

Chapter 16 – Blurs

Mattias had to rest for the next few days. He slept on his couch, uncomfortable and fraught with poor sleep and unnerved dreams. He would wake up from time to time, barely aware of his surroundings, and usually due to getting his tooth injected with fresh blood or someone putting him back together. He could tell days were going by – but to be in torpor was much different than sleep. There was a strange awareness of everything around him, of all the things that happened around him. Though he didn't have any sight, there were other senses. A muted sense of sound, the sensation of touch made his rest confusing. His mind tried to fill in the blanks there, to give him some sense of reality as he slept – though, in truth it just made his dreams stranger than normal.

It was his sense of smell that made them truly strange. He could smell everything in his home. While muffled talking, pricks and pressure made strange twists of his dreams, the smells dictated more of what was driving the direction of his dreams. He found he could determine who was around him, to some degree, through those.

Olivia was the easiest. She smelled like she always had. There was a slight undertone of the ingredients needed in her witchcraft, things like sage, lavender, and pennyroyal. She had never been one for perfumes – but she did like fruit-scented soaps and shampoos. There was a hint of charcoal in the scent as well, which his mind took as a bit strange, but the others matched. He knew when she was there and could sense when she was with him. That was a strangely comforting feeling. She was not there all the time, though. She'd trade off with others from time to time.

Rory was likely the next easiest. He had worn the same deodorant and used the same soaps since they were in high school. That was now decades gone. He would have thought they were long since discontinued, but there they were. They were that stereotypically male scents most related to salt and wood, the ones you saw stupid commercials the played only far enough into sporting events to know the audience was at least partially inebriated. It had a reputation for being the brand of stupid teens, or at least it once did. Now it was mostly forgotten. He noted that Rory was there quite a bit. While Olivia spent a good amount of time watching over him, he thought Rory was there more.

There were a few other scents. A subdued and bland scent, not unlike vanilla. It was there a couple of times. Another that visited his down and out self was the scent of something else. His mind thought of Halloween. He wasn't sure how that was, or what the smell actually was – just that it was that holiday that it reminded him of when he found the scent.

He couldn't recognize voices. Even when sure of the person, it sounded as though he was under running water, and there was just no way to hear a voice well enough to understand or identify it. He might know that Olivia was speaking to him, but he would only know so due to the scent. For those he couldn't identify through his other senses, he was simply at a loss. He didn't know what they said or who they were, and that was less comfortable of an experience as he was hopelessly vulnerable and in the hands of those around them.

The reminder that he had people that cared enough to stay with him, though. That was important. That was something that made this experience survivable, beyond the fact that he was put

out of his beast state by a stake. Had he feasted, he would have recovered alone, but he didn't think he would have survived the after. The Torpor would have taken everything out of him, all that was left of his soul. He wasn't sure there was much left. He wasn't sure how much of him was left, and how much had been replaced by this thing. He didn't feel like he was Mattias now. He felt like he was his vampirism. And he hated that sensation.

Eventually, he finally felt himself wake up – genuinely reaching the land of the living once again. It was the middle of the night when he woke up. His apartment was dark, except for the dim blue light of his television frozen on some screen of an old sitcom, with a warning up on the screen. Are you still watching? He smirked and glanced around trying to find out who was here with him. It was Olivia, curled into an uncomfortable-looking ball on his recliner. She didn't even have the recliner, well, reclined. She was just curled up under a pile of blankets and with a small legion of animated items curled up on her, in her arms, or around the bottom of the chair. Her purse, Lunchbox, and plenty of others sat with her. It was nice to know that she had so many loving pets.

It was a bit disconcerting as he adjusted and sat up. Most twisted as if to look at him, but then ignored the movement and went back to sleep with their creator. That was fine with him. He felt his stomach growl, and though he ached at every single joint, he swung his legs around and off the couch. He felt pain in his throat. It was dry, scratching pain. A lack of use for however long he had been in the state of torpor had not been kind on the poor dead body he inhabited.

He stretched, moving his palms along his upper legs and glanced down to his hands. They were still gaunt, but they were by no means skeletal. He took one long deep breath through his nose and pushed himself up. Standing was more of a challenge than he expected. He could feel his legs, but only just. It was like standing on a ghost of himself. He did not enjoy the feeling. He took the first step, carefully watching as he moved to try to make sure his feet found the floor and didn't end up atop any animated creature. Still, he needed to walk. He needed to see himself. If he still could.

He moved slowly, slumped against the wall from time to time as he realized just how little energy he had upon waking up. He felt weak, but he could feel again. He watched his legs moving slowly but surely, each step measured and with purpose. There still was not enough feeling to really trust his steps. It was coming back, though. By the time he reached the bathroom, he could at least stand without too much worry.

He took a breath and looked to the mirror. There was nothing but a blur, his image broken and twisted by a universe that couldn't deal with the existence of an undead monster. Whereas he could see himself somewhat a few days prior, now it was just a blur. There were still some colors but only vague shapes. It was a strange sensation. He reached out and pressed his fingers to the mirror. His fingertips pressed against the cold glass, but where they met the mirror there was an aura. The pale skin color flowed like a puddle out from his finger to the reflection that all but melted into a blur on the smudged glass.

The realization that his reflection had further deteriorated was a hard one to come to grips with, not just at that moment. There was a bit of shock, of course, while he felt nothing immediate he could sense the impending weight of a lifetime growing on his shoulders. He knew that looking back, this would be a memory that would scar him and stay with him forever. The time he realized he would never again see himself. It was a strange realization and one that was too important and impactful for his long-

term development for his mind to really wrap around swiftly or effectively. He wouldn't dwell on it. He could not. It would drive him mad. He knew that plenty of nights would be spent attempting to come to terms with it. No sense in starting now.

He did take some time. His eyes were glued to the mirror. He just stared at this blob that would have once been himself. He felt his eyes drift, his vision relaxed and his mind blanked. It was a moment of silence, though unwitting and unplanned, for himself. A somber feeling had washed over him, and so he did what he was want to do. He turned around and stepped over to the shower and twisted on the water. It was set as hot as it could, and the water hissed out of the head slightly. It was odd, he remembered it not working quite that well. He paused and moved back to the toilet, and just sat down on the seat.

It may have been a few minutes before anything changed. He had zoned out. Even missed the first time that she spoke to him, but when Olivia repeated herself from the doorway, he finally raised his head. He glanced at the doorway and shook his head apologetically. The room had filled with a small layer of steam, blocking off the view of the mirror, which was a relief to him. Of course, now with his ex-wife staring at him from across the room, with a few of her legion of animated items scattered around and bumping the back of her legs.

"You can't get in the shower, Mattias," She repeated. Her voice was quiet and broken. She waved her hand about his body. "You're still broken and falling apart. Rory hasn't been able to put you completely back together."

He paused for a few moments and gave a bit of a smirk, but he could feel the stitches in his mouth. He shook his head. "I know."

"The steam isn't good for you either," She added with a long sigh.

He gave a shake of his head and glanced over to the shower for a minute. He waited for a second and then took a glance back over to her, just his eyes moving to her. "I know that too," His voice was quiet and raspy still, "But, I just need a few minutes. The steam helps."

"Not physically,"

"Mentally is more important right now," He spoke with a small defensive twist towards her.

She relented and her shoulders slumping slightly, "I know."

That was it. That was the entire conversation. They both sat quietly in the bathroom for a moment. Him sitting, her leaning against the door frame. Her arms crossed and the two were just silent. There was something peaceful about it though. Only the sound of the shower and the feeling of the steam. It was nice. But he finally needed to say something.

"Thank you," He said softly, "For watching out for me."

"You're welcome. We're family," She admitted. She adjusted, standing up a bit straighter with a slight roll of her shoulders and movement of her feet. It gave enough room for Lunchbox to barrel beyond her legs. It stumbled over her foot and rolled back to its own little nubs and waddled swiftly over to its master. It twisted its head up towards him and knocked against his calves to try to spur him to some sort of action.

“Weird thing for an ex to say,” Mattias joked.

“Shut up,” She snapped her teeth at him, “You know that part only has to do with the weirdness with aging.”

“And the thing didn’t help.”

“True,” She shrugged her shoulders high. Neither spoke to what the ‘thing’ was, and the conversation twisted away and faded from the verbal part of the conversation. They both knew what they were talking about.

“No, I really can’t,” He tilted to one side and reached down to give Lunchbox a pat on the head. “It is weird and kind of awkward.”

“Mhm,” She spoke and stepped over towards the shower. She reached out and turned off the water. “Come on, let’s get you out of here and get some food in you,”

“Food or blood?”

“Blood, Mattias. I doubt you can metabolize food properly still,” She reached over to a towel and dried her hand before offering a hand over to him. “Need some help?”

“I’ll take it,” He took her hand, and she tightened up to let him pull himself up. Then the two moved back towards the other room. He returned to the couch where he had been set up to rest and finally took a better look around his room. It was cleaned up for the most part, though there were plenty of little messes around the room. Leftover food and drinks, and some casual reading brought by friends that were watching over him.

He was surprised when Olivia sat down next to him. The couch bumped a bit and laid her wrist on his arm. “Here, eat up.” That offer confused him. She bounced her arm a bit when he didn’t say anything for a moment.

“Are you sure?” He put his hand on hers and paused.

“Sure. It’s no problem,” She responded. “I figure I’m the most comfortable being fed on, and someone else will be here in a while to watch you.”

“Oh. That’s probably true,” He spoke with a slight pause.

She moved her hand towards him, and he took a breath. She gave a smirk, “Hand me the remotes. Might as well find something interesting to watch...”

He did so, offering over the controller and letting her find a show to put on. They ended up on some old sitcom, and he took her wrist and took a bite. There were two sides to this ritual. For the victim, or in this case volunteer, his venom was quick-acting. It made the person sedate and did so with a similar feeling to powerful antihistamines. It was a drowsy state, designed to make the prey easier to feed on and move past without danger of them fighting you during the bite. After all, a vampire’s teeth were no stronger than human teeth. For him, that warmth of blood was almost instantly calming and each minute of taking in the blood, he felt a little bit more human.

It took a few minutes of feeding to get his fill, but soon enough he had. She would need a few minutes to recover, and he was still fatigued – so the two dozed off on the couch. Honestly, he was comfortable for the first time in a long time. He felt content. He felt more like himself, despite the loss of control, than he had in a long time. He couldn't yet put a finger on why.

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