

EDEN'S FALL

BY

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This is dedicated to my sons.

Thor Rowan Stanger

Loki Elirik Stanger

Gene Ryo Stanger

Jason K'Talis Luedecke

Zander Gene Luedecke

You don't know it just now, but I want to tell you with everything in me, my love for you exceeds anything beyond measure or even understanding. I know that I have made mistakes that might cause you to doubt my love for you, but make no mistake that my love is both unfailing and unconditional. I doubt you would ever understand why I love you with every ounce of myself which will never be described in mere words. I barely understand it. I do know, however, that when the time comes and I am there to look at each of you in the eyes and tell you face to face that I love you please know that even before you were a thought in my mind or a sparkle in my eyes, I loved you even then. I may not know anything about you as I write to you because sometimes life happens and things take place entirely outside of our control, but I will tell you that there is absolutely nothing in this world that would change or take away my love for you. Each of you has played a role in my choosing to commit myself to something like this. I know it has been an extremely long journey for all of us. I wrote this long before it ever went to the publisher. I know once it is published, it will be great because it is driven by my love for you. Even if I can not impart nothing else to you for the rest of my life, I want each of you to know that you have always been and always will be my heroes. You are the reason why I live each and every day. The reason why I breathe. I love you always and forever and even when your sure of nothing else about life, this one thing you can always be sure of.

Until Forever Dies

My feathers continued to fall...  
I know nothing but the pain they caused;  
it takes my all.

My eyes cried tears of blood...  
I knew nothing but the pain they left behind;  
there is no sense of time.

My body is damaged beyond repair...  
I know nothing but the agony that fills me;  
there is nothing else.

How can you give an angel back his wings  
when he is the worst of all sinners

How can you wipe the tears from his eyes  
when even the blood stains his soul

How can you heal his body when there is nothing but an empty shell

I crashed like thunder as I landed...  
unable to stand and left so stranded;  
there is no thought in my head.

I screamed too loud, full of agony...  
too much pain it consumes me;  
there is nothing else but this.

I tried to run from the sight of myself...  
Knowing I had been condemned to hell  
there is nothing left but guilt.

How can you take away the guilt that lines this empty shell

Cloudy days  
sleepless nights  
unwillingness to give in  
to this life altering fight  
sun's rays  
feeling its warmth  
since the day  
we were known  
happiness inside of me  
no longer exists  
a void  
left there  
has dragged me down  
to the darkest pit

Sick inside  
with the pain I hide  
wearing this mask  
that shows only my eyes  
there it lies  
within my eyes  
all the things  
I've always tried to hide  
keeping myself composed  
while walking alone  
running faster than  
I've ever known  
betrayed by all  
loved by none  
can't show emotions  
won't let these tears run

Staying behind  
this blood stained veil  
that covers me  
and hides my true self  
nomadic in nature  
with no true home  
looking for that  
which I've never known  
never allowed  
to leave behind  
the blood on my hands  
the kind I hide  
the choice I made  
gives way to regret

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## PROLOGUE

My name is Fallun Grigorini. I am that which I am. My nature is to survive, although it is not by choice. I survive the only way I know how. Wandering. I am a nomad of sorts. I take what I need from the places I come to. I always move on before I am noticed; before someone has a chance to see me and who or what I really am.

I've stood on the edge of this cliff letting time pass. The humans move through it like ripples made with a pebble as one throws it into a pond. How can I even begin to question the beginning or end of so many things which I have no control over?

Humans have moved past me with a certainty I am nothing more than a shadow in the dark of night or a trick played on their eyes. The few who have seen me and my true nature, have never lived past the point of my lips moving across their skin.

Like any story, some believe the best place to tell it is from the beginning. For me, however, I have no beginning to my own knowledge. I only know the first memories I have.

## PART ONE: CHAPTER ONE

"Eden," Lucifer beckoned to me. "You must do as I ask of you. You're one of my best warrior angels. I need you to fight alongside Apollyon and myself. Do you honestly think I can take no for an answer? No, not with Michael and Gabriel, who are by far the best fighters in all the legions of heaven. Michael is second to me, but his skills can't be matched."

"I want no part of this! How do you expect me to rebel against our Creator of all things? You don't know what it is you ask of me, do you Lucifer? You think it is easy to do as you have asked of me, to wrong someone who has never wronged me? THIS IS PURE MADNESS!

"Since the day I came to be..." I could hear the frustration lining my voice as I spoke. "God has never wronged me or done anything to make me feel like you have just cause for what you ask! How can you ask this of me, knowing I have no personal reasons to do so? Furthermore, neither do you!" I spoke with anguish and anger.

"Eden, don't you see? I was made from the beginning, and I know there is just cause for my actions. I've seen the things our Creator has done. All for the unnecessary innocent blood He has spilled as a means to fulfill His purposes, when in fact there is absolutely no reason for these things. This purpose He claims is so just has never been known to me. How do you expect me to overlook such things by leading a third of heaven, those angels under my command to their very destruction simply because He so decrees it?

"Or do you honestly believe I would bring harm to you or ask of you something like this without reason to do so? Don't make me plead my cause or point of view in such a way that even I appear vulnerable. Far be it from me to cause

you to feel any guilt on this matter. I could not bear it." Lucifer said solemnly.

Lucifer was the highest ranking archangel in both form and status. He was pure perfection by any and all standards. It was hard not to be in awe of him because of his beauty alone. Lucifer stood out from the rest of the angels. Lucifer's beauty alone found no equal in all of heaven, save for that of the Creator himself. He had hair so golden, not even the light which filled the full expanse of heaven itself could match it.

His face was hard at first glance because of the seriousness in the expressions Lucifer usually wore. This, however, couldn't be further from the truth. It was easy to see the chiseled lines of his body which started at his cheekbones. They were noticeable even at a distance, and continued downward over the length of his body. His body itself resembled that of a marble statute. Each muscle from his shoulders to his legs was impressive even while he merely stood still as he was so prone to do most of the time.

Lucifer's wings were even more impressive than that of himself. They almost appeared to match the color of Lucifer's hair when he was not in flight. It was apparent, however, that Lucifer's wings were so radiant they appeared to give off light so bright those who saw him in motion assumed he was a shooting star in the heavens. The very presence of Lucifer always made those who saw him stop what they were doing and take notice. The sight of him commanded attention. For me, however, it did nothing. I did not marvel at him when I would look upon his face or any other part of him. I, instead, reflected upon it. I wondered if I had the same youthful appearance as he did.

No, I am not arrogant by any stretch of the word. Lucifer was made from the same mold as I, or rather, I from him. Lucifer was the firstborn and I am the youngest of all the angels in heaven. I was what my maker called

'Lucifer's Balance' on a grand scale; the exact opposite of Lucifer himself. Lucifer has a sort of arrogance to him because of who he was; it stemmed from his vast knowledge and his longer life. I'd never been able to guess his exact age, but I know he was in fact the first of the angels to be made by our Creator.

I am in many ways different from all the other angels. I was given purity, tranquility, piety, sincerity, integrity, loyalty, honesty, serenity, and obedience. I am the most reasonable of all the other angels, neutral in a sense, to the angels themselves. What my intended purpose is, I may never know, because even now I do not. I have never been one to question my purpose regardless.

"Lucifer, my dear brother, how can I even be in your presence knowing the anguish you can not hide? I can not begin to understand why you have allowed yourself to be filled with such malice and pride against our Creator. You know me. I could not live a moment with myself if I did not fight by your side or do all I can to help you. How can I bear the burdens of my own guilt if something came to be of you that was not favorable? You have my allegiance."

I spoke with a heavy heart while my eyes searched Lucifer's face.

"Remember," I started. "You don't have any reasonable cause to do so! Any at all for that matter. Keep this in mind as this battles rages, with you as the one to choose it. When all is said and done, know this: What is done in secret will be known, and what is done without cause cannot succeed, for failure is a must!"

Already my heart was heavy with the words as I spoke them. I knew I should have turned from Lucifer and refused him, however, I could not. I had never been able to refuse Lucifer anything he asked of me.

Lucifer looked at me while keeping his face entirely unreadable. He stood

there for a long time without saying anything to me. I could see him moving his golden eyes along the lines of my face. He was trying to read my thoughts and the various emotions I attempted to hide. Lucifer never had to ask me what I was thinking. He always knew. He always had a way of knowing my every thought or emotion. Good or bad, none of them were hidden from him. I did not know if it was because of the way we were connected to each other, or for some other reason. Somehow he always knew me intimately.

"Eden, my dear little brother. What can I say or do to appeal to you and appease you somehow? I am unable to make you understand that no cause is needed to see the truth of this matter. NONE AT ALL! There is much I can say and am prepared to say. I feel, however, it's pointless to do so. For you would not really listen to me. No, on the contrary, Eden..." Lucifer sighed as he paused.

Lucifer took a moment to collect his thoughts. It appeared to me that he was trying to figure out how to convey what it was he wanted to say to me.

"I know you will listen to me Eden, if I so asked it of you. Nothing, however, needs to be said on this matter. Be at the temple gate before the appointed time. This will help you to get the other angels in formation, receive your orders, and any other tasks I might delegate to you."

Lucifer spoke in a tone which left me no room to question him as he turned away from me. I wanted to stop him. I could only watch him walk away, knowing that would be the last time I saw him until he so chose. As I stood there alone, I contemplated the nearing battle. It would be one I remembered forever and one I could never just walk away from, not the same way I started it.

## CHAPTER TWO

Time, to me passed quickly. I was both anxious and apprehensive about the battle still to come. Nothing, however, seemed to matter to me even in the slightest. I moved about as if something else controlled me, barely noticing my own movements as I did them.

Everything else around me moved at a pace I could neither keep up with or leave behind. I briefly noticed things around me as they occurred, because my own thoughts consumed me.

I became complacent in my thoughts; little else mattered to me. I would hear my maker's voice from time to time. The usual clarity of it seemed to be such a low humming to my ears I found hard to make out. This went on for what seemed, to me, an eternity. It was odd how time did not stand still or speed up, it simply passed.

Without warning, time stopped and Lucifer was there. His eyes alone beckoned for me to come with him. They called me forward against my own will. At that moment, I stopped everything I was doing and went with him. I had to go. I was more than compelled to. We walked in silence toward the temple gates. How could any words be sufficient for that very moment? I knew the urgency of the situation which lay ahead of me.

Just before reaching the temple, we stopped walking. I could see the angels under Lucifer's command standing there waiting. They were ready to do as they were commanded. Their numbers alone were astonishing at first glance. I did not let this realization overwhelm me. I was not, however, used to seeing them altogether as they were, prepared for battle. The sight of them was unforgettable.

Each one was in armor and wore a gleaming helmet. Their faces were hidden by the masks of their helmets, but the expressions in their eyes spoke words beyond measure. Each one carried a sword strapped to a belt, ensuring it was within easy reach. They looked impressive even to my eyes. I could see the intensity of their stares as they gazed upon everything around them causing me to take in the full measure of it. There was no turning back for them. Each and every single one of them had now knowingly sealed their fates. But to what end?

"Eden," Lucifer called to me, causing me to turn my focus away from the formation and toward him.

I looked directly into his eyes. I could see the range of emotions even as he tried to keep them from showing on his face. It was hard to differentiate between them. This made my heart stop cold. I had never before heard of such possibilities of emotions from my creator, nor had I ever seen them firsthand.

I wasn't sure at that moment whether I could read Lucifer's emotions and thoughts, but he was not in lacking. In fact, this was one attribute he possessed that none of the other angels could imagine. Lucifer being most like the creator, possessed the greatest amount of attributes seen in the creator. From what I was able to ascertain, I assumed Lucifer's intentions were truly for harm. I swallowed hard. I hoped I was, for once, wrong in my assumption. Somehow, I knew I was not.

"I'm giving you an order now, I fully expect you to carry it out! Under no circumstances are you to deviate from it."

Lucifer spoke loudly as he looked at me while pointing toward a section of angels which stood a small, but noticeable distance from the rest. His voice was hard and struck a sense of dread in me while penetrating every

fiber of my being.

"These angels I have sectioned off are by far the absolute best fighters in the legions of heaven. I have divided them and am placing them directly under your command. Your allegiance is with me, however, none of that matters. Your task is to take down the temple and hold it until I am able to come to you. Is this understood? Spare whatever lives you can because this battle is only truly with our maker. No one should be punished needlessly."

I grimaced slightly, but, only for a moment as I tried to keep my own feelings concealed behind a stoic facade. I looked at the angels, each one's eyes filled with tension. I tried to keep my own face unreadable, but the range of emotions I felt inside made this an extreme challenge for me.

"I understand Lucifer. I am ready to do as I must. I want you to know above all else I would not choose this path on my own. I do not condone your your decisions or the consequences to come as a result of such actions. However, I know who I am dictates I do this because I have already given you my word." I spoke with no emotion.

How could I do ~~it?~~ A battle very completely meaningless. The outcome of it would be the same, and Lucifer, prideful as he was, would not listen to reason. How many times since this all began had I tried to explain my point of view always to no avail?

The things to come were already set in motion simply by my decision to stand where I stood. I looked around and sighed heavily, knowing it useless to delay the inevitable. This battle was going to happen; I had no way to stop it and no choice but to fight. I walked over to where my legion stood and awaited Lucifer's next orders.

## PART THREE: CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Waiting in the darkness, unaware of how much time pass the earlier consuming pain had now long been subdued! In its place, the hunger bared down on me relentlessly, leaving me powerless against it. Had night fallen? And if so, where was Raya? Why hadn't she come back? I did not know what happened to her, but something told me I needed to go and search for her.

However, I had a problem I needed to remedy beforehand! The hunger was pressing down upon me and threatened to dictate my every thought and deed! I knew I could not let this happen; if I did I would kill without discretion. Even the innocents would become my victims! This was a high price to pay for such a small mistake. Or could it really be called such a thing?

Stupidly, I had let my guard down and went into the sunlight, but as I thought about it I knew I was simply careless. I could not make sense of my unusual carelessness. Mistakes were not something I was accustomed to even on a small scale. The child! Was it not her voice that had so captivated me and held me in place? How was it that her voice could have so much power over me and cause me to detour from my usual routine? Was there more to Raya and Lerric than I initially thought?

I shook my head to bring my focus back to my current surroundings because I knew I had to find Raya and Lerric. Whenever I felt the hunger as strongly as I did I was never able to put aside the anguish of it to do anything else. There had to be a first time for everything! How strong, I wondered could I really be? Over the years I learned not to allow the hunger to control me to prevent becoming the monster in an attempt to do what I had to do. The fact someone other than myself was involved made everything much more complex.

Nothing about this situation was by any means simple. First, I needed to know if night had fallen, then I had to find Raya. I could not do the latter without knowing the former. I had no other choice but to see if dusk had fallen to see if Raya would come back like I instructed her to. I had many unanswered questions and was no worse for the wear. I knew I had suffered some type of physical damage from the sunlight, but I also knew my body retained the ability to heal instantly!

This, however, came at a high price! Only one other time had I needed to heal instantly, my hunger increased to compensate in such a way I was powerless to resist it. I remembered what it felt like to be around the humans then! I knew I would not be able to control myself against the hunger if I came in contact with another human being just now! I knew no matter how I looked at it, this fact was simply unchangeable. Would anyone so mercilessly fall prey to me? Or would I spill innocent blood as I had done in the very beginning? I knew I could in no way live with this fact!

What if the innocent blood happened to be Lerric's or even Raya's? I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt Raya would defend Lerric with her very life. I had come to know that Raya's heart was pure. I did not allow myself to entertain the thought of her at my mercy. I was not merciful and knew nothing of it. How could one such as I be merciful when driven by a force which held no mercy?

I did not consider allowing Raya to live the night I met her to be even remotely merciful; I simply wanted to understand why I could not kill her. Now as I lay there remembering that fateful night, I knew it was her lack of fear which intrigued me. Maybe this is truly what saved! In choosing to save Raya, I knew I had saved Lerric's life as well.

If night had fallen, I knew I had to be quick in my movements because every moment counted. I tried to get up but, was extremely weak! The first

movements left my head spinning slightly. I did not know how to react to this because what I felt was something new to me altogether. I shook this off and concentrated on my task at hand. I knew time was of the essence; everything I did mattered and every moment counted. Speed was not a worry to me, my movements were like the wind blowing; I was fast. Even this was an understatement. I could not properly describe it. As I tried to move, my movements were sluggish to me preventing me from keeping up with my thoughts.

Concentrate, I willed myself. I felt the hunger roaring under the surface of my skin, moving with the flow of my blood. I knew it was possible the hunger could consume and pull me under, much like a slave in chains. How strong was it? How strong was my own will to fight against it? So far, I had yet to win. I noted that the hunger had never been this strong before. I knew if there was a way to fight against it, I could find it.

My options were few, but I could not continue to be the monster I knew raged inside of me. I had to be different, be something more. This was no longer just about me. If it was, the decision would have been an easy one; but, it wasn't.

I had to rescue Raya at all costs. The realization stuck with such force, my entire body writhed against it. I moved to sit up and felt numb to everything even the hunger's pull. I knew somewhere in the deepest recesses of my mind it existed, but the thought of rescuing Raya and Lerric overpowered even the hunger. It was all I could think about, almost as if that became the driving force behind my very life. Instead of fighting against it, I did the impossible. I embraced it, letting it take over me until all I could feel, think, or see were Raya and Lerric.

I pushed back the blankets Raya covered me with earlier. Even in the darkness I could see myself perfectly. I wore no clothing on my torso, however the

clothing covering my lower half was in rags. At first thought, I was surprised by this fact until it dawned on me the sun had burned through them! I did not remove them because they served their purpose and covered the parts of me that might have caused discomfort to Raya and Lerric.

I had much to answer for on my own behalf without doing something which would cause unnecessary questions to arise. I had no time to bother with these or any questions. I stood up, stepping out of the blankets toward the door. Cautiously I moved, knowing the light would burn me again; I was not deterred from my chosen course. Placing my hand on the door, I turned the knob and pushed it outward, opening it. The door which should have moved, did not. I remember I had asked Raya to lock it behind her. Even in her haste she still chose to listen to me. I was grateful to this.

I did not want to damage the door in any way, but what choice did I have? The room would become my tomb if I remained confined within it. It was the one thing that separated me from Raya and Lerric. I could not allow this to happen. My mind was made up, I would not deviate from it.

I remembered my chosen course and could see it clearly in my mind. I took a step back from the door with a sigh. The last of my own apprehension left me, I kicked the door with such force it shattered. I remained still, unsurprised by my actions. The darkness, however did surprise me. Momentarily, I stood there motionlessly.

An array of thoughts and more questions crossed my mind. I knew Raya needed me more now that darkness had fallen. The hunger would also be stronger. It was my true nature to feed this way! I was after all, a creature that wandered, hunted, and fed in the darkness. I pushed the broken remains of the door away from me and stepped through the threshold. Walking through Raya's house, I took little notice of my surroundings.

Everything remained exactly as Raya had left it when she left! I wasted

no more time. I moved toward the open door the same way a shadow might. I came to Raya's outer door which would lead me to the outside world. Placing my hand upon the door, I pushed it open and stepped through the threshold. My eyes adjusted quickly to the darkness in the way they always did. The air felt cool against the surface of my skin. I did not shiver against it, but I could see the small cloud my breath formed as I sighed.

I smelled the air trying to see if Raya's scent was there. I knew the only way I would be able to track her would be by the scent she emitted through her blood. Immediately, it hit me in waves. Not simply a slight wave, the kind of tidal wave that wipes out everything else in its path. I did not wait to ask questions. I followed the scent at a brisk pace, one full of urgency.

I ran past the numerous houses and trees that appeared blurred to me. Only when they came into my immediate range of vision did I take note of them. I could already smell the blood; this is what led me to them. I stood there completely immobile, afraid to move. I knew at any possible moment they would become my victims.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

"Raya!!!" I heard myself scream when I looked at them both. However, it was not Raya who turned toward me.

"Fallun! Please come quickly! My mother is hurt. I need your help!"

I heard Lerric's frantic pleading, beckoning to me to come to them both. I desperately wanted to with everything in me. The hunger that clawed at me just below the surface of my self-control kept me from doing so. I knew that if I moved any closer to Lerric, the blood would take any control I still maintained over myself. A small part of me that was able to think clearly knew that I could never live with myself if I ever allowed that to happen.

If I did, then everything I had done up until that point would have been for nothing. There was some reason I had saved Raya and helped her to deliver Lerric safely into the world. Even the effort I made in looking for a cure to Raya's sickness. If I allowed the hunger to dictate my actions now, everything so far would have been for nothing. The least I could do was try to fully understand the problem and prevent myself from causing Raya or Lerric harm.

I glanced at Lerric and could see Raya's body prone on the ground. Lerric's body hid most of Raya's so I could not easily see the condition Raya was in. I could not help her unless I moved closer to her. I could see Lerric's tears staining her angelic face. Something constricted in my chest causing my breath to catch in my throat. I knew I needed to exercise caution in everything I decided to do, I had no room for error.

"Lerric, look at me. Before I can come closer to you, I need you to listen to me very carefully and do exactly as I ask of you. I mean you no harm. Are

you able to do this for me?"

Lerric looked at me without really seeing me. "Fallun," Lerric's voice was shaky as she spoke. She seemed to be in shock, almost terrified. I knew I could not waste time with questions so I remained silent as I listened to her timid voice which came out in a whisper.

"We were attcked by a mountain lion. Mom...she fought it off but...it... got to her! I know I should have come looking for you sooner, because I knew you could help her. I just couldn't leave her like this. I was afraid if I did, I wouldn't be able to find her again. Can you please help her? She's been hurt pretty badly. Please try to help her. I know that you can..."

Lerric was barely able to finish the end of her sentence before her voice broke and she started to cry. The feeling I had from the sound of her crying caught me off guard, surprising me with my reaction.

"Lerric, I need you to go into the forrest toward your house. I will see what can be done for your mother. I don't know what I can do, but if there is a way to help her, I will. I will come and find you once I see that she is going to be okay. Go now and don't come back here." I ordered.

Lerric glanced at her mother as she stood up slowly. She was reluctant to do as I asked, yet she did without any further hesitation. I don't know if it was because she trusted me or if her own fear propelled her to do as I wanted of her. I knew I could not waste time further complicating things with questions because of the hunger raging just below the surface of my control.

I stared at them both. The seconds passed by in such a way that made them seem sluggish to me. Lerric stood up and looked at me. Her face etched with turmoil and sadness she did not try to hide. I knew her own warring emotions weighed heavily on her.

"I don't care what you have to do to make her well again! Whatever it takes please just do it."

Lerric turned abruptly and started into the darkened forest. I knew that she would have to go the way I came, but I also knew that there were many ways through the forest that Lerric could travel by. The forest itself was a complex labyrinth! I knew it would take time for Lerric to navigate it alone. I was not afraid she would become lost with its hidden depths. I would still be able to find her with ease.

I heard a familiar sound and knew there was no reason for it. The sound only came from my prey as they were taking their last breath as I fed from them. How was it possible? I was not feeding just now. I realized with dread Raya made this noise, a destruction to my former pleasure. I knew then Raya was not only in distress, but her pain was enough to make me recoil as I sucked in my breath. Her breathing was thin and labored, barely there.

I saw her keenly through the darkness. The blood on her form glistened like tiny points of light, appearing darker than it naturally was. It was everywhere, all around her. I was afraid to go near her, despite my lack of fear. To her I went apprehensive with every step, I felt the hunger grow inside me until I felt it in my throat like a fast beating drum. As I reached her, I noticed she was barely breathing! Her breath came in ragged intravels which made it appear as tiny white clouds against the blackness of the night. Her mouth was ajar. I saw her eyes were closed, but the blood covered her face completely so I was not able to clearly make out her facial features. Motionlessly, I stood there disgusted by her distorted beauty.

Some part of me knew I should get up and try to hunt before I attempted to help her, I remained only torn inside. So much of me wanted to help her. She was alive, radiant in her vast array. She seemed surreal to me as she

laid without moving! Initially, I did not register she was unconscious. Seconds passed before the reality of her state hit me. The roar of the hunger was so loud, I could no longer hear her ragged breathing. I was close enough to her that I was able to feel the minute heat radiating off her body, I kneeled down next to her.

Too late, I realized what a mistake I had made until I leaned over her frail form while breathing in both her scent and the scent of the blood. I lost all sense of myself and my surroundings! I no longer saw Raya's small body lying there; all I visualized was the blood. I more than saw it. I felt it wrapped around my soul sinking its razor sharp claws into every part of me. I fell victim to it letting it consume me.

What happened next is still beyond my comprehension, even now. I know now I was insane, to say otherwise, is simply an excuse at best! Had I been in my right state of mind, I would never have done such unwarranted things! However, I was not. Even as I moved my mouth closer to her what little fight I had left in me became lost to the hunger! I did not move her, but I quickly put my mouth where I could feel the blood upon my lips! The hunger now screamed much too loud for my ears! The blood upon her body felt cold which caused me to recoil slightly with disdain.

I moved my mouth to the closest part of her body I could easily reach, which I knew would quickly satisfy the hunger raging in me. I noticed it was her wrist. I had never drank from this part of a human before, but was not hesitant in my decision! I picked up Raya's wrist. Her body was still warm to the touch, yet it was still colder than the usual warmth I felt from Raya. Under the tips of my fingers, I could feel the slow beating of her heart. Her heart seemed almost peaceful as if she was lost in the lull of slumber.

As I sank my teeth deeply into her wrist, I felt the blood hit me with such force, I staggered backwards. My mouth, however was held in place by the euphoria I now knew!

I closed my eyes, embracing what I knew was coming very soon. Her heartbeat sped up, sounding so loudly I thought my eardrums would burst from the force of it. Still, I made no attempt to slow down or stop. The hunger was in complete control now. Initially, the blood flooded through my viens, now her memories flowed rapidly through my own mind. I saw them in a rush causing me great confusion. This was something new to me. Usually, I controlled the memories as they filled my head, but somehow with Raya, I was unable to do so. The blood warmed me as it filled me completely. As I drank it in, my own heartbeat accelerated in tune with Raya's. Raya's heartbeat was fighting against an invisible force pulling her very life toward me. Still, I did nothing to prevent it.

How could I stop? I was truly a monster. I was simply reduced to killing the innocents such as Raya herself. Even as I drank, I was entirely powerless to stop myself. Raya's heartbeat continued to slow as the time passed in a sluggish manner. I lost track of time's passage. As her heartbeat slowed, so did her memories. I wondered if she had enough blood to last another beat of her frail heart. Still I drank. Her memories faded into fuzzy pictures becoming bleaker and blacker than even the night was itself. The blackness made me cold, freezing me to my core. The frozen finality of it wounded my soul.

The darkness was abruptly shattered by a sound I did not recognize. However, my entire focus was engulfed by it tearing my hunger into pieces leaving it empty and forgotten.

"Fallun, where you are? I need you by my side. Fallun. Please help me."

The sound was so faint even in the night I had to strain to hear it, piercing through me like a sharpened knife. I don't know how I managed it, but I pushed Raya's wrist from me and came back to my senses.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

We were alone in the darkness. As I looked at Raya's body, I could see no immediate changes. I knew time was against me. Raya's situation was a puzzle to me. She laid there unmoving and I took this as a bad sign. I had witnessed many humans in the same state that I saw Raya in now; it was never a good thing. Death was on the doorstep of those who looked as Raya did now.

Such sights were familiar to me because I was like the grim reaper when I drank upon them. The time passed slowly to me. My mind was frantic with various thoughts. What if Raya never woke up? What if she could not be healed and all my efforts were futile? If she did not wake up, what would I tell Lerric? Who would take care of Lerric if this did happen?

I took a deep breath and slowly let it out. I had far too many problems to deal with. First, I had to see to Raya's needs and then make sure Lerric was safe. As I looked down at my body, I knew my first priority was to find some clothes to replace the ones I previously had on. I knew there was only one way I was going to be able to do this; I had to take it from a body. In order for me to do this, I would have to hunt to see if I came across someone who could help me remedy my problem. I smiled at this thought.

Raya was still unconscious at this point, I knew she would not be questioning my appearance. I had Lerric to contend with, who always had an array of questions. I did not want to leave Raya alone and unprotected in her current state, in her nakedness, she appeared extremely vulnerable to me. She seemed fragile and childlike, I was afraid of her unchanged state.

I had very few options left open to me. I had to hunt to not only replace the clothes that I had damaged but, also to revive myself because of my weakened

My wrist had already closed up from the wounds I used to heal Raya. The only evidence of it was the small traces of dried blood along the edges of the wound.

I knew I gave Raya a great deal of my blood in an effort to heal her, it made the amount I took from her seem minimal by comparison. Her appearance remained unchanged. I wondered about my earlier assumption regarding my blood's ability to heal her. If so, how long would it take for the effects of such changes to show. I noticed Raya's bleeding had stopped, she was still covered in the blood I immersed her in.

I knew that Raya could not be left in the cold for very long. It did little to affect me, Raya, however was not the same as I. I could only imagine how long she could last if she was left in it for very long. This thought helped me to make up my mind. I leaned as close to Raya as I could. I lifted her into my arms and stood up with her close to my chest. She made no sounds or gave me any kind of indication she even took notice, I sighed with relief!

I felt her heart beating faintly against my body!!! I could only hope the blood I had given her would heal her both externally and from the inside out. As I looked at her, it was in that moment I realized how beautiful she truly was. Even compared to the beauty of the angels themselves was not an accurate comparison by far. The blood Raya was covered in did little to deter me from seeing her beauty as it really was. My heart stopped beating and time instantly stood still.

I don't know what it was, but something inside of me stirred that I had never felt before. I knew I needed to feed and could feel the pangs of hunger coursing throughout my entire body. My veins felt like they were now filled with liquid fire from this new feeling. I was warmed down to the deepest recesses of myself until it was all I could feel.

For the first time in my existence, I did not simply feel only hunger. The hunger did not call to me nor did it linger in my thoughts as a craving I could not calm would do. I knew I had never felt what I was feeling inside of me and knew that no words could describe what I felt.

"Fallun...." The sound came out in a whisper. It was faint to my acute hearing, but in the silence of the night it shattered everything with clarity.

I did not know what to think but I was truly at a loss for words. I was hopeful to be sure, but I couldn't wrap my mind around the possibility of Raya not living through all of this. I knew I would never be the same.

"Raya, don't speak. You've lost a lot of blood. I'm taking you home now. Everything will be alright...just hold on...Please. just stay with me." I pleaded with her.

I don't know if Raya could hear me, but, I did not wait around to find out. I pulled as close to me as possible, partially to protect her from the cold and to provide her with as much warmth as I could. I wanted to restrict the movement of her body as she ran. This presented a slight problem, but not impossible to do. Glancing at her once final time, I picked up my speed.

Time passed since Lerric's departure, but I was certain I could arrive at Raya's dwelling before Lerric did. I was grateful for such things. I did not let Lerric to see me or her mother as we were at that moment. The speed at which I moved was not just fast, it was urgent. I felt both apprehensive and anxious about getting Raya to her dwelling. I ran through the forest, moving past my surroundings with haste, vaguely noticing the things around me. Finally, after standing a few steps away from Raya's door, I slowed my pace and stopped running.

As I reached Raya's door, I realized it was barred to me. This caused

me to shift Raya's weight in my arms so I could open the door. I did this carefully so I would not move Raya without cause. I walked through the threshold, shutting the door behind me so I could keep out the night air. I went into the mainroom where Raya had been originally laying down when I first arrived. I laid Raya down as gently and as slowly as I could manage.

I had never known myself to do anything with caution, it never mattered to me if I did or didn't. However, with Raya, it mattered way beyond my comprehension. To me, it became of the upmost importance.

I walked into the other room to get some of the blankets Raya used to shield me from the rays of the sun and covered her with them. I pressed them tightly against her body so that she would stay warm. There was no fire burning in the room to give warmth, But I knew the blanket were better than the open air. Raya's hair was disheveled around her head. As I stood there, I had the urge to push it away from her face. I decided against this for numerous reasons.

Honestly, I doubted my own resolve to not kill her especially in her weakened state. I failed even now to understand my own desire to touch her in such a tender way; this was altogether something foreign to me. I did not want to chance opening doors I could not so easily close. I moved backward from her as if I had been struck. After staring at her momentarily, I turned and walked away from her.

I left the room in haste. I failed to know when dawn would arrive, yet I was unwilling to take any unnecessary risks when I did not have to. I could not be selfish at this point. Up until this point, I had been able to keep the hunger at bay, yet my realization that I had to hunt awakened the pull of it to an extreme. I didn't fight against such a force, I only gave into to it with a morbid understanding of myself.

I walked through the front door, closing it behind me. I stopped to smell the air. The wind blew it softly and without any force. I could see the trees being rustled by it, the grass also gave notice of its presence. Initially, all I could smell was water in the air, a prelude to the coming rain. I knew that the weather would soon change. It did not matter to me. Raya was my priority, I knew there was much to do before dawn.

Time was against me. I could not waste a single moment of it. So many questions crossed my mind. I knew Raya was alive, I took comfort in this small thing. How long would it last? I knew my blood was nothing like what flowed in the human's veins. My immortality lasted on as long as I gave into the hunger, but how would my blood affect Raya and her life? Was her sickness somehow what kept my blood from healing her?

There was so much I failed to understand and even more I did not know. Time, would give the answers I was in search of. The control I had over all things around me and how they affected me left me without much patience. This, however, affected not only myself but Raya as well. Would I have enough patience to help her, or would I be her downfall?

## CHAPTER THIRTY

Little, time passed, still I found myself impatient. This particular hunt served a dual purpose for me, but my eagerness for the hunt itself was undeniable. I wasn't sure when it happened, I didn't not feel the same way about the hunt as I once did. It held no sway over me as it once did. I did not cower beneath the roaming hunger I felt just below the surface of my skin. As I sniffed the air with anticipation the air smelled stale to me.

Truly, the blood from my prey never held the same taste, but it held a familiar sense of comfort to me. The moment it hit my nose, I knew exactly what it was and could always distinguish it from everything else around me. Silently, I stood motionless looking into the forest and surrounding structures. They were familiar to me. My ability to memorize something after seeing it only once at times baffled me.

I already memorized Raya's dwelling and knew I could still find it with little effort. I had never been so urgent to hunt as I was now, except in the beginning when I had no control over myself. There was too much at stake. My own weakened state propelled my own choice to feed just now. I could never help Raya if I lack the ability to control myself around her.

The sky's colors had changed into the darkest shade of blue, I knew dawn's approach was evident. Twilight. I had no choice except to hunt. I waited there, with more patience than I usually had. I took notice of the passing second which slowly passed. I hoped something would happen, enabling me to be delivered from my bondage.

I disliked sitting by idly waiting for things to happen as fate willed them to. On the contrary, I almost always took matters into my own hands.

I distinctly remember what it had been to sit by idly waiting on something to happen. If I had followed my first mind, I would not be plagued by the thing I was reduced to even after all these years. I had ample opportunity to refuse Lucifer anything he had asked of me, yet I did not. I could not, no matter what the cost might have been.

I was, in a way, naive, allowing myself to be persuaded by him. For what? What purpose did any of it serve? Where had any of it gotten me? No where. Even as I stood there lost within the depths of my thoughts, I realized that which I once was I could never be again. I found myself in a position where the odds were stacked against me, it was hard to see past them. Even to my own eyes, I could not recognize myself at times.

What was I really? I had thoughts and feelings I could not easily describe in words. This was so unlike me. As much as I wanted to push these new feelings away from me, I knew I could not. Everything I did concerning Raya and Lerric somehow affected me. How exactly, I was unsure. I wondered just how far-reaching such actions would be toward myself.

To say I was happy with my life as I had lived it before would have been a false statement, to be sure. I had come to terms with my own solitude and the forced wandering I had done since the beginning. I had paid dearly for what I had become. I knew my choice to willingly give up my elevated position was absolute madness. My choice was not simple, but complex. Ultimately, I am still the one who made the final choice.

Nothing could be done to change what had taken place in me; I assumed what I was transformed into was permanent! In a sense, I was numb to this morbid reality I lived in. I had two options left open to me. I could either deny them or I could embrace them head on. To deny these changes meant to deny

my very self. Such changes did not happen easily. Nothing came to me easy except my prey.

The feelings I felt for Raya, however, seemed almost natural to me. They felt as natural as the hunt itself. I remember wanting to touch Raya as she lay on the settee, unable to shy away from such thoughts about her. I decided against them because time as usual, was my unwaivering enemy. I was baffled by my own desire to touch her. How could I explain what I, myself did not understand.

My thoughts were broken by the wind whipping my hair, I felt it pick up causing me to shiver slightly. My patience was rewarded with the pungent smell blood floating on the wind as the cloud do. It caught my attention as if I was directly in front of a prize, one that would satisfy my bloodlust. I wondered if the wind had changed direction. Was there a unknown victim whose life was snuffed out when I become complacent in my own thoughts? Such maddening reality I admitted to myself.

I would be lying if I said I was not entirely focused on the hunt. I embraced the hunger, yet, I knew the driving force behind this particular time was Raya's dire need of me. This fact took the place of my need for the blood. It took precedence over everything else. This realization was not immediate, yet, it helped me to better understand the changes taking place inside of me. These changes, however, were not instant.

I took in the fullness of the night as I stood there in silent relection. I wondered what the future held. The future, in honesty, mattered little to me. However, as I thought about such things, I knew in the deepest recesses of my mind, it was all that truly mattered to me. As much as I hated to admit it, I knew I was no longer alone. Even if I was to distance myself from Raya

physically, that would be the full extent of my distance from her. I could never remove her from my mind.

I remembered how I thought ceaselessly about her when we were separated. I compared every sound I heard to Raya's own and Lerric's crying. Even if I did the unthinkable and left Raya alone, I knew nothing would be as it once was. This thought had crossed my mind before, but I failed to truly understand it before.

If I walked away as everything was now, I knew this would be detrimental to Raya. I had already vowed to find a cure for her sickness. Nothing seemed to be working. I couldn't see any signs of healing from the animal attack. Even on a small scale, I had yet to help her. I wondered how this made me look to her and how she viewed my promises. How much really was my word worth to her? If I so choose to leave her, I knew only time would tell how it would affect her.

This thought lingered in my head momentarily. I knew I would not be able to live with myself I decided to leave Lerric and Raya to their own fate. I was in a position to help them and would do all I could to ensure I did this. I was guilty of so much over the course of my existence. I killed so many countless humans just as a means to satisfy the hunger I knew so well. I did so without feeling the slightest form of guilt on my behalf.

I ran from Raya's dwelling, deeper into the forest, until I came to the origin of the smell. Initially, what I saw did not hit me. As I looked at the massacre, I stood motionlessly awed by it. I could not make out what I saw with clarity. Countless times over the passage of time, I witness such morbid cruelty, but not as gruesome as this.

Several children lay haphazardly with heads severed from their bodies. I turned from the sight, leaving it in shocked silence. I knew the killer

of such innocence would not be far from her. A trail of blood was there to guide my way like a lamp of blood; red candles, although I had no need of it. My search did not last long. I found a male covered in blood from his neck down to his waist, his form obscured by the crimson moisture, giving proof of his crime. His arms held the same covering yet, here the blood was dripping like droplets of water.

I glanced at him for only a second, then allowed myself to come close enough so his eyes would not be mistaken when he gazed upon me. I wanted him to know death had found him, finally coming to repay that which he had taken. Only a matter of seconds passed. I leaped upon him, feeling the warm liquid rush into my mount immediately. His heartbeat stopped in mere moments. As I let him fall away from me, I smiled to myself, knowing I had killed him.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Standing in the darkness of the night, I knew there was much to do before things could be tranquil again. After remembering I sent Lerric into the forest toward her dwelling, I wondered if she had made it home yet. With dawn's quick approach, I still had much to do.

I needed to find Lerric to ensure she made it home safely. After the horror I witnessed only moments ago, I became apprehensive about Lerric being left alone in such a place. I feared no one nor creature of the earth, Lerric, however, was a small child. She had ample reason to fear. My search yielded no prize as I looked in a deeper part of the forest, secluded away from the other trees. I knew without trying, I would find her; I would have to look for her but this mattered little. Unless Lerric was bleeding she would not be so easy to track, I hoped for Raya this was not the case. I knew without Raya having to tell me that Raya entrusted Lerric's care to me.

I knew without a doubt, Raya valued Lerric's life far above her own. Raya was in no position to take care of Lerric, so the responsibility fell to me. I tilted my head up, concentrating on Lerric's scent, similar to Raya's own. Briefly, I carried Lerric with me only a hand full of times, yet I had already memorized the distinct smell of her. Both Raya's and Lerric's scent were each equally unique in their own way. I knew Raya's vividly from her blood I once tasted in her mouth.

Even though I killed my victims, their scent usually stayed with me indefinitely. Raya's scent was one of these things. I had not tasted Lerric's blood, so it was much harder to track on the air. This became a guessing game to me. A game with no rules that mattered little to me. There was a limited number of ways to Raya's dwelling, I would have to search each one to locate Lerric.

If Lerric reached her dwelling any further search would be needless.

Immediately, I turned around, picking up my speed to the highest extent I was able to. Speed, I had to my advantage, yet time was against me this night. Much of the night was already spent, time moved as a dancer I held no control over. I could never dictate the passage of time itself. As I ran, trees brushed up against my body with enough force to scratch my skin.

My own nakedness was awkward to me, yet no clothes were found suitable to me. I decided to go back to the male to see if he wore anything I would find to my liking. I would cause countless questions if I appeared to Lerric without any clothes, such questions I would have no answers for. For one such as myself, it was not my place to answer such things.

I did not want Raya to think any less of me simply on the grounds of such trivial aspects I could not control. The humans, as I observed were never naked around one another. I had meant to ask Raya why this was so. I came upon the male and looked coldly at his lifeless form. Brightly pale in the darkness of the forest, the blood covering his body glistened in the light of the moon. The only other lights were those illuminated by the stars shining like diamonds in a vast array.

I picked him up easily. His shirt was worn, but in decent condition; his pants equally matched. I guessed him to be a vagabond, knowing the condition well because in the beginning I shared the same position as he occupied now. I could not fault him for this, knowing I held the same intimacy as him with this position. All my former memories came flooding back to me in a rush, yet I could not stand there dwelling on such a fragment of my own chains. There was always much to do.

I stripped him of his clothes and threw him from me with ease. Disgusted with his very life as it had been, I hated to look upon him longer than I

absolutely had to. The clothes closely resembled the size I would need for a good fit, I would not be sure unless I tried them on. I knew the humans well enough to mimic their actions in this way, such a perfect fit I found the clothes to be.

The human's memories is how I learned what I needed to know about them. The clothes made my movements seem slightly sluggish but in all things, I moved with angelic grace. They weren't a perfect fit on my form in size, but, what type of perfection would there be when you only had the dead to choose from? One man's trash as they say, I thought with a sneer, one any normal monster would cringe away from. Galancing up at the sky, I noticed the slight changes in the color; dawn approached. I had never learned how to measure accurately its approach except by the changing colors I found breathtaking.

I moved quickly, picking up speed as I distanced myself from the soulless corpse. I wondered who was really the real monster, me, or the one I killed for such crimes committed in cruelty. Ironic I knew as I let this thought fall from my mind, focusing on Lerric. I knew I needed to find her at all costs. I worried about Raya, I knew however, she was safe in the confines of her dwelling.

Running with a sense of urgency, I retraced my earlier steps. I had to make to it to Raya's dwelling before Lerric. It only took a few moments for me to reach my destination, I was not out of breath by any means. I slowed my pace to a walk, quiet in my movements. Cautiously, I approached the door, careful to be silent. I did not want to wake Raya because I knew she needed sleep to heal from the earlier animal attack. As I moved to open the door, I did sluggishly, I did not close the door as I moved into the main room where I laid Raya previously. There was still no sign of Lerri's return.

I turned, walked out of the house and closed the door behind me. I was

greatful Raya was still lost to the slumber, whether naturally or from her wounds, I did not know. I decided I could find Lerric quicker if I followed her exact footsteps. I ran toward the direction of the animal attack, using Raya's blood to guide my way. My efforts were rewarded when I found Lerric not far from the site of the attack.

Initially, I did not know if she was dead or simply asleep, she lay utterly still. Seeing her like this, stopped my heart cold. I was fearful of such foreign feelings which were unlike anything I experienced before this. I wondered at this. Slowly, I moved toward Lerric in an attempt to better assess her. I smelled her scent radiating off her in waves. It was similar to Raya's own yet, distinct somehow. I assumed this was due to Lerric's father. I knew I would at some point, ask Raya more about him.

I moved to pick Lerric up, feeling her warmth. I heard her heartbeating loudly in my ears causing me to sigh with relief. Usually it would have been agonizing to hear this but just now, it was music to my ears. Gently, I bent down and picked her up. I pulled her close to my chest, careful to keep from suffocating her. I picked up my pace leaving no more room for hesitations or delays. I knew if Lerric was left in the elements too long it would be detrimental to her or even tragic. I remembered this from when I delivered Lerric all those months ago.

Pulling her tightly to my chest as I ran, I could hear her slumber-filled breathing close to my ear. Time seemed to stand still as I reached Raya's dwelling, this gave me such relief as I gazed peacefully at it. I slowed my steps to a walk, but my movements still held a sense of purpose behind them. I walked up to the door and opened it slowly. I crossed the threshold, closing the door quickly behind me in an attempt to keep out the cold air. Silently,

I moved into the room so I could where Raya still lay. Her eyes were still closed in slumber. I laid Lerric down on the floor and grabbed one of the blankets to cover her with. She did not stir or notice anything beyond her slumber. Taking a step back I gaze longingly at them bōth.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Silently, I stood there wondering what my next move should be. Sighing, my breath appeared as a white cloud in front of my face. I knew it was cold because usually outside in the elements was the only times I saw this cloud. I wanted to provide some heat to the frigid room, I remembered starting a fire would allow me to accomplish this with little effort. I decided this would be beneficial to Lerric and Raya. Lerric was undamaged, Raya was another story altogether.

Lerric's only problem was that she was cold and tired from her early trauma. I knew the humans preferred to dwell in warmer climates and did not know how the cold would affect Lerric. I knew if I brought the temperature in the room to a bearable setting, I would solve at least one problem I faced. I had not been able to assess Raya's injuries properly.

This would come later. Right now, I knew I needed to get the fire started. I walked past Lerric toward the fireplace, considering what I would need to accomplish my decided task. This had become my priority in a matter of moments because I knew the danger I put Raya and Lerric in by prolonging my decision. Looking at the wood, I knew none of it would be of use. All that remained in the fireplace were embers left over from the previous fire, which had long since gone out. I saw no wood, but knew there had to be some nearby.

Walking toward the front door, I opened it, walking through it with haste. I knew in Raya's weakened state, she would be able to move very far, I assumed the firewood would be close to her dwelling. I closed the door silently to keep from waking either of them. I knew as long as the sleep had a hold of them it would be peaceful, even to Raya in her injured state. I wanted this

peaceful state to last as long as it possibly could.

As I walked around the house in search of firewood, the darkness penetrated my sight, but did not deter my keen sense of seeing the world around me. I did not have to search long before I was rewarded. Around the back of the house I found a stack of firewood almost as tall as the wall it was stacked against. I wondered how much I would need to carry, or how much would fit inside Raya's tiny fireplace. Picking up as much wood as I was able to carry without struggle, I walked back to the house. Shifted the load into one arm, I opened the door, walked through it and shut the door behind me.

I took the firewood over to the fireplace setting it down within reach of the fireplace. Kneeling down, I begin to stack as much of the firewood that would fit inside the fireplace in a manner similiar to what Raya had previously shown me in the cave. Once I mastered learning something, I did not so easily forget it. After I finished stacking the firewood, I stood erect, looking around for tools I would need to help me light the fire. I found easily and set to work lighting the fire. Quickly, I had a fire blazing in the harth.

Immediately, I felt the room's temperature rise as it was warmth by the fire. I moved away from the fireplace and went into the small room Raya showed me earlier. I knew this room would be helpful to protect me from the rays of the sun. However, as I assessed the damage to the door, I wondered if it would be enough to block out the sun from the room; I knew that my very life depended on this.

The room was well awy from windows. I remembered the light shining through various cracks in the door way. Crossing the threshold, I looked around the room seeing blankets on the bed. moving the blankets out of the way, I sat down lightly on the bed. I needed to assess my situation as a whole. I knew

as usual, time was stacked against me; I had too much to do. I needed Lerric's help, she would know the layout of the house better than I would. I hated to wake her, but I had no other choice. I wanted to be alone with my thoughts forever, because they were far more appealing than the alternative.

I felt as though an eternity passed since I had been left alone in the confines of my dwelling, but I could not concentrate on these things just now. There was too much to do. Getting up from the bed, I walked back into the room where Lerric and Raya both still lay, lost in slumber. I envied the peacefulness I saw etched upon their angelic faces, as one might envy the angels who have wings. Walking over to where Lerric slept, I knelt down next to her. I was apprehensive about waking her because I was unsure of how she would react to me. I nudged her gently.

"Lerric, Lerric. Wake up now. You have to get up." I whispered. A small eternity passed before Lerric stirred underneath my touch. I knew my touch was cold to her, but she took no notice of it. She opened her eyes sluggishly and looking around.

"Mother, where are you???" She asked me, her voice lined with her earlier slumber.

"It's me, Fallun. Your mother is fine. She is sleeping now, but I need your help. Wake up now. There is not much time." I said sternly. I waited for my words to register in Lerric's mind. I could see the exact moment they did because she facial expression changed to one holding a serious demeanor. she sat up slowly, shaking the remaining sleep from her body.

"What is it? Where is my mother?" She asked, her voice almost frantic.

"She sleeps there." I pointed to where Raya laid, still sleeping. However, she is still injured, I need to clean her wounds to better assess them. I need your help. I need to get some water and something to clean the blood

off of her. Can you manage this for me?"

"Yes, I think I can. Let me get some water, it's in the next room. I'll put it on the fire to warm. It won't take too long."

"Listen to me. Lerric, your mother is not wearing any clothes. I had to strip them off of her to slow her bleeding while we were still in the forest. Don't be alarmed by her." I looked at her face trying to read her expression. As she gazed deeply into my eyes, I saw her face become a stoic mask I could not make out.

"I understand, Fallun. I know you helped her the best way you were able to. I'm sure it's because of you she is alive even now." Lerric said. Her face held a brief look of sadness, but passed before I could hone in on it.

I remembered the earlier events in the forest. These things that took place between Raya and I made me uneasy. Would Lerric still feel this way if she knew the real truth? Would she begin to see me as the monster I really was?

I watched Lerric get up and move into another part of the house, not able to see her clearly from my kneeling position. I stood up, turning so that I was facing Raya, who was still covered by the blanket. Her head was the only thing not covered by the blanket. I was apprehensive about uncovering her. There was blood on her neck and hair, I did know if Lerric noticed it earlier, but my keen eyesight missed little.

Uncovering Raya slowly, I saw the blood covering her like a crimson veil. The sight sickened me greatly, Raya was not simply some nameless corpse to me. She was someone I knew on a very real, personal level; there was no denying this.

Lerric returned quickly with a pail of water in one hand and what looked like a bundle of rags in the other. Walking over to the fireplace, she hung

its just above the fire so it would begin to warm. Standing next to me, Lerric set the rags down on the ground within easy reach of Raya. As gently as possible, I picked up Raya and lay her on the ground to prevent getting any blood on the settee or blankets. This took no effort on my part, Lerric watched all this in complete silence. Lerric showed absolutely no reaction or emotions at seeing her mother like this. We waited in an eerie silence. Lerric focused on the pail of water; I guessed because the sight of her mother in this way was hard for her to bear. I could not fault her for any of these things.

"The water is ready now. I see steam rising from it, but if it's left over the fire for too long it will be too hot to be of any use."

Her words shattered the silence; until that moment the room had been filled the sounds of firewood cracking and popping as it burned. Lerric walked to retrieve the pail, hot to the touch she winched from the heat. Walking quickly to where I was, she set the pail down within easy reach of the rags. I wasted no more time as I kneeled down reaching for the rags. I left some dry ones off to the side and placed the rest in the water. The water was hot, but did not burn me, it had no affect on my skin.

I started taking the rags out of the water and attempted to wash the blood off Raya's broken body. This was a struggle because most of it dried in the cold. I applied pressure as I rubbed the rags against Raya's body, careful to keep from injuring her further. Lerric sat down, watching me in silence. I glanced at her momentarily and could see that her eyes were intensely focused on her mother. The process was slow, but the blood gradually started to come off. I kept dipping the rags into the water until it turned a deep crimson. I was too focus on my task to notice it as I normally would, yet I was shocked by the water color. I wondered if Raya was strong enough to survive. I could only hope that she was. The alternative was a morbid thought I did not entertain.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

As I looked at Raya's injuries in the dimly lit room, I could not see signs of them. This could not be right, I thought to myself. How was it just hours ago her flesh was ripped to shreds? For the first time in my life, I had no understanding of what my eyes saw. Nothing made any sense. Carefully, I had removed most of the blood from Raya's body, which proved to be taxing to me.

"Why isn't my mother waking up? Is she really alright?" Lerric asked, her voice shaking slightly. She spoke in hushed tones to hide her fear but it still broke the silence that filled the room. All I could hear was the movement of the rags on Raya's skin, the removal of the water as I drained it into the pail, and the crackling of the logs as they burned in the fireplace.

"I'm not sure, she's been out for a while now. I don't know the sole reason why she is still asleep, whether it's from the animal attack or for some other unknown reason. I don't even understand it myself. All we can do for now is watch and see what happens. These things take a lot of time and patience. I don't understand much about what is going on with your mother."

I was careful not to disclose the full nature of my own thoughts and feelings. I knew I wasn't being completely honest with Lerric, but how could I when I did not understand everything unfolding before me. All I really knew was Raya had been severely injured in the attack by the wild animal. I used my own blood to heal her, I drained her of all her own blood. I wondered if this was the real reason she had yet to regain consciousness. Did it mean she was too weak to handle the intermingling of my blood with her own? Did this affect her sickness somehow? There were far too many questions that needed to be answered sooner rather than later. How could I help Raya if I did not know what was

wrong with her? I was powerless against something I had no knowledge of. Raya was in no position to answer any of my questions at this point. Only time could answer me. I willed myself to believe Raya would regain consciousness, to believe she wasn't dead. I could still hear the faint breathing she gave as an indication of this, her frail heart beat was still moving below the surface of her chest.

Carefully, I removed the remainder of blood from Raya's body. Her nakedness drew my attention as I cleaned her wounds. I was curious, yet I made no move to touch her unless I had to. She looked strikingly beautiful to me in the dimly lit room. Even the angels, themselves could not compare to her unique beauty. I hid my thoughts of these things in the deepest recesses of my locked mind. I knew Lerric would fail to understand the inner workings of my thoughts in their vast array.

"From what I could see as you started to clean her, it appears as if she lost a large amount of blood. Do you think it would be best if she was given a transfusion of blood to at least sustain her and boost her energy?" Lerric queried me. This question brought all my focus on Lerric. She, however, did not remove her gaze from Raya. I was relieved by this because I did not want her to pay attention to me for even a moment. I was apprehensive about any questions she would ask that I would be leery about answering.

"I'm unsure, little one. I think we should not take any chances. There is not a lot of time before the sun rises. At some point, I will have to sleep. Show me where her clothes are or get her something to wear. Then after she is dressed, we will decide what we should do." I told her quietly, trying to keep my voice low. I did not know how I would sound to Raya but, I did not want to alarm her.

"I'll be back shortly, wait here. I'll only be gone a moment." Lerric

said as she moved to get up.

Standing up, Lerric walked hurriedly to another part of the house I could not easily see. I begin drying Raya off with the rags I set aside solely for this purpose. Gently, I was careful in my movements, doing as little as possible to move her. Her injuries were invisible to my eyes, but I did not want to make them worse by moving her without cause. I decided against anything that would compromise her well-being in any way.

Lerric returned a short while later, holding an item that was hard to make out because it was draped over her arm. She held it folded over her but the hem of it dragged the ground as she walked. As she came to stand in front of me, Lerric looked from me to Raya in one swift motion, letting her eyes rest on her mother. She did not look at me as she spoke. My eyes, however, remained transfixed on her face, trying to make out the hidden emotions there.

"I've brought a simple dress for her to wear. I don't know what my mother would have chose, but at least in this she will be the most comfortable." She handed the dress to me. "You don't know how to dress her, do you?" She queried as she motioned to the dress. I shook my head indicating my dilemma.

"Okay, let me help you then. I will need you to hold her because she is too heavy for me to lift on my own, then I will dress her. Pick her up so I can pull the dress over her head. I'll be able to do this easily so long as you are able to hold her up."

I did not speak, I merely nodded in response to everything Lerric said. Watching Lerric dress her mother, the process seemed to happen quickly. I could see that Lerric took care as she pulled the dress over Raya's head. Pulling Raya's arms through the sleeves, she then pulled the dress over her legs so it would cover most of Raya's body. Lerric finished her task and stepped back from both of us.

"Lerric, go and get the doctor who does your mother's blood transfusions. Just tell him its an emergency and he needs to come right away. Go now."

Turning away, Lerric quickly walked toward the front of the house. I did not follow her movements. I knew she was gone when I heard the door open and close a few moments later. I turned my attention back to Raya, knowing I needed to pick her up and put her back on the settee. Picking Raya up, I pulled her close to my arms with ease. She was cold to me, I did not understand why. I laid her down gently and covered her up with blankets. I put more logs on the fire to prevent it from burning out. I felt the room warm considerably as the fire burned brighter, emitting more heat into the small room.

I stood next to the fire thinking about what I would do next. I knew my overall goal was to take Raya with me to the cave; this would be the safest place for her until I figured out what was happening to her. I wondered if the mixture of my own blood with her was somehow harmful to her. I wasn't left alone with my thoughts for too long. I heard the front door open, followed by two sets of footsteps I knew belonged to Lerric and the doctor. My assumption proved to be right when I saw them both cross the threshold into the room. I was the first to speak.

"I know this is not the regular time you usually come here but it only proves the urgency of the situation. I know we said your services would no longer be needed, but, Raya was attacked by a large animal where she lost a large amount of her blood. I believe she needs a transfusion because she has not regained consciousness yet. She has been like this for hours."

"I understand." The doctor started. "Lerric has filled me in on most of the details. I will do whatever I can. Please roll up her sleeve while I get everything in place for the procedure." The doctor looked at Lerric and I with an unreadable expression.

Walking over to where Raya lay, I pulled the blankets down to her waist, tucking them to ensure she retained warmth. I knew the doctor was standing just behind me due to his body heat radiating off his in waves. I heard him removing several tools from his bag, similar to what he had used previously on Raya's last transfusion. I did not ask him any questions. I simply rolled up Raya's sleeve quickly in a dreary silence, moving out of the way once I finished.

Intensely, I watched him work. Time moved slowly even though I understood exactly what the doctor was doing. Just like before, I watched the blood flow from the bag through the clear tube, stained crimson with the color of Raya's blood, into Raya's arm. She showed no sign of being aware this was being done to her. I was vexed by this, but I kept it to myself because no one seemed to be able to answer the questions in the array.

When the doctor was finished, he removed the instruments and began placing them back into the bag. He turned, looking directly into my eyes before he spoke. "Sir, she was in dire need of blood, I have given her enough to remedy this. I brought extra with me in the worse case scenario, but Raya has required even this. Given enough time she should function normally. I can see no reason why she shouldn't."

Picking up his bag, he nodded in Raya's direction slightly but did not say a word.

"Lerric. Show the doctor out. I will stay with your mother."

Lerric did not hesitate to follow my instructions. I watched them recede from the room. I heard their footsteps on the ground and knew they were walking toward the door. When I heard the door open and close, I knew the doctor was gone. Lerric's footsteps were light as she came back into the room. I waited in silence for her knowing we were both anxious about the very same thing. I knew without having to look at Raya, her entire focus was on Raya. How

ironic that we should have this in common when we had so little else. I knew very soon I would have to take Raya with me, I failed to understand how I would make Lerric understand what I could not even now. I only hoped that she would not hate me in the end.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Lerric stood there looking at me with eyes unreadable. I was at a loss for words, but knew this was not the time for small talk between us. There was too much that needed to be said, to many questions we both had that could easily be answered.

"Lerric, little one, please listen to me. I need your full undivided attention and cooperation with everything I am about to tell you. Is this understood?"

She merely nodded her agreement to everything I said. She seemed to also be at a loss for words. I failed to understand why, but there was not time to waste asking questions. This would come later, or at least I hoped there would be time later to ask such questions.

"I've decided I'm going to take your mother with me to my dwelling for a time until she regains consciousness and is better. I want you to remain here where you will be safe, with the villagers who will look after you..." Lerric interrupted me before I could finish.

"I don't understand! Why do you have to take her away from me? What is the reason for all of this? Isn't there some other way than what you are suggesting? Why do you have to take her?!!!"

I looked her agonized face. My thoughts swirled around inside my head at a frantic pace, but I kept them from showing on my face. "No, Lerric. I have thought this over and this is the best possible solution. You don't want her to get worse, do you? I am trying to help her, without being able to take her with me where I can watch her closely, I will fail at this."

"No..." Lerric said, her voice filled with the unshed tears she held back.

"You want her to get better and heal don't you?" I asked her sternly,

while keeping my questions short.

"Yes." She said, her answers just as short as my own; this I was grateful for.

"Listen, this shouldn't take very long at all. You have to understand I've taken it upon myself to ensure your mother is healed and no harm comes to her. As you can see I haven't done a very good job of that. She is out in the open where unknown things can bring her harm and I am not able to look after her like I need to. I know this is hard for you to understand, but the least you can do is allow me to do what I can for her."

"Don't you understand we have never been apart except for the time I came to get you on my mother's behalf. That trip didn't take me but a few short hours. I don't know if I would be the same if I had to remain away from her, especially if something terrible happens to her. What will you do then?" Lerric's voice was almost frantic. I looked at her, trying to read her stoic facade. She was apt at hiding such things from such eyes, even my own.

"I can assure you that you don't have to worry as you are. I am what's called a perfectionist in my own right; I don't attempt to do things I will not succeed at. Your mother will be perfectly safe with me. You have my word. I know you do not fully understand what I am telling you, but my life is already bound up into your mother's. If I allowed anything to happen to her my own life would no longer matter."

"Do you really mean these things? It's my mother's well-being, her very life we are talking about here. It means more to me than even my own life. Do as you think is best, but please just bring her back as quickly as you possibly can." Lerric pleaded with me.

"I give you my word. I will remain here for a few more moments to see if the transfusion has any affect on her. Regardless of anything else, I am

taking her with me just before the sun rises. You will be okay by yourself, won't you?"

Lerric did not speak to me, she simply nodded her head in response to my question. I waited there for what seemed like a small eternity in silence. I saw Lerric walk over to her mother, taking Raya's hand in her own. She bent down slowly and kissed it.

"I know you intended to wait, but I want you to take her now before I change my mind. Please just take her and go...." Lerric choked back a sob she so desperately tried to hide from me.

I wasted no time. I moved toward Raya. Lerric stood up and walked over to the fireplace. I picked up Raya and pulled her close to my chest. Walking toward the front door, I shifted Raya's weight so I could open and close the without struggle. After walking through the threshold, I closed the door and shifted Raya's weight in my arms so I could carry her effortlessly.

I wasted no time picking up my speed. I wanted to reach my dwelling as quickly as possible without distress. I paid absolutely no attention to the blurred surroundings I moved past as I ran. Briefly, I would look up to make sure I wasn't running into something or straying from my destination, but mostly I used my head to shield Raya's face from the icy air. Her breathing remained constant.

I smelled the moisture in the air. My breath formed a small white cloud in front of my face I paid no attention to. This only indicated the coldness of the air around me. The cold did not deter me from my chosen task, instead it reinforced the urgency of my movements. I wanted to get Raya out of the cold as quickly as possible. I remembered when I first held Raya, how awkward she felt to me. Now I ran with her, feeling more comfortable than I ever had.

Raya's body gave off a heat that more than simply appealed to me. I felt the blood of her body rushing through her veins. I was sure her heart had been barely beating, but I could feel it beating rapidly against Raya's chest. Her heartbeat was strong and fast, simliar in movement to that of a hummingbird. That's odd, I thought to myself. How could this be? I wondered. I knew not even Raya could answer me. Many thoughts continued to enter my mind. I was still at a loss as how Raya was able to heal so rapidly, especially in her unconscious state.

I knew Lerric would be in no position to question what she could not understand; there was nothing to compare this to. Was it the blood I had put into Raya's open wounds which affected her this way? If this was in fact true did it affect her blood in other ways? There was no sure way to know these things. I would have to monitor Raya's progress once she regained consciousness. How long would this take? I had far too many questions no one could answer. I had never attempted to do what I did with Raya before, so I had no way of knowing the outcome of such things. I felt overwhelmed by the numerous questions that crossed my mind because I was unable to sort them out. I did not let myself become burdened by these things. I knew what my focus really was.

I would everything in my power to maintain this focus. A single thought entered my mind which set me at ease. Raya. In so many ways, my world was starting to revolve around her. I had a hard time admitting this to myself. Nonetheless, I did. What good did it do to deny these things as I knew them to be? Shaking my head to clear my thoughts, I noticed not only was the light coming into the sky, but I had arrived at my cave.

Swiftly, I jumped up into the trees; right now it was a race against the sun which left me no time to delay. I jumped from tree to tree until I reached

the tree limbs which were directly in front of my dwelling. I jumped lightly toward the entrance, landing at the edge of the cliff. I walked past the stockpile I made earlier before going into the dark confines of my cave. I did not stop walking until I was in the deepest recesses of the cave. I leaned up against the wall and sat down slowly, still holding Raya in my arms. I could see a small light coming through the cave's opening; I was far enough away from the entrance it did not reach me. I was grateful for this protection. The slumber began to call to me with such an overwhelming force, I was powerless to resist it. It caught me off guard because I had been lost in my earlier thoughts. I could feel myself giving into it completely knowing I had little choice in this. I closed my eyes, blacking out everything around me. The last image I saw in my mind's eye was Raya's face lost in slumber.

I heard it before I realized what it was.

"Fallun, wake up."

I opened my eyes slowly, not fully awake. Still disoriented, I knew without having to see the origin of it where the sound came from. It was Raya's voice. How was it possible, I wondered as I opened my eyes and looked at her.

"Fallun, are you alright? You need to wake up now." Raya said. Her voice loud enough to ensure she had my full attention.

"Raya, what's wrong with you? Are you alright? What is it?" I asked her while trying to keep my voice neutral.

"I am fine. I have been lying here with you like this for sometime. Where are we?"

"We are in my dwelling. I brought you here right before the sun rose this morning. How long have you been awake? I thought you would not be awake from your unconscious rest for a while. I am surprised you are awake even now."

Do you remember anything that happened?"

"I remember being in the forest with Lerric. After that everything is a blur. Can I sit up so that we can talk better?"

I did not answer out loud, instead I moved so that she could stand. I stood up with her still in my arms, liking the feel of her far more than I knew I should have. I could feel her body heat coming off her in waves against my body. I stood her erect while I moved to lean against the wall well away from where she now stood. I could see her distinctly in the darkness. At that moment, my mind was assaulted by many thoughts at once. I tried to keep them from overwhelming me. I had so much to say to her, yet words seemed to fail me. I paused momentarily before speaking, unsure of myself.

"Raya, I brought you here to keep you safe. I need you to sit down because I have much to tell you. All that I ask is for you to sit down and listen to everything I have to say before you say anything at all. Then, when I am finished you can ask me anything you like and say whatever you want. For now, please just listen..."

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Sighing deeply, I thought about everything I had to tell Raya. I had never told anyone the things I had to tell Raya, but it was way past time for her to know. If I was going to truly be a part of her life, I would have to tell her everything about myself and who I was.

"First, how do you feel? You've been given a blood transfusion, but I don't think it has affected you in a bad way. It was more than the normal amount you usually require to keep from getting sick, but just enough to revive you." I spoke slowly to ensure she understood me. She merely nodded in response so I took this as a sign to continue.

"You were attacked by a wild animal in the forest before I found you. By all rights you should be dead, or still unconscious and severely injured. However, as you can plainly see, this is not the case. Here you stand in front of me alive and uninjured."

Pausing, I wanted to allow the gravity of my words to sink in fully so Raya would be able to fully grasp all I was saying. I had so much to say. A huge part of me wished she was still lost in the peaceful confines of the earlier slumber, then none of this would be happening. None of it would matter. Apprehensive about the words I was about to say, I knew I no longer had no choice. This was inevitable now. I had trouble making sense of the situation myself, so I knew in her finite thinking, she would have trouble understanding things the way I needed her to.

"Raya, listen to me carefully. What I am about to tell you may or may not make sense to you, but it's important that you know. First off, let me ask you some things." I asked her while intensely gazing at her as she sat

down a short distance away from me. "Do you notice any changes in your body at all?"

My eyes bore into her own as I looked for any changes she would attempt to keep hidden from me. Unfortunately, Raya's face remained only a blank, empty mask.

"No, Fallun, none to my knowledge. I have only been awake for a few short hours. Am I supposed to notice anything?"

"I don't know to be honest. Since you were unconscious all this time you would not know exactly what I mean by my question. When you were attacked by the wild animal, it left you severely injured and because of this you lost a large amount of blood. To put it bluntly--this was just a few short hours before the rising of the sun."

"So... What is it you're trying to tell me that I don't already know? Has something happened I am not aware of?"

"Listen, Raya. I've got to tell you some things about myself so that you can fully understand everything as it really is. This is very important because without knowing everything you won't fully understand the entire situation. I once told you I am what is known as a vampire. I know you don't know what this is because I am the first of my kind. However, I kill the humans as I tried to explain to you before. I feed off of them, no not just any part of them--their very blood--because within the blood holds all life. This blood is what sustains me so that I can live.

"I was once an angel in heaven, but I was loyal to one other angel who was once my brother. His name is Lucifer. In my willingness to aide in his rebellion, known as The Fall, I was cast out of heaven, sent to the earth, and banished from my maker's sight forever. As a result, he turned me into

this creature you see before you, into a desolate wanderer. My fate was to feed off the humans just to live.

"My name used to be Eden. It is where I got the idea for Lerric's middle name. I must have blood to even live as I do. I can not go out into the sunlight for any period of time or I will die. You, yourself have seen what happens to me when I go into the light of the sun. I was cursed to this fate, but I had no other choice but to accept it."

Raya did not speak, her eyes moved frantically along the planes of my monstrous face. She made no movements. For a small moment, I almost mistook her for a statue because she was extremely still. The only things preventing me from this thought was the rising and falling of her chest and she breathed in the cold air deeply. This formed a small cloud in front of her face.

Raya looked at me, taking in my entire form. I saw the questions brewing just below the surface of her mind, hidden behind the depths of her beautiful eyes. However, she stayed silent, simply watching me as if I were a problem she had no answers to. The silence bothered me so I broke it first. My voice came out much too loudly in the stillness of the cave.

"Raya, what's wrong with you? Does everything I say to you unnerve you so much it leaves you speechless? Please say something to me. I need to know you understand what I am saying to you. Do you even want me to finish telling you what I have to say?" I asked her, more with my eyes than my words.

She looked directly into my eyes and in that moment my heart stopped cold. I did not want to tell her the rest of what I held inside of me. The truth. It was my own truth, a truly morbid unchangeable truth. As she stood before me, I realized I could no longer keep it from her. She looked as I was not nor could I ever be. Innocent. How could I ever keep anything from her? I

could never keep anything from her muchless my own secrets. She failed to realize it but, I was simply an open book whose chapter hide nothing. How could I expect her to take notice of such things I did not? She simply nodded to let me know she was paying attention to me.

"Raya, I know what I am about to tell you will change your opinion of me. I know after you know the truth of it you will truly see me as the monster I have always been." I sighed heavily and looked away from her. I know I owed it to her to look at her while I told her such a morbid truth, but I could not bring myself to do so. "When you were attacked by the animal, you were badly injured and unconscious when I found you. Your clothes were torn beyond reapiir and you had lost alot of blood.

"I did not know what to do for you. My desire was not to kill you as it is with those I find in such sites of ruin like the one I found you in. To be honest, I found it odd that the thought so much as crossed my mind to save your life by any means necessary. This was such a vexing thing to me because I have never thought or attempted to save another life besides my own. Do you understand all that I am telling you?"

Raya looked at me as is she saw me for the very first time. "So what does all this have to do with me and the ealier questions you asked me?" Her voice came out shaking, betraying her calm expression.

"Well, to be honest, the severity of your injuries made me think you would not regain consciousness. Also, you have already healed from your earlier injuries, which is impossible for a human to do in such a short amount of time."

"Fallun, why do I get the feeling there is something you're not telling me?"

"I see." I started. "I can hide nothing from you, so I'll just be brutally honest with you. I will bear the offense of it on my shoulders.

"Like I stated earlier when I found you, you were still unconscious and I wanted to spare your life. I knew I had to do something quickly, especially at the rate the temperature was dropping. I cut open my wrist and let the blood fall onto your open wounds to see if it would heal you. My logic in this is that when I get injured, I need blood to heal; my body possesses a unique healing ability that lets me heal myself almost instantly. I thought with my blood to help you, you would be affected in much the same way. However, after I used my blood to heal you, I became weak and the hunger overpowered me causing me to feed off of you. However, before I could end your life, I heard your voice call out to me. I don't know if it was real or in my mind because you were still unconscious, but it was your voice which stopped me from killing you."

Raya was silent unable to utter a single word or sound. She seemed to be looking at me without really seeing me. I was curious as to what thoughts were circulating around inside of Raya's mind, but I knew that unless she chose to, she would not disclose them to me. My stubborn nature prevented me from questioning her.

I realized everything I said to her was sinking in. She gave me no indication she was disgusted by my words or by me. This possibility, however, did cross my mind.

"Answer me this Fallun, or should I call you Eden...?" Raya asked me while looking directly into my eyes. "The reason you took my blood was to save your own life after you attempted to save mine?"

"Raya, listen. I have not lied to you through everything I have said and

will not lie even about the smallest details. Yes, to be perfect honest with you, I don't understand fully how the hunger affects me, but it does to a point where I am unable to control myself. I was so close to all the blood that covered you. Your blood is sweet to me and it appeals to me on a level even I can not resist. I don't know why this is. Your blood and even you, yourself have become a force my own life has become dictated by to a point I am powerless to resist or deny."

"Fallun, listen to me. I once told you without you, I can not function or even live. I meant this. Being around you has caused my earlier feelings to grow even more. Allow me to explain something to you..."

I looked at Raya not quite understanding what she was telling me. I fed off of her blood, but the memories she held in her blood told me little about her emotions toward me as a whole.

"Fallun, can I ask you something? Do you even know what love is? Or what it is like to be in love with someone?" Raya asked me while looking at me with a gaze that scorched me with its intensity.

"No, Raya. I don't understand. I have never known such a thing as this love you speak of. I have been alone for so long. I am the last thing the humans ever have a chance to see before I snuff out their life and introduce them to death itself. So how could I know of love?" I told her with a sneer.

"Fallun, I have much to say regarding this, trust me when I tell you there is a reason for all that I am going to tell you. Will you listen to everything I have to say? It does serve a purpose. I promise once I am done telling you all I need to say I will explain why I am telling you all of these things. So will you listen to me now?"

I nodded my head, looking at Raya intensely as I waited for her to begin.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

"I have many questions of you, but there is a point to my questions. I want to help you better understand what I am sure you don't about the humans. First, what is it you gain from feeding off the humans as you do?" Raya asked as she gazed at me with intensity.

I was silent at first, not really knowing what to think or even what to say to Raya's questions. However, my own curiosity won me over; I wanted to know where she was going with all the things she was saying to me.

"I honestly don't see how any of these questions are pertinent to what you have to tell me, but out of respect for you, I'll answer you as well as I am able to. Regarding what I gain from feeding off the humans it is not so much as what it is I gain from them. There is not much that can be gained from them as a whole. Over time my own strength has increased and my ability to numb myself to the changing seasons around me has increased as well. Very little affects me you see, this has become more evident as the time has passed.

"The cold, which is all that I am allowed to feel since I move about when the sun has set, no longer affects me at all. At first, this was not the case. I was used to the warmth of the heavens, so in the beginning when the earth was in total darkness, before the humans begin to inhabit the earth, the cold was all that I felt and the darkness was all that I knew. I was a vagabond, wandering from place to place with no knowledge of who I was or where I was. The memories, however, have slowly come back as I continued to feed off the humans. By the time they existed I was ravenous for their blood. I guess the answer to your question would be the memories the humans have given to me as I feed from them have in a sense helped me. This is how I learned much

of your world and the humans themselves."

Raya nodded in response, but she seemed to be engaged in what seemed like numerous internal thoughts, which her face gave no indication of.

"What is it you're thinking, Raya. I'm curious to know, actually."

I was apprehensive about allowing Raya to know what I was thinking because I did not want to hinder her somehow. I could barely read her facial expressions, much less read her thoughts. Despite the stoic facade she hid behind, my curiosity toward her was always piqued.

"Can I ask you something? Have you gained any knowledge that would be useful to you about the humans themselves?"

"Over the years, I've feed off them and watched them aptly, I've listened to them intently; I've noticed they live their lives in much the same way. When I rise, they sleep. Their memories have filled in the missing pieces to a puzzle I once found hard to put together. Their lives are much like the steps of an endless waltz; it repeats itself over and over again. The only difference is some of their lives will be snuffed out much sooner than that of the other humans. If anything, I have gained the ability to mimic the human's actions, mannerisms, emotions, almost everything except for their appearance."

Raya cut me off abruptly. "From my first observations of you, I noticed you were adept at this, but to my knowledge you haven't shown every possible emotions. I can see you are able to mimic humans in what they do, almost to the most intimate of details. However, do you have the slightest idea how to mimic love?"

"Love...?" I questioned her with a look of disdain etched upon my face. "What is the meaning of this word? I've never heard of such a word. How can I mimic what I have never understood in my entire existence?"

"Yes, Fallun. I can, but I have to ask you some more questions. Is this going to offend you, if so, it is not my intentions. Remember, everything I say is for a reason, to help make a point in all this. Have you seen how the humans interact with each other? Specifically, the adults with their children? Or even the children with the adults? What about the adults with each other? Or the children with other children?"

Raya paused momentarily. I thought back to what I could remember about the humans. I had no personal memories of the humans, only the memories of those worthless souls I gladly introduced to death. The humans were usually going to sleep by the time I rose from my own slumber.

I regarded Raya carefully before answering her question, wondering what she was trying to get me to understand as she painted a picture of the humans in a far different light than I had ever seen them. "No. I have never had any reason to pay attention to them or think about how they interact with one another. It served no purpose for me to do so." I explained to Raya.

"I will explain to you something about the humans and their ties to each other. Are you willing to listen to everything I have to say?" Raya asked me, her voice held a hint of hesitation as she spoke. This vexed me in a way I failed to understand, but I did not let myself dwell on it.

"Yes, Raya. I am....I will listen to you. If nothing else comes of this, I will be able to learn much more of what I still don't know. Tell me everything, help me better understand what it is I do not."

"Well, Fallun...The humans, they live in families who are all related by blood to one another. They are related by blood because each member of this family shares a portion of this same blood as another member in the family. However, this same blood is what ties them to one another. Do you understand me so far?"

"Raya, you know that I am a vagabond. I live in solitude, as I have for so long, it is really all I know or understand now. I don't know what it means to have ties to someone else because I have none to anyone. All the former things from my old existence are forgotten, except for the fuzzy memories swirling in the sea of countless other memories I hold inside my mind."

"Please understand, most families have two adults, a male and a female. The male is known as the father and the female is known as the mother. It requires both of them to produce a child, who are their offspring.

"Immediately, from the time the child is born to the parents, they are extremely protective of the child. They watch over it, care for it, nurture it, teach it, help it grow into an adult, and they do all this with love. You, yourself have seen this in memories or from a distance. It is the driving force behind almost everything the humans do."

"I only have the memories of those abhorrent creatures I killed. They are vague at best. These particular creatures did not possess memories filled with goodness, only the previous actions that went unnoticed. I vaguely remember at times the parents protecting their children. Why do parents feel this way toward their children?" I asked.

"So their children will grow up and be able to survive in a world without their parents one day. As their children grow, they learn to mimic what their parents do. The child tells the parents what it needs by its actions, the parents then do all they can to meet the child's every need, ensuring that the love they share for one another grows as well. If this love is not developed early on it will be nonexistent. Does this help you to understand why I am the way I am with Lerric" Raya asked me, with eyes filled with longing toward her own child.

I stayed silent for a moment while gathering my own thoughts.

"I know you will want to know that Lerric made a point to ensure I would protect you. She wanted me to hurry up and take you away from her before she decided to change her mind. She told me you two had never been separated except for one time, when she came here to bring me back to you. I remember she was upset by these things, by your having to be away from her. Is this because of your love for each other?"

"Well, this is Lerric's love for me that you speak of. She has never known what it is like to be separated from me for long periods of time. Just like it pains me even now to be away from her, I know it hurts her to be away from me for any length of time. Does any of this make sense to you at all? Have you ever experienced anything like this before?"

"Yes, it makes sense as you explain it to me, but what does it have to do with me? Why is it important that I know any of these things?" I asked my own curiosity overwhelming me.

"The reason this has to do with you is because although our time together has been limited at best, I have grown to love you with everything that is in me. I have fallen in love with you..."

I did not let her finish speaking.

"What is the meaning of this?!! Is this some cruel joke? Do you actually think I could ever believe you!"

Angrily, I let the words flow from my mouth so that she could clearly hear them. When I saw her cover her ears, I realized I was speaking much too loudly. However, I made no attempt to lower my tone. I was shaking with the rage. Her words hit me full force like a physical blow and I staggered backward away from her. For a moment, nothing registered in my head except her words.

However, when I began to make sense of what she was saying I was struck by an array of countless thought all at once. The entered my mind at a rate I could not keep pace with. I paused momentarily trying to collect my thoughts. I stood there motionlessly simply looking at Raya. Breathing deeply, I thought about all she had said to me since began to talk about love. What was love really? I knew and understood everything she said. I learned much from the memories my prey held. As I fed from them, I learned more than I was able to form into words.

The knowledge stored within the confines of my mind was endless. There was not easy way to define it. I was at a lost for words regarding what Raya told me. I could not make sense of it. How would I ever be able to? No other creature, not even my maker had ever said such words to me. Raya surely did not understand who or what I truly was. I tried to help her understand what she obviously did not. I knew I was unchanged since the beginning of time. I am that which I am. Controlled it seemed, by something so much stronger than these fallacies of love. Could this love Raya proclaimed to have for me, overcome that which controlled me so? It was futile to believe such a love could change even my very nature.

The fact remained that everything came down to one thing; Raya loved me. She loved me knowing that I was simply the monster. She loved me, the monster I am.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Up until this point, Raya was silent causing me to look at her with a measure of scrutiny. There were many question circling around inside my head, much too fast for me to easily sort through. How was it even possible for Raya to make such claims? How could she truly love the monster I knew myself to be?

I had to know if this was simply some fallacy of love. I had no real knowledge of what this love was, but I had to put Raya's claims to the test; I had to know for sure. I did the only thing I could think of. I allowed both my anger and the brute of my strength to take over me as I moved toward Raya instantly. I pressed her body backward until we were both up against the opposite cave wall. Looking at her, I saw fear in her mounting. She was not used to the quickness of my movements, but I did not care. Hurting her had never crossed my mind, but now she left me with no choice in the matter. Reaching toward her before she could react, I grabbed up by the throat as I raised her off the ground. I felt my finger tighten around her throat. The tips of my nails begin digging into her skin causing blood to form around them.

"Fal--Fallun!...what are you doing????!! Why are you...doing this to me??" I heard Raya ask between ragged breaths. I was a turmoil of emotions as I gazed at Raya with a deadly calm. I made myself hold back, I knew I did not want to kill her. I simply had to see who Raya really was and what she would feel if she were to really see me. I wanted to show her the monstrosity of myself and my nature. I kept myself from looking directly into her eyes, however, in the moment I made myself look at her. I could see the inner fear she could not hide from me.

"Is this what you want?!!!" I screamed at her, as I felt my own anger

building inside of me. I could also feel my features shifting in response to my growing anger. My eyes shifted from their natural golden color to the blood, red color they turned into when I fed. I felt my fangs elongate causing them to protrude from my mouth. I only felt this shift in my appearance when I hunted and fed. This fact, this shift, vexed me. I was surprised by these changes taking place within me.

"Do you see? Do you now see what I really am?!!! Do you see ME? This monster..." I screamed at her, my voice sounding foreign to my own ears as I talked through my fangs. "Look at me with your eyes and see me. Look at this creature, this monster who is damned and cursed before you. I could very easily kill you, you fool. Yet, you want this...you want me?? How could you love someone such as the monster I am?"

My voice was loudly, bothersome to even my own ears. I was unused to hearing myself talk in any tone, but this voice who spoke with my mouth could not have belonged to me. I cringed inside knowing it was in fact I who was speaking. "I am not what you think I am! Do you like what you see? Do you still find me worthy of this love you claim to have for me?" I asked her with a sneer.

I did not understand my own anger toward Raya, but it felt stronger than anything else I'd experienced before except for the hunger itself. I looked at Raya fiercely, more so than I had ever looked at anything before in my entire existence. I stood there looking at her in complete silence as she was clutched in my fingers. I did not know what to say to her, for once I could not form anything adequate to say. I stood like that with her for what seemed like a thousand small eternities. All I could do is pierce her with my gaze.

Raya moved her mouth slowly. I could tell even this pained her greatly.

"Fallun...Fallun, please stop; I love you! I don't care about any of that

or what you are. Please just think about what you are doing. Let me go."

I stared at her while tracing my eyes along the lines of her face. She was astonishingly beautiful and it was hard to keep from staring at her in this way. As I allowed her words to sink into my mind, I released her in one swift motion. I did not let her fall to the ground, I simply moved to catch her, holding her upright to keep her from falling.

I moved toward her so close, I pressed her up against the wall. I could smell her unique scent and was intoxicated by it. Never had I been this close to Raya causing me to feel awkward. Yet, I made no move to pull away from her. There was something about our closeness that brought me comfort. However, the feeling went beyond simple comfort; something I was unused to or had ever felt before.

"I do not know what it is you want of me. Do you understand the gravity of what you tell me and the way it affects me, even now at this very moment in time." I asked her, my eyes bored into her.

"Don't you know I have had centuries to watch the humans and have learned more than I wanted to know from them. Furthermore, I have listened to everything you have said, learning what I did not already know. I can only believe what you tell me is, in fact the truth. If I'm right then these feelings of love are not to be taken lightly.

"So, tell me. Why is it you so easily tell me these things? What is it that you're wanting from me? I don't understand any of this and to be honest there is very little I don't understand. Help me, Raya. Help me understand the answers to the questions I ask you, tell me what you want." I urged.

"Fallun, I have stood in silence listening to you. What you have done to me, it could easy for me to become angry toward you, and distance myself

from you. However, the love I have for you keeps me from doing this to you. I would never repay you in like kind for the ugliness you have shown to me. I have so much to say to you. I'm going to sit down because I have grown tired from all of this."

I did not voice any response. I merely back away from her slowly, once I was sure she would not fall. I turned and walked toward the cave wall opposite from where Raya stood.

"To be honest, I'm not going to talk about my feelings for you until I have told you something else first, which to me, seems far more important. I've never loved anyone, but I must tell you something about Lerric. As you know, it is only her and I who live in my house. There is not any other adult, male or otherwise in the picture as her father or who I love. I have raised Lerric on my own ever since I gave birth to her. To be honest with you, Fallun, I do not what to tell you that you will believe or really understand. I will try my best and tell you all that I know."

Raya, sat down and pulled her legs close to her chest. I did not know if this was because she was cold but, I decided not to question it.

"I will not interrupt you even though I don't see how any of this matters. I will listen in for no other reason than because you asked me to." I spoke, my voice barely above a whisper. I knew Raya could easily hear me so I made no attempt to speak any louder than I already was.

"I've never had anyone in my life, but about nine years ago I begin having weird dreams. The dreams I had seemed vivid and I did not believe they could actually be real. However, I learned over time that they were very real. I begin dreaming of a creature, whether he was real or not, I still do not know. The dream, however, have always been explicit in nature. He would come and

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have sex with me.

"At first, I did not believe the dreams I had were or could in any way be real. The only evidence there was of any possibility that these dreams could be real was that I would wake up feel drained every morning. In my dreams, I would ask the name of the creature, but he never answered me. He was dark in form and his features were always hard to make out. After so many months of dreaming this way, I begin to question if they were actually occurring. For a while, there was no proof, only the exhaustion I would feel when I would wake up."

"After some months, I realized I was pregnant. Initially, I did not even know I was pregnant. The creature, however, became immediately aware of this change in me. It was he who brought it to my attention. I was in total disbelief. I took in the full measure of his words and begin to pay closer attention to any changes in my body that would give proof to his words."

"Before this incident, I had never been with a man and the realization of my pregnancy made me question whether or not these were merely dreams and not something else. When I would try to remember the face of the creature, I realized I could only remember the color of his eyes, they appeared like pools of blood against the blackness of everything else. His eyes were so striking and filled with malice, they could not so easily be forgotten.

"However, when I begin to show more prominent signs of my pregnancy, such as the enlargement of my belly, I both marveled at this and questioned the parantage of my child. I knew there had to be something more to thes dreams. I had never known anyone else to experience these same things as I had. I know that I could never let anyone know the truth of these things.

"I begin to be questioned by the villagers in the place where I resided because no one had ever seen me with any man. My sudden pregnancy came as  
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a shock to most and caused many people to question me.

"I said I had gotten pregnant while visiting my family in another village and nothing further was ever said about my pregnancy, but the villagers became quite distant from me. When I would go and gather firewood or water from the river, the villagers would look at me as if I was a monster. I ascertained this to be because I was unmarried and did not have a male to look after me as is the custom.

"It is very unusual for a woman to not have a man with her. This is why when you met me eight years ago, those two men were able to over power me. I was out in the forest alone gathering wood. I don't know what I would have done if you had not come along when you did.

"You saved my life..." Her voice trailed off. I listened to everything Raya said. Countless questions swirled inside my mind, but only one came from my mouth before I could stop it. "So Lerric is not fully human? if what you tell me is true, then she has the blood of something else beside a human inside of her?"

"Yes, Fallun. I won't lie to you. It wasn't until I actually gave birth to Lerric and heard her cry, that the dreams occurred to me to be visions or things I saw when I was in a slumber induced state. I've never known what to make of them or explain them, not even to myself in a way that makes complete sense. The only thing that does make sense to me is that Lerric is my daughter and I love her dearly! I would give my life for her no matter what."

"I have never felt this kind of emotion for anyone, but I can clearly see it on your face everytime you speak of her." I told her, as I looked at her, seeing her in a far different light as I had before this moment.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Standing there silently, I let the gravity of her words sink in. My mind was frantic with questions and various thoughts about Raya concerning everything she had just told me. I was curious as to what exactly Raya could and could not answer.

"So have you told me everything you know about these dreams and Lerric's parentage?" I asked Raya solemnly.

Raya seemed to be in deep thought because she seemed not to hear me at first. I was patient with her, trying not to rush her as she stood motionless in her own hesitation. I could see she was struggling within herself by the expression etched on her face.

"Raya, what is it? What's wrong? You as if something is deeply troubling you. It's written all over your face."

Raya look at me intently, seeming to thinking carefully before speaking. I guessed she was gathering her thoughts, trying to put into words what she was thinking. Her next words helped to reinforce my thoughts.

"Yes, Fallun. I have told you all I know or can remember about these things. I have been silent because I don't know the best way to answer you. I don't want you to feel like I would try to hide anything from you. This is not my intention at all. I am simply trying to keep from leaving anything important out, no matter how minute of a detail it might be."

"I don't feel like you are trying to keep anything from me or hide the truth from me, but I have many questions I'm unsure I should ask. Eyes are like windows to the soul and yours have never betrayed you or led me to believe you would ever lie to me about anything..

"I want you to know it is not my intentions to ever hurt you, Raya. I did not want to hurt you like I know I did earlier. I know no fear, but the gravity of your words vexes me in ways I can't explain. I don't think you realize the full depth of what you say to me or even how much your words truly affect me. Have you ever felt this way for anyone else before me? You do know this love you speak of. Yet, how do you know it's real?"

"Fallun, don't you realize in my eyes you can do no wrong. I find no fault with you even now at this very moment despite everything that has happened between us. I have never tried to hide the depth of my feelings for you, I was simply as vague as possible when I first spoke about them for so many reasons."

"What is it you still haven't told me? There is much you have already said and I understand it all, but I still find myself confused when it comes these feelings of love you say you have for me. I find it so hard to wrap my mind around it not because of you, but because of who I am and those things I have done."

"I guess..." Raya started. "...before I completely tell you in depth about my feelings for you, let me tell you what you don't know. Have you even wondered what I spent my time doing when we were separated? Even if you haven't I still want to tell you because it matters to me that you know everything there is to know about all of this." "Can I ask you something and you will be honest with me?"

Raya waited silently for my answer. Her patience for things seemed to unlimited to me. I remained silent, hesitant about my own answer. I felt my own apprehension in tell her the truth.

"Fallun, can you tell me what you did for the eight years we were separated?"

I did not answer right away but, I did not want to deny her anything she

asked of me. This thought struck me as odd because I did not understand it. I did not dwell on it. Instead, I focused my mind on remembering everything I did when Raya and I were separated. I wanted to answer her, but my own apprehension warred within me.

"Do you want me to be honest?" I asked her while keeping my eyes focused on her face.

"Yes, Fallun. I could ask no less of you than the truth. I hope that you choose to give it to me. I hope you find me worthy enough to always be honest with me in all things."

"Raya, I will tell you the truth, I just hope it doesn't change anything between us once I have answered all your questions. To be honest, when I first took you back to the village with Lerric, I left you there while trying to push you out of my mind completely. I found that I could not no matter what I did.

"As I came back to the cave, initially my mind as usual was blank much like the dark, black world I inhabited for so long. However, as everything begin to come back to me in a rush, I found my thoughts were sporadic and I could not control them. I could not maintain my focus on anything. There were too many questions in my head.

"One, namely being, why I even allowed you to live. Why were you so different that I could not take your life as I had done countless time without so much as a second thought? I can't lie to you when I say this, to me you are beyond beautiful. There is no other in my whole existance I can compare your beauty to except for the angels who dwell in the heavens.

"Your features are different to me. Your hair is blacker than the blackest seas, and your eyes are a shade of fire I can not explain because there is

nothing to compare it to. I think of the beauty of heaven everything I look at you. When I arrived back at my dwelling, I threw myself against the darkest part of the cave I could find and fell into the deepest, darkest sleep. It consumed me above everything. I did not even feel the hunger, except from time to time when it clawed at my very soul. Then I had no choice but to feed. the slumber I gave myself over to snuffed out all other feelings until nothing else mattered to me, not even my life. I vaguely remember myself hunting from one point in time to another, losing track of the passage of time itself. I would feel the warmth of the blood pushing the frozen state I was in away that I somehow managed to remain alive.

"I found myself lost in the slumber, but something else beckoned to me as I slept. Usually as I slept, I remained but a corpse. This time, I found myself listening to every sound around me. This fact did not dawn on me immediately, but, when the realization hit me, I had no words. I could not comprehend such a thing happening. I knew before I ever admitted it to myself that I was listening to something specific..."

Looking at Raya's face, I wondered if she knew where I was going with all this. I wondered if she was truly listening to me. I found myself surprised to see she was hanging on my every word. I found myself grateful and cautious when I realized this.

"Do you know what I was listening for???"

"No, Fallun. I do not. What is it you were paying attention to so intently? Go on. You already have my full attention. I am curious to be honest, but I won't interrupt you because I know you are trying to tell me something."

"It was odd to me at first, as I found myself listening for two very different sounds. I found myself straining in the worst way, simply to listen in a way that honed in on what I longed to hear. This was the only way I was

able to stay asleep and not be a slave to the hunger. The sound I looked for was the sound of both a woman's voice and a child's cry. Do you know why I listened so intently to this sound, looking for it in all things as I slept? I did not notice it at first, but both you and Lerric have affect me in such a profound way. My life seems unable to go back to the way it once was. I found myself looking for anything that sounded like you two. In all these years, However, I have yet to find anything even remotely simliar to you."

"None of these things are making sense to me Fallun. How is it that either Lerric or myself would hold such a sway over you. I have understood everything you told me about the hunger and the hold it has over you. The way you are explaining this to me, you make it sound as if Lerric and I have a pull much stronger than the hunger. How is this even possible? Can you try and explain these things to me?"

"I want to, Raya. I have so much to tell you before I can answer you. I want to know what you did when we were separated, since I answered you already and have answered every other question you have asked me so far."

"I understand you know nothing of how to raise a small child. Lerric is small for her age even now. She appears to be only four years of age. I pay little attention to this because she is extremely wise beyond her years and exceptionally beautiful. Many of the villager's children are very jealous of Lerric beacuse of her beauty alone so she has spent most of her life in my care, alone and without the friendships most children usually develop.

"I told you about her ability to sing. You, yourself have heard her. Her voice is unlike anything else I have ever heard before and long before she form sentences, she was extremely skilled at singing songs of profound beauty. Taking care of Lerric has not been easy for me, I have still managed to do

the best I can. It's rare a parent having to raise a child alone, however, it does happen. Our village seems relatively new when compared to other villages, so it still possesses many flaws. They still treat her as an outsider. I wanted to make sure Lerric has always known what it means to be loved so I made up for what she did not have especially growing up without the comforts of having any close friends. No, in case you think to ask me, I have never tried to explain anything about her father.

"She has never attempted to ask me anything about him. She has asked about you, long before she questioned me about anything else. When I realized I would require her help to find you, I had no choice but to tell her about you. There was so little to say. I did not know much about you then to tell Lerric anything in detail. I want to tell her so much more but she is still a child and doesn't always understand things the way I want her to. I don't even know if she would be able to handle the truth about all these things. I would rather die than to ever hurt her."

"You have done a good job in taking care of her. I have limited knowledge when it comes to children because I have never been around them. Lerric listened to me and was very helpful when I needed her to be. This says so much about her and reflects upon you as well because you are her mother."

Raya smiled at my words. I knew that she was happy hearing them because her smile lit up the darkness around us. The smile she gave me filled me with warmth.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

I glanced at Raya, finding I could not take my eyes from her beautiful face. As I looked at her, it appeared as if I could see her in a new way, like seeing her for the very first time.

I remembered how she looked to me the first time my eyes ever looked up at her. This was altogether somehow different. I had so much to say; already we had talked about so much. Talking with Raya had been the most I interacted with a human being since I began to wander and dwell among them.

Only a few short hours passed since I brought Raya to the cave with me, we had talked of much. I learned so much from her as she revealed many things about herself in return. I did not know what Raya thought about regarding me but, I knew my own thoughts. Did she share the same opinions of me as I did? I wanted to ask her what she thought about me in every aspect. However, a part of me did not want to know what she thought of me in the event that I would find it offensive. I had to know. However, her thoughts could be no worse than those of the ones I entertained within my own mind.

"Raya...Raya." Until I said her name, Raya had been staring at the ground, seeming to be lost in her own thoughts. The sound of her own name seemed to startle her out of her deep thinking.

"I've been battling within myself whether or not I should even ask you the questions in my head. I just realized I do have something else to tell you. Even as eager as I am to know the answer to my questions I want you to know everything before you make your decision. Unless you have decided already.

"What do you think of me? What is your perception of me? What kinds of thoughts or feelings cross your mind when you think of me?" I asked Raya overly

anxious for her response. I waited patiently, despite my eagerness.

"What is it you have to tell me, Fallun? Do you think anything you could ever tell me would cause what I already think of you to change? My mind is already made up." Raya stated, with conviction lining her voice.

She was still looking at the ground. I saw her lift her head up so that she could look at me properly. Her eyesight was not superior to my own, so I knew she struggled to see me in the darkness of the cave. The cave itself was pitch black, all traces of light gone from the space we stood in. This mattered little to me because I could still her perfectly. Her features as usual were absolutely clear to me. I could always see better in complete darkness; any predator who hunted as I did shared this commonality with me. Raya always appeared as a bright light to me, but, as she stood there her light became radiant, brighter than any light from the sun I once gazed upon.

"I have, Raya, told you far more about myself than I've ever opted to tell anyone else. Mostly because of the forced solitude and also because I elected not to because who would have really understood this thing that I am and seen me with eyes unclouded by fear or hatred? No one save my maker and now you know of my existence here. Lerric knows of me but doesn't know who or what I am.

"So I can say all this because I am going to tell you about my nature. I can't tell you everything right now because that would take too much time and there is just too much to say. With time permitting it, I will tell you eventually. Are you absolutely sure you want to know this?" I asked.

Raya, could not see me well in the darkness, but she had an uncanny ability of being able to find my eyes even in the darkest of places. She looked directly into my eyes, although I was more than sure she did not know it.

"Fallun, tell me everything you want to know. I'm eager to listen to you and I promise you once you're done telling me what you want me to know, I will answer your questions." She told me.

I always looked forward to Raya's answers to the earlier questions or rather any questions I asked for that matter, so I lost no time in telling her what I needed to say.

"You know that I am a vampire. I was made this way in the beginning, some time before the humans even existed on the earth. You also know that I feed off the humans, this is how I truly am able to survive. Their very blood is what sustains allowing me to continuously live through time. You also know that I don't age and I don't die, unless by the light of the sun.

"What you don't know is the fact that in the beginning, I hunted the humans indiscriminately. In other words, I did not care who I hunted. I simply let the bloodlust control who I chose to hunt. I say hunted because I was simply like an animal in nature, prowling the night looking for anyone I could devour.

"In the beginning, the hunger so harshly dictated my every thought, feeling, and actions giving me the appearance of being consumed by it, I was in every sense of the word, to be honest. The darkness and the hunger are actually the only two things I can still remember about those very dark days.

"I had no conscience and I became a murderer from the start. Do you even realize how many countless faces of my own victims I have looked into, without even so much as a passing thought to the person they truly were behind their crimes. At first, I killed them and had no regard for them or who they were. As time passed, this began to change.

"Don't you know, I was in the garden of Eden? This was named after me and I watched the humans fall from grace with such sadness etched upon my

face. You can't possibly imagine the changes that took place not only upon the earth, but within the humans themselves. This change was by no means instant. In my mind, because I have no sense of time, these changes seemed to happen quickly. As I begin to watch them, I saw their own natures begin to change. They begin to harbor feelings of ill will and malice, holding hatred toward each other while committing crimes against each other as if this was the sole purpose of their creation itself.

"In the beginning, I was surprised by what I saw because in heaven there is nothing like this morbid cruelty which takes place. The angels may lie to maintain control, but they don't commit crimes against each other; they merely do what they were created to do. They serve our maker in earnest.

"As time has progressed, the crimes they committed merely begin to repeat themselves, over and over, becoming more gruesome with each other. All I could do is watch from a distance as they begin to wreak havoc upon the earth in limitless ways.

"Don't you know, its the blood of their victims that always leads me to them? I never have to search for very long because the blood is always that scent I am lured by. There are times when its incredibly strong in the air its the first thing my senses become aware of when I awakened by its pungency.

"I no longer know what to say except I can't decide who is more of the monster; me for hunting them or them for committing such gruesome crimes. I am that which I am and this will never change. I do not age, nor can I die. Nothing can harm me to my knowledge, except the sunlight, which you, yourself have seen. The hunger is in fact the only enemy I will ever have, it is the one thing I can never break my bondage of."

I stopped talking abruptly allowing the full gravity of my words to sink

into her mind. I did not know what her thoughts about my words truly were. I knew I was not in any way trying to scare or or play on her own apprehension about the person I was. It occurred to me in that very moment, I did not want to do anything to push her away from me. Instead, I hoped I could find a way to draw her closer to me. How I would manage this, I did not know.

"Fallun, can I speak now? I would like to tell you the truth about how I feel now about everything you have told me."

"Yes, Raya. I want you to be as honest as you feel I deserve, tell me everything you're thinking and feeling. Please don't spare me or hold back from me because I have not held back from you at all. Trust me when I tell you I'm not trying to scare you away from me, I just wanted you to know everything there is to know about me."

"Fallun, like I told you, my mind is already made up concerning you. Nothing you could tell me now or in the future could ever make me change my opinion of you or even think less of you, even in the smallest of ways. Everything you told me is hard for me to understand because I can not picture you doing the things you have told me about. In my eyes, you're not a monster or even a murderer.

"There are so many questions I wish to ask of you, but, I'm trying to truly understand everything you've told me up until now. You've helped me to see everything in a different light. I have never interacted with very many humans because of what I explained to you concerning Lerric. I was too busy raising Lerric to sit down with anyone and talk with them or spend time away from her. Lerric doesn't even like to interact with other children. In so many ways she is like a small adult, because of my sickness. She has had to take care of me when I was unable to care for myself. I love her for this.

"I would sit here and try to tell you that you having to kill another human or anything else for that matter sits well with me. I would be lying to you because the idea of this hurts me to my core. Seeing you in this way is nearly impossible for me, my mind can not fathom such things as you say even with your description of them. Can I ask you something?" Raya asked.

"Yes, Raya. You can ask me anything. I may not know the answer, but I will try my best to answer all your questions."

"The day you found me in the forest as I was being attacked, what happened to the two males?" Raya asked me with apprehension in her voice. I could see her searching my face even in the darkness of the cave as she tried to anticipate what I would say.

"Raya, I'm not going to lie to you. I killed those two men who were attacking you. Honestly, as I drank from them, draining the last signs of life from them, I took great satisfaction in doing so. How could I not? Don't you know that they were guilty of countless other crimes they committed long before they came upon you?"

"Fallun, there is no way I will ever agree with killing another human. I will never think taking anyone's life is good, but I would not be alive if it had not been for you. Lerric would not be here now if you hadn't saved us both. For this, I will forever be grateful to you. There is nothing you could do to take away this act because Lerric is the most important thing in my life.

"Fallun, I know it made you angry when I first told you how I felt about you. You know that I am honest with you as I always have been, more specifically about my love for you. Knowing what I know now only makes me love you more. There is nothing I would not do for you. I'd give my life for you and nothing

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will ever change how I feel for you. One thing you have failed to understand about love is that it is not dictated by anything, especially no a person.

All you have to know is that I do with evrything in me love you, nothing will every change this so long as I live.

## Bhartrihari

Where thou art and the light of thine eyes,  
     there to me is darkness;  
 even by the brightness of the taper's light,  
     all to me is dark.

Even by the quiet glow of the hearth-fire,  
     all to me is dark.  
 Though the moon and stars shine together,  
     yet all is dark to me.

The light of the sun is able only to distress me.  
     Where thou, my doe,  
     and thine eyes are not,  
     there is all dark to me.

--translated from the Sanskrit  
     by Von Schroeder

Alexander Pushkin

I loved you;  
even now I may confess,  
Some embers of my love their fire retain;  
But do not let it cause you more distress,  
I do not want to sadden you again.

Hopeless and tonguetied,  
yet I loved you dearly  
With pangs the jealous and the timid know;  
So tenderly I loved you, so sincerely,  
I pray God grant you another love you so.

--translated from the Russian  
by Reginald Mainwaring Hewitt

## CHAPTER FORTY

In that moment, I knew I wanted to be as close to Raya as I possibly could. I felt unsure as to why. Maybe it was due to her profound confessions of love. Maybe it was attributed to something more simple. Either way, I felt a variety of raging emotions inside me. I failed to understand much of what I felt. These feelings seemed altogether new to me. How could I properly describe or explain something I, myself had never known before?

Raya sat there looking at me silently. I watched her in the darkness silently willing her to speak because in the quiet of the night my thoughts were frantic. I remembered everything we spoke of with perfect clarity. My mind formed her words into tiny images inside my head. I replayed these images over and over. These images seemed just as vivid to me as if they had actually happened. Lost in the complacency of my thoughts, my mind filled with endless questions I had no answers for. The images I found myself replaying over and over captivated me completely. Oddly, something occurred to me in the stillness of my thoughts. Raya was astonishingly beautiful to me; I knew this before now, but I was struck like a blow with this realization.

I thought about the angels in heaven. As my eyes traced her form, I became more awed by this realization. I noticed her features with such clarity just then. Raya was absolutely flawless to me. In all my existence, I had yet to see another creature upon the entire earth who was in any way comparable to her. I began to fully grasp the reality of this as it sunk into my mind.

Something else occurred to me, something I wasn't as quickly able to accept. Initially, I simply assumed this was a mere want or desire for Raya. However, I admitted, it went beyond simple desire, it felt akin to a need. I looked

at Raya and took notice of her entire form. Countless times before, I was able to look at her and see her as she was in this moment. I had a burning desire far worse than the hunger to touch her and hold her in my arms. Thinking back to the first time I wanted to touch her, I remembered how against it I was.

The way I felt now, there was no way to decide against it. I had no other choice. This thought started off like a small flame with no warmth, quickly spreading within me like liquid fire I was consumed by. Was it Raya's blood coursing through my veins which help to dictate my thoughts even now? I had no sure way of knowing. Before I could stop myself, I felt my body move in haste toward her.

I walked across to Raya, reaching for her small hands in the darkness. I knew it was hard for Raya to see me in the darkness of the cave, but I had no trouble finding her even then. Her smell alone was like a beacon leading me in her direction. Initially, she made no move to reach for me. Instead, she spoke to me in a hushed tone.

"Fallun, what is it? Why are you so quiet? Does what I say to you somehow give you reason to find fault with me?"

I did not answer her question at all. I urged her toward me with my words.

"Come here, Raya. Take my hand..."

Raya did not hesitate to do as I asked of her. Her hand felt warm and soft against the icy flesh making up my body. I pulled her to her feet with ease. We stood there quietly facing each other with little distance separating us. I closed the distance instantly as I pulled her to me. I placed my hand on the small of Raya's back to steady her against me. Her body felt like fire next to mine.

I gazed into Raya's eyes and could see them vividly in the darkness. They appeared like the waves of the ocean, I found it hard not to lose myself in the endless depths of colored expanse I saw there. Placing my other hand on Raya's face, I pulled her to me, meeting her lips with my own. I kissed her softly at first, with my own lips barely touching hers. My own passion picked up as I felt my need of her continue to grow. The need was simliar to the ever present claws of the hunger. I felt almost hungry for Raya, yet this hunger was not for her blood; it was for her and her alone.

Her kiss tasted sweet to me, far sweeter than any taste of blood I had ever known before. All of my senses now alive and seemed to be waking up from a long past slumber. Her heart beat loudly to my ears and I could almost feel to movement of her blood in her veins. I pulled Raya even closer to me as I felt my own strength growing inside me. I knew if I wasn't careful, I could very well crush her. Hurting her was not my intentions. I simply wanted to show her how I felt, but was it possible to show her without harming her. I had never done to another what I was now doing to Raya, locked in the embrace even the angels would never know. The angels themselves would only find a cause to be envious of the humans were they to know such a thing. I had no words for this, I simply mirrored the memories of the humans I held in my mind.

I remembered in the beginning, the angel's rebellion caused them to mate with the humans. I failed to witness these crimes. I remembered Raya had never been with any man, yet she seemed to replicate my actions in equal measured amounts. I wasted no time. I begin to kiss her in earnest, tasting her skin upon the coldness of my lips. I felt her shiver beneath my lips. She emitted an unknown scent that was somehow vaguely familiar to me.

I moved my hand to the back of her head so I could run my fingers through her hair. Her hair was bound tightly in a bun on her head; I wanted it unrestricted, loosely flowing around her. I knew that her hair would be as soft and silky as I imagined it to be. As I kissed her deeply, I breathed in ragged gulps trying to breathe her in completely. I wanted to remember her this way for as long as I was able to maintain a life, even this one as morbidly hopeless as it was for me.

"Take your hair down." I urged her.

Raya did not hesitate and obeyed my every word. Pulling my lips from her, I wanted to see how she would look with her hair in disarray. It fell elegantly around her face, helping to make her look even more beautiful to me. I pulled her to me only to resume kissing her with even more passion than before.

Raya's heartbeat was greatly accelerated as she pressed her body up against me. I wasted no time in removing her clothes as gently as I could. I felt Raya's hands roam along the planes of my chest with curiosity.

"Stop...Fallun."

Raya's voice came out as a shaky whisper. I stopped kissing her and searched her face, looking for answers to the silent question hidden in the depths of my eyes.

"What's wrong, Raya?"

"Nothing...Fallun. You have me without any clothes, I would like to see you as well."

Everything seemed so inept to me. However, I could not and would not deny Raya anything she asked of me. I stepped back from her and begin removing my clothes. I looked up and saw Raya's eyes on me. I knew she was looking at every detail of my body. My nervousness was only slight.

Raya walked up to me, placing her warm hand on my bare chest. I pulled her against me and begin kissing her, laying her down in the process. I was a sea of countless emotions, but, I did not run. I embraced everything I was feeling there with Raya wrapped in my arms. The ground was cold, but, Raya did not stop kissing me. In this moment she was all I could see.

I could hear the sounds of the night in the distance, the silence that fell between us was much louder. The silence seemed awkward to me because of how much I had grown accustomed to the sound of Raya's voice. Raya still lay nestled on top of me with her head resting on my chest. Not much time had passed since we became one being, since our loved molded us into one soul. I gazed down at her, seeing her with such awe. With each passing moment, she appeared even more beautiful to me.

Lifting myself up, I heard Raya sigh heavily. Most of my earlier energy was gone, but I did not feel tired in the least.

"Raya, what is the matter? Are you okay? Did I hurt you?"

As I looked into her eyes, they held a look in them that was hard to decipher. No one had ever looked at me the way Raya was staring at me now. This surprised me because I did not understand why.

"Raya, why are you looking at me like that?" I was curious about her likely response. At first, Raya remained silent, appearing to be lost in her own rampant thoughts. I could not help but to watch her; I was openly fascinated by everything she did.

"Fallun, I've never experienced anything like this before. I have so many thoughts inside of my mind, I can't seem to sort them out. Yet, as I look at you I can't seem to stop staring."

Raya grew silent. I could tell she was trying to find the right words

to say.

"Fallun, I love you and I honestly feel like I am falling deeper in love with you. I've never felt like this for someone else so I can't compare what I feel to anything else. What I now feel utterly consumes me where nothing else matters."

I wanted to be as close to Raya as possible, but, I also wanted to make sense of what she was saying. I got up from where we lay, but remained kneeling.

"Are you cold? My body's temperature is much colder than your own. Let's get dressed so we can talk. I'm trying to make sense of everything you are telling me. I desperately want to, but all of this...you...me...us...everything, is so new to me. Don't fault me for this, just try to be patient and understand."

Our clothes lay in a heap next to Raya's head. I reached for them and stood up. I held them in one hand as I extended my other hand toward Raya in an effort to help her stand. Taking my hand, I helped her to her feet. I was slow to handing her clothes to her, I found myself fascinated by her nakedness. I tried to pay attention to Raya, but found every detail about Raya's body was both stunning and appealing to my eyes. I craved to touch her all over again. I watched Raya dress openly until it finally occurred to me I should do the same.

I was slow to dress due to my newfound loss of energy. After we were both dressed properly, I broke the silence.

"Sit down where you wish so we can finish talking comfortably."

Raya seemed tired, sluggish in her movements, but she did as I asked her. I knew she was anxious to hear what I had to say. I would not keep her waiting. All I had done up until meeting her was wait, now I would wait for nothing.