

NIGHTMARE
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AFRAID

Fear is something in the mind,
Being afraid is something more,
One is but a fleeting glimpse,
 Knocking on the door,
 The other stays for longer,
 And coils about the heart,
 Playing down depressively,
 To tear the soul apart,
 Looking on with terror,
 At every bump or bang,
Is less than living with the agony,
 That makes the body pang,
The mind is locked within a cloud,
 The eyes in distant dream,
 The weight upon the heart,
Remains beyond the scream...

PROLOGUE: KAYVEN'S FALL

In life, there is only one beginning, and one end. As much as anyone tries to tell you different; you are born, and you die. Maybe this view is a little bleak, but it is the view of a realist. A vampire has little choice but to err towards pragmatism. If there is anything like an afterlife, such does not come into the equation for the purposes of living. In existence, for something that has become *undead*, there is still only one beginning and one end, though the prolonged continuation may in truth make it seem endless. Even humans, who have such short lives, can be prone to melancholy, but for a being who suffers an eternity, it is the misery of the ages that erodes the mind until one no longer cares enough to ensure survival or continuance. What the living crave; this eternal life, is nothing but a fantasy. Eternal existence is fraught with the traps of hopelessness, boredom, and depression. How like life *undeath* can become. Perhaps it is divine parody that demands an element of a misguided sense of balance between existence, living or dead. In the end it is a question of survival. How long can one survive when the mind begins to give up, and the mental faculties that are essential to enjoying a prolonged existence start to erode?

Kayven Carinstein had cause to ponder such questions, especially when the depression clouding his mind became more prevalent in the passing decades. He clung desperately to anything that would excite his thoughts or provoke a response akin to interest in this world that now seemed to move so fast and left him behind more and more each day. His importance in a human society was something that he missed with a longing that not even the *blood* could satisfy. His stature among his own kind had likewise diminished in the passing of time that measured many lives among the fragile comprehension of humanity. Kayven could not halt his decline and he was desperate to cling to anything that might arrest the erosion of his mental faculty, even to the point of committing further despicable acts of barbarism that he would have once believed impossible. He had been elevated above the masses, and educated similarly in arrogance and noble disinterest, but he retained compassion, and a sense of obligation to maintain a line of decorum that even he would not pass. Desperation changed his mood. Need reflected his true fall from the grace of anything that could be considered divine. His prey had become younger as the diminishing spark of older vessels did little to satisfy his need. He killed more often. He had to if he was to ensure the survival of his mind. The regret consumed him in the wake of taking such fragile innocence to prolong his feeble attempt to deny the inevitable. However, the trace of his *human* concern diminished with the passing of time, and edged him closer to the precipice of moral decay, further eroding that which made the difference to his very existence. While he still had time, he remembered more of what he had once been, though he could no longer remember the benefactor, or malefactor, who had perpetrated his continuance within a society of the night. He had not been a young man at the time, but he had still retained that vital spark in sufficient quantity to know that he did not want to die. Emotion was the most vivid, and lingered with more regret than any other, because he had been so uncharacteristically frantic to survive, so emotionally vulnerable to the attentions of his saviour. *Saviour?* He had not been saved. He had been damned. He had been made smaller, reduced to a peasant among a new hierarchy. He had retained the vestiges of who he was without the societal status to be that which he was in the living world, and they had not even had the grace to provide him with a shade of his youth so as to adjust to his new insignificance. Bitterness was the one emotion that remained vivid beyond the decline of all others. While Kayven had not exactly been overburdened with an abundance of moral exuberance when he was alive, he had not been a fiend. There were several threads of decency flowing through his veins and he stopped short of outright corruption and baseness. Depravity was limited to perceived acceptable aristocratic behaviour and the idiosyncrasies of station. A certain amount of excess was expected. After all, it served to define the differences between a peasant and one of noble bearing. If the aristocracy behaved as a commoner behaved, then there would have been little need for class distinctions. Kayven pondered on his past, his present, and as much as he could; his future, but he did so in an abstract way, as if the images had become disjointed and interwoven on the canvas of an insane artist who could not focus on the picture long enough to create any coherent form.

Kayven was tall, standing a little over six feet in height, though he seemed less as he stooped in the sorrow of an age. His dark hair should not have matured. He should have been perfectly preserved at the moment of his death and *undeath*. The hair had greyed and indeed whitened in parts and he was certain that this was not always the case. His eyes, once vital, blue and shining with a thirst for knowledge, had also been diminished to a dull grey. The pale complexion of his skin had been as resolute as white marble with an essential quality of a

fresh glow, now seemed taut about the bone structure of his face, and while it remained smooth, it looked tarnished, as if the purity of the whiteness had been ingrained with a subtle and cruel stain of diluted rust. This should not have been possible. *A vampire did not age.*

Even his clothing had seen better years, both in style and texture. He was a relic, and he hated that he had fallen to such a state of misuse and flagrant disregard. He had been chosen for his prominence within a *human* society and for the influence he exerted, as well as the assets he retained, but time had not been kind. When everything that he had possessed in life had been passed to a *trust* that was precarious, he was elevated only as a figurehead and disregarded in equal measure as a remnant who had served his purpose. No, the memories were unclear. They had become tangled, twisted with his *human* life, distorted, and lost to the mire that clouded his mind.

Kayven had been the member of a society, some organisation as old as time, with others of his kind. He had been someone among the others, but he had been... *Deposed*, cast out – sanctioned. Why could he not remember? It seemed important.

Kayven has also been someone of note in his former life, and there he had been in decline. He had lived in opulence and decadence. He remembered servants. He recalled holding on to his life until his existence made such a relationship with his past untenable. An age had passed. An age that eroded far more than his memory. *A vampire did not grow old.*

Time changed the very landscape of a world that now remained harboured within his failing memory, soon to be forgotten, a fatal whisper on the wind to be carried away under the sway of a new dawn. Kayven too would be taken, discarded, and forgotten.

No! He could not permit this to be so. He must survive.

Kayven moved out from the mausoleum of his regret, concealed in a forest that once stretched as far as the curiosity of his imagination. The air was rank with the odour of death and decay. The unsavoury enclosure was a place that did not welcome the living as it oozed a malignancy and fetid grime that seemed to fester and thrive, and rage unchecked. Kayven no longer cared. The rats scurried before him, safe in the knowledge that they would not invite the vampire's attentions. They were a far too meagre fare to satisfy his rather specific cravings. He needed to feed, and tonight his hunger for the mortal essence that sustained him less and less was insatiable.

The wind seemed almost malignant in its efforts to dissuade Hannah from her path. She clutched the child to her bosom and increased her pace in an effort to be quit of this forest. She had walked this way so often in the day with no apprehension, but her heart laboured now under the tangible transformation of the dense woods from a vibrant beacon of life and hope to a twisted nightmare of surreal shadows, dark whispers, and imposing constrictions. While the memory of the blossoms touched her mind, and the fragrances of the day lingered, the sweet perfume mingled with pine was lost now to the force of the gale that hindered her way. The trail that had seemed so inviting in the day, now closed about her with malicious intent to keep her from proceeding further or from escaping back the way she had come. In truth, she knew this was not the case, but the darkness has become so severe as to deny all hope of her dismissing these sinister thoughts. The only light that remained came from a feeble sliver of the moon, and that too provided only a fleeting hope that was sporadic as clouds played with this uncertain emanation. The fear she felt was all too real, even if she could not be certain of the shadows that fuelled her distress. Perhaps tomorrow she would laugh at such childish insecurities when she was safe within the confines of her own home. However, she doubted that she would be so dismissive of the dread that clutched her heart with such imagined intent. The child began to cry, as much from the hunger as from the chill of the gathering gale. The eerie weeping only added to Hannah's anguish as the cries seemed to resound with a more distressing shriek from the forest. She imagined being under the scrutiny of some assailant lurking in the impenetrable pitch of the densely wooded fringes, his watchful stare piercing the darkness with undisguised purpose. The horror did not have to be so macabre to imply harm. Even an assailant set on robbery could be motivated towards other intents. She would not be the first woman taken so cruelly when she had nothing else to offer. The thought added more woe to her laboured condition. Her skin was flushed from exertion, the subtle traces of her youth burning with the effort of her burden and her plight. Her eyes, brown and warm, betrayed only terror and as much as she tried to deny her thoughts, the crying of the child and the increasing noise from the rustling of the leaves made it impossible. Her dark brown hair constantly swept into her eyes in spite of the heavy rich red shawl she wore to hold back the chill and to keep her hair in place in this

inclement weather.

All at once, the moon disappeared and the darkness became absolute. Hannah heard a sound in the distance as if something was moving through the trees. She ran, as uncertain of the trail as she was of the sounds closing all around her. She stumbled and the child rolled from her arms. The cry became a wail. Hannah had hurt her ankle but she clawed desperately in the dark to find the child who could not have fallen more than a few feet from where she too had come to rest. Tears filled her eyes as she fanned the leaves with her hands. She could no longer hear the sound of the child's cries and this only added to her anxiety. The darkness was too much.

'Clara,' she called. 'Oh Clara, where are you?' she wept. Her panic was acute, as she clawed the dirt and searched the leaves and prayed against the impenetrable darkness for anything that would guide her to the child.

The weak light of a poor moon returned. It was sufficient only to betray the subtle traces of blood on Hannah's hands. She screamed. All the pain and anguish overwhelmed her as a simple moment of horror choked her heart. Her terror was absolute. When Kayven discarded the child in the dense foliage after having drained every last morsel of blood from this delicate vessel, he moved with obvious purpose towards the woman. When he drew her up from the forest floor, she did not resist. Her eyes were flooded with tears and unbridled heartache. In spite of her anguish, she was a vision of youth and innocence, but to Kayven, she was only something to sate his need.

'My... my child?' she whimpered.

'Is dead,' he growled.

Hannah screamed. She screamed as Kayven shook her to end her fleeting resolve. She screamed until he pierced her soft, white flesh and drained her so completely as to make all hope of deliverance unattainable. He looked upon her without any remorse and snapped her neck before discarding her to the underbrush with her child and moved to be quit of this necessary fatal scene. Kayven paused in his retreat. His hesitation forced a thought but it splintered and remained abstract. Still, he did not leave.

The dark and brooding vampire reached down and placed the child near her mother. The serene look of joy on the face of his victims defied the nature of their unfortunate demise. Kayven lingered a moment as if he were deliberating on how such a thing could have been possible. Something was wrong. Something more than just the tragedy of their demise. He felt nothing of their joy or their misery. He felt nothing. *A vampire did not grow old.* The blood no longer sustained him and he was lost to the madness of aging decay...