, very surprised by the outcome.

Dr Brucker smiled at him and shook her head.

"I think, at this point, that is quite possibly the worst thing we could try to do," Dr Brucker said, walking around the side of the bed and checking the blood bag and IV hanging next to it. "Hopefully with just you here, Bill will sleep peacefully, since we aren't give him anything to help him rest at the moment."

Tom nodded; he hoped so too. Over the hours that he had been there, he had realised that Bill was not asleep against him as he began to recognise the nuances of the tiny movements Bill made every now and then. Bill barely moved at all, but Tom was sure his twin had been awake nearly, if not all the time.

"I don't think another bed would be much use," he said as he finally processed that he was being allowed to stay, "but a couple of blankets would be good, please; Bill seems a little cold."

"I'll leave you to say goodnight then," Dr Brucker said, seemingly cheerful despite the situation, "I'm going off shift myself in a few minutes, but I'll be back bright and early in the morning."

"Good night and thank you," Tom said, and he meant it; he had come to respect Dr Brucker even after only having known her less than half a day.

"Good night," Dr Brucker replied, "and good night, Bill."

Bill, of course, didn't react, well not so anyone would notice except Tom, who felt his twin shift by the tiniest amount.

"Bill says good night," he said, since it seemed like the right thing to do. Any reaction out of Bill at the moment, no matter how small, had to be considered communication.

He watched as Dr Brucker and his mother passed pleasantries and then Dr Brucker left and his mum walked up to the side of the bed.

"I'll see you in the morning," his mother said, placing a hand on his arm. "If you need me, call, I don't care what time it is."

Tom nodded.

"Of course," he said; there was no way he would leave his mother out of this, not when it was this important, "but try and get some sleep. It's going to be an even longer day tomorrow."

His mother smiled at him for that.

"What is the world coming to when a son is giving his mother the advice?" she asked.

"A sensible one," Tom replied, trying to make light of the situation.

His mum then leaned over and kissed him on the cheek.

"I'll see you in the morning," she said and then looked at Bill.

It was so clear that their mum wanted to reach out and touch Bill as well, but she didn't and Tom's heart went out to her. He didn't know what he would have done if he had not been able to touch Bill for fear of frightening him.

"Good night, Bill," his mother said in a tone of voice Tom recognised from whenever one of them had been ill, "try and sleep well, Sweetheart, at least for a little while."

Bill moved a little again, which was at least something.

"He heard you, Mama," Tom said, trying to reassure his mother in any way he could.

"I know, Tomi," his mother replied and there were tears in her eyes again, "I know."

Then she turned to go, and Tom could only watch as his mother left him and Bill alone.

The blankets arrived a few minutes later in the arms of a pretty little nurse that, once upon a time, Tom would not have hesitated to flirt with. As it was, he said thank you and waited for her to leave before manoeuvring himself a little away from Bill.

"I'm not going anywhere," he said slowly and calmly and hoped Bill understood him.

His twin was looking down, staring at nothing.

"I need to take off my jeans and then unfold the blankets," he said, doing his best to see if Bill was hearing him properly.

Bill's arms flexed where they were half wrapped around him and he knew he had been understood and Bill didn't like the idea.

"I'll be as fast as I can," he promised and carefully pushed Bill further away from him as he sat away from the pillows. "You hold on to the edge of my shirt while I sort everything out."

Bill's fingers fisted into his t-shirt almost instantly and he could see them going white where Bill was holding on so hard. He took that as Bill's agreement and went to work. Getting his jeans off was not the easiest thing he had ever done, since he didn't want to move too far from Bill, but he managed it eventually. Bill was only wearing a hospital gown and was already covered in a blanket, but Tom didn't really think it was warm enough. Trying to get them both into the bed did cross his mind, but the sheets looked stiff and difficult to handle, so he discarded the idea. Taking the two new blankets, he quickly opened them out and pulled them over himself and Bill. Then he settled back against the pillows and let Bill snuggle up to his side again, moving the blankets into proper position once they were settled.

It was not the greatest way to sleep, but it was better than nothing and Tom did his best to relax, using the switch beside the bed to turn the lights even further down. He could not fall asleep himself until Bill did and so he stared at the ceiling, trying to relax and waiting for some sign from Bill that sleep would be happening at some point. In the end it was nearly an hour before he finally felt the residual tension leave Bill, and it was only then that he let his own eyes close.

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Tom woke up to the feeling of Bill nuzzling his neck. It was a pleasant sensation, a little too pleasant as he felt his cock twitch when his body reacted in an unfortunate manner. Bill was making little purring noises and he wasn't really sure if his twin was aware of what he was doing. The last thing he wanted to do was frighten Bill in anyway, but just lying there was doing things to him that were highly inappropriate.

"Bill," he said quietly, moving very slightly, but Bill didn't seem to notice.

The nuzzling continued and he definitely felt tongue tracing little circles on his skin at one point. If Bill was dreaming, he couldn't imagine what about and if Bill was asleep he didn't want to disturb him. It was something of a quandary. He was still trying to decide what to do when Bill moved further and pressed against him completely. It was very clear, very quickly that Bill was hard and Tom had to conclude that Bill was having a very good dream. Considering what had happened to Bill, he prayed that it would stay a good dream.

He was doing his very best to think unsexy thoughts when he felt Bill's mouth open against his neck, and then, quite frankly, the world exploded. He felt the tiniest sensation of pain, like a needle prick and then fireworks went off inside his head. The inappropriate feelings went up by about a thousand percent and reality became a dim memory as every fantasy he had ever had seemed to coalesce into

the most incredible sensations that took away everything else. He was completely lost and for what felt like a long time he didn't care about anything at all.

When reality did reassert itself, everything was a bit mixed up. The first thing his confused brain managed to register was a strange growling; it was strange because it seemed to resonate through the room like it was going through a sound system or something. He finally managed to make his eyes focus and found that Bill was kneeling up on the bed making the growling sound and there were two people in the room who hadn't been there before. One of them was holding a gun and it was pointed at Bill.

"Put that away, Markus," the woman of the pair said and calmly pushed the gun down; "he's only defending his bond mate."

Tom had had quite enough by that point and he even forgot that Bill might react badly.

"What the fuck is going on?" he asked very loudly and very firmly.

Bill looked round at him and he couldn't help himself; he shrank back. Bill's eyes were a deep blood red and seemed to glow from within. Almost instantly Bill seemed to completely forget about the other two people in the room and Tom's heart almost broke as his twin looked devastated. He moved straight away to correct his error and he sat up and pulled Bill to him, putting aside his own confusion to comfort Bill's distress.

Bill felt so fragile in his arms and it didn't matter what he had just seen; Bill needed him and that was all that was important.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly, holding Bill gently, "I was just startled."

Bill didn't say anything, but leant against him, winding long arms around him so that they were almost fused together. Only then did he look up at the intruders and glared very hard.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked, not letting out his full anger, because he didn't want to upset Bill.

"Markus Nern, Bundespolizei," the man said, producing an ID as he put his gun away, "this is Sybil Cotteral, my partner."

"And exactly what are you doing in here waving a gun at an already traumatised person?" Tom could use words just like Bill could when he chose to and, since Bill couldn't tear the police officer off a strip, he sure as hell was going to.

"We apologise for that," Sybil said with a slight bow of her head, "Markus reacted on instinct, much as your brother did when we came in. If you would permit me, I believe I may be able to help him somewhat."

"How?" Tom asked pointedly; he was in no mood to be trusting.

Sybil walked slowly round the side of the bed.

"It would take a considerable amount of time to explain," she said politely, "and I do not believe you wish your twin to be in distress any longer than necessary. Suffice to say, he and I are alike, as are you and Markus."



As he watched, her eyes flashed and he realised he was a long way out of his depth. He had no idea what was going on.

"Please, let me be of assistance," Sybil said and calmly sat down on the side of the bed.

"Only if Bill wants you to," he decided, not really sure how to rationalise what was happening.

Sybil nodded her head and gave him a sympathetic smile.

"Bill," she said in a surprisingly gentle voice, "I know you have been through a terrible ordeal and that the only thing that seems safe and real to you at the moment is Tom. I would like to help you. I mean you no harm; please, take my hand and you will know I am telling the truth."

Tom held Bill like he was cradling a child and he felt his twin shift slightly as Sybil placed her hand on the bed between where she was sitting and Bill. At first he didn't think Bill would give a response, although he felt Bill shaking slightly and he was surprised when Bill slowly slid his hand across the bed until his fingers just touched Sybil's. For a moment the tableau held like that and then slowly Sybil reached out and took Bill's hand in hers. It took a long few minutes as they sat there in complete silence, but eventually Bill's shaking subsided.

"I need you to look at me, Bill," Sybil said eventually; "I need you to show me what happened to you."

It was difficult to watch, because Tom knew how close to the edge Bill was, he could feel it, but he loosened his hold as Bill slowly turned. Sybil was looking only at Bill and she gave him a small smile as they faced each other. Tom sat there as Sybil placed both her hands on Bill's one free one and fought down the irrational desire to make her let go.

"Show me," she said, her voice dropping so that it was low and almost hypnotic, "please."

When her eyes glowed this time, Tom had trouble not staring into them and he felt Bill go completely still in his arms. For long moments it was like everything had come to a stop, but when Bill made a small, distressed noise Tom moved to finish what was going on.

"Don't," Markus said, bringing him up short; "let Syb help him."

"She's hurting him," Tom replied, wanting to protect Bill more than anything in the world.

"Not deliberately," the other man said; "this has to be done."

When Bill gave a small cry and collapsed against him, Tom didn't care, all he knew was that Bill was unconscious in his arms.

"What did you do?" he demanded, looking desperately for signs of life in his twin.

"Put him to sleep," Sybil said and stood up. "Animals!"

Tom did not understand what she was talking about, but he was more worried about Bill. He moved carefully and placed his twin on the bed, checking that Bill really was sleeping.

"It was what we thought," he heard Sybil saying to Markus; "the filth that did this was trying to force a bond with him. The bond with his twin was too great and when it grew tired of trying, it turned him and left him in the sun to die. If he had not been extraordinary, he would be so much ash now."

"Is his mind still intact?"

When he heard this, Tom couldn't take it anymore.

"Someone tell me what the hell is going on and tell me now!" he all but yelled.

Markus did not look impressed, but Sybil did appear sympathetic.

"Your brother was taken by a Strigoi," Sybil said in a regretful tone; "a vampire," she said when he frowned.

Even after what he had seen that just didn't compute in Tom's head; he wanted to laugh and tell her she was crazy.

"Strigoi are not exactly what you would have seen on TV," Markus said when he did nothing; "some of them are even quite pleasant."

"Please forgive my imbecile of a partner," Sybil said and gave Markus a light tap on the arm; "he covers nerves with inappropriate humour."

"I am not nervous," Markus said in an irreverent tone, "I just have an overdose of adrenaline from staring down a pissed off day-dweller."

Quite frankly Tom had no idea what to do; he was more confused than he really wanted to admit. He had just seen his brother's eyes glow red and he had even caught a glimpse of fangs and to top that off he had seen a woman with similar glowing eyes who was trying to tell him vampires were real. He thought he could be forgiven for having a hard time with the whole situation.

"I think perhaps we should talk," Sybil said in a sympathetic tone as he just looked at her, "but first, let's make sure Bill is comfortable."

Tom was at a loss, but caring for Bill was one thing he could do without having all of his faculties intact and he moved Bill into a more comfortable position as Sybil picked up one of the blankets which had ended up at the foot of the bed. Tom was very glad Sybil didn't try and help him move Bill, because he wasn't sure he could have dealt with that.

"I'm sure you must have questions," Sybil said once they had Bill settled and Tom glanced between her and Markus, who had taken up a position near the door.

He had far too many question to put into words, but he didn't know where to start.

"You're telling me vampires are real?"

It sounded stupid even as he said it, but he had to begin somewhere.

"Yes," Sybil said simply while looking him straight in the eye.

"And you're a vampire?" he felt even sillier asking that, but he had little choice.

"I am," Sybil replied just as openly as the first time, "as is Bill now. We originated in Eastern Europe and our race tends to prefer the term Strigoi, but vampire is more obvious to the layman."

Tom looked at Bill and tried to get his head around the idea that his twin was no longer human. Even with what he had seen it was difficult to believe.

"So one of you kidnapped Bill and made him into a vampire?" he was more than a little confused by the whole situation.

"That was the ultimate outcome," Sybil said, her tone still kind and calm, "but it was not the original intention." Her tone changed then: "The animal that did this kidnapped Bill to be his bond mate. Such a bond would have made him immortal and turned him into little more than a slave, but he would still have been basically human. Because you and he are so close, the bond would not take and Bill was turned into a vampire so he could be disposed of easily. Bill was found tied to a poll on wasteland in full daylight; had he been a normal Strigoi, he would be dead. The sun would have killed him."

That one phrase sent Tom's thoughts in a thousand directions as his mind refused to believe that Bill might never have been returned to him.

"I felt him die," he said, as he trembled at the idea, "last night, I felt him die."

Sybil reached out and placed a hand on his shoulder as he struggled with the ideas. He didn't want to believe, but he had no choice.

"You and Bill had a remarkable connection," Sybil said, giving his shoulder a small squeeze; "very little can withstand a Strigoi bond, forced or not. That Bill resisted is as amazing as what he has become."

"What's a day-dweller?" Tom asked, as his mind returned to what Markus had said earlier.

"Exactly what you would think," Sybil told him, removing her hand again; "a Strigoi who can function during the day as well as at night. Some older Strigoi can survive in the light; I myself can take a few minutes of direct sunlight and can walk around in the daytime as long as I am in the shade, but most cannot. An unfed, young Strigoi burns in the sun and turns to ash. Bill is never going to enjoy lying on a beach soaking up the sun's rays again, but he has nothing to fear from it. He is quite remarkable."

The idea of Bill burning in the sun was too much for Tom to dwell on, so his mind flicked again and landed on what could have been an irrelevant point.

"Why did you say 'had'?" he asked as his besieged thoughts picked on that moment in time. "Why 'had a remarkable connection'?"

"Because what you had was remarkable," surprisingly it was Markus who spoke, "and what you have now is even more so."

Tom frowned; he wasn't following, although something sparked at the back of his mind.

Sybil sat down on the bed beside him.

"When you were reunited, in his need, Bill reached out to you," Sybil explained patiently; "he bonded with you in the way he could not allow his kidnapper to do with him. You accepted him and that is why you are his sole source of comfort."

The moment they had reconnected shot into Tom's head and he didn't try and deny what had happened. Now he had been told what was possible it felt all too obvious.

"But you said ..," he was confused.

"Between consenting partners a bond is a wonderful thing," Sybil said, almost seeming to read his mind. "Markus and I are bonded. If abused, a bond can be used to turn a human into an obedient slave, but when used between two people who want it, it is a joy."

"I'm sixty eight," Markus said from his position next to the door.

Tom had to go over that in his head again before he realised what Markus had said.

"You look about thirty," he said, since stating the obvious was about all his brain seemed to be able to do now.

"Well I always had a baby face," Markus replied with a smile, "I bonded with Sybil when I was thirty five. There is a program that runs across Europe which matches up human and Strigoi partners for work in law enforcement. I was lucky enough to have Sybil pick me and after working together as normal partners for five years, we bonded."

"It took a while for him to grow on me," Sybil said with a fond smile. "We handle cases that involve Strigoi and humans, which are rare enough to mean that we are not always required. This is our first case in two years and we were called in as soon as Bill's symptoms were flagged in the system."

"What do you do when you're not working?" Tom asked, since he had given up trying to make his shocked brain behave and work logically.

"Anything we want to," Markus replied with a smile.

It seemed to be a funny way to go about life, but Tom wasn't about to make anything of it, after all he played guitar for a living.

"And what happens now?" he asked, finally making himself believe that this was happening, but not knowing what it all meant for him and Bill.

"This is a Strigoi crime," Sybil told him, "and the culprit will be found and brought to justice by Strigoi, but the human police forces are already involved so Markus and I will act as liaisons. You and Bill need to simply concentrate on Bill's recovery; we will keep your involvement in the investigation to a minimum. I can help Bill's mind recover from the damage done by the attempted forced bonding and if you and he are willing, I would be honoured to act as Bill's mentor for all things Strigoi."

"You'll have to ask him that," Tom said quietly, as he did his best to assimilate all the information he was being given.

It seemed so crazy, but he knew it was true and it was taking a long time to sink in.

"Of course," Sybil replied with a smile. "In case you were wondering, I am eight hundred and fifty three."

Tom just blinked at that; he really couldn't imagine anyone being that old.

"So what made you choose law enforcement?" he asked, since the question popped into his head and he didn't think he could deal with any other revelations for a few minutes.

"My previous bond mate, Ilana, was killed by a human vampire hunter," Sybil said and Tom saw a flash of pain in her eyes, "and for very many years I kept to myself with very few friends in either human or Strigoi circles. Then I heard about the new age of Strigoi/human relations dawning and it intrigued me enough to draw me in. I think possibly I wanted to debunk the stupidity of my fellows, but then I met a young man who caught my attention enough to make me actually join. He can be insufferable, but Markus restored my faith in the world."

There wasn't a lot Tom could think to say about that; he had not expected a condensed life history and it kind of amazed him that this virtual stranger was being so open.

"Will Bill get better?" it was the only question that his brain seemed to have left to come up with.

"He is strong," Sybil said, reaching out and taking his hand, "I felt it in his thoughts. His mind is confused from the influence of the forced bond, but I can help remove that. It will take time, but he should start reacting more normally once the world makes sense to him again. The rest will be up to him and you."

It was a big responsibility, but then Tom had always been responsible for Bill and he had no intention of stopping now just because it was more difficult.

"Please can you tell me more about Strigoi," he finally decided to ask; "if I'm going to help Bill I need to know what to expect."

For nearly two hours Sybil spoke while Markus maintained his post by the door and added anecdotes or little pieces of information as well. By the time Sybil stood up and wandered over to her bond mate, Tom's head was spinning with information.

"He has to know the full truth," Sybil said to Markus and Tom didn't know what was going on; "I think it would be better if you explained. I will look after Bill."

Tom really didn't like being the subject of a conversation and not being involved in it, especially when he didn't understand what it was about. As Markus stood up, away from where the man was leaning on the wall, Tom found that he was worried.

"Let's go for a little walk," Markus invited, which was a bad start.

"I'm not leaving Bill," Tom said very firmly.

"I forced his mind into a peaceful sleep," Sybil said, walking back towards the bed; "he will not wake for at least another hour. I swear to you I will watch him as you would and if he begins to wake before you return I will summon you back."

"No way," he replied; nothing was going to make him leave the room.

"Tom," Markus said and for a change there was no humour in the man's eyes, "there are some things you need to know and they may make you angry. Being angry near Bill will not be good for him in his delicate state; he will sense it with you so close. We will be gone no longer than fifteen minutes, I promise."

Tom wanted to protest, but they had pulled the Bill card and he was torn. He could never hurt Bill, especially now, and this was clearly important.

"He will come to no harm," Sybil said, sitting down and stroking Bill's hair lightly, "on that you have my word of honour."

Even though he had been sitting there with visitors for two hours, Tom hadn't bothered to pull on his jeans and he couldn't be bothered with the voluminous material then either, so he stood up and grabbed the hospital dressing gown that had been hung on the back of the door.

"If this isn't important I will make sure neither of you ever see Bill again," he said very firmly and he meant every word.

"Tom," Sybil said from where she was sitting next to Bill, "we would never ask you to leave Bill if it was not of the utmost importance."

Tom was still not happy, but he did walk through the door when Markus opened it.

"There's an examination room where we can talk," Markus said as he closed the door to Bill's room, "not too far away, but far enough not to be a problem. Believe me, I remember what it was like; you won't want to leave Bill's side for days even if he were to suddenly return to normal overnight."

Tom didn't reply, because most of what he was thinking was not polite and he all but stomped into the room Markus indicated.

"Okay," he said the moment the door was closed, "what is so important that I have to leave my twin alone?"

Markus gave him a long steady look, but he refused to feel sorry for being so pissed off.

"When we came in Bill was feeding from you," Markus finally said something, "and you were reacting in a perfectly normal manner."

Tom frowned, he had managed to put his unfortunate reaction to Bill's nuzzling and then biting out of his mind. Syb had explained about feeding, how it could be platonic or sexual, but always pleasurable and he had hoped no one would mention his reaction. Bill obviously hadn't been in control to make it feel like that and since Syb had also explained that Bill would only feed from him whenever possible, he had assumed that that would change.

"Once Bill has the hang of feeding, that shouldn't be a problem," he said, very uncomfortable with the subject.

Markus shook his head and Tom frowned.

"It's always going to be the same way," Markus told him without beating around the bush; "you're Bill's bond mate; the connection is always sexual."

That didn't make any sense at all; Bill was his brother, the whole sexual thing had to be a mistake.

"He's my twin," Tom pointed out, not liking what Markus was insinuating.

He was not having sexual thoughts about Bill; that would just be wrong.

"He's your bond mate," Markus said and did not seem to be reacting the way Tom expected. "Bond mates are everything to each other; it's just the way it is. Neither of you will be able to stop the sexual reactions you have with each other. It will be as natural as being brothers is."

For a split second Tom considered hitting Markus squarely on the nose, but what he couldn't fight was the memory of his reaction to Bill. When Bill had bitten him, it had felt so right and the shame and guilt that brought with it made him sit down.

"It can't be true," he said, trying to rationalise the ideas going through his head; "that would be incest."

"Not exactly," Markus said and he looked up at the other man.

"How 'not exactly'?" Tom asked, feeling angry and wanting to lash out.

"Bill is more than your brother now; he's not human any more," Markus told him; "normal rules don't apply. Could you possibly love anyone more than you love him?"

Tom wanted to object, he wanted to scream and shout about how dare Markus suggest any of these things, but his heart knew the truth and his mind knew that his body would betray him with his heart in a moment.

"No," he said quietly and it was the truth; no one had ever meant more to him than Bill.

"Vampire instincts don't always work along the same lines as human ones," Markus said, far less blatant now; "they cross boundaries because the rules aren't the same. Bill is still your twin, but at the same time his vampire nature doesn't see it that way, which makes him far more as well."

For a few moments Tom just sat there and stared at the floor as his brain tried to rationalise this one more piece of information that seemed so ridiculous. It was almost too much.

"I can't be that to him," he said, standing up as his brain refused to behave and throw away all the memories of what it had felt like to be bitten by Bill; "not now. He won't want that, not when he's awake; he was raped for God's sake, over and over again; he's probably never going to want sex again, ever. If he thinks I want

that, it will scare the hell out of him and I have to be there for him, not make him afraid."

He went to walk past Markus; this conversation was irrelevant; he just had to control himself and be there to support Bill, but Markus caught his arm.

"It doesn't work like that," Markus said simply. "Neither of you may want to act on what you feel for some time, but it won't go away."

"So what," Tom snapped back, "am I supposed to walk back in there and just tell Bill that I want to fuck him, because that will go down so well."

Markus did not release his arm even when he tried to pull away.

"Calm down," Markus said in an even tone. "I don't suggest you tell Bill anything until he becomes aware that something is happening between you. You can't avoid this for long, but you can ease him into it and then you can take it at his pace. Just because the feelings are there, you don't have to act on them, but you do have to acknowledge them. Lying to yourselves or each other about this will not work."

Tom pulled away one more time and this time Markus let him go and he headed back to Bill's room. He needed time to think and he was confused, but he made sure he was as calm as he could be before he walked back into the other room.

End of Part 2

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### Chapter 3 Learning

Tom hadn't spoken to Sybil at all when he had re-entered Bill's room and he had just gone and sat next to his twin, taking up his position as guardian once more. His hand automatically went to Bill's hair and he carded his fingers through it slowly and carefully, almost reflexively. Bill's hair was soft, even after what Bill had been through, and the movement gave Tom as much comfort as it seemed to have given Bill throughout the late afternoon and evening.

He felt like he was almost meditating as he tried to work things out in his head. Bill was his brother; his twin; his soul mate, but now he had been told Bill was even more than that and he didn't know if he could deal with it. Possibly, if he didn't remember quite how he had felt when Bill had bitten him, it would have been easy to dismiss it as ridiculous, but he did remember and, frankly, it had blown his mind. Nothing had ever felt like that before, nothing in his whole life, and he knew himself well enough to know that he could be hooked on that experience very easily.

There was a niggling voice at the back of his mind whispering that this was right, that this was perfect, but every logical thought in him told him it couldn't be right. Incest was wrong. Then again, it wasn't exactly incest, not according to Markus; it was beyond that, stepping into entirely different territory. Bill was different now, Bill wasn't human and what Markus had told him moved beyond human rules and human notions. Unfortunately for him, he was still human and it didn't sit right with him.

Of course the more he thought, the more he knew it all came down to one thing really: what did Bill need? He knew, with out a doubt, that if Bill needed him that way then nothing else mattered. He had nearly lost half his soul and to get Bill back was the only reason to go on. He loved Bill with all his heart and whatever that meant he could find a way to deal with it; he had to, and with that thought he finally looked up.

Sybil was sitting in the chair his mother had occupied most of the time she had been there and Sybil was looking at him.

"Why did Bill's hair turn black when they gave him blood?" he asked the first random question that came into his head.

He was resolved that he would do whatever he had to do, but that did not mean that his mind did not want to shy away from it still.

"It's to do with how he sees himself," Sybil explained and Tom was very glad that she did not try and turn the conversation to something else. "For Strigoi self image is what makes us who we are and our bodies reflect what we see in our minds. If Bill were to dye his hair tomorrow and that was the colour he believed it should be, then that is what it would return to."

Tom nodded, barely registering the information.

"I think I need to get some sleep," he said, not wanting to talk about anything else just yet, "do I need to know anything else to help Bill?"

"You know everything you need to know," Sybil said carefully and slowly stood up. "Bill will require several more sessions with me before the effects of the forced bond can be eliminated. I will return tomorrow evening if you are agreeable."

Tom just nodded again; it was all a bit beyond him at the moment. He hadn't had much sleep for quite some time and with all the new information he was just about done in. Bill was still fast asleep and he had enough brain power to know that he needed to take the opportunity for what it was.

"We will see you tomorrow then," Sybil said and Tom knew it was rude, but he basically ignored the two police officers as they left.

Settling down on the bed next to Bill, he pulled the blanket over himself, not bothering to get up and take off the dressing gown. He didn't know how much sleep he would get, but he knew he had to try.

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By Tom's reckoning he had had just over two hours sleep the previous night: about an hour before Bill had bitten him and Sybil and Markus had appeared; and a little over an hour after Sybil and Markus had left before Bill woke him while having a nightmare. He had spent the rest of night with Bill curled up by his side watching stupidly childish cartoons on the TV with the sound very low. Bill hadn't seemed overly interested, but neither had Bill gone back to sleep, so Tom hadn't been able to either.

The two visits by nurses to check on them in that time had been uneventful, which was at least one thing Tom found to be thankful for. It was at about seven in the morning that Dr Brucker reappeared.

"Good morning," she said, as she entered the room, "I understand you had some visitors last night."

Tom nodded, looking down at Bill to check his twin was okay and the first thing he noticed was that Bill was watching Dr Brucker. Bill had ignored the nurses when they had come into the room and Bill hadn't moved this time, but Tom could see his twin's eyes were clearly focused on the doctor.

"Yes," he replied, watching Bill closely to see what his twin would do; "they were very helpful."

"Indeed," Dr Brucker replied, walking slowly towards the bed, "now that we know what Bill was exposed to, hopefully we will be able to help him a little more. It amazes me how people come up with such vicious designer drugs, but that said; we should be able to flush this one out of Bill's system in a few days."

It took Tom a moment to remember that Sybil had told him about a cover story for the hospital; his brain wasn't firing on all cylinders. Bill's toxicology results had been intercepted and replaced to give false information about a new, fictitious, designer drug; the effects of which Sybil was a recognised expert in. It probably wouldn't have held up under intense scrutiny, but Sybil had also mentioned something about Strigoi involvement and auto-suggestion that Tom hadn't really wanted to think too hard about. As long as it gave Bill a route to recovery that wasn't a minefield, he didn't care.

"You're looking less pale today, Bill," Dr Brucker said, and Tom watched Bill's eyes flick up to the doctor's face and then away again. "I need to take a couple of readings if you can bear with me."

Any and all equipment that had been attached to Bill when Tom had first seen him the previous day had been lost at some point because of Bill's movements; it

was a miracle that the IV and the blood bag were still attached really. It did mean, however, that the medical staff was left with less technological methods.

"May I have your wrist please?" Dr Brucker asked with a gentle smile.

Bill made no attempt to move, but when Dr Brucker reached for his wrist he didn't flinch away, which Tom took as a good sign. He felt Bill stiffen as Dr Brucker's fingers carefully took hold of Bill's wrist and she began to take Bill's pulse the old fashioned way, but that was the only reaction Bill made.

It seemed to take an age as Dr Brucker gave Bill a cursory examination, including blood pressure and temperature and other small things. Tom could feel his twin becoming more and more uncomfortable with the whole thing, but all he could do was give Dr Brucker warnings if it was becoming too much for Bill.

"I think we can remove this now," Dr Brucker said, fingering the bandage where the now empty blood bag was attached to Bill. "I can send a nurse in, in a few minutes or if you would prefer I can remove it for you now."

Tom felt Bill tense a little more, but he knew that the more people were involved the more likely Bill was to have a problem so he patted Bill's shoulder supportively and made the decision for his twin.

"If you do it I think it will cause him less stress," he said, watching Bill carefully to gauge any reaction.

When Bill did not move, he decided he had been right.

Dr Brucker smiled and pulled a pair of latex gloves from her pocket, which she quickly pulled on. Then she took out several other small things, a bottle, some cotton wool and what Tom thought was a band-aid; clearly she had come prepared.

"Now this will sting a little, but I have some numbing cream here which will take away any discomfort as soon as I'm done," Dr Brucker said and Tom felt Bill move slightly, so he held on a little tighter, trying to give as much comfort as he could.

It only took a minute or so, but something about what the doctor was doing definitely bothered Bill and by the time Dr Brucker had finished, Bill's face was buried in Tom's shoulder like it had been the whole of the previous day.

"All done," Dr Brucker announced, moving the dish she had put all the bits into, "thank you for letting me do that, Bill, I know it must have been hard."

Tom was glad that Dr Brucker spoke to Bill like a normal human being, but he wasn't sure how much Bill understood. He was pretty positive that some got through, but Bill was still adrift, he could tell.

"We'll leave the IV in for now," Dr Brucker was talking to him now and he focused his attention on her, "but if you can, Tom, I'd like you to try and see if you can get Bill to eat and drink something. The sooner we have him gaining a little weight the better."

"I'll do my best," Tom said with a nod.

"Which is all I can ask," Dr Brucker said with a smile. "Breakfast should be along soon and if there's anything you think will tempt Bill, please tell me and I'll see what I can do."

Thinking about simple things like food was hard; everything else seemed so much more important, but he nodded again anyway. Bill had always been skinny, but Tom could distinctly feel his twin's ribs at the moment, so feeding Bill up seemed like a very good idea.

"Anything with sugar is usually good," he said and did his best to smile; if Dr Brucker could keep it cheerful, then so could he.

"Well I have rounds to make," Dr Brucker said, picking up the waste from where she had removed the blood bag from Bill's arm. "If you need anything just ask."

Tom nodded, looking down at Bill and hoping that his twin would not spend all day hiding away again.

"Thank you," he said when his manners caught up with him as Dr Brucker reached to door.

He was rewarded with a departing smile and then they were alone again. What filled him with hope was that the moment the door clicked closed Bill moved and after a few moments he could see Bill's face clearly.

"Glad to have you back," he said in a chatty tone and Bill looked up at him. "Now you don't have to worry about talking to anyone else, but if you need anything you'll tell me won't you?"

For a little while Bill just stared at him, but then there was the tiniest of nods. Tom was so pleased that he positively beamed at his twin; things were definitely improving.

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Bill was trying to work things out in his head. He was sitting next to Tom with one hand twisted into Tom's t-shirt as Tom changed into clean clothes. Things around him were still pretty confusing and it took a lot of effort to keep track of anything except Tom, but it wasn't quite as nightmarish as it had been. He wasn't sure how long he had been where he was, which was disorientating, and sometimes he couldn't follow what people were saying. The only one who made sense all the time was Tom, so he always wanted Tom close, but he could now cope without clinging all the time.

He knew something had changed and he remembered Sybil, but the details were confused. He was different now, of that he was sure, and Sybil was the same as he was and she had helped him, but how and why were not coming to him. Thinking too hard about that caused memories to try and bubble to the surface, memories he didn't want and so he did his best not to concentrate too much on that. When things like that threatened, he turned his mind to Tom; Tom could keep away everything else.

"Bill," Tom said, dragging his scattered mind to the present, "do you want to get out of that awful gown now?"

For a moment he pulled the blanket around himself tighter; he was naked under the blanket and the gown and being naked meant bad things. Tom took his hand, squeezing gently and looking straight into his eyes.

"It's okay if you don't want to," Tom told him gently, "you can stay like that if it's easier. Mum brought in some clothes for us just now, remember, but you can wait if you want. They'll have to set up you IV again in a minute though, so we need to decide now, okay?"

Bill looked down at the back of his hand where there was a little plastic thing and a plaster and he vaguely remembered someone taking out the tube that had been attached. Time was a little amorphous as far as he was concerned, so he couldn't quite remember when it had been done.

"Bill," Tom's voice had a vaguely sing song quality to it when he heard it and looked up and Tom smiled when he did; "there you are, you phased out on me there for a bit."

Blinking and frowning slightly were the only responses Bill could come up with for that.

"Mum brought in some pyjamas for you," Tom said, clearly trying to coax him into doing something, "are you sure you wouldn't be more comfortable in them."

Bill's gaze travelled to the small pile of clothes a little further down the bed. The pyjamas looked familiar, but he was too confused to really know and just looked back at Tom.

"Not up with the latest fashion?" Tom asked in a playful tone. "I don't think they've ever been out of the drawer since Nana bought them for you for Christmas, but they have to be better than this thing."

Looking down at himself, Bill took note of the rather nasty blue gown he was wearing; it felt like paper against his skin. It wasn't very nice, but it was familiar and at the moment anything familiar was better than something strange.

"You really don't like the pyjamas do you?" Tom said, growing serious again. "Would you rather stay as you are?"

Bill shook his head before he had really thought about it, surprising himself, but then he looked at the pyjamas again and he found himself conflicted. He tightened his grip on Tom's shirt just a little as the whole situation unsettled him for reasons he couldn't even begin to fathom at the moment. He didn't understand himself at all.

"I have an idea," Tom said, making him look up again, "but you're going to have to let go for just a second."

That was something that Bill didn't want to do at all.

"Not completely," Tom assured him quickly, rubbing his arm gently, "just hold this instead, okay?"

Tom had lifted the edge of his top t-shirt to reveal the under one and Bill found it offered to him. It took quite a lot of effort for Bill to make his fingers unwind from the top shirt, but Tom sat there patiently as he did and gave him a warm smile as he gripped onto the second garment.

Then he watched as Tom sat away a little and then pulled off the top t-shirt, before moving back close beside him again.

"I know it's not really your style," Tom said in a chatty voice, "but it has to be better than that gown."

For a moment Bill just looked at the t-shirt being offered to him and then his mind caught up and he reached out to take hold of it. Tom had only been wearing it for a little while, he remembered that much, but it was still warm and Bill's sensitive nose could smell Tom on it and he held it to him.

"I think it would be better if you were wearing it," Tom said gently and carefully urged him to ease his grip. "If we put it over your head first, then we can get you out of this gown one arm at a time and into this and you'll be much more comfortable."

Bill nodded; he had complete trust in Tom and, as Tom began to gently help him into the huge t-shirt, he began to feel just a little more settled.

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If Tom was honest with himself, the day was a bit of a blur. There had been discussions about how long Bill would be staying in hospital, and it seemed to depend on how he responded to the treatment. Then there had been discussions about moving Bill to a hospital nearer their home, but it had been decided that was more likely to do damage at this stage. Then there had been yet more discussions about other things that Tom had decided other people could deal with, which meant he had managed to catch a few hours sleep in the afternoon and early evening when Bill had fallen asleep as well.

That meant that he was actually functioning quite well when Sybil and Markus arrived after his mother had left. The only way to describe Bill's reaction when the two law enforcement officers walked in was bristling. Bill was not being confrontational and Tom could almost feel Bill's anxiety, but he was suddenly in no doubt that if either Sybil or Marcus threatened him, Bill would leap into action as Bill had done the previous evening.

"I am glad to see you are more aware than last night, Bill," Sybil said, walking across the room and sitting herself down on the bed a little way from Bill.

Bill's grip on Tom's arm was almost painful, but at least this time Bill was not hiding away. He wasn't sure it was all good, since Bill was still very nervous of everyone, but he was glad that Bill had not retreated this time.

"How has he been today?" Sybil asked and Tom found himself the centre of her attention.

"A bit better," Tom said, snapping his focus away from Bill for a moment, "but I can lose him for minutes at a time."

Sybil nodded.

"It's to be expected," she said, which was kind of comforting and kind of not as far as Tom was concerned, "it's amazing how well he's responded already. I suspect your brother has a remarkable mind."

"I could have told you that already," Tom said, not quite sure how he should be feeling.

Sybil smiled at him for that.

"Well, Bill," Sybil said, apparently returning her attention to his twin, "I think it would be better if we began straight away. Being so confused must be distressing for you."

Bill's grip was still incredibly hard, but from the way Bill's eyes kept flipping to Markus, who was once again by the door, Tom didn't think Sybil was the one causing the tension. As he watched, he saw Sybil realise this as well.

"Markus will not hurt you, Bill," Sybil said kindly, "he is mine as Tom is yours."

Tom could tell Bill was not convinced.

"Markus, please come over here for a moment," Sybil said, causing Bill to go dead still next to Tom.

In Tom's opinion bringing the source of Bill's discomfort closer was not the wisest course of action, but he was well aware that Sybil knew what she was doing.

"Please give me your hand, Bill," Sybil said, holding out her own.

For a few moments it looked as if Bill wasn't going to move, but just like the previous night, after a little bit, Bill slowly reached out. Once Bill's fingers interlaced with Sybil's, Tom actually felt some of the tension leave Bill. As he watched, Sybil also reached out to Markus, taking her bond mate's hand and then the female vampire's face took on a kind of serene expression. The longer Sybil held Bill's hand the more Tom could feel his twin relaxing and by the time Sybil moved to bring Bill's and Markus' hands together, Bill didn't resist at all.

Tom was watching the exchange carefully and Bill held Markus' fingers for a few moments and then let go. It was clear that Bill was not completely at ease with Markus, but most of the tension was gone.

"It is easier for Bill to focus on those with a Strigoi connection at the moment," Sybil explained with a small smile, "since that is what his kidnapper was trying to make him do. Markus was probably not registering fully before, but he should be now. Hopefully that will make things a little more comfortable."

"Thanks," Tom said, since he was sure Bill was not about to speak.

Sybil nodded in acknowledgement.

"Now, Bill," Sybil said, speaking slowly and calmly, "I am sure you do not wish to break contact with Tom, but I need your full attention on me. I would like you to move so that Tom is behind you and you are facing me. Can you do that?"

Tom waited for Bill to move first, but when Bill shifted he took that as agreement and helped by moving behind Bill. He sat down with his legs either side of Bill and held his twin loosely around the waist as Bill leant against his chest.

"Thank you," Sybil said with another of her warm smiles.

Tom idly wondered if Sybil really was that serene, or if she was just really good at handling people. Sybil reached out with both hands and Bill reached back, which surprised Tom somewhat and then he saw Sybil's eyes flash momentarily and Bill shuddered slightly in his arms.

"Show me, Bill," Sybil's voice had a hypnotic quality that was difficult to resist and Tom found himself wanting to connect with her as well; "show me your confusion and pain, let me help you find your way."

Tom saw Sybil's eyes begin to glow gently with a constant warmth and he couldn't help being drawn in; this time he was face on to her rather than being at an angle and he couldn't look away. It was like staring into a fire and becoming lost in the comfortable heat and dancing flames. Everything except Sybil and Bill dropped away from his awareness and he drifted for happy moments in the cheerful warmth, but then he felt something else. It was distant, but it was there and it was not calm or happy. Without thinking, he reached for what he realised was a sense of distress and he tried to offer comfort.

He was not really aware of what he was doing; it was pure instinct that moved him and suddenly he felt the ball of confusion and hurt reach back to him. It was in that instant that he realised he was reaching out to Bill; he did not know how, but he was, of that he was sure. Almost at once he couldn't think as he was swamped with bewilderment and anger and pain and images flashed into his mind; images of hands and mouths and things he did not want to know. Each one was a moment of degradation and pain for his baby brother and that made him so incredibly angry. He wanted to lash out and repay everyone a hundred fold even as he needed to protect Bill, even from the memories.

"Tom, no," a firm voice brought his racing mind to a stop, "you cannot help him this way. Let the connection go; it is over for now."

Tom didn't want to let go; he wanted to hold and protect Bill in every way, but the voice was very commanding. He could hold on, but it would mean a fight.

"Please, Tom," the voice spoke again; "this will not help Bill."

Something in him believed the voice and so he finally did as he was asked; reluctantly, but he did it. The feelings of distress lessened and the warmth began to come back and very slowly he started to remember that this was not the real world. He blinked once and then twice and finally found himself staring into Sybil's eyes as he held a shaking and quietly crying Bill.

"I am sorry, Tom," Sybil said quietly; "I had no idea you would be dragged in. The connection you have with Bill is incredible."

Tom didn't know what to say; his mind was reeling in shock and about all he could think of was Bill. His twin had twisted in his arms and was leaning against him, clearly distressed, but not unconscious this time and he had no choice but to give Bill his whole attention. He wrapped his arms around his twin, still feeling and seeing the echoes of the images in his mind, and rocked Bill gently, doing his utmost to soothe away the hurt. Now he had seen what Bill had been through, even if it was only a fraction of the horror, and there was nothing in the world that could tear him away from Bill

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Tom had never had a shower so fast in his life. The hospital had let him use the staff facilities, but he hated leaving Bill's room, especially after the previous night. Their mum was in there with Bill and Bill was asleep, finally, but Tom still hadn't wanted to move away. He had only gone because his mother had made him. He opened the door very quietly, but he found what he had hoped not to: Bill was awake. It wasn't as bad as it could have been though; Bill was still at the top end of the bed, legs pulled up like a shield, but Bill was not hiding his face



and seemed to actually be looking at their mother who was speaking in a quiet, gentle voice about something that Tom couldn't really hear.

The moment Tom walked in, Bill's whole attention was on him and Bill wordlessly held out his arms. Tom dropped the bag containing the towel, old clothes and washing stuff onto the floor and trotted over to his twin straight away. He climbed onto the bed into the position he had been mostly sitting in for the past two days and put his arms around Bill, who snuggled up to him like he was a human security blanket.

What he had seen when he had connected with Bill through Sybil still haunted him, but he refused to let it bring him down anymore than simply knowing it had. Bill needed help to recover, not to wallow in anger and pain and this morning, in the light of day, he knew why Sybil had dragged him out of the link with Bill. Tom could have lost himself in hatred at what had been done to his baby brother and it was Sybil that had prevented that.

The previous night he had sent Sybil and Markus away almost as soon as Bill had calmed enough for him to pay attention to anyone else. He had had no will for discussion or anything else and he had instantly blamed Sybil, but he knew it was not her fault now. When she visited again that night he was going to have to apologise for his behaviour; it had been uncalled for.

"You were right," he said as he shifted a little to make himself more comfortable, "I feel better clean."

"Of course I was right," his mum replied, "mothers know these things."

He managed to smile at that.

"You two remind me more and more of when you were little," his mother said, sitting back in her chair; "I was sure when you were small you could read each other's minds and I'm sure Bill sensed when you were gone."

"We've always been able to read each others minds," Tom said, deciding that he really didn't want a deep conversation now; "it's just I've never really needed tips on eye makeup and Bill wouldn't have known what to do with a pretty girl if he had ever managed to pick one up."

It occurred to him just after he had said it that that could be a minefield, but his mother smiled.

"Well one of you had to be the romantic," she said, "its one of the rules of being an artist and I'd have been mortified if you both turned out to be realists."

Tom just nodded and looked down to see that Bill had begun to pay attention to what was going on. Both of Sybil's visits had helped Bill a great deal and Tom hoped that they would continue to do so.

"The treatment seems to be working," his mother said and he wondered briefly if she could read minds as well.

"Yeah," he agreed and tucked a stray piece of hair behind Bill's ear for him, "Bill's coming back to us, bit by bit. Soon we won't remember what it was like to have him so quiet; he'll be babbling non-stop again. Then we'll look back and pray for the blessed quiet."

His mother laughed lightly at that.

"Ah, well you see I learned to tune you both out when you were toddlers," she said, and her tone was cheerful, but Tom could still hear the underlying strain. "For the record you can both talk for Germany."

"Maybe," Tom agreed, very happy to just keep talking about nothing, "but at least I have something useful to say most of the time."

At that his mother raised an eyebrow in a gesture strikingly similar to the one Bill often used when doubting a comment; it was amazing how many of their mum's habits Bill had picked up.

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Bill had been quiet since Sybil's third visit, but Tom didn't think it was a bad quiet. His twin seemed calmer, less afraid, even though when he looked into Bill's eyes he could clearly see the haunted expression that never seemed to leave. This time Sybil had spoken to Bill for quite a long time about Strigoi, so much so that Tom had been worried that it would be too much for Bill, but his twin had just listened silently. They were reclining on the bed now, propped up by numerous pillows and Bill was snuggled up to him, but Bill wasn't clinging anymore.

"Tomi," Bill's voice was very, very quiet, but Tom heard it because he had been dying to hear his twin's voice for days now, "what am I?"

It was such a loaded question.

"You're my Bill," Tom replied eventually, stroking Bill's back gently.

Bill pulled away just a little, sitting up slightly and Tom found his twin looking into his eyes. It was a little eerie in that Bill had always been able to tell what he was thinking, but now it was as if Bill was reading his soul.

"But I'm not," Bill said quietly.

It almost broke Tom's heart to see the confusion in his twin.

"Yes you are," he said firmly, "no matter what else you are, singer, rock super star, model, Strigoi; you are my Bill."

Bill's features were marred by a tiny frown.

"Always?" Bill asked in little more than a whisper.

"Always," Tom promised, and he meant it from the bottom of his heart.

The frown finally smoothed out and Bill settled back down again, head on his chest, arm across his middle and for a while he thought Bill might go back to sleep. Bill hadn't been put to sleep by Sybil this time, but the meeting did seem to have wiped him out and they had been dozing for a couple of hours.

"When will mum be here?" Bill surprised him with the question.

So far Bill seemed to have had very little interest in anyone but him; it felt incredibly good to hear him talk about someone else.

"Visiting hours start at nine," Tom told his twin, "it's seven thirty now. There's breakfast first in a little while."

The hospital was still not enforcing visiting hours for Bill, especially considering that Sybil's visits were easier to arrange at night. The female Strigoi could take some sunlight due to her age, but what she was doing with Bill required her at her best and so she had requested night meetings. Bill didn't seem to be working to any time clock close to a normal day at the moment and so Dr Brucker was allowing anything that fitted in with Bill. However, outside the hospital certain times were easier because that was still running to a timetable so yesterday their mother had decided to try normal visiting hours.

"I'm hungry," Bill said after another moment's silence.

"Normal hungry or other hungry?" Tom asked, wanting to be sure.

The whole conversation about blood and feeding from Tom had been interesting and Tom wasn't sure if the idea disturbed Bill or not.

"Normal hungry," Bill told him, seemingly taking the question in his stride.

That was another new thing; they had taken Bill off the IV the previous evening and the previous day Bill had eaten some things when Tom had encouraged him to, but Bill hadn't seemed to care about it.

"I can see if I can get you breakfast early," Tom said, pretty sure that if he mentioned the fact that Bill was actually asking for food some would show up pretty fast, "or there's a huge tub of gummy worms that Mum brought in yesterday in the cupboard."

He felt what he hoped was a smile against his chest.

"Gummy worms it is," he said, pretty sure he was reading Bill right.

Bill sat up again, a very interested expression on his face as Tom slipped off the bed and opened the cupboard to retrieve the sweets. The fact that Bill let him move away with no objection was one of the best signs yet that whatever Sybil was doing for Bill was working.

"But don't make yourself sick," he warned as he carefully opened the tub and gave it to Bill.

"I haven't done that since I was eight," Bill protested and just for a moment there was a flicker of the old Bill.

Tom couldn't help smiling at that.

"Jumbie," was all he said and watched Bill blush.

Given how pale Bill was now, the red tint was even more noticeable than it would have been. It was actually totally adorable and Tom mentally rolled his eyes as he realised what he was thinking. When Bill picked up a gummy worm and sucked it into his mouth with a little pop, Tom's thoughts became anything but innocent and it was his turn to blush. His libido had adjusted to thinking of Bill as more than his brother quite well even if his logical brain hadn't caught up. He squashed the thoughts as well as he could and sat back down beside Bill. Bill's reactions in anything sexual still seemed to be completely unconscious; he'd felt Bill reacting

to him, but only when asleep or mostly asleep and, when awake, Bill seemed totally innocent of what was going on between them. It was not going to be easy when Bill finally realised, but Tom was ready for it when it happened.

"The fans loved that," Bill said, eating another gummy worm.

Tom still remembered the face Bill had made when the news had filtered back about the behind the scenes footage and how Jumbie was one of the favourite bits. Sometimes his twin really was so delightful and innocent.

"I'm not saying they didn't," Tom replied with a smile, "but with that plane I'm sure you regressed to being about five years old, so I had to make sure with the gummy worms."

That earned him a little grin.

For a little while, Tom just sat there watching Bill munch happily on defenceless sugared worms and then Bill stopped, looking down at the pot for a moment.

"Mum didn't bring these," Bill said suddenly, "Georg did, I will have to thank him."

For a moment Tom didn't know what to say and he didn't react at all until Bill had gone back to eating. The gummy worms were in fact from Georg and since they were being very careful with who came to see Bill, Georg had given them to their mother to bring in. His mum had told him about it while Bill was asleep the previous day.

"Bill," Tom asked carefully, not wanting to upset Bill if his twin was not comfortable with it, "how did you know that?"

To his relief Bill didn't seem to mind at all.

"I could smell something on the box," Bill replied as if it was perfectly normal, "and at first I thought it was mum's perfume, but I just realised it's Georg's deodorant."

"Yeah well, he always did like the girly smelling one," he commented and earned himself another smile from Bill.

"Is Gordon coming with Mum today?" Bill asked, surprising Tom yet again.

Tom almost felt like crying; it was such a normal question. Sybil's last session with Bill had had an incredible affect on Bill's state of mind and Tom was finally beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

"I'm sure he can if you want him to," Tom said, trying to sound perfectly calm; "the hospital was worried about too many visitors overwhelming you, but they can't really object if you're asking can they?"

Bill looked at him and shook his head with a little smile and then went back to the tub of gummy worms.

End of part 3

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## Chapter 4 Others

Bill had flaked out after about fifteen minutes with the gummy worms and Tom had taken the opportunity to ring his mother and ask her to bring Gordon as well for the visit. In the end Bill had been so deeply asleep that Tom couldn't wake him, so, when their mother and stepfather arrived, Bill was still eating breakfast. Having slept, Bill had a lot more energy than Tom had seen in him all the time he had been at the hospital. There was no where near the usual exuberance Bill normally had, but it was so different it amazed him.

The knock on the door came just as Bill had taken a huge bite of a piece of toast and Tom watched his twin carefully to gauge his reaction.

"Mum," Bill said, seemingly forgetting his mouth was almost full and looking at the closed door.

It was only then that Bill appeared kind of nervous.

"I'll go and let them in," Tom said, patting him on the arm.

He had been sitting on the end of the bed while Bill ate his food. The hospital was providing him with food as well, but he had eaten quickly, because he knew it was likely that their parents would arrive in the middle of breakfast. Tom saw Bill pick up a pillow and hug it to his front as he opened the door.

"Hi, Mum," he greeted with a smile and hug as his mother came through the door.

Gordon gave him a fatherly pat on the back and then he closed the door as his parents walked into the room. It was a little awkward as they came to a halt once they realised Bill was looking at them.

"Hello, Mama," Bill said very quietly and Tom heard his mother give a little gasp.

He waited then, not sure what was going to happen next. Very slowly Bill put down the pillow and moved to the edge of the bed. It was the furthest Bill had moved voluntarily and by himself since the kidnapping and Tom found himself holding his breath. He watched as their mother slowly walked towards Bill and Bill took a couple of hesitant steps in return. They stood a foot or so apart for what seemed like ages and then finally Bill moved.

"Oh, Bill," their mum said as Bill wrapped his arms around her and she responded in kind.

For a moment Tom felt like crying as he saw Bill reconnect with someone other than him, but he caught himself quickly. Instead he walked back up to the bed and sat down.

"Finish your breakfast," he said in a no nonsense tone when Bill and his mother finally broke apart and the rebellious look that Bill sent him made him grin broadly. "It's getting cold," he added as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Bill rolled his eyes at that and sat back down; Tom knew his twin could be obstinate, but even though he pouted, Bill did go back to his piece of toast.

Gordon didn't really seem to know what to do with himself, but went to sit down when Simone took him by the hand and led him to the two chairs that were set up for them.

"You're looking so much better, Bill," their mum said with a smile as she sat down, "how are you feeling."

"Strange," Bill admitted around his food, "but better; Syb is helping me sort my head out."

"Syb?" their mum asked. "Who is Syb?"

Bill smiled as if he was about to tell his mother about his best friend in school and Tom realised he should have spoken to Bill about that before their parents arrived.

"Syb's a S..."

"Specialist," Tom interrupted as smoothly as he could, hoping that it would not upset his twin; "the one Dr Brucker mentioned yesterday, she's been coming at night because that was when Bill has been most with it. She asked if you could come back this evening so she could speak with you, since she's an expert on Bill's condition."

Looking at Bill, Tom knew this was going to be bad, he could see it and he moved to Bill's side straight away. Bill went from buoyant and cheerful to anxious and distressed in a heartbeat.

"They don't know," Bill whispered in a voice Tom was sure only he could hear, "Tomi, they don't know. They might ... they might ..."

"Ssh," Tom said, stroking the hair back from Bill's face and making his twin look him in the eye, "this is Mum and Gordon, they won't anything."

"But they don't know," Bill said, clearly close to tears.

"My Bill," he said firmly, "remember; you're always my Bill and you're Mum's Bill and Gordon's Bill too, no matter what."

Bill was falling to pieces again, all the seeming togetherness gone as the crisis reared its head and Tom just climbed back onto the bed, pulled Bill to him and let it happen. He couldn't keep Bill in one piece, but he could hold the shards together until Bill could do it himself. With Bill's face buried in his shoulder he looked up at his confused and worried parents.

"Not you," he mouthed at them and gently cradled Bill as his twin shook silently in his arms.

In the end, when it became obvious Bill was staying put, he went back to the technique he had been using before and spoke to his parents as if everything was normal, holding Bill to him and hoping that his twin would react sooner or later. Eventually Bill did pull away from him, but Bill was quiet and withdrawn almost to the same extent as he had been before. Coaxing any words out of him was incredibly hard, but Tom managed it a few times as the day wore on.

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Bill was still subdued by the time Sybil arrived.

"Good evening, Gentlemen," Sybil greeted as she came into the room.

"Hi, Syb," Tom said and tried to present a more cheerful front than he was feeling; Sybil had asked both of them to feel free to use the shortening of her name and so he decided then was a good time to start.

After seeing such a difference in Bill that morning, having his twin set back so much in such a short time was weighing heavily on him. It was like living on a yoyo.

Bill was sitting in the middle of the bed, cross legged, staring down at his hands and barely even glanced up when Sybil entered the room. As Tom watched, Sybil walked over to where Bill was and sat down, reaching out in an almost motherly gesture and tucking a stray lock of Bill's hair behind his ear for him; clearly Bill brought out that instinct in many people. Bill didn't move.

"I can feel your fear, Bill," Sybil said gently, "you should not be keeping it inside."

Sybil looked over at Tom and beckoned him forward with her eyes. He walked over and sat down on the bed beside Bill.

"I need you to tell us why you are afraid, Bill," Sybil said in a firm, but kind tone, "you must not bottle it up inside or it will undo all I am helping you with."

She reached out and lifted Bill's chin and Tom just wanted to gather Bill back into his arms and take the pain away, but he knew he couldn't.

"I don't want them to know," Bill said in a voice that clawed at Tom's heart. "I thought they knew, but they didn't and I don't want them to know."

Tom slipped his fingers between Bill's and squeezed his twin's hand in silent support.

"It's too late, Bill," Sybil replied and surprised him as much as she clearly surprised Bill, "I have already spoken to them and they needed to know."

"What?" Tom couldn't help himself; that hadn't been the plan.

Sybil turned her wise gaze onto him and he found himself shutting up before he could protest further.

"I called them this afternoon and asked them to come in earlier than they had arranged with you," Sybil explained calmly. "Most people do not even suspect we really exist; it is a shock to the system and people in shock do not react normally. I did not want Bill exposed to that in his delicate condition so I spoke to your parents without you present."

Bill looked completely terrified.

"What happened?" it was a desperate question.

"Your mother cried," Sybil said, speaking in a very gentle tone, "and your stepfather comforted her. Then they both asked to see you as soon as possible."

Bill didn't look like he was sure this was true, which was so very sad, because once Bill would have had complete faith in their mother.

"Markus is talking to them now, reassuring them as only he can," Syb continued. "He will bring them along shortly."

Tom sat down on the bed and pulled Bill against him in a quick hug.

"Everything will be fine," he promised, rubbing Bill's arm gently, knowing that his touch soothed Bill in a way nothing else could.

Bill turned and looked at him and still didn't seem to believe.

"This is Mum and Gordon," he tried again; "the parents who let us go out and be rock stars. This is nothing compared to that."

It was supposed to be a little joke and he smiled at Bill, trying to make him see that everything would be okay, and he did get the slightest response back, but only the slightest.

"Mum will probably just ask you to help move all the heavy crap out of the spare room when we get home," he had a last ditch attempt. "You know Gordon's been avoiding it for years."

That actually earned him the tiniest of smiles. At that moment he wanted to kiss Bill so badly it hurt and he only just managed not to. He sat back a little to bring himself under control and then he turned to Syb. It was quite obvious that she knew what he was feeling, even if Bill still appeared completely innocent of it.

"These are for you, Bill," Syb said, reaching into her pocket and pulling out a small plastic case.

Tom leaned over a little, curious as to what Syb was holding.

"Contacts?" he asked as Bill took the offered gift.

Syb smiled and nodded.

"They make a vampire's life far easier," Syb replied and Tom watched Bill examining the case carefully and slowly opening it. "They will do the same job as dark glasses, but less visibly to anyone looking. Bill, I think it would be a good idea if you try these soon and get used to them before you leave the hospital. Once you're up and around properly we'll have to organise a trip to an optician to have some custom made just for you; they'll be more comfortable that way, but these will help you get started."

Bill put the lid back on the case and looked up.

"Thank you," Bill said in a quiet voice.

It was clear Bill wasn't really thinking much about the lenses and Tom couldn't blame his twin; he would have been scared in Bill's place as well. When Bill's eyes zeroed in on the door and Syb turned to look in the same direction, Tom knew that his parents had to be outside in the hallway. Without asking either of them, Syb stood up and walked to the door. Bill looked ready to bolt when Syb calmly took hold of the door handle and Tom tightened his grip just a little so Bill was flush against him. Right about then Bill needed all the comfort he could get, so Tom was going to make sure he was there to give it. By the time the door was opened and Markus appeared in the doorway, Bill was breathing in little gasps



and it was all too clear to Tom that Bill was starting to panic; he had little choice but to do something.

Taking hold of Bill's chin he turned his twin's head so that Bill had to look at him.

"Look into my eyes," he said calmly, but firmly, "don't think about anything else. Just breathe and look at me."

Bill appeared to try, but was obviously having trouble.

"In," Tom said, taking a long deep breath, "out," he continued and demonstrated, "in," Bill just about managed it on the second instruction, "out."

He didn't take any notice of the fact that people were entering the room, he gave his full attention to Bill and hoped that Bill would be able to do the same in turn. It took a few more calm instructions, but eventually Bill was no longer about to hyperventilate and Tom knew they had to face their mum and Gordon.

"There is nothing to worry about," he said in a low whisper.

Bill gave a shaky nod in return.

Finally turning to look, Tom saw their mother hovering at the end of the bed; it was very clear she had been crying, but what had Tom's eyes tearing up even though he blinked them away was the love shining in her red rimmed eyes. He had never had any doubt that their mum would embrace what ever became of her children, but then he had not had every foundation of his character tested and undermined like Bill.

"Billi," their mother said in a hushed voice.

Bill was still looking at him and Bill looked so terribly afraid. Tom gave his twin a little nod of encouragement and very slowly Bill turned. The tension was so thick Tom thought he could almost see it. This time their mother didn't wait for Bill to move, the moment Bill so much as glanced at her, she walked forward and she took hold of Bill's face in her hands.

"I always knew my boys were extraordinary," she said and Tom could hear the tears in her voice, "but I never imagined this much. My poor baby, what did he do to you?"

Then Tom watched his mother lean forward and place a kiss on Bill's forehead before pulling Bill into a close embrace.

"I love you," their mum said, holding out her hand to Tom as she held Bill close, "both of you."

Tom went to his mother then, without the slightest hesitation and wrapped her and Bill in his long arms. Bill's arm snaked around him as well and Bill's grip was almost painful, but that was because it was strong and firm. It felt like an embrace that could last forever.

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The world was a bit of an up and down place for Bill at the moment. One minute everything was clear and he was happy and content and the next something would frighten him and send him reeling into the abyss of despair from which he could barely escape. The only thing that was constant was Tom; Tom was his

rock as his mind lurched between states that he didn't seem to have much control over.

He remembered the last few days more as flashes than real memories and he had moments even now when he didn't remember what had happened, but they were much shorter. Syb had told him that it was the pressure his mind had been put under by his attacker trying to force a bond with him. Parts of his thought processes had shut down in self defence and with Syb's help they were slowly recovering, but sometimes his mind still retreated.

The memory of his captivity was also a mess of feelings and images rather than anything coherent, but bits of proper memory were beginning to come back to him as well. He didn't want to remember, but there was nothing he could do about it, so he tried to push the recollections as far away from his conscious thoughts as he could. Tom helped with that; he could concentrate on Tom when his twin was there and it kept the fears at bay.

He was concentrating on Tom very hard as they waited for today's visitors to arrive. Part of him wanted to see Georg and Gustav, which was why he had asked for them to be allowed to visit, but the rest of him was terrified. Logically he knew they wouldn't hurt him, but men frightened him; they pulled up garbled memories of strong arms holding him down and another body violating his own. He couldn't help it and the idea that he might freak out on his friends was horrible to him.

The fact that he was wearing his own clothes for the first time in a long while made him feel a little better. His mother had brought some in earlier in the day and it felt good to be at least a little in control of his appearance again. A small excursion to the shower down the hall had helped his confidence as well, even though he was absolutely sure he never would have had the courage to step outside his room without Tom right there.

"Oh my god," Georg said as soon as the door opened, "you'd think we were visiting royalty or something."

"At least you got the pretty woman asking you questions," Gustav replied, acting as if it was any other day, "I got the six foot four gorilla with a bad attitude."

Bill didn't quite know how to react, but after a moment he cracked a smile.

"Hi guys," Georg greeted with a grin, "you would not believe the hoops we had to jump through to get in here."

"You'd think you weren't famous or something," Tom said with a laugh.

Bill might have managed to find the courage to say something as well, but at that moment his nose twitched and his eyes zeroed in on a covered something that Gustav was carrying.

"Waffles," he said, before his mind caught up with his sense.

"Glad to see your nose is working okay," Gustav said and pulled the cover off what he was holding with a flourish.

"We come bearing gifts," Georg added and the pair walked further into the room.

"Where on earth did you get waffles?" Tom asked and Bill wanted to know the same thing.

The fact that the waffles were still hot and appeared to be covered in powdered sugar was making Bill's mouth water.

"Gustav sweet talked the manager of the cafeteria downstairs," Georg said with a laugh; "you know how the slightly older ladies think he's the best thing since sliced bread."

"That's because I know words longer than one syllable," Gustav replied and put the tray on the bed.

Gustav then produced four plastic forks and put them on the bed next to the waffles.

"I'd eat them while they're hot if I were you," their drummer said and picked up one of the four cardboard holders containing a waffle before wandering to sit down in one of the chairs.

Much to Bill's pleasure, Tom picked up two of the offerings and handed one to him. It wasn't that he couldn't move; it was just he didn't want to do anything stupid and he still had a few issues with men. It wasn't logical, but it took him a while to get used to people, even if he had known them forever.

"Thank you," he said, remembering his manners after the wonderful flavour of the first bite brought his mouth alive.

"I think we may need the name of your contact," Tom said with a conspiratorial wiggle of his eyebrows.

"Hmmm," Bill agreed happily around his next mouthful. "Oh, and thank you for the gummi worms, Georg," he added as the thought came to him.

"Well we couldn't let you starve on hospital food, now could we," Georg replied and successfully managed to tip icing sugar all down his black t-shirt.

That made Bill giggle and he realised he was having trouble remembering why he had been nervous in the first place.

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Bill was restless and agitated and he knew exactly why, but he didn't quite know how to go about getting what he needed. He was hungry, and not for food, and he had been most of the day. He had thought he had the whole idea of feeding sorted out in his head, but now faced with it, he clearly didn't. The problem was it seemed so alien to have to ask Tom to help him. He knew he had bitten Tom before, but it was all a jumble in his head that just didn't make any sense. He couldn't tell what was dream and what was reality from that time.

Tom had seemed somewhat reluctant to go into details about what it had been like for him and Bill could only assume that it had been unpleasant. Asking Tom for anything unpleasant after how much Tom had already done for him was something he only wanted to do if he really had to. The problem was that the longer he waited the more fixated he was becoming on Tom.

It hadn't been long since his whole world had been Tom, but it had been just long enough that his fixation was worrying. He gnawed nervously on the end of his

thumb as Tom watched a TV show that Bill had long since given up trying to watch as well.

"What's wrong, Bill?" Tom asked and he couldn't help jumping just slightly, since he'd been concentrating so hard on trying not to take any notice of his twin.

He looked up at Tom rather nervously, not sure what his reaction would be if he faced Tom full on. Tom frowned at him almost immediately and reached out carefully towards him. He was so busy trying not to fixate totally on Tom's neck that he didn't even react. Because he had lost so much weight in captivity he became cold very easily and the first few days the hospital had kept the room very warm, but now they were taking the temperature down to more normal levels and hence he was wearing more layers than normal, and he had used the excuse to keep his little black hat on. Tom gently pulled it off, letting his hair fall free.

"Bill," Tom said almost immediately, "why didn't you tell me?"

Bill knew his hair would have many more pale streaks than usual; it was one of the first signs of a real need to feed rather than just wanting to. He let his head drop as he realised that he was backed into a corner now.

"Billi," Tom said in a very gentle voice, "please tell me what's wrong. Why didn't you let me know you were hungry?"

He looked up through his fringe, barely daring to look Tom in the eye; he felt so ashamed that this need was eating him up inside.

"I don't want to hurt you," he said quietly.

"Hurt me?" Tom asked and sounded distinctly confused. "Bill, you would never hurt me."

Now it was Bill's turn to be confused.

"But you don't like it," he said, deciding that they just had different definitions of hurt at the moment.

Tom took his hand.

"What makes you say that?" Tom asked and Bill looked up a little more as his twin's tone comforted him a little.

He searched Tom's face for a little while, trying to work out if Tom was just hiding the truth. They hadn't been able to lie to each other ever, but they had perfected the art of omitting certain things if necessary and he was sure Tom would definitely omit things for him at the moment if Tom thought he couldn't cope with it.

"You didn't want to talk about it when Syb brought it up," he said in a quiet voice.

Tom shut his eyes and looked so sad for a moment that Bill reached out to touch his twin's face.

"Oh Bill, I'm so sorry," Tom said, eyes opening again, "I didn't mean to make you feel like that. I was being an idiot."

Bill didn't understand; not wanting to do something you found unpleasant wasn't being an idiot. He opened his mouth to reply, but he was a little slower than Tom.

"I was embarrassed," Tom said, which surprised Bill somewhat.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because of the way I reacted last time," Tom said, cheeks turning a little pink. "It wasn't unpleasant, Bill, it was the opposite and I reacted to the pleasure. When you bite me it's the most incredible feeling."

Bill didn't know what to say; it was difficult to know how to respond to news like that, so he just sat there.

"Look," Tom said before he could remotely come up with something to say, "let's forget that we've both been idiots, okay. You need to feed and I'm more than ready to let you, so I'll go and lock the door and then we can sort out how we're going to do this. Is that okay with you?"

Bill nodded; he still didn't quite know what to think, but he could not argue with his needs anymore. As he watched, Tom hopped off the bed, walked over to the door and flicked the latch on it. When his twin came back, he began to feel very nervous.

"You look like you're about to take a hideous exam or something," Tom said with a little smile, sitting back down beside him.

"I'm not sure what to do," Bill admitted, since he was suddenly sure he was going to mess this up somehow.

"Then I think you're over thinking it," Tom told him; "you know what you need, Bill. Go with the flow and let it happen."

Bill didn't feel anywhere near as confident as Tom sounded, but he did know what he was feeling and his eyes found the pulsing blood vessel at Tom's throat incredibly interesting.

"Bill, you won't hurt me," Tom said in a very knowledgeable tone, "now stop hurting yourself."

He looked into Tom's eyes and knew instantly that his twin was completely sincere and it was almost like flicking a switch. There were tiny prickling sensations in his gums, like the faintest static shock, and it felt incredibly bizarre as his teeth moved. What was even more bizarre was that it didn't hurt in the slightest, it was just really weird and he couldn't resist running his tongue over one of the sleek fangs that had descended from his upper jaw. Things in the room seemed to have far more detail all of a sudden and when he let his eyes sweep over Tom, he found that he couldn't drag his eyes away again.

He knew Tom was beautiful; it was a given fact that he had never really thought about. People called him beautiful all the time, but Tom was as well; they had the same bone structure, he was just a little more feminine than Tom. Yet now, Tom was captivating and his eyes danced over every detail of his twin's face, slipping down over the broad, muscled shoulders and taking in everything that was Tom.

"Bill," Tom's voice made him smile; he couldn't help it, "are you okay?"

"Hmmm," he replied, nodding and slowly kneeling up on the bed and moving closer to his twin.

He could smell Tom's deodorant and the light hint of their mother's fabric softener, and under that there was the musky, male scent of Tom himself. He'd never really thought how Tom smelt before, not consciously, and he realised that Tom's smell comforted him and called to him and made him feel something that his mind just skipped over.

Leaning forward, he let his nose linger at the crook of Tom's neck and he breathed in, enjoying the moment for the pure hedonistic pleasure that it was. He didn't question why he wanted to do it or even what he was doing, he was far too wrapped up in actually doing it and on impulse he darted his tongue out and touched it to Tom's offered neck. Instantly his senses sparked with recognition and need and he saw Tom shudder.

A tiny voice in the back of his mind wondered why Tom reacted like that, but most of him didn't care as his instincts spoke far louder than logic. Without really thinking what he was doing, he pushed Tom backwards onto the bed, coming to rest half laying on his twin. He could hear Tom's pulse; the steady beating of his twin's heart and it called to him like a Siren. Opening his mouth, he moved in as close as possible and bit down, almost delicately, on Tom's flesh.

Almost instantly blood hit his tongue and it was the most wonderful taste and flowed into his mouth like warm velvet. Every cell in his body seemed to come alive at the same time as he tasted Tom and felt his twin become part of him. The pleasure was so intense he had to share it and he opened himself to Tom, giving back everything he could as the perfect moment seemed to go on for eons. It was as if time had slowed down to an infinitely slow crawl as the wonderful nectar flowed into him. Swallowing seemed to take an age of time as universes of feeling were created and destroyed in the wake of the energy that came with the blood.

Bill hardly knew what he was doing as he was completely consumed by the experience of feeding from Tom. It felt perfectly right and for all he cared it could have gone on forever, but it didn't. Just as his instincts had led him into the experience, so they led him out and he found himself drawing back and sucking and licking on the small wounds he had created. He became aware of more than the existential, and the fact that Tom was making small breathy sounds and holding onto him tightly made it into his head. Again he felt something, something that his conscious mind skidded away from as if he wasn't allowed to know it yet and he slowly pushed himself away from Tom, sitting up and blinking as his brain tried to adjust back to normal reality.

He felt content and sated and very, very awake, if somewhat dazed, but there was one thing he had to be sure of.

"Tom," he said quietly, looking down at his brother where Tom was just lying there, "are you okay?"

Tom held up one finger.

"n minute," Tom mumbled and did not open his eyes.

Tom didn't look distressed or anything like that, in fact Tom looked how Bill felt, apart from the awake bit, but Bill was not feeling overly secure just at the moment and he had to be sure.

"Tom," he tried again.

Now his twin cracked open an eye and peered at him.

"I'm fine," Tom told him and slowly cracked a smile, "I'm better than fine. God, that's almost better than sex."

Bill couldn't help it as he felt his cheeks beginning to heat up.

"Tom," he said and swiped his brother on the arm.

Tom just grinned at him and slowly sat up.

"Sorry, Bill," Tom said with a laugh, "but I didn't want you getting the wrong idea again. Next time, no hiding and then I promise not to tease you."

Bill let his head drop as he blushed some more, but he did nod and smiled just a little. At least he knew Tom did enjoy this now.

End of Part 4

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## Chapter 5 Going Home

"It's okay, Bill," Tom said slowly, stroking Bill's back in gentle circles, "you're safe, no one can hurt you."

It had been a hard session; the more sessions Bill had with Syb, the less confused he seemed and the fewer moments there were when Bill lost time, but each time Bill remembered more about his ordeal and Tom hated to see his twin in pain. There was nothing more in the world Tom would have liked to be able to do than wipe away what had been done to Bill, but all he could do was be there for Bill and help his twin through it.

Bill was half turned to him and leaning against him, breathing hard and clearly trying to banish the images from his mind. It was hard not to be able to take away the anguish and hurt, but Tom knew it was nowhere near as hard as what Bill was going through.

"Breathe deeply," Syb said in her ever calm voice, "the disorientation will pass and the memories will not seem so overwhelming."

"Easy ... for ... you ... to ... say," Bill managed to gasp out.

Tom knew Bill was trying to distract himself, and not long ago Bill wouldn't have even been able to do that, but he could feel Bill shaking and he wasn't really comforted.

"Concentrate on Tom and how he makes you feel," Syb said, holding Bill's hand gently and rubbing in circles the same way Tom was doing with Bill's back.

For his part, Tom was trying to ignore how Bill made him feel, at least partly. The longer Tom lived with what he knew he and Bill could be, the more difficult it was for him to ignore the signals his body wanted to send him. So far he was managing to keep that part of himself under control as Bill continued to be completely innocent of it, but it wasn't always easy. It made him feel a little guilty that it was Bill's pain giving him the ability to control himself.

"I've done all I can for you, Bill," Syb said after another few moments of silence. "The damage done by the forced bonding is as undone as it can be. The rest, my dear youngling, is all up to you."

Tom watched Bill turn and look at Syb then and he was glad to feel that Bill's trembling was easing off. He hadn't really expected Syb to say something like that so soon; Bill was very far from being like his old self, but he realised now that some of the way Bill was, was not going to have an easy fix. The rest wasn't paranormal, it was psychological and he tightened his grip on Bill momentarily as he accepted that fact.

"I know," Bill said quietly, which surprised Tom even more; "I can't feel him in my head now. Thank you."

Syb smiled at Bill and patted him on the hand, sitting back from where she had been leaning forward.

"No being should be touched like that by another," Syb said and for a moment Tom could see the steel in her gaze that he knew was lurking under the surface. "It was as bad as the other things he did to you and I wish it was in my power to take those away as well."



"Me too," Tom whispered and Bill's hand tightened on one of his for a moment.

"That's the bit that's up to me," Bill said and Tom was surprised how resolute his twin sounded.

Too many people looked at Bill and saw the girly hair and the makeup and thought his brother was weak, but Tom knew that there was strength in Bill. Once Bill decided something, nothing could stop him and Tom could feel it right then.

"With my help," he added and Bill turned to look at him.

"Like always," Bill said with a nod.

They sat like that for a little while, just looking at each other.

"I think it's time for you to go home," Syb said and Bill turned so fast Tom thought his twin might get whiplash.

"What?" they both asked at the same time.

"Time to go home," Syb said with a small smile and Markus chuckled from his usual spot beside the door, so Tom had to conclude both he and Bill looked equally as shocked.

The only physical reason Bill was still in the hospital was his weight, which was slowly going up, but it was his mental health that had had everyone worried. Syb's pronouncement was what Tom had been praying for; he knew that at home at least Bill would be more comfortable in his surroundings. It was getting him there that had always been the issue, and making sure that Bill stayed calm.

"Really?" Bill was still trembling just a little, but his twin sounded so excited that it made Tom smile.

"Really," Syb said and smiled even more. "I would still like to visit to help you talk through any issues you may be having, but from now on I believe you'll be far better off in your own space. I can't release you myself, but I will have a word with Dr Brucker and strongly suggest she agree."

Bill turned back to Tom, eyes wide and surprised.

"Home," Bill said quietly and Tom smiled widely at his twin.

"Yeah," he agreed and put his forehead against Bill's, "home. Mum is going to go crazy making sure everything is perfect."

It was then that Bill smiled. So soon after a session it was an amazing thing and the real joy Tom saw there made him so happy. It was a wonderful moment.

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Bill had been in the hospital a little under ten days and the previous evening Dr Brucker had uttered the words he had been longing to hear ever since he was compos mentis enough to know what they meant: it was time to go home. It had taken another day since Syb had told him and he had been beginning to think that Dr Brucker disagreed, but his fears had been unfounded.

Finally going home was something Bill was looking forward to with great anticipation, unfortunately there was the whole problem of getting there. The press knew exactly where he was, of course; he had seen the news when Tom hadn't been quite quick enough and he was one of the top stories. That meant that getting him out of the hospital was going to be tricky; there were even fans camped outside the building, all of which dictated that security was required. This in turn meant Saki, and as much as Bill's conscious mind looked on Saki as safety and a friend, Saki was a very large, intimidating man and his subconscious was wailing in fear.

He had been up and dressed early, even though they weren't due to leave until the afternoon, because he couldn't sleep any longer knowing what was coming that day. He hadn't really slept at all; he'd only managed to lay still so Tom could get some sleep and he was tense and nervous. They were due to have a briefing that morning to plan the whole thing and their mum and Gordon were going to be there, as was David, Gustav and Georg, and of course Saki. It was the most people Bill had been around since his kidnapping and he was a little afraid he might not react well.

When he heard a familiar voice in the corridor he was rather surprised and he opened the door even before Markus knocked.

"Agh," Markus said and made movements to mock a heart attack, "you're as bad a Syb; let people knock first to avoid the coronaries."

Bill cracked a small smile at that; Markus was quite funny.

"Come in," he greeted, pleased with himself that Markus didn't make him feel nervous at all anymore. "Why are you here?"

"Someone needs to organise the muppets for your grand exit," Markus said, strolling into the room and closing the door, "and I have been drafted as your official police protection until you are safely installed at home."

Bill spent most of his time trying to forget that his kidnapper was still out there and he couldn't help the shudder at the reminder. Even though his main attacker had been Strigoï and would hence be averse to daylight, Bill knew there had been others, possibly human others and that meant there was danger all the time.

"Syb press ganged you then," Tom said and Bill was glad that his twin was keeping the tone light.

"Of course she did," Markus replied with a dramatic sigh; "threatened my manhood if I so much as objected. Overdramatic; that's what vampires become with age: overdramatic."

"Well Bill was overdramatic to begin with, so we probably won't be able to tell the difference when he's getting on," Tom replied with a laugh.

Bill just stuck his tongue out at his twin and sat down on the bed. His jeans tried to fall off his hips as he did so and he had to hurriedly pull them back up.

"Shit," he said, since he was feeling a little petulant; the belt wouldn't do up any further and it was at times like that it became very obvious how much weight he had lost during his ordeal.

Tom handed him a sandwich from the plate sitting on the bedside cabinet without comment. Dr Brucker in conjunction with Syb had come up with a regime to help him regain the weight he had lost and it involved healthy food with lots of calories. No one was trying to force feed him, but there was always food on hand these days, just in case. Bill tucked into the chicken and something-he-chose-not-to-enquire-about sandwich and chose not to argue. It tasted fine and he really didn't want to know what they were feeding him; as long as they let him eat crap every now and then as well, he was happy.

Markus lifted an eyebrow at the behaviour, so Bill lifted one back and Markus gave him a small grin for the reaction.

"Well I'm the advanced guard," Markus revealed, leaning against the wall where he seemed to habitually end up as far as Bill could tell, "so prepare yourselves for the invasion."

Bill did his very best to keep munching on the sandwich as if he was perfectly fine with that, but his appetite had all but vanished instantly. He saw Tom glare at Markus out of the corner of his eye, but it wasn't really Markus' fault.

"So do we get a 3-D computer model and walk through as well?" he asked, trying to make a joke and almost managing it.

"Yeah," Markus said with a grin; "one of your lot is bringing the over head display."

"Knew David wouldn't let us down," Bill replied, doing his best to smile as well.

As if on cue he heard people in the corridor outside.

"And I'll let them knock this time," he said, very pleased when Tom moved closer and sat on the other side of the bed, even though he didn't say so.

The knock followed very shortly and Markus answered the door.

Bill did his best to smile at people as they came in, but he found himself moving closer to Tom, nevertheless.

"Hey, guys," Georg greeted and wandered over, taking up a position to the right of Tom.

The fact that Georg and Gustav were there as a distraction tactic for the fans had not escaped Bill and he appreciated the support even if he couldn't quite show it like he used to yet.

The last person into the room was Saki and, the moment the man stepped in, he felt totally irrational fear creep up his spine. His instincts screamed "big" and "male" and that was all it took for the anxiety to start, even though he knew Saki was the opposite of anyone who would hurt him. He couldn't take his eyes off the security chief.

"Bill," Tom's voice finally distracted him and he looked round, blinking at his twin as his thoughts were jump-started again, "are you okay?"

"Huh?" was about the most sensible thing he could say, since he didn't quite follow.

Tom looked really quite worried and he didn't think he had done anything to warrant that from his brother.

"I've been trying to get your attention for about thirty seconds," Tom seemed to understand his confusion.

"Oh," he said, embarrassed now as he realised he had done something strange again, "sorry."

Tom had agreed not to baby him and always let him know when he did something odd, but it was still not a comfortable experience to find out.

"You're okay?" Tom asked again, just to make sure, and he nodded.

There was an uncomfortable silence in the room.

"Okay," Markus stepped into the breach, "so there are going to be five police on duty, not including me; two in plain clothes and three in uniform. They'll make sure there is no threat outside of what is normal for you guys; personally hundreds of girls screaming and wanting to rip my clothes off would scare the shit out of me. Once we get you home, Bill, there will be an unmarked car outside your house 24/7, which, I think, covers everything from my angle."

Bill nodded and tried to ignore the nagging fear at the back of his mind.

"We'll have the two vans out the back," David took over, professional as ever, "one for Tom, Bill, Simone, Gordon and Markus; Saki will be driving that one, and the other for the rest of us. The idea is to minimise the impact on the hospital and all of us."

David looked to Saki who then took up the mantle.

"I will be with Tom and Bill, Karl will be with Simone and Gordon and Tobi will be with Georg and Gustav," Saki said, his deep voice giving Bill comfort and causing him anxiety at the same time.

He knew that Saki was his friend and there to help and he was really becoming sick of the irrational fear inside of himself.

"The fans are to the left behind a low barrier," Saki continued to speak, "the press should be to the right behind another barrier. If any of them try to come past the barriers we will remove them. We'll take Simone, Gordon, Tom and Bill out first; there will be no stopping; it will be straight to the van. When the doorway is free Georg and Gustav will come out and head over to the fans to sign some things, then on to the van. Is that okay for everyone?"

Bill nodded; he didn't like the idea of bypassing the fans, it was an alien concept to him, but he knew he was in no state for anything like that.

"When?" he asked, feeling the need to at least give some input to the proceedings.

"Two thirty," David gave the answer.

Bill nodded and was glad when someone else asked a question and took the focus off of him. While everyone worked on the details, he made himself focus on Saki.

The tall man had been his friend and guarded the whole band for years now and it didn't feel right that he was reacting badly.

"Are you okay?" Tom leaned over and whispered to him while the others were talking.

He turned and looked at his twin and nodded. His fear annoyed him; it was in the way and causing issues that he didn't want. If he couldn't trust their head of security, he couldn't trust any of their staff and that was ridiculous. As the conversation began to come to an end, he decided that he wasn't going to put up with the irrational feelings. He didn't want to feel awkward and he definitely didn't want Saki to feel that way either.

Moving to the edge of the bed he stood up and he noticed that most people in the room realised he had moved, but were doing their best not to make an issue of it. Tom gave him a look and he gave his twin a tight smile to tell Tom he knew what he was doing. Possibly he was about to be a bit overdramatic, but it was the results that counted and he was pretty sure his psyche needed overdramatic at the moment.

Taking a deep breath he walked across the room to where Saki was standing against the wall, quite obviously as far from Bill as possible, no doubt to make sure Bill didn't feel uncomfortable. He looked into Saki's rather surprised face and paused for a moment, knowing full well that everyone else was watching by now. With a little smile at Saki he stepped forward and wrapped his arms around the big man and refused to remotely listen to the voice that screamed at him in his head about the possible danger.

At first Saki stiffened in surprise, but Bill needed this and he didn't give up and eventually one of Saki's large arms came round him and carefully patted him on the back. It wasn't the closest of hugs, but then Bill was pretty sure both he and Saki knew that that might have been one step too far for Bill's fragile control and it proved something to Bill; his fear did not rule him. When he drew back, he looked into Saki's face and Saki smiled at him and nodded; they both knew why Bill had done what he did. Bill felt quite pleased with himself, even if his heart was beating at a million miles an hour, and he was confident that going home was one step closer now.

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What Bill really wanted to be doing was clinging to Tom for dear life, but instead he was clutching a small bear that he thought had come from a fan via his mother, but he was a bit hazy on the details. He was a bit hazy on a lot of things, especially since he was trying his very hardest not to be terrified.

"No one will get past Saki," Tom told him, leaning forward so that they were forehead to forehead, "and if they do there is no way they are getting past me. All you have to do is stick with me and get to the van. Okay?"

"I hope so," he replied in his most confident voice, which was rather on the side of not confident at all.

Tom gave him a small smile for trying and dragged him into a quick hug.

"I'll be with you the whole time, I promise," Tom told him before breaking the hug.

To some it might not have seemed much, but to Bill it was everything.

"I can do this," he said and balled up his courage.

"I know you can," Tom replied and handed him his jacket.

He went to put the jacket on and then realised that he couldn't while clutching the bear, so he held it in his teeth as he pulled the leather on over his hoodie. He had a hat, a t-shirt, a hoodie and a jacket on, but he was pretty sure he would still be cold once they made it outside. He hadn't been out of a controlled temperature environment for a long time now and he didn't have a huge amount of body mass to help. It wasn't as if it was the middle of winter, but he was pleased to have the extra warmth.

He pushed his shades onto his nose, clasped his bear to his chest and tried to think happy thoughts.

"I'm ready," he said, although he was pretty sure he never would really be ready.

Tom gave him another smile that filled him with warmth for a little while and then his twin guided him to the door. When he opened it, Saki was waiting and he even managed a small smile through his abject fear.

"The cars are this way," Saki said, stepping back and indicating right before setting off down the corridor.

Bill fell into step behind the large man and for a moment it seemed perfectly natural, like he'd never been away from it, then he saw his first member of staff. The male orderly was checking something on a cart of some description and Bill almost fell over his own feet as his motor system hiccupped. Tom had a hand under his arm and a hand on his back before he could so much as breathe and he almost squeezed the bear to death as they walked past the oblivious man.

"Keep breathing and think of mum's delicious waffles that are waiting at home," Tom whispered in his ear.

Bill did his best and they made it to the back door without him completely freaking out, but by the time they met up with their Mum and Gordon he was doing his very best not to hyperventilate. It was hitting him very hard that he was now only in a semi-controlled environment and that frightened him more than he cared to admit.

"It's only twenty meters or so to the car," Saki was speaking to him and he did his best to concentrate. "You and Tom stay directly behind me and we'll be there in under a minute."

Bill nodded and was very glad that Tom had hold of his arm and he was pretty sure he was strangling the fluff out of the bear in his hands.

"Nothing to worry about," he whispered to himself and tried to make his face take on any expression except terrified.

"We could go first," Gustav suggested from where the second group was waiting behind them.

"No," Saki said firmly, "we stick to the plan. This way the photographers will be able to get some shots of Bill and Tom, which will hopefully stop anyone doing anything stupid."

Saki didn't say it, but Bill was pretty sure Saki meant like someone jumping in front of the van; that had happened before in France.

"Ready?" Saki asked and Bill knew everyone was looking at him.

He nodded, even though he wanted to curl up and hide. Just this once he wished he wasn't famous and that he didn't have to worry about the press and the fans, but it was an empty wish.

"Let's go," Saki said and led the way to the door.

What was strange is that when he and Tom stepped through the door, there was no screaming. He could see all the fans, about thirty of them, right where he had been told they would be, but there was no screaming; instead there were hushed whispers. It was something new and he didn't quite know how to deal with it, so much so that he stopped for a moment in confusion. He was used to the girls screaming at him and he had been prepared for it, but he wasn't prepared for this and all he could think was that he looked that bad.

"Bill, we love you," someone called from the crowd.

"We hope you're better soon," another voice added.

"They don't want to scare you," Tom whispered in his ear as he tried to process what was going on; "they were asked not to scream in case it confused you. Remember, at the briefing David mentioned it?"

Bill realised then that maybe he should have been paying attention at the end of the briefing.

"I missed that," Bill said, feeling embarrassed and he gave the fans a little wave before starting to walk again.

There were cameras clicking all over the place where the press had been herded and it was at that moment that Bill realised he was too far behind Saki. It was also then that two photographers broke from the pack of press over the barrier and came straight at him. Saki stepped in front of one, but the other sidestepped and Bill found himself faced with a strange man directly between him and the car. His fear spiked and he froze like a deer in headlights and for a moment he was back in his hotel room opening the door to a perfectly ordinary looking man with a room service trolley.

"Get out of the way," Tom all but growled and Bill knew his twin would have tackled the photographer himself if it hadn't meant leaving his side.

If Tom hadn't been holding on to him, he knew he would have panicked completely.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a fluffy bunny rabbit hit the man on the side of the head.

"Leave them alone," came a very annoyed female voice.

"Yeah," added another, "get the hell out of the way."

A second fluffy animal hit the photographer squarely in the face, then another and a fourth. The man had to put his camera down and defend himself. It was attack of the killer soft toys and Bill really didn't know what to do. If he hadn't been quite so scared he would have laughed, but as it was he let himself be led around the man as Saki arrived back to deal with the photographer and they made it to the van without further incident to a chorus of abuse being hurled at the errant member of the press.

Once in the van, Bill sat in a corner seat with his bear clutched to his chest as everyone else climbed in around him. He was somewhat in shock as Tom sat down next to him and he did his best to sort his head out.

"Bill," Tom spoke to him slowly and gently, "are you okay?"

Bill just looked back blankly for a moment; he wasn't really sure about that or not. The photographer had frightened him really badly, but the soft toys had been so absurd that his brain didn't know how to react. He was caught between shaking like a leaf and laughing his arse off; neither of which would have been particularly productive at the time.

"Bill, Sweetheart," his mum said, reaching out and placing a hand lightly on his knee, "do you need anything?"

It was then that his reactions, which had frozen along with the rest of him decided to kick back in and he gasped loudly and he lost his grip on his bear as he began to shake so badly his whole motor system seemed momentarily out of his control. Tom put an arm around him straight away and pulled him close.

"Okay," Tom said as Saki climbed into the front and started the van, "just breathe; in and out slowly. We'll be home in a little while."

When his mum picked up the bear and handed it back to him, he took it and then he concentrated on his breathing just like Tom had told him to. He had never been prone to panic attacks before and he didn't want one now, so, using Tom as his bolster, he tried to bring himself back under control. It was clearly going to take some more work before he could deal with lots of people.

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Tom was a little worried about Bill when they began the trip home; his twin was clearly on the verge of falling apart, but he was incredibly proud when Bill managed to pull himself together. It wasn't exactly a chatty trip; Bill spent the whole time looking out of the window while holding his hand and Tom spoke to his parents for a bit, but the incident with the photographer had coloured the mood and everyone was quite quiet. Even Markus had little to say and they drove in relative silence the whole way, especially once they hit the autobahn.

"Will we be in our own rooms?" since it was so quiet, Bill's question caught him completely off guard.

"Huh?" was the most sensible thing his brain came up with.

"At home," Bill said, looking towards the interior of the van for the first time, "will we be back in our old rooms?"

It seemed to be something that had just occurred to Bill and there was worry in Bill's eyes.



"We thought you could share Tom's room for now," their mother said before Tom could really process the question, "since it's a little bigger."

By a little his mum meant six inches; that had been one argument Bill hadn't won when they were kids.

"Syb didn't think it would be a good idea for you two to be apart too long just yet," Gordon added, for which Tom was very grateful.

The worry left Bill almost straight away and for the first time since about lunch that day, Tom saw the ghost of a smile touch Bill's face. It was funny how they hadn't thought of discussing it before, but it seemed to have only occurred to Bill that there was the possibility of separation; it had never even crossed Tom's mind. He made a mental note to make sure it never bothered Bill again.

"Okay," Bill said, seemingly satisfied, "that sounds good."

Then Bill turned back to the window again and the conversation was over. Tom hoped they would be home soon.

End of Ch 5

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## Chapter 6 Home

Bill had lit up with excitement when they had been about ten minutes from home, which pleased Tom no end and had meant that getting into the house had been less stressful than it could have been. There were no fans outside the house, but there were photographers lurking around the place and Tom had been worried about a repeat of the hospital. As it was, he had found his worry was for nothing; they had stepped out of the van virtually into the front door and that had been it, which was why Tom was breathing a sigh of relief.

"Home," Bill said, standing in the hallway and looking around as if he couldn't quite believe where he was.

"Home and blocking the doorway," Tom said with a grin as he gently urged Bill to move.

"Well that's my job done," Markus said with a smile as everyone else piled into the house; "home safe and sound."

"Will you stay for supper?" their mum asked and Tom was inclined to agree with her; he was pretty sure no one had eaten much lunch.

"That's very nice of you, Simone," Markus replied and seemed genuinely grateful, "but I'm afraid I have to get back and the delightful Saki here is my lift."

Bill seemed to find Markus' turn of phrase funny if his grin was anything to go by, which had Tom silently cheering inside.

"Well of course Saki is invited as well," Gordon said and patted Saki on the back.

It wouldn't have been the first time Saki had eaten at their house and probably not the last.

"I'm sorry, but I cannot stay either," Saki said with a small nod of his head; "I am needed elsewhere. We are meeting the other van in Hamburg once it has dropped off the others."

Tom was a little surprised at that.

"Are you sure," was the next question from his mother, "it's been a very long day?"

Saki nodded: "But thank you."

"I just have to go and talk to the officers on duty," Markus said cheerfully, "and then we'll be off, but don't worry I'm sure both of us will be back sooner than you think."

"Not too soon I hope," Tom said and laughed when Markus gave him a mock scowl.

It was great to find the atmosphere so much lighter now that they were finally home; he only hoped it would stay that way.

"Love you too, Tomi boy," Markus said and grinned, "see you later."

"Bye," came from several directions at the same time.

It was amazing what a difference some miles made.

"Who's hungry?" their mum asked as she hung up her coat.

Bill grinned.

"Me," Bill said and Tom was glad, because Bill had hardly eaten anything all morning.

When Bill didn't eat, everyone worried, but especially Tom; he hadn't even been able to tempt Bill with sweets, which was saying something. Now they were home, though, Bill seemed to be perking up really well.

"Me too," Tom agreed; he had been worrying so much he hadn't had much appetite either.

"Okay then," their mum said with a smile, "you boys go and settle back in and I'll start supper a little early. Nana came in today and did all the preparation for me so it shouldn't take too long."

Bill all but bounced all the way to Tom's room after that and leapt onto the bed the moment they made it past the doorway. Tom laughed as Bill sprawled on his back and took up virtually the whole bed; it was huge compared to the hospital one, but Bill seemed to be able to fill it.

"Hey, I have to sleep on there too," Tom laughed, putting the suitcase he was carrying in the corner.

"You can have that bit," Bill said pointing to the corner of the bed.

"We'll see about that," Tom replied and stalked towards the bed.

Then he did something that never would have remotely occurred to him to do while in the hospital; he climbed onto the bed and began tickling Bill. The high pitched girly squeal from Bill was ear splitting, but soon dissolved into uncontrollable laughter and pleas for mercy.

"Okay, okay," Bill panted out between laughs, "I give."

Tom stopped tickling.

"You can have at least a quarter," Bill finished with a mischievous grin.

"Why you little," Tom said and was about to start again when Bill curled into a little ball.

"Pax," Bill said before he could re-instigate the tickling, "no more, we'll share."

"Are you sure, oh diva king," Tom asked, punctuating his words by poking Bill lightly and making his twin squeak and giggle; "I wouldn't want to put you out at all; not like this is my room or anything."

Bill was smiling at him and looked so happy that for a moment Tom almost forgot what had been happening over the past month. For just a little while it was like everything was normal, well almost, the desire to lean down and kiss Bill had

never been there before. Slowly Bill stopped laughing and became a little more serious and Tom wasn't quite sure what was going on in Bill's head.

"Thank you," Bill said, lying there looking up at him.

"For what, the bed?" Tom asked, trying to make a joke out of it.

"For bringing me back," Bill replied, perfectly serious now, "for keeping me sane. I couldn't ... not without you."

From giggling and light to deep and serious in a heartbeat; that was their world now and this time Tom couldn't help himself, he leaned down and placed a kiss on Bill's forehead. He made it as chaste and as brotherly as he could and then he drew back.

"Anything for you, Bill," he said, and meant every word, "always."

The tableau held for a few seconds.

"Now we have to get sorted out before mum calls us for supper," Tom said, deciding that after the stress of the day, now was not the time for deep conversations. "You can supervise since you're so good at that and I'll do the work as usual."

Bill grinned again and sat up as Tom climbed off the bed.

"I think we should get one of my Nena posters and put it there," Bill said in a cheeky tone.

Tom looked at where his twin was pointed at one of his Sammy Delux posters.

"Dream on, Billi, dream on," was his response to that.

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Full was an understatement as far as Bill was concerned; his mother had just fed them to bursting point and he couldn't have eaten another thing if he'd wanted to. He kind of felt like waddling back to Tom's room rather than walking or possibly rolling would have been easier. When he made it into the room he flopped back on the bed.

"God, I think I'm going to explode," he said as Tom did the same beside him, "and no tickling or it's going to be messy."

"I think I'm stuck," Tom said, just lying there and staring at the ceiling, "so there's not much danger of that. I don't think Mum's tried to feed us like that since that time you were in hospital when we were kids."

"Maybe it's a default setting," Bill suggested with a grin; "boys home from hospital, must feed them."

"Hell, I'm never breaking a leg," Tom said resolutely, "then I wouldn't even be able to run away."

That made Bill laugh, but he was soon groaning.

"Don't say funny things," he complained, holding his stomach; "laughing hurts."

Tom sniggered at that and then made Bill want to giggle again with a groan. Just lying there and letting the food settle did occur to Bill, but it was coming on to evening and he always had the most energy then. Staying in one spot had an appeal, but not to his brain.

"I want to go online," he decided suddenly, sitting up very slowly and wondering if that was the way pregnant women felt when trying to move with a baby on the way.

"Um, that might not be such a good idea," Tom said, still lying down, but sounding somewhat worried.

Bill turned and looked at his twin and he knew why Tom was not overly happy about the idea. At the moment he had a lot of triggers, sometimes ridiculously innocent things, and he didn't want to fall apart any more than Tom wanted him to. The afternoon had been enough stress for one day.

"I don't want to surf," he said with a little smile, "I want to post on the blog."

The North American blog had been so successful that they'd had to set one up in German as well. A member of the band tried to post to it at least once a week, or had done, Bill wasn't sure if it had been kept up while he was missing.

"I want to let the fans know we're home safe and to thank them for today and all the letters and gifts," he explained as Tom looked dubious.

They hadn't been able to go online at the hospital, it hadn't been an option, but Bill was pretty sure it was one of the inadvisable pastimes like watching the news. He didn't mind that he was being shielded from everything; he didn't want to face most of it at the moment, but he was going to have to start doing so soon and this seemed like a good way to start.

"Please?" he said and knew that Tom wouldn't be able to resist.

Tom sat up, grumbling under his breath about headstrong brothers and it made Bill smile as his twin fished out the laptop.

"Thank you," Bill said as he accepted the device and put it on his knee.

It was Tom's laptop not his own, but there was a shortcut at the top of the browser as soon as it popped up, so he clicked on it and waited for the page to load. He didn't wait around on the main page; as soon as the menu loaded he clicked on the post option and filled in the username and password.

*Hello*

It was a classic beginning and Tom didn't say anything as his twin sat down and watched over his shoulder.

*This is Bill. Tom and I are at home now safely curled up in Tom's room and about to watch a DVD.*

"So that's what you want to do next then?" Tom asked with a laugh.

"It means not moving," Bill replied and tried to decide what to type next.

*We wanted to thank you all for your support. I've seen some of the letters and cards and some of the gifts, thank you all for thinking of us.*

David had told him there was a mail room of stuff that had come in, but he hadn't actually been in any state to deal with most of it. All he had really seen was a few choice cards that his mother had brought in and the bear he had been clutching all the way home.

*Thank you also to the fans who were outside the hospital this afternoon. I can't condone assaulting anyone, even photographers (or David would kill me), but attack of the soft toys was very welcome at the time :).*

*I hope you can be patient with me; it going to be a little while before I can come back to Tokio Hotel, but I hope it won't be too long. Thank you for all being there, we'll see you when we can.*

"Nicely put," Tom said and gave him a quick hug, "now post it and put that damn thing away so we can choose a DVD and relax."

Bill smiled at his twin, hit the post button and closed the laptop. He'd had enough excitement for one day.

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Bill was asleep, very deeply asleep, so Tom had taken the opportunity to wander into the kitchen where he knew he would find his mother cooking. Feeding Bill seemed to be very high on his mum's priority list at the moment and Tom had never seen her cook so much. They had been at home a day and more food than any family could ever possibly eat had come out of the kitchen so far; much to the joy of the policemen stationed outside, who were eating like kings.

"Hi Mum," Tom said, folding himself into one of the kitchen chairs.

"Hello, Darling," Simone replied with a smile as she poured something into a saucepan; "is Bill sleeping again?"

Tom nodded when his mum glanced at him.

"Out like a light," he replied, pulling one of his dreads round from behind his head and playing with it.

It was amazing how interesting a bit of hair could be when it was a welcome distraction.

"Okay, Tomi," his mum said, making him look up, "tell me what's bothering you."

Turning the heat down on the stove, his mother sat down in the chair opposite him and looked him directly in the eye.

"Why would something be bothering me?" he asked, trying for an innocent tone and missing; he had never been able to lie to his mother.

"Because, Darling, you only ever do that when you're nervous," his mum said and pointed at the dread he was twisting in his fingers.

His mother could read him almost as well as Bill could and he knew there was no point pretending anymore.

"Ummm ..." wasn't an overly good start to a conversation, "Syb told you and Gordon everything right?"

There were some things that weren't mentioned anywhere near Bill, just in case Bill wasn't as asleep as he seemed, and the full extent of the bond was one of them, so Tom had had no chance to talk about it with his mother or step-father. As soon as his question was out, his mother reached out and took his hand as she nodded.

"Syb and Markus explained everything, yes," she said, looking him straight in the eye, "and you don't have to worry, Tom, Gordon and I are behind you all the way."

Tom was kind of relieved and kind of terrified at the same time; at least he didn't have to reveal the details. He had been almost positive that his mother knew, but he had had to make sure.

"It's weird, Mama," Tom said, needing to talk to someone about it, "but it feels so right."

"I can tell," his mother said and patted him on the hand.

For a moment Tom felt horrified; he was instantly terrified that he was being obvious.

"And don't look so worried," his mum told him with a small smile, "I'm your mother; I see things no one else could possibly see."

Tom felt his heart slowing down a little at that information; it wasn't that he wanted to hide the bond; it was that he knew he had to. No one could possibly understand, not even those they worked with all the time.

"When Markus first told me, I wanted to deny it," Tom said, confessing his fears to the only person he felt comfortable telling, "but I can't. Every time I'm close to Bill I can feel it like it's part of me. He's everything to me, Mama, absolutely everything."

"You've always been close," his mother said and he looked into her eyes, needing to see that she wasn't just saying something to try and make him feel better, "and I won't lie to you, I didn't like it when Sybil told us the truth, but you are my boys and this is how it is now. I don't understand it all, but I know you, Tom, and you would never do anything to hurt Bill and I also know Bill needs you. You're holding him together, Sweetheart and I think you will be in one way or another for a long time to come."

For a long while Tom just faced his mother and let his mind work. It amazed him a little, how well his parent was taking the whole situation, but then his mother had always supported both him and Bill in whatever they chose.

"I'm terrified he will be afraid," he admitted quietly; "that he's suddenly going to realise what's going on and it'll frighten him."

His mother put her hand on his cheek and stroked gently.

"He will never be afraid of you," she said with a certainty that almost put his fears to rest.

"But what that monster did to him, Mama," he said in little more than a whisper, "it was so terrible. If he realises I want the same..."

"Tom," his mother interrupted him, "you will never want anything the same as the evil that took Bill. What you feel is completely different."

"But Bill's so innocent of it all," he protested, unable to let go of the anxiety that had been troubling him, "it's going to be such a shock."

"And I have complete faith you will help him through it," his mother told him and he could see the belief in her eyes. "This is not something that can be changed, Tomi. I know that much, I asked Sybil and Markus and another thing I know is that you have the strength in you to deal with this."

The support meant more to Tom than he could say and he squeezed his mum's hand in thanks. It was going to be hard, but he would find a way.

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It was a good day so far; Bill hadn't had any nightmares the previous night, so they had slept the whole night through and Bill had been cheerful and happy for most of the morning. It was around lunch time that Tom noticed a change and Bill became quiet and a little withdrawn. He didn't know what had set his twin off, but he did his best to cheer Bill up without being overbearing. So far it wasn't working and Bill was sitting staring at the TV in the living room not really seeing it as far as Tom could tell. He was a little worried, but he knew he couldn't push Bill too hard or he would only make it worse.

"It was a nice room," Bill said out of the blue as the TV station flipped to adverts.

It was so random that for once Tom had no idea what Bill was talking about.

"What room?" he asked, not sure where this was heading.

"The room I woke up in," Bill said slowly, still staring at the TV.

That made Tom stop everything else he was thinking. So far Bill had not spoken of what happened to him in anything but vague references; he'd only shared that with Syb in the very direct way they had of communicating. That Bill was talking about any of it was very significant and Tom was nervous as to how to go on.

"What was it like?" he asked, hoping that he would not push Bill in the wrong direction.

"It was a bit girlie," Bill said with little emotion in his voice, "but it was nicely decorated. The bed was all white and the chest of drawers and desk were dark oak. It was like something out of film. If it hadn't been ..." Bill's voice cracked a little, "if ... I would have liked it."

Some parts of the conversation were obviously more difficult for Bill than others, so Tom just waited for his twin to go on.

"I woke up wearing one of those silk robes you see on TV shows," Bill continued after a moment, "and silk pyjama bottoms. It was really weird and I couldn't work out what was going on. I didn't remember the hotel room then; it was like my memory wasn't working properly."

Tom shifted in his seat and moved closer to Bill.



"He was there," Bill said, voice becoming quieter, "waiting for me to wake up. I remember him being there, but I can't remember his face; I know he was handsome, but I don't know what he looks like. How odd is that?"

Bill finally looked at him then and Tom reached out and took his twin's hand.

"He was playing with your mind," he said gently; "you can't be expected to remember things like that."

"For the longest time I didn't know what to do," Bill said, looking perplexed; "I wasn't even really afraid. I talked to him and he talked to me and it was like talking to anyone else. There was wine and food and I tried to say I didn't want any, but I ended up eating and drinking anyway. I knew he was trying to seduce me and at first I didn't really care."

Bill frowned and looked down at the floor.

"He kissed me and it was almost nice," Bill continued after a moment, "but I knew something was wrong. I tried to push him away and he wouldn't let go and then he bit me and ..." Bill's tone was agitated and scared, "and he tried to reach into my head and it felt so wrong. I tried to fight him, but he was so strong and I couldn't get away and all I could think about was getting back to you."

Tom opened his arms and Bill was wrapped around him in a second. Bill was trembling uncontrollably.

"He was angry, Tomi, so angry," Bill did not stop speaking, "because it didn't work. He threw me onto the bed and he said, 'Now we do it the hard way'. He began tearing at my clothes and I saw his fangs and I remembered the hotel and then I was so scared. I kicked at him and he called the ... the others ... they held ... me down while ... he ... he ..."

Bill was becoming hysterical and Tom pulled his twin close, stroking his hair and trying to soothe Bill's pain.

"Ssh," he said, trying to pull Bill away from the memory, "you don't have to tell me. He can't hurt you anymore, I've got you."

He felt Bill burying his face in his shoulder and he was not surprised when the tears started. All he could do was hold Bill close and let him cry. It hurt to see Bill in so much pain; to see his lively, happy twin reduced to someone so damaged and he prayed with everything he had that he could heal everything that had been done to Bill. It made him so angry that he wanted to lash out, but there was no one to lash out at and so all that was left was being Bill's rock and protector like he had always been.

Looking up, he saw him mum in the doorway and he shook his head slightly at her questioning glance. There was nothing anyone could do at the moment except be there and letting Bill deal with his emotions was his job this time.

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"What a lovely home," Syb said as Bill lead her into the living room.

"We like it," Tom commented from where he was sitting in one of the arm chairs.

Bill smiled a little as his twin tried to lighten the atmosphere, but Syb's visits tended to be hard on Bill, so he wasn't really in the mood. He did his best to wander over to Tom's chair rather than run, and sat down on the arm as casually as he could, but, by the way Tom looped an arm around his waist, he knew he wasn't overly successful in his deception.

"Make yourselves at home," he invited as Markus walked in as well.

Sybil smiled and took up a position on the sofa and Markus sat on the other end. It felt somewhat strange to have Markus actually sit down, but then it was strange not to be sitting on a bed in this situation, so Bill did his best to ignore the disquiet the newness caused. He had never been one to like routine, but lately it comforted him and he was trying not to become dependent.

"There are many happy years here," Syb said and for a moment Bill thought the female vampire's eyes were a little vacant, "I can feel it."

"Really?" he asked, since he had learned that Syb was quite often literal and filing away the new piece of information.

"Yes," Syb said and ran her hand across the sofa arm, "it is a talent I grew into. The feelings are only ever vague, but I can find the sense of a place. This is a good place."

Bill found himself smiling a little at that; he was pleased his friend and mentor felt that way.

"So what are we going to do tonight," he balled up his courage and asked what he really wanted to know.

"This evening I thought we would just talk," Syb said and, by the sympathetic look on her face, seemed to know what he was thinking. "We haven't really had much opportunity to do that. I think it's time I explained a few things, unless of course there is something you would like to talk about instead."

Bill shook his head; he was quite happy to let Syb do the talking for a while. They had had brief chats while he was in the hospital, but their exchanges had been mostly at a far more fundamental level than that and he was pretty sure Tom knew a lot more about Strigoi than he did at the current moment in time.

"What did you want to talk about?" he asked, beginning to feel a little less stressed by the whole situation.

"You," Syb replied with a smile, "or rather your current status. Up until now our discussions have been mostly general and I thought you might like to know more about day dwellers."

Bill relaxed a bit more; that didn't sound bad at all and he nodded. So far he knew some details about Strigoi and he knew that he was unusual because he could go out in the daylight, but that was about it.

"That would be good," he said and for the first time that evening, meant it.

It was then that his mother walked in with a tray of drinks. There had been the whole discussion at the door about what everyone would like and Bill had been expecting his mum to reappear at any moment.

"Thanks, Mum," he said as he was presented with a large mug of coffee.

Everyone else accepted their drinks gratefully and then his mum went to leave again.

"You can stay if you want to, Mama," he said on impulse.

Gordon was out at band practice and Bill appreciated that his mother was trying to give them some space, but there was no reason for her to leave now.

"I don't want to intrude," his mum said, obviously surprised by the invitation.

So far there had been a distinct divide between human and vampire interaction, his parents had mostly been day visitors and Syb and Markus had been evening visitors; there had only been the one crossover. It seemed a little silly to keep that up now that there was no concept of visiting hours.

"We were going to discuss Strigoi day dwellers," Syb explained in a kind tone, "you are most welcome to stay, Simone."

Bill gave his mother an encouraging smile and he could see her relax; it appeared she had been as worried as he had been as well.

"I'll just pop this back in the kitchen," his mum said as she acquiesced and then disappeared through the door.

By the time they were all ready and comfortable, Bill was halfway through his coffee and feeling quite calm. It of course helped that Tom was right there beside him; Tom's presence always made it easier to relax.

"So," Syb said once they were ready to begin, "I know you know that day dwellers are unusual, Bill, but I'm not sure you realise how unusual. The reason it would never have occurred to your kidnapper that you could be one is that at the current time there are only four others. The oldest is Uri and he lives in Moscow at the moment; he's so old no one is sure if he really is a day dweller, or he just became that way with age. From what I understand he is not fond of other Strigoi. Naomi and Daniel are the other two day dwellers that we as a race have not lost track of and Naomi lives in North America and Daniel somewhere in Asia. The last, Peter, disappeared into the Tibetan mountains two hundred years ago and has not been seen since, but the occasional report comes back that makes most of us think he is still alive."

"Four, just four?" Bill didn't quite believe it.

In his head he had pictured himself as part of a smaller subgroup of Strigoi, but something like ambidextrous people verses handed people, not one of five.

"There have been more," Syb said with a smile, "but vampires, like any other race are susceptible to wars and despots."

"So what makes a day dweller?" Tom asked, clearly very curious.

Bill was still in shock, but he murmured his agreement to the question.

"No one knows," Markus said with his usual irreverent grin, "and you should hear some of the elders go on when they debate and try and figure it out. The arguments are spectacular."

The fond smile Syb bestowed on Markus was something Bill could relate to; he often felt like that when Tom launched in with things too.

"As Markus so delicately put it," Syb said, clearly amused, "that is a question that has yet to be answered and our race had been debating the subject for a very long time. What it means in the end is that you are very special to us."

That wasn't something Bill had heard before.

"Why?" he didn't see why just being usual would make him special; in his experience being unusual tended to make people outcasts.

"Rank within Strigoi society comes with age, because with age comes power," Syb replied; "very rarely do Strigoi come into being who have innate power, although it does occasionally happen. A day dweller is the ultimate; the epitome of Strigoi power: to be able to walk in the sun without fear."

"What she's trying to say is that you are a diamond in a coal mine," Markus said with a laugh and this time Syb rolled her eyes at her bond mate.

"I seriously wonder why I put up with you sometimes," she said, but the fond smile was back.

Bill found the interplay between the two fascinating.

"Some very important people are interested in your wellbeing, Bill," Syb told him, which kind of surprised him; he had just assumed he was a blip in the Strigoi scheme of things, "and when you are ready they would very much like to meet you."

He wasn't quite sure whether to be worried about that or not. He had met a total of two Strigoi, one had hurt him, the other had helped him and it left him somewhat conflicted.

"But all I can do is walk around in daylight," he said, still not seeing what Syb was getting at, "why does that make me so special?"

"Because it means you have been a vampire for less than a month and yet you have the power of one thousands of years old," Syb said, although she seemed to understand his confusion.

Bill still didn't see why being able to take daylight made him special even if it was a trait of very old vampires, but he didn't ask again. Clearly Strigoi cared a great deal about it, so who was he to argue?

"So who are these important people?" he asked instead; he liked to know who people were even if he didn't think he'd be ready to see them for a while.

"The elders," Syb said with a smile, "which at the moment in Germany means four Strigoi. I won't bore you with names at the moment because they will mean nothing to you, but rightly or wrongly, when your attacker is caught he will automatically be tried by the highest court we have because of your status."

He wondered briefly what would have happened if he had just been an ordinary Strigoi, but then it occurred to him he would be dead in that case which meant the whole train of thought was a dead end, so he gave up. If this was the way it

was he wasn't about to argue with centuries of vampire tradition. He also didn't want to dwell on any thoughts of his attacker at the moment.

"So are there a certain number of elders in a country or is it everyone over a certain age or what?" he asked, hoping that it would take his mind off of everything else.

Syb smiled and Marcus groaned.

"You had to ask that didn't you," Markus said with a shake of his head; "I had hoped to be home before dawn."

"It's complicated," Syb said, tapping Markus on the knee, "but it does have a convoluted logic."

Bill wondered if possibly he should have asked a different question.

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Tom wandered into the kitchen behind Syb and put the empty mugs he was carrying down on the table. Markus, Bill and their mum were talking about art in the twentieth century, a subject that had absolutely nothing to do with Strigoi and which seemed to have been reached more from desperation than anything else. Syb's explanation of the structure of Strigoi society had been a little complex to say the least and Tom was sure his brain had melted at one point in the hour long talk. Syb had mentioned one elder who had been a painter just after the hour mark and Bill had jumped on the subject like a lifeline; it had been quite funny to watch.

There was now a lively discussion going on about things Tom had no interest in and so he had volunteered to make more drinks. He had been a little surprised when Syb had offered to help, but as he switched on the kettle and went to the fridge for the bottle of wine, his thoughts returned to earlier in the evening.

"It's not just the walking around in daylight is it?" he said, as a question he had held back asking in the other room jumped to mind. "With day dwellers," he added when Syb looked at him; "it can't just be that."

"It is most likely not," Syb replied with a nod, "but I did not think Bill was quite ready for that conversation yet."

Tom had to agree; overwhelming Bill was not something he wanted anyone to do at the moment.

"What else is there?" he asked; Bill might not be ready for the news, but he wanted to be.

"With age vampires gain more than the ability to venture out in daylight," Syb told him, rinsing the glasses and mugs under the tap as she spoke, "but it depends on the individual what these other powers may be. Some barely gain anything at all, others develop psychic ability or powers of the mind. Day dwellers come into being with everything that can be switched on automatically and if Bill has other abilities they will probably begin to manifest over the next few months. It is impossible to say what they might be."

"Will they be a problem?" he asked, worried that this might be more than Bill could cope with.

Syb gave him a sympathetic smile and rubbed his arm lightly in support.

"No," she replied and went back to cleaning the mugs, "he will be ready for them when they appear. We have a saying: 'With age comes the person', which basically means that the years bring us to who we are supposed to be. Bill does not need age, he just needs to adjust and then he will become whatever he is meant to be."

It all sounded a bit up in the air to Tom, but Syb had not led him wrong on anything so far. He nodded, accepting what she said and focused on pouring the wine into the now clean glasses. If Syb was right, then Bill would become the best he could be, which had to be a good thing, but the only niggling worry Tom had was Bill had a way of being spectacular without even trying. It was just how Bill was and he wondered if Strigoi society was ready for a Kaultiz.

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Bill felt good; he was warm, he was comfortable and he was aroused. He felt safe and happy and the feelings running through him were wonderful. His sleep had been calm and undisturbed and he felt rested and waking up to this was nice. It was only as he moved slowly against the body beside him, enjoying the wonderful friction, that his mind began to clear more. He stilled suddenly as he realised where he was and what he was doing; he was horrified.

He didn't know what to do as shame washed over him; he was virtually lying on Tom and he had been rubbing against his twin. It was almost impossible to believe that he could have done something like that, and to his own brother. Feeling lower than dirt, he went to pull away, to hide his shame, but Tom's arm tightened on him. He made a distressed little sound and tried to pull away again.

"Ssh," Tom said, stroking his hair, "just relax, let it go."

The comfort that Tom's presence gave him warred with the shame and humiliation he was feeling, but eventually the call of his bond mate was too much and he had to give in.

"I didn't mean it," he said, horrified that he could be doing such a thing.

He had been degraded and humiliated by another forcing himself on him and that he could do anything remotely similar appalled him.

"It's okay," Tom told him, still petting him gently; "it's instinct," when Tom urged him to look up, he had no choice but to do so, "but, Bill, you did mean it."

He wanted to say he didn't, that he would never do something like that to Tom, but he was looking into his twin's eyes and he could see that Tom meant every word. Something was going on here; something he didn't understand and it frightened him.

"You don't have to be afraid of what you feel," Tom said, smoothing his hair and speaking very softly. "Too many things have happened to you, you don't have to worry with me; I am here, whatever you need."

Bill didn't know what Tom was trying to say; he could not let Tom sacrifice himself because he now had instincts that shouldn't be. It spurred defiance in him and he tried to move away.

"Bill," Tom held him and spoke to him and refused to let him go, "we're bonded; I'm your bond mate; this is normal. I want it too."

Those words froze him and, for just a moment, Tom's arms seemed threatening and he almost struggled. As if his twin could read his mind, Tom's grip released at exactly the right moment, before panic overtook him, and he remained where he was. There were too many thoughts flying around his head and he didn't know what to do.

"Relax," Tom said, trying to soothe him again, "everything is fine. Nothing happens unless you want it to, Billi, but you don't have to fight what you need."

"I..." he tried to find something to say, but he had no words.

He was confused, afraid and full of shame.

"I love you, Bill," Tom told him, "you are everything to me and I want to be everything to you. This is not wrong; it can never be wrong."

Bill wanted to believe that, but his thoughts were so mixed up, all he could do was hold to Tom and hope that things would start making sense again. Since he had been taken, everything had been strange and it was all too much.

"Go back to sleep," Tom urged, rubbing his back in slow circles; "everything will look better when you aren't so tired."

Fighting sleep seemed to be a far better idea if this was what he did in his dreams, but Tom's touch was soothing and it had been a very long day and evening. He hadn't moved that far from sleep as it was and, despite his misgivings, he let his eyes fall closed. Maybe Tom was right, maybe it would look different when he could think properly. Pushing the troubling thoughts away, something his logical mind whispered he was becoming far too good at, he accepted the comfort instead and let Tom's gentle fingers lull him to sleep.

End of Part 6

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## Chapter 7 A Little Weird

Tom had been awake all night just holding Bill and hoping that his twin would get some sleep despite the incident. It hadn't been as bad as he had feared, but it hadn't been as good as he had hoped either. The fact that Bill had woken up to what was going on between them was a relief in some ways, but now came the difficult part. Bill had gone back to sleep when Tom had urged him to, so the trust was still there, but Tom knew it was not going to be so easy for long.

It was nearly lunch time by the clock, although it was grey outside and very little light was coming between the curtains. They kept it dark when they slept anyway so that Bill's eyes would not be hurt if it was bright and sunny in the morning, but Tom could see enough to figure out the numbers on the clock. They usually stayed up late and then slept in late now they were at home; at least that was one thing that would mostly fit in with the rock star lifestyle. The only changes in that were when Bill was awake with nightmares and needed more sleep during the day.

He felt Bill shift in his sleep and knew that his twin was near waking. Most mornings he was awake before Bill and he knew the signs very well. This was going to be interesting to say the least.

He had never been able to sleep with someone sprawled over him except Bill; usually he liked his own space to sleep in, but with Bill that didn't seem to matter. The fact that Bill was lying against him with his head on his chest was perfectly comfortable; even his arm hadn't gone to sleep, which always amazed him. From this position he could see Bill perfectly and he knew the moment Bill opened his eyes.

As he waited for Bill to react, he just watched and his twin blinked sleepily, looked up at him and smiled. It was totally obvious that Bill's brain wasn't quite on at that point and he knew the moment the switch flicked, because he saw Bill's features cloud and then Bill was pushing away from him and sitting up. This time he didn't try and stop Bill from pulling away, but he did catch his twin's hand and go with him so they were both sitting.

"It's okay," he said, something he seemed to be saying a hell of a lot these days, "don't panic."

The horrified look hadn't quite taken over Bill's face; there was confusion there too, but it was a close thing.

"I ... I ..." Bill clearly didn't know how to react.

"Bill," Tom said very firmly, "calm down."

The strong tone worked and the edges of panic in Bill's eyes disappeared, but it didn't take away the rest.

"It's wrong," Bill finally said after Tom gave his twin time to collect his thoughts.

Tom reached out and took Bill's other hand.

"I thought that too," he said in his best calm voice, "but it's not."

For a moment he thought Bill would pull away.



"It took me days to come to terms with this after Markus told me the truth," he explained as well as he could, "and it will probably take you longer, because of what has happened. All I want you to know is that I don't expect anything from you. I feel this, just like you do and the only thing I need you to promise is that if you are ever ready, you'll tell me."

"But Mum and Gordon," Bill protested.

"Know everything," Tom replied, squeezing Bill's hands gently. "We are not just brothers any more, Bill; we're bonded."

Bill sat there looking at him, big brown eyes round and confused.

"Did I do this?" Bill asked in little more than a whisper.

"No," Tom responded, a little more emphatically than he had meant to, "no," he reiterated more quietly, "you reached out to me in that hospital room, but I reached back. You needed me, but I needed to be needed. This is us, not just you or me."

He could see Bill accepting what he was saying.

"How did I not know," Bill asked, and Tom could see his twin searching his own mind; "you knew, why didn't I?"

"Because you've been through a terrible ordeal," Tom told his twin, wishing this wasn't so difficult, "and until now you've been protecting yourself. These feelings are strong, Bill, and you weren't ready for them, I still don't think you're really ready, but you seem to have decided you are. Just remember that they're there, but you don't have to act on them. I will hold you every night and never think about sex again if you need me to."

Bill didn't look comfortable.

"I think what I'm trying to say," Tom said, doing his best to explain what he was feeling, "is please don't let this get in the way of what we already have. I need you in the same way you need me."

They sat there looking at each other for a long time after that and Tom prayed that they could weather this squall. When Bill pulled his hands free, Tom was worried for a moment, but then Bill leant forward, put a head on his shoulder and wound arms around him.

"I'll try," Bill whispered and it was all Tom could ask for.

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Trying to figure out how to react was difficult; Bill was so confused it was silly. He felt like when he had finally hit puberty and all these strange things had been happening to his body and all these odd thoughts had started running through his head. Tom made him feel safe and comforted, but now there was also this other feeling in the background. He knew it had always been there, he could sense that much, but his mind had never paid any attention to it before. It still amazed him that he could have been ignoring it for all this time.

He was torn between clinging to Tom, asking Tom to make it go away and staying as far away from Tom as possible so he didn't have to feel it.

The idea that he could feel anything sexual astounded him and he was terrified of what memories it would dig up if he let himself pursue it even remotely. Sex equalled bad in his head and it was all a bit much for him to deal with, especially since it was his twin he was attracted to.

He wandered into the kitchen for brunch without any idea at all of how to deal with the situation. Promising Tom he would try and not let it interfere had been easy, but doing it was proving harder.

"Bill, Sweetheart, are you okay?" his mum's voice snapped him out of his thoughts and he realised he had been standing next to the table for a good few minutes without doing anything.

Following this, his mind caught up with what he had been thinking about, added it to the fact that his mother was asking him a question and he began to blush furiously. He had no clue what to say at all.

"Bill knows about the bond, Mum," Tom said, sounding ridiculously calm and Bill tried to decide if dying would be easier than taking his mother's scrutiny.

"Oh, Sweetheart," his mother said, much to his surprise, "try not to worry about it too much. You'll figure it out when you need to."

Then his mum patted him lightly on the arm, gave him a supportive smile and went back to what she had been doing. Bill was astounded that his mother was so matter of fact about the whole thing. He looked at Tom who just gave a little shrug and indicated the chair for him to sit down; his life seemed to become more bizarre by the day.

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"Andi," Bill all but squealed and bounced off the sofa and wrapped their best friend in a hug.

Tom was of the opinion that Bill had decided that hugging was a good offence against the lingering fear; everyone was getting hugs at the moment.

"Breathe, I need to breathe," Andreas panted with mock breathlessness as Bill was just a little over enthusiastic.

"He's turning blue," Tom added to the joke and climbed out of his seat to go and greet their friend as well.

"What have you been feeding him," Andreas laughed as Tom gave his friend a brotherly hug as well, "Popeye's spinach?"

"Even I'm not that cruel," Tom replied and looked over Andreas' shoulder to where Bill had gained a worried little frown; "you've just forgotten how enthusiastic Bill is when he hasn't seen someone for a while."

By the time Andreas turned around Bill was smiling again, but Tom could tell his twin was second guessing himself and he hoped it wouldn't last long. It was so difficult to tell if Bill would just bounce from these things these days, or fall flat.

"It seems like it's been forever," Andreas said, sitting down in the spot he usually took up in the middle of the sofa.

Usually when they were playing video games or watching TV, Andreas would sit in the middle with Bill on one side and Tom on the other; it was something Tom hadn't even thought about. It had started automatically when they were younger as a way to make sure there was never an argument about 'he's more my friend than yours', only now it caused an issue. Tom decided to do something about it before it could become a problem.

Plonking himself down on the sofa right next to Andreas he started his campaign.

"Budge up, skinny arse," he said, leaning forward and picking up the games controller from the coffee table; "I'm going to show you both how it's done."

They'd brought the PS3 down from his room to the living room so they could play some games as a group when Andi came round, but he decided that showing off a bit first would solve the dilemma of seating space. Whether Andreas realised something was off or not, Tom couldn't tell as his friend raised an eyebrow and moved as ordered.

"I'm going to take great pleasure in beating your character to a pulp once you're done showing off," Andi said as Bill pushed the remote on the widescreen TV and the Playstation graphics jumped into being.

"Yeah right," Tom said with a grin and hit load on the game.

As Bill sat down beside him, he felt quite pleased with himself; now everything could be mostly normal without any awkward conversations. Andi knew he was here for some fun rather than any deep and meaningful conversations, Tom had made sure of it on the phone, and Tom was determined it was going to be a fun afternoon. Bill had rung Andi a couple of times since they'd been home and Tom was sure that when Bill was ready the daily phone calls would recommence and sooner or later he just knew Andi would be let into the secret, but for now this was good. It was time to kick some virtual arse and enjoy every second of it.

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Tom had a strange feeling and he was pretty sure he knew what it meant. It wasn't the first time he had had the feeling, but it was the first time he recognised it as soon as it started and the fact that Bill was acting a little strangely and refusing to look him in the eye clinched it.

"You're hungry," he said, looking over at Bill past the pile of mail they were sitting in.

Bill had asked for some of the fan mail that had come in addressed to him and Tom to be delivered to the house and they had been going through it for the last two hours. Bill seemed to have been enjoying sorting out the letters and the gifts, but then, about ten minutes previously, Tom had felt the odd sensation start in his chest. When he voiced what he thought it was, Bill looked up at him in surprise.

"How did you know?" his twin asked, clearly shocked.

"I get this weird feeling," Tom explained, perfectly happy to tell Bill everything; "and this time I noticed it."

Bill had not yet been craving blood for long enough to even remotely affect his outward appearance, but the feeling was already there. Of course Tom knows what the problem was; why Bill hadn't mentioned his need yet. They had settled

this issue once, but this was the first time Bill needed to feed since the true nature of the bond had come into the open. The sexual aspect of the whole thing was there now, sitting between them like a gooseberry.

"Look," Tom said when Bill just sat there looking unsure, "this is going to be awkward, we both know it is, but you have to feed. I can't guarantee what I'll do while you're biting me, but I promise to studiously ignore any effect afterwards."

The fact that his body was betraying him and he was already getting hard just thinking about it didn't help the situation, but there was nothing he could do about it. He had a certain reaction to Bill feeding and that was that, but if he had to, he could pretend he didn't for Bill's sake.

Bill was looking guilty and interested at the same time, which was quite a dichotomy.

"Bill," Tom said, having decided that talking plainly was the only way to get through this, "I know this is hard for you and these feelings seem alien, I've been there as well, but we've already been through the you not hurting yourself conversation. You can feed from my wrist if it makes it easier."

It was actually really hard to say that; it felt all kinds of wrong that Tom couldn't explain, but he said it anyway. He was not letting Bill hold off feeding until it became a need again; that couldn't be good for his twin at all. Bill's eyes rested on his wrist for a while and Bill seemed to be thinking about it, but began frowning after only a few moments.

"No," Bill said, looking back up finally staring into Tom's eyes, "you're right, I have to get over this. I'm sorry, I'm being stupid ... I just can't ..."

Tom reached out and took Bill's hand.

"I know," he said, understanding Bill's quandary, at least partially; "don't worry about it. Just take it one step at a time. Let's go somewhere more comfortable and you can take what you need before we get back to sorting all this mail."

Tom was glad when Bill nodded and his twin climbed to his feet as he urged him to. They were in the living room, so Tom led Bill towards the bedroom where no one would walk in on them.

"Maybe if I sit behind you," Bill suggested as Tom sat on the bed and waited for Bill to decide how they were going to do this.

He nodded, he was perfectly happy to go with anything that made Bill more comfortable. He knew what it was like not to trust his own feelings and he couldn't imagine what it must be like for Bill with everything else piled on top as well. He was incredibly glad of his baggy clothes, because it hid the fact that he was, more than a little, looking forward to Bill feeding, but he couldn't help the little shiver as Bill climbed onto the bed behind him. There was only so much he could deny.

His dreads were piled on his head in a messy bunch, since that was far easier than arranging them properly as they were off duty, and he felt Bill moving the odd one that had escaped away from the side of his neck. Sitting still was very hard, but somehow he managed it. Bill was clearly trying to avoid leaning up against him completely, but it was impossible not to do so at least in part, and he felt his twin press up against his back.

The tickle of excitement and arousal twirled in his belly as Bill leant forward and warm breath ghosted over his throat. When he had said it was almost better than sex, he hadn't been kidding and his body was anticipating it in the same way. Bill's hands were on his shoulders and he held his breath waiting for the first bite.

Bill's fangs going in hurt, but the momentary pain was like the spark which lit the fire and, as Bill's mouth closed over his throat, he felt the feedback connection explode into life and it was amazing. It was as uncontrollable as an orgasm and just as good in many ways as his body reacted and his mind engulfed the whole experience, taking in every part of it. The pure pleasure ran through his entire body, unadulterated by thought or guilt or anything else as Bill shared this fundamental part of himself.

There was no holding back when Bill fed from him. Syb had explained it once, something about the pair-bond between Strigoi and bond mate demanding the complete connection. He was carried away on a wave of arousal and bliss and while it was happening he didn't care about anything else. He knew he loved Bill in every way possible and it was in these moments he could feel it as starkly as if it was written in neon lights.

When Bill fed he had no doubts or worries, it was only when Bill broke away that any of those came back. As he descended from the high this time he found they were still sitting on the bed, but Bill was leaning on his quite heavily and his twin was shaking. He lifted one hand and covered one of Bill's that was still on his shoulder.

"Are you okay?" he asked as he did his best to put away everything he was feeling.

"I'm ... yes ..." Bill's voice was strong, but incredibly unsure, "I ... I need ... going to the bathroom."

He didn't want Bill to go when his twin pulled away from him, but he had promised to pretend, so he had to let Bill go. It was abundantly clear that the feeding had affected Bill the same way it had affected him, and he could feel the ache in his groin very clearly, but it was also clear that Bill couldn't deal with him knowing that right then.

"Bill," he said, making his twin halt at the door.

Bill turned to look at him, guilt and confusion etched in every movement.

"I'll see you back in the living room, yeah?" he said, doing his best to pretend everything was normal.

He even managed a little smile.

"Yeah," Bill said quietly and looked incredibly grateful, and then his twin was gone and he was left to decide if he should deal with his problem like Bill was obviously about to do, or just hope it would go away.

It wasn't an easy choice to make.

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They had been at home a little over a week and Bill seemed to have adjusted to the new aspect of the bond okay. Everything was not as relaxed as it had been

before, but Tom was hopefully optimistic that they would be able to sort things out. Talking about it, however, was not yet on the agenda and so he'd caught Syb when she had arrived and asked her not to mention it, just in case the perceptive Strigoi noticed something. For the first time, Syb was alone for one of her visits, and she had agreed as Tom took her coat for her.

"Good evening, Bill," Syb greeted as Tom followed her into the living room, "how are you today?"

Tom was pleased when Bill smiled brightly; it seemed that Syb's last visit had quelled Bill's fears of what might happen and Bill was far more relaxed this time.

"I'm fine," Bill said and bounced out of his seat to greet Syb with a quick hug and a kiss on the cheek, "how are you?"

"Very well thank you," Syb replied as Bill offered her a seat, "very busy, but then running around after human law enforcement always was rather frantic."

Bill looked a little less at ease for a moment and so Tom decided to step in.

"Are you any closer to catching Bill's attacker?" he asked, since it was the obvious question.

"We found an empty house," Syb said while making herself comfortable, "but it was completely cleared out. We think they left as soon as the news that Bill was still alive hit the media. It means it will take longer to find them, but it seems likely that this monster and his people are running."

"So you don't think he'll try and come back for me?" Bill asked in a very tight sounding voice.

"It's unlikely he'd try," Syb said with a nod; "since it would be more dangerous than trying to get away. The police will remain outside your house, though, just in case, and at night they will still be a Strigoi-human partnership."

"Thank you," Bill said, although, to Tom, he did sound a little more relaxed.

Tom hoped with all his heart that Bill's attacker was at least that logical. So far there had been no sign of anything strange going on near the hospital or their house, which was a good start. He prayed that they were safe.

"Markus sends his apologies," Syb said, changing the subject quite neatly, "but he is up to his eyes in paper work. If he would learn to type with more than two fingers I'm sure he would get through it much faster."

"And he doesn't have the excuse of nails," Tom said with a laugh; "you should see Bill typing."

Bill stuck his tongue out and Tom grinned; at least they could start with a chat before the conversation became heavier.

Chatting about all sorts of things went on for over half an hour before matters turned to more important subjects. Tom was quite happy to let Bill and Syb talk as Bill asked whatever random questions occurred to him. It was almost relaxing, listening to Bill investigate different aspects of Strigoi nature and culture. Bill had always had an enquiring mind, it was just that so much at school had simply

bored them both, and when Bill got his teeth into a subject he cared about it was always entertaining to watch him go.

It was past midnight before Syb took over again and steered the conversation to something she obviously needed to talk about.

"I have been speaking with the elders," Syb said and something about her tone alerted Tom to the fact that this was not going to be a simple exchange; "they would like to meet you, both of you..."

Tom knew that; Syb had made it very clear how interested the elders were in Bill.

"...on Friday."

Tom's thoughts stalled and he was caught somewhere between wanting to laugh and simply not believing he had heard correctly.

"You have to be kidding," he said as he finally convinced his brain that he had indeed heard the word 'Friday'.

"No," Syb said with a small shrug, "I am not."

It took Tom a fraction of a second to stand up.

"How can you even think that?" he demanded, all sorts of terrible possible scenarios running through his head.

He glanced at Bill who appeared shell shocked by the announcement.

"If you agree it will be a formal dinner and small gathering afterwards," Syb explained as if Tom had not all but yelled at her; "nothing too crowded."

"You're out of your mind," Tom said and really couldn't believe what Syb was saying. "Markus must have told you what happened outside the hospital and what getting from there to here did to Bill."

Syb inclined her head, but did not look in the least bit apologetic.

"And I have seen with my own eyes how much improvement Bill has made in his time at home," Syb said and Tom felt like laughing in her face. "I would never have brought it up if I didn't think Bill was ready."

"I can barely cope with people I have known for years," Bill's quiet voice stopped Tom from raging; "how am I supposed to deal with complete strangers?"

Tom moved back to Bill's side as he realised his twin was looking a little white; it was clear the mere suggestion of the meeting had frightened Bill.

Syb stood up slowly and walked across the room, crouching down in front of Bill. Tom felt like pushing her away, but he knew that would have been petty and futile.

"I am not talking about humans, Bill," Syb said carefully, "these are Strigoi and in a few cases their bond mates as well. You will be able to sense them and know that they mean you no harm the moment you are introduced and take their hands. They are all aware of what you have been through and for a civilised

Strigoi there is no worse crime than what the animal who took you tried to do. They only wish to welcome you and show you what we are really like."

"Then why can't they wait?" Tom asked, still angry at the idea.

Syb stood up and looked him in the eye.

"Because the longer we wait, the more difficult it will be for Bill to re-evaluate what he is and what we are in his head," Syb said evenly. "He needs to meet more of his own kind. He is ready."

Tom didn't like the arrogance he saw in Syb when she spoke now; there were some things that she could not possibly know.

"How can you stand there and say that?" he all but raged. "You don't listen to Bill scream at night when he wakes up from a nightmare. I will not let you..."

Bill took his hand, making him stop and look down.

"Please don't argue," Bill said quietly, clearly shaken by what was going on.

When Tom looked at Syb she seemed as abashed as he felt; what had he been thinking?

"I'm sorry," he said, sitting down next to Bill and wrapping an arm around his twin.

"My apologies as well," Syb said, returning to her seat, "I did not mean to be so adamant. I will of course tell them that it is not possible if you do not feel up to it."

Tom took a calming breath and let it go slowly; it was clear the stress must have been getting to all of them.

"I'll really be able to sense them?" Bill asked slowly.

Syb nodded.

"Just as you sense me when we meet," Syb explained. "Our connection is greater because of what we have shared, but you will feel their intentions and through them any bonded who are also there."

Bill looked at Tom and Tom squeezed his twin's hand in support; he would back Bill in whatever his twin decided.

"Maybe it is time," Bill said eventually. "I need to get back out there and I can't with normal people yet. If anyone came up to me asking for an autograph I'd probably faint in a heap."

Tom gave his twin a smile for trying to lighten the tone with the last phrase.

"If you think you can I'll be with you every step of the way," he promised faithfully.

It was abundantly clear to Tom that Bill was terribly unsure about the whole thing, but he also saw the resolution come across Bill's face. If there was one thing Bill had never lacked it was courage.



"Okay," Bill said looking back over to Syb, "tell them yes."

Syb did not bother replying, the female Strigoi simply nodded; the discussion was over.

"I will make arrangements and give you the details," were the last words on the matter.

Tom knew that there would be nightmares that night when they finally went to bed. Moments of stress, even small things, seemed to come back to haunt Bill in his dreams and this had definitely been a considerable amount of stress. He only hoped the rest of Syb's visit would be more relaxing.

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Friday arrived all too quickly, but all Tom could think when he surveyed his twin was that Bill looked stunning. No effort had been spared and Bill looked every inch the regal vampire. Bill's hair was down, carefully styled around his sculptured face and Bill had chosen an all black outfit: black silk shirt, black, tailored suede jacket and black jeans. Bill's shoes were leather and expensive and the accessories were subtle, but stunning, as was the makeup. Tom was more than impressed.

"You look amazing," he said, not bothering to hide his awe at the beauty that was his brother.

He suddenly felt really, really underdressed; which wasn't like him at all. When Syb had given them the details and that it would be a formal occasion, Bill had only made one request: lose the hat. That had been it and now Tom was beginning to wish his twin had asked for more.

"So do you," Bill said with a smile and stepping up to him, gave him a kiss on the cheek.

Tom looked down at himself; he was wearing blue jeans, white trainers, two black t-shirts and a black jacket. His hair was being kept at bay by a black band and he felt very down beat compared to Bill.

"Compared to you I look like I crawled out of the sewer," he said even though everything he was wearing was pristine.

"Rubbish," Bill said, taking his hand; "you look as well presented as always; you're just different."

And that was that; Bill didn't seem remotely fazed at all.

"Let's go," Bill suggested and pulled him towards the door; "the car is waiting."

The Strigoi were dealing with making sure the press didn't notice their exit and Tom had decided not to ask how. He knew no one was going to be hurt and that was all he cared about.

End of Chapter 7

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## Chapter 8 Eccentricities

Strigoi tended to be somewhat old fashioned compared to their human counterparts, according to Syb, so Bill wasn't one hundred percent sure he knew what he was getting into. He still really wasn't quite clear on the details of why the fact that he could move around in sunlight meant that he was automatically quite an important person, but he couldn't exactly argue with it.

So far Syb was the only Strigoi he had met properly and the idea of being introduced to more frightened him more than a little, but he knew she would not have asked him to do it if it was not important. Syb had been in his mind; she knew exactly what had happened to him and she cared, of that much he was completely certain. He had spent hours getting ready and he was as nervous as if this was an opening night, but he was prepared. As long as Tom was there he was sure he could do anything.

Climbing out of the car, he looked up at the very grand house at which they had just arrived. It was big and it was old and definitely suited the occasion. Syb had explained that it belonged to Graham, one of the four elders, and was being used for the gathering since it was the closest to where he and Tom lived.

As they stood looking up at the building, Tom looped an arm around his waist for a moment and gave him a quick half-hug. He was nervous and his hands were shaking slightly, but he wasn't about to give in to his anxiety.

Syb led the way up to the front door and knocked using the very ornate knocker on the big oak structure. Bill was so busy trying to ignore the fact that he was so nervous he felt sick that it took him a moment to notice that the knocker was a gargoyle, a vampire gargoyle to be precise. He almost let out a small hysterical laugh, but managed to keep it inside; at least Graham seemed to have a bit of a sense of humour.

A young woman in black and white opened the door.

"Please come in," she invited with a polite smile, "your host will be with you in a moment."

Bill had no idea if Graham had staff or if Strigoi hired staff for functions just like everyone else, but he was almost positive the woman was human. It was only as he stepped past her that he felt anything out of the ordinary. He looked along what was a wood panelled hallway as his attention was caught by a presence, a presence that reminded him of Syb, but somehow more so. He had a vague inkling that he knew why age brought power and respect in the Strigoi community, because he knew he was looking at an elder without being told. However, what he was seeing wasn't quite what he expected.

The image in his head was so entirely not what he was looking at that for a moment his brain kind of stalled. The word elders conjured images of people with grey hair and spectacles, but of course he was dealing with vampires; people who didn't age.

"Sybil, how wonderful to see you again," said the young looking man walking down the hallway.

Syb smiled brightly and stepped forward to accept a kiss on each cheek from the male Strigoi.

"Graham," Syb greeted in return, "I missed you at the last meeting."

Bill was so surprised by the way Graham looked and was then mentally kicking himself for being such an idiot that he totally forgot to be afraid. Graham was tall, blonde, broad shouldered and had bright blue eyes and Bill was reminded of younger version of Brad Pitt in Mr and Mrs Smith more than anything else.

"And since I know your reprobate other half, I must assume that these two young gentlemen are the ones I have heard so much about," Graham didn't fit any characteristic of 'elder' that Bill had in his head at all. "Good evening, welcome to my home."

Bill had been clutching Tom's hand most of the way to the gathering, but he actually let go and took Graham's hand as the other Strigoi held it out in greeting. He didn't even think about it until he'd done it and by the time his brain caught up with his actions it was far too late. He couldn't help breathing in a little in shock as he was overcome by a feeling of welcome and cheerfulness and concern; he almost took a step back.

"Bill, are you okay?" Tom asked, sounding concerned.

"Fine," he said, looking Graham straight in the eye and feeling strangely at ease. "Hello," he added, so as not to be rude.

"You have caused great excitement within our community, Bill," Graham said with a smile, "I do hope it is not too overwhelming for you, either of you. So little happens around here that when it does we can be a little over enthusiastic."

"It's nice to meet you," Bill said and he was surprised to find that he actually meant it.

He had reacted so badly to several people and yet he really did mean it and it was a strangely liberating experience. A glimmer of hope fired up in the back of his mind that maybe the evening wasn't going to be as terrible as he had imagined. He slipped his hand back into Tom's the moment Tom had shaken Graham's hand as well, but he found to his pleasure the nervous tremors he had been trying to hide had subsided.

"Graham, darling, don't monopolise the guests of honour."

Bill looked up as an unfamiliar female voice joined the conversation and he was just in time to see a stunning woman walking down the corridor. She was almost as tall as Graham, blonde as well and wearing the most incredibly beautiful gown that made her look as if she had just stepped off a catwalk somewhere. Graham smiled and turned.

"Bill, Tom, this is my bond mate Karin," Graham introduced, but Bill didn't really need the extra information, because, looking at Karin, he knew exactly who she was bonded to without any doubt what so ever.

He wasn't sure how he knew, as with everything Strigoi, actually knowing and knowing why he knew were two entirely different things, but he was getting used to that.

"Good evening," Karin greeted brightly, first shaking Tom's hand and then his, "it is so nice to finally meet you both. We have been hearing wonderful things from Sybil."

"Not too wonderful I hope," Tom said, filling in nicely when Bill had no idea what to say, "we don't want to have too much to live up to."

If Karin's huge smile was anything to go by, the blonde woman thought this answer was delightful.

"With you, Tom, it couldn't be too wonderful," Syb said with a mischievous grin.

Tom made to look offended and did a beautiful job, which made Bill laugh just a little. He knew that Syb and Tom were doing their best to make sure he was distracted and he appreciated it. He hoped fervently that it would last.

"Never end up on the wrong side of dear Syb," Karin said with a laugh, "for her tongue can be sharper than her fangs."

"As we have all found out from time to time," Graham agreed, laughing as well. "Still, we have a party to enjoy. If you would all come this way, Phillip will be glad to take your coats, and every one else is in the lounge. There are two more to arrive yet, but most people are already here."

Philip turned out to be a teenager who couldn't have been more than seventeen and Bill was a little surprised to find that Philip was human. The young man took Tom's, Syb's and Marcus' coats without saying a word. Bill's jacket was part of his outfit and he kept it; he was still feeling the cold anyway. He was also nervous again, but he did his best not to show it and Tom was glued to his side, which helped.

"When you're offered drinks," Syb said quietly as they followed their hosts up the hallway, "Bill, take a glass with a gold stem, Tom, go for silver."

Bill found that instruction most odd.

"Why?" he asked, not really understanding.

"Some things are only palatable to Strigoi," Syb said and patted his arm; "it's nothing sinister."

Before Bill could ask anymore, they reached the other room and his voice vanished in nerves as he saw how many people were inside. Syb had briefed them on how many people would be there, but Bill still hadn't been quite prepared. Their whole gathering was to be the four Strigoi elders and their companions as well as a select few other members of the local Strigoi community. Bill couldn't help feeling very unsettled as he followed Graham and Karin into the room.

"Let me introduce you around," Graham offered and Bill nodded after taking a deep breath.

"I can do this," he muttered under his breath; it was quickly becoming his motto and he felt Tom squeeze his hand in support.

"Drinks first I think," Karin interrupted with a smile and took two glasses off a tray a waitress was carrying.

Bill noticed the gold decoration on the stem of the glass Karin passed him and the silver on the one Karin gave to Tom and it was the same with Syb and Markus.

There was only one thing he could think of that Strigoi consumed that humans didn't, but the liquid in the glass just looked like red wine. Cautiously he sipped it as Graham led them over to one of the groups in the room and when it hit his tongue he couldn't help it, he stopped dead. His taste buds lit up like a Christmas tree and he stared at the glass.

"That's not just red wine," he said, utterly flabbergasted by the effect it had on him.

For a second the whole room seemed to sparkle.

"I'm so sorry," Graham said, "I totally didn't think. Red wine with a small amount of blood is a traditional cocktail to start off an evening like this. Alcohol has less affect on our systems so we spice it up a little; if you would rather I can get you a normal glass."

"No, that's okay," Bill replied, settling himself down again, "it was just a bit of a shock. Thank you."

The evening was becoming more and more bizarre, but then a whole lot of his life was a little bizarre these days, so he tried to just accept it.

"I'd kill for a beer," Tom whispered in his ear as they continued on their way and it made him smile.

Champagne was as close as Tom usually liked to get to wine of any sort. It was just after that when Bill realised Syb, Markus and Karin had peeled off to elsewhere in the room.

"Lorrie," Graham drew his attention back to what they were supposed to be doing and he realised he'd been effectively distracted again, "I'd like to introduce Bill and Tom. Bill, Tom, this is Lorrie, the oldest of the old around here, Bianca Hislop, her personal assistant and Xavier Balldock head of our police force."

"Thank you so much for the wonderful introduction, Graham," the newly introduced Lorrie said with a roll of her eyes, "once a barbarian, always a barbarian. Very pleased to meet you."

Lorrie was short, brunette and plump and had a smile a bit like the one Georg used on all the girls; it said 'I know something you don't know'. About the only similarity between Graham and Lorrie was the fact that neither of them looked remotely like an elder of any sort. Bill shook Lorrie's offered hand and felt gentle amusement flow over him and he knew it wasn't aimed at him, but at the world in general. He had the overall impression of age and he was surprised by the seemingly total absence of seriousness.

"Hello," he said and managed to do so at exactly the same time as Tom.

It wasn't as if it didn't happen a lot to them, but it made the others in the group smile. He shook hands with Bianca and Xavier as well and discovered that they were both Strigoi as well, but no where near as old as Lorrie. The fact that he could tell they meant him absolutely no harm was comforting and he found himself beginning to relax again.

"My niece is a very big fan of your band," Bianca said conversationally, "or rather I should say my grand-niece. If it was not so rude I would ask for an autograph."

"We'll have to see what we can do by the end of the evening," Tom said, with Tom's usual flair.

Bill just smiled, since his brain was still processing everything about the room. Once upon a time he could have worked the room with no problem at all, but he needed a bit of breathing space now.

In the end it took him about five minutes to warm up to the conversation, about the same time it took for a beer to mysteriously appear for Tom. If Tom had had any shame at all Bill was sure his twin should have been mortified that someone had overheard his comment, but this was Tom. It was when Lorrie mentioned something about the Dior collection (it seemed she was a bit of a connoisseur) that Bill finally decided to jump into the conversation; fashion was one thing he could talk about without any negative connotations what so ever. By the time Graham dragged him and Tom away to the next group, he was feeling quite at home, so much so that when Karin asked to borrow Tom for a while, he actually said yes. He didn't feel as comfortable without Tom glued to his side, but it was clear that Karin and Markus wanted to talk to Tom about something and hoped he could manage.

The new group consisted of Peter, the third elder and his two bond mates, Fiona and Yan; that introduction had been an eye opener, and James Farhl who was a publicist of some sort. Bill hadn't been able to resist and had had to ask about the double bond mate situation. It turned out a Strigoi could have as many bond mates as they wanted, but if you had more than one, you had to have a very good reason, because the free will of those involved would be questioned and investigated. Bill was fascinated and hoped he wasn't being rude by making all sorts of enquiries. Peter, Fiona and Yan seemed fine with talking about it and Graham and James were equally at ease, so he hoped he wasn't stomping over any niceties.

He found himself chatting amiably for quite some time. He even noticed Karin exiting the room and then coming back with some more people, but the whole atmosphere was setting him at ease and he found himself altering his position a little so he could see them out of the corner of his eye, but nothing else. With Tom away from his side he was not relaxed, but he knew how to play a part, at least for a while.

Over time, however, he began noticing Tom's absence more and more and it began making him more and more uncomfortable. Eventually he looked over to where Tom was talking to an attractive female vampire, one of the party who had just come in, and his eyes zeroed in on the hand the woman had on Tom's arm. She was leaning in close and speaking quietly, making Tom lean in too and Bill saw red. Everything flew out of his head and rage bubbled through him like a fire, consuming all rationality as it went. His brain screamed "mine" and "protect" and the only thing that stopped him leaping at the woman was a sudden very strong grip on his arm. It didn't stop him growling though.

"Delphine," Graham's voice carried across the room, "I would suggest you release the young man and step back."

The woman in question looked up and straight at him and then shock registered on her face. Almost straight away she removed her hand from Tom's arm and took a step away from where Tom appeared somewhat confused.

"If you would be so kind, Tom," Graham said, sounding perfectly calm, "I believe that remaining closer to Bill would be sensible just at the moment."

Bill still wanted to tear Delphine limb from limb, but he did feel a little less homicidal when Tom quickly walked across the room. When Tom took his hand he felt even better, but it didn't stop him glaring at the woman across the room.

"Tom is quite safe, Bill," Graham spoke to him and something about the older Strigoi's voice demanded his attention, "you do not need to be on guard."

For a moment Bill stared at Graham, trying to work out what the man was telling him. It took him long seconds to take it in rather than just hear it and then he realised what he was doing. His rage vanished in a moment leaving him confused and anxious.

"Bill, are you okay?" Tom asked, sounding worried.

"I..." Bill tried to explain, but he was at a loss himself.

"A simple reaction," Graham said with a smile as if it was nothing; "it has happened to us all at one time or another. Delphine should have known better than to flirt with the bond mate of one so new. Now your glass is low, let me find someone to refill it for you."

And that was it; the incident was closed, but Bill couldn't help looking at Tom and wondering what on earth he would have done if Graham hadn't been right there.

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Bill padded back from the bathroom having removed all his makeup, brushed all the spray out of his hair and pulled on an old t-shirt and a loose pair of boxers. The meal after the gathering had been food that was rather fancier than he was used to, but it had been very nice. He and Tom had met Arabella, the last of the elders and it did seem that everyone had really just wanted to meet and talk to them. After all the frantic anticipation, it had been a nice evening all told; nerve wracking, but no where near as bad as Bill had thought it would be, and he had learnt a lot about interaction among Strigoi. It was all rather informal really, apart from the affectations around the whole affair. He had almost enjoyed himself.

There was just one thing that would not let his mind rest and he had been considering it ever since it had occurred. His reaction to Delphine at the party had been an eye opening experience and he couldn't stop thinking about it. As it turned out, when he had tried to apologise to Delphine she had apologised in return and explained that she hadn't meant anything by it, it was just the way she was. That, however, did not take away from the revelation that the incident had been.

If he had just felt protective it would have been different, but he hadn't; he had felt territorial as well. He had seen Delphine touching what was his and wanted to stake his claim as well as protect Tom from any possible danger. It had been there, right at the front of his mind, so strong that he couldn't ignore it and it drove home everything Tom had been telling him. Feeling such things for Tom made him nervous, but he couldn't ignore them anymore and deep down they felt so right he wasn't sure ignoring them was what he really wanted.

Tom was already changed for bed and had used the bathroom first, so his twin was sitting on the bed with his nose in a magazine waiting for him. Walking over, he sat down on his side of the bed, still trying to work out what he was thinking.

The idea of sex, any sort of sex made his stomach drop away and be replaced by a knot of dread, but part of him craved it as well. He had woken three times since the first incident with exactly that same problem and Tom had not pushed him, but the last time he had had to run to the bathroom to deal with it before his erection would go away. It was awkward and uncomfortable for both of them that his subconscious seemed to want this and his conscious mind didn't and he didn't like it.

"You okay?" Tom asked quietly and he realised he'd been sitting there staring at the floor for quite a long time.

He looked up and round into Tom's concerned face and with his heart in his throat he made his decision.

"Will you kiss me?" he asked in little more than a whisper, "please," he added as an afterthought.

Tom appeared surprised and then he smiled just a little.

"Of course I will," Tom said and reached out to take his hand, "I would love to."

Bill felt like an inexperienced ten year old as Tom moved closer to him and slowly leant in and he couldn't help feeling just a little afraid. He was stiff and tense as Tom's lips touched his, but he was shocked when his mind did not fill with the terrible images of his ordeal, in fact his mind didn't fill with anything; logical thought seemed to be frozen and instinct took over.

There was no other way to describe it; he melted into the kiss, reaching out and wrapping his arms around Tom. Even when Tom's strong limbs wound around him, pulling him closer, it did not fire his fear response. Something in Tom's touch made it impossible for him to be afraid and the kiss was deep, heady and full of passion. Only when he started getting hard did anything in his head fire that he didn't want and he had to draw back. He was breathless and part of him wanted more, but not all of him was ready yet.

"Okay?" Tom asked, watching his face very carefully.

Bill nodded, biting his lip.

"Thank you," he said, feeling vulnerable, but warm and happy as well.

Tom smiled at him, stroking the side of his face very gently. He was tempted to lean back in for more, but he didn't want to ruin it all by freaking out.

"I..." he said, wanting to explain.

"Need to get some sleep," Tom said as if reading his mind; "we have visitors tomorrow and I don't think we can get away with the excuse that you're on sleeping pills anymore if you start snoring on my shoulder."

A small grin crept onto his face at that; Tom always knew how to make him feel better. When they climbed into bed, he snuggled close to his twin and settled down to sleep, more relaxed than he remembered being in a very long time.

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"Morning," Tom said brightly as he walked into the kitchen for breakfast, "it is still morning isn't it?"



"Just," his mother replied with a laugh. "I will assume from the good mood that last night went well?"

Tom gave his mother a bright smile.

"Very well I think," he said, but his mind was more on what had happened after the Strigoi party than during it.

The fact that Bill had asked him to kiss him was amazing, wonderful, astounding even. He had been so worried that Bill might never be ready and yet the kiss had been fantastic. It was going to take a while, he knew that and he had seen the conflict in Bill afterwards, but it was a brilliant start. Of course he couldn't exactly just blurt out all that to his mother, at least not at breakfast.

"The Strigoi elders are," he looked for the best word as he tried to distract his brain from its current obsession with Bill, "I think eccentric is the best way to describe them, but they were very friendly. Bill fitted in perfectly; I think he may have found his niche."

The way his mother smiled at that told him they were on the same page; it wasn't as if anyone had ever tried to make Bill out to be your average teenager. Tom could admit that he wasn't either, but Bill was definitely the more out there of them both.

"Any nightmares last night?" his mother asked.

That was basically code for was Bill completely stressed out by the whole event and would they need to do some damage control over the day. Sooner or later their mother was going to have to go back to her normal schedule, but at the moment everything was being fitted in around Bill. No one could ever say that Simone was not devoted to her children.

"Only one," Tom replied, pouring himself some cereal into a bowl, "and that wasn't bad; he didn't even really wake up. Markus and Karin, she's one of the elder's bond mate, took me aside and explained what was going on in case Bill needed any reassurance during the evening. All the Strigoi there were keeping themselves open to reassure Bill, so he could feel their general intentions. On a psychic scale Bill's at the top of the curve, something else to do with the day dweller stuff, so they didn't have to work too hard, but they were being very careful with him and it seemed to work. Of course the blood in the wine might have helped to mellow him out too."

The look on Bill's face when he'd first tried the wine had been priceless.

"Blood in the wine?" his mother asked, clearly not knowing what to make of that.

"It's a vampire thing," he assured her with a grin; "something about it making the alcohol act on them in sort of the same way it does on us. Seemed to work on Bill anyway."

Their mother didn't appear to know whether that was a good thing or a bad thing, however, Tom was saved from having to convince her at the sound of quiet singing coming down the hall. They both stared at each other and Tom knew they were having the same revelation. As Bill walked into the room half humming and half singing to himself, Tom couldn't help the huge smile that burst onto his face. Bill had always sung or hummed or whistled really badly; it was something that

was expected, but since the abduction there had been a pained silence. Once upon a time Tom would have said he had tried every way to shut his twin up, but when it had been missing he had missed it and now it was back it made his heart swell.

"What?" Bill asked and Tom realised he was probably staring, along with his mother.

"Nothing, Sweetheart," his mother said, covering for them both, "Tom was just telling me about last night. It's nice to see you so cheerful this morning, I was a little worried it would be too much for you."

Bill smiled then, a genuine, shadow free, honest to god, happy smile and Tom was overjoyed.

"Everyone was really nice," Bill said, grabbing a bowl and cereal as he spoke. "The elders didn't look like elders at all; I think I had white robes and beards in my head, but it was more like action hero, den mother, philanthropist and fashion designer. What was really weird though is that elders don't seem to have last names. Well I'm sure they do, but everyone else was introduced as so-and-so last name, but with the elders it was just Lorrie or Graham, like Cher or Madonna."

Tom sat back and listened to Bill babble. The milk almost missed Bill's bowl because Bill was trying to gesture with his hands at the same time, but when Tom glanced over, his mother didn't seem to care any more than he did. Seeing Bill so animated was wonderful, almost as wonderful as that kiss and Tom didn't really think anything else mattered about then.

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Bill looked at his phone and it almost seemed to glare back at him. He was in a bit of a quandary and he wasn't sure how to deal with it.

"It won't bite," Tom said, sitting down next to him on the bed.

His twin handed him a cup of tea and he took it with a mumbled thank you, but didn't look up.

"I went to call Andi," he said eventually and finally put the phone on the bed beside him, "I was going to tell him all about last night and I only realised I couldn't when I was about to dial."

Tom gave him a sad little smile and took his free hand.

"You could explain everything to him if you wanted to," Tom said in a careful tone.

He appreciated the delicacy Tom was using, but he didn't actually need it at that moment.

"I know I could," he said after a few moments, "but I'm not feeling that brave. I don't think he'll freak out, but there's that voice at the back of my mind that keeps suggesting he might and it's too loud for me to ignore it yet."

"I have a voice like that too," Tom said, clearly knowing that trying to talk him round wouldn't do any good, "mostly it sounds like you. Sometimes it stops me doing stupid things, but at others it's a pain in the arse."

Bill smiled at his twin for that.

"Yeah, I think mine sounds like you too," he said and it did at times; he had occasionally mused on the idea that the little voice really was Tom, but that was too Twilight Zone even for his crazy life at the moment.

"Andi will probably think you're even cooler than he already does when you tell him," Tom said and nudged him gently in the side.

"Andi does not think I'm cool," he said and rolled his eyes, "he thinks I'm a dork just like you do."

Tom grinned at that.

"Only sometimes," Tom replied, a humorous sparkle in his eyes, "but I beg to differ; Andi may be our best friend, but he does get the hero worship glaze in his eyes every now and then and has done ever since we first met him."

Bill just took a sip of his tea; sometimes Tom thought the oddest things.

End of Chapter 8

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## Chapter 9 Hints of Normality

Tom looked up from reading his magazine to see Bill sitting at the other end of the sofa staring at a notebook with a small frown on his face. They had taken up residence on the couch an hour or so before, both sitting in a corner with their feet up and touching in the middle and had maintained companionable silence ever since. To anyone else they probably looked as if they were hiding from each other behind their knees, but that was very far from the reality. Bill had muttered something about lyrics and had been scribbling and occasionally singing quietly to himself as Tom caught up on reading a couple of magazines he was subscribed to and hadn't had the chance to look at.

"How's it going?" he asked, since he knew for a fact that Bill hadn't written anything in the last ten minutes.

Bill could be a little strange when writing lyrics: sometimes he'd want to share everything all the time and other times he wouldn't let anyone see anything for ages. Tom wasn't quite sure what had inspired Bill to write this time, but he was pleased to see that something had; it just meant he wasn't sure what reaction his enquiry would receive. When Bill looked up at him, the little frown disappeared.

"I think I'm done," Bill said, worrying his lip a little with his teeth.

It was a nervous tick that Bill had had since they were small, well actually they both had it, only his had morphed slightly since he'd had the lip ring, and Tom knew that he was about to find out what Bill had been working on. Bill was only ever nervous like that when ready to reveal the masterpiece.

"What do you think?" Bill asked and handed him the pad just as he had expected.

The page was full of writing with crossings out, scribbles, and insertions, but as with everything else about Bill, he was one of the few people who could decipher it. At the top of the page was the word "title" with a colon after it and nothing following it, so the song wasn't quite complete yet, but he could tell that everything else was there. The way the handwriting was so messy in places told him one thing very clearly; Bill had put his heart and soul into this and so he set about reading carefully and slowly.

The first few lines made him go cold; they were bleak and scared and it was very clear where the lyrics were coming from, but then he read the end of the first verse and he could not help looking up. Bill was watching him closely and he glanced back down quickly, continuing to read. After that he couldn't take his eyes off the page as the lyrics took him on a whirlwind ride through Bill's psyche. By the end he wanted to cry and he was not a tearful person, but he didn't want to cry because the song was so sad; quite the opposite in fact. It was amazing to him really; it was a song about love and hope.

"It's about being lost and your friends helping you find your way again," Bill said quietly in an unsure voice.

"Oh god, Bill," he replied, looking up from the paper, "I know; it's ... I think these are the strongest lyrics you've ever written; it's amazing."

And Tom meant every word. Possibly it was because he was so close to the subject, but he had never felt words move him quite so completely before.

"You like it?" Bill asked, as if unsure.

"Like it?" Tom asked, putting his magazine on the floor and crawling over the sofa so he was right next to Bill. "I love it, and we have to put some music to it as soon as possible. This is our next single."

Bill looked rather shocked at his reaction.

"It's just some words," Bill said, clearly somewhat flustered.

"You never just write words," Tom said, giving his twin a smile and leaning forward and kissing Bill on the nose, "you write what's in your heart; if we can get the right tune this will knock everyone's socks off."

For a few moments Bill just sat there and blinked at him, but slowly a tiny smile formed.

"You think so?" Bill asked.

"I know so," Tom replied with supreme confidence.

"Um, maybe we should see if Gustav and Georg are free," Bill suggested tentatively, "and then we can find a tune?"

The fact that Bill was suggesting other people visit filled Tom with almost more joy than the ideas the song provoked and he grinned happily.

"I'll find my phone," he said and bounced off the sofa.

Things were looking up; they really were.

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Bill was trying so hard not to giggle; he really was, but it was a losing battle. He was sprawled on the floor, leaning against the sofa and one of Tom's legs; Gustav was on the other end of the sofa and Georg was in the arm chair. They had been playing around with the new song most of the afternoon and they were almost there, but had mutually decided to take a break when food had been produced.

He wasn't blind; he knew how pleased his mum and Tom had been when he had shown real interest in doing things with other people and the over catering was to be expected. There were sandwiches, snacks, vegetable sticks and dips, fruit, sweets; basically just about everything their mum had had to hand and could produce at a moment's notice.

They had been eating and chatting for a while and the reason Bill was trying so hard not to giggle was that Tom had been throwing things at Georg every time Georg looked away and finally one had stuck in Georg's hair. It was a cheesy twig kind of thing and Georg seemed totally oblivious to the fact that it was there. Every time Georg moved his head it kind of danced and Bill found it incredibly funny.

If the way Gustav's eyes were twinkling was anything to go by, he wasn't the only one.

Eventually he couldn't help himself and he fell over sideways, dissolving into a fit of giggles to rival any ever seen. He was laughing so hard he could barely breathe. For a moment Georg looked as if he wasn't sure if this was some weird

coping mechanism or not and it was only when Gustav began to laugh as well that Georg realised he was the butt of a joke.

"Okay, who did what?" Georg asked in a patiently resigned tone as Tom started laughing as well.

"Hair," Bill just about managed to squeak out between laughing.

"Oh very mature," Georg said as he found the cheesy addition to his hair style and Tom threw another one at him for good measure, "how old are you two again?"

Georg was very often the butt of the jokes, their friend had the temperament for it. and rolled his eyes while smiling. Bill just about managed mock shock that he was being accused of having anything to do with this, but he was still giggling like a loon.

"Y'know, Bill," Georg said as he ate the cheese snack, "if your cowardly brother wasn't using you as a human shield, I might have to spank him."

"I'd like to see you try, Big Man," Tom jeered back.

For a split second Bill thought Georg might try; it wasn't as if it would be anything new in the continual round of horseplay that had always been part of the band, but at the moment Bill almost panicked. Then Georg just picked up a handful of nuts and threw them at Tom and thus began a food war. Bill joined in almost instantly, as his panic vanished as quickly as it had appeared, but he couldn't forget it, even as he tried. They were going to be in so much trouble when their mum saw the state of the room, but it was definitely fun. Some things were still very far from normal and he wasn't sure they ever would be again, but he could live with it.

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Bill looked up from his sketchbook when Tom wandered back into the bedroom from having had a long and indulgent shower. Being away from Tom for any amount of time still made him very uneasy, so he had picked up the sketchbook mainly as a distraction when Tom had gone to the bathroom, but then he had begun thinking and he had an idea. He wasn't sure if it was a practical idea, but he was quite excited by it.

"You look like you discovered gold while I was gone," Tom said, pausing just inside the door.

"I've been thinking," Bill said, trying not to sound too excited.

"Now there's a bad start," Tom commented with a grin and Bill just stuck his tongue out.

"The new song," he said.

"What about the new song?" Tom asked, throwing himself down on the bed beside Bill and peering at the sketchbook.

"Do you think they'd let me do the idea for the video?" Bill asked; not sure how the management would react if he asked.

Tom looked thoughtful, but smiled as well.

"I think, right about now," Tom told him, "if you asked to do a concert from the moon, they'd see if they could arrange it. You're hot property at the moment."

Bill made a face.

"You'd think something like this would make me less popular, not more," he commented; not sure he liked all the extra publicity.

"Hate to break it to you, Little Brother," Tom said, patting him on the leg, "but now you're a tragic hero soldiering on through adversity and that makes you about ten times more interesting even than you were before."

"Yeah, well I'd just like to go back to making music if it's alright with the rest of the world," Bill replied, feeling just a little annoyed.

He felt a bit like a freak show; there were paparazzi from all over Europe parked outside the house for any glimpse of him and it was beginning to piss him off.

"Yeah well, we will," Tom said, clearly trying to cheer him up, "especially if we have a killer video to go with the new song. Show me what you're thinking."

Bill flipped back his pad a page and showed Tom his sketches. Tom gave him a long hard look then.

"Okay," Tom said slowly; "and you're sure about this."

He nodded; he was really rather excited by the idea.

"Okay," Tom agreed with a nod, "as long as you're sure. If we can work it out properly today then we can pitch it to David tomorrow when he comes over and we tell him about the new song."

Bill grinned; he was actually beginning to look forward to climbing back onto the horse and getting back to work. It would be slow at first, but that was why David was coming over to talk about how to proceed. He couldn't stay cooped up in his safe little world much longer and it was time to begin to put things in motion.

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"Hey, David," Bill greeted as he walked into the living room.

He hoped he didn't look too mussed, since Tom had just had him pinned to the wall, snogging him senseless, when their mum had called to them to announce that David had arrived.

"Hey, yourself," David greeted with a smile, "your bodyguard not with you at the moment?"

"He's ringing Georg to find out where he and Gustav have got to," Bill replied and folded himself into the arm chair. "Last time Georg took them on a detour to avoid the press and they were lost for an hour."

"That's what you get for letting Georg navigate," David replied and laughed; "he's worse than you and that's saying something."

"Hey, no picking on the singer," Bill said with mock petulance, "or I'll tell Tom you're being mean to me."

David held up his hands in mock surrender.

"Okay, okay," David said, doing a good impression of terror, "I swear I'll never pick on you again, just don't send the Tom monster after me!"

Bill giggled at that; it was one of the things he liked about David; they could be silly with him sometimes.

"The mighty navigator and his side kick will be here momentarily," Tom said, walking into the room and throwing himself down onto the sofa. "They brought the navigation system this time and it only took them twice as long to get here than normal."

"Why do they bother," Bill asked, a little bewildered, "they're going to be seen coming into our house anyway?"

"I think Georg just thinks it's fun," Tom replied and grinned, "and Gustav likes to have some blackmail material for later, so he goes along with it."

"One day Gustav's going to write his memoirs and then we're all in trouble," David commented, while opening his filofax on the coffee table.

"Well except me," Bill said in an airy tone, "I threatened to burn his collection of Metallica t-shirts and we came to an agreement."

"Ooh, and the dangerous play wins," Tom said with a laugh; "he could have just turned around and put you out of your misery on the spot to protect them."

Bill made an off hand gesture.

"I made sure there were witnesses when we had the conversation," he said. "What do you think I am, stupid?"

"Don't answer that," David said as if it was the most dangerous question in the world; "I'm not here to arbitrate an argument."

David was saved from any form of cutting reply, because the door bell went.

"That'll be our dangerous duo now," Tom said and pushed himself off the sofa to go and answer the door.

Bill played with the printouts he had brought down from upstairs with him while they waited for Tom to come back with the others. He knew David was incredibly curious about what it was, so he made sure to make a thing of it, to see if he could catch his friend trying to catch a glimpse of what was on it.

"I think it's time to call in the army," Georg said as he walked in; "there are ninja photographers in every bush out there."

"Don't worry," Bill replied, "we have ninja Scotty and he's bitten at least one of them on the bum when they tried to climb the fence at the back."

"Your dog is my hero," Georg said with a laugh. "Hi David."

David made noises of acknowledgement and Georg and Gustav settled into comfortable spots as Tom vanished to furnish everyone with drinks. These types



of meetings were so predictable that asking what people wanted to drink was rather moot, since it was always the same. Georg and Gustav managed to get into a mock fight over one of the cushions on the sofa, which Gustav won, by grabbing it from Georg and glaring like an angry bear. By the time that was over, they were all set and ready to begin.

This was one meeting Bill was rather looking forward to.

"Okay," David said, sitting forward and looking at them all one by one, "what is it you wanted to talk to me about?"

"We've written our next single," Tom said and Bill handed over the piece of paper with the lyrics on it.

"It's called 'From the Fire'," Bill added, suddenly unsure that David was going to like it, even though the other three had thought the words were great and they had all come up with a wonderful tune.

Tom had helped him come up with the title that morning when he had typed it into his laptop to print it out properly.

"Those are the words," Tom seemed to sense his reticence and took over for him, "and we can sing it for you in a while, but you'll want to read those first."

David looked down at the paper and began to read and Bill held his breath, waiting for the verdict. It took David a while to reach the bottom of the page and Bill had to start breathing again or go blue, but he was so nervous that it was difficult. Tom rubbed a leg against his and instantly managed to calm him down quite a bit, but it wasn't a cure-all. By the time David looked up Bill was almost vibrating out of the chair; he had managed to wind himself up that much.

"That," David said after a moment, "is amazing."

People seemed to keep saying that, but Bill wasn't sure the words were that great.

"Really?" he asked, waiting for the 'but'.

There was always a 'but', usually a 'but if we just add this ...' type of 'but' and he was used to them by now. As long as his words mostly made it to the songs he didn't mind that most of the time there are other people's names on them as well. Even the best authors need an editor and it had ceased to bother him a long time ago.

"Really," David replied with a smile.

No 'but' came and Bill began to wonder why.

"Aren't you going to say anything else?" he finally asked, not sure if this was going to be one of those awkward times when those around him were trying to spare his feelings.

He was delicate, but not about something like this, well at least not that delicate.

"There's nothing else to say," David said and looked back down at the piece of paper; "with the right tune this will knock them dead."

"No improvements?" Bill asked, honestly confused by now.

David smiled at that.

"Bill," David told him, while looking him directly in the eye, "no one could improve on this, and if they say they can, they're lying."

Bill couldn't help it, he felt his mouth fall open. Tom laughed and nudged him in the side.

"See miracles do happen," Tom quipped and made him smile.

Never before, not once had one of his songs been accepted without comment.

"And you're not just saying that because you think I'm going to cry and hide behind Tom?" he had to be sure.

David put his hand over his heart.

"I swear," David promised faithfully. "These words come from the heart; anyone with two eyes can see that and messing with them would be sacrilegious."

"We told him that yesterday," Gustav commented, looking pleased, "but he didn't believe us."

"Well believe it," David said firmly; "this is gold."

There was no point arguing with that, so Bill didn't try, but he still wasn't quite sure the song would have had the same reception under different circumstances.

"We were thinking of a pretty quick turn around," Tom started the conversation in earnest; "use the single to get everything going again."

"We could go to the apartment and record it," Gustav began to elaborate on what they had discussed the previous day, "and maybe write some more for a new album."

"Do a few light interviews," Tom took over again, "nothing too heavy and build up until we're ready to release."

Bill was very well aware that the 'nothing too heavy' meant no in-depth interviews about his kidnapping. That would come, it had to really, people wouldn't give up until they knew something, but he definitely wasn't ready for that just yet. David was nodding and flipping through his filofax as the others spoke.

"Sounds like a good plan," David said, clearly looking something up. "We can talk about where we want to go and how soon as we go along, but if you want, I can have everything set up to start by next week."

It wasn't difficult to notice that everyone was looking at him at that point and Bill had a fluttery feeling in his chest as he realised things really were going to happen, but he nodded.

"That's fine with me," he said and tried to sound supremely confident.

Just leaving the house seemed like such a big thing at the moment, when before it had been such an insignificant obstacle. Dwelling on the maybes was not going to help him and he knew he was going to make sure he was up to the job. Becoming the front man of Tokio Hotel again was going to be difficult and it wasn't going to happen overnight, but the need to perform was still there in his heart and with that he knew he could build anything.

"There's one other thing as well," Tom said and dragged him from his thoughts, "Bill has an idea for the video, can you run it past the production people to see if it's feasible?"

David looked surprised at that; they had all always had some creative input, but the videos had always been someone else's genius.

"It might be a bit complicated," Bill said, not wanting to put too much pressure on their manager.

He then handed over the other sheets of paper he was holding. They had scanned his sketch book and then annotated his storyboard with print rather than his overexcited handwriting. David took the offered pages and began sifting through them.

"We could get a couple of great photo shoots out of it too," Georg offered his support from where he was sitting.

"Vampires?" David asked, looking up from the drawings.

Bill had always loved horror movies and vampires and his lyrics had put images in his head that he knew would suit the song. It was also a way to purge some of his demons and he really hoped David liked the idea.

"It would be very dramatic," he offered with a little shrug.

David gave a smile.

"We'd have to get some specialist people in for it, which would be expensive," David said, clearly thinking out loud, "but I think this single will be more than strong enough to carry the expense. If this is what you are all agreed on then I don't see it being an issue; I'll run it by the right people later today."

That made Bill smile brightly.

"We probably will have to refine it a bit though," David said, looking at the sketches again.

"That's okay," Bill said quickly and it was.

Now that David had said yes he couldn't help being excited. It might not turn out quite like the idea in his head, but they were actually going to use his idea and he almost bounced off the couch. There were details to sort out, lots of details, but he didn't care; things were beginning to happen and he used his excitement to quell any nerves.

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"This is so cool," Andi said, looking over the sketch pad that Bill had handed him a few minutes earlier, "and they're really letting you go this gothic?"

"David said it shouldn't be a problem," Bill replied with a nod, pleased that his best friend liked the idea as much as he did, "and he rang again this morning and said people seemed to like the idea. I don't think they're just humouring me."

That statement was met by a laugh from Tom, who had just appeared in the doorway with three mugs of coffee.

"Bill, David knows better than that," Tom said, putting his burdens down on the sideboard; "last time any of them tried humouring you, you ate them alive and then told the public how evil the record company were."

Bill thought about that for a little while and then gave a small shrug; Tom had a point.

"When you make this one, can I come?" Andi asked with a grin. "It's just so cool."

Andreas actually seemed to be more excited about the idea than he was and Bill couldn't help grinning, but it did bring up other thoughts into his mind. They were going to the studio apartment in a few days to start the production of the single and that meant leaving Andreas behind as usual. Their best friend's whole life did not revolve around them, but Bill never liked leaving Andreas out of things, which in turn led him on to the one big thing he was leaving his friend out of completely.

"A vampire gansta rapper is going to be interesting," Andreas teased Tom and Bill watched the pair as they joked.

"Undead bad ass," Tom responded and struck a pose.

Bill would have laughed if his thoughts hadn't been busy with other things.

"Andi," he said, before either of the others could launch into anything else, "how would you feel having a vampire for a friend?"

Tom looked a little startled for a moment, but Bill gave him a small smile and turned his attention to Andreas. The question had clearly caused a mild brain flip in his friend, but Andreas had had to become used to those over their friendship, so it didn't take his friend long to recover.

"Dracula type vamp or Underworld type vamp," Andi asked in only a way a true vampire fan could with a straight face.

Bill looked at Tom and he knew that his twin knew what he was thinking.

"Underworld," they said at the same time, "ish," Bill added.

"So not likely to eat me then," Andi said with a grin.

"Definitely not," Bill replied and tried not to sound too shocked by the suggestion.

It was strange how quickly he had adjusted to the Strigoi way of thinking and the idea was preposterous.

"Then that'd be cool," Andi said with a big smile.

"I knew you'd say that," Tom said and Bill was very aware it was for his benefit.

He accepted the mug of coffee his twin passed him and put the sketch pad back down the side of the bed where it would be safe. Andreas had been their friend for a long time, through the hatred, into the fame and success and he had always been constant. That was what Bill admired most about his friend; Andi was never swayed by others' opinions and he really wanted to trust his friend now. He watched Tom hand Andreas the second mug of coffee and he tried to decide if he was feeling brave enough.

"Andi," he said and he still hadn't decided what he was going to say or do, even as his friend looked round at him.

It wasn't really a conscious choice at all, but he let his Strigoi nature surface as he gazed into Andreas' eyes. As events unfolded, he realised his timing could have been better. Andreas's mouth opened in shock, his friend's face went slack and so did the fingers holding the coffee mug. For a moment time seemed to slow down and Bill lunged at the mug, but he was too late and hot brown liquid spilled onto the bed and Andreas's legs.

"Ow, shit," time started again at normal speed as Andreas hopped off the bed, swearing and trying to get the soaked jeans away from his legs.

Bill didn't have time to think about his best friend's reaction, he was more worried that Andreas had scalded himself badly.

"Bill, towels, cold water," Tom took over and Bill didn't even consider not obeying and dashed out of the room as his twin tried to help their distressed friend remove the jeans.

It never occurred to him not to use every advantage at his disposal and he moved about as fast as he had ever moved. Turning on the cold tap and soaking the nearest hand towel with icy water seemed to take an age as his mind began working with incredible speed. He barely remembered to turn off the tap as he ran back to the bedroom where Tom had just finished dragging the jeans off of Andreas, who was sitting on the bed.

Andreas' right thigh was very pink and there were splotches of pink on the left one as well, but Bill hoped it wasn't too bad. He switched back to normal speed and handed Tom the towel, which his twin then placed over Andreas' legs. Andreas yelped, but then visibly relaxed as the cold took the heat away.

"Are you okay?" Bill asked, desperately afraid that he had caused his friend real damage.

It was then that it looked as if Andreas' mind flicked back from the accident to what had caused it and he found his friend just staring at him. He was about a breath away from freaking when Andreas finally spoke.

"I'm fine," his friend said, still looking at him. "Bloody hell, Bill, couldn't you have broken it to me a little more gently?"

Bill felt his face heating up; he felt somewhat of an idiot.

"Sorry," he said a little sheepishly, but he couldn't deny that the fact Andi seemed mostly unfazed by the whole thing had him a little elated.

He was still nervous, because he wasn't completely sure, but he wasn't on the verge of running for his room and hiding.

"You know Bill and subtle do not go together," Tom said with a small laugh, but Bill could hear the tension in his twin's voice.

Planning, he was beginning to think he should have done some planning, but it was too late now.

"How are the legs?" Bill asked, hoping to deflect whatever was coming for a little while.

Andreas lifted the towel and peered underneath.

"No serious damage," was the thankful conclusion and Bill breathed a sigh of relief, "but no one is sitting on my lap for a while."

Bill laughed a little at that, but it was a slightly hysterical sound. He wasn't sure what to do next.

"Vampires," Andreas said, looking down and shaking his head, "fucking vampires are real. This is kind of crazy."

"We know," he replied quietly

Andreas looked up at him again then.

"Wow," his friend said and looked honestly amazed, "can you fly?"

For a moment Bill didn't quite catch up with the question and when he did he laughed. No deep, probing questions, no recriminations, just 'can you fly'.

"No," he said, somewhat delighted by his friend's reaction, "and I can't change into a bat either."

"Damn," Andi said with a small grin, shock still showing in his eyes, but far calmer than Bill had feared, "you could have got in anywhere as a bat."

Bill gave a little smile back.

"But sunlight, you're always out in sunlight," Andreas said, clearly assimilating the information little by little. "Don't tell me the whole night thing is a bunch of crock; it's the whole cursed to darkness thing that makes half the vampire legends romantic."

"No, that's true for most vampires," he said, thanking his lucky stars that he had a best friend who thought almost like he did, "I'm just different."

"What Bill is trying to say in an unusually bashful way," Tom said, entering the conversation while hanging Andreas' jeans over the end of the bed, "is that he's a very rare type of vampire that has the whole vampire community thinking he's the best thing since sliced bread."

That made Bill blush again; Tom sounded so proud of him when all he'd really done was fail to die.

"Okay," Andi said, looking at both of them, "tell me everything. How big is this 'vampire community'? How the hell does no one know? Are there any gorgeous vampire babes who might be looking for a bleach blond boy toy?"

The way Andreas wiggled his eyebrows made Bill laugh; in some ways his friend was exactly like Tom. Andreas would probably love Delphine if they ever got to meet.

End of Chapter 9

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## Chapter 10 Getting Ready

The next day they were off to the apartment and they had spent most of the day packing and making sure everything was ready. Tom could tell that Bill was incredibly nervous about the whole thing, but was putting a brave face on it. Leaving the comfort and safety of home was a big step and he wouldn't have let it happen if he hadn't thought Bill could cope.

One of the consequences of the move was that that evening it was the last night visit from Syb. In the apartment with the other guys it would be impossible to have the long, often intimate chats with Bill's mentor and sometimes Markus. Bill was in no way ready to let go of Syb's guidance yet, but any meetings were going to have to be arranged more formally from now on. They wouldn't be able to act so casually around each other either. Tom knew it was going to be difficult not being able to just reach out and touch Bill anyway he wanted at anytime.

Tom had already had a quiet word with Georg and Gustav to explain that he and Bill would probably disappear into one of their rooms at odd times. He had told his friends it was because Bill sometimes needed personal space without anyone else but him around and they had been very understanding of the whole idea. Once a bedroom door was shut, he was confident that it would be sacrosanct, but they couldn't hide out the whole time.

"Syb's here," Bill said as they arranged the living room ready for the meeting.

Bill was becoming extremely proficient with the enhanced senses gig and Tom was very glad of this, because it had saved them a couple of times. Even though their mother and step father accepted their new relationship, being caught snogging would have been mortifying.

"I'll get the door, you get the drinks and let Mum and Gordon know that our guests have arrived," Tom said and headed in the right direction.

Syb had been giving Bill and him lots of information about Strigoi society and the traditions and niceties of it. This being the last chance they had to see Syb and Marcus at home, Bill had decided, as Bill was want to do, that this should be a special occasion. It turned out that the whole wine and blood thing was a tradition at more than just formal gatherings and, between close friends, the blood was often the host's. Tom didn't think Bill was overly fond of red wine, but Bill was embracing the tradition and had even begged Gordon to find some wine glasses with gold stems and some others with silver stems. Everything was set up in the kitchen and although Tom had put his foot down at drinking wine, he was happy to see Bill partially back on form.

Their mother had been most surprised when they had invited her and Gordon to the gathering; usually their parents made themselves scarce when Syb was coming round, to give them some privacy. It wasn't a huge house so most often their parents went out on those evenings.

"Come in," Tom greeted brightly as he opened the door.

Syb smiled at him, since she had not yet knocked.

"Not you too," Markus complained in a good natured tone. "We, as the humans, have to help them," Markus nodded in Syb's direction, "to maintain the illusion of not being omnipotent; otherwise it goes to their heads."



Tom laughed and moved out of the way, so their guests could enter the house.

"Blame Bill," he said as he took Syb and Markus' coats, "and blame Bill for this evening as well; he wanted to make it special."

After hanging up the coats on two available hooks, he led his friends into the living room and watched Syb take in the area. The whole place was lit by candles, far gentler on vampire eyes than any electric light and there were little bowls of nibbles on various small tables around the room. Bill appeared seconds later carrying a tray and looking kind of nervous, but to Tom's delight Syb saw the wine glasses on the tray and absolutely beamed. It wasn't very often that Syb seemed to let such an all encompassing expression onto her face, so Tom was positive the female Strigoi was incredibly pleased.

Obviously encouraged, Bill walked over to their guests with the tray and offered first Syb and then Markus a glass.

"This is a wonderful surprise," Syb said, taking a sip from her glass.

For a split second Syb looked rather startled and Tom was sure he saw the woman's eyes flash just for a moment.

"Are you okay?" Bill asked, clearly having seen the same thing and putting the tray down. "Did I do it wrong?"

Tom could feel the evening going downhill rapidly before it had really begun, but Syb reached out quickly and patted Bill gently on the hand.

"You did it perfectly," Syb said with a smile and visibly recovering, "it's just your blood is distinctly potent."

"What Syb means is that she has no head for the strong stuff," Markus added with a laugh, at which Syb just rolled her eyes.

It was then that Tom saw his mother and step father arrive and he casually walked over to where Bill had put down the drinks and handed them out. He took a glass himself to keep Bill happy, but he had an eye on the exit to the kitchen where he had some cold beer in the fridge. Then he stepped up close to Bill, because he knew his twin was not quite finished.

"I just wanted to say thank you," Bill said, uncharacteristically bashful. "It's been a difficult time these last few weeks and I know I wouldn't be standing here ready to step back into the world without all of you. I know it's not over and there's still a long way to go, but I wanted to say thank you now, before it gets crazy."

Putting his glass down Bill bent down behind the table and produced a few little boxes. The agonising that had gone into deciding what was in each had been, in Tom's opinion, way over the top, but when Bill did something it was never done by halves.

"They're not much, but I hope you like them," Bill said, and quickly handed a box to Syb, then Markus and then each of their parents.

What surprised Tom was when he was handed one as well. He had helped Bill plan and order everything, paying extortionate prices so that everything was ready on time, but he had not helped Bill buy something for him. How Bill had

managed to do so without him knowing was beyond him; they had hardly ever been apart.

"Mum helped," Bill said with a sheepish smile.

Tom found himself grinning happily. They rarely bought each other presents. They bought each other things all the time, like if he saw something in a shop he just knew Bill would love and if Bill had known about it wouldn't have been able to live without, he'd pick it up and vice versa, but actual, wrapped gifts were rare and hence very special.

Opening his box, he couldn't help laughing in delight; it was a hat, not a cap, but one of the bands he wore under his caps to keep his dreads back. It was black, just like his others, but he knew Bill and he knew that wouldn't be it so he pulled it out of the box. Sure enough, on the inside there was some embroidery and it said: "All my love, Bill".

"Thank you," was all he said and pulled Bill towards him, giving his twin a quick kiss on the lips.

Bill was smiling when they pulled apart, but still looked nervous.

"Oh, Bill," Tom heard their mother say and he turned to see her holding the two tickets he had helped Bill put in a box earlier.

Their mother loved the theatre, but because of the crazy lives they all had and where they lived, she very rarely had a chance to go. Bill had found her favourite play, bought the best tickets in the house and arranged hotel accommodation and transport to go with it.

"You always say it's your favourite," Bill said, smiling a bit more, "I hope it's a good company."

"Sweetheart," their mum said, looking just this side of weepy, "they could be the local players and it would still be wonderful."

It seemed as if everyone was taking turns, because Gordon opened his next. They had been buying people expensive presents since they had had the money to do it, they liked to make their friends and family happy, so it had been very difficult for Bill to decide what to buy their parents. Tom had had a lot to do with this one and he was very proud of Bill for thinking of it. Their stepfather was frowning as he pulled a piece of paper out of the box and Tom knew all it said on the top was Gibson.

He was not the only Gibson lover in the family; he had picked that up from his step-father. On the back the piece of paper said: "A V.I.P. tour for two of the Gibson factory in Memphis Tennessee, all expenses paid." When his step-father read it, he saw Gordon's eyes go round. For a second Tom thought Gordon might actually squeal like Bill often did when excited, but his step-father held it in. He and Gordon had talked about doing the tour one day, but it had always been one of those dream type things. It seemed that when you were on the Gibson website it paid dividends when trying to arrange such things and he knew that V.I.P. would mean extremely V.I.P..

"All you have to do is call the number and book it and it's yours," Bill said, sounding more relaxed by the second. "We'll sort out your flights and accommodation if you tell us when you want to go."

Tom knew that Bill had asked about a tour for four as well and that if they could manage it they would be going along as well, but schedules were so hectic that that was still up in the air.

"It's perfect," Gordon said and Tom believed his step-father completely.

"My turn then," Markus said before the situation could begin to feel awkward.

Bill's eyes were bright with excitement now and Tom was so pleased; Bill had been more than a little worried about the arrangements.

Markus opened his box and laughed.

There was a problem when buying presents for people who had everything they needed; Syb was an old Strigoi and the Strigoi even had specialists to help the members of their society maintain their style of living through the ages. Syb was old money and lots of it and hence, by default, so was Markus. Deciding what to give them had taken Bill the longest; he had been through the agony of Bill choosing as well.

What Markus pulled from his box was a bottle of cognac. It had come up in conversation once that Markus' secret vice was fine cognac and of course Bill had remembered, eventually. The bottle was very fine and very old and Bill had had to ring the people who made it personally to purchase a bottle. It hadn't been the price that had impressed Bill; it had been the recommendations on the connoisseur websites that Tom had managed to find.

"How on earth did you manage to get a bottle of this?" Markus asked, clearly impressed.

"I told them it was the only way I could express my appreciation to a very dear friend," Bill said with a small smile, "and so they sold it to me."

Tom hid his smile; the conversation had been more like an hour long, but that had been the gist of it.

"Thank you," Markus said, for once not irreverent at all, "it will be saved for a very special occasion."

Bill gave a small nod, but Tom could tell his twin was still nervous; the only one left was Syb. Tom was almost positive Bill was holding his breath as Syb opened her little box. When Syb looked into it, her face went completely blank and Tom had absolutely no idea what the female vampire was thinking.

"Bill," Syb said in a very uncharacteristic, quiet voice, "do you understand what this means?"

"Yes," Bill said, voice also very quiet.

Very carefully Syb pulled the pendant that Bill had had specially made from the box, letting it dangle in the light of the candles. This was the gift Bill had fretted the most about, the one Tom had had to make him bring down from the bedroom, because Bill had been so unsure of the contents.

"I spoke to Graham," Bill added and Tom could see the anxiety etched in every muscle of his twin's body.

The pendant was a small dragon, but that wasn't the important part, that was just the design Bill had chosen, what was significant was the silver, glass-lined vial on which the dragon was sitting. It had a rune inscribed on it, a very old rune that had been used by Strigoi for a very long time, a rune that to them meant maker. It was a gift from child to parent in the form Strigoi knew them.

Of course Bill knew that Syb was not the Strigoi who made him, but after a long conversation, Tom was well aware that to his twin Syb was as close as Bill would ever know to the reality. Syb had brought Bill back to life, Tom had seen it happening and he agreed completely with his twin's belief. The idea had come to Bill when, after his twin had been searching around desperately for an idea, Tom had suggested calling Graham, since it was clear Graham and Syb had been friends for a while. Tom had no idea how the subject had come up, since he'd only heard one side of the conversation, but he had seen Bill's eyes light up when it had been suggested.

There had been some abandoning and rekindling of the idea over the last few days, but Tom knew it had been the right thing to do and had managed to make sure Bill didn't become too anxious about it.

Placing the box on one of the small tables, Syb took the pendant in both hands and unclasped the chain, then she very carefully put it round her neck and fastened it again. Tom was pretty sure Bill almost bounced across the room and Syb hugged Bill close and Tom found himself oddly jealous, but then Bill moved back to his side and he realised he was being ridiculous. He looked over to his parents and realised that they seemed confused, so he mouthed that he would explain later.

"Shall we sit down?" he decided to move things on and they piled into the carefully arranged chairs.

He then launched into a conversation he had had playing in his head just for the purpose of keeping things light; right at that moment was not the time for deep and meaningful; Bill's gestures had been more than enough of that. What made him really happy was the fact that Bill was on cloud nine and virtually sitting in his lap; he didn't even mind that he was drinking wine.

It was also nice to see how relaxed Bill was; he hadn't seen Bill that relaxed around other people for quite a while. Bill chatted away animatedly about absolutely nothing for a good half an hour and Tom couldn't help noticing that Bill's hand, which was resting on his thigh, was moving dangerously higher. He was absolutely sure Bill had no idea he was doing it, but Tom was very, very aware.

"How is the bond progressing?" Syb asked in a momentary pause, which was the point where Bill noticed what he was doing and snatched his hand back.

Tom reached out and took his twin's hand to make sure Bill wasn't too mortified even as Bill turned a lovely shade of pink.

"We're figuring it out," Tom said with a smile, hiding the fact that part of him was a little disappointed that Bill had withdrawn the touch.

"Subconscious is in line with conscious," Bill added, with a small embarrassed smile, "mostly."

"Glad to hear it," Syb replied, smiling as well. "It's going to be more difficult for you from now on, so I'm very pleased you're working from a good foundation."

Tom glanced sideways at Bill and was glad to see that the discussion of the subject was not causing Bill to clam up, in fact his twin appeared to be calmly accepting it. Bill was nodding.

"It's not going to be as easy as it has been at home," Bill said, sounding completely rational about it, "but we can only try."

Syb nodded then

"You're both still in the first stages of the bond, so being apart isn't an option at all," Syb told them and Tom had the feeling this was what Syb had expected to talk about that evening; "I would suggest touching quickly and often to reinforce the bond, but still giving the illusion you are returning to how you used to be."

"Bill's always had zero concept of personal space," Tom said and smiled, although he did not wish to detract from the seriousness of the conversation, "especially mine, so we should be able to get away with quite a lot."

Bill rewarded him for that comment by draping over him with a come on smile.

"You mean like this?" Bill asked in a playfully seductive voice.

Tom groaned; Bill was punishing him in a delightful, but nonetheless torturous way.

"Bill," he said, praying for deliverance, "our parents are right over there."

Bill grinned, but didn't look in the least bit remorseful.

"Then be careful how you tease me," was the response that had Tom thinking their relationship was well on the way to returning to it's old balance.

One thing Tom had known since they were old enough to think of themselves as separate people was that, in some things, Bill had him totally outgunned.

"Okay," he said and held up his hands, "you win and now I'm going to find a beer."

Bill squeaked and fell into the space he left as he vacated the chair very rapidly, which caused most of the room to laugh.

"What can I get everyone else?" he asked and hoped Bill wouldn't take revenge before the evening was out.

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Bill giggled as Tom ran fingers lightly up his sides, tickling him. They had been kissing, but Tom had moved onto his neck and his twin was doing a wonderful job of making his limbs turn to jelly. Ever since the first kiss, Tom had taken to touching him and kissing him at odd times. Tom always asked permission; not always verbally, but in a way they both understood and each time Bill found himself more at ease. His mind was fuller of Tom now and reacted by bringing up those memories rather than the ones he didn't want to recollect.

Most nights they made out before going to sleep, which was what they were doing right then. Since they had started, things had progressed to some seriously heavy, above the waist petting, but that was as far as they had gone. Bill was setting the pace and he sincerely hoped it was not too maddening for Tom. He would have liked to have gone further, but freaking out was a complete passion killer, so slowly was the lesser of two evils.

He was feeling a little braver and decided to take a little control. Being passive was so not his thing and he pushed Tom over onto the bed and attacked Tom's neck the way his twin had been. He didn't need to feed, but, for a split second, he felt like biting anyway, in the end he nibbled instead and the incoherent noise from Tom suggested he was doing well.

He wanted to show Tom that he wasn't afraid, that he could take the lead as well. Tom seemed happy to let him, so he began to explore, using his tongue to taste his twin's bare chest. It was all new and the way Tom was responding to his touches was incredibly arousing. He could feel his own body reacting and it was just about perfect. Of course perfect didn't tend to last forever in his world at the moment.

The gasp that left him as his groin slid against Tom's leg was totally unstoppable, but the shots of electricity that ran through him brought him up short. He felt almost out of control and at that moment that scared him a little. It wasn't that their make-out sessions didn't usually arouse him, it was that this time it was nearly overwhelming. Part of him wanted Tom to touch him there and take this the rest of the way, but most of him wasn't quite ready for that yet. The idea still brought up the dark shadow of hands that had touched him and forced his body to respond when he hadn't wanted it to.

"You okay?" Tom asked, pulling back a little and looking at him.

Bill felt his face slowly heating up. Normally the kissing sessions turned into soft petting that allowed his arousal to slowly fade away and he dealt with any pent up tension by himself in the shower in the morning, but he knew that wasn't going to work this time. Tom seemed completely aware that he wasn't ready to be touched so intimately yet and never pushed it, but he could not help feeling guilty, because Tom had to be ending up in similar states to him. He wanted to be able to give Tom the next level, but he didn't dare.

"I think," he said quietly, eyes dipping out of shame, "I need to go ... go to the bathroom and ..."

It felt like he was abandoning Tom again, like he had done those nights when he woke and couldn't deal with the situation, and he was ashamed of his reaction.

"Bill," Tom said gently, "you don't have to be embarrassed, I understand."

He looked up then, into his twin's face and he saw nothing but understanding there, yet still he felt like he was rejecting Tom and on this night of all nights. This was their last night at home; they would have to be far more careful after this.

"I know you're not ready yet," Tom told him, "and it's okay. I'm amazed at what you do let me do."

"But I don't want this to feel bad," Bill finally found a voice for what bothered him the most, "this shouldn't feel bad. But when you ... it's like he's there as well."

Tom stroked his hair and kissed him on the forehead. They stayed like that for a while, but Bill found himself shifting as his erection made itself known again.

"Is it just the idea of someone else touching you," Tom asked and surprised him, "or the whole thing of there being two of us here while you're that aroused?"

The way Tom chose his language almost made Bill smile; Tom's choice of words was usually cruder than that. Only the awkwardness of the situation stopped him finding it overly amusing.

"Touching," he said quietly and honestly.

It was the memory of hands that he couldn't quite get past yet. What was ridiculous was that in the shower he could imagine it was Tom touching him; that seemed to come naturally, but, when they were together, there was the shadow that would not quite leave.

"Then I have an idea," Tom said, giving him a little smile, "and say no if you don't like it."

Bill was intrigued; for once he had no idea what his twin was thinking.

"Tell me," he encouraged; he so wanted to get past this.

"Don't go to the bathroom," Tom said simply. "Remember when we were younger and we first discovered wanking and we used to do it side by side until that time Mum caught us and told us that we better not do it like that anymore because people might think things that weren't true? We could revive an old tradition."

For a moment, the suggestion shocked him, which was utterly ridiculous and then he felt his face colouring some more. It wasn't that he hadn't been naked in front of Tom; he had been several times since the kidnapping, it was just he had never been naked in front of Tom for sexual reasons. So far their kissing and touching had all been done with at least underwear on.

When he realised that there was an excited little feeling in the pit of his stomach, he knew what his answer was.

"Okay," he said, feeling out of his depth again, but quite enjoying it this time.

Tom smiled at him as if he'd just revealed the secret of life, the universe and everything and then, in a move that surprised him, released him and leant over the side of the bed. His twin returned with a ratty looking box of tissues that was half covered in dust and Bill couldn't help laughing.

"How old is that box?" he asked, using the implications and humour to fight his nerves.

"We haven't been home," Tom said with a grin, "so it's been there a while, but the tissues will be just as good as the day I bought it."

The box was placed on the bed to the side and then Tom gave him a small smile and simply shimmied out of his boxers. Bill couldn't help it; his eyes fixed on Tom's more than ample erection and he felt the funny feeling in his stomach spike and his own groin throbbed. He refused to let his mind dwell too deeply on anything but what he was seeing; thinking too hard tended to not be good some

of the time. Part of him definitely liked what he was seeing, so he concentrated on that.

As he watched, Tom wrapped long, clever fingers around his hard cock and groaned low and long, thrusting up once. Bill remembered their early efforts as frantic, unskilled and instant gratification; Tom was quite obviously much more practiced now.

Bill suddenly had a mad urge to reach out and touch as Tom relaxed back onto the bed, but he held himself in check; it definitely wouldn't be fair to indulge when he couldn't let Tom do the same. Instead, he just watched as Tom slowly stroked himself, making small noises of pleasure that had Bill shifting slightly as his own erection begged for attention.

"You can watch if you like," Tom said and Bill realised his twin was looking at him with heavy lidded eyes, "but it'll probably be more fun if you join in."

It felt to Bill as if he had never been as self-conscious as he was at that moment, but this was Tom and Tom was sharing part of himself with him that he suspected very few people had seen. Bill knew there was a difference between the real Tom and the ladies man Tom and he knew he always saw the real one. Feeling awkward, but determined not to leave Tom hanging, he slipped his boxers down and then in a fit of bravado, kicked them off when they reached his feet. Where his underwear landed he had no idea, but he almost took out part of Tom's CD collection which made him giggle a little.

"Save the clever tricks for later," Tom said, sounding amused, but very distracted, "or I'm going to be way ahead of you."

Tom was languidly stroking himself and Bill could feel his twin's hungry eyes all over his body and he felt the heat rising in his cheeks again. He wanted desperately to ask Tom to reach out and touch him, but he didn't dare, so he decided to do the next best thing; he tried to put on a little show.

Sex hadn't really been one of his fortes, but he did know how to please himself and he had certain things he liked to do, so he chose to show Tom. Unlike his twin, Bill did not go straight for his insistent cock and instead brushed a finger over one, pink, erect nipple. Tom had given his nipples some attention already, so Bill found himself breathing a little hard as the nipple turned out to be a little more sensitive than he had expected. He brushed it lightly again, feeling the little shots of delight it sent around his body. He felt his cock jump at the stimuli and he let out a little breathy moan even before he properly touched himself.

"Oh god, Bill," Tom's voice was heavy with desire; "do you have any idea what you look like?"

Bill did not reply, just closed his eyes and ran his hand down his chest and over his flat stomach. As his fingers threaded into the coarse blond hair surrounding his cock, he lifted his hips, moaning and thrusting into the fist he made as he did so. For a moment he forgot everything except the wonderful sensation that ran through him. Somehow it felt better than it usually did and he didn't really care why.

Letting his hips lower back to the bed, he released the hold he had on his cock and let his fingers run lower, spreading over his balls as he kept his thumb curled around his erection. It felt so good as he fondled himself gently and he let his legs fall open slightly. As he moved his hand up and down slowly, he lost himself



in the sensation and it was only the sounds of an uncontrolled gasp that brought him back to reality.

Opening his eyes, he looked over to Tom and it was all too obvious that Tom's gaze was firmly fixed on him. When they had been younger any exchange between them had been furtive glances, just to see if the other knew something that the one twin didn't; now there was no such inhibition. Tom's eyes flicked up to his face for a moment and they joined gazes. In that instant, Bill felt pure heat in his belly as he saw the lust and love in his twin's eyes. Soon Tom's attention was wandering south again and Bill let his own do the same. Tom was stroking his own erection with firm, deliberate movements and Bill let himself fall into time.

There was no need for words between them and Bill reached out his free hand, taking hold of Tom's arm. Tom swapped hands without barely a hiccup and then Bill found his fingers wound into Tom's between them on the bed. He could sense the sexual energy in his twin and it only added to his own. Tom's presence was like a balm, but exciting at the same time and he let himself be overtaken by the whole experience.

Seconds stretched into what felt like hours as he closed his eyes again, keeping rhythm with Tom by instinct rather than sight. Every sound that came from Tom he found himself mirroring as he climbed higher on the ladder of sexual completion. In the end it was like a tidal wave, completely unstoppable as it broke over him and claimed every part of him for its own. He barely felt liquid shooting onto his hand and stomach as his whole body surrendered and it was all he could do not to yell at the top of his lungs. Only the well trained knowledge that his parents were just down the hall kept his exclamation to a minimum and he was still louder than he should have been.

His muscles dissolved into jelly and he collapsed onto the bed in an immobile heap, breathing hard and enjoying the after shocks that made him shiver in delight. He didn't need to look to know that Tom was in the same state he was; his mind had managed to catalogue Tom's orgasm even as he had succumbed to his own.

"You have great ideas," he said with a little laugh as he finally began to come down properly.

"You have a great way of carrying them out," Tom replied, equally light hearted. "Bill, I think you're the hottest thing I have ever seen."

Bill could cope with lying beside his twin in post orgasm bliss, but compliments he couldn't and he opened his eyes to see Tom staring at him again. His face felt like it was on fire in only a few seconds and he was sure he would spontaneously combust when he found himself letting his eyes run all over Tom as well. Tom looked positively debauched and he could only assume he looked the same.

"Here," Tom said before his embarrassment could spiral out of control and handed him some tissues, "I think we should get some sleep now."

For a split second Bill considered going to the bathroom to clean up properly, but very rapidly decided he couldn't be bothered. Solitary wanking sessions in his room during his early teens that he had had no intention of letting his mother find out about meant that he could very efficiently clean himself up, so he did so. Then he climbed into bed when Tom moved to do the same and snuggled down next to his twin.

He felt relaxed and satisfied in a way that his sessions in the shower had never managed and he had a sneaking suspicion that the bond approved of this small step forward in his and Tom's relationship. When he realised he was assigning sentience to the bond, he mentally smacked himself and found a comfortable spot to lie in.

Hoping that the relaxed feeling would last all night, he wound his hand with Tom's and did his best to sink into the lethargy of post orgasmic bliss.

"Sleep tight," he said as Tom reached out and turned the light off, "I love you."

"Love you too, Billi," Tom replied and kissed his lips ever so lightly, "see you in the morning."

It was probably wishful thinking that he would sleep right through, but it was nice to pretend, so Bill snuggled a little bit closer and let himself relax completely. The next day was going to be a very big one.

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Bill looked around the room at the cases and took a deep breath. Everything was packed and there were only a little over an hour of complete safety left. The outside world had never used to frighten him, but parts of it did now and he still had to work that out. This was the first step to that and it felt so huge from this side of it. He was used to the warmth and safety of home and leaving it was not easy.

"Everything ready?" Tom asked, walking in with the bags from the bathroom.

"Everything but me," Bill said, feeling suddenly very small in a big, big world.

Tom put the bags down straight away and walked towards him, pulling him into a warm hug.

"The world might not be ready for you," Tom told him firmly, "but you are ready for the world."

The doubt and anxiety, that had been trying to overwhelm him, dimmed a little and he held to Tom for a little while. Nothing was remotely as large when Tom was there and he let himself breathe in the scent of his twin and used Tom's presence to calm himself. They were both tired; the night had not been restful even after their indulgence, but together they would always be strong.

Eventually he pulled back and gave Tom a small smile.

"Thank you," he said, "now I am."

End of Chapter 10

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## Chapter 11 Back to Work

Everyone was in bed, Bill knew all too well that was true because he was hearing things he didn't want to hear. Climbing off his own bed, he judged that at least the coast was clear and tiptoed to the door, opening it with barely a sound. Tom's door was across the way and he walked quickly across the hall and let himself in.

Sleeping alone was not an option for him yet, he wasn't really sure he ever wanted it to be again, but they had decided that, to appear more normal, they were going to hide that particular aspect. Hence he had to wait for the others to be in their rooms before he could sneak into Tom's. He was doing the sneaking since he had the senses to make sure he wasn't caught.

"Oh god," he said as he closed the door behind him, "I think I might know far too much about Gustav's personal habits now."

Gustav's room was right next to Bill's and he had made the mistake of not trying to ignore the sounds coming from his friend's room. He could often make all the extra information his hearing gave him form a sort of background noise that he ignored, but, since he had been waiting for everyone to be settled, he had been paying attention.

"What did you hear?" Tom asked from where his twin was sitting in the bed waiting for him.

"Y'know sometimes we forget Gustav is a teenager just like us because, well, because he's Gustav?" Bill asked and Tom nodded. "Well in some aspects he's just like us; he has hormones."

A grin spread across Tom's face and his brother snickered in a way that made Bill roll his eyes. Sometimes Tom could act like an eleven year old talking about dirty pictures found in his dad's porn collection.

"Some sympathy please," Bill said and pouted; "you didn't just have to listen to Gustav wanking. It's almost as bad as that time I walked in on Mum and Gordon getting frisky in the kitchen last year because they were so used to us not being there they'd forgotten we were in the house."

Tom managed to keep his face schooled to calm sympathy for about five seconds before he was laughing again and Bill huffed his disapproval. It wasn't that he didn't know Gustav had to do that sort of thing; Gustav was a male without a steady girlfriend and certain things were a given, but he hadn't needed to listen to it.

Moving in to the apartment had been a little hectic and Bill hadn't done much more than walk from the car to the door. Tom had left him safely sitting in the kitchen area with a cup of coffee while the other three moved things in and while Saki made sure there were no surprises from fans or the press. He had been so bored with just sitting there that he had begun arranging things inside; much to everyone's amazement.

That had been about six hours previously and they had been eating pizza and watching movies since; getting back into the swing of things, as Georg put it. Gustav was clearly getting more into the swing of things than the rest of them. They had plans to start work on the single first thing in the morning, well first thing in their morning anyway; Bill was very glad that their usual schedule was sleep later, work late. Moving back to a normal day when they started doing

interviews and things would probably be really difficult, since his metabolism liked the night.

He walked over to the bed and Tom stopped snickering to lift the duvet so he could climb in.

"Did you set the alarm?" Bill asked, making himself comfortable.

"Yeah, for ten," Tom replied, reaching over and turning out the light; "Gustav won't be up until at least half past so you should have time to sneak back. If not I can always go and bother him so you can sneak back while he's distracted."

Gustav was always up before the rest of them and was, hence, the only hiccup in the plan. It was going to be more difficult living in the apartment, but they had strategies for everything and Bill knew Tom had planned for all situations, so he was sure they would be fine. The day had been a very long one and Bill was tired, so he snuggled up to Tom, relaxing the moment he was in proper contact with his twin and bond mate. A little kissing might have been fun, but his body seemed far more interested in sleep, so he let himself begin to drift off and hoped that Tom didn't mind.

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Tom could tell at a single glance how Bill was feeling and over the first few days in the apartment he kept a very close eye on his twin. While they were in the studio there was no problem at all as Bill dropped back into what Tom came to think of as work mode. As ever, Bill wanted everything to be perfect on the new single and they worked on it very hard. Bill stayed close to him and was prone to reach out and touch him every now and then, but that wasn't really much different than before; it was when they were relaxing that the problems occurred.

When they sat on the sofa in the main living area, Bill sat close to him, but they couldn't be open about how close they wanted to be like at home. Bill had always invaded Tom's personal space from time to time, but they both knew that if Bill started doing it all the time eyebrows would be raised. While there was something else to do everything was okay, but it was clear to Tom that when they were just sitting, Bill was on edge. By his reckoning, Tom was about sure that Bill could take about half an hour of "relaxing" before Bill was ready to go insane.

It was their fourth day and the whole band had done two email interviews and updated both blogs and the single was almost done; Bill hadn't even let them begin to record it properly until the previous day, and they had broken early for dinner to celebrate. Dinner had been fine, the computer games they had played had been fine, but now they were sitting around chatting and Tom could see Bill becoming more and more uncomfortable.

"Bill," he said, intervening because he knew Bill was determined not to make an issue out of anything, "can we have a chat? I need to pick your brain on jewellery."

It was not the greatest excuse, but Georg and Gustav took it at face value; what they were thinking inside he had no idea, but they had done the same every night when he had excused himself and Bill.

"Thinking of investing?" Georg teased with a grin.

"Don't you think I'd look nice with some dangly earrings?" Tom shot back and since he had just stood up, struck a pose.

The way Bill giggled and sent him a relieved glance was all the thanks he needed.

"If you must know I want to get Mum something and I don't want one of you mugs blurting out the details when you forget I haven't given it to her yet," he continued in a haughty tone that he suspected didn't fool anyone for a minute.

They all knew Bill was still delicate even though Bill was trying very hard not to be, so no one was going to argue.

"Leave us alone then," Georg said in a dramatic voice as Gustav just laughed at the antics, "talk about girlie things and don't include us, see if we care."

"I'll give you a full make over if you like, Georg," Bill said, playing along as well; "you'd look lovely in eyeshadow, maybe a hint of green to bring out your eyes."

"And pigtails," Tom added, shepherding Bill towards his room, "high pigtails with ringlets."

Georg lifted a cushion and hid behind it.

"I take it all back," Georg said as if trembling in fear, "I'm well out of it."

Bill was still giggling when Tom closed the bedroom door, however, that didn't mean that he felt Bill finally begin to relax properly when he put his arm around his twin. Syb had been right; the bond did make it hard, but it also made some things easier.

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Bill sat bolt upright in bed, breathing hard with his heart beating a mile a minute, as he struggled free of the nightmare. Tom's hand was on his back rubbing a gentle circle almost instantly and the cry he could feel building in his chest began to die immediately. The images that had caused him to wake were already dimming in his mind into a garbled mess, but unfortunately they didn't take the fear with them.

"Just breathe," Tom's tired, but gentle voice told him and his twin sat up and wound long arms around him.

"Sorry," he managed to stutter out as Tom pulled his shaking form closer.

They had known this was probably going to happen, but Bill had hoped so hard that it wouldn't. He had had several undisturbed nights in the apartment and his nightmares had been less forceful when they did come, but they had been in the apartment just over three weeks and things were being to move a little faster.

"Don't apologise," Tom said, stroking his hair in a soothing manner, "it's not your fault. It's the stress of the meeting tomorrow."

So far they had done two face to face interviews, both at the apartment and both with interviewers they had had before. They had been asked about their plans and chatted about music and how the group were filling in time, nothing heavy at all. The next day things were moving up a gear. They had been just about to launch a new tour when Bill had been kidnapped and although there were no plans to go into something that big for a while, they were beginning to talk about doing a few concerts in their home country. It wouldn't be for a while, but the planning was underway and the meeting the next day was about security.

"Fuck," Bill swore at himself; he hated feeling as helpless as the nightmares made him.

Sometimes he felt perfectly normal and at others he felt weak and scared. The real problem was that now he was paying attention enough to really understand the difference, because sometimes he even forgot what had happened to him. When he was in the studio singing it was like he had never been away.

"Come on," Tom said, seeming to understand his frustration, "let's lie down again and see if we can at least relax."

Bill didn't want to be putting his twin through this night after night, he wanted things to be calm again, but he couldn't make his mind comply. He wanted to pout and sulk, but Tom urged him to lie down and he slowly did. Tom's hands never stopped stroking his hair or rubbing his back and it was so gentle and soothing that it was difficult to stay angry. With Tom's arms wrapped around him, everything seem less insurmountable and he began to let go of the tension running through him.

The fear was still there, it never left easily, but with Tom holding him it was manageable. Sleep wouldn't come for a while, but at least his heart rate was starting to slow.

"Just remember tomorrow that if it gets too much for you we can leave," Tom said quietly. "It's only going to be the security guys we know and the two new ones that Markus is bringing along."

"David's face was a picture when Markus gave him the news that one of the new guys would only be working nights because of an allergy brought on by Gulf War syndrome, but that he was Special Forces trained and the best in the business," Bill replied, trying to banish the nightmare with more pleasant thoughts.

They had been on speaker phone in the office at the time when the arrangements were being made and David had looked shocked to say the least.

"I can't believe he actually bought it," Tom replied with a soft laugh. "The more I know that there are things normal people just don't know about, the more I wonder how much is wilful ignorance. Gulf War Syndrome? That's stretching it."

"It sounds more reasonable than vampires," Bill replied, feeling himself actually becoming a little sleepy.

"I suppose so," Tom said, continuing to stroke his back slowly and gently. "It's amazing that the whole world doesn't know though."

"They do know," Bill pointed out and yawned a little, "they just don't believe it."

There were a hundred and one vampire legends out there, he knew, he'd read most of them, it was just people thought they were folk law and nothing more. Normally he would have said more, but Tom's hand movements were kind of hypnotic and the soft touch chased away his fears. He wasn't quite ready to sleep yet, but he was in the very content place where speech was too much of an effort.

Tom said something else and he hummed in reply, but it couldn't really have been considered a conversation. Maybe they would get a little sleep after all.

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"Meetings," Georg complained as they sat in the living room waiting for everyone to arrive, "when will they ever stop?"

"You're going soft," Gustav said, taking up residence on one of the chairs, "you've had too much of the good life while Bill's been recuperating."

Bill laughed at the gentle teasing, but Tom could tell that his twin was on edge. Being in a room full of big burly men had to be a nightmare scenario for Bill, especially when Bill didn't know some of them, and he only hoped that at least Bill would adjust to the rest of their security team the way Bill had with Saki.

"Just remember," he said quietly as Georg and Gustav continued to banter, "if you need to we can get out of here."

"I'll be fine," Bill replied and gave him a little smile, shame that it didn't reach Bill's eyes.

David chose that moment to enter the room.

"Hey guys," their manager greeted with a smile, "we're just waiting on the new guys, but everyone else is here. We should be able to get this over in no time."

They had spent the day in the studio trying out some songs for a possible new album and it was now evening; a time especially set up for Sven, the Strigoi Markus was bringing along.

"Let's get on with it then," Bill said, actually managing to sound less than completely terrified, which was a plus in Tom's book.

David called back to the others and Tom felt Bill tense as even he picked up the sounds of people outside. Saki came in first, nodded a hello and then moved into the room, next came Tobi and then the rest of the crew. Bill smiled and waved at everyone as they came in, but Tom was well aware of the strain in his twin's stance.

"Everyone get comfortable," David said, moving things along as if it was perfectly normal.

"Markus is here," Bill said as everyone was moving around and several people looked at him askance.

"His car has a wicked engine," Tom stepped in while Bill coloured a little, "I heard it too."

Bill shot him a look of thanks; Bill didn't often slip up, but no one was perfect.

"I'll go and let them in," David said and disappeared from the room again.

It was at that point that Bill stood up and surprised Tom completely by walking over to Saki. When Bill gave the chief of security a hug in greeting Tom almost fell off his chair, because he had been almost sure Bill wouldn't have been interacting with anyone. The hurdle with Saki had been overcome long ago, but Tom hadn't expected Bill to be remotely demonstrative in this meeting. When Bill moved on to Tobi, Tom decided he had better be right next to Bill just in case. He

could see Bill's hands minutely shaking and determination rather than comfort was written in every line of Bill's body.

Tom really wasn't sure what Bill was saying to each of their body guards, because all he was really interested in was the fact that Bill gave each of them a hug in greeting. They all seemed to accept this, some less awkwardly than others, but Tom could almost feel the toll the exercise was taking on Bill. In the past they had all trusted everyone of these men with their health and safety and Tom knew Bill was trying to get back to that point, but he didn't even want to guess what kind of courage it was taking to do it. Tom shook hands and hovered, just in case.

By the time David came back through the door, followed by Markus, Sven and Klaus, Bill had been around everyone else. They had been sent pictures of Sven and Klaus, but Tom saw Bill freeze and he had to admit that both men were a little bit intimidating. Photos couldn't really convey hugeness. Sven really looked like a Sven and as if he was related to Graham, but bigger. Sven was very tall, taller even than Saki, and he was muscular, but not overly so, with white blond hair and pale blue eyes that made him look like a husky. Klaus was shorter, but broader than Sven, dark where Sven was blond and looked like he could quite easily have stepped into a WWE ring and made someone eat mat.

"Hi, everyone," Markus greeted; the whole security team already knew Markus quite well, "I'd like to introduce Sven and Klaus. They're both Bundespolizei, but we're going to pretend that they're not."

Then David introduced the rest of the security team, leaving the band for last.

"Bill, Tom, Georg and Gustav," David introduced them and Klaus actually grinned.

"That I did know," the big man said cheerfully; "if I didn't my daughter would have disowned me by now."

Bill was still eyeing both men as if they might bite and trying not to, Tom could tell, so he stepped forward and offered his hand.

"Nice to meet you," he said and for a moment he thought he might never play the guitar again as Klaus gripped his hand.

Sven had a lighter, but still very firm grip and Tom had the impression of very carefully controlled strength. When Tom stepped back, Bill stepped forward, back ramrod straight and radiating tension from every pore. Without thinking, Tom reached out and rested a hand against the base of Bill's back in silent support. It worked a little as Bill shook first Klaus's hand and then Sven's. It was as Bill connected hands with Sven that Tom saw the first real change. The pair stared at each other for a long moment and Tom was pretty sure the whole room would have been able to see the way Bill relaxed.

"Nice to meet you," Bill said eventually and actually gave Sven a smile.

Tom knew it had to be something to do with Sven being Strigoi, just as meeting the Strigoi elders had had the same effect on Bill. He wished it was as easy with humans.

Georg and Gustav said hello as well and then everyone settled into place in the room. It wasn't the easiest meeting, since the apartment was definitely not designed for it, but everyone found somewhere.



"Right," David took charge, "security is going to have to be much tighter for now ..."

Tom looked over at Bill as David continued speaking. Bill did not look overly pleased with the direction the meeting had started in, but Tom could tell his twin knew it was necessary. Their security had been tight before, but there was a madman out there now as well, one who could just come after Bill, and until he was caught things were going to be that much more difficult. There had been an unmarked police car outside the apartment just as there had been at home with a Strigoi agent in it every night, but now that Sven was on the team, Tom couldn't help feeling a little more secure. There had been something in the pale eyes when he'd looked into them that had made him trust the vampire.

Turning his attention back to the briefing, he set his mind to making sure he knew everything there was to know about keeping Bill safe.

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"I can do this," Bill said to himself as they all waited for Saki to give them the signal to go.

"Of course you can," Tom whispered to him and he blushed a little, realising he had spoken more loudly than he had wanted to.

There were about a hundred fans outside the hotel and they would be wanting autographs. The interview had been kept secret and their hotel had only been known to a few people, but, as ever, the information had leaked, but only a tiny bit. Bill wouldn't have been surprised if the management had invited a select number of fans just to get him back into the swing of things. Getting into the hotel the previous night had been a quiet, subdued affair, but getting out of it obviously wasn't going to be. It was time to start the publicity wagon for the single; this was really it now. Today's exercise was a silly teaser, showing their faces and announcing that there would be a new single, but no details. The idea was to drive the fans wild with curiosity and Bill was pretty sure it would work.

"I've done this a thousand times," he said quietly, this time meaning Tom to hear, "I shouldn't be nervous."

"Small steps," Tom told him, leaning in close and offering his support, "you need to get used to all this again. Eventually it'll be like we've never been away from it."

"Do you think so?" he asked; more than anything in the world he wanted things to go back to normal.

He knew it could never be quite the same; he wasn't the same, but he was craving his old life.

Tom handed him a pen.

"I know so," was the definite response and for the thousandth time Bill was incredibly glad he had Tom with him.

"Everyone ready?" Saki asked, returning from having made a quick check of the front of the building.

Saki looked at everyone, and Bill was grateful, but he knew the question was really aimed at him. He put on a smile and nodded and then followed Saki to the front door, closely shadowed by Tom, Georg and Gustav. The scream that went up as they walked into the open was ear splitting, but Bill found himself genuinely smiling for the first time that morning. His heart sang with exhilaration as he let his eyes run over the hoard of girls screaming for his attention. This was the drug he had almost forgotten about, but most of him remembered, even if his conscious mind had almost let it go.

All the waiting fans were young and female apart from one lonely boy standing on the end and Bill felt his nerves dropping away. With a confident stride he walked over to the line and signed the first thing that was shoved under his nose. This he knew how to do; it had been grafted into his fundamental makeup over the last few years and he realised that he had missed it.

Tom was close by his side, a constant comfort in the big wide world and Bill stepped back into his role of rock star almost as if he had never been away.

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"Welcome back, Tokio Hotel," the female interviewer greeted as they sat down and made themselves comfortable, "thank you so much for coming."

"Thank you for having us," Bill replied dutifully, along with all the others.

He was trying not to let his nerves show, but he was all but glued to Tom. The impromptu signing outside the hotel had been good, but coming into the studio and being prepared for their slot on the show had set Bill back a bit. He had never realised how many strange people they habitually met in the course of one interview. He had found everything very uncomfortable, which really hadn't set him up very well for the actual interview. What he would have loved to do was sit just behind Tom's shoulder and let his twin do all the talking, he was that nervous, but he knew that would freak out the fans. He was the front man and he had to jump back into the saddle at some point, preferably sooner rather than later. They had a microphone each this time and he could tell that the interviewer wasn't quite sure how to deal with him. No doubt the show had been warned that he was likely not to be as vocal as usual.

"So it's back to the grind stone then?" the woman said with a smile, eyes dancing over him and on to the others. "You have a new single coming out, isn't that right?"

It was the big news and Bill decided that it was then or never.

"Yes," he said, leaping in with both feet and plastering a smile over his face, "it will be coming out at the beginning of next month and we're shooting the video for it tomorrow."

"Yeah," Tom added from beside him, "Bill designed the whole video; he's had too much time on his hands; it's going to be epic."

The audience laughed at the quip and the interviewer smiled.

"So, Bill," she said, seemingly glad to have something to talk about that wasn't awkward, "thinking of branching out into music video directing then?"

"I think our director's job is safe," Bill said, quite happy to talk over the easy subjects; "I'm more of an idea's guy."

"The rest of us do the manual labour," Georg added in and earned a laugh from the audience as Bill slapped him on the arm.

"I think we need a scene added where our bassist is suspended upside down in mud," he joked and caused a round of laughter himself.

He'd almost forgotten how good it felt to have the audience reacting and on side and by the end of that he was smiling for real; there was nothing forced about it. His stomach was still fluttering, but it was nearly in a good way now.

"So what can you tell us about the new song?" the interviewer asked before any more hilarity ensued.

"Well it's mostly a secret," Bill said, leaning forward like he was about to pass on vital information, "but it's about how those you love can save you from anything."

"Can you even tell us what it's called?" was the interviewer's next question.

"No," Tom chimed in; "they made us sign in blood and swear we wouldn't."

It was a good way to keep the conversation light, especially when Georg held up his finger with a band aid on it. The reality was Georg, being his naturally clumsy self, had cut his finger on a broken glass, but it made for a good story.

"How about the video, any clues?" the interviewer asked.

"Think gothic," Bill said with a grin.

The interviewer then proceeded to try and prize as much information out of them as possible about the new single and summarily failed, but they did get in some good anecdotes. It turned out to be a fun, crowd pleasing interview without even a shadow of the trauma that had brought them to that point. When they were given their exit cue, they stood and waved and walked off and as they entered the backstage area Bill couldn't help it; he grinned broadly and threw his arms around Tom, then Gustav and then Georg. Then he bounced off down the corridor dragging Tom with him, because he wanted to get ready for the three other interviews they had for magazines where they were actually going to announce the details of the single.

"I think Bill enjoyed that," he heard Gustav comment as he left.

"I think that might be an understatement," he heard Georg reply; "it good to see our Bill back."

"Almost," Gustav seemed to agree, "almost."

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Bill collapsed on the sofa with a sigh and Tom collapsed next to him; Gustav threw himself into a chair and Georg just folded up on the floor. They had just travelled back to Hamburg after the three quarter day itinerary since they were filming there the next day.

"You accused me of going soft yesterday," Georg said from his position on his back, "but I think we've all gone soft. Four interviews and a couple of signing sessions is nothing, so why are we all knackered?"

"My hand feels like it's about to drop off," Bill complained in slightly bemused tone; "we didn't sign that many autographs today did we?"

There had been a couple of hairy moments during the day, but mostly it had gone very smoothly, but Bill was beyond tired.

"It's the nervous tension," were Gustav's words of wisdom; "it'll be easier next time."

"So this is my fault," Bill said, coming to what seemed like the obvious conclusion.

Bill found himself with a cushion in the face as Gustav pulled one from behind where the drummer was sitting and threw it at him.

"What was that for?" he asked, almost startled out of his lethargy.

"You work it out," Gustav replied, looking at him with one eye open and one closed.

Bill looked at Tom, who just laughed.

"I think that's his way of saying drop the guilt," Tom said and Bill had to conclude that his twin agreed, since Tom as still laughing at him.

He pouted and cuddled the cushion; he could feel guilty if he wanted to. That seemed to make Tom laugh more.

"Stop laughing at me," he said and he knew he was whining, but he was feeling petulant.

"When you stop pouting about not being allowed to take the blame I will," Tom said with no sympathy whatsoever.

"I'm going to make coffee," Georg announced, standing up and heading for the kitchen, "who wants some?"

Georg and Gustav had long since learned that it was prudent to never become involved in a Kaulitz argument, even if it was a small silly one.

"I'll have one thanks," Bill said as both Gustav and Tom added their orders in as well.

Bill pouted some more and decided to give Tom the silent treatment. He managed it until Tom sidled a little closer and pushed their legs together. It was rather like turning on a heat lamp in a freezer, Bill felt the tension he had had no idea he was still carrying around, flow out of him like a wave and he relaxed and realised that he was being an idiot at the same time.

"Alcohol," he decided and stood up, heading for the cupboard where they kept the vodka.

"Bill, we have a shoot tomorrow," Tom pointed out.

"And we're going to all be made up as vampires," Bill pointed out as he opened the cupboard, "so if we're a little hungover it won't matter. We won't get smashed, just a little happy; we need to relax."

He turned and smiled at his twin while doing his best puppy eyes and he saw Tom cave instantly. The puppy eyes worked far better on Tom these days than they had before; it was great.

"Bill's right," Gustav agreed, much to Bill's surprise.

Gustav was usually the uber sensible one and Bill felt rather smug that their drummer was actually agreeing with him. He dragged the bottle of normal vodka and the bottle of Dooleys out of the cupboard with some glasses and put them all on the coffee table.

"We should order in some food too," Gustav said and reached for the phone, since it was beside the chair, "but no getting drunk. If I have to drag you all out of bed in the morning I will use buckets of cold water."

"You'd need more than that for Georg," Tom said with a laugh and Bill managed not to panic about the possibility of Gustav finding him in Tom's bed; "maybe a small atom bomb."

"I'm that great you have to talk about me while I'm not here?" Georg said, from where the bassist was now standing in the doorway.

"You wish," Tom replied and threw the cushion Bill had abandoned.

"Pizza, Thai or Chinese?" Gustav interrupted the banter and held up three menus from where they usually sat under the phone.

Bill looked at everyone else, who was doing the same thing and then grinned.

"Pizza," he said at the same time as the rest of the group.

"So we still want the coffee?" Georg asked as Bill arranged the glasses and bottles on the table.

"Yes," Gustav said in a resolute tone; "no one is drinking any alcohol until the food arrives."

It seemed the world wasn't coming to an end after all; Gustav was still the sensible one. Bill didn't argue, just retrieved the ice bucket they had acquired from somewhere and went to fill it; there was nothing worse than warm toffee vodka.

End of Chapter 11

## Chapter 12 The Grind Stone

Bill sat in the makeup chair while the special effects makeup artist fitted him with fangs and he thought to himself how much easier it would have been if he had been able to use his own. The others had been caked with pale makeup, but with his pale complexion he, at least, only had a normal level. The lenses he had in had been specially made and were just colourful versions of his usual ones, which was also a bonus, because it meant they were incredibly easy to wear. To finish the look, the make-up artist had done his hair down.

He had a high, wing-collared white shirt, complete with cravat, a deep red waistcoat, black breeches, knee high black boots, laced all the way up the front, and a thigh length black jacket. He had decided on the classical look himself and he'd insisted the others be in similar things. He'd spent ages on video Skype with the head of wardrobe and he was very pleased with the outcome.

All their costumes were old fashioned for the vampire part of the shoot, but they were still individual. Tom had the same breeches and boots he did, but had a long, billowy poet's type shirt over the top with an open waistcoat, hence there had been no wailing about too tight clothes. Georg was styled in a similar manner to him, except the breeches were brown, the jacket was green and Georg's hair was in a low pony tail and Gustav had a shorter jacket, cream breeches and a dark blue jacket.

That left only one person.

"Wow," Andreas said with a slight lisp, bounding up and bouncing in place next to the chair, "you look stunning."

"You look pretty cool yourself," Bill said as he practised talking with the fangs in.

With his own fangs he had no trouble talking, but everyone else seemed to have trouble with the artificial ones, hence Andreas' lisp. He was very glad to find that there were still some advantages to having fangs normally as well, because his voice sounded perfectly normal.

There were going to be extras in this video as well, other vampires and such and Bill had managed to wangle it so Andreas had the full makeup treatment as well. He was pretty sure his best friend was in heaven at the moment and Andreas did look good in a similar outfit to his own. He was also sure that Andreas was on a mission to keep an eye on him; Tom was off checking guitar things, but Bill was positive that his twin had set Andreas to make sure he was never alone. Klaus was hovering and no one was getting near Bill unless they had been vetted and Bill had been introduced to them, so it wasn't too nerve-wracking, but it was nice to know that someone was there even if it wasn't Tom.

"Let's go find the others," he decided, pulling on his jacket that had been hanging over another chair while his makeup was finalised.

Andreas beamed, revealing the pointy, artificial fangs. It was very clear that Andreas was having a ball and Bill didn't blame his friend; this was fun already. The fact that this video was his idea, every last bit of it, rather than someone else's where they had just thrown in some thoughts, was exciting.

There were two halves to the video that would be interlaced together, one old fashioned with vampires, one modern. They were doing the vampire part that day and the modern bit the next. Since the song was about everyone being there for

a person, he'd made sure that there were very few bits where he was doing anything alone, so the whole band were required for both shoots almost all of the time. At the moment they were in a big warehouse that had been done up in places like a castle. Somewhere around there was a drop dead gorgeous young actress in a low cut, old fashioned, white dress. Her name was Petra and she was going to be the heroine of the video. She was going to be chased around by some nasty looking men with dogs and then be rescued by Bill and the others.

The nasty looking men were actually Leo and Jack and the dogs were Sabre, Pringle, Dash and Cassie, all husky/wolf crosses. They were beautiful animals, but Bill hadn't had a chance to meet them up close yet. The professional actors had been on set for a couple of hours before Bill and the others had arrived, doing some of the chasing shots where the band weren't required.

"All fanged up?" Tom asked with a grin as Bill walked over to where his twin was playing with a guitar.

Even Tom had a very slight lisp with fangs in, which made Bill laugh.

"Yep, fanged and raring to go," he said, to prove that he could speak perfectly well.

He reached out and brushed his hand against Tom's the moment he was within the touching distance and he felt twenty times better instantly. When he was away from Tom things never felt quite right.

"That is so unfair," Tom complained, clearly having realised that Bill was having no problem with the fangs at all; "how come you get to not sound like an idiot when these fangs are nothing like your real ones?"

"Maybe I'm just cleverer than all of you," Bill said, more than a little pleased with himself.

They were doing the group shots first with the band playing and him singing. There was a castlescape set up against a green screen and they were all going to be positioned on it at various levels. They were going to do the whole song in playback so that the video editing people could pick and choose whichever shots they wanted to slice in. This was where the extra vamps were going to be used as well, for hanging around in dark corners.

The plan was to do a photo shoot in the costumes after that, up against some of the set and then get into the storyline bits of the video. Then the next day they were going to do the whole thing again, but in normal clothes in normal settings while Petra was chased by street thugs rather than villains with dogs. It wasn't the most original storyline, but Bill was sure it was going to look fabulous when put together.

"Everyone ready," the director asked, walking up to them with his clipboard.

"And raring to go," Bill said with a smile; he was really pumped about this shoot.

"Did you have to ask for these breeches to be so tight?" Georg complained as the bassist walked over carrying his instrument. "They are riding up my arse."

Bill flicked up the back of his friend's jacket playfully to see.

"Okay, that's more of Georg's butt than I really wanted to see," Tom joked as they moved to their marks.

"I have a very nice butt, thank you very much," Georg said, fighting back for once, "all the fans say so. Just because you have to find yours with a magnifying glass..."

"Not in those trousers," Gustav commented from where their drummer was already set up behind his kit.

Bill did his very best not to blush, because he thought the same thing. Tom had also complained about the riding up of the breeches, just in a less public manner, and, when the long shirt was pulled up, there was indeed a very nice view as far as Bill was concerned. He was quite glad Tom went in for baggy tops, because if he'd given his twin an outfit like his own he was positive he wouldn't have been able to concentrate.

"I'll go lurk like a good vampire wannabe," Andreas said and dashed off towards the rear of the set.

"Places everyone," the director called as a couple of makeup people made sure Tom and Georg hadn't wrecked their hair or makeup putting on their guitars. "We'll have one run through and then we'll go for a take."

Bill didn't have a mike for this section; he was just kind of singing to himself as it were, but he had talked to the director before and he knew where to look and when and what he wanted to portray, so he was ready.

"Ready," the director said, "playback and action."

When he was singing, Bill always put his heart and soul into it, even when he wasn't really singing at all, and he came in perfectly on cue. The beginning of the song was about the pain and the sorrow and he found it a little too easy to find the emotions he needed for that bit, but, as he was carried along by the music and it started to build into the recognition of hope, he went with it. He was so involved that he almost became lost in it.

"Cut," the director called as the song ended. "Guys, that was great, let's have exactly the same again."

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In the end it had taken three takes to get the long shots done, then they had set up for different angles and it had been well on to lunchtime before the director was happy. Lunch had consisted of grabbing something cold from the catering table, before having makeup retouched and then running off to the photo shoot on the other side of the building. Bill hadn't been particularly hungry and had thought about skipping lunch all together, but Tom had shoved something under his nose and demanded he eat, so he hadn't had much choice. Even take after take hadn't dulled his enthusiasm and he had been almost too excited to eat.

"Bill, how do you feel about biting Tom?" was the question that brought him up short in the middle of the photo shoot.

"What?" he asked, as his thoughts flew in all directions.

They had done lots of group shots and now they were down to the individuals and the smaller groups.



"Biting Tom," the photographer said with a grin; "since you're supposed to be the head vampire. It might be nice to get a little bit of the back story in the shots. We can photoshop Tom a little in the finished product to make him look a little less pale and it could be you bringing him over."

Bill looked at Tom who shrugged and let him make the decision.

"Sure," he said and began praying that he didn't become overly involved in the shot, "how do you want us."

"You behind Tom," were the pleased instructions, "biting his neck and looking up at me."

The moment Bill walked behind his twin and Tom leant against him with his head on one side, he knew it had been a mistake. The position sent all sorts of signals around his body that were very much not conducive to being on camera. He took his position and looked at the camera as asked, but he didn't know how long he could hold it. Tom's scent drifted into his nostrils and his mouth began to water and, with his mouth so close to his twin's neck, he had the urge to kiss and bite. He wasn't used to fighting such urges; usually when they were in this position he was supposed to bite and he found it very distracting.

"That's brilliant, guys," the photographer said, snapping away, but for Bill the desire to feed was all too real.

He felt his control slipping and he had to break away.

"Oh fuck," he said as he felt his fangs try to descend and one of the fake one's popped out.

"Bill, you okay?" Tom asked, turning quickly.

"Fine," Bill said, more than a little annoyed with his lack of self control, "just lost a fang."

Luckily he had caught it, so he just showed it and pulled himself back under control. That had been too close. He made a mental note that that was something else he needed to practice and let the makeup girl fuss over putting him back together again. Tom was watching him very closely, so he tried to send his twin a reassuring look. It was only getting back to the shoot that stopped Tom hovering, however.

The next interesting moment came when it was time to take some pictures with the dogs. The shots with Petra had gone off without a hitch, but then they had all met Petra before at a casting meeting, so there had been no hurdles to jump. Funnily enough Bill had had no problem at all controlling himself when doing a couple of romantic shots with Petra, although Tom had looked hideously jealous while Bill was working.

In the video, the dogs were chasing Petra and each member of the group used their vampire powers to make the dogs turn on the men using them and chase them away. Someone had, hence, decided that the dogs should be in the photo shoot as well.

"Okay, bring the dogs in," the photographer said. "If you each stand behind we'll have proud vampires and loyal wolves."

"This is getting ridiculous," Gustav said, but moved into place never the less.

Bill was pretty sure there weren't many things Gustav hated more than photo shoots.

The handlers brought the dogs in and Bill waited for Sabre to be sat down so he could move into position. The problem was that Sabre took one look at him and just stopped. It occurred to him at that point that Scotty had done exactly the same thing when he had gone home for the first time. It hadn't meant anything to him at the time; Scotty had stared at him then promptly turned on his back and begged to have his tummy rubbed, it had seemed like a Scotty thing to do, but when a very large husky/wolf cross did exactly the same thing he saw a pattern.

"Sabre," the dog's handler chided, clearly shocked, "get up."

Sabre refused to move and lay there, legs in the air, tail wagging just slightly, looking at Bill like he was the second coming or something. Syb had mentioned that animals could sometimes sense Strigoi, but Bill had never thought about it before. What was very clear was that Sabre was not about to give up and Bill could feel everyone beginning to look.

"Silly dog," he said, deciding to do something about it since he was pretty sure he was the cause, "now is not the time for a tummy rub."

He bent down anyway and gave the dog's chest a good scratch at which Sabre huffed and wagged his tail properly. When Bill stood up again Sabre looked at him and wiggled, clearly wanting more fuss.

"We have work to do," he said in a stern tone and Sabre was on his feet in moments.

That caused everyone to laugh, which was quite a relief.

"I think he likes you," Sabre's handler said as they finally set up for the shot.

Bill thought it might have been more, momentarily scared shitless until peace was made, but he petted Sabre anyway and gave the husky/wolf cross a good scratch behind the ear.

"He's a lovely dog," he said and then put his mind to looking smouldering for the camera.

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Long day didn't quite describe what the video shoot was turning into. They were into the individual shots and Bill had made sure that everybody had some, so there were times when they were just sitting around. Tom had been surprised all day how much energy his twin had had for the shoot and he had been pleased and worried at the same time. He hadn't really been surprised when, while Georg and Gustav did some solo takes for the video, Bill had sat down next to him on one of the prop chaise longs, leant against him and fallen asleep.

"Hey," Georg said, coming back from his stint filming.

"Ssh," Tom said and indicated Bill.

It wasn't really very quiet anywhere in the building, but he was pretty sure Georg being loud would wake his twin.

"Sorry," Georg apologised instantly and sat down on one of the spare chairs, "how long's he been asleep?"

"A few minutes," Tom replied, looking down at his precious twin, "I don't think he got any sleep last night at all; too excited."

Georg smiled fondly; they were all pretty protective of Bill these days and it warmed Tom's heart to see it so clearly.

"It's going to be a fantastic video," Georg said, looking back at him and grinning; "I just saw a little of the raw playback. Wow, Bill hit it spot on. There will be fangirls needing hospital treatment when they see this one."

Tom grinned back.

"But is it worth the stupidly uncomfortable costumes?" he said with a very quite and gentle laugh.

"I think you'll find it will be," Georg replied and sat back in his chair.

Tom almost laughed very loudly when his clumsy friend narrowly missed tipping himself over; the plastic and metal chairs were not that stable.

"Crap," Georg said, only just righting himself, "I wish someone would design these things for actually sitting on."

"Most people don't seem to have that much trouble," Tom said mischievously.

Georg seemed to choose not to reply to that.

"Have you seen Petra," he asked after a few moments, "I was thinking of seeing if I could get her number."

That made Tom grin even more.

"Not that you'd have had much chance if I'd tried my hand," he said, still playing his role even though he had no interest in anyone but Bill, "but I think you're too late. Andreas was chasing her that way last time I noticed."

He pointed off towards the catering area.

"Well we'll see about that," Georg said, standing up; "we'll find out if she's interested in a boy toy or a real man."

"Where?" Tom asked, looking around in mock surprise.

His friend gave him the finger for that and walked off to the sound of his soft laughter. Sometimes it was just too easy. He hoped Georg was right about the video; a great song needed a great launch pad and he knew without a doubt it was a great song.

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In the end, the video shoot had taken three days not two, because the director had decided they needed a few more shots after the rough cuts had been done.

The modern parts had been much easier to do than the vampire parts, which had been good, but Bill had been dying of anticipation since they had finished filming. He didn't know anything about film editing, so he had left that to the professionals, which was why, when David showed up with a DVD in his pocket it was the best thing ever.

"Everyone ready?" David asked as they all sat around the TV.

"Just play it," Bill said and made a playful grab for the remote.

David laughed and pressed the play button and the screen jumped into life.

The scene opened on a dark, moody landscape of woods and a little village, panning over the whole thing and round to the castle as the intro rolled over the top. Then there was a long shot of the whole band at their positions on the castle walls which then zoomed into just him as he started to sing. Even as he finished the first line and looked out over what had been to him green screen and was now landscape, the scene skipped to a terrified Petra running through the forest, cut in with shots of the dogs.

It was all very dramatic and Bill couldn't help smiling. Next it cut to him singing again, in modern dress this time, no fangs and panned out to bring in the rest of the band in a similar set up to the historic setting, just on a modern building. It then cut to Petra in a very short modern dress being chased into a dark alley by two men.

The next bit was shots of him and the rest of the band cut in with shots of Petra which used both time periods until they reached the first chorus. Then it was all of them moving through the woods sans instruments, shoulder to shoulder, flashing to the same shot, but in the city. Then back to the woods again as they all peeled off into the trees like predators around prey.

It was all really quite exciting to watch and Bill was captivated even though he knew what should be happening.

It continued to cut between timezones showing them moving closer and closer to a more and more dishevelled Petra.

Then in the vampire setting they stepped out into a clearing in a half circle, each calling to their side one of the wolf dogs that were about to devour the damsel in distress. As the chorus roared over the top, the shocked faces of the men who had had the dogs cut across the scene; each member of the band smiled a deadly, fangy smile one by one and then the men ran and the dogs ran after them.

It quickly cut to the modern day setting and this time they all stepped out of the shadows in an alley with nothing but themselves. The two men stalking Petra froze, but were not afraid until the distant sound of a siren was heard and Bill produced an open mobile phone.

Not overly heroic, but very modern and could not be seen to invite vigilantly violence. Bill had wanted it to be more dramatic at one point, but he could see the suits side of things and had not argued too hard.

As it came to the final chorus the scene switched back to the vampire theme with Bill walking towards Petra and offering her his hand. She took it and it switched back to the alley where modern Bill was doing the same thing. It did some

switching between individual shots at various points and kept the whole thing going until the final parts of the song. In the vampire setting, Bill pulled Petra to her feet and into his arms and in the modern one he placed his jacket around her shoulders. Then for the final scene in the vampire world it panned out to show him standing there with her in his arms and the other three standing behind him before switching back to the modern day one where Petra initiated the embrace. It also panned out to show them all and then the final shot was modern Bill looking up where he had Petra in his arms, smiling and growing fangs.

When it finished, there was dead silence in the apartment and Bill held his breath. He was gob smacked, but he had no idea if the others would like it as much as he did.

"Wow," Gustav finally spoke, "that is our best yet."

"You can say that again," Georg added and they both looked round at Bill.

Bill couldn't help it, he beamed.

"Guess I can cross the creative team off the payroll then," David said with a smile, "Bill's doing the video ideas from now on."

Everyone laughed at that; Bill was so happy he could have burst, but there was still one person and he looked to Tom. His twin just looked back, totally unreadable and for a second he almost thought Tom didn't like it. If there was one thing he knew it was that Tom would always tell him the truth no matter what and with the others he wasn't so sure they wouldn't protect his feeling.

"It's amazing," Tom said and then slowly smiled.

"Bastard," Bill said, as the knot of tension in his chest released and Tom laughed, nudging him with his arm.

"Come on," Tom said, clearly very happy now, "you really think I wouldn't like that?"

Bill didn't have anything to say to that; he couldn't help being a little insecure sometimes. The video would be premiering the next week just before the single release and he had a right to be nervous.

"It's going to be huge, guys," David said, as happy as they were it seemed. "You're going to be back with a bang."

Bill hoped so, he really did and he felt the familiar excitement moving through him. This was better even than he had hoped.

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The single was number one in just about every chart it was eligible for in Germany, even on German MTV, which was actually incredible. The launch had gone smoothly and superbly and the video was playing on every channel that carried such things. MTV were one of the stations begging for interviews, which was like the world coming to an end. It seemed that having your singer kidnapped and still coming back to the music earned some respect from people who had refused to see them as anything but a teenie band before.

They were due to do a live set for MTV later in the day, but the morning consisted of one main thing; a chat show where the questions were likely to be more personal

rather than about the music. Tom hadn't wanted Bill to do it, but Bill had known he was going to have to do something like that at some point and they had been on the show before, so he had convinced Tom to agree. The J.B. Kerner show had always been good to Tokio Hotel and Bill wasn't afraid that there would be questions out of the blue.

"Welcome," Kerner greeted as they walked on and sat down, "it's very nice to see you again."

"Thank you," Bill said as Tom said something similar, "we're pleased to be here."

It had been decided that given the fact that a good portion of the interview was going to be about Bill and not the whole band, only he and Tom would appear, but it already felt strange not to have Gustav and Georg with them.

"So, the new single has taken the charts by storm," Kerner said with a smile; "a mega hit even by Tokio Hotel standards."

"It's amazing," Bill said, launching in and hoping that he wasn't going to turn into a gibbering wreck at any point; "the fans are being incredible. We never expected it to go to number one this fast, and we've had so many positive reviews about it, it's incredible."

"Even MTV like it," Tom added and earned a laugh, since it was well known how well Tokio Hotel and MTV usually mixed.

"And a very interesting video to go with it," Kerner said as the laughter died.

"Well I've always liked horror movies," Bill said with a grin, "and while the record company was malleable I thought I'd see if we could do something fun."

"You'll notice how Bill made sure he was the one rescuing the pretty girl," Tom chimed in and grinned at him when he rolled his eyes.

"The perks of being the singer," Bill replied and just about refrained from sticking out his tongue.

"So are vampires the new in thing?" Kerner asked before he could say any more.

His smile almost slipped at that, since the question hit much closer to home than Kerner had any reason to believe it did, but, even as his heart beat just a little faster, he covered it quickly.

"Only for this single," he said as brightly as he could manage, "but we're having fun with it while it lasts. They let us keep the costumes from the shoot and so none of us will be short of a Halloween costume this year."

"The fangs are cool," Tom said, giving Bill a chance to breathe; "they were specially made for us and you can wear them while eating and everything. The girls seem to like them too."

Bill was very glad he didn't have to pretend to be the playboy of the band; that was one thing he wouldn't have been able to cope with. Tom was used to the role and did it so well.

"The song has some very deep lyrics," Kerner continued into the lead up to talking about more than the single; "what is the message behind it?"

For once Bill didn't leap in instantly and he took a deep breath before he said anything.

"It's about how those you love can help you through anything," he said, his smile fading now. "If you have just one person who cares, then you can face anything at all."

"It sounds as if it's a very personal song," Kerner said, and Bill could tell that they both knew they were entering less stable territory.

"It is," Bill replied, trying not to let the trepidation he was feeling show on his face; "I wouldn't be here today without my family and friends, and I don't mean just what happened recently; without the support of everyone, we never could have made it as far as we have."

"But would you say it was recent events which prompted you to write these ideas down?" was the next question.

Bill nodded.

"Without the people around me, especially Tom, I would never have been able to come back like I have," he admitted, trying not to think too hard about what he was talking about. "I think I needed to put that into words and share it with people."

He looked over to Tom, who gave him a small smile of support.

"Your recovery has amazed a lot of people," Kerner continued along the same line, "from what we've been led to believe, when you were first found you were catatonic."

"Almost," he replied with a nod; "I'd been overdosed on a designer drug; it made everything seem unreal and nightmarish. I'm lucky to be alive and doubly lucky that it wasn't addictive."

It was funny; the lies came easier than the truth when it came to talking about the dark episode in his life. He never liked lying, but in this case, it was easier than remembering the reality.

"Is it true that it was several hours before anyone recognised you?" Kerner asked, continuing the line of questioning they had agreed before the show.

The tabloids were full of speculation about the details of Bill's ordeal and this interview was partially designed to clear up some of the rumours. Bill nodded again.

"I was pretty messed up," he said, trying not to let his voice drop too much.

"Someone eventually recognised Bill's tattoos," Tom added to help him. "Before that I think the medical staff had been more focused on keeping Bill alive."

Bill was very glad when Kerner's attention turned to Tom for a while. He didn't like talking about his kidnapping or the aftermath and he couldn't hold on to Tom on national television either. He had spoken to Syb about all this, but most of the time he'd been in Tom's arms while doing it, which made him infinitely stronger.

"It must have been terrible for you, Tom, while Bill was missing," Kerner said, sounding sympathetic and Bill didn't think the man was acting. "Are you able to tell us about it?"

Bill couldn't help it, he moved a little way out of his chair so that he was closer to Tom; he was well aware this wasn't just difficult for him.

"It was the worst time in my life," Tom said and Bill could hear his twin's pain. "Everything was completely wrong all the time. When the news came that they had found Bill it was like coming back from the dead. I think I would have run across the country to the hospital if our mum hadn't been there to stop me."

"And what did you think when you got there?" Kerner asked.

"I didn't think about much," Tom replied and Bill so wanted to reach out to his twin; "the doctor warned us what state Bill was in and I just wanted to get to him."

"I don't remember much from that time," Bill added in quietly, "but I remember Tom arriving. He became my lifeline."

"So Tom brought you through?" was Kerner's next question and it wasn't remotely surprising; the media loved the twin angle.

"Yes," Bill replied; Syb had requested that she not be mentioned to the general public. "Everyone was so good to me, but Tom was always there; we haven't been apart since."

"Has this ordeal brought you even closer then?" Kerner asked, leaning over his table.

Lots of different ideas flew through Bill's head, but he knew the question was an innocent one.

"We've always been close," Bill said, thinking about his answer carefully, "but it's difficult for me now if Tom isn't there. At first I'd panic if he wasn't in the same room all the time, now I just find it really stressful if he isn't there. As long as Tom's there I can mostly cope; if he's not there I fall apart."

"I get nervous if I don't know exactly where Bill is," Tom added in, which surprised Bill a little, Tom rarely admitted to weakness to anyone but him or their mum; "I have to know he's safe. It's going to take us a while to get over that I think."

Kerner was nodding in a sympathetic way; it was quite obvious that the man had compassion at least.

"Now before I ask my next question I would like the audience to know that Bill and Tom have agreed to all the questions I'm going to ask today," Kerner said, turning towards the camera. "Would you like to tell us why?"

This was the part that was going to be really difficult; the part Tom had wanted Bill to have nothing to do with, but Bill felt it was important.

"We want people to know the truth," Tom spoke for him as he did his best to gather himself.



"And we want people in a similar position to know they're not alone," Bill added, gathering his courage; "that they don't have to be ashamed and don't have to hide it."

There was a moment's silence as they all drew a deep breath.

"Bill," Kerner said eventually, "please would you tell us what happened to you?"

Bill was sure he could have heard a pin drop as the whole studio was completely quiet. There was speculation in the press as to what had happened to Bill during his captivity, but so far no one in the band or close to them had told the complete truth. The media knew Bill had been assaulted and drugged and they suspected that assault had been sexual, but the medical records had been kept carefully sealed, the police had not revealed details and no one had come out and said it.

"He came to my hotel room," Bill began, trying to keep his voice audible and strong; "and drugged me and took me somewhere."

His mind's eye was full of the memory and he was having great trouble remaining remote from it. It was in the past, it couldn't hurt him anymore, but it still frightened him and he wanted to reveal some of it.

"I kept refusing him, I wanted to go home," he said, looking down at his hands and playing with his fingers. "Eventually he got fed up of talking, that's when he brought the others in; that's when he raped me for the first time."

He looked up as he said that and didn't bother trying to hide the effect the memory had on him.

"The only thing that kept me going was thinking of Tom," he spoke slowly and clearly, holding himself together with an iron will.

Kerner actually looked pale even with the studio makeup.

"The police will find the people who did this," Tom said and Bill was almost overcome with the need to reach out to his twin, "and when they do this will finally be finished. We don't want anyone's pity, that isn't what this is about; we just wanted to stop the speculation and let anyone else out there who is hiding something like this know they don't have to suffer in silence; actually Bill wanted to, I didn't think he was ready for this yet. We're picking up our lives and carrying on with what we love; nothing is going to take that away from us."

The clapping started quietly, but quickly grew and Bill watched, amazed as the audience slowly climbed to their feet. From the fans he might have expected such a response; they had been supporting him and the rest of the band through the whole thing, but there were only a handful of their fans in the audience. Kerner even gave them a little clap as well and it was a good minute or so before it began to die down.

"It seems you are both incredibly strong young men," the man said as everything quietened down again and he really appeared to mean it.

"It's because we have each other and our families, our friends and our fans," Bill said, and he made sure everyone knew he meant every word.

Kerner nodded and there was a moment's silence.

"And speaking of carrying on with what you love, I hear you're all planning to go back on tour," Kerner said, moving on to the agreed roundup, "are you looking forward to it?"

"Yes," Tom said, managing to crack a smile and giving Bill a chance to recover some more, "it's going to be great to be entertaining the fans again."

"It's not going to be a long one yet," Bill added in, pulling the persona of entertainer around himself as well as he could, "just five or six dates in Germany to begin with."

"But we'll be adding more if those go well," Tom said, smiling just a little too much now.

Bill didn't like the fact that Tom was having to cover for him so much, so he did his very best to pull himself together.

"And I'm sure they will," Kerner said with a smile. "Thank you very much for coming in today and talking so frankly with us. Bill and Tom Kaulitz, everyone."

The applause was loud again and so were the screams and Bill smiled, but he wasn't really feeling it. Both he and Tom stood up and waved before walking off the stage. He handed his radio mike to someone who looked like they'd know what to do with it and then headed back towards the green room as fast as he could. The moment he was inside, he sat down and did his very best not to completely fall apart. Tom was there in a second, standing in front of him and pulling him close and holding him tight.

"Let it out, Bill," Tom said firmly.

All his breath seemed to escape him in one shuddering gasp and Bill soaked up the comfort from his twin, but he refused to break down. He could have dissolved into a pool of tears and shakes, but he kept the tears inside. He drew the support from Tom and the remembered support he had felt from all the people in the studio around him like a suit of armour, and he shook in Tom's arms, but he would not cry.

Eventually he drew back and looked up into Tom's concerned face. They both had too much worry behind their brown eyes, but Bill firmly believed what Tom had told the world: nothing would stop them returning to what they loved.

End of Chapter 12

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## Chapter 13 What It's All About

Time was going so fast. The single had been a huge hit, so much so that the record company were releasing it in France already and wanted an English version as soon as possible and now they were setting off on tour. They were on the bus, living in each other's pockets again for a few publicity dates before the first concert, and Bill was having trouble. He was sitting near Tom in the media room with Georg and Gustav on the other side of the table and they were watching a movie. It wasn't a bad movie, but Bill wasn't really watching it; he was too busy trying not to move closer to Tom.

It was like an ache in his chest.

If they had been at home he would have been curled against Tom's side, warm and comfortable and secure, and if they had been in the apartment they would have gone to one of their rooms and just sat quietly, but they were in neither place and he was trying to pretend to be normal.

Normal; the word seemed like such a joke now.

Frankly, it was killing him. In such a confined space he couldn't even use the little touches that had been sustaining him through the rest of their work; they were just so close with Georg and Gustav all the time that it would be noticed. He felt cold and tense and on edge and he couldn't relax at all. It was physically uncomfortable to be so close and not be able to touch in the way he wanted to. If he wasn't careful his grip on the table was going to become so hard he would actually bend it.

"Bill," Tom's voice snapped him out of his mental struggle and he looked round sharply, startled.

He was so off balance that he almost slipped off of the seat. Tom took one good look at him and then lifted an arm.

"Come here," Tom said simply and Bill didn't have the will to stay away.

He went straight to Tom, leaning in and shuddering with relief as Tom's arm wound around him. He buried his face in Tom's neck and the small sounds of relief that escaped him were completely out of his control. The tension flowed out of him in a torrent, leaving his muscles shaking in relief and he sagged against Tom. For a little while he completely forgot where he was as wonderful heat seeped back into his body and his nervousness vanished in its wake.

It was the sound of the movie stopping that brought him back and he remembered they were not alone.

"Is Bill okay?" he heard Gustav ask in a very worried tone.

"If it's the movie..." he heard Georg add.

"It's not the movie," Tom said while stroking his hair, "just put it back on; he'll be fine in a minute."

Bill was embarrassed by his reactions, but he couldn't make himself let go and he couldn't turn and he stayed right where he was as Tom petted him. It was a good fifteen minutes before he felt even remotely comfortable enough to sit back a little and turn his head. To his great relief both Georg and Gustav had their eyes

fixed on the TV and Tom only looked down at him as he moved. If it hadn't been for him the whole situation would have been normal.

"Okay?" Tom asked quietly and Bill glanced at Georg and Gustav, but neither of them looked round.

It was really nice of them to try, but he knew they had to be listening.

He nodded and sat back a little more, but made sure to keep a considerable amount of contact with Tom as he did so.

"I never thought it would be this hard," he admitted quietly, feeling far better than he had, but shocked by quite how much the separation seemed to have affected him.

Being normal all the time seemed to be beyond him. He could keep up the front when working, he was sure of that, he always kept up an image when he was working, but it didn't look as if the rest of the plan would work; so much for hiding how much he had changed. If he was this bad at staying away from Tom, what was he going to be like with other things? Just sneaking into Tom's bunk when everyone else was asleep didn't look like it was going to work. It had been easy when they had had separate hotel rooms, but on the bus they lived in such close quarters that it was virtually impossible.

The TV went off and he looked round.

"If you two need to talk and want us to leave, all you have to do is say," Gustav spoke for both of their friends.

Bill looked back at Tom and he knew Tom would let him decide on this one and he wasn't sure what to do. It wasn't fair to ask their friends to look the other way with no explanation at all.

"No," he said eventually, "you don't have to leave. I'm sorry, I'm a bit tense."

"A bit tense?" Georg said, sounding concerned. "Bill, I thought you were going to break the table in half at one point. If you're that worried we can postpone some more; no one is going to mind that you need time."

Bill shook his head.

"It's not the concert," he said, falling back on the truth as he saw his friends worrying about him.

He looked at Tom again, who stroked his arm gently in support.

"There are things you don't know," he said slowly, turning back to Georg and Gustav, "things about me, and I don't know if I can tell you yet. I'm not the same anymore and I can't pretend I am, not in here."

Gustav leant over the table and placed fingers lightly on his arm.

"Then don't try," their drummer said in a warm voice; "just be how you need to be."

Bill glanced at Georg who nodded in agreement.

"When you want to tell us, we'll listen," Georg added, "but like Gustav said; don't mind us."

Bill could have kissed them both, metaphorically speaking.

"Okay, well the first thing you should know," Tom took over, "is that Bill will be sleeping in my bunk with me. No more sneaking around."

Both Georg and Gustav looked surprised by that.

"I have nightmares if I'm alone," Bill added in explanation.

"So all those hotels and in the apartment," Gustav said, clearly working it out, "you only ever used one room?"

Bill nodded and felt Tom doing the same.

"David knows that much," Tom continued to explain, "so he knew one room in the hotels would be empty, but, in case the bookings got out, we all figured it was best to pretend. What he doesn't know and you do now is that the second bed he always made sure was available in at least one room was messed up by hand in the morning because Bill needs someone right there."

"And Tom being there stops the nightmares?" Georg sounded so concerned it made Bill feel warm inside.

"Mostly at the moment it means Bill doesn't wake the whole place screaming," Tom said in a no nonsense tone; "sometimes we get a full night's sleep, sometimes we don't."

His conscious mind was behaving these days, but Bill still had a lot of trouble with his subconscious, especially now with the stress of the tour and some nights all he could do was endure and Tom endured with him.

"Jesus," Gustav said with a frown, "no wonder you both look so tired sometimes. From now on, if there is anything we can do, just say. If you need an extra hour in bed or something, text us and we'll have David chasing his tail for as long as you need."

Bill heard himself laughing before he realised he was doing it as he was suddenly assaulted by the mental image of David in puppy form.

"Thank you," he said and found that Tom had chosen to say it at exactly the same time.

It was quite incredible to think what their friends would do for them without even knowing the truth. They all shared a little grin at the twin moment and the atmosphere was once again comfortable.

"Want to finish to movie?" Georg asked as a companionable silence fell.

"Sure," Tom said and pulled Bill against him again and Bill settled down comfortably, this time in a position where he could see the TV.

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Bill had been buzzing all day, in fact he'd been so hyperactive that Tom had threatened to tie him to a chair and Bill had only half thought his twin was joking.

There wasn't a lot he could do about it, however; he was so pumped for the concert. If he didn't stay excited he knew his nerves would get him and he wasn't letting that happen. The sound check had had him bouncing all over the stage and he was pretty sure half the crew thought he was a few cards short of a full deck.

The half hour before the concert had, as ever, been the worst. Now, standing back stage as the music started, he was so worked up that he was positive that if his cue didn't come soon he would simply explode. He had his mike and the fans were screaming and he was more ready than he had ever been in his entire life. They weren't using the full stage they had had made for the tour before Bill's kidnapping, but they had a pretty spectacular set up and his entrance was not going to be small.

He heard his cue and ran up the stairs to the upper level of the stage area, counting in his head to his entrance. He reached zero, opened his mouth, sang the first note to Schrei, the spotlight hit him and the whole auditorium exploded with screams. It was such a shock that he almost stopped singing, only habit kept him going. The wall of sound just hit him, even with all the decibels the band were sending back, and it was incredible.

Vampire hearing was far more sensitive than a normal humans, but he had thought that the ear pieces would deal with that, since the music was playing loudly to him. In reality he could hear far more from the crowd than he had ever heard before. It was an amorphous wall of sound, but every now and then individual voices would leap out at him as well. He had to concentrate on two levels, but it was the most wonderful feeling to sense the support of all the fans. It lit a fire in him and his nerves were burnt to cinders in its heat. The words flowed out of him and his heart filled with joy and he sang like there was nothing else in the world.

He sang his heart out as the fans began to sing with him and the energy didn't remotely wane all through the first and second song. As the music came to a close for the second number and he came towards the front of the stage to speak to the gathered crowd, the screaming started again. He walked all the way to the edge so he could see the sea of faces and they were all calling to him. Some were just screaming, others were yelling things like "I love you, Bill" and "Thank you for coming back" and the overwhelming support was amazing to him.

What he had had to say was still going around in his head, but all he did was stand there and look out. There was so much energy flowing through the crowd that he could feel it. It was like electricity running over his skin. The fans were united in their joy and Bill didn't need to be able to see body language or look into their eyes; it was so strong it prickled up every nerve in his body.

There were signs being waved and he let his eyes run over them as he tried to bring his mind back on track. Some expressed love of the band or a particular member, some had messages and phone numbers, but one brought a lump to his throat. The banner was just black on white and it said: "I was being abused; your courage gave me the strength to tell someone. Thank you."

It struck a chord in him that jangled through his brain and almost removed everything he had prepared. Suddenly it felt like he had swallowed a golf ball.

"Hello," he said, doing his best to speak past the imaginary blockage, "it's great to be back."

There was such a wave of screaming after that one sentence that he had to stop again.

"We're so glad to see you all," he started again as the sound died away a little, "it's been too long."

The crowd seemed to like that as well, but Bill was finding it harder and harder to talk. His eyes kept flicking over all the banners and back to the one that had most of his attention.

"Without you all," he said, forcing the words out, "we wouldn't ... we wouldn't be able to do this ... and this is what we love ... thank you."

He couldn't help it; that was the point where he lost it. He really hadn't expected to feel so emotional and he tried to remember what he had wanted to say, but the words were all jumbled in his head. Bill was exactly where he wanted to be and there were thousands of fans screaming their support and love at him and the rest of the band and it overwhelmed him. The first tear leaked out the side of his eye and down his cheek and he simply couldn't stop it. Words didn't seem adequate anymore and he couldn't get them out anyway. All he could do was stand there.

When Tom touched him on the shoulder he could only look round.

"You okay?" his twin asked, only just audible over the noise.

Bill nodded, but did not resist as Tom took the mike.

"You've done the impossible," Tom told the crowd, taking over for him; "you've rendered Bill speechless."

The sound rose and fell in response and Bill felt it to the depths of his being.

"We didn't have a contingency plan for this," Tom continued, joking with the crowd and taking the pressure off him in the way only Tom ever seemed able to do, "because we never thought it would happen."

So many smiling faces; Bill was still having trouble, but he swallowed hard and began to pull himself together.

"Thank you for your support," Tom continued as Bill did his best to calm himself down; "what we'd like to do now is perform for you the new single."

When Tom looked at him, Bill nodded; if nothing else he was sure he could sing. The songs already expressed what he felt and he didn't need to reach for the words. He could definitely sing and he took the mike back even as the fans screamed their hearts out at the idea and the music started again.

This was what Bill lived for; this was the feeling he had given half his childhood to feel and even though, for the first time ever, words had failed him, as the introduction finished he opened his mouth and those he had written before came to life. Nothing in the world could have stopped him and he gave everything he had.

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Bill was on cloud nine; the concert had been fantastic and the fans had been wonderful and he had enjoyed every single minute. By the end it had almost been

back to old times and he was so happy he'd forgotten about everything else. He'd only left the others to pick up something he'd left backstage; he hadn't even thought about it. Tom was in the shower, so he had jogged back to where he had left the small plushy that had caught his eye when someone had thrown it on stage, picked it up and headed back. Everything was fine, up to the point he rounded a corner and caught sight of a male face he didn't know.

The man was wearing all black and was standing between him and where he needed to be. They had new people on the crew for the concerts and the man looked like backup security, but Bill thought he had memorised all the faces and he didn't recognise this one. The moment he laid eyes on the man his heart rate increased and fear began to stir in his belly.

He froze.

Everything seemed normal, but then when room service had called at the hotel, everything had seemed normal, but when he'd opened the door his nightmare had begun. The man was just standing there, facing the other direction and having a smoke and Bill knew that all he had to do was call and someone would come running, but he couldn't move. He didn't sense other vampires, but his mind still whispered to him that he might just not know what he was feeling and he knew it was irrational, but he couldn't stop it.

Very slowly, making sure his feet made no noise, he backed up the way he had come, stepping round the corner. There was one dark spot next to a store cupboard and he shrank into it, clutching the plushy to his chest as if it could protect him. In a matter of seconds he had gone from over the moon to terrified and he let himself slip down the wall until he was hunched in his dark spot, hidden from the rest of the world.

It was like he was stuck in a horror movie and couldn't get out and all he could do was sit there, frightened out of his wits, awaiting rescue. Minutes seemed like hours.

"Hey, Greg," Tom's voice almost made him sob with relief, "have you seen Bill?"

The fear still trapped him though; his paranoia whispering at him that it could be a trick, and he kept the sounds inside. He missed the reply to Tom's question as he wrestled with himself and then he heard footsteps and he completely froze again. It didn't matter that logic told him it was Tom or anything else; his fear had control and he didn't even dare breathe.

"Bill?" the voice was Tom's and he could feel Tom, but reality had very little to do with his reactions and he couldn't reply.

When Tom came closer, all he could do was stare up in terror as his mind refused to believe what was real.

"Oh hell," Tom said, crouching down beside him instantly, "Bill, come here, Love."

As soon as Tom touched him the illusion in his head shattered and he let out a sob as all his terror exploded from him. Tom pulled him into a firm embrace and held him tight as he shook. He was shaking so hard that he could barely breathe, panic ripping through him and leaving him weak as his heart threatened to come out of his chest. He was almost hyperventilating and he clung to Tom, his safety line.



It was a long time before he could let go and even then his heart was still beating like a humming bird's. Tom seemed as reluctant to release him as he was to be released, but eventually they had to part.

"I'm sorry," he began to apologise immediately; he had reacted so badly, "I ... I ... saw ... and I ... didn't know..."

"It's okay," Tom said, looking him straight in the eye and stroking the side of his face, "just breathe; everything is fine."

Bill did his best to bring his breathing under control, but it wasn't easy and just as he was managing it, a large shadow fell across them.

"Is everything okay?" a deep and unfamiliar voice asked.

He almost panicked again as he looked up and saw the man from earlier.

"Yeah, everything's fine," Tom said, looking away from him and smiling, "Bill just slipped trying to find his plushy; no harm done. We'll be along in a minute."

The other man left, but when Tom turned back to him, Bill knew he looked terrified; it was totally out of his control.

"Was it Greg?" Tom asked urgently. "Did he do something?"

Bill shook his head; it was clear that Greg was a legitimate member of staff and he was completely overreacting and he didn't want someone else suffering for his stupidity.

"Didn't ... recognise him," he tried to explain while doing his very best to force his breathing back under control; "stupid."

"Greg's one of the new guys in concert security," Tom said gently, "he was ... oh shit, no he wasn't at the briefing; we met him just before because he had to sort out a visa or something, you weren't there. Shit, Bill, I'm so sorry."

Bill squeezed Tom's hand; he didn't want his twin blaming himself either.

"No ... one's ... fault," he said, feeling the panic finally beginning to ebb away.

It was all so ridiculous; one strange face and he had panicked. He was becoming angry with himself now.

"Idiot," he said, talking to himself and berating his own stupidity.

"Hey," Tom said, lifting his chin and making eye contact, "not your fault either."

Bill didn't agree, but he chose not to disagree out loud either.

"Are you okay to go back to the dressing room?" Tom asked, backing off a little so they could stand up.

As Tom helped him up, he nodded.

"I'll get David to arrange for us to go back to the bus first," Tom said, rubbing him on the arm in support, "I think you've had enough excitement for one night"

and I'm sure Georg and Gustav can entertain the girls waiting out back without us."

"No," Bill said, reacting instantly; one thing he definitely didn't want to do was let the fans down; "I'm fine."

Tom appeared dubious.

"I'm fine," Bill repeated; he was not being budged on this one.

"You're sure?" his twin asked and he nodded.

"They came here to see all of us," he said in a resolute tone; "we don't want them to go away disappointed after the first show."

Tom didn't look happy, but Bill knew he would not be beaten.

"Okay," his twin agreed eventually, "but I'm sticking to you like glue."

He gave Tom a smile for that and they turned back towards the dressing rooms.

"Why did you leave without me, anyway?" Tom asked as they headed down the corridor.

"I wanted to get this," he explained and held out the little furry cat; "I thought mum might like it. It matches the colour she just did the bedroom."

Tom shook his head and grinned with an exasperated little sigh.

"Only you, Bill," Tom said, putting a gentle, guiding hand on his back; "only you would notice something like that in the middle of a concert."

"Well it's cute," he tried to defend himself.

"Yeah," Tom said with a laugh, "well so are you."

Bill gave Tom a swipe on the arm for that and held on to the cat to prove his point, but he felt a lot safer with Tom beside him as they walked back to the dressing room. He even managed a smile for Greg as they walked past the man, who was back at his post in the corridor.

End of Part 13

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## Chapter 14 Gently Does It

Bill was usually a very up front person; he said what he meant and that was that, but he just couldn't find the words to tell his friends what had happened to him. Remembering the whole Andreas debacle, he was mindful that straight out was probably not going to cut it. He couldn't think of a way in which he could tell them without shocking them to their cores and neither Georg nor Gustav were vampire geeks like Andreas, which made it harder again. He didn't want to give either of the Gs heart attacks so he decided to break it to them gently another way instead.

His first opportunity came at the second concert venue while everything was being set up. Gustav was somewhat anal about his drums and something was obviously not right almost as soon as they reached the venue. Gustav had been to check on his drums and had come back looking furious before grabbing his gloves from the bus and stalking back the way he had come. Bill followed his friend.

What he found was a whole pile of equipment in cases and it appeared that Gustav's drums were mixed in with a whole heap of other things. If Gustav couldn't check his drums he always ended up in a very foul mood and for a moment Bill watched his friend trying to move what was clearly a very heavy box. When Gustav finally gave up after moving the box only a foot or so, Bill made his decision: he walked over and to Gustav's obvious consternation took hold of the handle on the top of the case.

The look of complete shock on Gustav's face when he just picked it up as if it weighed nothing was almost worth the anxiety the act caused him.

"Where do you want it?" he asked, knowing that he really didn't want to have an in-depth conversation right there.

Gustav took the hint.

"Anywhere away from my drums," his friend said and Bill nodded and moved it to against the wall and out of the way.

With Bill moving anything that would normally have required two six-foot-plus roadies to shift, they had the drum kit cases clear in only a few minutes.

"Thank you," Gustav said, once they were done, clearly torn between checking his drums and asking Bill what was going on.

Bill smiled and hoped he didn't look too nervous.

"Need any more help, just text me," he said, knowing that Gustav would take his lead in this.

Gustav nodded and went back to his drums as one of the crew came round the corner. Bill took this as his cue to leave.

"How did you move all that?" the man, whose name Bill couldn't remember, asked as Gustav opened one of his drum cases.

"Bill moved them for me," Gustav said and Bill almost stopped walking.

The roadie laughed.

"Yeah right," the man said, "no, really, how?"

"You'd be amazed what a little anger can do," Gustav said and Bill changed his mind about stopping: someone was about to be chewed out in a way they would never forget.

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Gustav was thoughtfully quiet most of the day after that, but they were all so busy preparing for the concert that there was no time to have a conversation. Bill did find Gustav watching him every now and then, but it was in a quiet contemplative way that Bill found didn't freak him out in the slightest and the concert went off without a hitch. The atmosphere was just as wonderful as the first one and the fans were incredible; Bill still couldn't believe how amazing the fans were being.

The sea of placards with supportive messages and declarations of admiration and love were breath taking, and he almost cried again when it came to speaking to the crowd. It was only the fact that he was determined not to get a reputation for bursting into tears that he managed not to do it.

He really forgot about everything else until they were climbing back onto the bus after the impromptu signing session and it only came back to him when they all just about fell into the media room at the back of the bus. They all needed sleep, but it seemed that winding down was the measure of the moment.

"Wow," Tom said, lounging on one of the seats and waiting for Bill to sit down next to him, "that was wild."

They had all showered after the show, but David had been urging them on to sign for the fans because they needed to be off fast for the overnight trip. That meant there had been little to no conversation, except for the odd congratulatory exchange.

"I think they missed us," Georg said with a grin.

"You can say that again," Tom agreed with a laugh, "I think I'm missing bits of clothing."

Tom held up the edge of his t-shirt to illustrate and Bill had to sit on the irrational desire to go and rip someone's arm off when he saw the hole.

"No one touched me," he said to distract himself from the surge of homicidal jealousy.

Leaning up against Tom, he felt the adrenalin beginning to ebb out of his system.

"That's because they know that five seconds after they tried anything the best thing that could happen to them is Saki reaching them before Tom did," Georg replied, still smiling.

"Oh I think Bill could handle it all by himself," Gustav said, looking at him in that thoughtful manner again.

It was clearly his move.

"Yeah, but picking them up and throwing them across the car park might be really bad PR," he said with a sweet little smile.

Gustav snorted a little laugh at that and Georg looked confused. For his part Tom had gone tense behind him; he hadn't had any time to speak to his twin either.

"I think I'm missing something," Georg said, looking between him and Gustav.

Bill just cocked his head to the side and lifted his eyebrows when Gustav glanced at him from permission.

"You know those really heavy equipment boxes that were unloaded in the wrong place this morning," Gustav said in a conversational tone; "the one's Mike was swearing about at lunch because his crew had to load them onto pallets to move them?"

Georg nodded; it had been rather difficult not to hear the curses from one side of the venue to the other.

"Bill can lift one of those with one hand," Gustav revealed, seemingly at ease with the whole thing.

Georg frowned and looked over at Bill.

"You're joking," Georg said, and it was obvious their bassist wasn't sure if Gustav was pulling his leg.

Gustav just shook his head when Georg looked back at him and Bill smiled when Georg's attention was back on him. He was glad that since he was taking it all calmly, Tom seemed to be relaxing again.

"Just how strong are you?" Gustav asked and sounded very interested.

Bill shrugged.

"Don't really know," Bill replied honestly; "never tested it."

Georg was looking a little ruffled.

"How?" his friend asked.

"Significant physiological changes," Bill said, quoting Syb's quote of what passed as about the closest anyone could be sure of how he had altered.

Since no two Strigoi seemed to be quite alike and continued to change the older they became, no one was quite sure of his limitations, especially since he was a day dweller.

"There's more isn't there?" Gustav observed, back to calm and contemplative.

Bill just nodded.

"Okay," Gustav decided, seemingly perfectly happy with just that response, "when you're ready, and now, I'm going to use the bathroom before Georg turns it into a wreck and then I'm going to fall into bed."

"At least I don't leave little bits of cotton wool all over it covered in makeup residue," Georg retorted, giving Bill a hard stare.

"If you didn't rush me all the time I wouldn't forget," Bill decided to play the game and the conversation dissolved into a griping session that had nobody fooled for a minute, but made them all feel better anyway.

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The next incident really wasn't a decision; it just happened. They were all sitting in a green room waiting to do an interview. Bill was going over the list of questions they had been told were going to be asked and, although there were huge windows, they had blinds and so he had taken his shades off. He planned to find a mirror somewhere just before the interview so that he could put in his lenses, since his eyes had been itchy that morning so he hadn't put them in straight away. What he hadn't noticed was Georg walking over to the window.

"Oh fuck!" he said more loudly than he intended as light lanced over what he was reading and the white paper reflected it straight into his eyes.

It hurt like hell and he dropped the paper and threw his hands over his eyes as fast as he could. There was nothing he could do about it; it was an instinctive reaction and it gained everyone's attention.

"You okay, Bill?" Tom asked, immediately coming closer; not that Bill could see his twin, but he could feel him.

"Will be in a second," he replied, feeling around blindly for where he had put his shades.

Once they were back on his nose, the room dimmed to manageable levels even as Georg tried very hard to close the blinds that he had just opened.

"You can leave them," Bill said, realising he was causing Georg to panic a little and hence the blinds were being stubborn.

"Sorry," Georg apologised and Bill suspected his friend thought he might be about to be ripped a new one by Tom, "I had no idea ... it ..."

Bill held up his hand to halt the disjoint apology.

"Not your fault," he said and gave his friend a smile to prove his point, "I should have put my lenses in this morning."

"Lenses?" it was Gustav who asked the obvious question.

He had been meaning to just drop hints, but he hadn't made it that far yet, so Bill pulled the small case out of his pocket and put it on the table.

"These," he said and indicated the nondescript case; "they stop me having incidents like that."

Gustav looked like he was adding that fact to a mental list.

"You're photosensitive?" Gustav asked in a way that only Gustav could manage without coming off like he had swallowed a text book.

"Yep," Bill replied, blinking to try and clear the last of the glare from his vision; "another of the 'significant physiological changes'."

"Well that explains the dark glasses half the time," Georg said and sounded relieved, "we were worried you were trying to hide."

Tom laughed at that.

"Bill, hide?" Tom said while still laughing. "Yeah right!"

Bill swiped at his twin for that and Tom danced out of the way, still chuckling.

"I think I'll go and put in my lenses rather than put up with the insults," he said, but he did grin to make sure no one took him seriously.

As he went to leave the room he heard Gustav ask Tom something quietly, but he didn't bother to try and figure out what it was. He was happy for his friends to ask; he knew they weren't about to step over the line. It made his job easier anyway; now he didn't have to come up with a way to slip the information into their every day lives, because Georg had done it for him.

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It was a hotel night and Tom was incredibly glad because it meant he could have some quality time with Bill. On the bus they couldn't do more than exchange the odd kiss before going to sleep and grab the occasional smooch in a locked toilet stall at a venue. Tom had been gratified to find it was not just him who was missing their more heated encounters at more regular intervals.

He figured that the fact that Bill pushed him up against the wall and began kissing him madly as soon as the door closed behind them, was a good indication that Bill was as needy as he was. The fact that Bill was taking the initiative sent shots of delight through him that he didn't even try and contain. It was only as Bill moved on to nibbling on his neck that he remembered what else they had to do on their one night in safe solitude.

"Bill," he said and groaned as his twin nipped at a particularly responsive spot just where his neck curved into his shoulder.

Thinking about it, he had a pretty good idea why Bill was quite so interested.

"Bill," he tried again and almost gave up when Bill began nibbling his earlobe and turning him to jelly, "need to stop, now."

"Don't want to," Bill said, still pinning him to the wall.

It wasn't much, but it was the break that Tom needed to gather his will power and he pushed Bill away a little. Bill went, of course, because there was no way in hell Bill would ever force anything like that, but his twin was pouting very sexily when Tom looked at him.

"We'll get to the kissing later," Tom said, wondering what he had ever done to deserve such a delicious creature as all his, "but first you need to feed."

Bill looked more cheerful almost instantly; it wasn't as if feeding was unpleasant for either of them. They kept feeding separate from anything sexual, even though it had definite sexual overtones for both of them. Neither of them had a huge

amount of control when Bill was feeding and going further than either of them was comfortable with because of that was not something they wanted to do.

"I think living on the bus is going to drive me insane," Bill said, stepping away a little so Tom could lead them into the room; "I keep wanting to kiss you and having to stop myself. It was never this hard in the apartment."

"Tell me about it," Tom replied, fully in agreement.

The bus was beginning to feel very, very small to Tom and he was as frustrated as Bill.

"The sooner Georg and Gustav know the truth the better," Bill said, walking past him.

That made him come up short.

"You want to tell them everything?" he asked.

The fact that Bill had started dropping hints about the vampire side of things had been a surprise at first, but was entirely Bill when it came down to it. That Bill was considering telling Georg and Gustav the whole truth was more of a shock.

Bill sat down on the bed and looked at him with a thoughtful little frown.

"I've been thinking about it," Bill admitted with a shrug, "and I don't think we have a choice. I keep forgetting they don't know; we've been friends so long that they know just about everything about us. Sooner or later I'm going to make a mistake or go completely mad trying not to."

Tom wandered over and sat down next to his twin.

"It's also not fair to lie to them all the time," Bill added quietly, "I don't like lying."

That was something Tom agreed with completely; when it came to their friends, lying just felt very, very wrong.

"And you're sure about this?" he asked carefully.

"You think it's a bad idea?" Bill asked, looking worried.

"I think you're right," Tom said, making sure Bill was looking at him, "I just want to make sure you really want to do this. They might not be okay with it."

Bill nodded.

"I know that," Bill replied and it was quite obvious to Tom that his twin had been thinking about this carefully, "and if they aren't we'll have to deal with it, but I don't think we can do anything else."

Now it was Tom's turn to nod; he agreed completely.

"So any plan on when we tell them?" he asked, since he was leaving this to Bill to decide on. He was there to support Bill in everything, but it was Bill who was making the choices in this one.



"A bit longer," Bill said, brightening a little, "I want to drop some more hints first. If Gustav doesn't begin to work out the vampire stuff soon we'll just have to tell them, but I don't want to do something impulsive like with Andi."

If the truth were told, Tom wasn't sure there was any way for their friends to guess the truth, even with the hints, because it was so completely out there, but he could see where Bill was coming from.

"Okay," he said, deciding that they had dwelt on the maybes long enough, "just let me know if you want me to drop any hints of my own, and now I think we were about to be distracted by better things."

Bill appeared hesitant for a moment, clearly still on the previous page, but then Bill smiled and the small cloud that had been forming disappeared.

"That sounds like fun," Bill said and Tom let his twin grab his hat and throw it into the corner of the room; Bill was the only person allowed to abuse the hats. "On the bed then."

Just the way Bill said it made Tom's groin throb and he kicked off his shoes before moving back onto the bed. The kissing had made him half hard and the thought of being bitten was well on the way to making the confines of his boxers rather tight. Clothes always stayed on during feeding; it was part of their safety net, but neither of them tried to pretend it didn't turn them on a lot anymore. Tom was even more pleased when Bill pushed him back onto the bed and climbed to straddle his hips. Bill was becoming braver all the time and the sexy little smile his twin gave him made what little blood was left leave Tom's brain.

Bill closed his eyes for a moment and Tom didn't need to see Bill's eyes to know that his twin had brought out his vampire nature. He could feel the raw power that ran through Bill and it excited him more. When Bill opened red, almost glowing eyes and looked down at him, the thrill that ran through Tom took his breath away. With his Strigoi form revealed Tom was sure his twin was the most beautiful creature on the planet. That Bill let him look now was a gift Tom would never know how to repay.

"I think I died and went to heaven," he said, staring at his twin, "I'm looking at an angel."

Bill giggled, smiling and revealing sharp, dangerous fangs. It was the corniest line in the book and Tom had used it deliberately; he loved to see Bill smile. Looking at the fangs made him shiver as his mind happily reminded him what happened when Bill used them.

"You need some new pickup lines," Bill told him, still looking at him with hungry, enticing eyes.

"Why," Tom asked, smiling himself, "I think I already pulled."

Bill leant over him and pinned him to the bed for that comment.

"The question is, Tomi," Bill said in a very provocative voice, "are you ready for what you pulled?"

Tom's mouth went dry and his groin throbbed mercilessly and he found himself wishing that there wasn't such a clear dividing line between feeding and sex; he would have given anything to be naked.

"Hell yes," he said and he knew that if he let this go much further he'd do something they might both regret, so he turned his head a little to the side.

He saw Bill's eyes zero in on his pulse point and then his twin was leaning down. Bill's breath tickled his skin for just a moment and then he felt the first touch of a bite. It hurt for just an instant and then he was on the fast track to pleasure. He could feel Bill's weight on him even as his mind was partially transported to what he could only describe as another plane of existence. Even as he bucked up, unable to control himself, he was as close to one with Bill as he had ever been. What made this so amazing, so completely addictive was that it was their pleasure that flowed through him. It was shared and it made him want more of his twin, made his lust and desire, but it also made him love so completely that it hurt.

Eons of time were encompassed in only moments and, as ever, just when Tom thought he couldn't take anymore without crumbling under the strain, Bill drew back. The world came back into proper focus and Tom looked up into Bill's still glowing eyes. They were both breathing hard and he could still see need in Bill's face, even as his twin's eyes faded back to their normal brown. When Bill leant down to kiss him, he wasn't surprised in the slightest.

He opened his mouth and Bill's tongue darted past his lips and he replied in kind, nipping at Bill's bottom lip when he had the chance as well and his already aroused body thought that was wonderful. It was only when Bill ground down on top of him so that their clothed groins rubbed against each other and his twin's hands started working at his clothes that he remembered why they didn't do this. With a supreme effort of will he grabbed at Bill's hands.

"Bill," he said, bringing things to a halt for a second time, "you need to calm down for a minute. Is this you or is it a blood high?"

Bill whined at being stopped, but did sit back when Tom urged him to. To his credit, Bill did stay there and did appear to actually think about the question.

"It's me," Bill finally said, still breathing hard, but appearing in control again, "I ... I want you to touch me, please touch me, Tomi."

Tom didn't resist as Bill took his hand and pushed it flat against the bulge in Bill's jeans. It hadn't been something he was expecting, but he could see Bill's need and he could definitely feel his own. He moved his hand experimentally and the moan it brought from Bill made up his mind.

"Off," he said and urged his twin off of him and onto the bed, then he wasted no time in releasing Bill's belt, button and fly.

When he went to pull off the jeans, Bill lifted his hips and let him remove the offending garment. Just in case, he left Bill's boxers in place before quickly removing his own jeans and threw them onto the floor. He could tell that Bill's mood had changed again, by the time he was finished; the slightly dominant, in control Strigoi was firmly back in the box and his slightly unsure twin was back.

"We can just go with the kissing," he said, wanting to make sure that Bill really had meant what he said.

Bill shook his head.

"Make me come, Tomi," Bill said in a tone so low that Tom could barely hear it, but which sent messages through him and made him want Bill even more.

"Oh God, Bill," he said, moving to lie down on the bed beside his twin, "are you trying to kill me?"

He kissed Bill slowly and thoroughly, waiting to feel Bill beginning to relax properly again. The moment he sensed Bill was more involved in what he was doing rather than what he was going to do, he let the hand he was using to play gently with one of Bill's nipples slowly move down his twin's body. He felt Bill tense slightly as his fingers danced over the waistband of his twin's boxers, but he kept going, careful rubbing over the pronounced bulge under the material. Bill moaned into their kiss and moved against his hand and so he explored some more.

He'd seen how responsive Bill could be when he had watched his twin satisfy himself on more than one occasion, but it was totally different to have Bill under his hand. Nerves had clearly got to Bill a little since Bill wasn't completely hard, unlike him, but it only took him a few light touches to have Bill very firm beneath his fingers. When he felt dampness through the soft jersey material, he decided it was time to go one step further.

Lifting the waistband of Bill's boxers, he pushed his hand inside, wrapping his fingers firmly around the hard cock he found there. Bill gasped into his mouth, pulling away and throwing his head back onto the pillow.

"Yes, Tomi," Bill whispered his name with a reverence that sent chills of delight up his spine, "please."

Leaning up on one arm, he looked down at Bill caught in sexual arousal and he didn't think he had seen anything more arousing in his entire life. Just the fact that Bill trusted him this much was enough to make every nerve sing and he watched his twin's revealing face as he slowly pumped his hand around Bill's stiff cock.

Bill's eyes were tight closed and Bill's breath was coming in shorter and shorter gasps and he knew Bill had to be close. He could feel the arousal in Bill's tightening muscles and he could sense the build up in his twin. Instinctively he knew what would bring Bill shuddering into ecstasy and with every move he brought Bill closer to the edge.

"Are you close, Billi?" he asked, voice deep and even. "Are you going to come for me?"

Bill's eyes opened, looking straight into his own and then Bill was bucking into his hand, gasping loudly and clinging to him with the hand closest to him. Warmth spread across his hand, still close in Bill's underwear, stroking Bill's cock for every last drop and eliciting every last shudder of ecstasy.

Bill's eyes closed and Tom thought his twin looked thoroughly debauched as he carefully removed his hand and surreptitiously wiped it on a corner of the duvet. In fact, Bill looked so relaxed and sated that Tom didn't even want to say anything that might disturb the peace.

"Oh my god," in the end Bill spoke first, opening those brown eyes again and looking up at him, "I think I might have a new favourite thing."

Tom couldn't help smiling at that.

"Oh," he said, leaning down and kissing Bill on the nose, "when you're ready, I have some much better things to show you than that. The hand job is only level one."

Tom had no experience with other men, but he knew what he liked and, as soon as Bill would let him, he was going to show his twin and bond mate just how good it could be.

"What's level two?" Bill asked, clearly intrigued.

"That," Tom said, settling down beside his beloved twin, "would be a blow job."

He saw the spark of interest in Bill's eyes, but he also saw some reluctance and he saw the momentary shadow that was a sign Bill wasn't quite ready. It was one step at a time, but he didn't think it would be very long before he had Bill pushed up against a door while he sucked his cock. Tom had very few ideas about how exactly their relationship should go; he was playing it by ear to make sure nothing hurt Bill, but that was one mental image that had implanted itself in his brain and he very much wanted to play it out.

"Well if we're going to have levels I'd best make sure I fully understand each one," Bill said in a thoughtful tone; "don't you think?"

Tom's answer disappeared in a low groan as Bill's nimble fingers slid into his shorts.

"I'll take that as a yes," Bill said and Tom just gave in to the inevitable and slid onto his back.

This was one time he had no problem surrendering at all.

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Opportunity number three came after their next show when they were all walking down a dimly lit corridor to their dressing rooms. They had been waylaid coming off stage to sign a couple of things for some VIP guests. Bill had taken the opportunity to slip his lenses back in their case, since his eyes had begun to dry out and bother him. That was why when they finally escaped he had no trouble seeing everything in the corridor.

The main light seemed to have failed, so the whole corridor was lit by only two dimmer lights, one at each end. It was as clear as day for him and he only realised it was darker for everyone else when Georg walked straight into a pole that was lying next to the wall and took a header towards the ground.

Bill reacted without thinking, grabbing Georg before his friend could hit the ground and dragging him back to his feet.

"You okay?" he asked, making sure Georg was upright again.

"Fine thanks to you," Georg replied, sounding shaken but otherwise okay, "wow you have good reflexes."

"Well I saw the pipe so I had an advantage," he replied with a smile and kicked the pipe back against the wall. "You should keep an eye on your feet."

He was ready to leave it at that and keep going, but, when he went to move, Georg didn't follow.

"Um, Bill," Georg said as he waited for his friend, "it's pitch black in here; I can't see what I fell over from here."

"Oh," was all Bill could think to say, "well it was a pole. Some idiot must have left it there; the rest of the corridor is clear."

As far as he was concerned the conversation was over at that point, so he went back to walking; there were too many people to overhear in a place like this. He wasn't really surprised when everyone followed him into one room though.

"Just how well do you see in the dark?" Gustav asked as Bill began stripping off his accessories.

Bill shrugged.

"Probably as well as you do in twilight," he replied wondering where he put the towel he'd need for the shower he was dying to take.

He began shifting his stuff; sometimes life would have been far easier if he was a bit more organised with his things.

"Which is why you're photosensitive?" was Gustav's second question.

"Yep," Bill said, still moving things. "Can you see my towel around here?"

"It's with your robe on the back of the door," Tom provided helpfully.

Bill beamed at his twin in thanks; he wanted to get into the shower as soon as possible. The one bit of concerts that he was not completely fond of was the cool down afterwards; he didn't like being sticky.

"Oh and I can hear better as well," he decided to drop in the information as he retrieved what he was looking for, "and since that's out in the open, Georg, who the hell is Kaisha?"

Georg went bright red in a little under ten seconds and Gustav began to laugh like a loon.

"Kaisha?" Tom looked at him, clearly confused.

"He says goodnight to her every night," Bill said, gathering the last of his stuff, "and I've been dying to know who she is for ages."

"You told me you threw it away," Gustav was still laughing.

Georg was giving their drummer 'don't you dare' looks.

"Okay, spill it," Tom said, clearly enjoying Georg's embarrassment.

"When I first met Georg he had this little bunny in his bag," Gustav was still trying not to laugh; "he wouldn't go anywhere without her. Her name was Kaisha."

Georg looked defeated.

"My mum gave her to me when I first started school," Georg said and Bill could tell that his friend thought he was going to be teased mercilessly about it; "I keep her for luck, okay?"

"A bunny?" Tom sounded like he was about to laugh as hard as Gustav had. "Big bad Georg has a bunny?"

"A little white fluffy one," Gustav said and began laughing again.

Bill couldn't help grinning, but he thought it was kind of cute.

"That's okay, Georg," he said, feeling a little sorry for landing his friend in it; "it's no where near as embarrassing as Gustav's pet name for his penis."

Dead silence followed him as he made a sharp exit towards the shower and, when he heard Tom and Georg burst into laughter, he made a run for it just in case Gustav decided on revenge.

End of Part 14

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## Chapter 15 Not Gently Enough

Looking at himself in the mirror, Bill decided that his makeup was as good as it was going to get and went on to his hair. He didn't really need to do anything, but he wanted to do something with his hands. Tom was playing the acoustic on the sofa across the room, Georg was standing up with his eyes closed going through what looked like air bass playing with his hands and Gustav was doing some stretches to warm up for the concert. They were just into their half hour before the performance and it was when the nerves began to set in.

Teasing out one bit of hair that wasn't exactly where he wanted it, he frowned as something caught his attention. He wasn't sure what it was, but it made him look around the room. Nothing appeared to be out of the ordinary, so he turned back to the mirror, which was when it happened. There was a twang, a ping and then a yelp from Tom. He was out of his seat in a heartbeat. He didn't move as fast as he could, but it was a close thing and only the fact that Georg had jumped to Tom's aid stopped him.

"You're bleeding," was Georg's pronouncement and Bill wanted nothing more than to reach his twin's side; the problem was, Gustav and Georg were both in the way.

It was clear now what had happened, since one of the strings on Tom's guitar was hanging loose. Bill could see the blood from between Tom's fingers where his twin had his hand clasped to his cheek and he could smell the coppery tang.

"Let me have a look," Georg urged and Tom slowly moved his fingers away.

As a long bleeding line was revealed on Tom's cheek, Bill was vibrating in place with need to get to his twin.

"Shit," Georg said, "someone needs to get the medic; that's nasty."

"Let me through," Bill said, since Gustav was blocking his only way to Tom.

"I'll go," Gustav volunteered, which did take his friend out of Bill's way, but was definitely not what Bill wanted.

"No," he said firmly, walking to Tom's side quickly.

"Bill," Georg said, clearly sensing his anxiety, "that might need stitches; we have to get the medic."

"No," Bill reiterated and looked right into Tom's eyes.

He could tell Tom knew what he was thinking and his twin gave him a little nod.

"Bill," Gustav started to say from where his friend was halfway to the door.

"Don't," Bill said, turning and looking at his friend, letting his Strigoi nature rise to the surface.

He was wearing his lenses, so he knew not all of his eyes would have been visible, but he was sure it was enough as Gustav just froze. When he turned back Georg stepped back without having to be asked and he stepped right up to Tom. His saliva could heal the wounds of feeding, but for the right properties to be

released he had to convince his body that feeding had taken place, so he let his fangs descend.

At that point he really didn't care what the others could see and what they couldn't see, he just needed to help Tom. The blood was strong in his senses now, and, without thinking about what he was doing, he climbed onto the sofa straddling Tom. Tipping Tom's head back a little, he examined the wound.

"Hold still," he said, eyes never leaving the nasty tear in Tom's cheek.

He did catch the small smile Tom gave him though.

Leaning forward, he touched his tongue to the drop of blood currently running down Tom's face and he felt his connection to Tom flare up instantly. He could feel the edge of the pain Tom was feeling and he reacted to stop it straight away; it was an automatic response. Tom's eyes fluttered closed and he gave a quiet, breathy moan that had Bill's thoughts descending in directions they shouldn't have been. It was very hard to pull himself back from what he was feeling and keep himself focused on what he was doing. If it had not been for the fact that the ugly red swathe across Tom's cheek struck him as so incredibly wrong, he was almost sure he would not have been able to keep his mind on the job.

Tasting the blood, he closed his eyes and forced his fangs to withdraw, as if he had just fed from Tom. Then he leant forward again and ran his tongue along the wound, just as he would have done over the puncture marks he usually left. Tom moaned again, trembling slightly in his grip and Bill so wanted to go further. He had so many needs that he had to push himself off of Tom and away from the sofa before he gave in to them.

His head was full of Tom and nothing but Tom and it took him long moments to gather his wits back under his own control. He was breathing hard and his eyesight was very bright as he used every ounce of will power he had to drag his senses back into line and the world into proper order.

"Holy fuck," Georg's voice gave him something to focus on and he turned back, hoping that everything wasn't about to go to shit.

Georg was staring at Tom's cheek as Tom blinked at the room in a rather dazed manner. Gustav was looking at him with an open mouth and it suddenly dawned on him that they had a concert in under half an hour and he might have just wrecked it.

"You're ... you're ..." Gustav didn't seem to be at a loss for words.

"Strigoi," Bill said, not sure what else to say. "Vampire," he added when Georg turned stunned eyes on his as well.

"Strong, sensitive to light," Gustav sounded like he couldn't believe he'd missed the obvious.

He really had no idea what to say next. He had tried to plan the whole conversation out in his head time and again, but it just hadn't come to him. It didn't look as if breaking it to his friends gently had helped much.

"Look," Tom said, shaking himself out of his daze and standing up, moving over to Bill and making him feel a tiny bit better, "when Bill was kidnapped it wasn't just some lunatic; it was a vampire who wanted him as a slave. Bill ended up like



he is now because the asshole couldn't break the bond between him and me. Bill's still Bill, just a little different, so don't freak."

Both Georg and Gustav looked hideously confused and just a little afraid. Sometimes Bill was just as he had been before the attack; he could laugh most things off, but some things hit him harder now, and the idea that he was ruining everything leapt up and tried to overwhelm him. He managed to hold it together for a few seconds, but then the shell he tried so hard to hold between the things that frightened him and the rest of the world cracked. Losing the people he cared about because of what he was now was right at the top of the list and piled on top of the stress of the concert it was too much.

"I'm sorry," he said, not sure what exactly he was apologising for and then he turned away.

His composure cracked and he crumpled, falling to his knees and covering his face with his hands as the tears came. He tried so hard to be strong, but there were just some things he couldn't deal with. They had been so careful and it hadn't made any difference.

Strong arms wrapped around him almost immediately and Tom pulled him close and he sagged against Tom's chest. Taking his hands from his face, he gripped onto Tom's t-shirt and buried his face against Tom's shoulder instead.

"Ssh," Tom spoke to him gently, rubbing his back while holding him tightly, "its okay."

"I'm sorry," he said, more and more sure that he had destroyed everything they had, "I'm sorry."

Tom's grip tightened.

"None of this is your fault," his twin told him, "none of it."

He tried to believe it, he really did, but it felt like his fault. He was the source of the problem and it didn't make any difference that he hadn't chosen this; it was still him. He knew he was messing up Tom's nice white shirt and his makeup would be going all over the place, but he couldn't stop the tears.

"I'm ruining it," he voiced his fears to the only person he knew could understand.

When another hand touched his back he almost flinched away.

"You're not ruining anything," Gustav's voice was warm, calm and absolutely resolute.

As a third hand came to rest on his back as well he couldn't help the sob that escaped him. Rationality was no longer a part of the equation and he had to let the emotion out. Tom just held him, rocking him gently and stroking his back. He was in pieces and he didn't have the will to glue himself back together.

"Georg," he heard Tom say quietly after a few minutes, "can you go and find David. Tell him Bill's had a meltdown and we're going to need a little longer to get ready. Get them to tell the crowd there's been a technical malfunction or something."

"Consider it done," Georg said and one of the warm hands on his back disappeared.

"Gustav, help me to get Bill onto the sofa, please," Tom continued speaking.

Part of Bill wanted to object, but he was still in too many pieces to really do anything, so, when Tom and Gustav urged him to move and all but lifted him up, he went. He did not want to let go of Tom; Tom was always his lifeline when things became too much, so he held on, and he ended up sitting beside his twin on the sofa, still being held close. The tears had stopped, but he felt like he could shatter again at any moment.

He hadn't lost it so badly when he had had Tom there since they'd made the decision to leap back into all that was Tokio Hotel and it frightened him a little. It was like a pit had opened and swallowed him and there hadn't been anything he could do about it. That lack of control bothered him; it bothered him a lot.

"Can I do anything?" Gustav asked as Bill started trying to calm himself down.

"Some water would be good," Tom replied and Bill heard his friend move away over to the refreshment table.

As he slowly pulled himself back together, he began to feel more than a little silly.

"Hey," Tom said when he finally pulled back a little, "how are you feeling?"

His twin presented him with an open water bottle which he took as a way of making himself let go of Tom's shirt.

"Stupid," he said, trying to convince himself that he didn't just want to collapse back into Tom's arms and take the comfort that was offered there.

His throat felt all scratchy from the crying, so he swallowed a little of the water. He almost dived back for cover when, at that moment, the door opened and Georg came back in. He automatically looked at his friend, but dropped his gaze almost instantly when he realised what he was doing.

"All done," Georg announced, clearly trying to act as if everything was normal; "David said to let him know when we're ready."

"Ugh, I must look like a panda," Bill derided himself; he didn't like how out of control he had suddenly felt.

"More of a racoon," Tom said with a smile, obviously trying to make him laugh.

He did manage a small smile in return and drank some more of the water. More than anything he felt ridiculously embarrassed now. This definitely hadn't been how he wanted to reveal his true nature. Reaching out he touched Tom's cheek, just to make sure it was perfectly healed.

"That's just incredible," Georg sounded in awe and Bill glanced over at his friend before looking down at the floor again.

"Just one of Bill's new talents," Tom said and took his hand, squeezing lightly in support.

"Can you heal any wound like that?" Bill was surprised by how curious Gustav sounded and he actually looked up properly.

He shook his head.

"Just small ones," he decided to be completely honest, "it's for healing bites. I've never used it like that before."

"It's called improvisation," Tom said, still playing at being cheerful, "y'know, like when you get the rhythm wrong and have to make it up as you go along."

Gustav gave Tom an unimpressed look for the teasing and Bill found himself smiling a bit; maybe Tom did have the right idea.

"And this is what you've been dropping all the hints about," Georg said, coming round and sitting on the other end of the sofa.

"When I told Andreas it was too much of a shock," he explained himself, "and I was trying to break it to you two more gently. I don't think it worked though."

"I think vampires might be impossible to break to anyone gently," Gustav said, clearly not afraid anymore; "I was still working my way through blood diseases on Google."

At that Bill actually found himself laughing; only Gustav would actually have been doing research. He looked over at Georg who shrugged.

"I was just waiting for you to get round to explaining," their bassist said with a small smile. "I didn't expect this though. Talk about world view altering moments."

Bill couldn't exactly disagree with that; it had certainly changed his world significantly.

"It gets easier after a little while," Tom said and he was grateful for the support. "Bill is Strigoi, which is probably a bit like what you think vampires should be and quite a lot not. It's going to take time to explain, time which I don't think we have at the moment. We have an arena full of fans out there and we need to do this concert, then we can talk about this."

Bill watched Gustav and Georg exchange looks.

"There's even more isn't there?" Gustav observed before they finally began to move.

Bill nodded.

"We'll explain later," Tom said in a calm, no nonsense tone; "but now's not the time."

Both Georg and Gustav nodded at that; they had a concert to give and none of them would let the fans down.

"I need a new t-shirt," Tom decided, looking down at the black and grey mess Bill had left on the current one.

"And I need to fix my face," Bill said, going into professional mode.

"Or you could just both go with a new style," Georg suggested and Bill decided not to bother with retribution of his own when their bassist caught Tom's soiled t-shirt with his face.

Now it was time to worry about notes and lyrics; everything else could come later.

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Bill had thrown everything he had into the concert; sort of his way of apologising for making the whole thing late and he was totally exhausted as he came off stage. In fact he was so tired he almost walked into the door that Tom opened to take them into the dressing room. The only reason he missed it was because strong hands took hold of his shoulders and steered him round it.

"Unless you forgot to mention the power to phase through things," Georg commented with a chuckle, "I think going round would be a better idea."

"Haven't mastered that one yet," he said, doing his best to keep his eyes open.

What he had done for Tom and his breakdown had taken a lot out of him and with the concert on top, the energy seemed to be draining out of him like he was full of holes.

"You're supposed to be a vampire, not a zombie," Tom teased once they were safely in the room with the door shut.

Bill gave his brother the finger for that and did his best not to trip over things on the way to his bag. He would really have liked to curl up in a ball somewhere and fall asleep, but there was a shower with his name on it somewhere and he decided to focus on that rather than anything else.

"Bill," Gustav said as he wandered past his friend towards the door behind which there was a shower, "is your hair blonder than before we started tonight?"

That woke him up a bit and he stepped up to the nearest mirror.

"Oh shit," he said as he looked at his reflection; his hair was indeed lighter than it had been.

There were many more pale streaks in his hair than there had been before and that meant only one thing; he needed to feed, urgently.

"Calm down," Tom said, before he could work himself up, "it must have been the way you healed me. We'll just go in there and deal with it."

Bill was pretty sure that without Tom he'd be in a padded cell and his twin's words brought his racing heart under control a little.

"Need anything we can help with?" Georg offered.

Tom took Bill's hand and grinned.

"Not unless you feel like donating to the cause," Tom said and for a moment Georg looked like he had no idea what to say.

Recovering from his shock, Bill swiped at Tom's shoulder and tutted.

"Stop frightening him," he said in a vaguely annoyed tone, "there's only one person I'll feed from and you know it."

"You're no fun," Tom complained and rolled his eyes, "I could have kept him going for ages."

Georg appeared relieved and amused at the same time and Bill thanked his lucky stars that Georg had such a well developed sense of humour.

"So the hair means you're hungry?" Gustav asked; ever the seeker of knowledge.

"I don't feel hungry," Bill admitted, but Syb had warned him that odd things might occasionally happen.

"The hair means he's left it too long," Tom added for him, "well usually. We'll just be through there; don't let anyone else come in."

Bill didn't bother protesting when Tom dragged him into the shower room and shut the door. He still didn't feel hungry, but when Tom gave him a coy little smile and offered him that long, elegant neck, who was he to argue? They were both sweaty from the concert, but, as Bill brought his fangs out to play, that just increased Tom's underlying scent in his senses. Everything else flew out of his head as he zeroed in on his target and he pushed Tom up against the wall.

He was definitely awake now as all his faculties came online and he leant in to Tom. Licking a stripe up Tom's neck, he made his twin moan even before he bit and Tom's arms encircled him as he opened his mouth.

"Oh fuck," he heard Tom say as he carefully sunk his fangs into his twin's neck and he could taste the adrenaline high from the concert in Tom's blood.

Pleasure swamped him as he pressed against Tom, even more heady than usual as his twin's state of mind affected him as well. It felt so good and he flattened Tom against the wall, pushing their bodies together as much as possible, almost trying to consume his twin with every part of his being. In a corner of his mind he knew Tom was being loud, but he couldn't be bothered to care. He drank what he needed and revelled in the experience, just about dragging himself back when he had to. He really didn't want to stop and, even when he did, he wanted to be doing other things to Tom, but he pushed himself away before he could lose what control he had.

Tom caught him and pulled him close once more.

"The moment we have time alone," Tom whispered in his ear, "we're going for level two."

Bill almost gave in then and he was so hard it ached.

"If you don't let me go," he whispered back, "we'll be going for level two right here and now."

He could feel the reluctance in Tom, but his twin did let him go. There was only so long before Georg and Gustav would want to know what was going on and the wall wasn't that thick.

"You take a shower," Tom said and it clearly took a lot of effort, "I'll go and keep the guys occupied until you're done. David wants us out back as soon as possible."

Bill nodded, grabbing hold of his professional side to stop him moving back towards his twin. Their job wasn't quite finished for the night, which was thankfully enough motivation to get him moving. He was going to be buzzing for ages.

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David was giving Bill a somewhat concerned look as they all barrelled out of the dressing room.

"Problem?" Bill asked, grinning because he felt like it.

"You seem remarkably awake given that you were asleep on your feet twenty minutes ago," David said, clearly unsure about the whole situation.

"We force fed him sugar and caffeine," Tom said, throwing his arm around Bill's neck and ruffling his hair playfully; "we have fans to dazzle."

"If you touch my hair again you'll be dazzling them with broken teeth," Bill warned with mock seriousness.

"Aw," Tom said, making doe eyes at him, "doesn't Billi like having his hair mussed."

"Aw," Bill responded, "does Tomi want a spanking."

Tom's face went all thoughtful.

"There was this one girl, I think her name was Belinda..."

Tom didn't get any further because Bill pulled his twin's cap down over his face to shut him up. By that point David didn't look worried anymore.

"Fans, outside, now," was all their manager said.

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Even with the blood high Bill had flaked out as soon as they made it to the bus, so it wasn't until the next day that they all had a chance to talk. Bill seemed to be quite happy and bouncy, but Tom could tell there was underlying tension that his twin was trying not to show. As they all piled into the room at the end of the bus and shut out the rest of the world, he hoped that Bill would be able to relax properly once this conversation was over.

"First thing," Georg said as they all sat down, "we talked last night and we agreed this is your lives. If you don't think you can tell us, we'll wait, forever if necessary, but we have to admit we're very curious."

Bill gave their friends a smile for that, but Tom could still see the nerves underneath.

"We've been talking about it for ages," Bill replied for both of them, "and it's not fair to leave you guessing. We want to explain everything and then we'll answer any questions."

Tom was incredibly proud of Bill at that moment; it took a hell of a lot of courage for Bill to talk about any of his vampire nature.

"That sounds more than fair," Gustav said with a nod and Georg backed him up with a nod of his own.

Tom had agreed to play backup for Bill in this, so he moved closer to his twin, leant his support and waited for Bill to go on.

"Strigoi are spread throughout Europe and America in low numbers, but high enough to be considered a minority," Bill began to explain. "They ... we have our own laws, but when in contact with the human world are ruled by them as well. I'm what's called a day dweller; I'm resistant to sunlight, most Strigoi aren't. Usually the older a Strigoi gets the more sunlight they can take, younger ones can't take very much at all and some can't take any."

Moving his leg against Bill's, Tom tried to make his brother feel a little safer. The next bit was going to be incredibly difficult.

"Strigoi can form a pair-bond with a human," Bill continued after taking a deep breath; "and the bond gives the human the same immortality as the vampire. Their life-force sustains their bond-mate, not allowing age to touch them. A human in a pair-bond isn't invulnerable and won't heal like a Strigoi, but they don't age. The vampire that took me ..."

Bill had to pause, clearly distressed by the memory and Tom moved yet closer, slipping his hand under the table and taking Bill's fingers in his own.

"The vampire that took me," Bill started again, "wanted me as a trophy. The pair-bond can be used to control a human and he tried to force a bond on me. It didn't work because Tom and I have a connection and eventually the vampire gave up. He turned me and left me in the sun because he thought I'd die. He's not normal for Strigoi; he's a rogue, a criminal. I'm not saying Strigoi are like everyone else; some of them are very weird, but they're ... we're not monsters."

"Bill," Georg stopped Bill before he really got going, "we get you're still you; last night was just a shock, that's all."

Bill took a deep breath and nodded, still ill at ease, but looking a little better as far as Tom could tell.

"When I woke up in the hospital I didn't really understand what was happening," Bill went on and Tom had to sit on the desire to take over for his twin.

Bill had told him that he wanted to do this and so Tom could only abide by Bill's wishes.

"The forced bonding had messed with my head," Bill explained, voice steady, but very quiet; "the first thing that was real to me was when Tom came. It was like everything else was a dream and Tom wasn't; before he was there I kept expecting to wake up ... back there ... but when he came I knew it was real. We've always been connected, but when I saw him I automatically completed a pair-bond."

It was so obviously incredibly difficult for Bill to talk about and Tom squeezed his twin's hand to give him more support.

"So this means you're immortal too?" Gustav asked, looking at him.

Tom nodded.

"Not that I can feel the difference," Tom said, glad that he could give Bill a little break. "I have it on very good authority that I won't age anymore though. It also means that the only person Bill will feed from is me, unless there's an emergency."

"I don't need that much," Bill added in explanation. "no more than a few mouthfuls every three to four days. I think I confused my metabolism with that stunt yesterday, so it complained. If a Strigoi is starving they'll appear albino and the lighter hair is an early sign that something needs doing."

"How come your hair returns to black?" Georg asked, clearly a little confused.

Bill shrugged.

"Something to do with the mental image I have of myself, according to Syb," Bill said and Tom just nodded, since that was all he knew as well.

"So the police investigating this know about vampires?" Gustav sounded surprised.

"Syb is a vampire," Bill said with a little smile; "Markus is her bond mate. They are part of a task force that deals with vampire/human relations. She helped me sort my head out," Bill added more quietly.

"They're hunting the rogue," Tom decided he couldn't let Bill tell the next bit. "He's killing other humans as well, when Bill woke up a vampire there was another with him, but she burned in the sun. They have a lot of people looking for this monster."

That seemed to make Gustav and Georg much more comfortable and Tom knew the feeling; to realise that there were powers out there like vampires was scary, but to know they were governed by similar laws as humans made it somewhat better.

"Sven is Strigoi as well isn't he?" Gustav said and Tom wasn't overly surprised.

"He's my bodyguard, just in case," Bill replied with a nod, "until they catch the one who did this to me."

"What happens when they catch him?" Georg asked.

"Because I survived they can trace the bloodline through me," Bill said, gripping Tom's hand quite hard; "when they catch him they will try him, prove he's my sire and then they will execute him."

Georg went white and Gustav looked shocked.

"You can't imprison a vampire forever," Tom said, since it had seemed very final and quick to him as well, "and he's too dangerous to let loose. Once they are sure he is the one who kidnapped Bill they will make sure he can't hurt anyone else."



"Interactions between Strigoi are handled by Strigoi laws," Bill tried to explain, "not human ones. Locking up a vampire for fifty years is just a waste of time."

It seemed to be an uncomfortable topic for all of them.

"So," Georg said, shaking his head as if to clear it, "what was it you couldn't tell us last night?"

Tom would have smiled at the obvious change of subject if it hadn't meant quite how awkward the next part was going to be. This time Bill moved closer to him.

"This is the bit that's even more complicated," Tom had put his foot down about letting Bill explain this part by himself.

Bill had enough trouble talking about this between themselves, so Tom had made sure he would be taking the lead.

"It's about the pair-bond," he said, all his carefully prepared ideas rushing out of his head; "it's not as straightforward as we've told you so far."

Georg looked a little worried at that, but, looking into Gustav's passive face, Tom had the distinct impression that their drummer might have worked it out already.

"The pair-bond isn't just about blood," Tom said, feeling Bill tensing up beside him; if this went badly then Bill was very likely to have another breakdown. "It's everything."

The expression on Georg's face was confusion, on Gustav's it was validation.

"I don't follow," Georg admitted, looking to Gustav who refused to say anything.

"I'm not called Bill's bond mate because we're friends," Tom decided that he couldn't say it outright; it was too intimate to just blurt out.

Georg's eyes opened in surprise and flicked between him and Bill and back again and then it was obvious that Georg didn't know what to think.

"You're ..." Georg didn't seem to know what to say.

"Lovers," Bill said quietly, finally leaning against him like Tom had known his twin wanted to do, "almost."

"What Bill means is that when he's ready we will be," he said, backing Bill up. "Its part of us now, we can't change it; we don't want to."

The news had clearly stunned Georg, it was impossible to tell what Gustav was thinking and Bill was becoming tenser by the second.

"You'll still have to pick up girls and take them to your room," Gustav said and completely took him by surprise with the bluntness, "or someone is going to notice."

Tom realised his mouth was hanging open as silence descended over the room.

"I can make them think they had the most wonderful evening of their lives without Tom ever touching them," Bill said quietly, and, looking between his twin

and his friend, Tom realised that the two were on the same page. "I don't think I do jealousy very well."

"You knew," Georg said in accusing tone while staring at Gustav.

Gustav just shrugged.

"I guessed," their drummer said; "you heard them last night as well as I did."

"I thought ... I mean ..." Georg was clearly struggling.

"For the record," Tom stepped in, "that was only Bill biting me; it's just very like sex for us."

Bill was still so tense that Tom was beginning to worry. Gustav seemed to be on side, but it was difficult to tell what their drummer was thinking so he wasn't sure, and Georg was in shock; that much was obvious to Tom. The press had accused him and Bill of incest on several occasions, but it had never been true before.

"Look," he said as Georg continued to wrestle with the idea, "this is how it works now; there is nothing we can do about it. We've had a connection since the day we split into two people and now some bastard made Bill into a vampire and that connection changed. We're together, end of story."

"But it's illegal," Georg said in a quandary.

It was Gustav's turn to reach out and offer some comfort by putting a hand on Georg's arm.

"It's not as if one of us is twenty years older than the other or we plan on making babies and bringing little mutant Kaulitzes into this world," Tom pointed out, hoping that he could make Georg see that this wasn't bad before Bill lost it. "We're not hurting anyone and Bill is everything to me. I love him with every fibre of my being."

That made Georg freeze and Tom found himself being scrutinized.

"Fuck," was the explosive comment from Georg after a silence that seemed to go on forever, and their friend banged his head on the table, "fuck, fuck, fuckity, fuck. I cannot believe we're having this conversation," Georg said, sitting up again; "first vampires and then" he waved his arm in their general direction, "you; it's crazy."

Tom tightened his grip on Bill's hand.

"Yeah, it's crazy," he said, leaning forward and looking Georg straight in the eye, "and it was caused by someone taking my brother, abusing him and then killing him. I realised something when Bill was gone; all the talk of dying together: not so much shit, very, very true. I felt him die and I thought my life was over, I almost closed my eyes and gave up, but I got him back and it was the most amazing thing in the world. Nothing is more important to me than Bill, not this band, not our success, not even world fucking peace and that's just how it is."

He glanced at Bill and found his twin looking at his with huge, amazed eyes. It hadn't been a speech Tom was planning on; he wasn't really a baring his soul in front of his friends type of person, but he had meant every word. He wrapped an

arm round Bill and pulled him close and then looked back at their two friends to see what the verdict was. To his surprise, even Gustav had changed expression; their drummer looked impressed. Georg still appeared shell shocked, but strangely, calmer.

"That's the way it is," Georg said quietly, and it wasn't a question.

"That's the way it's always been," Gustav said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world, "this is just half a step further."

"Are you trying to tell me it's time to get over it?" Georg asked and looked directly at Gustav.

"You already have," Gustav said and folded his arms; "your logical brain just hasn't caught up yet."

Georg gave Gustav a hard stare and Tom decided it was best to stay out of it.

"How the hell are you so calm?" Georg finally asked.

"I only slept about an hour last night," Gustav said, which surprised Tom, because his friend appeared as awake as the rest of them; "I've had more thinking time."

Pursing his lips, Georg looked back over the table and Tom stared his friend in the eye. By now Bill was trembling slightly and Tom knew that this needed to be over soon. It was unsettling when Georg sighed and looked out the window and Tom held his breath until Georg finally turned back.

"This is weird," Georg said, eyes flicking between him and Bill, "it going to take me a while to get used to it."

"It's taking us a while to get used to it," Bill said in little more than a whisper.

That actually made Georg smile a little and Tom began to hope. For long moments Georg looked at Bill and Bill looked back and Tom sat as still as possible. Bill's kidnapping had been the worst thing that had ever happened to all of them and getting him back had been tantamount to a miracle; if there was anything that could pull them through it was that.

"Okay," Georg said eventually, "I get it. Just, could we talk about something else until I've got my head round it?"

"We could go on to questions," Tom suggested as he felt Bill sagging against him.

The relief coming from Bill was palpable.

"I think taking a break might be a better idea," Gustav said, re-entering the conversation, "Bill looks like he's about to pass out."

"I'm fine," Bill protested, but not with much conviction.

"You're a wreck," Gustav said bluntly; "who wants coffee? Georg, find us a film."

When Gustav had that look in his eyes there was no arguing with it and Tom just gave in.

"Coffee sounds good," he said and Bill squeaked with indignation beside him.  
"Just accept it," he told his twin, giving Bill a fond smile; "when Gustav decides to mother hen us all, there is no fighting."

If there was one thing that Bill hated it was being told what to do, but eventually Bill huffed in defeat.

"I'll have one," Bill said and actually appeared to be relaxing properly.

Tom decided that perhaps Gustav really did have the right idea.

End of Part 15

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## Chapter 16 Normal Is As Normal Does

It was two days before they were in another hotel and even though Georg and Gustav knew about them now, neither Bill nor Tom wanted to push their luck, so they had no chance for more than a little kissing in Tom's bunk. That was why Tom dragged Bill towards his hotel room as fast as possible once they were checked in.

"Hey, guys," Georg called to them just as Tom got the key in the lock, "want to go down to the bar."

One look at Bill told Tom what the answer was to that.

"Give us an hour," he said, opening the door and pushing Bill inside; "we're going to be busy until then."

Georg looked confused.

"The other night was rather ..." Tom tried to explain because he didn't want his friend thinking they were brushing him off, but he didn't want to say too much either, "and we've had no chance ... so ... y'know ... 'busy'."

It was quite clear that the light dawned as Georg went a light shade of pink.

"Gotcha," Georg said and hurriedly entered his own room.

Bill was giggling by the time Tom entered the room and that definitely wasn't the reaction Tom wanted.

"I hope you didn't scar him for life," Bill said, clearly enjoying the whole situation; "a bassist with bad mental images might not be able to keep time."

"Right now I couldn't care less," Tom said, slamming the door and pushing Bill up against it.

Bill's smile went from amused to interested in a heartbeat.

"Level 2?" Bill said with a suggestive wiggle of his eyebrows.

"I thought you'd never ask," Tom responded and kissed his twin soundly.

Bill looked a little dazed when he pulled back, which was just how he wanted him.

"Shouldn't we..?" Bill asked, looking further into the room and indicating the more comfortable surroundings.

"Well we could," Tom said, although he had little intention of letting Bill go unless Bill really wanted him to, "or you could just brace yourself."

The way Bill's eyes opened in surprise was very endearing, but Tom wasn't on the same page as cute at the moment, he was well into sexy, soon to be debauched. When Bill didn't object, he fell to his knees and very efficiently released Bill's belt. He looked up one more time to make sure Bill wasn't averse to what he was doing and he saw just a hint of nervousness in Bill's face, but it was completely overshadowed by desire.

He made short work of the fastenings on Bill's jeans and then he pulled them and Bill's underwear down over Bill's pale, firm thighs. There, right in front of him, was his prize and he had no idea why the thought of taking his twin's cock into his mouth turned him on quite so much, but it made his groin throb just thinking about it. Bill had obviously been thinking about something, whether it was blowjobs or alternatives, because Bill was fully erect.

"Ready for me, Little Brother?" he asked, throwing off his cap and keeping his eyes firmly glued to his goal.

"Y...ungh," Bill reply disappeared into complete incoherence as Tom reached out and took what he wanted.

He didn't bother with anything half-hearted, Tom just opened his mouth and swallowed as much of Bill as he could manage. With a grip on Bill's hips, he held his twin in place and sucked as hard as he dared.

"Tomi," Bill all but whined, grabbing onto his shoulders.

Blowjobs were a bit of a mystery from the giving end for Tom, but he'd received enough of them, so he had a fairly good idea of what worked and what didn't as he set about exploding every brain cell Bill possessed. He hadn't really known what to expect taste wise, but he definitely didn't find it unpleasant; salty and somehow, intensely Bill and he wanted just about anything he could get of Bill.

It wasn't as easy as it had looked from the receiving end and, as he pulled back a little, he lost some control, so he brought one hand in to help. The way Bill whimpered a little as he touched him sent erotic messages all over his body and he decided the hand was a very good idea. He used his thumb to make sure he wasn't about to do anything stupid like slip and stab himself in the eye with Bill's cock and used his fingers to slide over Bill's balls.

Even though he knew they were identical and he knew Bill was really blond it still surprised him to see sandy curls in front of him. Bill's self image obviously still knew what hair colour he really had. The hair was soft in places, wiry in others and he let his fingers run over and through it and Bill slid about an inch down the door.

"Oh god," Bill panted quietly.

Tom would have smiled if he hadn't had his mouth full. Just the way Bill spoke turned him on like he couldn't believe, so the fact that he was driving his twin to it was doing things to him he was having trouble following.

He used every trick in the book that any girl had ever used on him: he ran his tongue over Bill's head, sliding down the crease and discovered that Bill was a little more sensitive there than he was and could take about ten blissful seconds of such treatment before leg muscles began to give out; he hollowed his cheeks and sucked, which Bill seemed to like a lot; he did his best to deep throat, but that was obviously going to take practice; and he used the head of Bill's cock as a lollipop for a time which turned Bill into a gasping wreck as well.

As he played, Bill whimpered and moaned and gasped and clung to him in what felt like complete desperation and every indication of pleasure from his twin had him moving that one step higher in bliss himself. This was the image that he had had in his head for weeks, the image that had been driving him crazy and the real thing was even better than his imagination.

"Tomi," Bill moaned, more than a little loudly; if anyone had been passing in the hallway they would have known exactly what was going on, so it was lucky for them that the floor was mostly off limits to the general populace.

Bill's thighs were shaking by then, little tremors running up and down as Bill tried to hold himself up and Tom had one eye on his twin's footing just in case he had to catch. He couldn't help himself though; he was so achingly hard that he removed his spare hand from Bill's hip, fumbled with his belt and zip and dived into his underwear. He couldn't help moaning as his fingers encircled his own cock and, from the way Bill trembled from head to foot, he thought it was probably good for Bill too.

With that in mind he fisted his cock, sucked on Bill's and hummed at the same time. Bill swore very loudly and colourfully, shuddered as if motor control was a completely forgotten ability and warm liquid hit the back of Tom's throat. He swallowed automatically and the simple eroticism of the experience was more than enough to send him tumbling over the edge of orgasm as well. He just about managed to use the hand that had been fondling Bill to keep his motor functionally challenged twin in place as his own body dissolved in spasms of wonderful sensation.

Bill was leaning against the wall, eyes closed in perfect bliss and, when his twin slowly began to slide down into a sitting position, Tom let him. They were both just about sentient as far as Tom could tell, but he had no intention of moving far for a while and managed to flip himself sideways and land in a boneless heap against the wall next to Bill.

"Nghhh," was what Bill said and for once Tom had no idea what his twin had been trying to say.

He couldn't be bothered to find out either; it clearly wasn't important.

They would have stayed that way for a considerable length of time, except for the fact that Bill's phone beeped and announced Bill had a text message. Bill was almost as addicted to the phone as Tom was to Bill, so Tom wasn't surprised when Bill fished in his pocket and pulled the infernal machine out. At first Bill frowned and Tom was momentarily worried that something was up, but after one click Bill laughed and turned to phone his way.

"Impressive vocab, Georg," was what the message said and Tom grinned as well.

It seemed that maybe Georg was getting used to the idea; it was always a good sign when Georg could joke about things. That was the good part, but he also made a mental note to make sure Bill had more things to do with his mouth so they weren't too loud next time.

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Tom and Bill were lounging close to each other on one side of the bed, Georg was lounging on the other and Gustav was sprawled in a very comfortable looking armchair as they watched a bad pay-per-view movie on the wide screen TV in Bill's hotel room. It was a free day after the previous night of somewhat indulgent drinking and they had all been too tired to bother going off and doing their own thing, so they had been working on a new song, but they had all decided they were too tired, or possibly that should have been hung-over, for that as well, hence the movie.

It was a very cheesy film, but it had some big explosions and some cool lines every now and then, so Tom was happy. He was in the comfortable place between waking and sleeping where he was just about paying attention, but he could drop off at any moment and, with Bill relaxed against him, he was content. There had been something that little bit more relaxed about Bill since their fun the previous evening and it was comforting. Tom was beginning to think that a simple blow job had been more of a major milestone than he could have guessed.

None of them were really with it, all staring at the screen without the usual comments that went along with watching movies together. If you could get Bill to shut up all the way through a film you were usually doing well, but even Bill was just quietly watching. If it hadn't been for the odd explosion on screen Tom was sure he would have been asleep. However, he wasn't far enough gone that when Bill suddenly tensed and sort of squeaked he failed to notice it. He looked down to see Bill staring at the tub of sweets, which they'd kicked to the end of the bed so they didn't eat the whole thing. Bill had an expression on his face that seemed to suggest the innocent tub had just grown a head and spoken to him.

"Bill, something wrong?" he asked.

Bill blinked and then looked at him.

"Um, no," Bill replied, but didn't really sound convincing, "I think I must have fallen asleep for a moment and it was kind of funky."

"You're sure?" Tom asked, ever mindful that Bill liked to downplay things sometimes.

Bill nodded and relaxed again.

"Sorry, didn't mean to disturb you," Bill said and this time did sound as if everything was okay, so Tom went back to watching the film.

Peace reigned for five minutes or so, well at least if you considered peace an over blown car chase and some gun fire.

"Fuck," Bill said in a shocked voice, sitting up, "shit, shit, shit, shit, shit."

Tom sat up as well, because it was clear something was not okay.

"Bill, what's the matter?" he asked, realising that Bill was staring at the tub of sweets again.

"It moved," Bill said, sounding shocked and slightly scared, "I wanted it and it moved."

That didn't make a huge amount of sense.

"Come again?" he asked and Gustav flicked the sound on the TV to mute as everyone turned their attention to Bill.

"I wanted the sweets, but I didn't want to get up," Bill said, still staring at the offending box, "and I was trying to think of how to get them when it moved. The first time I thought I dreamed it, but it did it again."

Syb's warning about "other abilities" flashed into Tom's head, but he didn't voice it yet.



"Are you sure you weren't imagining it the second time as well," Georg asked, sitting forward to join them.

"Positive," Bill said and he sounded very sure, "I did it deliberately to see."

"So the box moved when you wanted it to?" Tom wanted to make sure they were all on the same page.

Bill looked at him then and he didn't think Bill had thought of it quite like that.

"Um, I think so," Bill sounded less sure now Tom was asking him about it.

"Okay," Tom said, deciding that a logical approach was required before Bill panicked about anything, "can you do it again?"

With a quick glance at the box Bill looked back at him and appeared unsure.

"Just try," he suggested and gave Bill a small smile, "to make sure it wasn't a fluke earthquake or something."

Bill rolled his eyes at that, but it did just what Tom had hoped, it made his twin forget the worry and focus on proving Tom was an idiot. Pulling his legs under him, Bill sat crossed legged and then stared at the tub and Tom waited to see what would happen. After about ten seconds with nothing occurring he heard Georg take a breath to say something, but he silenced his friend with one look as Bill continued concentrating. It took another twenty seconds or so, but then it happened; the tub shook just a little and moved about half a centimetre towards Bill.

"Oh my god," Gustav said, and Tom could only agree.

"That definitely moved," Georg added his support to what seemed to be unanimous agreement.

The only problem was, Bill was not celebrating the success, in fact Bill was biting his lip and seemed to be back to worried.

"Am I supposed to be able to do that?" Bill asked, looking at him and seeming more than a little lost.

Tom leant forward, took Bill's hand and put their foreheads together.

"There's no supposed about it," he said, giving Bill a smile, even though he was pretty sure his twin couldn't see it at the moment; "you are writing the rules as you go along. Syb told me there might be things like this, but she didn't say what and she didn't want to worry you with it, because there was no way of telling. I think this might be a sign you're getting the hang of this vampire malarkey."

Bill looked relieved, but a little wary as well as Tom sat back again.

"But it's weird," Bill whispered as if he didn't want the others to hear.

"It's not weird," Georg said, clearly having heard and using a stage whisper to make his point, "it's really cool. Can you do it again?" Georg added in a normal voice.

Bill gave Georg a look so scathing that it made Tom laugh and Georg grinned as well; things were looking up if Bill was trying to make someone feel about an inch high.

"It might be a good idea to see what you can do," Tom defended himself when the scathing look was turned on him for laughing; "it's probably better to know these things."

"Forewarned is forearmed," Gustav added and Tom gave his friend a stare that said 'thanks for nothing' since he really didn't want Bill thinking of this as a problem.

Luckily for Gustav, before he could tell their drummer off, Bill humphed and stared at the box again, seemingly unworried by the comment and obviously deciding it was good advice. Tom settled in next to his twin and waited to see what would happen.

In three hours, Bill went from being able to make the sweets move a little bit, to having them slide most of the way across the bed. It seemed that real want helped in the task, because when Tom had started to use the sweets as bribes, Bill's performance had improved quite dramatically. At Tom's urging Bill was just trying to see if he could actually lift the tub off the bed rather than slide it around when there was a knock at the door.

"Shit," was Bill's loud opinion when the whole tub leapt into the air and dumped its contents on the floor.

It seemed that startling Bill when he was concentrating wasn't a good idea either.

"Guys," David's voice came through the door, "we need to know if you want room service or to eat in the restaurant later so we can organise it."

"I'll give him room service," Bill all but growled, glaring at the sweets all over the carpet.

"Not unless you want to have the whole vampire conversation you won't," Tom pointed out and climbed off the bed, hiding his smile.

Bill pouted and crossed his arms, looking like a petulant five year old and Tom used walking to the door to keep from doing something stupid like ruffling Bill's hair, which would bring down the wrath of Kaulitz the Younger on his head.

"What the hell happened here?" David asked, walking in to the room once Tom opened the door.

Trashing hotel rooms, even by dumping food all over them was frowned upon.

"You happened," Bill said in a tone that was just the wrong side of dangerous; "I was holding them and you startled me. Now they're all over the floor."

Luckily for them all, David had learned the signs many years ago and knew when not to push it. Their manager held up his hands.

"Sorry," David said, even though Tom knew that there really was no blame, "I can have housekeeping up here in a couple of minutes to clear it up if you like and I have three more tubs of those in my room."

"Another tub might be good," Gustav said, standing up, "but I think we can manage the clean up."

Ever neat and tidy, Gustav began to pick up the mess.

"So," David said, smiling and clearly hoping the topic was closed, "what's the verdict; room service or restaurant?"

"I vote for restaurant," Georg said, moving to help Gustav; "the room service for lunch sucked."

Tom nodded; he had to agree, the room service had been less than stunning.

"Too right," Gustav vocalised his agreement, but Tom had to smile when everyone looked at Bill to see what their singer would say.

"Majority rule is fine," Bill said with a shrug; "lunch really was shit."

Crisis over, everything seemed to be back to normal and Tom breathed a sigh of relief. It was nice when hurdles were that easily overcome.

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During dinner it had become clear that David had not completely been forgiven for interrupting Bill's practice session when the salt mysteriously upended in David's drink, but that was the only incident all evening. The way Bill looked incredibly pleased with himself afterwards made Tom think that his twin had managed to do it without actually touching the salt seller, but nobody had seen anything, so he hadn't been sure. It could have been simple revenge so he didn't bother mentioning it.

They fell into bed just before midnight and given that the rest of the evening had been full of a few drinks, some laughs and Georg being summarily dismissed by a young woman in the bar, Tom had almost forgotten about the whole thing.

"Do you think there'll be anything else?" were the words that alerted him to the fact that Bill definitely hadn't.

They were lying beside each other in bed, hands lightly touching, and Tom had just been drifting off to sleep, but he woke up for Bill.

"I don't know," he replied, since he honestly didn't; "according to Syb day dwellers don't conform to ... well ... anything. She said that really old Strigoi sometimes develop powers as they age and they become resistant to sunlight and it's like those who become day dwellers straight away miss out the whole needing to age part. It's like you were born a thousand years old, Bill."

"Why didn't Syb tell me this?" Bill asked, turning on his side.

Tom did the same so he could look at his twin. He couldn't see a whole lot in the dim light coming through the curtains from a lamp outside, but he knew Bill would be able to see him clearly.

"Because she didn't want you to worry," he explained, taking Bill's hand properly under the duvet, "and I agreed. There is no way of predicting what you may or may not be able to do, so we decided you had other things to worry about. I know you like to know everything, but I'm sorry, Billi, you weren't ready for a long time and then I thought we might as well wait until you needed to know."

For a little while Bill didn't reply and Tom couldn't see his twin's expression well enough to tell what Bill was thinking.

"Protecting me again," Bill said eventually, fingers playing up the front of his chest.

Tom remained silent, waiting for Bill to finish the thought process.

"You've always protected me," Bill told him and he could just see the ghost of a smile in the low light, "I can't be mad at you for that."

"Good," he replied quietly, "because I don't know how to stop."

He could see Bill looking at him and basked in his twin's attention.

"Make love to me," were the hushed words that made his breath catch in his throat.

He blindly reached behind him towards the side of the bed, because now he needed to see Bill; he couldn't have this conversation without that. When he flicked the light on Bill squinted at him and he moved back to where he had been so they were face to face. Bill didn't seem to mind that he had turned the light on, but it was several seconds before his twin could stop blinking.

"What do you want to do?" he asked, feeling ridiculously nervous even as he spoke.

"Everything," Bill said with complete sincerity in his face.

Tom's mouth went dry and he had to admit that he was a little afraid.

"Are you sure it's not too soon?" he asked, even though he had never been one to take it slowly before Bill.

Bill was the most important thing in the world to him and when they finally took it all the way it had to be perfect.

"You don't want to?" Bill responded, seeming suddenly worried.

That made Tom laugh, he couldn't help it.

"Oh god, Bill," he said, needing Bill to understand that this had nothing to do with want, "I want to; I really want to, but I need to be sure you're ready."

Bill looked into his eyes then; the same stare that could frighten the hardest man, but which only seemed to pull him closer.

"I am ready," Bill told him, never breaking eye contact, "and I want you to make love to me, Tom, please."

Tom felt as if his heart might explode; it was beating so fast.

"You want me ..?"

Bill nodded before he could finish.

"Maybe it would be better if you were top first," he suggested, and his nervousness spiked, but it wasn't an idea he was averse to.

Bill took his face between long fingered hands and he shut up.

"Every time you touch me," Bill spoke slowly and carefully, "you take away part of what he did to me. My body forgets what he felt like and only remembers you. Please make love to me, Tomi, take away the last of his touch; I want to be free."

There was no way Tom could say no to that, there was no way he wanted to and he moved over a little so he could lean forward and kiss Bill ever so lightly on the lips.

"It would be my honour," he said quietly; "I would love to."

He was very well aware of the logistics of what Bill was asking for, since he had done his homework, and he knew there were several things they were going to need.

"Don't move," he said with a small smile and slipped out of bed.

For some time he had been prepared for every contingency and there was a wash bag in his case that didn't hold anything to do with washing, which he retrieved and brought back to the bed. Bill was sitting up by then and Tom decided to let his twin see everything he had, so he dumped the contents on the bed. There was lube; condoms; two dildos, one tiny, one slightly bigger that vibrated; and what had been laughingly named a love egg. He had used all three toys on himself after he had bought them just to make sure they did what they said and he had been pleasantly surprised.

"Don't need those," was the first thing Bill said and took the condoms and threw them over his shoulder.

Tom opened his mouth to protest; he had been well trained in that area.

"I can't get diseases, which means you can't get any from me, and even if you did I could cure it in about five seconds, and I'm clean," Bill said before Tom could get any words together, "I made sure in the shower earlier."

Tom almost forgot how to think at the mental image that statement conjured. Bill clearly had certain ideas that were not going to be shifted and, looking into his twin's eyes, Tom didn't even try and argue.

"Okay," he agreed.

"So what are the other things for?" Bill asked, seemingly very interested.

"Playing," Tom said with a small smile, "well and preparation. Sorry, lover, but I wasn't going to let you near me with those talons you call nails until you'd had at least a bit of practice. Since we're going the other way around that won't be a problem, but these could be fun anyway."

Bill appeared dubious.

"Honestly," Tom said, becoming serious again and reaching out and stroking Bill's arm, "I think you'll like them, but all I really wanted was this."

He picked up the lube and showed it to his twin; he wanted to make sure Bill was completely aware of everything. Then he threw the toys back in the bag and put it on the bedside table. Having Bill freak out because he took things too fast was simply not an option. As it was, Bill looked kind of nervous.

"Hey," Tom said, moving a little closer; "you're allowed to change your mind at any time; I won't be annoyed."

Bill shook his head.

"I'm not going to change my mind," Bill said and almost sounded like he meant it.

It was obvious that Bill wasn't completely sure, but Tom knew that if he continued asking questions Bill would probably end up annoyed and frustrated with him. Bill very rarely went back on decisions, but Tom had to make sure that Bill knew in this case he could. Pushing his worries aside for now, he crawled over to Bill and leant in to kiss his nervous twin. The first order of business was to make sure that Bill wasn't thinking too hard.

Sustaining the kiss, he pushed the lube under the pillow and then slowly urged Bill to lie down again. Foreplay was something he had down to an art form and he knew just how to get Bill to relax. There was one particular spot about halfway down the left side of Bill's neck that was incredibly sensitive. Tom suspected it was where Bill had been bitten when he was made a Strigoi, not that he was ever going to mention that to Bill, but he was going to exploit it. He knew he'd made the right choice as soon as he kissed the well memorised spot, because Bill relaxed and made encouraging noises almost instantly.

They had both been ready to sleep nearly naked so there was little annoying cloth in the way and he let one hand wander up and down Bill's torso, eliciting delightful little sounds of pleasure from his twin. Bill was always responsive to his fingers; it seemed Bill loved to be touched and that someone had almost robbed Bill of that pleasure by tainting it forever made Tom so angry he could have killed, which was why he rarely let himself think about it. He loved to see and hear the enjoyment as Bill let him explore.

He had no intention of rushing things and he moved over Bill's torso, using his mouth and his hands to see just how insane he could drive Bill without actually dipping below the waist. He'd had quite a lot of practice, so he was really rather good at it by now. Bill kept trying to reciprocate, but Tom wanted his twin relaxed and just enjoying the receiving rather than trying to give anything back, so he kept doing things that had Bill completely losing track of what he'd been trying to do. By the time he actually decided to move things up a gear, Bill was so turned on that Tom was almost bucked off as he slipped his hand between Bill's legs.

"Oh god," Bill said, panting heavily, "that's good."

"Just wait 'til I get under the shorts," Tom said in a low tone as he nuzzled at Bill's neck.

Bill gave a little whine at that revelation and Tom decided to take pity on his strung out twin and dipped his fingers under the elastic of Bill's waistband. Bill made some very interesting, appreciative noises and spread his legs obligingly, so Tom was pretty sure his twin liked what he was doing.

"My hand aches," Tom said after a few moments of contented fondling; "I think it's time to get rid of the annoying underwear."

The way Bill grumbled when he removed his hand made him smile, but he had no intention of leaving Bill wanting for long. He moved down the bed, took hold of Bill's waistband and pulled downwards as Bill lifted his hips. Bill's ample erection bobbed free and Tom whipped the underwear completely off as fast as humanly possible. Since he didn't want to bother with it later, he did the same with his own and the settled back down beside and slightly leaning over Bill.

"No where were we?" he asked and gave Bill his best cheeky smile.

Bill just grabbed his hand and guided it back to where it had been, which sent hot streaks of desire through every nerve in his body. He would have said something, but Bill clearly wasn't interested in talking as he found himself in the middle of a very passionate kiss and so he gave up trying to think for a while and just went with it. As long as Bill was enjoying himself then so was Tom and Bill was very definitely enjoying himself.

He continued to fondle and touch Bill for several minutes until he was sure his twin was completely in the moment and not thinking about anything except the next sexual gratification. Then, taking the lube from its hiding place, he began to work his way down Bill's chest, moving his hand slowly up and down Bill's cock, making sure his twin was thoroughly distracted. He left the lube on the bed within reached and lifted himself up and over one of Bill's legs so that he was lying between his twin's thighs. Bill was like the finest of guitars and needed to be played with great care and Tom felt like the greatest virtuoso at the particular moment. He had been caught rather off guard by Bill's initial request, but he had everything laid out in his head now.

Arranging himself carefully, he breathed on Bill's cock and he felt Bill twitch in response. It was quite clear they both knew where this was going and that Bill was very much looking forward to it. Almost lazily, he let his tongue circle the head of Bill's erection and the way Bill moaned and let his legs fall open slightly further had erotic messages running all over Tom's body. It was at moments like that when Tom couldn't help thinking that Bill was made for love; he had never been with a girl who could turn him on the way Bill did.

He didn't want Bill too close to the edge, but he did want Bill so far down the path that his twin would not be thinking too hard. Bill's fear was still there, oh Bill hid it well most of the time, but Tom could still see it and he didn't want Bill remembering anything that he wasn't doing to him. Sucking gently, he played with Bill with one hand just as he had the previous evening, but he didn't allow himself to become as lost in the experience. He had a specific purpose with every movement and slowly he was urging Bill's legs further apart as he carefully insinuated himself into the gap.

When he had Bill as splayed as he thought he could get without deliberately moving his twin, he reached for the lube. Keeping Bill as distracted as possible by applying some tongue to the proceedings, Tom popped off the top of the lube and quickly coated two fingers. These he used to rub gently over the area just behind Bill's balls, spreading the lubrication slowly so that Bill became used to the sensation. He knew Bill knew what he was doing now because he felt Bill tense just slightly, but he took his time and Bill gradually relaxed again as he kept up what he was doing. Only once Bill felt ready did he slowly slide one finger further back, venturing into territory that he had dared not explore before.

As his finger brushed over Bill's hole he heard his twin make a tiny little noise and he stopped everything he was doing instantly. That hadn't been a noise of pleasure and he could feel the sudden tension running through Bill.

"Bill," he said, looking along his twin's body to where Bill had one arm thrown over his face, "look at me, lover."

He knew Bill wanted this, but now he wasn't sure at all that Bill was ready. He didn't move away, but he stayed perfectly still and waited as Bill slowly moved his arm and looked at him.

"We can just do what we did last night," he offered, hating the shadow of fear he could see in Bill's face.

All Bill had to do was say and he would stop straight away, but Bill shook his head.

"Keep going," Bill said and his twin's voice was firm and resolute.

"Then watch me," Tom said, never breaking eye contact, "so that you know it's me."

Bill nodded just slightly and Tom glanced down very quickly before looking up again and looking his twin straight in the face. He moved his finger very slowly, brushing it over Bill's hole lightly, teasing the tense muscle there and waiting until Bill became used to the idea. It took a while; the whole thing clearly made Bill uncomfortable, but slowly the pleasant sensation seemed to make it through whatever was going on in Bill's head. Like a master craftsman preparing to cut a diamond, he moved with the utmost care lest he ruin his art.

Very gently he pushed the lubricated finger against Bill's entrance, slowly increasing the pressure until the strong muscle gave and allowed him entrance. The way Bill tensed and the expression on his twin's face told Tom that Bill wasn't at all sure it was a pleasant experience, but Tom kept his finger moving, slowly and carefully.

He knew from his few trials with the toys that it felt odd having something pushed up there, but he also knew how good it could feel and he was positive that Bill's resistance came from memory rather than what he was doing. He needed to show Bill how good this could feel and so he began to work his beloved twin with the utmost care. As soon as Bill seemed used to the experience he moved forward again and took Bill's cock back into his mouth.

Bill made a slightly strangled noise and began panting a little and, as Tom looked along the line of his twin's slim body, he saw the beginnings of pleasure in Bill's features again. Now he decided to bring in the big guns. He had found his own prostate pretty rapidly when he had decided to go looking and his reaction had been so strong that he'd almost ended up in heap in the corner of the shower; he hoped Bill was similarly responsive. Curling his finger, he angled his next push at what he hoped was the right place and sucked on Bill's cock at the same time.

The words that fell from Bill's mouth were not overly coherent and Tom didn't bother trying to decipher them, especially since he was pretty sure half of them were curses. It seemed Bill was as responsive as he had been and, if the way the words dissolved into a deep, sustained moan were anything to go by, it was a very good response. Another good indication was the way Bill's thighs shifted further apart.



It took him another ten minutes of gently playing and a lot more lube to work two fingers into Bill, but by then he could feel his twin loosening up significantly. Lifting himself up, he moved back a little; he needed more room for more fingers.

"Lift your legs," he said, even as he kept his fingers in place, "I want to see what I'm doing."

Bill went a lovely shade of pink at that, but did as he was asked.

"Oh god," Tom said, using what seemed to have become one of Bill's favourite phrases at the moment, "do you have any idea how completely amazing you look right now?"

Bill bit his lip and managed to blush even more. Tom decided he had never really desired anyone in his life properly before; not compared to the feelings that had him in their thrall now.

He opened the lube again and withdrew his fingers for a moment, putting plenty more of the gel onto them and then massaging them back into Bill. Then, as carefully as he could, he added a third finger and Bill groaned as he did so, but it slipped in relatively easily.

"Okay," he asked to make sure.

Bill nodded, eyes closing and head going back again.

Tom was in no hurry, even though his own erection was throbbing and in need of attention, and he worked the his fingers in and out of Bill until he was sure that his twin was as ready as possible. His heart was pounding in his chest when he finally pulled them free; this was it, the moment he had been anticipating from the moment he had come to terms with what he and Bill were now.

He loved Bill with everything he had and this was the most intimate thing he could give his twin.

Bill's eyes opened as he moved into place between his twin's raised legs and it filled his heart with the most amazing feeling as all he saw in Bill's gaze was perfect trust.

"Ready?" he asked, even though he already knew the answer.

Again Bill nodded as if words had deserted him.

Tom leant over and grabbed the other pillow before urging Bill's hips up and pushing it underneath. Bill was a lovely shade of pink again by the time he had finished, but there was no objection from his beloved twin. Hurting Bill was his greatest fear and so he lined himself up with the greatest care.

"Now, Tomi," Bill said, looking up at him like some debauched angel, "take me now."

There was nothing Tom wanted more in the world than to make Bill completely his and he eased forward slowly. Bill made a breathy, panting sound, but it was more surprise than anything else, so Tom paused, but did not pull away. Even after only such a little movement Tom could already feel Bill's body tight around

his cock and he wanted to push further in so much it was almost a need. Only the thought that he might hurt his precious twin held him still.

"More," Bill said after a moment.

Tom was happy to let Bill take the lead, so he slowly eased forward and he felt resistance almost immediately and Bill gasped, this time it was discomfort so he stopped and pulled back just a tiny bit. The frown that had appeared on Bill's face disappeared almost instantly. Tom tried again and felt the same resistance and it seemed Bill was unconsciously tensing up every time he tried to move forward.

"Sorry," Bill apologised after grimacing again.

"This is supposed to take practice," Tom said, doing his best to smile even as his body was humming with arousal.

Telling Bill to relax would probably do as much good as telling the Indian Ocean to freeze, so Tom decided on a slightly different approach. Very carefully he began to move, first slightly forward, then slightly back, almost nothing more than a rocking motion. Bill looked a little confused to begin with, but as he continued, Bill's eyes began to close and Bill began to make a little humming sound, a very good humming sound. Ever so gradually Tom increased his movements, trying to never push too hard. He over did it just once or twice, but the expression on Bill's face gave everything away, so he knew what he was doing wrong and right.

It kind of seemed to happen by magic then; one moment there was resistance trying to keep him out and the next Bill opened to him and he slid home as if they were made for each other. Bill gasped and bucked up as he slid into him, but it was with a bemused amazement on his face that Tom could only share. He hadn't been able to stop himself moving forward and he would have been worried that he had hurt Bill had it not been for the look on Bill's face.

"Okay?" he asked, just to be sure.

Bill nodded wordlessly, still appearing amazed. Tom took that as permission to move because, quite frankly, he had to. The way Bill's muscles were squeezing his cock was driving him insane and he needed to react to it. Bill groaned, long and low as Tom pulled out and then pushed back in again. There was no sudden resistance now and it felt incredible; so incredible that Tom did it again as quickly as he dared.

Bill's head fell back onto the pillow and Tom felt his twin pushing into his movements. It was wonderful and the intensity of the sensation around his cock was far more than Tom had expected; Bill was far tighter than any girl and the fact that this was Bill made all the difference as well. He had never felt so at one with any other human being and, as he continued to move, he was not just interested in his pleasure, or just Bill's pleasure, but both of theirs. As Bill bucked up a little and managed to change their angle he slid home and he knew he'd all but slammed into Bill's prostate because Bill made a high keening sound, half pleasure, half overload and for all the difference it made it could have been his body that was being bombarded, because of all the physical feedback he was getting.

He couldn't last long, not with the overwhelming pressure and heat and he could feel how close Bill was as well.

"Tomi," Bill said breathlessly, "I'm ... I'm going ..."

The new sensations were having the same effect on Bill and Tom had been about to reach out to make sure Bill went first, but instead he kept up the steady thrust. Words began to spill from Bill's lips like a quiet mantra; words like 'yes' and 'more' and 'oh god' and it was almost like Bill was singing to him. He was so very, very close and he knew that it would only take the smallest of pushes to send him reeling into orgasm, but he hung on grimly as he waited for Bill.

"Oh god," Bill sounded desperate and strung out and just about there, "Tomi!"

When his twin came with his name on his lips, Tom didn't need the sensation of muscles clamping down around his cock to send him over the edge; he was already there. He buried himself inside Bill, needing to be as close as physically possible to his bond mate as they finally expressed that bond at its ultimate level of human intimacy. The well of pleasure and of rightness exploded through him and it carried every sensible thought he had away with it.

His whole body was shaking and all his extremities were tingling and he was sure it was the hardest orgasm of his entire life. He wanted it to go on forever, but his arms didn't want to hold him and his legs were trembling like they would give out at any second so he had no choice but to pull out carefully before he did something that might damage either of them.

Tom collapsed on the bed beside Bill, spent and happy, but he couldn't close his eyes for long; he needed to see Bill. The moment he opened them, he saw the tear leaking out the side of the one closed eye of Bill's that he could see from his current angle and he instantly panicked.

"Oh shit, Bill," he said, sitting up and wanting to gather his twin into his arms and comfort him, but not daring to, "did I hurt you?"

There were tears running down both of Bill's cheeks and Tom was terrified that he had done something unforgivable. Only as his brown eyes opened and looked into his own and his arms reached for him did he start to calm down and then only slightly. He had his arms full of Bill in moments and he held his shaking, silently crying twin close, not having a clue what to do. He really didn't understand what was happening.

"Thank you," Bill whispered in his ear after long moments of silence, "thank you so much, Tomi."

He was still completely confused when Bill pulled back and it was only then that he realised Bill was smiling through the tears.

"I didn't really believe," Bill said and paused, "I wanted to, but I thought it would hurt ... I thought I might never ... but you ... Tomi, you gave me it back. I'll never ... be ..."

About half way through his speech Bill began hiccupping as the tears started flowing in earnest and Tom just gathered his twin up again. Now he understood; now he was no longer afraid.

"Oh, Bill," he said quietly, letting Bill calm down against his shoulder, "I love you and I'm going to make love to you and with you for ever."

Bill managed to laugh and hiccup at the same time, which resulted in a very peculiar sound, but neither of them broke away. Tom didn't care if they stayed that way all night; all he cared about was his Bill and his Bill was a little mixed up, but seemed, over all, to be incredibly happy.

End of Part 16

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## Chapter 17 Revenge

"Morning, David," Bill said brightly, bouncing up to their manager, giving him a hug and then bouncing away again, "it's a lovely day isn't it?"

David looked at Tom, clearly shell-shocked as Bill moved on to assaulting various others in the entourage with his happiness.

"Tell me he's not discovered drugs, please," David said, walking over to Tom and speaking in a very low voice.

Tom had to grin at that; there was nothing quite like Bill in full-out joy mode.

"He hasn't," he said and watched Bill chatting animatedly with Tobi, "he's just in a really good mood."

David actually smiled at that.

"That's great," David said and looked genuinely pleased, "I don't think I've seen him like this since..."

It was as if David had just realised what he was saying and to whom, but Tom knew what his friend had been about to mention.

"Since before the kidnapping," Tom finished for his manager; he was too pleased with the way Bill seemed so happy to be pulled down by anything, "I know, neither have I."

It was wonderful to see his Bill back to his old self and he wanted it to go on forever and ever. In the end it lasted for three days, and then Syb called.

"Hi, this is Tom," he answered Bill's phone since Bill was in the middle of a sound check and he recognised the ring tone Bill had just for Syb.

"Hi, Tom," Syb greeted him from the other end of the call, "I have some good news."

"You've caught the bastard?" Tom took a wild guess.

"Not quite," Syb replied and Tom's spirits fell a little bit, "but we're close. We know who he is and we found his lair. He got out just before we raided the place, but we have his associates and it is only a matter of time now. Without his bolt hole there is nowhere for him to go; we'll have him before the week is out."

"Can you be sure of that?" he asked, he did not want to tell Bill about something like this and for it not to be true.

"It's almost over, Tom," Syb told him and it sounded as if she understood where he was coming from. "The Finders have the feel of his essence now, he didn't have time to scour the lair; it won't take then more than two nights to track him down like the beast he is. When we have him I will let you know."

If Tom remembered correctly Finders were Strigoi with low level psychic aptitude that gave them ability to track other Strigoi by the psychic residue they left behind. He didn't really understand it, but it was something to do with a bloodline trait and he did know that Finders very rarely failed.

"Thanks, Syb," Tom replied, feeling incredibly relieved.

Once the bastard was caught and tried the nightmare would be finished and then they would be able to close that chapter in their history. He looked up at the stage, prepared to send Bill some sort of signal that he wanted to talk to him, but Bill was already looking at him. There had to have been a gap in the sound tests, because he could see that Bill knew already; his twin must have heard every word.

He gave Bill a smile to show that he thought this was good and Bill gave a little nod in return, but Bill was just a little bit cowed when the sound check resumed. Watching his beloved twin, Tom vowed that he was going to make Bill happy again and this time he would never let anything change that.

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Something wasn't right; that was all Bill could think as they all stepped out of the lift onto the floor of their hotel. They were doing a signing at a big music store the next day, so they were in a hotel again for the night. They'd added more dates to the tour so things were speeding up again, which could have had something to do with it, but he suspected it was more to do with Syb's news of a few days ago.

It was a nice enough hotel and the staff was very pleasant, but something set Bill's teeth on edge from the moment he walked in. It hadn't helped that both he and Sven had sensed another Strigoi when they had walked in, but it had turned out to be a fan in the bar. Tokio Hotel even had fans amongst his own kind now and it wasn't the first time they had bumped into one. Bill and Tom had hurriedly signed something and Sven was currently escorting the woman from the building so that there were no further distractions.

That didn't help either; Bill always felt safer when it was dark if Sven wasn't too far away. Saki was still with them, as was David, but Bill was on edge as they walked towards their rooms. It was halfway down the corridor that Bill heard Saki's phone beep and then he felt the presence of another Strigoi. For a moment he assumed it was Sven following them up in the lift, but he started to worry when he realised the presence added to his feeling of wrongness.

There was a bend in the corridor beyond where their rooms were and Bill found his eyes zeroing in. When a figure stepped round that corner, he went cold all over and pure fear engulfed him. He couldn't move and he couldn't speak and all he could see was the face of the man at the end of the hall. Suddenly the fog in his memory that hid the face of his attacker from him fell away and he had no doubt who he was looking at. For long moments nothing existed in his awareness except the face he was seeing; he didn't even see what the Strigoi was doing.

The first Bill knew was when he felt the blast of something hitting his chest and he was flying backwards into the wall. It wasn't until he started to slip down the wall that the pain hit. The agony started in the centre of his chest and spread outwards and it consumed him. He couldn't breathe and there was the taste of blood in his mouth and the part of him that wasn't struggling realised he'd been shot.

It hurt. A lot.

Gunshot wounds would never be fatal to a Strigoi, but they still caused a great deal of debilitating pain. Bill could feel himself healing, which was part of what hurt, but he couldn't move. Even as he tried, he saw Saki rush the insane

vampire in the corridor, only to be backhanded and landing in a heap against the side wall.

"You filthy slut," his attacker all but screamed, "you destroyed my life."

Another shot and more pain, in his abdomen this time.

"Now I will destroy yours."

Everything slowed down as if time was making fun of him and all he could do was watch as millimetre by millimetre the insane vampire turned the gun from him and onto Tom. He could not even draw in enough breath to scream and he could see every tiny movement of muscle as the assailant began to squeeze the trigger. It was as if his vision tunnelled and all he could see was the gun. He actually heard the trigger click and saw the puff of smoke from the barrel and watched the bullet as it flew out of the weapon. It was like he was frozen in time and could neither move nor affect the world around him.

He saw Gustav move with agonizing slowness, pushing Tom as the first bullet sped towards them. The spray of blood was unmistakable as it hit home, sending Gustav sprawling backwards, even as another shot echoed through the hallway.

He saw this bullet hit Tom, high up on the right side and he watched as his twin twisted and fell, but he could not do anything to stop any of it. Only as Tom's scream of pain reached his ears did the world start moving properly again and it was as if his rational mind stepped sideways to let what lay beneath free reign. The pain, the injuries, everything was instantly irrelevant as pure adrenaline drove him into action.

He came to his feet with a scream that was completely inhuman and he shed his disguise like so much useless rubbish. There was nothing human about him now at all as instinct wiped away all he remembered from before, leaving everything he had become. He was Strigoï; powerful and eternal and nothing was beyond him.

The two mirrors on the walls exploded outwards along with the table and its flower arrangement sending shards of glass, wood and china into the air where they froze, twisting in place. They surrounded his enemy like a cloud, floating in place like thousands of small weapons and the creature that had dared do this to him stared at them in amazement. He saw the fear start, watched the realisation seep into his enemy's mind and the gun began to shake. For one moment their eyes met, an eternity in a microsecond and his assailant's finger moved on the trigger, but it was too slow. In that instant he sent every shard hurtling at the other Strigoï with the speed of tiny bullets, whistling through the air in high chorus.

Their attacker made only a gurgling sound as the gun fell from limp fingers, the bullet unfired, and Bill just watched as the vampire fell into a heap. He didn't care if he had killed his enemy; all he cared about was that the threat was gone.

As the other vampire hit the floor it was like a switch flipped and suddenly the pain came back. His strength was an illusion that shattered and he fell to the floor, right over Tom's legs. He couldn't move, he couldn't speak and he could barely breathe and everything around him began to dim. In the periphery of his vision he saw the lift doors open and people with guns and crossbows stream out of it and others appeared from the opposite direction and a corner of his mind realised the cavalry had arrived, just a minute or so too late.

"Keep them together," he thought he heard Syb's voice, and he felt someone moving him, but it was all so distant.

There was the sound of ripping material and then more pain as a hand touched his wounds, but he could barely grunt.

"What are you doing?" he thought it might have been David's voice.

"Bill's blood can heal them," was the short reply.

"But what about Bill?" Georg this time.

"He will heal anyway."

He felt a connection flare between him and Tom, as if he was feeding, but Tom's pain swamped him and on top of his own it was too much. When another, alien feeling joined it, he couldn't take it anymore. He had nothing left and he let his eyes close as he succinctly passed out.

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Bill tried to breathe and found that it was almost impossible, at which point he sat up, twisted to the side and began coughing. His lungs felt like they were full of something and he coughed and spat helplessly as someone patted him on the back, helping him move the congestion. His sides ached, his lungs hurt and his throat was sore, but finally he managed to draw a breath and it was like being reborn. He gasped for breath, dragging metallic tasting air into his lungs.

"Take it slow," he recognised Syb's voice and realised who was patting him on the back, "long deep breaths and you'll be fine."

It was also then that his brain clicked back in and he remembered what had been happening. He promptly panicked and tried to sit up and look around.

"Tom," he managed to croak as the world span at his too fast movements, "Gustav."

Everything played over in his brain with infinite attention to detail and he could barely make out reality from memory.

"Tom is behind you, sleeping," Syb told him, holding him up so he didn't fall off the bed, her voice bringing him back from the horrible recollections; "he will be fine. He's almost healed."

He turned, moving out of Syb's grasp, needing to see with his own eyes what she was telling him and, indeed, his twin was lying on the bed. Someone had removed Tom's shirts and Bill could see the red wound just below Tom's right shoulder. There was blood all down Tom's chest and blood in his dreadlocks, but the wound was nothing more than a scratch now and Bill could see it changing colour even as he watched. For a few moments all he could do was stare and then he reached out, placing his hand on Tom's arm and feeling warm life under his touch. It was only then that he realised half his question had been answered, but that still left a big gap.

His panic ebbing away, he had enough brain power to focus on something other than Tom and his eyes lifted to the next bed while his ears finally recognised the



sound of laboured breathing. Gustav was on the next bed, shirtless like Tom, but there was a wound in the centre of Gustav's chest and it was still an angry red.

"Gustav?" he put all his questions into his friend's name and looked at Syb.

Something was wrong, that much he was sure of or Syb would have told him straight away.

"The healing only partially worked," Syb said as he let his eyes run over Gustav again; "it brought him back part of the way, but he's not getting any better."

"Why?" Bill didn't really understand what was going on.

"Our blood is not a miracle cure," Syb told him, her tone as understanding as usual, but giving him the facts; "we change when we bond so that our saliva and blood can heal our bond mate perfectly, but that does not make us compatible with all humans. Small wounds are easily healed, but this was far worse than that."

"Then why is Gustav still here," he asked, trying to figure out what was going on, "why isn't he at the hospital?"

Syb looked sad at that point and he knew it was bad.

"It's too late; a hospital won't help," Syb said, reaching out and stroking his arm slowly; "he's partially healed, but that means his natural healing ability is weakened; he can't heal the wound normally."

Bill didn't believe what he was hearing.

"Then why...?" he almost exploded and only Syb taking his hand and looking him directly in the eye stopped him.

"He was going to die," Syb said in a way that meant he could not argue. "The bullet nicked his heart; he had already stopped breathing and there was no time; he would have died. It was a risk we had to take."

He looked over to where Gustav was lying and he didn't know what to do. Gustav had saved Tom; he had every moment of it etched in his brain, but now Gustav was stuck in some half life.

"What's going to happen?" he asked, fearing the answer, but needing to know.

"He'll die," Syb said, as honest as ever; "it will take time, but his body will eventually shut down and give up."

Bill felt tears prickle the back of his eyes; this couldn't be happening, it just couldn't.

"There has to be something we can do," he said, desperate for it not to be true.

This was so crazy and he didn't think he could deal with it. He wanted to curl up into a tiny ball and stay that way until everything went away, until the world wasn't insane anymore and life was like it used to be. He was a hair's breadth away from losing it completely and the only thing keeping him hanging on was the faint hope that there was something he could do to make it not real.

"There is one way to save him," Syb said, voice serious and hushed.

Bill turned to her, latching on to the real hope and when he looked into her eyes he knew what the 'one way' was. It hit him like a physical blow and his gaze swung to Gustav's unconscious form.

"But he can't choose," he said, "would he want that?"

Syb placed a hand on his shoulder, leaning close to him as he turned back to look at his friend again.

"If you do it there is a very good chance he will be just like you," were the words that gave him a little more hope. "Strigoi usually pass on many of their traits if they choose to make another."

He bit his lip.

"But what if he isn't?" he asked, feeling nervous and confused. "Gustav is a day person; the night would destroy him."

"That is the risk you must choose to take," Syb said, but not unkindly. "It is his only chance; neither human nor Strigoi can do anymore for him as he is."

There really was no choice; Bill couldn't just let Gustav die.

"What do I have to do?" he asked since there was no other path he could see.

"It will be difficult, Bill," Syb said, taking his hand; "the older a vampire the more difficult to make a child, because of the raw power involved, and you were born ancient. The first thing you need to do is feed."

Bill's eyes flicked to Tom, but he knew his twin wasn't strong enough for that, which meant he would have to feed from a different donor.

"I would offer myself," Syb told him as he ran through his options, "but it cannot be vampire blood, nor the blood of a vampire's bond mate or the essence will interfere with that of your own. You need to be perfectly focused so it must be human blood."

That really only left one person; one person who knew the whole truth; one person he trusted enough; and that was Georg. The real question was would Georg trust him enough for what was required.

"Georg," he said, looking around the room and realising for the first time that the only other person with them was Markus; "it has to be Georg. Where is everyone else?"

"They're next door," Markus finally made himself known now that Bill had noticed him.

"We couldn't risk interference," Syb explained and Bill nodded; that he could understand, "Sven and Klaus are looking after them."

Heaven knew what David and the rest of the team were thinking; it had to have been terrible for them, but Bill had no time to worry about that now.

"Go and clean up in the bathroom," Syb told him; "I will bring Georg here and explain what he needs to know."

Bill felt wobbly when he stood up, but he had a purpose now and he walked as fast as he could to the bathroom. What brought him to a halt was his reflection, because he barely recognised himself. His hair was virtually pure white, sticking up in all directions, his skin was ghostly pale and his eyes were a brownish red. To add to that, there was dried blood over his chin and the bottom half of his face as well as all over his torso and the wrecked t-shirt that was hanging off of him. He looked like a monster from a horror movie and for long seconds he stood there and stared.

It was the sound of the bedroom door opening and the distinct timbre of Georg's voice that brought him back. He was needed and he could melt down later. Stepping forward, he turned on the water in the sink, pulled out a washcloth and began to clean himself up. The t-shirt ended up in a heap in the corner with its dried blood and bullet holes and he washed himself off as well as he could. Then he ran a brush through his hair and pulled it back into a low ponytail out of the way.

When he was done, he looked more like a civilised monster and he quickly walked into the other room. Georg was sitting on the bed next to Gustav, holding their drummer's hand and he looked up as soon as Bill stepped out of the bathroom. The expression on Georg's face and the look in his friend's eyes told Bill all he needed to know.

"Tell me what to do," was all Georg said.

"Come and sit on the sofa," Bill said, doing his best not to sound as worried and anxious as he was.

He walked to the sofa himself and, as Georg sat down, he knelt down next to his friend.

"I'll try not to hurt you," he said, hoping that this would be almost like feeding on Tom.

He had never fed from anyone except his twin and he didn't know if he would be able to control it as well as he instinctively did with Tom.

"I don't care if you hurt me," Georg said, looking at him with a shell shocked, frightened gaze; "just save him, please."

Bill nodded; he was not going to let Gustav die and he was going to do everything in his power to make sure Gustav ended up like him. He was hungry; he hadn't needed the hair to show him that, and it was easy to let his fangs descend. The memory of the hallway flashed through his mind as he allowed his power to the surface, but he refused to allow it to move him from his purpose. Reaching out, he took hold of Georg's shoulders, holding firmly, but gently and then he leant forward. In response Georg moved his head to the side and Bill had free access.

Human skin was no object to razor sharp fangs and his teeth slid through Georg's flesh with ease. Georg gasped with pain and there was nothing Bill could do about it except hold his friend still, even as blood hit his throat. The feel of Georg was alien to him, his instincts were not finely tuned to the sensations he felt as some sort of temporary connection formed and it took him long moments to adjust. It

was like searching for a key hole in the dark and the light only came on as the key slipped into the lock.

Georg moaned low and long as Bill felt everything click into place and he could feedback the pleasure of the blood. Georg's hands gripped at his arms as if holding on to some lifeline of reality and Bill took his fill. He was almost starving, so it took longer than usual, but his instincts were good enough not to take too much and he drew back before he could hurt his friend. With a swipe of his tongue, the two small holes in Georg's neck vanished as completely as they always did on Tom.

He stood up and away as Georg slumped against the sofa and he did not wait to see his friend's reaction; he was not that brave. Looking at Syb for guidance he asked for direction without actually speaking.

"You must feed him some of your blood," Syb told him as he stepped towards Gustav's prone form. "You will feel a connection form and your natural reaction will be to shut it down, but you must accept it. Your own power will fight you because the connection makes you vulnerable; at a fundamental level you will be fighting yourself."

Bill nodded; he could do that.

"When you have yourself under control feed from Gustav," Syb continued to speak; "make his essence part of you. You will have to drain him until the point of death."

He looked round at her at that; it sounded so dangerous.

"You will know exactly when," Syb told him, seemingly understanding his quandary without him having to ask, "and at that point feed him again. The circle will complete; your power will join with Gustav and start to change him."

There wasn't much else to say really.

"Watch Tom for me please," he said, letting his eyes move over his unconscious twin one more time to reassure himself that Tom would be fine, and then he moved to the other bed.

Gustav's skin was incredibly pale and the sounds of breathing were almost painful to hear. It was so clear that Gustav was hovering between life and death, so close to the edge that it would only take a moment for it to all be over. Bill could not let that happen; not and live with himself. Sitting down, he brushed a, quite possibly, non-existent piece of fluff from Gustav's cheek as he did his best to gather himself. Nothing in this world stopped him from doing what he set his mind to and he wasn't going to let anything in the next stop him either.

Letting his fangs slip from his gums again, he lifted his own wrist to his mouth and bit down. Small wounds like fang marks would heal almost instantly and be useless for what he needed so he sucked the blood out of his own wrist. When he had a mouthful, he took his wrist away and leant forward. Leaning fully over Gustav, he opened his friend's mouth and carefully placed his own over it. The blood trickled from his lips as he let it free in a controlled stream straight into Gustav's mouth. It was almost a kiss and it certainly felt intimate enough to be one when he felt the connection, which Syb had warned him about, flare in the back of his mind.

Every instinct he had urged him to shut down what he was feeling and it took a supreme effort of will not to do so. The moment he resisted he felt a wave of energy sweep through him and it almost swamped the connection, but he held onto it grimly. For what seemed like a long time, he lost all sense of reality as he mentally stood like a rock and his own instincts tried to drag him from his purpose. It was like holding off a flood tide all by himself and he almost lost the feeling of Gustav several times.

He put his head back, yelling his frustration as he battled with himself. Nothing was going to stop him and he brought his considerable will to bear, forcing his wayward power back down inside himself. It did not want to go and it lashed back at him and he threw his eyes open, pushing himself away from Gustav and searching madly around the room with his gaze. It was like there were too many people in the room in the way and the only thing he seemed to see in his line of fire and far enough away from the others in the room was the TV. In a second it flared and died with a nasty bang as he threw his battle outwards.

It might not have been good for the television, but it was good for him and, when he harnessed his power this time it obeyed, retreating to his core, although it was anything but quiet. He knew it wouldn't be long before he started to lose control again, so he moved quickly. He pulled Gustav's unresponsive form into a sitting position and put himself between Gustav and the wall, sliding his legs either side of his friend and pulling Gustav back against his chest. Then, without hesitating, he bared his fangs and sank them into Gustav's neck.

His mind had already become used to the feel of Gustav, even though half of him was battling to be rid of it, so that was not a shock, but the cold that invaded him with the blood was. He knew what it was; instinctively he understood what he was feeling, but he still had to fight against the numbness it brought. Gustav was poised between life and death, held in limbo by vampire power; his power, now disconnected from himself, and it was the limbo that was cold. Fingers of ice seemed to run all through his body, inside and out. It felt like death trying to take him as well.

Drinking beyond his usual couple of mouthfuls was difficult; he wasn't starving as he had been with Georg, and once again he had to fight his instincts. At least this was not him fighting with his own power, simply his urge not to hurt Gustav. Causing damage was alien to him and by continuing what he was doing he was, by default, doing damage. He felt full and sated and he did not know if he could drink more, but he forced himself on, feeling Gustav's life force growing weaker and weaker.

It seemed to take forever, but then he felt it; the fluttering of a heart, almost as if it was his own, and he pulled back. The flash of the room in his vision was bright and garish, as if he had taken drugs and was on some sort of trip. There was no time to worry about it, though, as he lifted his wrist again, this time slashing it with his fangs and putting it straight to Gustav's lips.

All it took was a few drops; like a micro-switch moving a fraction of a millimetre to close a circuit, his blood slammed the connection home and his power leapt to fill the new avenue of exploration. He couldn't control himself anymore as he pushed Gustav away, screaming in pain as his life force was ripped from his body. It was like looking into an endless volcano that was erupting through him and into Gustav and he clawed at his skin as if it would peel away like burned parchment.

He had had no idea of the depth of power lurking inside him; it almost drove him mad just glimpsing it and only strong arms winding around him like a warm

blanket kept him anchored to reality. He could do nothing but lie in those arms as the energy inside him poured out of him into Gustav and back into him again like a stream of fire.

Time seemed endless.

"Sssh," was the first thing he heard over the roaring in his mind, "hold on, Love, just hold on."

His throat was raw and he realised that the hoarse whine was coming from his mouth, slowly becoming quieter, but it was as if someone else was making the noise, because it was not within his conscious control to stop it. Only slowly did it die away to nothing as his eyes gradually began to see what he appeared to be staring at. For a long time he had no idea he was looking up at Tom, staring into his twin's face as Tom held him, rocking him ever so gently.

Bill had felt every part of himself flow out into Gustav and back again and, even as Tom's features swam into focus, he felt the world slipping away again. This time when darkness took him it was cool, calm and welcome.

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Tom was shell-shocked and even as Bill passed out in his lap, for a while, all he could do was sit there, holding his twin and gently carding his fingers through Bill's hair. The last clear thing he remembered was a gun pointing at him, Gustav barrelling into him and then pain, and he had woken to hear Bill screaming. He had reacted without thinking, disregarding anything about himself and moved to try and help Bill.

He didn't think he had heard anything quite as terrible as the cry coming from Bill and to not be able to stop it had traumatised him almost as much as the events turning over in his memory. Now that Bill was finally quiet it was almost worse, because his thoughts were in such a jumble and he didn't have anything to focus on.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, holding Bill, he let his eyes leave his twin for the first time. Gustav was sprawled across half of the bed, blood smeared down his neck, over his front and over his face and Tom couldn't put it all together to make any sense.

"Tom," he turned to see Syb as her familiar voice requested his attention, "they'll be okay."

His befuddled mind just about grasped that, but he could feel the shock settling in. Thinking was hard and his chest ached and he was so completely confused that holding it together was difficult.

"You need to sleep some more," Syb spoke to him gently as if he was a child; "you're not fully healed yet."

At that he looked down at himself and saw the pink mark where the ache was coming from. All at once the gun and the shots and Bill falling and Gustav falling and then the pressure in his chest flooded into his mind in one huge wave. He'd been shot; he'd really been shot and the bastard who had taken Bill from him the first time had almost done it again. All the months of being strong, of making sure Bill was okay, of caring for his precious twin crashed down on him at the same time and he cracked. He was the strong one; he looked after Bill, he never

cried, but he was tired, hideously confused and he hurt: the sob that rose up in his chest would not be denied.

"Oh, Tom," Syb said and enclosed him in a very motherly embrace, holding him gently.

He clung to Bill, holding his unconscious twin in his arms and Syb held him as he cried his eyes out. He really didn't know what had happened and he didn't have the brain power to work it out as he caved to the stress. Syb just let him cry everything into her shoulder.

When he finally quieted, Syb pulled back and wiped the tears from his cheeks.

"Let's get you and Bill into the next bed and Markus and Georg can make sure Gustav's comfortable," Syb said, giving him a small supportive smile. "Everything will make more sense when you're not exhausted."

Tom didn't have the energy to argue; part of him wanted to know what was going on, but the rest of him knew he was in no state to demand explanations. He let Syb pick up Bill and move him to the next bed and he followed, climbing in beside Bill when Syb urged him to do so. It didn't take him more than a few minutes to let go of confusing reality and sink into the relief of sleep.

End of Part 17

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## Chapter 18 Plus One Makes Two

Sleeping forever seemed like a really good idea to Bill and he drifted towards waking a couple of time, but soon slid back into dreamland again. It wasn't until the third time that his consciousness came back online enough to urge him towards full wakefulness. Opening his eyes was tantamount to climbing Everest, but he did manage it after a couple of tries. It was at this point that he realised why breathing wasn't the easiest thing in the world; he had his face smushed up against Tom's chest where he and Tom were snuggled together so closely that the concept of personal space was completely non-existent.

He tried to move and Tom made a very disgruntled sound, pulling him closer and not letting him go. Relaxing again, he just lay there for a while and decided he quite liked it anyway. Going back to sleep wasn't an option, but lying there being cuddled by Tom wasn't at all unpleasant either. His brain was playing the one thought at a time game, so it didn't really occur to him that there might have been anything else he needed to do.

"Bill, are you awake?" he recognised Syb's voice and couldn't quite figure out why she would be there.

He vaguely hummed in reply.

"You need to wake up properly, Bill," Syb told him as he went back to relaxing; "Gustav will be waking soon."

Gustav? He really couldn't remember why he should be worried about Gustav, but the information niggled at the back of his mind. Not really clear who was where or why, he lifted his head and looked over Tom, at which point he realised he was in a hotel room, Gustav was lying on the next bed with Georg sat beside him and it all came rushing back.

His mind had been cheerfully protecting itself until that moment and then he remembered everything and he pulled away from Tom in shock, sitting up. Gasping, he did his best to re-find his equilibrium, but for a moment it was touch and go. Tom groaning and rolling over helped a great deal.

"Someone please tell me there are drugs," Tom said, squinting up at him, "I feel like I have a hangover from hell."

Bill had to blink when Markus appeared beside the bed and handed Tom two white pills and a glass of water.

"You do," Markus said with his usual smirk, "vampire blood direct to the system causes metabolic changes and coming down is a bitch."

Tom lent up on one elbow, popped the pills into his mouth, took a mouthful of water, swallowed and then flopped down again, holding the glass out to Markus. All this was done with the flair of one who had had practice with hangovers on several occasions. Bill found himself wanting to apologise as Tom made a face, but the thought that a hangover was probably less painful than a bullet hole kind of held him back.

"And how are you feeling, Bill?" Syb asked and he turned to find that his mentor was sitting on the other side of the bed.



"Fine," he said, since he couldn't identify anything he couldn't cope with, at least not physically, "just tired and I ache a bit."

"You'll probably feel that way for a day or so," Syb told him and gave him a small smile. "You did very well."

"It was so hard," he found himself saying even as his mind shied away and refused to give him all the details of what he had done.

There was one thing the experience had taught him that he didn't understand.

"If it's so hard," he said, looking at Syb even as Tom began playing with one of his hands, "why did he ... the one who ... why did he change me?"

"For younger vampires it is much easier," Syb told him, "and some enjoy the sensation of the power transfer. It is also far easier to hide a pile of ash than a drained body. Nikols is already regretting that decision."

The first thing Bill noted was the name of his attacker, but he also definitely caught the present tense of that statement.

"He's still alive?" he asked, not sure whether to be relieved or petrified.

Syb nodded.

"You shredded him," she replied and sounded a little too pleased about that; "a very good job, and he probably won't have healed by the time he is executed, but you didn't kill him. That at least should reduce the paperwork."

It was difficult to know how to react, so Bill simply didn't and instead put his attacker from his mind. He looked back over to the other bed instead, to his second worry. Gustav was incredibly pale and the drummer's normally blond hair was pure white, but the wound in his chest was gone. The conversion had clearly worked, and now all Bill had to worry about was how well it had worked.

"Is he going to wake up soon?" Tom asked and Bill looked down to find that his twin was looking in the same direction.

"Very soon," Bill said at the same time Syb did and he realised he was picking up on something he hadn't noticed until that moment.

He glanced over at Syb and she gave him a small smile, seemingly pleased with his reaction.

"And he's going to be hungry," Syb told him, standing up and walking around the end of the bed.

As if to back this up, Gustav moved, almost going to turn over, but then relaxed back in place again.

"Who?" Bill asked, leaving the rest of the question unspoken, even though he had a suspicion as to the answer.

"The first feed should be from creator to child," Syb said and Bill wasn't surprised; his making had been anything but normal and he could feel what he was supposed to do. "It cements the trust there should be."

Bill looked at Tom, who gave him a small nudge of encouragement. His head was still a little fuzzy, but, now that he was properly awake, it was passing and it wasn't that he didn't want to help Gustav, it was just he felt suddenly very nervous. The only time he had ever been bitten by another Strigoi was during his captivity and, although he knew this was entirely different, he couldn't help feeling a little afraid.

Sliding to the end of the bed, since Tom was between him and the side, he stood up next to Syb and slowly walked around to the second bed. Georg was sitting close to Gustav and it was quite clear that his friend didn't really want to move, so Bill didn't ask him to. He perched on the very edge of the bed instead, took Gustav's hand and waited.

He remembered the lethargy and the disorientation of waking up and, although he wasn't sure how much of that had been the state his mind had been in because of the attempted bonding, he suspected that Gustav would not be completely with it.

His attention was so completely on Gustav that he didn't notice Tom moving until his twin stood behind him and placed both hands on his shoulders. He looked up and around for a moment and Tom gave him a small smile of support before he turned back to continue waiting. It was about another minute before Gustav moved and it was only a little frown, but it was definite movement. Bill leant forward, making sure he was close.

"Gustav," he said, giving Georg a quick glance before turning his full attention back to Gustav.

Gustav frowned again and moved his head as if trying to wake up, but not quite making it.

"Gustav," Bill tried again, "I know you can hear me. It's time to wake up; you must be hungry."

"Hmm," Gustav kind of hummed in reply.

Bill gently squeezed the hand he was holding in encouragement.

"Hungry," Gustav seemed to be a bit delayed in his responses, but Bill did see his vampire child's eyes flick open just for a moment.

The red glint was unmistakable.

"Juschtel," he tried once more, feeling more than a little protective now that Gustav was waking up, "open your eyes for me."

Gustav's eyes flicked open again, this time for longer, and then again, and finally, confused, red eyes were blinking up at him.

"Hey," Bill said in greeting, doing his best to smile confidently, "how are you feeling?"

Gustav just blinked at him for a while.

"Bizarre," Gustav replied eventually, a growl in his voice that wasn't usually there.

From the looks of it, the growl surprised Gustav and Bill could almost see his friend's mind beginning to wake up.

"There was a gun," Gustav said slowly and looked up at him for confirmation.

He nodded.

"There was, but that's over now," he didn't want Gustav worrying about anything but himself, "everyone is safe. You saved Tom."

Gustav appeared to be waking up a bit more and blinked at him again and then looked around the room.

"And you saved me," Gustav said simply; it was not a question.

"It was the only way," Bill said, worried how Gustav was going to react; sometimes their drummer could be very volatile.

Sometimes, however, Gustav was very rational too.

"Am I like you?" Gustav asked and Bill hoped that it meant this was one of the latter times.

"Probably," he replied, since he had no intention of lying to Gustav at all, "but the first thing we have to do is make sure you feed. You must be starving."

Gustav's eyes flicked around the room again.

"I am," Gustav said after a moment, still a little disengaged from reality if his tone was anything to go by.

"Can you sit up?" Bill asked, feeling very strange taking charge of something like this; he wasn't used to being the lead in Strigoi matters.

Gustav frowned for a moment and tried to sit up and Bill moved to help as soon as he realised Gustav wasn't quite managing it. Georg had moved to Gustav's other side and they both helped their friend to half vertical without any mishaps.

"Deep breath," he encouraged as Gustav blinked hard and didn't seem quite with it; "once you've fed you'll feel much better."

Clearly the combination of nearly dying and then being made Strigoi was not a good one. Gustav nodded, but Bill still wasn't sure if his friend was really with it. If Gustav was going to make any sense in the near future blood had to be involved, so Bill decided it was then or never. He moved closer beside Gustav, changing his angle and making sure his friend was steady and then he held out his wrist. Gustav looked at him and then at his wrist and then back again.

"Just go with your instincts," Bill said; he still didn't remember the first time he had fed from Tom, but he knew his instincts had worked for him.

Gustav looked at him one more time and then took hold of his wrist in both hands. He felt when Gustav let his Strigoi nature take over and he saw his friend's red eyes glint brightly in the gloom of the room. For a moment he wanted to struggle and pull away, but he fought it and won, although he could not stop the tremor that ran through him. Gustav's eyes flicked to him again at that, but he just nodded; he was ready.

He had not felt fangs against his skin since his kidnapping; then, an alien force had invaded his mind and demanded things of him he could not give; now, he did not know what was to come. The initial breaking of the skin hurt and he winced, but then he felt Gustav and he didn't just feel Gustav remotely, he was swamped by Gustav's presence and Gustav was reacting very well to the blood. He wasn't sure if it was Gustav or him that moaned, but he was very glad that Tom was standing so close to him or he would have fallen off the bed.

It was like being drunk, but happy drunk with none of the desire to be ill. Unlike when he bit Tom, he didn't feel anything remotely sexual about the experience and he wanted to giggle more than anything else. The idea of breaking away barely entered his head and it occurred to a remote part of his mind that this was how Strigoi could take a meal without a victim complaining. It was a survival technique, but he liked it.

"Urge him to stop, Bill," Syb's voice brought him back a little from the euphoria, and made him think again.

He wasn't quite sure what Syb meant on a conscious level, but part of him clearly did, because he found himself sending a comforting, lulling feeling back over the link. The high began to vanish almost instantly and he blinked reality back into his vision as it dissipated. It was strange; it had only felt like moments for him, but more time than that had to have passed.

Gustav pulled back just as he managed to make his eyes focus on his friend and he felt his wrist heal itself without any assistance from Gustav. His friend looked more normal now; eyes back to their regular brown, and hair blond rather than white, with various lighter highlights that looked like an expensive salon job rather than anything else. The only thing that marked Gustav out as different was his much paler than normal complexion.

"Feeling better?" Bill asked, even as he scraped his own wits together.

Gustav just looked at him for a moment again.

"Much better," Gustav replied, "thank you."

That made Bill smile; if Gustav's manners were coming through then Gustav was definitely feeling better. Bill was just considering what to do next when Georg grabbed Gustav and dragged their drummer into a hug. It kind of surprised him, but Gustav didn't seem fazed at all and patted Georg on the back gently before carefully disengaging from their friend after a couple of seconds.

"I'm okay," Gustav said, much more calmly than Bill would have expected.

Georg really didn't look as if he was taking the whole situation as well as Gustav, which was definitely the wrong way round, but Bill had given up trying to rationalise either of the older band members quite a long time ago. There was just one thing left to find out and it made Bill's heart beat fast to think about it.

Looking at the clock it was early morning. They had been coming back to the hotel late in the evening and they must have been asleep for a few hours, because it was now just past dawn. That at least meant they didn't have to wait around for what had to come next.

"We need to check one more thing," Bill said, hoping he wasn't rushing his friends.

Gustav turned his attention back to him and gave a very practical, typically Gustav type nod.

"How do we do this?" Gustav asked.

Bill glanced at Syb, but he was pretty sure there was nothing clever about what they were about to do.

"We go to the window and you put your hand in the light," he told his friend and he was glad to see Syb nod.

"If you are a day dweller like Bill you should have no reaction," Syb added in explanation, "if you are like me your skin will blister, but with minimal exposure, because you have fed, it will heal quickly."

Gustav nodded again and Bill moved and stood up, trying to ignore the slight light-headedness he felt as he made room for Gustav to move.

"You okay?" Tom asked him quietly.

"Yes," he said with a small smile; "it was just a bit overwhelming."

Gustav climbed to his feet and then headed towards the window.

"Let's get it over with," their drummer said in a resolute tone.

Bill wasn't quite sure if his friend was really as brave as he was trying to seem, so he stayed close. He would wanted to have this over and done with as quickly as possible as well so he didn't want to make Gustav wait. The thick curtains were closed and letting in very little light, so Bill took hold of one and moved it to the side to let in a small sliver of the early morning sun. It made him squint a little since it was brighter than the rest of the room.

When he turned to Gustav, his friend was looking at the light with similarly squinted eyes and an expression that suggested the light might suddenly come alive and bite. Bill was terribly nervous for his friend; he had no idea what they would do if he had failed to make Gustav like himself. Yes he would have saved Gustav's life, but would their drummer thank him for it if Gustav was then condemned to live in darkness. Gustav was the least night-owlish of them all.

"Whatever happens," Gustav said quietly, looking at him, "thank you for saving my life."

Bill just gave a little nod in return and put his own hand in the light, palm up. Gustav didn't hesitate then and Bill felt his friend's strong fingers wrap round his own as Gustav took his hand. He remembered the sun hitting him the first time and turning his unfed skin pink and he dreaded seeing the same pink on Gustav's skin. Normal young Strigoi who had fed could take a few moments of sun, reacting like humans who had sunbathed too long, but it only took seconds for their skin to blister and start to burn after that. Holding his breath Bill watched Gustav's hand for any sign of change.

Two or three seconds passed and he began to believe everything might be alright. They stayed put, just in case, since some Strigoi had a slightly longer sun

tolerance and there was total silence in the room as everyone's attention rested in the same place. As ten seconds ticked by in the count in Bill's head he knew and he gave a relieved and pleased little laugh. Pulling Gustav towards him he enveloped his friend in a hug.

"You're like me," he said with genuine joy and he heard Gustav let out a shuddering breath in relief as his friend returned the hug.

Bill wasn't surprised when two other sets of arms joined them in the hug; Tom and Georg had as much invested in this as they did and they all shared the relief. Things were still a mess, but they were all whole and capable of facing it together.

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Tom bundled the towel up on top of his head as Bill stepped into the shower. He would have liked to have showered with Bill, but there were four people in the next room and he was pretty sure his will power would not have held out. Bill was far too touchable and he was far too needy just at the moment to resist flattening his twin against the wall and thoroughly ravishing him, so they had chosen to shower one after the other. He let himself watch though.

It was a clear glass shower cubicle separate from the bath, so he had a lovely view. Six months ago if anyone had told him he would be admiring another male's arse through a shower screen he would have told them they were mad; if they had mentioned it would be his brother's arse he would have decked them, but as it was he simply enjoying it.

"I can feel you looking at me," Bill said, hair lathered up and back still to him; "go and do something useful and rescue Gustav before Georg mothers him to death. I've seen Gustav in mother hen mode, I've seen you in mother hen mode, but Georg in mother hen mode is plain scary."

"It is a very different side to him," Tom admitted with a laugh.

Georg was usually the laid back, not a care in the world one of them and the fact that Georg seemed to be borrowing Gustav's rather intense personality for a while was a bit bizarre if nothing else.

"He had to watch us all virtually die," Bill said, turning and looking at him for a moment, "so don't take the piss out of him too much."

Bill was in a very up and down mood at the moment, so Tom decided not to push it. They were all still vaguely in shock and he didn't want Bill to worry about anything except how much conditioner to use. He was joking as ever, but then that was his defence mechanism, so he couldn't blame the others for any of their reactions. He wanted to get Bill somewhere safe where they could just rest, but they had the whole issue of David and Saki first; their manager and head of security had seen everything.

"I'll be as tactful as David in a room full of suits," he promised and tore his eyes away from Bill for the first time.

Bill said something back, but Tom didn't catch it, because Bill seemed to have decided to wash off his hair at the same time and hence whatever it was, was very mumbled. He wandered out of the bathroom and into the bedroom smiling slightly to himself and trying not to worry about Bill. He knew Bill's hair was

blonder than it should have been, but Bill was categorically ignoring it and for once Tom wasn't going to fight his twin on it.

"I'm fine," were the words he heard as he left the smaller room.

What he found was Gustav sitting on the bed, changed and looking for all the world like everything was all but normal and Georg hovering near by.

"I know," Georg said, sounding a little exasperated, but Tom couldn't tell if Georg was exasperated at Gustav or himself, "but I saw ... and it was ... and ... let me worry okay."

Gustav rolled his eyes at that. If there was anyone more practical in the band, Tom didn't know who it was if it wasn't Gustav and as far as he could tell, Gustav seemed to be adjusting remarkably well. Of course Gustav tended to bottle things up as well, so it was difficult to tell.

"Just think of the blackmail potential when he finally gets his head on straight," he decided to enter the conversation and wandered over to his friends.

Syb was sitting on the other bed watching them silently and it appeared Markus had gone to check on the others. The plan was to put everyone in one place and see if it would be possible to answer all the questions that had to be flying around. According to those who had been awake the whole time David and Saki had been given a very brief introduction to Strigoi, but that was all. Hence the rapid showers and the reason Georg and Gustav were already scrubbed and changed.

"You're allowed to worry about Bill so I get to worry about Gustav, okay?" Georg said, clearly still on the anxious side.

Tom reached out and patted his friend on the arm; one thing he did understand was the worry.

"There's nothing wrong with me," Gustav insisted, but Georg did not look convinced. "It's not like I went through something like Bill did."

"No, but you did get shot," Tom decided that he had to support Georg, because his friend really did look about ready to snap, "which has to be a shock. Once we've dealt with David and Saki I suggest we all hole up somewhere quiet and safe and just relax for a while. With the story of someone attempting to blow us up circulating no one is going to expect to see us anywhere soon."

As seemed to be the norm when Strigoi were involved, the public had been fed a line. The cover story was that Bill's attacker had come back with an eye to destroying the whole band with a bomb. The bomb had gone off prematurely killing the bomber and slightly injuring members of the band. As far as the general public were concerned Tokio Hotel were long gone from the place and the police had the area cordoned off for forensic investigation.

"I'll vote for that," Georg agreed and the poor bassist looked more than a little stressed.

Tom did not know exactly what Georg had seen of the whole thing, but he was glad he had slept through it if it could do that to their unshakable bassist.

"That would be a very sensible idea," Syb added from her position across the room; "Bill will need time to recover and Gustav, you will need time to adjust. I would suggest a few days at least."

It seemed like a good plan; now all they had to do was get over the hurdle of their friend and colleagues in the room down the hall. Tom tried not to worry too much, so far no one who had found out the truth had gone off the deep end, but of course that didn't mean there wouldn't be a first time. He sat down on the sofa and did his best not to think about it while they waited for Bill.

In the end his twin appeared after about five minutes, still brushing his long damp hair. It was far too light and Tom almost said something, but Bill pulled it back into a low ponytail quickly and definitely seemed to be in an active mood if the way he walked across the room, picked up his hat and pulled it onto his head was anything to go by. The hat was followed by dark glasses, since Bill didn't have his lenses, and Bill walked over and passed another pair to Gustav.

"Ready?" Bill asked and Tom stood up.

"As we'll ever be," he commented and looked around at the others.

"I'll check the corridor just to make sure," Syb said and went to the door.

The whole floor was sealed off and the likelihood of anyone being there to see them was small, but since they weren't supposed to be there Tom could see that it was better to be safe than sorry.

"Okay," Syb said after a moment and stood outside the room holding the door open for them.

Bill took the lead, walking out quickly as if they were just headed for another interview or something, but Tom could tell his twin was horribly nervous. To most other people Bill might have looked supremely confident; to Tom it was obvious that it was all a bluff. He followed right on his twin's heels, trying to prepare himself for whatever reaction they had.

When Bill knocked on the room two doors down, Markus opened it almost immediately and Tom followed Bill into the room as closely as he could. He was pretty sure the others were as close behind him, but he didn't turn to look; he was more focused on what they were going to find inside. What he saw were several people who clearly hadn't slept all night and who looked more than a little strung out. Saki was standing by the window and seemed to have been looking out and David was sat on the bed and appeared as unkempt as Tom had ever seen their manager. Sven was leaning up against the table on one side of the room, well away from any light being let in by the partially open curtains and Klaus was sprawled in an arm chair on the other; no one looked particularly comfortable.

David's eyes opened in shock as they all walked in and it was completely obvious that the poor man didn't really believe what he was seeing.

"Hi," Bill said and gave a little wave.

Even Saki was staring at them, but Saki seemed to be looking them over more than anything else. When the big man walked over Tom wasn't sure what to expect and from the way everyone else in the room appeared tense, neither were they. Tom was the closest, since he had slipped behind Bill and stood to one side



when his twin had come to a halt, and he found himself being looked at very carefully.

"You are all okay, yes?" Saki asked and didn't seem sure about the answer to the question.

Tom nodded; it was probably a broad description of okay for some people, but it worked for them. What he really didn't expect was to be enveloped in a hug that nearly forced all the breath from his chest. He could almost feel the relief running through their security chief even as the man let go and went on to Bill. Bill seemed the least phased by Saki's actions, but they all acquiesced to the hugs, even if Gustav didn't look quite sure where to put himself. Saki was not usually overly demonstrative.

David was standing up by the time Tom looked back over in the direction and their manager appeared relieved, but was clearly still in shock from the whole situation.

"How many of you are ..?" David wasn't usually lost for words, but couldn't finish the question.

"It used to be just me," Bill said, trying to sound cheerful and calm as far as Tom could tell, "but so is Gustav now."

"Bill saved my life," Gustav said as if to make the situation absolutely clear.

"After you saved mine," Tom pointed out and decided that he was too tired to just stand there.

He went to lean next to Sven and Bill followed him, hovering close by.

"There was screaming," David said and seemed very freaked by the whole thing, "we heard screaming."

"Probably me," Bill said, playing with his nails and biting his lip.

The cheerful front that Bill had been trying to put up was cracking, Tom could tell, so he reached out to Bill and pulled him in close beside him. Now was not the time for false bravado.

Syb walked fully into the room from where she had been standing in the little corridor towards the door.

"It took a great deal of pain and effort for Bill to make Gustav like himself," Syb said, playing the ancient and wise role if Tom didn't miss his guess. "Bill is a day dweller where as most of us prefer the dark; to create another like himself was probably the most difficult thing he will ever have to try and do."

"So it wasn't the one from the corridor?" David appeared nervous and Tom finally thought he knew what was bothering their manager.

"No," Syb said and smiled slightly, "we are not monsters, Mr Jost. The one of us who took Bill and caused all of this is a criminal and he had been taken into custody. He will be dealt with by our laws, but we are not cruel."

David didn't look convinced.

"The normal police couldn't cope with a vampire," Bill put in, "so Strigoi have our own."

Tom was glad when David did seem to accept that.

"What happened last night?" David finally asked the question that Tom thought was really the issue.

"I lost control," Bill said with stark simplicity, "I saw what he did to Tom and nothing else mattered. I don't know how I did it; I don't even really remember doing it, I just know I did."

David was looking directly at Bill now and Tom just kept Bill close and hoped they could sort this out.

"It looked like magic," David said, shock clear on his face.

"It was a manipulation of natural forces," Syb said, but Tom didn't think that would help much in this case.

David didn't appear less confused.

"Look," Bill said, standing straight and stepping away from Tom a little, "I don't understand it either. About all I can do normally is this."

Tom watched as Bill narrowed his eyes a little and stared at a discarded glass on the bedside table. After a moment it shook and slid to the other side of the wooden surface.

"And I only just learnt to do that," Bill said, seemingly a little frustrated that he couldn't explain things better.

"We all do things we cannot explain in times of crisis," Syb pointed out; "human and Strigoi alike. The need to protect those we love is a very direct motivator."

Tom could only agree with that; that was one force he understood perfectly.

"It's nearly over," he was surprised when it was Georg who spoke since his friend seemed to be having trouble coping with everything; "can't we just accept this and keep going. David, Bill has been Strigoi since that animal turned him and it didn't make any difference when you didn't know. We know this is difficult; shit, we had the same shock not very long ago and in the scheme of things it doesn't really change anything."

"We were going to tell you anyway," Bill added quietly.

"We've been working on breaking it to everyone we consider friends," Tom gave his own thoughts on the matter, "but it's been taking time."

He would have said more, but he found himself looking at Bill and frowning; something wasn't quite right. The feeling of disquiet was there in the back of his mind because Bill needed to feed and wasn't acknowledging it, but it felt worse than that. Bill was unconsciously rubbing a hand over his stomach and didn't look very comfortable. When he glanced over at Syb, Tom could see Bill's mentor looking concerned as well.

"Look," Bill said, focus squarely on David and Saki as far as Tom could tell, "is there anything we can do to make this easier? We're..."

Bill didn't finish his sentence, stopping instead and wincing. Tom felt the tiniest twinge in his own stomach and he knew something was wrong without a doubt.

"Bill, what is it?" he asked, ignoring everyone else in the room.

"I don't know," Bill said and then winced again, pushing at his own torso as if it would help.

Tom moved closer and was just in time to catch his twin as Bill doubled over, arms wrapping protectively around his middle. It was as if Bill's legs gave out and Tom quickly lowered his gasping twin to the floor. Syb was there almost as fast as he was.

"Breathe through it, Bill," Syb said, rubbing gently on Bill's back as Tom held his precious brother.

"What's wrong?" Tom asked as Bill leant heavily against him in the midst of the attack.

"Stage three hunger," Syb said paying more attention to Bill than to him, "it will pass in a moment."

"Stage three?" Tom didn't quite understand. "What the fuck?"

"Stage one is the normal feeling of hunger," Syb told him even though she was looking at Bill, "stage two is the hair beginning to change colour; stage three is cramps and stage four is lethargy. I was hoping Bill wasn't this far gone."

"Oh shit that hurt," Bill interrupted their conversation, sounding breathless, but slowly beginning to uncurl.

Tom could feel a dull ache in his own abdomen and he didn't like what it was telling him; feeding Bill was his responsibility and he had failed in that.

"You idiot," he said, but he was more angry with himself than he was with Bill, "why didn't you tell me it was this bad."

"Didn't know it was," Bill admitted, barely trying to make any defence at all.

Frankly Tom would have bared his neck there and then, but Bill was leaning against him so heavily that the angle was impossible.

"Let's get somewhere more comfortable and we can deal with this," he decided and went to help them both stand.

"No," was the one word from Bill that shocked him into inaction.

"What?" he asked incredulously.

There was no way he was letting Bill suffer, not even if his twin had suddenly discovered a new masochistic streak.

"You're not strong enough," Bill said even as another cramp took him, "you lost too much blood."

Tom wasn't having that; yes he felt a little weaker than usual, but it wasn't as if Bill ever took much blood from him.

"That's not ..." Syb's hand on his arm stopped him telling Bill exactly what he thought about the situation.

"He's right," Syb said firmly and Tom wanted to argue, but the look in Syb's eyes stopped him; "you are not recovered. Feeding is more than a simple exchange of blood; it would weaken you too much. If you will allow me, this time I can be of assistance."

The irrational surge of jealousy that forged through him almost took his breath away, but Tom stomped on it mercilessly. Part of him was very much against letting Bill feed from anyone else, but he also trusted Syb; this was not some game. He looked down at where Bill was leaning against him and he could see his twin's red tinged eyes looking up at him questioningly.

"Okay," he said, finding it a little weird that he seemed to be the one saying yes to this when it would be Bill doing the feeding.

As the second cramp began to leave Bill, Tom sat back a little and let Syb get closer. He knew that if he stayed too close he might do something stupid, so he did his best to hide quite how uncomfortable the situation made him and waited. His eyes followed every move as Syb calmly rolled up her sleeve, helped Bill sit up straight away from Tom and offered her wrist to Bill. Bill looked up at him, clearly sensing his discomfort and he knew he was probably radiating all sorts of emotions that were likely to confuse the issue with David and Saki, but he couldn't help it. When Bill bit Syb he had to look away; it felt too wrong to him.

To distract himself he tried to focus on something else, anything else, which was the point he realised David was standing only just behind him. He looked up to see their manager watching Bill with a kind of fascinated confusion on his face.

Neither Bill nor Syb were making any noise at all, something which Tom knew had to be taking a lot of effort and was probably for his benefit and he felt he had to try and do at least something in return. If that meant trying to put David's mind at rest then so be it.

"It won't take long," he said, pulling away further and slowly standing up.

David turned to look at him.

"That..." David didn't seem to know what he was trying to say.

"Feels really good," Tom said; the truth seemed like the best option, "and they're both being really restrained. Normally Bill will only feed from me and I'm currently jealous as hell."

He wanted to give David something else to think about than the feeding that was going on right in front of them.

"Jealous?" David obviously had no idea what to think.

"Strigoi can form bonds, they don't have to, but they can," Tom decided that David wasn't ready for the whole story, but part of it would help, "they choose a human bond mate and feed only from them unless there is a very good reason."

Bill chose me and I'm beginning to realise I'm as territorial about it as he would be if another Strigoi fed from me."

"It will be easier once the bond is not so new," Markus said and Tom realised it had to be not particularly easy for Markus either; they were both protective to a fault; "give it a couple of years."

As if on cue Bill drew back from Syb's wrist and released his mentor and Tom found himself moving whether he liked it or not; he knelt back down and gave Bill a once over to make sure his twin was alright.

"Feeling better?" he asked to make sure, even though Bill was beginning to look more normal again.

"I'm fine," Bill promised and gave him a small smile, "I just over did it."

"Yes well healing two people's wounds and then making one of them a vampire will do that to a person," Tom replied, rather sarcastically; seeing Bill in pain brought out the worst in his character.

"Agreed," Syb said and when Tom turned to look she did not appear pleased, "Bill you're exhausted and you are going to stay that way for a couple of days. You're hiding it a little too well for my liking."

Bill did manage to look a little shame faced, but it was Tom who felt the guiltiest; he should have known Bill would soldier on no matter what.

"With all due respect, gentlemen," Syb said, standing up as she refastened her sleeve, "I think it is time we found you all somewhere you can rest properly. I'm sure things will seem much more in proportion once everyone has rested."

Bill looked like he was going to disagree, since nothing had really been settled with David, but Tom wasn't having any of it.

"Good idea," he said and made sure Bill was well aware that arguing was not an option. "What's the plan?"

He didn't care where they ended up as long as they were away from this place, they could call their families and he could get Bill into a comfortable bed as soon as possible.

End of Chapter 18

## Chapter 19 Trial and Retribution

"Hey," Bill said, walking into the second living room in the house they had rented as a hideaway.

Gustav was sitting in one of the over stuffed arm chairs reading a book and Bill hoped that his friend wouldn't mind him interrupting. They had been in the house a little over a day now, hiding away from the world and things seemed to be improving, but he had wanted to talk to Gustav alone. He was used to sharing everything with Tom, but Gustav was a private person and he wanted to make sure his friend could tell him anything he needed to.

"Hi," Gustav said, putting a bookmark in the book and closing it in a familiar gesture; Gustav often had his nose in a book.

"How's it going?" Bill asked, not really sure of his opening, but going for it anyway.

The little shrug was not what he had been hoping for as a reply, but Gustav could be a man of few words when he so chose.

"Anything you need to talk about?" Bill tried again; he wasn't overly good at the caring for people thing, not that he didn't care, he did, it was just that what to say in such situations never came easily.

When it was Tom everything was instinctive, with the rest of the world he often had no clue. For a little while he thought Gustav might just shrug again.

"How do you deal with the hearing?" Gustav finally asked and frowned a little. "I kept waking up last night, because I kept hearing things."

"Oh?" Bill said; he hadn't ever had that problem. "I think I missed that one; I needed so much sleep to begin with that I just got used to it. Eventually you just ignore it. Maybe we could get you some ear plugs until then?"

He felt quite pleased with himself when Gustav appeared to agree; at least he wasn't completely useless at this. Of course they weren't talking about what he had really been contemplating.

"Not hungry again yet?" he asked, deciding that subtle just wasn't his cup of tea.

He usually needed to feed every three to four days, but Syb had warned him that at the beginning Gustav might feel hungry more often. It was another one of those variable things.

"No," Gustav replied with a shake of his head, "nothing yet."

Bill sighed; Gustav was clearly in few words mode, which made the conversation all the harder.

"But you'll tell me when you do?" Bill just wanted to make sure.

Gustav nodded and Bill decided that banging his head on the table might be a good idea.

"What happens when I do need to feed?" Gustav asked and Bill almost cheered; maybe this conversation wasn't going to be so ridiculously hard.

Bill smiled and took a deep breath, glad to be able to launch into what he had come to discuss.

"Well, unless you object, you can keep feeding from me for a while," he said, revealing what he had talked about with Syb the previous evening, "and then once everything's started to settle down Syb says she can introduce you to some people that would be happy to be donors. You're welcome to find your own of course, but you don't have to."

He, of course, had never had the issue about donors, because of Tom, but the Strigoi had a tried and tested system set up for their new members. Bill hadn't really considered it before, but it made perfect sense.

"That's fine," Gustav said and Bill saw just a touch of a smile twitch his friend's lips.

It was then he began to cotton on.

"You already talked to Syb about all this didn't you?" he said as he realised Gustav was being deliberately difficult.

His friend nodded and grinned; sometimes Gustav had a very dry sense of humour.

"Sorry I couldn't resist," Gustav told him; "you're entertaining when you're not quite sure what to say."

Bill rolled his eyes, but it did make him happy. Knowing that Gustav could joke about things went a long way to letting him believe that everything really was going to be alright.

"When did you speak to her?" he asked, since he was curious now.

"Not long after you did," Gustav replied and seemed perfectly calm about the whole thing; "when you were taking a cat nap."

"Okay, so after making me squirm, which, by the way, I will take revenge for once I'm not feeling so over-protective," Bill said and took the teasing for what it was, "is there anything you did want to talk about?"

Now Gustav's expression became a little more serious.

"How did you tell you parents?" Gustav asked eventually.

"Honestly, I didn't," Bill replied since he wasn't about to lie about it. "Syb and Markus explained everything to them. Syb didn't think I was in any state to deal with it and they needed to know. There was lots of crying and hugging afterwards though."

"Yeah," Gustav agreed, "my mum is probably going to cry too. I'm going to tell them as soon as we go home. I spoke to Dad on the phone yesterday and it seems they were all so worried by the bomb story that my sister is coming home as well, to prove to herself that I'm in one piece."

The fact that Gustav was facing this completely head on was not a shock to Bill; the whole band were very much go getters or they never would have made it.

"If you need moral support I could be there for you," Bill offered; he had had Tom there the whole time and he didn't like the idea of Gustav having to face the whole thing alone.

"Thanks," his friend replied, "but Georg already offered."

Bill grinned.

"I should have guessed," he said; Georg was keeping an eye on Gustav almost as closely as Tom was on him, which was saying something indeed.

"I may have to take him out and shoot him to put him out of his misery if this behaviour keeps up," Gustav said with a roll of his eyes.

"Aww, it's sweet," Bill countered.

Gustav did not look overly impressed with that comment.

"It's unnecessary," was the direct reply.

Bill chose not to argue, but he still thought it was cute.

"We all just want to make sure you're adjusting okay," he decided to redirect some of Gustav's ire onto himself. "You've taken everything very calmly."

Gustav gave a little shrug.

"I have freaked out once," Gustav admitted and surprised him; "I just happened to do it in the privacy of the bathroom this morning. It's easier to just get on with it."

That was a sentiment Bill could agree with; there was no point bemoaning something you couldn't change.

"But you're sure you don't want to talk about it?" he wanted to be sure.

Gustav nodded and fiddled with the book a little.

"Once I have it all sorted in my head, maybe," Gustav said, which pleased Bill, because it was not a complete dismissal, "but you know I have to think everything through first."

Bill gave his friend a smile and nodded; Gustav was definitely the thinker of the group, sometimes too much so.

"Well if you want me, just come ask," he said, standing up, since he knew the book gesture had been a dismissal of sorts, even if it had been an unconscious one.

"I will," Gustav promised with a hand on heart that made Bill grin.

He went to leave his friend to his book.

"Oh," he said just before walking out, "if Tom and I are in our room, it might be best to text first. Never know what you might find otherwise."



Then he continued on his way.

"Bill," Gustav's voice followed him; "that was a mental image I didn't need."

Bill laughed to himself and went to find Tom; things seemed to be working out.

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Two days of complete relaxation and rest had done wonders for Bill's state of mind. The fact that Markus had taken David under his wing and had helped their manager sort everything out in his head was a blessing. They had had a meal the previous evening where they had all sat around and talked and it had almost been like old times. Saki seemed to be taking the whole situation with his usual stoicism now that he was sure everyone was okay and David was coming around. Even Sven, who had appeared guilt ridden since the incident was beginning to relax again. It would never be quite the same, but then, when you brought vampires into the equation, things never could be.

Bill did not like the early morning; he hadn't when he was human and he liked it even less now he was Strigoi, but they were going home that morning, so everything needed to be packed. The press would know they had gone home of course, but now that they had had time to rest, Bill was sure they could all cope.

The person he definitely did not expect to see when he walked into the kitchen was Syb. His mentor and friend was sitting at the table and nursing a cup of coffee. The sun had been up for some time and he would have thought that Syb would have returned to her home.

"Hello," he said, trying to clear his head a little; he had wandered into the kitchen to try and find some caffeine to wake himself up.

He managed to find a mug and fill it from the coffee pot without dropping anything, so he awarded himself a point in the morning game. Tom was in the shower and he wanted to be sentient by the time Tom finished, so that when he went to take his, he didn't do something stupid like try and wash his hair with toothpaste.

"Good morning," Syb replied as he sat down in the chair beside her; "did you sleep well?"

"Like a log," Bill replied and took a swig of his coffee, "I think I've been asleep half the time we've been here. It's waking up that's the problem."

Syb smiled at him as he tried to cut through the fog in his mind with caffeine.

"Speaking of which," he said as his brain started to function a bit more, "shouldn't you be at home doing just that?"

"Normally yes," Syb told him and there was something about her expression that bothered him, "but this morning I needed to see you."

That set alarm bells ringing inside Bill's head.

"It's him, isn't it," he said, refusing to give the creature a name.

Syb nodded.

Bill didn't think he could take it if his attacker had escaped.

"It's the trial," Syb told him, which at least allowed him to breathe again; "he is contesting the charges."

Bill knew his brain wasn't working too fast at the moment, but he didn't understand.

"Isn't that what people do at a trial?" he asked.

Syb reached out and took his hand.

"The evidence is overwhelming," Syb explained carefully, "and normally a Strigoi would face them and admit to them at such a point. Even our criminals usually have an odd sense of honour, but this creature lives only to torment others. He is claiming that you wanted the bond and that, when it did not work, it drove you both slightly mad. That is what he is blaming his behaviour on."

Bill tried to draw back, but Syb had his hand very firmly.

"No one believes that do they?" he asked rather desperately.

"No," Syb told him with no doubt in her voice; "there is no doubt that he is lying, but it means the evidence must be presented at the trial rather than just to the judges. It means you have to be there."

For a moment Bill just sat there, not believing what he was hearing. Syb had told him that because she had seen in his mind and he had willingly allowed his blood to be used to prove lineage that he would not be required for the actual trial. He had not prepared himself for this eventuality and he felt himself going cold all over.

"When?" he asked; not surprised when his voice cracked a little.

"Tonight," Syb said, holding his hand gently now. "I am very sorry, Bill, no one thought he would try this."

Bill nodded; he didn't blame Syb or anyone else really, no one except the monster that had caused all of this.

"What about the others?" he asked; he definitely didn't want anyone else dragged into this.

"He is not contesting his actions against them," Syb said in a gentle tone, "only those against you, blaming that for everything he has been seen to do. You may bring anyone you wish, but none of them have to be there."

The cold was making him shiver and Bill did his best to turn aside the urge to panic.

"Bill," he heard Tom's voice and then his twin was charging into the kitchen in nothing but a towel, "what's wrong?"

Bill didn't care that Tom was damp when his twin leaned against him and pulled him close. He really didn't know what to say, his mind was in turmoil.

"There has been an unexpected development with Nikols' trial," Syb explained for him; "it means Bill's presence will be required."

He felt the tension that immediately shot through Tom and squeezed Tom's hand before his twin could explode at the wrong person. This wasn't Syb's fault and he knew how Tom could be when his twin was being over protective.

"Don't," he said quietly, "please."

"You shouldn't have to deal with this," Tom said, holding him gently.

"Other victims have to," Bill pointed out, doing his best to fill his head with rationalisation; "I can do this, Tom. It was just a shock."

"I wish the bastard had died," Tom said and part of Bill agreed, but another part was very glad he had not actually killed.

He would have done the same in a heartbeat, but to have been responsible for a death was not something he ever wanted.

"Well he didn't," Bill said, pulling back and refusing to give in to the anxiety running through him, "but I'm not going to refuse to show up and let him get away with this. What time tonight?"

He looked back at Syb and pulled his courage together.

"The trial will begin at midnight," Syb told him, and he thought that maybe he saw a little pride in her eyes; "I'll arrange for a car for you and Tom at eight so you have time to adjust once we're at the venue."

Bill nodded his head; that gave him all day to prepare himself. At least he would have a chance to see his mother first.

"I need a shower," he said, standing up and excusing himself; "I'll see you later."

Tom was clearly worried about him, but he gave his twin a quick kiss to try and reassure him.

"Together we can face anything, remember?" he said, looking into Tom's eyes.

It took a moment, but then Tom gave a little nod and Bill took strength from that. He was no longer the confused, afraid boy he had been in the hospital; he wasn't even the same as when he had panicked after the first concert; he could do this. He had faced his attacker once and almost destroyed the bastard; he could do it again.

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When Bill had told him what he planned to wear to the trial, Tom had been unsure if his twin knew what he was doing, but when Bill stepped out of the bathroom, Tom knew it had been the right decision. Bill looked the part; it was as simple as that. The fact that Bill was wearing the costume from the video for From the Fire, minus the special makeup, was neither here nor there; as Tom looked, he knew it was the correct thing to do.

Bill had his hair tied back in a low pony tail and looked liked he had stepped out of two centuries past, but with a few pointers here and there of the modern world. The makeup was one giveaway and the accessories, but frankly the most impressive thing about Bill was his expression. If Tom hadn't known his twin as well as he knew himself he might have been a little afraid. There was no fear

showing in Bill's expression at all, only hard determination with a side dose of anger.

For his part, Tom has chosen the one and only suit he owned; the one reserved for funerals and other occasions where his mother would have killed him if he wore his usual clothes. It was a sharp suit; he'd let Bill help him choose it a little while before the kidnapping, so he knew it was in style. They were going to make an impression, that was for sure.

"Ready?" Tom asked, even though he already knew the answer.

"As I'm ever going to be," Bill replied and brushed a piece of non-existent fluff off of his jacket.

Tom gave his twin a smile of encouragement, took his hand and headed for the front door. Waiting for them were Georg and Gustav. It turned out Gustav had managed to over hear the whole conversation in the kitchen purely by accident and, when they had headed back to their room to finish the morning routine, their friend had stopped them in the corridor. There really hadn't been much arguing with Gustav's demand to go with them to the trial; when Gustav put his foot down there was no shaking their drummer. It was really a good thing that Gustav very rarely did so, or there would have been stalemate between Bill and Gustav all the time.

They were all decked out in their Sunday best and, if Tom hadn't known where they were going, he would have said they were headed for a premiere or something where they were expected to be ultra smart.

"The car's outside," Gustav said as soon as they approached; "Markus and Syb are waiting for us out there.

"Then let's get going," Tom said with as much confidence as he could manage; "the sooner we get this over, the sooner we can all have a stiff drink."

"I'll second that," Georg replied with a nod.

"We'll see you in the car," Gustav said and Tom realised his friend was looking over his shoulder and he turned to see his mother in one of the doorways with Gordon not far behind.

He just nodded as he and Bill turned to say goodbye to their parents.

"Are you sure you don't want us there?" their mum asked for what had to be the twentieth time.

It was Bill who nodded this time.

"I need to be strong, Mum," Bill said and Tom was not going to try and change his twin's mind. "I don't think I can do that if you hear everything."

They had had this discussion before and their mum still didn't look happy about it, but Tom knew there would be no more resistance. In this Bill had to be the lead; it was that simple.

"Be careful and call if you need anything," their mum said and dragged Bill into a hug.

Gordon patted Bill on the back as well and gave Tom a supportive smile. He almost got away without having his mother go embarrassingly emotional on him, but Tom found himself being hugged as well.

"We'll be back in the morning," Bill promised and Tom ushered his twin away before the tears he could see in his mother's eyes could fall.

This was hard on all of them, but Tom was going to make sure Bill would get through the trial, hopefully without falling apart. According to Syb, Bill's appearance was more for show than anything else. The trial would take several hours, but Tom was going to do his best to make sure Bill wasn't under too much strain. It wasn't going to be plain sailing, but together they were stronger than anything life could throw at them.

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Normally when they were anywhere but at home or in a hotel room, Tom wasn't allowed to hold Bill's hand, but the moment he stepped into the rather grand building where the trial was to be held, he reached out and laced his fingers into Bill's.

From the quick briefing Syb had given them in the car, the Strigoi court did not conform to human norms. The first difference was that witnesses did not wait outside to be called or anything like that; everyone was inside all the time. Because of this, they all walked into the main chamber and took seats in what was styled more like an amphitheatre than anything like a courtroom Tom had ever seen on TV.

On the outside Bill looked as calm and regal as he had done when Tom had watched his twin walk out of the bathroom, but Tom's hand was in a vicelike grip, so he knew Bill was no where near as at peace as he looked. There were many more people there than had been at the party and Tom didn't need to be Strigoi to be able to feel them around it; the air seemed almost alive with the supernatural.

They took their seats in one of the shorter rows towards the front. There were only four seats between the aisles so he, Bill, Markus and Syb sat in one and Gustav and Georg sat just behind them. There was no witness box in the court and, as Tom understood it, witnesses would either just stand up, or be called forward into the main floor area before the bench to speak. As the grandeur of the court started to wear off, he began to talk to Bill in a low tone about nothing important. He wanted to keep Bill as distracted as possible for as long as possible and so he went about it with determination.

Bill wasn't really very talkative, but Tom persisted. Only when Bill's eyes zeroed in on the side of the room and his twin seemed to lose all interest in him did he finally give up. Bill was just about rigid beside him as the double doors to the left of the room opened and Tom found himself almost as anxious as he could feel Bill was. What he saw as the defendant was led into the courtroom made his mouth go dry and his stomach do flips. Nikols was barely recognisable as the same person who had confronted them in the hotel hallway. Tom was never going to forget that mental image and the creature that was brought into the court in chains didn't match at all. When Bill had shredded the other Strigoi he'd done a very good job and Nikols' skin was covered in little red welts that appeared to still be healing. About the only thing Tom could recognise through the disfigurement was the stare; those mad eyes he remembered all too well from when they had looked at him with death in them.

Behind Nikols were two other men, both appeared no more than twenty and they were also in shackles. Tom had never seen them before, but the way Bill's fingers flexed around his own, he knew Bill had; he guessed they were the 'others' Bill sometimes referred to. He did not think they were Strigoi. Nikols was led to a chair to one side and the other two were given seats to Nikols' left, just behind the Strigoi.

There was murmuring from around the room as Nikols was put in position, but Bill didn't so much as take his eyes off of the Strigoi who had caused so much pain and anguish, let alone say anything. All Tom could do was keep hold of Bill's hand and offer his silent support. He glanced round to see that Gustav was glaring across the room with an expression that could kill and Georg had a hand on their drummer's arm. When it came to Strigoi, looks could kill, but Tom hoped Gustav was not that angry yet.

As Nikols looked around the room and those hated eyes fell on Bill, Tom actually felt Bill's power shift. From the glances that came from those sitting around them, he wasn't the only one who sensed it either. Syb put her hand on Bill's other arm where she was sitting next to him and whispered to him quietly. Tom didn't know what Syb was saying, but he did see Bill relaxing a little.

After a few moments, the double doors opened again and everyone rose to their feet. A full Strigoi court consisted of five judges; because of Bill's and now Gustav's statuses among the Strigoi, all four of the German elders were sitting on the bench and the fifth member was someone Tom thought he remembered from the party, but he couldn't remember her name. As the members of the bench sat, so did the rest of the court, except Nikols and the other two men in shackles.

"Edward Nikols," Graham appeared to be the head judge, "you stand accused of Perversion of the Life Bond, Murder, Kidnapping ..."

Tom tuned out the list; it made him shiver just to think of it.

"By your actions and theirs, your bond mates also stand accused," Tom tuned back in to that bit; "how do you plead?"

"Not guilty by reason of insanity," Nikols said, standing straight and sounding almost like a reasonable human being.

"So it is entered into the record," Graham said and Tom was impressed with the impassive face the chief elder was giving to the whole proceedings. "You have refused a mind touch, let the record state why."

"My mind has been in turmoil," Nikols said evenly; "I fear what another touching my thoughts would do."

The Strigoi court may have appeared somewhat old fashioned in setup, but Tom hadn't missed the fact that they were using state of the art computers to record the trial. There were no prosecution or defence attorneys in the Strigoi court; from what Tom understood, the judges asked the questions and the accused spoke for themselves unless deemed mentally incompetent.

"State your case," Graham said firmly and banged a large stone onto the bench in a very final type manner.

Nikols inclined his head.

"I stand accused of many things and I do not deny that I committed most of them," Nikols began to speak and Tom moved a little closer to Bill, "but I beg the courts indulgence since I was quite mad when I did so. Only the complete shut down of my mind and body caused by the wounds I received in the perpetration of the last of these acts restored my sanity."

Tom could hear Bill breathing just a little too fast; this was beyond a joke.

"I met Bill Kaulitz in the restaurant of his hotel," Nikols continued, "and I admit I had been waiting there for him. I had met him several times before, unknown to his friends or colleagues. He agreed to meet with me later that evening."

Bill's grip on his hand was almost painful by then.

"When I saw his friends leave for their engagement, I went to see him," Nikols spoke calmly and evenly as if it was the truth. "He invited me into his room and we talked. I admire beauty and Bill is enchanting in person with character as well as beauty. I had told him the truth about myself on our second meeting and we had planned for him to come with me and be one of my bond mates. We left together."

"How do you explain the evidence of the hotel room and the obvious conflict within it?" Lorrie asked, which was just what Tom had been thinking.

"We had planned to make it look like Bill had been taken," Nikols said, clearly having thought it all through, "and then, when the bond had settled, to return him home for a time. Unfortunately his bodyguard returned earlier than expected and there was an altercation and an accident."

It all sounded so logical.

"Bill returned to my residence with me," Nikols continued, "and I introduced him to the rest of the household. We attempted to bond that night and failed. The bond Bill shares with his twin prevented the new bond and we tried several times, but all it did was make things worse. I do not remember the next few days clearly, but I do remember becoming obsessed with the bond and trying to complete it. Both of our minds were damaged by the failure, I fear that by the time I left him to die I was quite mad."

Tom was seething; it was all so much rubbish and he wanted to rip Nikols' larynx out for suggesting that Bill would ever be party to such a thing.

"Why would Mr Kaulitz have wished this bond?" Graham asked in a reasonable tone.

"Why does any mortal wish to bond?" Nikols replied. "At first I think he was intrigued by immortality and then we began to fall in love."

The need to stand up and yell at the man was almost more than Tom could bear. He almost didn't stop himself, but then he heard a most unexpected sound. He turned to Bill immediately and found his twin staring at the floor and laughing. It was a loud sound in the quiet court room and all eyes turned to Bill.

"You actually expect anyone to believe that?" Bill said and Tom knew his twin had timed it the moment he had everyone's attention.

Bill looked up and all humour vanished from his face, so fast that Tom was afraid his twin was about to go off the deep end.

"It is the truth," Nikols said, and made a good show of feeling sorry that Bill couldn't see it.

"May I come forward?" Bill asked, turning his attention to the bench.

Tom had no idea what Bill was doing, but he did not try and stop his twin.

"You may," Graham said after a moment; "the court recognises Bill Kaulitz."

Bill stood up and Tom hurriedly did so as well, moving to let his twin into the aisle. One glance from his twin was all he needed to put away his worry and focus on only supporting Bill and he followed Bill down the stairs and into the main area.

"I never met him," the way Bill said 'him' conveyed enough venom to make the point, "before the day he kidnapped me. He accosted me in the restaurant and caused me to feel ill so I would stay behind when the others went to the Charity event. He came to my room dressed as room service and forced his way in. He tried to confuse me into sex, but Tobi, my bodyguard came to check on me and they fought. Tobi and I were both knocked out and I woke up in his home. I never wanted anything to do with him and the bond with my twin is what saved me. He raped my mind and he raped my body before leaving me to die like a discarded toy. These are the facts and you may search my mind as much as you like to end this charade now."

Whispering went all around the courtroom; Bill had clearly just stepped all over protocol, but Tom was with his twin on this. From what Syb had told them, because of her involvement in untangling the mess Nikols had made of Bill's mind, she was supposed to testify and Bill was there simply to agree that she spoke the truth. Tom didn't know if it was because of Bill's status or if the court just preferred to leave the victims as much out of it as possible, but Bill had just stomped all over that plan.

For the first time Nikols appeared less than calm.

"You are aware that you will consciously relive the events if you allow the mind touch?" Graham asked in a grave tone.

Bill nodded, but showed no signs of backing down.

"Your mind is clouded," Nikols tried to intercede, "it pains me that..."

"I shut you up once," Bill said in a voice that could have frozen fire, "I can do it again."

Tom had very rarely seen Bill so angry that he could do damage, but Bill was very clearly there now. If he hadn't known how much it was costing Bill, he might have been afraid. Nikols actually flinched.

"Approach," Graham said and Bill walked towards the bench.

Tom followed his twin and hovered just behind him; he knew this was not going to be fun.



"You may choose which judge will initiate the contact," Graham told Bill and Tom did his best not to fidget.

"Then I choose you," Bill said simply and Tom did the only thing he could think of doing; he reached out and placed his hand on Bill's shoulder, giving his twin all his support.

Bill did not look round, but did bring up a hand to place over his.

"Are you prepared?" Graham asked.

Bill nodded again and then Tom saw Graham's eyes glow slightly. He needed to be strong for when Bill came out of this, so he closed his own eyes for a moment so as not to become lost in the connection as he had done that one time with Syb. Bill went completely rigid under his hand and he wasn't even sure Bill was breathing until a little gasp escaped his twin. It seemed to take forever as Bill gradually began to shake, but in reality it couldn't have been more than a couple of minutes. Total silence had spread across the whole room and only Bill's harsh breaths every now and then broke it.

Tom wanted nothing more than to pull Bill away and stop what was happening; he could all but feel Bill's distress. Yet, this was what Bill had asked for and breaking it now would only cause his twin more trouble. When Graham finally blinked, Tom moved instantly, because Bill began to fall. Bill was shaking from head to foot and breathing so hard, Tom thought his twin might start hyperventilating.

Tom gathered his twin into his arms and held Bill on his feet as he looked up towards the judges. This needed to be over soon. Graham closed his eyes and held out his hands to the two Strigoi sitting next to him and then held out their hands to the two on the ends. It took only a moment before they all nodded and Graham opened his eyes once more and fixed Nikols with a hard stare. The impartiality was gone now.

"Your defence is rejected," Graham said with the finality that begged no question. "Edward Nikols you are found guilty of all charges against you. There is but one sentence for such crimes. Evil such as yours will be ended by death."

Nikols seemed to change almost instantly, as if a mask dropped away.

"You little whore," Nikols screamed, lunging towards Bill, "you enticed me with your pretty face and your pretty voice and then you refused me. This is your fault."

Nikols was so quick that the two Strigoi standing either side of him missed him as he dove forward, but even as Tom tensed for an attack, none came. Gustav came out of nowhere and Tom had no idea when his friend had come down from the seats or how the hell Gustav had moved so quickly across the floor, but their drummer had Nikols on the ground in under a second. With the shackles and Gustav's knee in his back, Nikols was face down and going nowhere.

"Silence," Graham brought the court to order with one word and Nikols continued to scream obscenities into the floor, but they were muffled by the carpet.

"Edward Nikols, you will be taken from the court and your head will be removed from your body. Your remains will be burnt and your ashes will be returned to the earth. Your bond mates will be held at the discretion of this court."

Tom couldn't help feeling relief at the verdict, but all he cared about at the moment was Bill. Bill was holding it together, but only barely, and Tom wanted to get his twin out of the courtroom as quickly as possible. As the two guards relieved Gustav of Nikols, Tom turned to find Syb, Markus and Georg just behind him.

"Court is dismissed," Graham said very loudly.

"This way," Syb said and indicated a small side door; Tom didn't need telling twice.

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Bill couldn't really say what had possessed him to offer himself as a first hand witness; he had just been so angry. He hadn't been able to stand the idea of Nikols being allowed to lie so openly, even though he had known that Syb's testimony would bring the truth out. It seemed like a fit of madness now as he tried to pull himself together. When Graham had touched his mind it had been like he was back there with Nikols; if Tom hadn't been right there with him he was sure he would have been a gibbering wreck on the floor.

As it was, he was trembling uncontrollably and he couldn't seem to make himself breathe with any sensible rhythm. He was clinging to Tom as if his life depended on it.

"Just breathe," Tom told him in a gentle voice; "don't think about anything else, just breathe."

He wasn't quite sure where they were; he hadn't really followed leaving the courtroom, but they were in a small quiet room somewhere. He needed to pull himself together; he was not giving that creature the satisfaction of having torn him apart one more time, not even if Nikols would never really know.

"We need to get Bill home," it was Gustav spoke and Bill would added that they needed to all get home if he'd been able to take in enough air to not pass out and speak at the same time.

"The car will be here in fifteen minutes," Syb said and Bill found her voice comforting, even if she did sound a little on the stressed side.

In a weird kind of way it was comforting to know that not even his mentor could stay completely calm in the current circumstances.

"What," Bill decided he needed something else to occupy his mind and so he forced himself to speak, "what ... happens to ... the others?"

"Bill," Tom did not sound pleased with his question, "forget about them and concentrate on not passing out."

He looked his twin in the eye then.

"Need ... something ... else to ... concentrate on," he all but gasped out.

Tom pulled him close, but didn't argue anymore.

"Once they are free of the bond," Syb began to answer his question and he filled in the unspoken 'when Nikols is dead', "their minds will be examined. If they were unwilling bond mates they will be cared for and released if they wish. Without the

bond they will live out normal human lives. If they were willing, they will be imprisoned so they cannot harm anyone else."

Bill remembered them helping Nikols to subdue him and playing with him themselves when they had felt like it. It was difficult to remember that they might have been as unwilling as he was and that it might have been Nikols' influence making them act that way. At least he could be sure that there would be justice.

The sound of a bell made his look up. It was a deep, ominous tenor bell and it resounded through the whole place.

"Tom," Syb said before Bill could try and ask what it was, "get ready."

Bill was confused; he had no idea what Syb was telling Tom to get ready for. Then he felt it, a sharp pain around his heart and he couldn't breathe at all. He collapsed against Tom as all strength momentarily left him and the whole room lurched. Nothing made a lot of sense, but he was peripherally aware of Georg putting out a hand to steady Gustav. Only as the pain faded away did he realise one indisputable fact; Nikols was dead. Until that moment he hadn't been aware that he knew his maker was alive, but now he knew, without a doubt, that the bastard was gone.

"What the hell was that?" Tom demanded, even as his twin held him tightly.

"They've done it," Bill said before Syb could reply and he found it strangely easy to say.

"The bell announced the execution," Syb added in explanation; "as Nikols' child Bill felt him die, and to a lesser extent so did Gustav. If Nikols let any of his other children live, they also know now as well."

"And you couldn't have warned us?" Tom sounded angry.

"Tom," Bill drew his twin's attention to him, "it doesn't matter. It's over; it's finally over."

He had managed to maintain the strange calm that the simple knowledge of his maker's death had given him for just a little while, but he knew it couldn't last. He didn't know if he was happy or sad, relieved or disgusted, all he knew was that it was done. Suddenly he was so tired and he didn't have the will to hold it together anymore. He wanted to go home, curl up with Tom and pretend that nothing else existed while he quietly fell apart and put himself back together ready to begin again.

Letting the tears come now was easy as part of him mourned, even though he wasn't quite sure what for and he let Tom hold him together for now. The nightmare was done; they could get on with the rest of their lives, but he just needed a little while for his tears to wash away the fear of what was finished. He knew that Tom would keep him safe.

End of part 19

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## Chapter 20 Coming Round

Tom caught Georg's arm as the other two exited the bus.

"Are you okay?" he asked, since Georg seemed the least relaxed of all of them now.

It had been a week since the whole shooting incident and they were back on the road and they all seemed to be getting over it, except Georg. At first Tom had been worried that the trial would have put Bill's recovery back, but it actually seemed to have had the opposite effect. Bill really had meant what he'd said about a new start and there was definitely a weight missing from Bill's shoulders now that everything was over. Now, the worry was Georg. Georg seemed tense all the time, which since Georg was usually so incredibly relaxed, had everyone else on edge by default.

They had had two days away from everything, just adjusting to the whole situation; Georg had barely loosened up at all in that time. Then they had been at home for another three days resting and recuperating after the trial; as far as Tom could tell, Georg had been on the phone to one of them almost the entire time. Then they had been in the apartment and travelling to press conferences and such before getting back to the tour. Georg's attitude barely seemed to have altered at all since day one.

For a moment he thought Georg was just going to blow him off, but then his friend leant against the side of the bus and sighed. The way Georg pinched his nose and looked defeated made alarm bells go off in Tom's head. He and Bill had known there was something wrong, but it was clearly worse than they had thought.

"I saw him die," Georg finally said, sounding almost broken. "He wasn't just hurt, he died; I saw him stop breathing. For ten minutes he was dead."

Tom's heart almost missed a beat; he knew what Georg was going through, he understood completely. He hadn't seen Bill die, but he had felt it deep in his soul and he knew the shock and emptiness for what it was. That Georg was feeling something just as deep for Gustav didn't shock him as he thought it might have done.

"But he came back," he said, reaching out and placing his hand on Georg's shoulder.

"But I keep thinking that maybe it isn't real," Georg said, hanging his head; "every time he's out of my sight I think I might have dreamed him waking up."

That was a feeling Tom knew as well; it had taken him weeks before he had been able to leave Bill alone without thinking something was terribly wrong.

"Georg," he said and waited until his friend looked up at him, "I know, I felt the same, but he's not going to disappear."

"He's my best friend," Georg said, clearly still distressed, "he's the brother I never had. I sat there watching him not breathing and I suddenly realised that if he wasn't there, there would be a hole in my life so big nothing would be able to fill it. I didn't know it was even possible to feel that empty. I have to stop myself ringing him in the middle of the night to see if he's okay."

Seeing the pain in Georg's eyes, Tom recognised a reflection of his own and he stepped back a little as he began to realise something. It was something that he almost rejected out of hand, but he ran over the past week in his mind.

"He hasn't tried to kill you yet," Tom said, more to himself than to Georg.

Georg just looked confused in response.

"He's been moody..." Georg started to say.

"But mostly with me and Bill," Tom said as ideas began to form in his thoughts, "and you've been mother-henning him to hell and back and he's only yelled at you once."

None of what he was saying seemed to help Georg's confusion.

"Are you sure Gustav is the brother you never had?" he asked and hoped Georg would cotton on.

He waited for a few seconds and Georg just looked more confused.

"Oh hell," Tom said, as things he had never considered became rather solid in his head; "I'm going to ask you a question and I want you to think about it really carefully, okay?"

Georg nodded.

"If you had Gustav in a room and you were all alone with no chance of interruptions," Tom said slowly, "what would you do?"

From the expression on Georg's face, his friend thought that was a really odd question, but Georg did look thoughtful. It was when Georg's cheeks slowly began to colour that Tom knew he was right.

"Not a brother, am I right?" Tom said when Georg failed to give a reply.

Georg looked rather shell shocked, but shook his head in agreement.

"And you really hadn't got that far, had you?" he added, as Georg just looked at him, astounded.

"Not even close," Georg admitted, which, given how often Tom took the piss out of his friend, was a big opening.

"No wonder you're a mess," Tom said, without taking the offered shot; now was not the time for jokes.

His mind was racing with possibilities.

"And Gustav must feel something in return," he mused allowed, "because otherwise he would have taken your head off by now. Vampirism is supposed to make people more volatile, not less, so I think we can rule out him having suddenly become spiritually enlightened and eternally calm."

Georg looked even more shocked at that.

"He'd have said something," Georg said and sounded very sure of that, "you know Gustav; if something needs saying, he'll say it."

"Unless he's as clueless as you," Tom pointed out. "We're guys, we're not overly in touch with our feelings; he could be wandering around as confused as you. The person we need to ask is Bill; he'll be able to figure it out for sure."

"No!" Georg said in a strangled tone. "You can't tell anyone."

Tom rolled his eyes.

"Would you rather get Gustav alone in that room I mentioned sooner or later?" he asked and watched Georg's cheeks turn a healthy pink. "That's what I thought; so we need to talk to Bill. If this is all just you, Bill will be able to figure it out."

When people spoke about men in touch with their female side, Tom was sure they had had Bill in mind; Bill was the poster child for in touch with his feelings.

Georg sagged in defeat and Tom dragged his friend to find his twin.

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Georg had appeared mortified through the whole discussion with Bill, even though Bill had promised to find out what Gustav was thinking without tipping their drummer off. Bill had appeared enthused by the whole situation, which had only added to Georg's mortification as far as Tom could tell, but there had been something just a little off about the way Bill had reacted. Tom knew he was about to find out what when Bill pulled him aside during the sound check.

"I think you're right," Bill said very quietly while Gustav and Georg were both busy on stage; "I don't need to ask Gustav anything."

Tom knew there was a 'but' coming; he could see it in the way Bill was biting his lip.

"And?" he prompted.

"What if I caused it?" Bill said in so much of a rush that Tom could barely make it out.

Tom frowned; he wasn't following Bill's line of thinking.

"How?" he asked, unsure of what Bill was getting at.

"I fed from Georg," Bill said, nervously chewing the side of one finger, "then I made Gustav like me; what if I managed to mangle their friendship when I did that?"

That was a possibility that Tom had not remotely considered.

"They're both so clueless," Bill carried on; "it's like they had no idea at all. I was in both their heads; maybe I did something."

Tom thought about it for a while.

"Or maybe seeing Gustav die pushed Georg into thinking about things differently and becoming a vampire has changed Gustav's outlook on life," he countered in

the most logical manner he could think of. "Even if you did push them in this direction, does it make any difference?"

Bill was still chewing at his lower lip.

"I don't know," Bill admitted eventually.

Tom sighed; it was typical of Bill to get worked up about something that could have been nothing at all. Reaching over, he took Bill's phone out of Bill's pocket and handed it to his twin.

"Ring Syb and ask her," he told Bill, "and stop doing a guilt trip; it doesn't suit you."

"But it's the middle of the day," Bill protested and Tom put his hand on his hips and gave his twin a look.

"So apologise for waking her and then ask her," he said in a no nonsense tone. "You're going to be useless until we figure this out."

Bill looked unsure, but, when Tom glared a little bit more, his twin looked at the phone and started pressing buttons with perfectly manicured nails. Tom watched silently as Bill listened to the phone.

"Yeah, hi," Bill said after a moment, "sorry to call now ..."

Tom couldn't help smiling as Bill started talking at a mile a minute to explain what was going on. Bill really was adorable when he was worried and Tom was just glad that his twin was worried about something that wasn't life threatening for a change. Bill made little noises of agreement while frowning all the way through whatever Syb was telling him. Tom had no idea how the conversation was going, but he waited patiently to find out. Bill was still biting his lip and playing with his hair which was a sure sign of nerves, but Tom thought he saw some of the anxiety leaving his twin.

"And?" he asked after Bill finally thanked Syb and hung up.

"She says I might have nudged them further along, but there had to have been something there first," Bill said, still looking unsure.

"God you can be an idiot sometimes," Tom said, and gave his twin a quick hug of support, "this is a good thing. So what are we going to do about it so the light dawns on the other half of the clueless duo?"

"Syb said not to push them, but that we could point them in the right direction," Bill told him and then went from looking worried to looking thoughtful. "I think I have an idea."

Tom smiled; he had known Bill would come through.

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Bill wandered onto the bus after Gustav while Tom kept Georg out of the way; he was going to have to be subtle, which wasn't his strong point, but for a good cause he could do it.

"I think if they asked me to sing the beginning of Rette Mich one more time I was going to scream," he said, flopping down into one of the seats.

"You should try playing it that many times," Gustav responded from where their drummer was rooting through a bag looking for something; "my shoulders ache and I have Strigoi healing to help."

Bill smiled to himself; it was the perfect opening.

"Yeah," he said with a grin, "I've forgotten what it was like before; Tom's probably going to be bitching all of tomorrow."

Then he let his face become more serious.

"I'm a little worried about Tom," he said, starting his gambit; "I think the strain of the shooting and now me feeding slightly more often because I'm feeding you is a bit much for him."

Gustav looked up; now he had his friend's attention.

"You want me to find my own donor?" Gustav asked, clearly sympathetic, and Bill had the squelch his slight guilt at lying to his friend.

"Oh god no," Bill said quickly, waving his hands to emphasise his point, "heavens, the last thing you need is to have to worry about that while you're getting used to the whole vampire thing. No, I was thinking more of getting a secondary donor for a little while, just to take the pressure off Tom every now and then."

He didn't miss the look of relief on his friend's face.

"And you're sure Tom would be okay with that?" Gustav asked carefully.

"Yeah," Bill replied with a nod, "I already talked to him about it. He tried to pretend everything was fine to begin with, but he finally admitted he's a bit overtired at the moment. I think if I asked a complete stranger he'd probably try and take their head off, but I think there is a solution closer to home."

Gustav had gone back to looking in the bag halfway through Bill's speech, but now his friend was looking directly at him again.

"Really?" Gustav asked.

Bill nodded and smiled.

"I was going to ask Georg," he said and watched Gustav's face go blank. "He's done it once so it wouldn't be a shock and I wouldn't need to borrow him often, so I think he'll be willing. What do you think?"

"Um," was Gustav's response and the drummer turned away, suddenly finding the bag to be the most interesting thing in the universe, "yeah, um, that could work."

It was as if the words were dragged from Gustav by slow torture and Bill almost rolled his eyes. Clearly he was going to have to push it just a little more.

"Great," he said, bouncing to his feet again, "thanks for letting me talk about that, I feel much better. I think I'll go and ask Georg now."



And with that he turned his back on Gustav and walked back towards the entrance of the bus. He also began counting in his head.

"Bill," he heard Gustav call after him as he reached the stairs and he couldn't help smiling.

"Yes?" he asked, turning back to find Gustav coming towards him with the cutest confused expression on his face.

"Is there anyone else you can ask?" Gustav seemed to not quite know what to say.

"Um, not really," Bill said in a perfectly innocent tone, "why?"

"I ... he ..." Gustav appeared to be trying to rationalise whatever was going through his head while he spoke. "I'd just rather you asked someone else."

It wasn't an explanation even in the broadest sense of the words and Bill could see that Gustav knew that.

"I don't think there is anyone else," Bill said and put on a show of thinking about it. "Are you feeling a bit possessive or maybe protective; I know Georg was your friend first and this Strigoi thing can be odd about stuff like that sometimes."

He didn't want to force Gustav into admitting anything that Gustav wasn't ready for, so he had already thought of a way out. Given the opportunity Gustav nodded.

"Yeah, I think so," the drummer admitted.

"Hmm," Bill said, biting his lip and frowning a little while hoping he wasn't over doing it, "maybe we can work this the other way then. Maybe if you asked him, Georg could be a stand in for you to feed from rather than me. If you only feed from me every other time I won't need to feed from Tom as much and we'd all be happy."

From the way Gustav's eyes opened slightly in surprise and then narrowed again, Bill could only assume that that had never occurred to Gustav and Gustav felt like a bit of an idiot for missing something so obvious.

"Do you think he would?" Gustav asked in an uncharacteristically hesitant manner.

"Oh yeah," Bill replied, grinning, "hell, it might even stop him worrying about you if he can help. That might be why he's so down, because he feels left out. I could always come with you and give the whole spiel about Tom if you need me to."

Gustav thought about it.

"No," the drummer replied, "thanks, but I can handle this."

Bill smiled broadly; his mission was accomplished.

"Right," he said, "let me know how it goes. Now I need to find Tom."

Gustav and Georg would work out the rest between them and for once Bill did not want to meddle. Once Gustav got his fangs into Georg it was likely to be all

downhill from there; all he needed to do was wait and give any advice if Gustav needed it. It was a little odd being the experienced one in such things for once. Wondering if he could manage 'The Talk' from a Strigoi angle, he bounced down the stairs and wandered in the direction he knew he would find Tom.

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Tom found Bill sitting on his bunk with his head on one side and a little smile on his face.

"What are you doing?" Tom asked and Bill immediately shushed him.

When he opened his mouth to ask something else, Bill hit him on the leg and held up a finger. Tom rolled his eyes and waited; Bill was clearly listening to something.

"Yes," Bill said quietly after a few moment and sporting a triumphant grin, "base one for team Gustav."

The light dawned in Tom's head.

"You mean they're?" Tom asked just as quietly; he was well aware that Gustav could hear as well as Bill could.

Bill nodded.

"It might take them a while to get much further," Bill said, leaning towards him, "but Gustav just finished feeding and now I think Georg is trying to suck Gustav's tonsils out."

Tom grinned; things were working out very nicely.

"Speaking of which," he said, climbing into the bunk beside his twin, "that sounds like a really good idea."

Pulling the curtain across, he leant in towards his twin; they had a couple of hours before they were needed at least.

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"Just get over it and hold his hand," Bill said as they all piled out of the van they were in.

There was no one to see anything, since they were heading for a Strigoi party. Two day dwellers in the same place at the same time had been too much to pass up and they had been politely invited to another gathering so Gustav could be shown off this time. There had been little choice about accepting and with David on side an evening's hole in the tour had been found.

Gustav looked a bit scandalised at Bill's suggestion and Bill couldn't help grinning, taking Tom's hand to make his point.

Gustav and Georg were not bonded and Bill wasn't sure it had even occurred to Gustav yet, but that didn't stop Gustav from being possessive. The previous night after the concert a fan had managed to get backstage and had been all over Georg before security had arrived; Bill thought it might have been a close thing whether Tobi reached the girl before Gustav did. It was really very sweet and sooner or later the penny would drop and Gustav would realise what it all meant.

Gustav wasn't usually slow, but with matters of the heart he was just like a large percentage of the male population: clueless. Bill sometimes wondered how the human race had lasted as a species.

"You weren't kidding were you?" Andreas said and drew his attention away from Gustav and Georg.

Bill had promised that if he could he would introduce Andreas to other Strigoi; his best friend was becoming a real Strigoi groupie, and, when he had asked if Andreas could come along, Karin had thought it was a wonderful idea. It seemed that she was of the opinion that there weren't enough humans mixing in Strigoi society and they needed more as keen as Andreas. He hoped Andreas was ready for the whole Strigoi overload, because there was no getting out of it now.

"No I wasn't," Bill replied with a smile, "Graham has a great house. I think in a few years I might get Tom to buy me a castle so we can set up house and throw eccentric parties like Graham does."

Andreas laughed and Bill looked over to see that Tom had one eyebrow raised.

"You like buying me things," he said and batted his eyelashes.

It was Tom's turn to laugh.

"You are such a girl," was his twin's comment on the situation.

"No," Bill replied with a grin, "I think you'd have noticed."

Andreas made a face.

"Eeww," Andreas said, "I love you guys, but I don't want those mental images of you two."

Bill laughed out loud at that; Andi had such a way with words.

"I think I could live without it too," Markus added from where he had offered Syb a hand when climbing out of the car.

"I don't see how it's my fault if you all have dirty minds," Bill replied and gave them all his best innocent look.

"Bill," Georg said, smirking, "that look only works on people who don't know you."

Bill stuck his tongue out at that; he was in far too good a mood to resist the impulse.

"Let's get inside," he decided and let Tom lead the way.

This place held no fear for him at all and it was the most wonderful feeling. There were still the nerves about being on show of course, but that was just life; it was the fact that he felt no trepidation walking up to the house that made him smile so much his face ached. With the death of his tormentor he had turned a corner; it was as if the execution had freed him. He was sure there would still be moments, but part of him had recognised his enemy as his maker and that part now knew the Strigoi was no more and it freed a section of his psyche. Here, at Graham's house he could already feel the Strigoi energy inside and he had no qualms about going in at all.

Graham and Karin greeted them like family, even Andreas, and they were shown into the party. Since Gustav was the guest of honour this time, Bill delighted in watching his friend being dragged off to meet everyone instead of him for once. It was sweet how the moment they were in the room Gustav had Georg's hand clamped in his, even after the disdain Gustav had shown outside. Being a drummer and Strigoi, Gustav had a grip like iron, so Georg wasn't getting away anytime soon.

There were lots of people Bill wanted to talk to, but he spotted one across the room and gave her a little wave.

"There's someone I want you to meet," he said to Andi before turning to Syb and Markus; "we'll see you later."

Then he beamed at them and dragged Tom and Andreas across the room to where Delphine was now waiting for them.

"Bill, how lovely to see you again," Delphine said and reached out to hug him.

They did the whole cheek kissing thing and then Bill stepped back so Tom could greet the other Strigoi as well. They were very brief and Bill was quite proud that he felt no desire to get between Tom and Delphine at all, but that probably had more to do with what was on his mind than his willpower.

"Delphine, this is Andreas, our best friend," he introduced as soon as Tom was finished; "Andi, this is Delphine, the charming lady I had a misunderstanding with at the last party."

"The Delphine?" Andreas said, going into full suave mode, which was always entertaining for those around him. "I've heard so much about you."

When Andreas had asked to hear about vampire babes, Delphine was really the only one who had come to mind, so Bill had told his friend everything about her.

"Really," Delphine said, laying a manicured hand on Andreas' arm, "all devilish I hope."

Bill saw Andreas' eyes light up; when it came to beautiful women his best friend was almost as bad as Tom had been.

"Completely wicked," Andreas replied with a smile.

"I love him already, Darling," Delphine said and gave Bill a mischievous smile, "and I promise I'll give him back in one piece."

For a moment Andreas looked kind of scared, which Bill found hilarious. He did of course make a mental note to rescue his friend if necessary, but he was pretty sure it wouldn't be. This was turning out to be even more fun than expected.

Bill was used to working parties, it was part of the territory and he couldn't stop himself at this one either. He spoke to everyone, moving around the room like a pro with Tom by his side, leaving Andreas in Delphine's capable hands. By the time they were all invited to sit down to dinner, it was clear that Delphine had adopted Andreas as her date for the evening and Andreas was basking in the attention.

Gustav seemed to have found someone very interesting to talk to, because, even as they all took their places at the table, Gustav and the male Strigoi remained in deep discussion. Georg appeared to be chatting up a young woman, but was still quite clearly glued to Gustav's side and Bill didn't even try to figure out what was going on there. Gustav seemed quite happy, so Bill decided that he'd rather not try and work it all out.

"So," he said, indicating Gustav and Georg with his eyes.

He finally had a chance to talk to Syb, since they were sitting next to each other; he hadn't had a moment where they could speak where all the others couldn't over hear.

"You don't need to ask me," Syb replied with a kind smile, "you know how they feel as well as I do."

Bill grinned; he was so pleased to hear what he was thinking backed up. Georg and Gustav were becoming closer by the day and he was almost positive they were headed for a bond. It was unusual for any Strigoi to find a bond mate so quickly, but given the more than extraordinary circumstance surrounding the whole band, no one seemed overly surprised. Gustav still didn't seem to have cottoned on, but Bill knew he wasn't allowed to drop hints; if it was going to happen it would happen, it was as simple as that. He firmly expected to wake up one morning and find Gustav and Georg looking dishevelled and being bonded.

"I don't think Gustav will get a clue until the moment it happens," he told Syb quietly; "they're both so adorably male."

That made Syb's eyes sparkle with mirth.

"And that would make you?" she asked.

"Not dense," was his cheeky answer.

He looked across the table to where Delphine was whispering something in Andreas' ear and he could see the colour rising in his friend's cheeks. It was turning out to be a really great party and he turned to Tom, smiling brightly. They were definitely going to have to do this sort of thing themselves one day.

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Tom followed Bill into their hotel room and threw himself onto the bed. It had been a good party and he was feeling mellow after the beer and several vodkas he had consumed. The fact that they didn't have to be anywhere until four the next day helped his mellow mood immensely. Bill had seemed perfectly relaxed all evening, which had been wonderful; not even a hint of anxiety and Tom was more than pleased, he was ecstatic. They weren't at the end of the road yet, but Bill was amazing him with the progress he had made.

As if reading his mind, Bill climbed onto the bed beside him and then threw a leg over him and straddled his lower abdomen, looking down with a very playful expression.

"I'm horny," Bill said with a mischievous little smile and made Tom laugh.

"I can see that," he replied, since not very far from his face was Bill's crotch and there was a rather obvious bulge.

"Do you think Andi is getting laid too?" Bill asked, wiggling on top of him, which he knew was meant to drive him crazy.

"I have no doubt, the dog," Tom replied with a laugh.

Andreas had hastily said goodbye and that he would see them in the morning just before they left the party. No one had actually seen Delphine leave, but the whole group had decided that that had to be whom Andreas had left with.

"But what's this too business," Tom asked, feeling just a little evil, "who said you were getting laid?"

Bill pouted and then when Tom didn't give in instantly, began to look a little worried.

"I..." was as far as Bill managed before Tom relented and placed a finger on his twin's lips; sometimes Bill could still be so insecure.

"I'm joking," he said with a soft smile, "but I think tonight, you should be the one doing the laying."

For a moment Bill frowned and then the light dawned.

"You want me to top?" Bill sounded surprised and a little bit nervous.

Tom reached up and began undoing the buttons on Bill's shirt, one by one.

"I think," he said, punctuating his words with releasing buttons, "that we should find out if we both like both ways as soon as possible. I've been in you, so it's time you were in me."

The expression on Bill's face was very unsure, so he stopped what he was doing.

"Unless you don't want to," Tom said, very aware that this was still new ground for Bill; "I will ravish you until the final day if you want me too."

The use of one of their song titles made Bill smile a little bit and Bill shook his head. Tom was pleased.

"I'm just not sure I know what to do properly," his usually confident twin said in a shy tone.

"Well I've never bottomed either," he said and started on the buttons again, "so we'll learn together and we get to play with some toys too."

He definitely saw the light of interest go on in Bill's eyes at that comment. The toys had definitely been a good buy, Tom could tell already. Patting Bill's leg, he silently asked his twin to move and then he dragged himself off the bed and over to his case, pulling out the little bag of supplies. He turned back to the bed where Bill was sitting, watching him intently and smirked, swinging the bag from one finger.

"You know we both have far too many clothes on to play this game properly," he said, running his eyes up and down Bill's still clothed form.

To his surprise, Bill crawled across the bed with a very sexy look on his face, and Tom almost forgot he was trying to be the seductive one. This was definitely a

new side of Bill that he hadn't expected to see for a while, but almost as suddenly as sex kitten Bill had appeared, slightly unsure Bill was back as his twin gave him a cute little smile.

"Let's shower first," Bill suggested, bouncing off the bed, "I feel a bit icky after that car ride."

When Bill reached for his hand, Tom threw the little bag on the bed and let Bill lead him into the bathroom. Bill's brain seemed to have switched to being clean rather than sex, because Bill started shedding jewellery and clothes in a completely haphazard fashion as they entered the smaller room. Tom decided to lean on the door frame and just watch as his twin very efficiently stripped; it was a very nice view. Bill was in his underwear reaching for cotton wool to take off his makeup before he seemed to even realise that Tom wasn't moving.

"You still have your clothes on," Bill pointed out with a little frown.

Tom couldn't help smiling; sometimes Bill was the oddest person he had ever met and he loved every second.

"I was enjoying the view," he said and pushed himself off the door frame, "and you have so much more to take off than me."

To demonstrate, he loosened his belt and his jeans descended to the floor in one simple movement. He stepped out of them and kicked them aside, before pulling his shirts up over his head and dumping them in the same place. That left him in his underwear just like Bill and it was Bill's turn to devour him with his eyes.

It had taken Bill a long time to put back on the weight he had lost during his captivity; Strigoi metabolisms did not lend themselves to getting fat and so Strigoi plus Kaulitz meant it had taken Bill almost forever to put any bulk back on, but he was there now and Tom very much liked the look of his twin's slim frame. When Bill turned back to the mirror to remove his makeup, Tom stepped up behind his twin and threaded his arms around Bill's small waist. Bill immediately moved back against him even while removing makeup and looking in the mirror. Tom decided to start as he meant to go on, so he began to run his fingers over Bill's chest and stomach.

"Ummmm," Bill hummed, seemingly almost forgetting how to use the cotton wool for a bit.

"Finish the makeup," Tom encouraged in his twin's ear, "and I'll wash every inch of you in the shower."

Bill shivered at that and Tom smiled into Bill's soft hair; this was going to be fun.

It took Bill another few minutes to remove all his makeup, because, by the end, Tom had his hand in Bill's boxers, which seemed to distract his twin quite a lot. It was a fun game, but Tom eventually gave up, because he wanted to move the evening onwards.

He fulfilled his promise, washing every inch of Bill once they made it into the shower, but Bill reciprocated with touches that drove him almost insane, so he thought they were pretty even. One day he was pretty sure that Bill would manage to kill him with the innocent little brushes of fingers that made him so horny it hurt, but he managed to find the willpower to drag them both back out of the shower before that happened this time. They were both squeaky clean and it

didn't take long to dry off either, because Tom could tell Bill was as eager to get back into the bedroom as he was. Bill's hair was still damp after a quick towel dry, but Tom didn't think Bill cared, as, with one accord, they moved back into the other room.

Tom took the initiative again, grabbed Bill's towel, throwing it across the room with his own, and pushing his now naked twin down onto the bed, kissing Bill soundly. He was hard and aching already from the shower and he wanted Bill as soon as possible, however, when he pulled back from the kiss, he realised Bill was looking a little nervous again.

"Hey," he said with a small smile, "everything okay?"

Bill nodded and tried to look confident, but Bill had never been a very good liar, especially not to Tom.

"We can play anyway you want," Tom reassured his precious twin; "if you want to go to sleep right now, I might die, but that's what we do, okay?"

Bill grinned at him for that.

"I think I might die too," Bill replied, running a nailed finger down his back and making him shiver. "I'm just not sure what to do."

Tom looked at his little bag and came to a decision.

"Well how about I start on you," he asked with a sly smile, "to remind you of how it's done, and then you can play with me until you're ready to take it all the way?"

The way Bill's eyes lit up at that, Tom was pretty sure what the answer was before Bill nodded.

"Right," Tom said, reaching over and upending the bag on the bed, "this one for you I think," he picked up the smallest dildo, "and then maybe a bit of this," he poked the 'love egg', "and then you can use the other one on me."

"Sounds good to me," Bill replied and Tom decided to tactfully ignore the nervous edge to his twin's voice.

"Then you better get comfy," Tom said, grabbing a pillow and urging Bill to lift his hips.

Bill was blushing, just like last time, and there was the underlying nerves, but Bill seemed to be much more relaxed than their last encounter. It spoke volumes for the amount of trust Bill had in him and he decided to blow Bill's mind a bit before they moved on to Bill blowing his mind. He reached over and picked up the lube and settled himself between Bill's legs. He was aching for some attention himself, but just the look of Bill lying, spread out in front of him was enough to send blood surging into his already hard cock.

The first thing he did was spread a little lube on his fingers and then work it gently over Bill's hole. Up until that moment Bill had been watching him intently, but at the touch, Bill's eyes slipped closed and a breathy little moan escaped his twin. Taking this as encouragement, Tom spread some more lube on the dildo and lined it up with Bill's entrance. With the utmost care, he slowly pushed it in and Bill let out the most beautiful sound, somewhere between a sigh and a moan.



"Okay?" Tom asked, simply because when it came to Bill he was a little paranoid.

"Mmmmm," was all Bill replied and Tom smiled to himself; Bill seemed to really be beginning to like this.

Slowly and gently he began to work the toy in and out of his twin and Bill reacted with wonderful little noises of encouragement. Bill looked so delicious lying there that Tom almost abandoned the idea of Bill being top, but his curiosity was a little too high for that. It didn't take him very long before he had Bill relaxed and moaning, especially when he did his best to graze Bill's prostate with every thrust of the small toy. Every noise Bill made sent messages to Tom's cock and there were so many things he wanted to try, but they did have to sleep at some point, so eventually he pulled the toy out.

Now Bill made a rather discontented grumble and his twin was looking at him and pouting when he picked up the other toy.

"I think you might like this one even more," Tom said with a grin; he found his slightly demanding twin adorable on so many levels.

"What does it do?" Bill asked, even though Tom was positive Bill had seen its type in at least one porn movie before.

"It vibrates," Tom said and used the wired remote to turn it on to the first setting.

He'd had some rather interesting moments with this one when he'd tried it on himself, finding that if he put the lube on it, it became impossible to handle, so he dribbled more of the lube onto Bill instead.

"And it goes ..?" Bill started to ask.

"All the way in," Tom replied and pushed the small vibrating device against Bill's needy hole.

"Oh," was Bill's rather surprised response, "oh," Bill said again as Tom slowly manoeuvred it in, "oh god."

It slid in with very little difficulty, Bill's body just opened and swallowed it and Bill made a very interesting, strangled sound when it did. Tom remembered quite how different it felt to have something up there that vibrated and he gave Bill a chance to adjust before he did anything else. He intended to keep Bill as aroused as possible for as long as possible.

"So," he said after a few moment of watching Bill expression turn from amazement to pure pleasure, "how do you feel about having a go at me now?"

Bill looked rather surprised.

"But?" Bill said and kind of indicated the remote in Tom's hand.

"Oh that's designed to stay there for a while," Tom said with a grin, "to keep you nicely stimulated," he turned up the control for a moment to make his point.

Bill didn't look too sure, but eventually began to move. The expression on Bill's face was delightful as Tom watched his twin move and the toy had to have shifted inside Bill.

"I think," Bill said, coming to his hands and knees, "you're trying to drive me insane."

"Guilty," Tom replied with a big smile, "but now it's your turn," and he handed Bill the last toy. "Just remember: plenty of lube and don't push too hard to begin with."

Bill nodded and Tom moved to a position where he was leaning on his elbows with his arse in the air.

"It's easier to see this way," he assured Bill, just to make sure his twin felt comfortable with this.

"Yeah," Bill replied, voice heavy with something that wasn't nerves, "I can tell."

Tom twisted his neck so that he could look at Bill and he saw that his twin's eyes were very firmly on his behind. Bill reached out and ran nails delicately across his skin and he almost forgot to breathe. Bill was going to be good at this; he could tell.

It was uncomfortable twisting to look at Bill, so Tom went back to resting his head between his arms and waited. He heard the cap of the lube being opened and then he had to stifle a little cry as the rather cold liquid hit his behind and he made a mental note to ask Bill to warm it up next time. Bill's fingers touched him very gently, spreading the lube over his hole and he could tell that Bill was being incredibly careful with those long nails of his. It was touching that Bill was being so cautious, but Tom was pretty sure that if Bill didn't get on with it pretty soon, he'd have to take matters into his own hands.

He felt the slightly pointed end of the dildo press against him and then it was sliding inside. His body welcomed it far more easily than he had actually expected and he mumbled his approval into his hands. It felt so good.

"More?" Bill asked, sounding a little uncertain.

"Uh-huh," was about the most sensible thing Tom could vocalise at that moment and he was rewarded by the toy being pushed deeper.

Tom could feel his muscles tight around it and as Bill began to slowly move it, he was in heaven. He forgot just about everything as Bill loosened him with the toy. It didn't take very long for Bill to become creative and, when the toy for twisted and angled so that it hit his prostate for the first time, Tom gave up trying to have any coherent thoughts at all. All he did was made encouraging noises to everything Bill did.

When Bill paused with the dildo buried in him almost up to the hilt, he had just enough time to wonder why before the whole thing began to vibrate and took away any semblance of control he had left. It was snugly lying against his prostate and all Tom could do was curse very loudly as his brain turned to mush. By the time he had recovered enough to actually look round at Bill, his twin had a very pleased, smug look on his face and Tom had to admit that he probably deserved the payback. He wasn't letting Bill get away with that scot-free through

and his hand closed on the control of the love egg before Bill could stop him and he turned it to max.

Bill collapsed into a gasping heap next to him, reaching helplessly for the control.

"Stop, stop," Bill begged a little desperately, "going to come."

Even though his own brain was being scrambled by the toy still vibrating in his arse, Tom took pity and turned Bill's toy all the way off. He could feel the dildo beginning to slip out, since Bill wasn't holding it any more, so he reached around and helped it out, since he thought the time for playing was over.

"How about we forget the artificial stimulation now?" he asked, leaning close to Bill, who was still recovering from their little game.

Bill looked into his eyes and gave a small smile, before nodding.

"Want to leave this in for later, or take it out?" Tom asked, giving just a tiny tug on the wire of the egg.

"Take it out," Bill said, looking a little relieved that he had asked, "I think I will come before I even get close to you if it stays there."

Tom smiled at the way Bill was so completely honest with him and then moved down the bed a little so he could see what he was doing. Very carefully he pulled on the wire, but he needn't have worried, the small toy popped out as easily as it had gone in. He set the toys aside and moved back up so that he was nose to nose with Bill.

"Can we do this bit so I can see you?" Bill asked, looking just a tad nervous again.

It made Tom's stomach flutter just thinking about it and he nodded, feeling suddenly a little nervous himself.

"We can do this anyway you want," he said and he totally meant it.

Truth be told, he wanted to be able to see Bill as well.

They arranged themselves on the bed so that Bill was between Tom's legs and they were all but ready to begin. Tom could feel his heart beating hard and fast as he just looked at Bill for a little while. He could only conclude that he was the luckiest man alive to have such an incredibly beautiful creature to love and to love him.

"Want me to?" he asked, picking up the lube.

Bill smiled at that.

"No," Bill replied, blushing a little, "if you touch me all bets are off."

Bill's cock did look very proud and he could see the glisten of pre-come on the tip, so he could see his twin's point and handed him the tube. If they went on like this they were going to need some more soon.

His eyes never left Bill's long fingered hands as Bill carefully opened the lube and smeared the slick liquid all over the more than ready cock. Fully erect, Bill was

considerably larger than the dildo and Tom wondered if this was going to hurt. It worried a small corner of his mind, but most of him desperately wanted Bill as soon as possible.

Once Bill was ready, Tom lifted his legs and Bill moved into position.

"You're sure?" Bill asked hesitantly.

It was sweet that Bill felt the need to be the one to make sure he was okay this time and he nodded.

"Just slowly," was all he could think to say.

The feel of Bill pushing against him sent flutters all through his body and he willed himself to relax. This was Bill; the other half of his soul; they were incapable of hurting each other. It took a few moments of gentle insistence on Bill's part, throughout which they were both mostly silent, as Bill edged closer to his goal and then Tom felt the main muscle give up resistance. There was a burning ache as Bill eased into him, but it was a good kind of ache; it made him want more. The intimate nature of the moment made his whole body flood with pleasure and he moved his hips just slightly, urging Bill on as his twin tried to pause.

"Keep going," he whispered, somehow feeling that speaking any louder would be a sacrilege.

Bill did as he was asked, easing into him more and more and Tom forced his body to comply and relax. He wanted this with every fibre of his being and only when Bill was ball deep in him did he feel that he had it. For a moment he had the most ridiculous urge to cry, which he quickly put down to an overload of hormones and decided to pretend it had never happened.

They remained completely joined, looking into each other's eyes while Tom's body became used to the intrusion and then he nodded. Bill knew what he meant instantly and very carefully began to pull out, only to push back in after no more than a little way. Tom couldn't help the little grunt he made, since it wasn't completely comfortable, but he urged his twin on with a wiggle of his hips.

The more Bill moved, the easier it became, and it didn't take long before Tom was falling apart under his twin's control. With every thrust Bill seemed to grow in confidence too and he began to make noises specifically to encourage his twin's movements. They were meant to be together, whether like this or the other way around; they were made for each other and Tom drank every single sensation from the whole thing, loving every moment. There was such strength in Bill; he could feel it and it excited him beyond any ability to explain to be at the mercy of his incredible twin. This was love in its rawest, basest form and he surrendered to it completely.

Tom was on the edge and he could barely think. Every thrust Bill made drew whimpers from him as his strung out nerves fed the wonderful sensations back to his brain. To think he'd been nervous of this; he had to have been insane.

He stared up into the face of his love, his brother, his bond mate and he knew this was the only place in the universe he ever wanted to be. It was almost perfect and when Bill's eyes flicked open he knew it was about to be complete. Bill's eyes were red and glowing and Bill slowly came to a stop, buried deep within him. It could not have been hunger that had brought out Bill's Strigoi

nature, but Tom could still see the need; he could feel it and he gave the slightest of nods.

His body was already singing, but, when Bill's head lowered and fangs sliced into his skin, it was as if the whole orchestra was playing. He didn't know if his orgasm hit first, or if Bill's did or if they both came at the same time, but he heard himself scream and the world disappeared into pure sensation. The bite had always been sexually tinged, but combining it with real, full on sex was so mind blowing that Tom could barely breathe. He dragged air into his lungs in stuttering little gasps as his whole body surrendered to the high and every single muscle, including his heart, seemed to spasm erratically.

Bill only drank for a moment, no more than a mouthful, Tom felt it, but the connection went on beyond the bite. He felt Bill collapse on top of him, still in him and their bodies convulsed as one; little waves of motion neither of them could control. It was heavenly and exhausting at the same time and Tom could barely open his eyes, let alone move, even when the tiny spasms were eventually beginning to pass.

"S'okay," he heard a familiar voice say, but he couldn't work out who, "Tom found a spider in the bathroom."

Bill seemed to be trying to move, but wasn't having much luck and Tom finally managed to force his eyes to focus almost properly. He was most surprised to see Gustav at the inside of their hotel room door talking to someone on the outside, and the second thing he noticed was that the bed sheet was covering him and Bill. He had no idea when that had happened.

Confusion seemed to be the best course of action and, when Bill mumbled something and tried to move again, Tom decided he didn't want Bill to move and somehow managed to slip his arm over his twin.

"Go ... sleep," he slurred out and realised that his motor functions were shot to hell.

Bill mumbled something back, but didn't try to move again, so Tom was happy and found that he couldn't care less about everything else as long as Bill was happy. When he felt his twin beginning to relax, so did he and he slipped into sleep without considering anything else.

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Bill opened his eyes very slowly and found himself sprawled over Tom. The last thing he remembered was biting Tom and then ... he pushed himself up rapidly as the mind blowing experience came back to him. He and Tom had clearly moved in their sleep, but they were still basically in the same position as the night before, although no longer joined; they had slept like that all night, Bill looked at the clock, and half the morning.

There had been other people in the room; he remembered that much and he suddenly had a horrible thought; what if security had found them. Saki and David knew there was something between them, although not quite how far it went, but none of the others knew. Bill began to pray that they hadn't done something really stupid.

"Bill?" Tom's confused and sleepy voice made him look back down.

"We ... um ... I think other people saw us," he said, needing to share his anxiety.

Tom blinked at him for a moment, frowning.

"It was Gustav," Tom said after thinking about it; "I think he put off security."

Bill felt relief wash over him and finally had enough rational thought to move off of Tom.

"I think bits of me may never work again," Tom complained, just lying there, moving his limbs very slowly.

"If I could move I'd give you a massage," Bill said, and he meant it; he felt guilty for sleeping on Tom all night and guilty for having bitten his twin in the first place.

It was as he was trying to make his own limbs work properly that he noticed the sheet of paper on the sideboard next to him. Moving very slowly, he picked it up. The lighting was low in the room, but he could still read it.

"Guys," it said in Gustav's neat handwriting, "no more screaming without some warning. Security almost got here before Georg and I did. They think Tom is a big girl's blouse for screaming about a spider, but they don't know what you two were really up to. See you for lunch, Gustav."

"I think we fucked up," Bill said, rolling onto his back beside Tom.

"Yeah," Tom said and didn't sound remotely repentant, "but what a way to go."

Bill tried to keep feeling guilty, he really did, but he couldn't help it: he laughed. He'd bitten Tom while they were having sex and Tom had all but screamed the hotel down; it was kind of funny. Gustav would probably be grumpy with them for days, but as the memory swam through his brain he had to agree with Tom's sentiment; boy had it been worth it. Still laughing he made a mental note not to bite Tom during sex again unless they were somewhere completely safe or had prearranged things. That big castle in the country was beginning to look like more and more of a good idea.

**The End**