

VAMPIRE
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ASHES TO ASHES

I rest beneath the flowers now,
I rest beneath the earth,
I died and took my final bow,
And now no longer hurt,
The angels didn't come for me,
The Devil set me free,
I rise to see the night again,
Shadows follow me.

I wake within the darkness now,
I wake within the night,
I died and screamed my final shout,
And sleep beyond the light,
Demons cry in sympathy,
God is done with me,
Until I face the final death,
As ashes on the sea.

I float upon the water now,
I'm lost and I'm alone,
The light has burned the rest of me,
To ashes I have flown,
Like wisps upon the wind I am,
Dust inside a dream,
Melancholy madness,
And I'm no longer real...

PROLOGUE: REFLECTIONS

Even the dead can know sorrow. The trouble with strong emotions is that one never knows how they can sway the reactions of an individual or a crowd. Mortals are exposed to fleeting moments of feeling, reacting, and forgetting the frivolous and the mundane. Sometimes the emotions linger, when a hurt is too much or too deep for one to forget. Sometimes it remains only because an individual cannot let the feelings go, be it love or hatred, though negative emotions seem to hold on longer; lament, envy, spite, greed, and all those wonderful traits that distance mortal and immortal souls alike from the divine but make them certain of their shared origin. Even love can be a prolonged misfortune if lost or unrequited. Vampires were *human* once, and while some are never moved again by the inconvenience or power of a feeling, most cling to the need for emotions as strongly as the desire for blood. They are the ones who recognise and mourn the loss in matters of the heart. *If you can no longer feel, why go on?* A vampire's feelings could be lasting, every facet prolonged in agony or ecstasy for an age. Even those that plagued the spirit at the time of death could seem relentless in the aftermath of the change. There was a danger in embracing emotions and becoming trapped, or indeed overwhelmed by feelings. However, there was an equal measure of jeopardy in denying the emotions that made existence all the more bearable. A cold and empty shell is only that and nothing more and can never aspire to be more. *Vacant, unfulfilled, and dead.* What one had to remember was the truth of where the emotions came from, and that was not the heart, though the physical manifestation certainly made itself felt in the body. Emotions, like everything else came from the mind first. Only the consequences of that realisation were felt elsewhere. The romanticist and impractical view derived feelings and sensations that could not be explained by cold reason. Emotions began in the mind but they were felt in every fibre of the being. Love and hatred, opposite and compelling extremities of nature, from the subtle to the raw emotions varying in the powerful hold they could have on any one soul, eager, lost and everything in between.

James Bourne would never understand why it was therefore hard for one of his kind to accept that they were not so unlike *humans* as to be removed from the species. James was a vampire, but the distinction for him rested in that he was also *Brethren*. He was part of a society that accepted they had an obligation to mortals and vampires alike. While the interests of the *Brethren* were certainly stacked in the favour of their nocturnal associates, they had *human* interests that ran in parallel. They also had *human* emotions, and love was just one of those that could overwhelm the spirit and reason as much as the need for blood. For James, debating love was singularly the most amusing aspect of any discussion. Not because it was humorous, but because he had been dead, or *undead*, long before he had realised that he had a need for companionship – a need for love, or even became aware that he had the capacity to explore such a chaotic and unreasonable emotion. He was still the visage of a young man, perfectly preserved and *improved* at the moment of his change. He was tall, standing slightly over six foot, and retained the slender physique of youth that now could only be denied in his eyes. They betrayed far more experience than the physical form. James could appear unmoved or haggard depending on the weight of his obligations as the long hours that had dogged his weariness in his mortal life often projected in his *undead* existence under similar circumstances. His dark hair contrasted his pale flawless skin. His lips were too thin and were inclined to lack the colour of a healthy man even when he had just fed, retaining an almost bluish shade as if extreme cold had taken away any possibility of returning to a natural flush. His emotions were always kept firmly in check, except perhaps in matters of love. He loved Kara Reiss. He loved her with all his heart, mind and everything that transcended reason. She was his companion. She was his love. She was his wife. They would spend an eternity in mutual darkness knowing only the light of being together. At least that was something akin to the promise he had made to her. His duty had a way of circumventing what his heart wanted. He found that he required more out of his love than the carefully ordered existence that had been his only focus for longer than the desire had been realised. There was a time when he would never have believed that this was possible. Duty and honour were everything to him. The preservation of *Doctrine* and the laws of the *Brethren* were his very existence. In time, he needed more. Kara Reiss was more.

Love was the feeling that Helena had lifted from him. A feeling that overwhelmed reason. She was still the picture of innocence in spite of all that she had endured, though he would never make the mistake of judging her by her form, curiously locked in time at the moment of her death. Just like him. Her youth, however, was more pronounced. She had been taken far too young, on the verge of becoming a woman. She had almost bloomed as a mortal, and that aspect permitted her to pass for more than a child. With the cosmetics of mortals,

she added to her years to present a charade of normalcy in a world that demanded its due, and turned against those who were different. Her brown eyes could soak up the room and they could burn with the fire of her rage when aggravated. Her emotions could become extreme. She struggled to quell the severity of her mood swings but she was not often successful. If she had been found sooner by the *Brethren*, it might have been different, but the unfortunate aspect of her beginning denied her the possibility, and now centuries separated her from that time when she could have been guided to accept *Doctrine* and the laws of this society; the same society that had left her *sire* to the melancholy madness that had driven him to the most despicable acts as his fragmented mind clung desperately to existence. The *Brethren* had failed in their obligation to both mortals and vampires by their inaction. *Kayven Carinstein* should have been contained. There were those within this vampiric society who believed *Kayven Carinstein* should have been destroyed. James was not one of them. The *Brethren* had failed and Helena could yet be forced to pay the price for that failure. Her association of the blood could end with her final death, and yet she seemed almost oblivious, or at the very least nonchalant to the price she might yet have to pay. Her *sire* had done her a great disservice but so too had the *Brethren*. So too had James. Only this reason prevented her from being destroyed before now, though the outcome of any deliberation was far from certain.

James walked the ancient stone passages of a place that still caused him concern even after all this time. This was where the *damned* had been left to die in an age that locked away their miscreants and troubled. An age when those who were deemed flawed did not warrant any reflection by either society – vampiric or mortal. Rehabilitation was not a consideration. His haven – his house, had been built above the former site of the cells. While much of the underground beyond the main structure had collapsed and fallen to ruin, James had maintained the last vestiges of this relic to the past directly beneath his home, and he did so with greater care than the former custodians. If *Kayven* had been consigned to such a place, he would never have perpetrated unrestrained harm on those who now lingered behind to face the consequences. The cells were not an ideal solution and James did not often approve of their use except under the most extreme of circumstances. They were an alternative to a finite solution. Destruction could not be taken back if a mistake was made, and not every judgement made on the spur of the moment proved acceptable. He had been cultured on the need to deliberate and a requirement to be right, even in the face of adversity, but there were those among the *Brethren* who had not been so refined in their judgement. They either lacked patience or had another agenda, and they were often not held accountable for the mistakes unpremeditated or otherwise. James did not want Helena to become one of those mistakes. Sometimes having a conscience was inconvenient.

Lanterns lit the passages at precise intervals. The stone was clean and the cells kept in good stead. *Immaculate*. Where once an awful odour of past misdeeds permeated the air, there was now a strange absence of anything that could be considered identifiable, though James still professed to detect the faintest taint of a rich earth odour beyond the walls that held back the underground layers beneath the foundations of his home. No one else could trace this phantom scent when he had cause to comment. The remark usually amused Darius Black, the former *Protector* of the *Castellan*, whom James had been certain was the only other person in existence who seemed to validate his senses. Perhaps he was just being indulgent. James did not often think of Darius, except when some stimuli served as a reminder. He had so many reasons of late to remember. This place had been one of them. There were now only three occupants, though there were enough cells of sufficient standing for nine more. Only one of the residents was here by choice. Helena was not here by choice. She was a necessary guest. The alternative would mean her end.

James did not pause. He passed down the long corridor and came to a halt before Helena's cell, preferring to stand in view of the bars in spite of the awkward wooden stool that Carmen had provided for his use during these – *discussions*. He had visited Helena often in spite of the way she affected his resolve and left him morose for many nights after. He had persisted even during those nights when she ignored him and offered only a greeting of silence.

'Good evening, Helena,' offered James respectfully.

The chains that held the child-vampire in place were exact. They were fashioned after those that had once held his wife, Kara, captive of the *Deposed Primarch*, Farielle. The *Deposed* and now destroyed Farielle. The shackles were strengthened to withstand the strongest vampire. They were also fixed with a restraining pin that was forced unceremoniously and rather painfully through the wrist so that the victim could not contort, break or contract their appendage and effect escape; which meant they were made to hold a vampire. The design left no doubt. Helena had not been coherent at the time of her imprisonment, and she had not reacted to her precise

confinement in this manner. This curious invention was obviously the work of *Hunters*, in particular, those who hunted vampires. He suspected that they had been the invention of an organisation that had long been aware of his kind as the implements had been perfected with singular intent.

James had acquired similar shackles for the ankles but had refrained from using these on any of his captives. None of them had proven too agitated as to require a change in this practice. Still, in Helena's case, he had both of her wrists shackled just to be sure.

Helena laughed falsely. Her face immediately adopted a snarl of contempt. Not the most auspicious start to their discussions. She was not in one of her better moods.

'Good? What is good about this evening, Mr Bourne?'

The air of her vitriol was so plainly evident and so unbecoming. As he had surmised, Helena was not of an agreeable disposition tonight. At least she remained true to form. He ignored her question and took it be rhetorical. He had often adopted such a stance when she was less than herself or irritated by her captivity or her hunger, or both. Her eyes burned involuntarily when she was moved to anger or agitation, but sometimes the change was so subtle that James doubted a mortal would have noticed, or else passed it for the flickering notion of the light if they did.

'I have come to continue our discussion about feelings, in particular... love,' he stated.

For a moment, it seemed that Helena was not going to be a genial host. Then, her demeanour softened, as much as it could given her situation when he made a motion to turn and walk away. She took up the conversation almost from the very instance where they had ended their previous discussion in spite of the fact that it had been two nights since their last exchange. It seemed her argument remained ingrained in the obvious.

'Being a vampire isn't about love. The only one you are fooling is yourself. You cling to *human* reactions and *human* emotions but we are no longer *human*. Relationships are meant to end. Life is meant to end. Otherwise, what is the point? You cannot live forever.'

James regarded her with some degree of exasperation, but he let it go with an emulated sigh.

'And yet, you too regarded feelings as necessary,' he countered.

Helena didn't want to play this game. It was wearing thin. It was tedious. And it was too much for her to bear. She resigned to answer with her silence again. *Defiant*. He knew too much about her, too much about her time with Agnes. She, in turn, knew far too little about him, or why he chose to keep her here rather than ending it in what seemed like a long time ago. She had destroyed Darius Black. Something that had hurt James Bourne deeply but which he had put aside for some greater good. He pushed her without reason. At least none she could define in the aftermath of the trouble she had caused. Due to the weakened state they kept her in, she had difficulty hiding the truth of her emotions. Something he had become far too adept at exploiting.

'You are nearer to being *Brethren* than you imagine. There are many among us who believe that we are clinging to the past, and that we should treat mortals as nothing more than livestock to feed us. We are above them and they should be made to serve us...'

This provoked a definite reaction. Helena tensed visibly. James continued.

'They have been put here to pander to our whims. We are the true princes of the *Earth* and we should not remain in the shadows. We should...'

Helena stood up and strained against the chains that held her in place. Her eyes burned with renewed anger. *An emotional extremity*. His tone of arrogance may have been practiced, traced with the subtle pretence of an act that would have fooled most, but it still had the desired effect. *Irritation and provocation*.

'And they should be put down!' she snapped. 'They should be destroyed! We have no right to prey on the living! We have...'

James smiled. Helena realised that she was just adding weight to his argument, and that he was baiting her but she could not stop herself. If he wanted to see the extent of her feelings, he only had to set her free. She would be happy to show him the full extent of her hatred and fury.

'You did not choose to be alone, Helena,' stated James softly, a reversal of his goading, forcing her to change emotional direction. 'You do not have to be alone.'

Helena let the chains slacken and returned to sitting on the cold stone floor. This was pointless. She was a prisoner. He had already won. *What did he want from her?*

‘If you let me go, I will kill you,’ she whispered, but the lack of venom left her words less effective than before, as if she was not convinced. James was not likely to make the mistake of trusting her. At least not yet. There was far too much at stake here to let her go. Time would tell, but in the end, could he ever really be sure?

Unfortunately, he had other matters to attend to on this night. He left her alone with her thoughts and the misery she endured simply because she had been confined. He did not have to reach out to lift her thoughts to know that the desire for freedom consumed her. However, she was waning, and he took solace in the fact that her emotions regarding mortals were real. She cared, even if she did not like to believe the truth after an age of hunting her own kind to protect *humanity* from those who would prey on innocence.