

Prey into the Night:
Allies and Adversaries

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As I search the streets for the predator hunting its next prey, I think of my diner at my loft growing cold with each annoying minute that passes by. I finally had the night off and decided to treat myself to a delicious Chicken Mediterranean dish. But who I was kidding, in my line of work there is no night off. Everyday a creature kills, devours, drinks, eats, mutilates, kidnaps, or whatever they plan on doing to their prey that night. A select few of the elite soldiers are out here in each major city hunting them.

I know it's hard to believe, I didn't believe it myself when I was approached by the agency. It was a gloomy

day; I just got released of active duty in the army to visit the freshly dug graves of my mother and sister. After the terrorist attack in NYC they were the only family I had left. An older gentleman approached me; his slick silver hair complimented his aged face. He was decked out in a fresh pressed black suit as he walked up to me the only thing I could think of was to punch him in the nose and walk away, which thinking back now I should have. He asked if I knew how they passed, and honestly I had no idea. Nobody gave me an answer and I never asked, his question would not leave me alone even have to told him off and drove to the only hotel in the small town. Peering out the hotel window I cursed under my breath. I hated everything to do with that town and all the people in it, I resented having to come back.

A crash steals my attention, a normal person would have ignored the sound and kept on their way, but I know the sounds of a struggle. Putting my thoughts away I quickly make my way through the trashed streets. I'm surprised nobody shut this part of town down yet. The stores all closed up and the apartments are falling apart. From what I could gather crime rate increase as the death tolls did and nobody cared. Nobody would think twice if everyone died on this side of town. Poor saps, there was a

time where I held this country and government high with honor. But knowing the truth changed my whole view on what was honorable and disgraceful. I kneel down tracing the warm blood with my fingers. Wiping the blood on my pants I follow the deathly trail down a few hidden back alleys. I find the poor soul made into a midnight snack. Another young female, but her lack of clothes explains she wasn't so innocent.

Another noise catches my attention acting oblivious I continue to walk further into the dark shadows. I hear the soft breath behind my neck and just as it lunged for attack I struck its heart with my lucky wooden dagger. Jamming it harder passed its rib cage he looks at me with pleading eyes. It's funny how their look right before they die never changes. At first I couldn't think of how human they appear to be taking their last breaths, but seeing them as the predators they are; how exhilarated they are and the enjoyment they get out of the pain and fear they place in their victims before they kill them, all possible thoughts of their humanity were flushed down the sewage drain they came from. I text my cleanup crew the coordinates of the two bodies then disappear back to my loft to enjoy yet another cold meal.

I enjoy an open floor plan I don't like separation of

the rooms, too many options for my enemies to hide. I've never been attacked at my loft, I'm trained to spot a tail, but you can never put your guard down, I know a few men who made that mistake. The motion sensor light dimly lights as I enter the kitchen. Growing bright with the seconds I warm up my old chicken dinner. Glancing at my plain apartment I think of how wonderful it'd be to be able to decorate and put some color over the white and grey scheme the agency provided for me. I know that it would just be a waste of time because who knows how long it'll be before they relocate me. Still, I love to imagine the possibilities. I consume a few hard drinks before my head hits the pillow and drift off to a dreamless sleep. I miss my dreams, but the agency makes sure their soldiers don't have any weaknesses and dreams are fears and fears are weaknesses. My phone wakes me early; alerts of yet another job. I hunted only one of these creatures before, so I had to search its bio again. With a black cup a coffee I get to work opening my agency database laptop is search in the key words.

It takes only a few sips to pull up all the information on the creature. I refreshed my mind with its weaknesses and hunting traits. The last known attack was in the cemetery, knowing it doesn't hunt far from its home I

pack up my machete and a few other knives and head out to the gym. After a day at the gym, I shower and walk to the old St. Bergs Cemetery. As morbid as it sounds I love hunting in cemeteries it's so peaceful and welcoming. How the air seems lighter and crisper allowing my senses to pick up anything unwelcoming. Dim lights shine down on the locked entrance gates. I climb up and over the rusted metal gates landing on the hard dirt on the other side. I take in a deep breath and stare straight in to the darkness. I step forward with no hesitation of fear. The only lights that present themselves in the cemetery are flashing from the high beams of the passing cars. The headlights would normally play tricks with your mind on the tombstones, but with my training I'm unaffected. I hear laughter and hushed whispers. Rolling my eyes I sneak up to the trespassing teens. "Freeze!" I shout scaring the kids senseless. I'm only a few years older than them, but I made it so they couldn't see my face. "What are you kids doing?" I ask forcing my voice to sound older.

"We- we're visiting a relative."

"Is that so?" They nod like bobble heads, "Get out and don't let me see you here again," I watch the teens flee the cemetery, smiling at myself.

I hear ominous clapping, "Well done, my respected

police officer," The voice hisses. Knowing the voice belonged to the Biroyd.

I smiled to myself, "Sonny you need to leave too, come on let's go."

"Oh I can't leave. This is my home."

The Biroyd reveals himself from the shadows. These creatures are not the most hygienic. I fight the urge to cover my nose as the stench burns me, "Boy, let's go."

"Boy?" he laughs showing his corroded teeth. He lunges at me within an instant I draw my machete and decapitate him.

Three others appear from the bushes, "You shouldn't have done that," They warn as they surround me. Smiling at the threat, I school all three of them with a quick double counter move. Wiping the black blood from my blades I hear another one try to sneak up on me. Without looking I whip around sliding the head clear off its neck. The sight of a little girl's body falling to the ground stuns me. I peer over her body only a second before I text my cleanup crew. It's always hard killing the young ones; they all seem so innocent by appearance. That is before they try devouring you that is also why they are the most deceptive ones and the most dangerous. I stroll in my usual bar, I've cleaned up the trouble on this block and as a gift to me the owner

allows me to come in and drink on the house whenever I want to, which isn't often, but I like to stop in and show my face to reassure that the area is still under watch.

"Hey Nikki."

"Hey!" The bright cheerful bartender reaches over the counter and gives me a one armed hug, "The usual?"

"Actually I'll go with iced vodka tonight."

"Wow, that kind of night."

"That kind of month," I joke, but the look on her face and the shift in the atmosphere I know I just scared the day lights out of the ease droppers.

"Hey sweet thang," A drunken voice tries charming some poor soul, but when I look up at the voice I see that the drunken statement was directed towards me.

"Newbie, she's not interested," A local says starting an argument.

"Who asked you?"

"You best be moving on boy," The rough looking local says staring down at the drunk.

"Stanley, it's okay. What's your name?"

"Danny," he says through his smug smile towards Stanley.

"Where is your home?"

"Up the block."

I quickly finished my drink, "Let me walk you home."

"You're too kind," Stanley says with all intent for it to be a compliment, but in my line of work kindness is weakness. But this man is a walking invitation to any beast that is roaming the streets tonight. As I walk Danny towards his home I begin picking up on some hidden signs; his frequent glances to my neck, his twitching fingers and the sweat dripping from his brow. They were all signs of a vamp trying to resist the urge to attack, "Do you know who I am, Danny?"

"No, you didn't give me your name."

"My name doesn't matter, but that lousy scene in the bar and your pathetic performance to lure me out got me thinking that you have no idea what I am."

His face turns paler than it already was, "A soldier."

"Oh so you have heard of me?"

"I heard of the myths."

I laugh at his word choice, "We are myths to you?"

"Well no one has ever seen one and lived."

"That is true and it's going to stay true," I knew he was too weak to give me a full fight so I couldn't pass up a good tease. I felt his movement before he made it stopping him in his tracks, with the wooden dagger to the

heart.

I walk back to the loft, placing my weapons in the chest by my bed. I smile at the dagger remembering what my trainer said, *"the sneakiest of them all are the vamps. They can slip under your radar if you're not paying attention and most of all they are everyone and multiplying like rabbits. Always be ready to fight them,"* I jump in the steamy shower; just as I finish up my phone begins to ring. The sound is so unfamiliar to me I hesitate to pick it up, I don't say hello, but the familiar voice explodes in my ear, "I know I'm not supposed to contact you, Isabelle, but I need help and you're the only one I can trust, please help me."

"Em, where are you?"

"There is a small convenience store on 85th street meet me there, alone," Questioning the phone call, Emily is my best friend since the war I couldn't just abandon her, but she knows that you're not supposed to contact other soldiers for help you have to go through the agency. I do owe her one, I think as I pick out a few universal weapons and lock the loft doors.

I reminisce of the time we first met. It was the first day of boot camp. I was already in trouble with the sergeant, for waking up late. Which if you know anything

about boot camp that has to be done on intentionally; there is no accidentally sleeping in with the constant screaming and alarms buzzing through the camps. I was responsible for making the whole group's punishment. As I'm doing the last set of reverse pushups Emily leans down over me kicking out my arms, "Do it again, private!" she shouts in my face. I smile at the torture I put her through as a first time sergeant, I tested her every bit of patience, but through all the punishments and tortures we became the closest – well just the closest. We'd never admit it even to ourselves that we were friends.

I look for Emily in the deserted convenience store, waiting to see her matted hair twisted up into a bun of some sort. She wasn't a pretty girl who spent hours on her hair, but she always had her hair in an exotic hair due every time she saw her. An eerie feeling crept over me as I wait noticing that nobody was around; not even the store clerk. After ten minutes of silence I pick up the phone and attempt to contact her. The phone went straight to voicemail I hung up quickly. Worried I leave the store through the back exit and search the area for Emily. A block over I see a person stumbling over the concrete, "Em, is that you?" I ask stupidly seeing Emily stumble towards her, dripping with blood, "EM!" I grab her before she falls

to the ground slowly lowering her. I look around quickly seeing her attacker race away scared. I check her cuts and bruises; from what I could tell no beast we hunt attacked her, "Emily what did this to you?"

She pulls me close mumbling gibberish into my ear in between her coughing on her own blood. "Emily, please just stay with me," I beg as I aide her the best I could, with my field training, but I'm not the agency doctor, I don't know too much about fixing somebody this bad. Reluctant from how Emily acted tonight, I give in and text S.O.S. to the agency and my location and wait for them to send a medic.

"Thank you for contacting us, we lost radio with her a few days ago, I'm surprised she made it all the way here."

"Where was she assigned?"

"You are dismissed, we got it from here," I obey the hidden, *get the hell out of here*, message and retreat back to my loft. I scribbled down what Emily whispered to me, I thought that it might make sense if I see it on paper, I was wrong, reading it out loud made it even worse, "The brother's will come up from the shadows. And out of the blood and ashes of the mutilated corpses' of our loved ones, emerge a new predatorily species, to dominate the

world, we once belonged to," My mind is spinning with the last of my drink so I retire to my bedroom.

I wake from my dreamless slumber to a crash in my living area. Creeping out of the bedroom I see nothing out of the ordinary, but I know that there's something different in the air. Examining the room I see a shadow out of the corner of my eye, I whip a knife towards. Another shadow makes me waste another knife. "Show yourself,"

"Promise not it kill me?"

Emily appears from the shadows, "Emily? What's wrong with you,"

"They killed me."

"Who?"

"That's what you have to find out. Change is coming and you have to follow my message even if it goes against what the agency trained us to do," My phone rings besides my bed I wake in cold sweat, my brain is in a haze, *I had a dream?* I questioned in disbelief. My phone chimes again; opening the message with foggy eyes I read the new location I'm assigned to. Packing only a few bags of weapons and clothes I pile into a taxicab.

"Where you headed to?" the cab driver pries.

"California," I lie.

"The sunshine state!" he exclaims, "I'm jealous it

beats being stuck in this gloomy town," I don't answer; my mind drifts to the dream Emily haunted last night.

I think back to the first week in training, "You will not have any weaknesses, any thoughts, pets, family, friends, not even dreams."

"Dreams?" I question.

"Yes, no dreams. Dreams are fears and fears are weaknesses," My trainer explains.

"How do you stop dreaming?"

"Once you're done with training you won't be able to dream," This was one example of how the agency never gave me a direct answer to my questions, be strangely accepted them. As I sit and wait for the plane to take off I shut my eyes just for a second before I know I'm waking up two thousand feet above ground. I look out the window to see patches of a variety of green and brown colors.

"Oh you're finally awake. I was wondering how long you could sleep for," A young man says smiling kindly next to me. I return a fake smile and retreat to the unoccupied bathroom.

"You headed to Louisiana or just making a pit stop?"

Remembering my assignment I lie again, "I just took up an intern job at the local hospital."

"Interesting position. Why Louisiana?"

I shrug, "that's where the school sent me," I admit part of the truth, "What about you?"

"Just a pit stop, I'm visiting some family in Texas."

"Fun," I say sarcastically.

"I hope so," The seat belt button lights up and the plane begins to descend. Hating the dropping of the altitude I grip the armrests. "Afraid of heights?"

"Hate the falling part."

"It'll be over soon."

"Well good luck, Miss..."

"Chamberlain. Donna Chamberlain,"

"Chamberlain. Good luck at your new job."

"Thank-you," People like him make it so hard to lie to; they are so full of life and energy they just give kindness to everyone. Unfortunately, they are also the ones I tend to save a lot. I hitch a ride with a taxi to an old Victorian house in just a block from the center of town. I look up at the all too familiar house as it stares back at me ashamed.