Heartbeat

by quackers

Summary

So the guy Ryan sits next to at work is a vampire. That's no big deal, right?
Chapter 1

“Looks like we're going to be desk buddies.”

Ryan turned at the words, looking up and then more up, only carefully learned manners keeping him from being incredibly awkward as he automatically offered his hand for a handshake. The guy, someone vaguely familiar as being the tallest of his fellow interns, smiled at him politely. It was an odd smile on an odd face; a thin glimmer of white teeth glimpsed behind a small mouth.

“Shane,” the man said, taking Ryan's hand in a firm, dry grip. His skin was noticeably cool to the touch.

Pale, cold skin, and carefully keeping the tips of his teeth hidden. This guy was a vampire.

The hair on the back of Ryan’s neck rose. “Ryan,” he blurted, slightly too late. “You, ah, sitting next to me?” His heartbeat sped up, hard enough that he could notice it.

If Ryan had had any doubts about his suspicions, they were all dashed by the way Shane narrowed his eyes, something wry in his expression. “Indeed I am. I hope that won’t be a problem?”

Realizing that he was staring and saying nothing, Ryan finally let go of the man's hand. Fuck, his mother had raised him better than that.

Guilt made him answer a little too loud and fast, “No, no problem! Sorry, I never met a-” Ryan could see the moment Shane disengaged from the conversation, his polite smile turning fixed. So it was a bit fun to continue with, “- hairless Bigfoot before.”

Shane blinked. “What?”

“That is entirely too much leg. What do you even use all that for?”

Smile slowly widening into a grin, though the tips of his teeth were never quite revealed, Shane laughed quietly and said, “It's so I can reach the leaves at the top of the trees.”

Ryan snickered, delighted at the reply and glad he had salvaged the situation. If the person he sat next to had a good sense of humor, the next six months of the internship would be a lot easier. Surely the guy being a vampire wouldn’t be a big deal?

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Working next to a vampire was oddly easy. The six month internship passed in a blur as Ryan volunteered for everything he had time for and some things he made time for, determined to make himself useful and learn everything he could firsthand about the industry.

Editing, holding extra cameras, carrying equipment around, making food runs for the on-screen talent; whatever job people were willing to give him. And Shane, while outwardly more relaxed, seemed to be in just as many places as Ryan.

They were both so busy on different projects that Ryan honestly forgot that Shane was a vampire. For the most part. Sometimes he would walk into the room to notice that Shane was mixing
something into an iced coffee that would turn the drink a disturbingly dark brown color, or he would take note of the constant supply of sunscreen next to Shane's keyboard, but both things were so low on his radar that he barely noticed them.

When the months had passed and they were both offered a job, Ryan didn’t think anything about inviting Shane for celebratory drinks with the others that had been hired. And when they both walked into work as official, full-time employees of BuzzFeed, he didn’t think anything about the fact that they were still sitting next to each other.

They weren’t exactly the closest of friends, but it was oddly comforting to see that lanky figure slouched in front of the computer next to him; a constant, familiar presence. One that he had grown rather fond of.

And then things changed for Shane.

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“Hey, you. Shane, right?”

Ryan watched from the corner of his eye as Shane took his headphones off and turned to face the speaker, a woman he thought he recognized as being an assistant executive. Someone that didn’t often show up often in that part of the building.

“That would be me,” Shane said. “What can I-”

“Do you want to be in a video?”

Ryan didn’t make any pretense of not paying attention as he jerked his head up. Shane exchanged a look with him before casually saying, “Sure. What’s it for?”

It was probably convincing to the woman, but Ryan knew his deskmate well enough by now to know that Shane was nervous under the chill veneer he had going. Over a year of working at BuzzFeed and Shane had yet to be in front of the camera. Ryan had been in a fair number of videos by that time, since, in his experience, all it took was being in the wrong place at the wrong time to be roped into something odd.

He had always assumed that Shane had just never wanted to be in a video. Quite a few people preferred being behind the camera.

Judging by the way Shane’s fingers, hidden from the woman’s view, were tapping on his thigh, Ryan may have been wrong about that assumption.

“We need people to eat a bunch of chicken nuggets.”

Ryan made a confused face at that and started to turn back towards his computer screen, wanting nothing to do with the entire idea. He liked chicken nuggets as much as the next guy, but he was sure there was some kind of caveat. They were probably made from Soylent Green or something.

Working at BuzzFeed led to some odd days.

Just as his eyes were passing over Shane, he caught the quickest flash of determination on the man’s face. Which wasn’t exactly an emotion he would have thought the situation required. It was a simple yes or no, it wasn’t-

Shane was a vampire.
Ryan felt like slapping his own forehead. Vampires could eat, he knew. Shane always had a box of raisins at his desk and they had had more than one discussion about popcorn during down times. But vampires didn’t exactly eat a lot. Ryan didn’t know all of the details, but something about their systems just couldn’t take very much solid matter. As far as he was aware, vampires only ever ate a bite or two for the flavor.

So asking Shane to be in a video that was specifically about eating didn’t make any sense. It wasn’t exactly a secret that Shane was a vampire, either. This lady had to be aware of his… uh. Species.

It surprised him when Shane said, still acting as casual as he could, “Sounds terrible. Where do I need to be?”

Ryan could tell that the woman was surprised as well. If she hadn’t expected Shane to say ‘yes’, then why had she even bothered to ask?

“Hey,” he said before he could second guess himself. “Need anyone else? These files are going to take awhile to convert.” It was a straight up lie, since he wasn’t done editing. Shane knew that, too, judging by the glance he sent Ryan’s way.

The woman paused, her eyes narrowed as she studied him. “You’re Ryan, right?”

Somewhat nervously, Ryan nodded.

She shook her head. “Shane was the last person we needed. Maybe for the next one.” She glanced at Shane. “Sound stage two. Shouldn’t take more than twenty minutes.”

As soon as she was out of hearing distance, Shane turned to him. “Ryan, what are you doing?”

“What? I thought I would try for free food!”

Shane raised one eyebrow. “You’re not that hungry.”

“You’re don’t know that, big guy,” Ryan said, grinning. He wasn’t entirely sure why he had volunteered himself, either, but like hell was he going to admit it. It wasn’t until Shane gave him a weird look that he realized he’d just called Shane a pet name. Pet name? What the fuck, dude?

Fuck. Nickname. It was a nickname.

Shane continued to give him a weird look as he followed the man to the sound stage, but he just blithely smiled back. There was something off about the producer woman’s request for Shane, and Ryan wasn’t going to let one of his favorite coworkers face anything alone.

He tucked himself into a corner, amused as the makeup artist did her best to do something to Shane’s pale skin that would keep him from screwing up the white balance on the cameras, and even more amused when Shane was paired with Keith, the only other man in the room that came close to Shane’s height.

It was clear from the start that Shane had never actually had chicken nuggets before, which made Ryan idly wonder, not for the first time, just how old the guy was. It was hilarious to watch, though, the way Shane kind of poked at the meat in front of him.

He and Keith exchanged some words that Ryan couldn’t hear, but he was heartened to see Shane smile as he curiously opened a little container of dipping sauce.

Maybe Ryan’s nebulous suspicions were completely unfounded.
Nobody had realized that they were already filming when Shane took the first bite. He chewed slowly and tilted his head to the side. “Well that ain’t half bad.”

“Shane,” called the guy directing from behind the camera, startling everyone. “Can you say that again but smile a little more?”

After a moment’s hesitation, Shane repeated the words, showing off a glimpse of white between his lips.

The director sighed. “Big smiles, Shane.” He paused, listened to something the assistant exec said, and with clear reluctance elaborated, “Show off those teeth.”

It had already been silent on the set, everyone too well trained to make noise while the cameras were rolling. With those words, it became deathly quiet.

Had they seriously only asked Shane to be in the video to show off that they had a vampire in the office? What the fuck?

Ryan wanted to step forward, to say something, but he had no idea what he would say. As much as it aggravated him, he knew it wasn’t his call, anyways.

Shane closed his eyes in a slow blink, audibly breathing out once through his nose.

Then he grinned. It was a friendly expression. Almost silly. On anyone else, it would have been downright cute.

On Shane, it showed off four wickedly sharp fangs that looked like they’d cut through metal. They gleamed in the bright lights of the set. It was a shock to Ryan to realize that he had never seen Shane’s fangs clearly before. It had only ever been occasional glimpses when Shane laughed. The man was just so good at keeping them covered with his lips that Ryan had honestly forgotten that vampires had different teeth.

How the hell does he not bite his tongue off?

Keith was the only one that seemed unaffected, since he was too busy eating to pay attention to what was going on next to him. Or he was just that good at acting like nothing was happening.

The grin turned into a smirk as Shane popped a nugget into his mouth and said with comedic relish, “Load me up with some chicken nuggets, baby.” His gaze strayed towards Ryan as he finished the sentence.

Ryan’s expression must have been priceless, because Shane started laughing. For the first time since Ryan had known him, Shane did nothing to hide his teeth.

The video did well. Surprisingly well.

Half of the comments were about how the ingredients that went into chicken nuggets were disgusting, but the other half were about ‘the vampire’. Ryan was torn between a mix of indignation that Shane had been reduced to a species and pride that Shane’s first video had done so well.

Which was silly, considering they were just coworkers. Friends. Friendly coworkers. Something.

For whatever reason, Shane became the new popular person to grab for videos. Especially the ones
where the people on camera had to eat something weird. The only caveat was that Shane had to flash his teeth whenever he was being filmed. Only once, but it became some kind of unspoken requirement. Whoever was directing the video wouldn’t let Shane leave until he had done something to show off his teeth. He usually laughed or smiled, but in one memorable video that Ryan absolutely did not watch on repeat until he had it memorized, Shane had literally snarled at the taste of something disgusting.

That video hit one million views in one week.

Suddenly, Shane was being allowed to pitch his own ideas, to go off and film videos about science and social experiments; the kinds of things that he had only researched and written scripts for, never produced.

Ryan carefully never said anything about Shane’s newfound popularity. He had lived in LA his whole life, he knew the kinds of things people would do to get ahead in the industry. Even if it seemed a bit degrading, if Shane was willing to show off a little fang in exchange for his own ideas being produced, Ryan wasn’t going to judge. And if this had been Shane’s goal all along, he’d do his best to support the guy.

Though Ryan had laughed himself sick when he had learned that Shane had managed to convince someone to give the go ahead on a video about sitting or standing to wipe. It was pretty much the best thing he had ever heard. Maybe Shane had the right idea after all.

“Hey, man,” he said during lunch. They were sitting in what passed as the break room, right next to Maycie and Jen. “Congrats on your shitting video. I can’t wait to see how it goes.”

Shane rolled his eyes, methodically chewing through a pile of raisins. He looked tired and paler than usual, but there was a proud tilt to his smile when he said, “It’s not a shitting video, Ryan. It’s about wiping. An important aspect of everyone’s culture.”

Ryan actually giggled a little, feeling his own grin stretch wide. “I still can’t believe you pulled that off. You want to get drinks tonight to celebrate?” For one second, he thought about leaving it at that, but some sense of self preservation made him add, “We can invite a few others, make a real party of it.”

Maycie visibly perked up as she overheard that.

“Sorry,” Shane said, grimacing. “Alcohol would not be a good idea this week.” He doggedly chewed another raisin.

“Ah, too tired?” Ryan told himself he wasn’t disappointed.

Shane shook his head. “Mix up at the bank,” he said with a listless smile. “Blood’s late, so I’ll be pretty worthless the next couple days. Good thing the makeup crew is getting better at working with my lily white complexion.”

Ryan could feel his own heart beating faster. Which was a stupid reaction and he hated himself for it. It was just that Shane almost never mentioned blood. Sometimes it was amazingly easy to forget exactly what made up the majority of Shane’s diet. “You mean the Blood Department?”

“The Department of Vampire Assistance Blood Bank,” Shane downright drawled, raising one sardonic eyebrow. “Get it right, sir.”

“Yeah,” Ryan replied, just as sarcastic. “I’ll start doing that. But seriously, what do you mean by a mix up? Isn’t that like… your food?”
Shane shrugged and said, “It happens. I’ll be fine.” He held up a single raisin. “I’ve got these babies. Iron rich and easy to digest.”

Ryan almost asked why Shane didn't just go to a vampire bar and pick up a chick that had a biting fetish. But he didn't know anything about that aspect of vampires. It was probably dangerous to pick up strangers like that. Vampires were pretty damn sturdy, but they weren't completely immune to disease. Or being attacked.

And he had heard rumors that very few vampires were actually rich enough to afford to buy from the private blood banks. Surely there were other alternatives than raisins, though.

“Wouldn’t a rare steak be better?”

Not that Ryan really wanted to watch someone eat a bloody steak.

“Eh. Meat’s not great on the system,” Shane said.

Ryan wanted to ask him to elaborate, but Sara chose that moment to pop up out of nowhere, leaning casually against the back of Shane’s chair. “Hey, Shane. Ready to go film?”

Shane turned to smile up at her. “As ready as ever, fair lady.”

Sara rolled her eyes and smacked him on the arm. “Don’t try that old fashioned charm bullshit on me. Let’s go get you in costume.”

Ryan watched after them as they walked away, chatting and laughing together. He absently chewed on his lower lip, brows lowered. Ever since Shane had made it known that he was available to be in videos, Sara had snatched up a lot of his free time. She loved putting him in videos where his vampirism was completely ignored, leaving a small but vocal section of viewers incredibly frustrated.

Carefully, trying not to think about it, Ryan pushed away the minor feelings of jealousy over a coworker’s friendship with another coworker. He also tried to ignore his anger at how Shane was blatantly being treated as just a tick in the diversity column by so many. Sara’s videos wouldn’t cause as much controversy if people would just get over the fact that he was a vampire.

It didn’t help that Shane was genuinely an easy going guy and he never seemed to mind mugging for the camera. He approached everything with an amused kind of intrigue and had no problem doing silly things for a laugh. And as far as Ryan was aware, he had never turned down a video. Ryan couldn’t help but be worried that was going to bite him on the ass one day.

Maycie clearing her throat next to him made Ryan jump. He turned wide eyes towards her, both eyebrows raised in question.

“So,” she started innocently. “How old do you think Shane really is?”

Ryan groaned and rubbed at the bridge of his nose. “Why do people keep asking me that? Why would I know!”

“You two sit next each other,” Maycie shrugged. “And since you watch him like he’s your favorite thing in the world, we figured if anyone would know, you would.”

“I’m not helping you cheat at the betting pool,” Ryan said, pointedly ignoring the rest of her words.

“Oh, I didn’t know you knew about that.”
“Knew about it?” Ryan laughed. “I helped start it.”

Jen leaned in, her grin conspiratory. “Then when did you say he was born?”

Steven plopped down next to her, Andrew trailing along behind him. “We talking about Shane?”

“Of course,” Maycie said brightly. “You place your bet yet?”

“Yup,” Steven grinned. “1970. No way the guy is one of those old vampires. He’s too good with pop culture.”

Jen scoffed. “You’re blind. Half of his mannerisms are from the 40’s.”

“That just means he’s odd, not old.”

“But what’s old for a vampire?”

Andrew quietly spoke up. “It’s got to be before the turn of the century.”

“What’s the earliest anyone has put down?”

Steven laughed and said, “Zach went with 1550. He said he was going with super old in case we were all fooled by Shane’s ability to keep up with the times.”

Ryan shook his head. “I know he was born in America. Unless you think he’s a fucking Pilgrim, he’s definitely not that old.” Unlike some, apparently, he knew how to use Google and Wikipedia. If Shane’s family had still been using the original pronunciation of their surname when they had had him, that meant they had pretty strong Polish roots. Whether that meant his parents had actually been from Poland or they were just proud of their heritage, Ryan didn’t know, but he had decided to gamble for an earlier year than most had.

“You’re all wrong,” he continued with all the confidence of someone that has lost a few too many bar bets. “He’s a pretty good actor, so his mannerisms and references aren’t going to tell us anything. He's probably-”

The door to the break room opened and Shane leaned in. “He's a vampire that can hear you,” he announced loudly at them. “What with the vampiric hearing and all. Any of you jokers think of just asking?”

Everyone exchanged glances, then as one, shook their heads. “Where would the fun in that be?” Jen called back. “It’s about tricking it out of you.”

Shane looked both surprised and pleased by that. And Ryan thought he could understand. It always felt nice to be somewhat included in the joke, not just be the joke.

“That being said,” Ryan added, “You wanna give us a hint, big guy?”

After a moment of staring at him, Shane smiled. It was an oddly soft expression. It didn't entirely fit the situation. And then he said something. A phrase that none of them caught before he ducked back out of the room.

Jen and Andrew turned to each. “That wasn't English,” Andrew said.

“Yes, thank you for your insight, Andrew, we all got that.”

Andrew just raised an eyebrow at Ryan.
Stein and Maycie, on the hand, were looking at Ryan with matching grins.

“What?”

“’Big guy’?” Maycie asked.

Ryan knew it was the wrong reaction going into it, but all he could think to do was glare and mutter, “Shut up.”

“Forget Ryan's crush,” Jen said. “What language was that?”

Ryan thought he knew, but now he had every intention of being petty and not voicing his suspicions.

_Crush._

As if. They were just friends.

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Life developed a good pattern. Somehow, through a series of conversations and random pitch ideas, Ryan was able to be in a series of videos with Shane and some of their friends. It was stupidly fun. Occasionally terrible.

Mostly, it meant that more than once, when somebody got the bright idea to force the others into some new, popular exercise program, a trainer had to come up with ways to make a vampire struggle while working out. Something about the vampire virus meant that vampires were just strong. It didn’t come up often, but Ryan had once witnessed Shane casually lift a filled electrical cart. The kind of cart that held hundreds of pounds of equipment. Shane had done it with one hand, just to help the tech guys figure out what was wrong with one of the wheels.

So weight training ended up being something of a lost cause. That didn’t mean that every single trainer they dealt with didn't take it as a personal challenge to make Shane do so many repetitive exercises that his shirt would eventually stick to his back from how drenched in sweat he was.

Ryan did a poor job of hiding his fascination. He hadn’t actually known that vampires could sweat. And he had, somewhat stupidly, thought the sweat would be red. It wasn’t. It was just plain, disgusting, smelly sweat. So he wasn’t entirely sure why he made excuses to watch the raw footage whenever Shane had to make a fool of himself with his lanky noodle limbs all akimbo.

When Shane agreed to do a CrossFit video, then subsequently only went to a couple of sessions, Ryan had no real idea what had happened. He hadn’t been paying much attention while filming for the video had gone on, since his personal pet project had been okayed for a season. Most of his energy had been going towards making his little Unsolved dream a reality. But when he found out about Shane’s apparent laziness, he couldn’t stop the nagging thought that it was odd that Shane would so blatantly skip so many days of working out, especially on camera.

It had worked out in the end, of course. Shane dressing in a cheerleader outfit had been a, uh, rousing success for the video.

Ryan tried not to think about what else was ‘rousing’ about it.

He just didn’t think Shane had skipped the days because he had been tired, though. Or if he was tired, there was a reason for it. Something more than the guy was letting on.
Luring Shane to an unused meeting room was easy. Making sure he stayed for the length of the conversation was another matter entirely.

“Hey, pal,” Shane started, eyeing the way Ryan was planted in front of the door. “What’s going on? Should I be worried that you’re trying to trap me?”

“Why didn’t you do all the CrossFit days?”

Both of Shane’s eyebrows twisted in a frankly hilarious expression of confusion. Whatever he had thought Ryan was going to say, it obviously wasn’t that. “Uh, because it was boring and I was tired? Not everyone is a gym rat, Ryan.”

“You liked the ballet stuff.”

“That was interesting. I had never done anything like that before.” Shane shrugged, making a show of leaning his hip against the conference table. “CrossFit is just going out of your way to kill yourself.” He tilted his head. “Surely that isn’t what you actually wanted to ask me?”

“It is what I wanted to ask you. And don’t call me ‘Shirley’.

Shane laughed quietly at the movie reference but didn’t stop staring at Ryan expectantly.

Ryan took a deep breath, mentally rehearsing his words in an attempt to get them right. The pause made Shane straighten up slightly. Which didn’t make it any easier to get the words out. “Were you tired because you weren’t getting enough blood?”

For one eerie moment, Shane stopped moving. All of the little tics and twitches that humans did, the automatic motions that marked them as living, that Shane did with the same thoughtlessness that anyone else did; they all stopped. There was one brief, incredibly creepy, second where Shane was as still as statue. Then he slowly shifted his gaze away from Ryan and said, “Don’t be ridiculous. You’ve been reading too many conspiracy theories for Unsolved if you’re seeing them at work.”

“That- that’s not really a conspiracy theory. I’m just concerned.”

Dark eyes darted back towards him. “Are you asking because you’re worried my control is going to snap and I’ll attack someone?”

Ryan blinked. Opened his mouth. Blinked again. His mind was nothing but shocked white noise. “Uh. Honestly, that thought never even occurred to me.”

This time Shane was the one to look stunned. The shock quickly morphed into embarrassment as he stood up from his slouch and started to try and sidle around Ryan. “Well I’ll be, look at the time, I should scoot on out of here.”

Knowing that there wasn’t much he could physically do to stop a vampire, Ryan still put his hand out, stopping just shy of touching Shane’s chest. “Dude. Seriously? I think I’m kind of offended. I’m just worried that you’re staying healthy.”

Shane grimaced and ran his hand through his hair, tugging absently at the ends. It left his hair even more of a mess than usual. “Don’t worry about me. I’m fine.”

“Which is why you’ve been super pale lately, you’re constantly tired, and you’ve been eating raisins like they’re candy?”

“To a lot of people, they are can-”
“Shane,” Ryan said on a sigh. “You can talk to me. If you want to. I’m your friend.”

If anything, Shane looked even more embarrassed. He rolled his eyes and pulled out a chair, slumping down into it in a dramatic tangle of limbs as if he had given up. “Look, it’s just a clerical error. The Blood Department clerks are overworked, sometimes the Red Cross doesn’t want to play nice, et cetera et cetera.” He shrugged expansively. “It happens.”

Ryan frowned. “Twice in four months?”

“It’ll get sorted out. I can pick up my order next week and things will be fine.”

The statement would have been more believable if Shane had actually met Ryan’s eyes when he said it.

“Wait,” Ryan said, taking a step closer. “Are you saying people at the Department aren’t giving you your blood? That’s like, government mandated to vampires that qualify for it! That’s illegal!”

Shane held up both hands. “Whoa there buddy, it’s nothing like that. Things just get a bit lost in communication.” He narrowed his eyes. “How do you know that stuff, anyways?”

“Oh.” Ryan stopped short. “Internet?”

“Ryan…”

“What, I can’t want to learn about one of my best friends?”

That was the moment the emotion level became too much for Shane, Ryan could tell. The man suddenly slapped his hands on his thighs and shot to his feet, his grin wide in an obvious attempt to turn it all into some kind of joke. “Aww, that's touching. Besties for life. If that's all, I really ought to-”

“If you need blood, you know a lot of us would volunteer some for you,” Ryan said as quickly as he could, forcing the words out so fast that his tongue felt like it got tangled up in itself.

Damn his heart and it deciding that now was the best time to speed up.

He had absolutely no idea what Shane was thinking in that moment. Usually he could anticipate how Shane would react in any given situation, but Shane’s face was unnaturally blank. When he blinked, it looked like he had to remind himself to do it. “You’re… volunteering?”

There was something brittle in Shane’s voice.

“Not-not just me,” Ryan hastened to explain, pushing away the odd surge of disappointment at the thought that his blood wasn’t good enough for Shane. “I haven’t actually asked anyone yet, but you know some of our friends would do it. It’d be like donating to the Red Cross, but just, you know, skipping the middleman.

Ryan hadn’t realized Shane wasn’t breathing until the guy inhaled loudly through his nose. “To be clear,” Shane said, looking pained, “You mean using a needle and syringe, right?”

“No, I mean a hatchet and a vacuum hose. Yes, of course I mean a syringe, what else would.”

Shane gave him a look.

“Oh. Right, the fangs.”
“Yes, Ryan, the fangs. The things designed specifically to tear flesh.”

Ryan’s heart tripped, lurching uncomfortably in his chest as a shiver stole up his spine. The very idea of Shane’s mouth on his skin, biting until he bled-

Rather than think too hard on the weird squirming, unwelcome feeling of fear and arousal that was making him feel sick to the stomach, Ryan pulled an exaggerated wide-eyed face and took a step back. “Dude, I don’t want you to starve to death, but you’re not getting your mouth anywhere near my neck. I’m no bite junkie.”

Shane’s lips slanted into something that wasn’t really a smile. “Just say ‘no homo’ and get it over with.”

Yeah, that’s not the problem.

“I just don’t know where your mouth has been.”

Shane muttered something, then shook his head. He relaxed as he slumped back into his usual stoop-shouldered pose. “I do appreciate the thought, Ryan. But I’ll be good. I’ve been doing this for awhile, I know how far I can push myself.” He laughed. “I’m not going to ‘starve to death.’”

Okay, that was an opening if Ryan had ever seen one. “How long is awhile, exactly?”

Shane just grinned instead of answering

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The very next week, Shane was asked to be in a video about weird snack food combinations.

Shane, of course, agreed to do it. Ryan trailed behind him, not even bothering to pretend that he had a reason to be on set.

It wasn’t like he was alone, though. If they had free time, people liked to watch the weird things that occasionally got filmed. Ryan was able to stand behind a couple of interns, his beanie pulled low in an attempt to hide from Shane.

Ryan wasn’t even sure why he was there, honestly. He really needed to take a day to figure out why he was becoming such a stalker towards his friend. Part of it, maybe, had to do with the tiny crush that he might have had. But that was something he could have easily ignored. Shane wasn’t the first coworker he had had a crush on and wouldn’t be the last. It was just something that happened.

Something else, though, some kind formless worry made Ryan want to keep a constant eye on the big-headed lug.

Shane started his and Keith’s bit looking distracted, his gaze off the camera as the producer asked them prompting questions about the combinations they were about to try. He didn’t even really reply.

The producer, the same guy from that fateful chicken nugget video, sighed. “Shane, you’ve got to engage. C’mon, you know how this goes. Smile a little, make the jokes.”

A frustrated expression twisted Shane’s lips before he abruptly smiled. It was like something in Shane had snapped. Throughout the filming, he acted like he had something to prove as he willfully and gleefully flashed his fangs at every opportunity. He might as well have had a flashing neon sign
above his head that said, ‘If you want a vampire, here’s your vampire.’ It was lucky that he had been paired with Keith again, as the man never seemed to notice Shane’s teeth. Anyone else would have been staring.

It would be a record for the number of times Ryan had seen Shane’s fangs in one day. He laughed freely, smiled with his mouth open, even took a bite of the pickle juice soaked cheeto with a snarled click of his teeth that was audible on the set.

Ryan wasn’t sure if he wanted to be disgusted by the food, intrigued by the teeth, or worried about the manic way Shane was acting. He was sure the video was going to be cut down to a bare handful of minutes and most of Shane’s more bizarre actions wouldn’t make the cut, but it was still disconcerting to watch.

He had never seen Shane flaunt his teeth before.

Nor had Ryan ever seen Shane eat that much. He just wasn't stopping.

As soon as they were done and setting up for the next two unfortunate souls that had agreed to try the disgusting food pairings, Shane was off like a bat out of hell. Ryan hurried after him, ignoring the looks he received as he slammed through the door to try and keep Shane in sight.

“Shane,” he yelled, darting past a couple of people in the hallway

Shane slowed to a stop, though it was clear from the set of his shoulders that he didn’t want to. He turned just as Ryan ran up to him. “Really? Can’t this wait?”

“What the hell was all of-” Ryan cut himself off as soon as he got a good look at Shane. “Holy shit, are you okay?”

Shane looked terrible. He wasn’t pale, he was gray. And there was sweat gathering at his temples, matting his hair down. “I’m fine,” he said, incredibly unconvincingly.

“Dude-”

“Ryan.”

“You ate too much, didn’t you? C’mon, man, you know you can’t keep eating so much solid food, you-”

Shane groaned and pushed past him in a remarkably gentle way considering that he was a vampire, and headed straight towards the closest men’s room.

Ryan, because he didn’t always think things through, followed him.

As soon as he walked into the room, he was greeted by the unmistakable sounds of someone throwing up. For a second, he was extremely tempted to just leave. But he wasn’t about to abandon his friend. Suffering shared and all of that.

He knocked on the stall partition, though Shane hadn’t closed the door and he was sure the guy had heard him walk in. His answer was another groan and a spitting noise, though Shane somehow managed to make it sound exasperated.

“You’ve got to stop doing this to yourself,” Ryan said, gut twisting in sympathetic nausea. This wasn’t exactly the first time he’d watched a guy throw up, but it was the first time it was in a stall so tiny that he couldn’t do more than stand there awkwardly. “There’s plenty of people that work here,
they can get someone else to do their weird food videos.”

Shane spit once more into the toilet, then wearily sat back on his heels, hunched forward in what had to be a painful position to rest his forehead on the rim of the toilet seat. Ryan tried desperately not to think about how often the bathrooms were cleaned.

“I can’t stop,” Shane said quietly, his voice hoarse. “I…” He trailed off and shook his head.

Ryan edged forward, trying not to step on Shane’s feet. He lightly grasped Shane’s shoulder, eyeing the sweat-soaked hair at the back of the man’s neck. It was honestly a little disgusting, but his fascination with Shane sweating had never really gone away. The guy never drank water, how was his sweat so clear?

There was more important things going on than his stupid interest in the health issues of vampires, though. Ryan squeezed once, angling his body awkwardly so that he could reach over Shane to flush the toilet. Red, chunky vomit was not something he ever wanted to see again. “You’re hurting yourself, Shane. I get it, you’re a big bad vampire, but even if you heal through most stuff, there’s no point in torturing yourself for the videos.”

Shane sighed, the sound echoing against the porcelain. “Ryan, do you know how many vampires are in media?”

That wasn’t exactly a question Ryan had been expecting.

“Uh. Not off the top of my head? I can think of a couple.”

“Seven. That includes the four of us that are internet content creators.”

Ryan smiled a little at the way Shane so precisely said ‘content creators’ but it quickly fell. He realized that he was gently caressing Shane’s shoulder, so he drew his hand away and took a step back, leaning against the stall wall. “Really? There’s only three in Hollywood? But I thought—” Ryan paused and stopped to think of who he knew of. “Huh. Wait, weren’t there rumors about Keanu Reeves and Jared Leto?”

Shane snorted tiredly, finally sitting up and rubbing his hand across his mouth. He contorted his body in the small space, sitting his ass on the floor that probably had so much urine on it that it was a biohazard. Ryan cringed but didn’t say anything. It was clear that Shane had a point he was trying to make. “Oh the rumors are true for one of them. The other one just has really good genes.”

“…Well, which is which?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Shane asked with a lopsided smirk, resting his head on the stall wall, his eyes closed. One of his stupidly large feet was braced against the toilet, forcing him to bring his knee up to his chest. The man looked horribly squashed.

This truthfully wasn’t the worst or weirdest place that he had had conversations in, since drunken frat parties could lead to some pretty crazy situations. Ryan still didn’t want to be there. He wasn’t entirely sure why Shane was forcing himself into such an uncomfortable position. If he had wanted privacy, they could have gone to an unused meeting room or something.

“I know about you and the guy at the New York offices,” Ryan said, quietly trying to pretend that he didn’t know the name of every single vampire that was famous on the internet. “And the Rooster Teeth guy and the woman on Twitch. But surely there’s more vampires out there, streaming and making videos? Just because they haven’t made it big doesn’t mean—”
Shane was shaking his head before Ryan could even finish. “No. It’s just the four of us. And only because we’re attached to large companies that already came with an audience. No one wants to watch vampires outside of movies and porn. And those are usually humans with fake teeth, anyways. We’re not safe. We’re not… people.”

“That’s bullshit,” Ryan said, frowning. “Just because—”

“There isn’t a single vampire that is a journalist or a news anchor. There’s one politician that’s a vampire and he only made it as far as he did because he was already a Representative when he died. Was turned. Whatever the parlance is now.” Shane opened his eyes, the lazy droop to his eyelids mixing with his expression to make him look exhausted. “A vampire that’s a CEO or a lawyer? Fine, that makes sense, we’re soulless devils anyways. A vampire that’s a police officer or a soldier? Sure, they won’t be killed if they’re shot. Saves a squishy human from being out there. But no one wants to see us as something normal. Secretaries, clerks, fucking housewives. The gamer your precious kid likes to watch after school. The public can’t handle seeing us as like that.”

Ryan hated to tacitly admit that he was just as obsessed with the analytics over Shane’s videos as he was his own, but he couldn’t stand there and listen to what Shane was saying. “But I’ve seen the numbers! Any video with you in it gets a twenty percent increase in views. People want to see you.”

“Because I’m a sideshow attraction. And I’m part of a company,” Shane said slowly, as if explaining it to a small child. “BuzzFeed is responsible for me. Half the people watching are just trying to find hints that I’m the monster they know I am. If I went crazy and killed every person in the building, everyone would just nod and say it was BuzzFeed’s fault for taking a chance on a vampire. That they watched that one video I was in and did you see when he kept staring at that woman’s neck?”

His voice took on some weird, cartoonish accent. “‘I told you, didn’t I, Jeb! No good was going to come from lettin’ those rotten bloodsuckers become legal!’”

“Oh come on, no one is saying shit like that. Especially about you!”

“Ryan,” Shane said, his face pulling into something sardonic. “I’ve watched you have to deal with way too many racist assholes. And you’re human. You really think it’s any better when you’re a monster that’s probably going to tear everyone’s throat out?” He laughed, though there was no amusement in the sound. “Fuck, pretty sure the only reason I’ve even gotten this far on camera is because I’m a white guy.”

It was weird to think about, but Ryan was slowly realizing that Shane was right. Sure, major businesses had started making things more ‘vampire-friendly’ and more legal protections were being won every day, but at the same time, Ryan couldn’t think of the last he had seen a vampire in a produced TV show. Even the three actors that were openly vampires hadn’t been in a movie in the past year.

Ryan shifted uncomfortably. The thing was, he could actually understand some of the fear people might have. It was a little odd to see someone on a screen and think ‘that guy isn’t human.’ It didn’t help that, at the moment, Shane was so tired and out of it that his meticulously good control over his mouth was gone. Usually, when he wasn’t in front of the camera, Shane never once let even a hint of fang slip. Ryan had been trying to ignore the flashes of teeth that he had been seeing since Shane had stumbled into the bathroom, but it was difficult when his instincts kept telling him he was stuck in a very small space with a predator.

Of course, Shane chose that moment to sigh again, and with his head tilted back like that, Ryan had a very clear view of the tips of all four sharp fangs. He couldn’t help the shiver that stole up his spine and the way his heart thumped a handful of times in too quick succession.
Shane raised one eyebrow at Ryan, then pointedly bent his neck and closed his mouth, hiding his teeth like he usually did. There was something wry in the curve of his lips.

Ryan wanted to apologize, to explain, but he couldn’t think of a good way of saying that his heartbeat was fast just as much from interest as it was from fear. After everything Shane had just said, it didn’t seem like the right time.

Before Ryan could find something to say, Shane started speaking again. He looked like he was talking to the stall wall. “When vampirism was declared a virus and we were no longer considered the undead, it was the first opportunity I’d had in way too long to stop pretending I was human. And I want it to stay that way. I’m going to do everything I can to convince humanity that we’re people, too. If that means that I have to eat stupid shit on camera because it’s funny watching a vampire eat, if that means I have to be the ‘token vampire’ that’s the brunt of all the jokes, I’ll do it. I’ll do it for the next hundred years if I have to.” He nearly whispered, “It’s better to be the joke than the monster.”

His next words were so quiet, so exhausted that the sounds lisped sightly, that Ryan would have missed them if they hadn’t been in a bathroom that amplified every sound.

“I’m so tired of everyone being afraid of me.”

Fuck, suddenly Ryan felt like he was going to cry. He wasn’t sure if it was a product of Shane maybe growing up in an era where men couldn’t show emotion, a Midwest thing, or just a Shane thing, but Shane didn’t say things like that. Heartfelt confessions were about as foreign to Ryan’s concept of Shane as the idea of the man being short. It just didn’t work.

That he would say something so heartbreaking and vulnerable while huddled next to a fucking toilet after throwing up was so depressing that it was edging into comical. Like a sad fucking clown.

Ryan bent down and took ahold of Shane’s wrists, tugging until the man got the hint and clambered to his feet. Shane’s skin was a normal, human temperature to Ryan’s touch. That had to be a bad sign. It wasn’t like Ryan went around touching Shane whenever he could, but he knew that vampires were supposed to be room temperature.

He hadn’t known vampires could get fevers.

“I’m not afraid of you,” Ryan said, his voice shaking. It probably didn’t help his statement. Shane stared at him, clearly not believing him. So Ryan squeezed Shane’s wrists once and repeated himself. “Shane, you’re my best friend. I’m not afraid of you.”

Shane ducked his head and muttered something that didn’t sound like English.

“Dude, don’t insult me when I’m trying to be nice,” Ryan said, desperate to get Shane to smile. Apparently the joke worked, because Shane’s mouth slanted into a reluctant smirk. “Oh, just calling you a liar.”

“What!” Ryan squawked, making his voice go high on purpose. “How dare you?” He was only half joking.

Shane gently pulled his wrists from Ryan’s grip and tapped his own earlobe with one finger. “Supernatural hearing, Ryan. No one’s heart beats that fast if they’re not afraid.”

Ryan rolled his eyes, and in a fit of pique mixed with the kind of daring that either got him into huge trouble or led to the best things in his life, patted Shane’s chest. He intentionally let his hand linger...
before taking a step back. “Fear isn’t the only thing that can cause a fast heartbeat. I would have thought you would know that by now, since you’re the old-as-fuck vampire.”

It was actually a little funny to watch Shane’s eyebrows slowly come together in a confused frown. “What-”

**Christ. Straight boys.**

Ryan laughed and shook his head. “Nevermind, Shane. You’ll get it eventually. I know you’re not this stupid, so I figure you’re pretty tired after the day you’ve had. You should call an Uber and head home. Get some sleep.”

Shane opened his mouth to say something, then cocked his head to the side before turning to stare towards the entrance to the restroom.

There shortly came the sound of someone opening the door and pausing.

“Is that two pairs of feet I spy in one stall?” Curly exclaimed, obviously trying not to laugh.

Ryan closed his eyes for a second and held back a groan.

Footsteps, and then Curly peeked around the open stall door, his grin faltering when he took in Shane’s sweaty, flushed, obviously-sick form. “Ah hell. Ate too much solid food?”

Shane nodded slowly, clearly surprised that he had guessed it so fast.

“My tia is a vampire,” Curly said with a shrug, answering the unspoken question. “There was some trial and error in figuring out what she could keep down. You done?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I’m done.”

“Then shoo,” Curly said, making the corresponding motions with his hands. “I’m not shitting next to a throwing up vampire.”

Ryan sighed through his nose and slid past Curly, both of them turning to watch as Shane washed his hands and splashed water into his mouth, swishing it around before spitting into the sink.

They were about to leave when Curly called Shane’s name. “Stop letting them walk all over you. They ain’t gonna respect you if you don’t respect yourself.”

Shane kind of stared for a second before nodding slowly. Ryan followed closely behind him, and as soon as the restroom door was shut, he said, “See? Curly agrees with me. I get that being a goofball is like, your thing, but you can be the company clown without hurting yourself.”

Neither of them said anything for a few moments as they both slowly walked down the hallway.

“You’re not-” Shane said abruptly, swallowing before continuing. “You’re not wrong. I’m not saying you’re right, either, so slow your roll. But maybe I’ll try to keep the weird food to a minimum.”

Ryan clapped Shane on the shoulder, smiling at him. “Good. Watching you throw up blood, pickles, and Twizzlers was a very traumatic experience and I’ll Post-It Note your entire computer if I have to see it again.”

Shane snorted. “Oh no, the dreaded Post-it Notes. Whatever would I do?”

They were nearly back to their computers when Shane suddenly stopped. “Wait. You-”
Ryan turned in time to see Shane point at him, then slowly point back at himself and make some kind of gesture, both eyebrows raised.

“You’re either miming that I find you attractive or its first down and you declined the penalty,” Ryan said, his voice cracking despite his attempt to sound confident.

“Would me making a sports reference be a good thing?” Shane asked, his own voice oddly strained as he stared at Ryan like he had never seen him before. Luckily, it didn’t seem to be a negative reaction. If anything, Shane seemed more flattered than upset. It wasn’t exactly a declaration that the attraction was mutual, but Ryan hadn’t held high hopes for that.

“No, ‘cause you’re bound to get it wrong.”

That made Shane snap out of his staring. “You have a weird taste in people, Bergara.”

“God, don’t I know it,” Ryan said, giddiness making him far more willing to admit things out loud than he normally was.

Shane shook his head, his expression thoughtful.

Thoughtful was better than angry, all things considered.

Ryan took the win.

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“By the way, you made a mistake,” Ryan said as Shane sat down at his desk the next morning, looking more alive than he had the day before. Well. As alive as vampires ever looked.

“Hmm?”

“Now I know that you’re at least sixty.”

Shane turned to give him a questioning glance. “How did you come to that conclusion? Enlighten me.”

“You said you’d had to pretend before vampires were legal. The law passed in ’79, which means you were already a vampire by the late ’70’s.”

“Huh. Look at you, using your context clues.”

“Shut up, Shane,” Ryan said, grinning.

“Guess that’ll knock a few people out of the race.”

Ryan absently moved his mouse around, moving Unsolved files from one folder to the next. With Brent moving on to something else, he was going to have to change the cases he worked on for the show. “I don’t have to tell anyone, y’know. “

Shane shrugged. “You guys will figure it out eventually. Really, all you’d have to do is look at birth records in Chicago.”

“Yeah, I’m going to comb through the last three hundred years of birth records of one of the largest cities in America.” Ryan didn’t say that he had already spent an evening going through a cursory Google search of Shane’s name on the off chance he’d find something. It had been a bust. Which was another reason he thought Shane was using being born in America to muddy the waters.
“‘Madej’ isn’t exactly common.”

“Your face isn’t exactly common.”

Shane looked up from his computer. “Really, Ryan?”

Ryan grinned. “Think of it as a compliment.”

“So what year did you put down for the betting?”

Ryan rubbed at the back of his neck. “You’re gonna laugh. Now I’m half-convinced you’re not any older than my dad and you’re just being a dick about your age. You’re a little too good at pop culture for me to think you’re as old as I first suggested.”

“I am the Meme Lord,” Shane agreed with a completely straight face. “So, hit me with it. Eighteenth century. Seventeenth! Please tell me you went with four hundred.”

Ryan made a face. “Someone did, but no, there’s no way you’re that old. I, uh, said 1840.”

Shane didn’t react for a long second. Finally he blinked once, slowly, a very deliberate movement. “What made you come up with that year?”

“I, uh. Well, I used Wikipedia—”

“The best friend of lazy researchers everywhere.”

“Fuck off, that site saved my ass so many times in school.”

Shane grinned. “Oh no, it’s a great website. I wish I had had it when I was a kid.”

Ryan narrowed his eyes at the not so subtle reference to his age. “Anyways, I did some reading and the first real Polish presence in Chicago was in, uh… 1835? 6? Because of some Captain guy. But you were born here, so I picked a year after that, to, you know, give your parents time to bone.”

Shane made a face at that. “Thanks. I really needed that thought.”

“So?”

“So what?”

Ryan flicked a paper clip at him. “Am I close?”

Shane’s eyebrows did something complicated. It looked like he was trying to decide if he should actually answer. Finally, he said, “You’re closer than Zach, I’ll tell you that much.”

“Wait, you really were able to hear that?”

“One day you guys will remember how well I can hear.”

Ryan stared unseeing at his computer, his face twisted into a disgusted expression. “It just now occurred to me that that probably sucks. All those farts…”

Shane snorted. “I’m used to it by now.”

“You can’t keep making references to your age like that and not give me any real hints!”

“I’ve got to keep the mystery alive, Bergara,” Shane said as he put his headphones on. “Keep you
comin’ back for more.”

Ryan rolled his eyes and turned back to his computer.

They worked in companionable silence for an hour, both caught up in their own personal projects. Ryan idly wondered who he could get for an episode. It was hard to find someone that would have the free time to commit to multiple episodes. And if he was able to get the budget to travel out of the state, that was even more a commitment. Who did he know that he would trust to be a good guest? Or maybe, if it worked out, a new co-host?

It wasn’t a sudden epiphany or a culmination of careful planning. It wasn’t even spur of the moment. It was just a thought he had.

For something that would prove to be one of the biggest turning points of his life, it was an oddly simple exchange.

“Hey, Shane,” he said, slipping his headphones off one ear.

Shane glanced over, taking his own headphones off. “What’s up?”

“You want to do Unsolved with me? Brent is leaving.”

“Yeah, sure,” Shane said without hesitation, giving an easy shrug.

“It might be a time commitment if it takes off,” Ryan warned. He thought about suggesting that Shane could just do a couple of episodes to give Ryan the time to keep looking for someone more permanent, but Shane was already bringing up his Google calendar.

“Looks like I’m pretty clear for a bit.”

Ryan smiled in relief and started clicking on a couple of his episode files. “Cool.”

The headline of an article caught his attention. His smile grew wider.

“How do you feel about exorcisms?”

Chapter End Notes

Happy belated birthday, Cellar! Hopefully it's not too boring...

And a shout out to those lovely people that keep encouraging me to write. It helps more than you know!
“You remember when we were the ones that had to do the coffee runs?”

Shane laughed, snagging his oddly colored iced coffee, along with Ryan’s more seasonally appropriate latte, from the carrier that the poor intern was trying to balance. Before the intern walked away, Shane grabbed a twenty off his desk and folded it in between a couple other cups, murmuring a quiet, but heartfelt ‘thank you’.

Ryan sipped from his drink, watching the entire exchange with curiosity. When Shane sat back down, he asked, “You can’t tell me a blood shot is that expensive.”

“Ah, no. It’s ten-”


“The rest is for the hassle of ordering it,” Shane continued, ignoring him.

“What hassle? It’s just like getting an extra shot of espresso, right?”

Shane didn’t really have an expression on his face when he explained, “You can’t order them online because too many people were getting them as pranks. Which means you have to order in person.”

Unspoken was the fact that ordering a shot of blood out loud would mark the intern as either being a vampire or working with one.

Ryan couldn’t come up with a good reply to that. So he just awkwardly took another sip to give himself time. For some reason, he had always assumed vampires could easily pick up blood, like going to the Blood Department was the same as taking a quick trip to the grocery store. He was starting to realize how wrong he had been.

If only Shane would let him help.

The warmth of the coffee traveling down his throat was pleasant, a stark contrast to the sound of the ice cubes moving against each other in Shane’s coffee. Ryan frowned in thought, eyeing the drink. Despite what Shane said, fifty degrees was cold, damn it. There was no need to get iced drinks in the middle of winter. Yes, even if it was a southern Californian winter.

“Why do you never get hot coffee?”

Shane absently took a pull from the straw, his mouth distracting as his lips tightened around the long, cylindrical- stop it. Seriously?

Ryan managed to wrench his thoughts back to something vaguely resembling coherency by the time Shane swallowed and said, “The blood coagulates when the coffee is too hot and then I’m sucking up bits of chewy blood through the straw. Not bad, but it gets stuck in my teeth. You think people give you weird looks when you’ve got spinach in your teeth?” Shane gestured towards his own mouth. “You look like a lunatic if it’s gooey blood bits.”

“That is disgusting.”
“Don’t knock it till you’ve tried it,” Shane said, sending him a quick grin. “Maybe you’ll find you like it. Good for the hair.”

The entire idea sounded, admittedly, gross as hell. He got the feeling his knee-jerk response might have been a little rude, though. Ryan made a face, but in an attempt to be supportive of his blood-drinking friend, he said, “So, it’s kind of like boba?”

Shane looked away from the computer screen, one eyebrow raised. “What’s a boba?”

Ryan stared at him. “Seriously? Bubble tea? The chewy tapioca stuff that got really popular a few years ago? I think it’s originally from Taiwan.”

“Oh, I think I’ve seen signs for that,” Shane said, sitting up, an interested light in his eyes. “Is it actually tea? I wouldn’t have ever thought about putting tapioca in a drink.”

“Oh, I guess? It’s a really sweet tea, and the tapioca isn’t like the pudding. They’re—” Ryan shook his head. “I can’t believe you’ve never had bubble tea before, dude. We’re going to get some.” He hesitated, then took the plunge. “Tonight. If you’re free.”

Ryan hadn’t meant to make it sound like question, but his voice raised in pitch awkwardly on the last word. He willed his heartbeat to slow down. It wasn’t like he was asking for a date, it was just after work drinks. Because he wanted to watch Shane experience something new. Which wasn’t sappy in the slightest. Friends did that all the time!

Shane started to answer and it looked like he was about to say yes, but he shook his head and grimaced instead. “I shouldn’t. All the traveling we did in the past month hit my budget a little harder than I expected.”

“Oh.” Ryan tapped idly at his keyboard, trying not to feel disappointed. Then a thought hit him and he twisted his chair to more fully face Shane. “Wait, why were you using your own money? Everything was paid for by the company. Even the meals were comped.” He knew because he still had the multiple emails about the expense reports.

It was clear that Shane wanted to ignore the question. His lips had thinned into a straight line and he was running his fingers up and down the side of his plastic cup, dragging lines through the condensation.

“Didn’t you fill out the expense—”

“Blood isn’t covered, Ryan.”

“Oh,” Ryan said again. He sounded like a broken record, which was annoying. More annoying was the sudden realization that that wasn’t fair in the slightest. He sat up in his chair, filled with abrupt anger. “But that’s your food! You need that to live, how the fuck is it legal to not cover your—your meals?”

Shane glanced around them, obviously uncomfortable with how loud Ryan was getting. He muttered, “I can live off solid food for over a week if I have to, so it’s not considered a necessity.”

“Well, yeah, but isn’t that like only living off water for a week or something?”

Finally Shane seemed to have hit his limit with the conversation. He reached over and gripped Ryan’s wrist, two cold fingers accidentally pushing the cuff of Ryan’s shirt sleeve up. “Dude, Ryan, it’s fine.” He grinned, an expression that almost looked pleading, like he was trying to silently tell Ryan to shut up. “I would have paid a lot more to get a chance to watch you freak out about spiders
and the wind."

It took Ryan a moment to reply, his entire being hyper aware of the tips of Shane’s fingers on his bare skin. *This* fucking crush. *Goddamnit.*

Consciously lowering his voice and trying to nonchalantly tug his arm away, Ryan asked, “Is the Blood Department still not giving you your blood or-”

“I just picked up some extra from one of the private places so I wouldn’t have to worry while traveling. That’s all.”

Ryan must have looked more concerned than he had intended, because Shane laughed softly and continued, “You keep frowning like that and your face will freeze in that position.”

“... What are you, my mom?”

“Definitely old enough to be.”

Knowing that Shane was intentionally trying to distract him, Ryan let himself be steered away from the topic and into a banter-filled conversation about Shane’s age. But he didn’t plan on forgetting what he had learned. If Shane was going to be his co-host, he was going to make sure the man didn’t have to buy any more blood when they traveled. Not if it was as expensive as Shane was so carefully not saying.

He also didn’t forget about how Shane had looked like he had wanted to say yes to Ryan’s not-date proposal.

When the work day was over and both of them were walking through the parking lot towards their cars, Ryan forced himself to say, as casually as he could, “Let me get you a bubble tea.” Knowing full well how pride could be stung at the idea of something being charity, he was quick to add, “You can pay me back later. I just can’t wrap my brain around you having never had any before.”

It was honestly a little surprising when Shane agreed readily. Ryan tried not to read into that.

Watching Shane decide what flavor to get was amusing. Seeing his honest delight at the taste and the chewiness of the tapioca made Ryan feel so warm and fond that he half-expected to hear bad pop romance music start playing in the air around him.

The best part was getting to watch Shane try to discreetly work a large, gummy tapioca pearl off one of his fangs. It was fucking hilarious and Ryan couldn’t stop laughing.

Shane glared at him, making a show of being disgruntled, but the way his eyes crinkled at the corners gave lie to the smile he was trying to hide. He finally gave up and used his fingernail to try and pick the bits out from between two fangs.

Ryan had seen Shane do some pretty undignified things, but something about it just being the two of them in the corner of this little store, with no co-workers around them, made it oddly intimate. As if watching Shane do something as simple as try to get food out of his teeth was… domestic.

*For fuck’s sake. Next I’ll be writing his name over and over again in a diary.*

“Suave. Very classy, long legs. Exactly what I wanted to see tonight. ”

Shane mock-snarled at him in response, snapping his teeth together before grinning teasingly; a happy, open expression. It took Ryan a second to realize what he’d just seen, his heart abruptly
thumping hard. It was one of the most inhuman things Ryan had ever seen Shane do. It hadn’t been threatening in the slightest, just surprising. Obviously lighthearted, like a dog in the middle of play fighting.

Worried that Shane had heard his heart rate increase, Ryan opened his mouth to try and make a joke or, scarily, truthfully admit that he enjoyed seeing his best friend being so carefree, but he stopped as soon as he registered Shane’s expression.

Like an animal that had seen a threat, Shane was frozen, his head turned towards the front door of the store. Only his eyes moved, tracking the progress of a man that had just entered with a couple of women. Ryan looked back and forth between the man and Shane, confused by the reaction. Did Shane know this guy?

“Shane-”

Shane didn’t say anything or move his eyes off the stranger, but he did hold up one finger in a jerking, distracted motion. Normally Ryan would have scowled at the inherent rudeness of being gestured into silence, but Shane looked far too serious for him to feel offended in the moment.

Ryan looked back at the man in time to see the guy glance over at them and then freeze as well for one long moment. One of the women with him tugged on his arm and the guy smiled at her distractedly, revealing two exceptionally sharp canines.

_Holy shit._ Another vampire. Ryan would have never clocked him as a vampire if he hadn’t seen the fangs. The guy was flushed pink, very nearly tan. And not the kind of red sunburn tan that vampires got if they stayed in the sun without sunscreen for too long. This vampire looked incredibly, healthily human.

The second woman snuggled up against the vampire, laughing at something. It was hard to be sure, but Ryan thought he saw dark bruises on either side of both women’s necks. Were they girlfriends or bite junkies?

Or, Ryan realized, feeling like a dick, they could just be friends. He shifted, the rustle of his clothes so quiet that he himself barely heard it. But the gaze of the strange vampire strayed towards him, studying him with piercing judgement that could be seen even from across the store.

Shane growled quietly, a warning noise, making the other vampire snap his eyes back towards him. Ryan had never actually seen two vampires interact in real life before. Was that why Shane was acting like that? Was it like a territory thing? He had no idea how territorial vampires really were, but he had heard rumors.

The strange vampire and the two women were only in the store for a handful of minutes, but it felt like forever as Shane and the other vampire never took their eyes off each other. Just before the three left the store, the stranger paused and whispered something that made Shane snarl silently. This time the snarl had nothing playful in it. The man sneered before leaving.

Shane muttered something that Ryan didn’t understand but had the sound of a swear word. He followed that with a hissed, “Damn pigeon-livered asshole.”

Ryan took a moment to get over ‘pigeon-livered’ then tentatively asked, “Uh, what was that about, dude?”

“Nothing. Just a rich egg that doesn’t know how to keep his mouth shut.”
Knowing there was no polite way to ask what was on his mind, Ryan just went ahead and asked, “Why was he so… Um. Not pale?”

Shane smiled unconvincingly in a poor attempt at looking like he hadn’t been angry enough to growl a couple minutes ago. “Subtle, great execution.”

Ryan waited him out.

Finally Shane sighed, staring at the forgotten drink in his hand. “Just means the guy makes enough money to buy blood on the reg. And he obviously has his-” Shane made a face “-companions to help him out.”

So Shane really wasn’t getting enough blood.

Clearly Shane had gotten to know him too well, because before Ryan could even say a word, Shane pointed at him. “No, Ryan. I don’t need your pity.”

“It’s not pity, it’s wanting to help a friend.”

Shane gave him a sarcastic look and muttered that unknown swear word again.

It was clear that Shane wanted him to drop it. And Ryan didn’t want to push him in public like this. Besides, there was a plan building in the back of his mind. Something that would get Shane to finally accept some help.

So he jumped into the mystery of whatever Shane was saying instead. “What was that word? Was English your first language?” The abrupt topic change was startling even to him, but it was a question that had occurred to Ryan before. He knew a number of people with immigrant parents that grew up speaking their parents’ language and English. It made sense to him that Shane could have been the same.

Shane was taken aback, but he merely shrugged after a moment. “No, actually.” He smiled, a self-deprecating little expression. “Not that I remember much Polish. Speaking only English for over a-” He narrowed his eyes and smoothly switched to “-For a long time means I can pretty much only remember insults.”

“That’s really all you need to know, though.”

“Right? Though I’m sure if I tried to speak it now, no one would understand me.” He tilted his head. “Why do you ask?”

Ryan shrugged. Their number one topic of conversation outside of work matters was film. The two of them could talk for hours about their favorite movies, filming techniques and styles, interesting tidbits and information about the processes that went into making cinema great. And sometimes not so great.

Their second favorite topic, or at least Ryan’s second favorite, had quickly become Shane’s age. Shane seemed to enjoy dropping little history stories and facts as if he had been there to witness said history. It was a fun mystery that neither of them felt uncomfortable with. So Ryan felt pretty safe with saying, “Curiosity, mostly. But, well, you don’t exactly have an accent. Maybe that means you were born in the 50’s or something and only ever knew English.”

Then Shane did something that would remain in Ryan’s memory for the rest of his life. He raised one eyebrow and leaned forward over the table that suddenly felt too small, farther into Ryan’s space than Ryan was entirely comfortable with. With a slight smirk, his vowel sounds shifting from a flat
American tone to something richer and deeper in the throat, Shane murmured thickly, “I could have an accent if you like.”

He said it in a way that Ryan could only categorize as ‘vaguely European’, since he had never been great with figuring out languages. It was ridiculously attractive. Stupidly so.

Between the suddenness of the accent catching him off guard, the smug, sexy little smirk, and the way Shane was looking at him, it was one of the hottest things that had ever happened to Ryan in his entire life.

He knew he was staring and his mouth was hanging open, but he couldn't help it. Where the hell had that come from?

Shane tilted his head and leaned back away from him. “Sorry,” he said, completely normal again.

Ryan was confused before he realized that he could feel his heart beating a mile a minute. He laughed softly, a nervous little sound, and shook his head. “Not fear,” he admitted. “Definitely not fear.”

“Oh.” A pause, then, “Oh,” Shane repeated, the smug expression back. “You liked that, did you?”

“Shut up, Shane.”

The problem with Shane was that when it came to joking around, if he got an inch he would take a mile. Ryan knew that Shane wouldn’t mean anything by it, good or bad, but if there was a chance to make Ryan squirm, Shane wouldn’t have any issues with exploiting his weaknesses.

Normally, Ryan could respect that.

He just didn’t think he wanted Shane flirting with him to be used as nothing more than a way to tease him.

Maybe Shane understood that somehow. Where Ryan had fully expected Shane to lean into the joke, to take it to its extremes like he had the tendency to do, the man merely smiled at him instead, his mouth quirking in a surprisingly fond way. Though it was a little disconcerting when he said, “I’ll remember this for the future.”

Great. Sexy threats from his probably straight crush. That just wasn’t fair.

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The problem, Ryan thought, was getting Shane to accept blood the first time. Then it’d be easier to get him to accept it a second time. He was not starving his co-worker just so he could film.

After looking it up and spending far too long on 'So Someone in Your Life is Now a Vampire’ FAQ forums, Ryan had learned that the Blood Department only had branches in major cities. That meant quite a few of the smaller towns that he had plans on visiting for Unsolved would not have a government regulated source of blood. As far as Ryan was concerned, he needed to get Shane used to the idea of taking blood volunteered by friends.

He tried not to think about it the oh-so-innocent ‘Primary Donor’ phrase that he had seen multiple times.

“So I have an idea for a video,” Ryan said casually while they were both at their desks, having just returned from lunch. He realized his mistake as he soon as the words left his mouth. He didn’t do
ideas *casually*. They were usually either half-joking concepts that he never expected to actually do or he was far too intensely excited about whatever harebrained shenanigan had popped into his head.

Sure enough, Shane turned to face him, slowly raising one eyebrow. “I get the feeling I’m not going to like this.”

Ryan swallowed. “Hear me out.”

“Always a great start to any pitch.”

“It’s about you being a-” Ryan paused, his teeth still on his bottom lip, about to make the ‘v’ sound of ‘vampire. For some reason, it was hard for him to get the word out. Would Shane be upset? This was *Buzzfeed*, making videos and listicles about people’s chosen labels was the bread and butter of the pop culture side of the site. There had to have been people that had asked Shane to share his experiences as a vampire at some point, right?

“A swell guy?”

“... vampire.”

Shane huffed a soft laugh and muttered, “Yeah, figured that’s where this was going.” He smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “Alright, hit me with it. What’s this idea?”

For a second, Ryan thought about dropping it. But he had already gotten this far, he might as well keep digging the hole he had put himself in. “Well, is there a difference in how blood tastes? Like different people taste different?”

“Yeah,” Shane replied easily enough. “It’s not wildly different, but a vegetarian isn’t going to taste like someone that eats nothing but Chipotle.”

“Uncalled for.”

Shane just smirked.

“Wait, would that mean my blood would taste like Chipotle? That’d be amazing!” Ryan grinned, gesturing in excitement. “Can you imagine? Telling the blood donor to go to In N’ Out before donating because you’ve got a craving for some animal style burgers?”

With a smile that looked like he had been surprised into it, Shane lifted one finger and comically said, “More like ‘Waiter! I ordered the vegan. This is clearly a vegetarian!’”

Ryan straight up giggled, though he filed that little tidbit of information away in the mental file marked ‘Vampires’. “Okay, so, what if we did like a blind taste test to see if you could guess whose blood is whose?”

There was a second of hesitation, then Shane tilted his head, his expression going thoughtful. “That actually isn’t a half-bad idea.”

*Oh thank God.*

Ryan relaxed back into his seat. “Yeah! Quick and fun and you get to make whatever wacky descriptions about how everyone tastes that you would want to.” And Shane would have to actually drink it. It would be a waste to only take a taste.

Once everyone, including Shane, got used to the idea of donating blood, it’d be so much easier in the
future to bring it up again. Or so he hoped.

It didn't help Ryan that the image of the healthy, pink, arrogant vampire that had sneered at Shane had grown to be such an annoying memory that it made Ryan want to punch something. Preferably the guy’s smug face. Maybe Shane didn't have a lot of money but he was rich in friends, damn it.

“It might be an HR nightmare.”

Ryan waved that off. “I've got that handled. You should probably be the one to ask people to volunteer, though. You probably have preferences.”

He assumed. Vampires would have preferences in taste, right?

This time Shane’s smile was embarrassingly knowing, as if he had guessed exactly what Ryan was thinking. “So, you’re volunteering?”

Okay, there was no reason for Ryan’s body to suddenly feel so hot. It was just a question, for fuck’s sake. “Uh, yeah,” Ryan said, his voice cracking. He coughed and continued, “I mean, if we can’t get enough people, sure. I- I can, uh. Offer. To help.”

“Mhmm,” Shane said, staring at him. “Sure.”

“What?”

“Oh, just admiring how red you get when you’re embarrassed.”

Ryan threw a paperclip at Shane. He really needed to get out of that habit. He was running out of paperclips.

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It was harder to find people to volunteer their blood than Ryan had originally thought. Not because no one was willing, but because all of the people he usually did videos with were slowly being pulled away to other projects and were extremely busy. In the end, he had to rope a new intern into being their fifth donor.

To his surprise, once he had found four other people willing to get stabbed by a needle for the sake of a video- and for Shane- it all went smoothly. Even getting the video approved had been easy.

Maybe people were starting to realize the potential in including vampires as a target audience.

After filming the opening interviews from all of the participants, getting their blood drawn by the cheerful medic, and setting up the table, Ryan’s stomach was a hard knot of jittery nerves. The only thing keeping him together was the knowledge that he had multiple cameras on him.

When Shane stepped into the room, having been exiled to another building so he wouldn’t overhear any hints, he hesitated for a long moment. It was probably a little intimidating to have over a dozen people, from the faces to be filmed, to the producers and equipment operators, to the handful of curious onlookers off to the side, about to watch him do the very thing that characterized vampires.

Ryan couldn’t help but think that Shane looked a little like a man marching towards his death when the man squared his shoulders and grinned somewhat unconvincingly. “Should I be making a buffet
The table did look a little like a very lame buffet. Five cups labeled one through five, in cheap styrofoam because it had been decided that blood in clear glasses would be considered a bad idea for YouTube’s filters. Ryan couldn’t really fault Shane for the comparison.

Honestly, most of the filming passed in a weird mix of hyper focused detail and formless time skips for Ryan. Shane’s carefully cheerful expression as he sipped from the first cup, the way he seemed to be trying to hide his fangs. The way his nostrils flared before each taste test. The casual confidence as he guessed each person correctly.

Jokes and comparisons as Shane leaned into a ‘pretentious wine connoisseur’ bit, accurately guessing the first cup as belonging to Keith and telling him that his blood had ‘earthy notes’ and telling Kelsey that her blood was like the sunrise over an Italian villa. It was all massively ridiculous and Ryan was sure that it could be edited into something great.

Suddenly there was only one cup left. The one that held Ryan’s blood.

Ryan had deliberately been the only one of the five donors to know whose blood was in which cup so that everyone’s heartbeats wouldn’t give them away. Maybe he should have had someone else do it, though, because as soon as Shane sat down the second to last cup, Ryan’s heart started beating so fast it felt like it was trying to escape from his chest.

Their eyes locked as Shane picked up the last cup. Shane’s expression slowly morphed from a camera-ready smile to a sly smirk, as if he could read Ryan’s racing, incoherent thoughts. Ryan’s mouth felt weirdly dry.

As soon as Shane tilted the cup back and took the first small sip, he froze for the barest instant. Shane was too good of an actor for it to be very noticeable, but since Ryan was watching him like a hawk, he didn’t miss it. Nor did he miss the way Shane’s eyelashes actually, literally fluttered, like he was fighting with himself to not close his eyes.

Ryan exhaled shakily, shifting on his feet and doing his best to ignore the shiver that went up his spine. Had that been a good reaction from Shane? He could feel his heart pounding against the cage of his ribs, a steady, hard beat that counted the seconds as Shane took a second, longer sip. This time he made a show of it for the camera, swishing it around his mouth before swallowing audibly.

“Eh,” he said, as if his free hand wasn’t currently gouging claw-like marks into the hard plastic table. It was a such a nonhuman reaction that Ryan didn’t think anyone knew how to interpret it. They were definitely going to have to zoom in on his face for that part, since Ryan wasn’t going to leave anything in that vampire-haters could point to. Well. Beyond the fact that the entire video was about blood drinking, “Process of elimination says this is Ryan’s. And it tastes a little like cheap, light beer, so-”

“Hey!” Ryan exclaimed, glad to have a part to play, to have something to do to distract himself from his thoughts. “I don’t only drink beer. I bought wine the other day.”

“Doesn’t count if it’s in a box, Ryan,” Shane drawled, almost casually draining the cup. He sat it down on the table with a resounding click, licking his lips fastidiously. They were red. Viewers would probably love that, for good or ill.

It really was fascinating that he hadn’t let a single drop of blood escape throughout the entire process.

Shane spread his hands, the smug expression on his face telling everyone that he already knew he
had been correct. “Did I get it right?”

“Five for five,” Ryan said, doing his best not to let his voice shake. “You didn’t even seem to have any problems.”

“It helped that you guys have pretty distinct diets,” Shane said with a shrug. “What you’ve eaten in the past couple weeks can change the flavor of your blood. Subtly, but if you’ve been at this for awhile, you begin to learn the differences.”

“How old are you?!” someone yelled from the audience. It would have to be cut, but it made everyone laugh, which Ryan could appreciate. He liked that over a dozen people had just watched Shane literally drink blood and no one seemed afraid or upset.

“Zach’s bet is wrong,” Shane said simply, grinning wide.

“Damn it!” Zach shouted, making everyone laugh again.

As if the interruption hadn’t happened, Shane continued. “I actually might have had a hard time figuring out Keith and Ryan if I had tried their blood back to back. You two need to eat more vegetables.”

Keith made a comically shocked face while Ryan made sure to scowl into the camera. “I eat vegetables!”

“Who was your favorite?” Jen asked.

Ryan’s gaze instantly darted to Shane, who was already looking straight at him. Then Shane deliberately shifted his eyes towards Jen. “Sure you want to know? The big bad vampire might come for you.”

Everyone paused. It was rare for Shane to so directly reference the ‘monster’ rhetoric that still shaped so much of the cultural makeup, especially in a video. Keith was the one to laugh. “Yeah, I’m so scared of the guy who left his Clark Gable mustache on for two days because he didn’t want to deal with the spirit gum.”

Shane snorted. “Hey, I’m terrifying. Downright spooky.” He made a little clawing motion in the air with his hands. “Rawr.”

“Quit stalling and tell us! It had better be me, Madej,” Jen practically shouted.

Without much deliberation, Shane said, “Can’t decide between Kelsey and Maycie.” The two girls high-fived. “Probably you, though” Shane continued, pointing at Kelsey, who grinned and clapped her hands together, letting out a little “Yay!”

For anyone that knew Shane well, it was clear he was lying, though. He was so steadily not looking at Ryan that even the cameras could probably pick it up. That was going to take some interesting editing in post. And he would probably have to find a way to apologize for the finger marks on the top of the table.

Jen elbowed Ryan and grinned teasingly at him. Ryan did his best to keep the fluttering nerves in his stomach from showing on his face.

The closing statements and impressions from everybody was filmed in a blur, Ryan barely able to pay attention. He couldn’t get the image of Shane drinking from the cup filled with his blood out of his head. The slight pause, the way Shane’s eyelids had twitched. Truthfully, Shane had looked like
he had just tasted something utterly delicious.

Fuck, why was that a turn on?

“Hey, Ryan,” Shane said from behind him as he was helping clean up the set on auto-pilot. He jumped and whirled, blinking owlishly at Shane. “You got a sec?”

“Uh, yeah,” Ryan said, setting down the cups that he hadn’t even realized were in his hands. There was still a faint ring of blood in the bottom of each.

Shane glanced down at the cups. “In private?”

Ryan felt his eyes go wide, but he straightened up and nodded seriously. “Yeah, sure. Meeting room work?”

Shane gestured for Ryan to go ahead of him, his expression oddly intense.

They didn’t say anything to each other as they walked to the next building over. It was making Ryan nervous. Was Shane mad at him? Had he pushed it too far and now Shane was going to tell him in no uncertain terms to never do a video like that again? It had been a little exploitative, but Shane had seemed fine with it, he could have said something if he didn’t want to do it, he didn’t have to-

Ryan’s worried thoughts were interrupted as soon as the door to the meeting room closed behind them, large hands clamping down on his shoulders and pulling him to a halt.

He turned under those hands to face his best friend, confused, “Shane? What-”

“You-” Shane stopped and growled. “You keep pushing and pushing-”

“What?” Ryan squawked. What the fuck did that mean? “I haven’t pushed for anything-”

“If I bite you now will you stop tempting me?”

Suddenly Ryan’s chest felt tight. He stared up at Shane, mind blank. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t lie to me,” Shane snapped, his eyes a little wild. “I get it, you’re curious, and your curiosity makes you do stupid shit, like going into a place that you think is filled with murderous demons or continually tempting a half-starved vampire.”

Ryan’s brain latched onto what was probably the least immediately important part of that sentence. “I knew it! I knew you weren’t getting enough blood.”

“Ryan.”

The rest of what Shane was saying finally filtered through. Ryan tried to take a step back, but the hands on his shoulders didn’t let him move an inch. He tried not to let that rattle him. “Shane, chill, dude. I don’t- I don’t want you to bite me. We talked about this. I’m not a bite junkie.”

Shane drew his thumb down the column of Ryan’s throat, the feeling soft and cold. It looked like he didn’t even realize he was doing it. “Don’t lie to me.”

“Shane-” Ryan closed his eyes for a second to gather himself, overly aware of his freaking heartbeat. “Yes, I’m curious, I’m only human-” Shane snickered, the sound a little unhinged. “- But you made it clear you don’t want to and I respect that.”
“Which is why you went out of your way to orchestrate an entire video just to get me to taste your blood.”

“I did it so you won’t fucking starve when we go to San Diego!”

Shane finally leaned back slightly. “It’s San Diego, not the other side of the country. We’re only going to be gone for two days.”

Ryan tried not to think about the thumb that was still slowly stroking over his carotid artery. “You’re not going broke stocking up on blood just so you can travel with me. And I’m not going to these locations by myself. So you’re going to accept my help if I have to shove the damn blood down your throat.”

Looking a little lost, Shane haltingly said, “But I know you want me to bite you.”

With a quiet groan, Ryan mentally waved goodbye to his dignity. “Yes, alright? Because I’m curious. Because I like you. As in middle school like like. As in I want to climb you like the fucking telephone pole that you are. I thought that was pretty clear. But I also want to hold your hand and ask you out to prom and all that other sappy shit. It’s not- It’s not because you’re a vampire, it’s because you’re you and you just happen to be a vampire.”

Shane stared at him for a long moment before shifting on his feet, his face actually tingeing slightly pink.

Holy shit, he had made a vampire blush.

“Ah. Well. Alright then.”

Suddenly Shane was well out of Ryan’s reach, tugging at his hair and staring at the floor. There was a small, almost shy smile on his face before he deliberately pulled his expression into something dramatically innocent. “So, how ‘bout them Chargers?”

It was so tempting to take the ridiculous topic change that Ryan almost went with it. But he couldn't just leave the conversation open-ended like that. Not if he didn't want 'what if's eating away at him. And that shy smile gave him the slimmest amount of hope.

“As much as I want to bore you with how the Chargers have been doing,” Ryan said, doing some needless gesturing of his own, “I feel like I should apologize. You know how focused I can get. Sorry if I made things awkward.”

“Pretty sure that’s on me.”

“I know you’re straight—”

Shane’s head jerked up. “You think I’m-?”

Ryan’s entirely world went still. That slim hope blossomed. “Yes?”

“Ryan, I’m more temperamental than a mercury thermometer.”

“Um.”

Shane chuckled faintly, rocking back on his heels. “Right, sorry. Old slang. I’m pretty sure most vampires over a certain age really don’t give a fuck about gender. Blood is blood and arguably more important than attraction. And if you get it tied up with sex—” He snapped his mouth shut as if he had
realized he’d probably said more than he wanted to.

There was a lot to unpack there. Ryan chose to focus on the one question that, of course, had the most potential for embarrassment. “Wait, if you’re not straight, then why haven’t you responded to my flirting at all?” He realized how that sounded as soon as he heard his own words and he hastily added, “Not that you have to be into me, that's not what I mean, I just-”

All he could do was weakly wave his hands around in a motion that meant nothing. It wasn’t that he was arrogant enough to think that Shane should be attracted to him, it was just that they vibed so well together that he would have assumed compatible sexualities and availability would have led to them at least drunkenly making out at some point. The fact that they hadn’t, that Shane had never been more than friendly, meant something.

Ryan took a deep breath and forced himself to say into the awkward silence, “Dude, if you only want to be friends, that’s cool.

Once again, Shane started tugging at his hair, his gaze very firmly to the side of Ryan. “Come on, man, don't make me say it out loud.”

Despite the cliche, all Ryan could ask was, “Say what out loud?”

Shane brought one hand up to rub his face tiredly, exhaling softly in a faint sound of pained amusement. “Should have seen that coming.” He sighed. “Yes. I am interested in you. Obviously. It’s just that- Well. When I was human, good God-fearing people didn't date the way you do now. It was a lot slower, for one thing.”

“If you think you were being obvious, you need to relearn the definition of the word,” Ryan said, stuck on the first part of Shane's statement.

“What I’m trying to say is that for so long my options were either meaningless sex or a lifelong commitment.” Shane’s mouth quirked into a wry smile. “And while a lifelong commitment means something a little different to me now, I don’t want meaningless sex. Not from you.”

Ryan furrowed his eyebrows together, trying to ignore how the words made him feel oddly shaky. “I know I didn’t exactly pay attention in my history classes, but even I know the image of no one having sex before the ‘60’s is bullshit. Dating isn’t a new concept. Hell, even eloping isn’t a new idea. Not that- Not that I’m suggesting-” Ryan shut his mouth before he could make it any worse.

“No, those aren’t new concepts,” Shane said, laughing softly at him before sighing again, with the air of someone that knew their point was completely missed. After a momentary pause, as if he had to force himself to say it, he continued with, “But I also have to get over the fact that not that long ago it was illegal to be with another man.”

“Well, not that long ago, you legally didn’t exist.”

Shane made a quick little amused sound, clearly surprised into it. “Point.” He closed his eyes for a second, shaking his head. “Slow, Ryan. I need slow. Okay?” Here he looked up at the ceiling, his cheeks once again a very faint pink. “If you’re interested in more than just sex or satisfying your curiosity about vampires, let me- Let me court you.”

Ryan’s immediate reaction was to let out a short bark of laughter, an incredulous “Really?!” bursting out of him before he could think better of it. At Shane’s glare, he managed to choke back the rest of his laughing. “Okay,” he said, sounding breathless from trying not to cackle. “Okay, that's fair. Slow is fine. Slow is great.” A warm, bubbly giddiness made him add, “I’ll try not to shock you by
scandalously showing off my ankles before you’re ready for it.”

Shane didn’t bother to hide his reluctant grin. “I’m old-fashioned, baby! You’d better get used to it.”

Ryan laughed again, taking his time in walking back into Shane’s space. Shane raised one eyebrow, watching him with an amused expression. “Remember how I said ‘slow’, Ryan? It was like ten seconds ago.”

“We’ve apparently been dancing around each other for well over a year. That’s slow enough.” Ryan felt like there was pure electricity fizzing through his bloodstream, giving him the courage to ask for what he wanted. And God, he had wanted for a long time. “Kiss me.”

Shane literally swayed forward, but he seemed to realize what he was doing and took a judicious step backwards. “I just drank blood. Doubt you want that taste.”

The not-so-secret fact that Ryan was a huge romantic made him say, “I don’t care,” despite his initial reaction having been to curl his lip in disgust.

With a quiet snort of exasperation, Shane reached out and took Ryan’s hand. And then proceeded to kiss the back of it like they were in the middle of a period drama, his lips cold against Ryan’s skin. Ryan was dumbfounded to realize that his face was warm. The stupid gesture had actually made him blush. He didn’t think a real kiss would have done that.

Still bent over his hand, Shane looked up at Ryan through his lashes and smirked. “It’s going to be fun to see how slow you can take this before you snap.”

Ryan could only stare at Shane, his mouth open, as the man straightened with a wink and then casually waltzed out of the room.

Like the cheesy sap that he was, Ryan touched the back of his own hand and grinned to himself.

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Despite the conversation, nothing much changed between the two of them at first. Frankly, they were both too busy to devote much time to figuring out whatever the thing was that was between the two of them. Ryan especially felt like he was running himself ragged. Producing his own show was a dream come true but it also brought with it a ton of work. And while he had plans of Unsolved becoming successful enough that he would be able to bring in more people to help him, at the moment he only really had Shane, TJ, and whatever person they could bribe into being their cameraman. He would have thought paid trips around the country would have been enticement enough, but apparently there weren’t that many people that wanted to go to the Lizzie Borden house.

Weeks passed without any real indication that Shane had mentioned an interest in him or kissed the back of his hand. There were a couple of times that Ryan thought for sure one of them would have the balls to finally do something, but each day passed with the exact same level of playful bantering they always had. Sure, that could have been considered flirting, but it wasn’t anything new.

Weeks became a full month and the only reason Ryan didn’t become a bundle of second-guessing nerves was because he was too busy to dwell on it. They even filmed an episode in Kentucky. Traveling with Shane when he was obviously pale and grouchy had been an exercise in frustration. Ryan had assumed that Shane would have been able to make a quick trip into Cincinnati for blood if he needed it, but Shane had spent the entire time glued to the crew. It had actually been a little odd.

Whenever Ryan tried to get Shane to take their rental van into the city, Shane had grown more and
more curt, which was unlike him. Ryan even offered to go with him, wondering if he needed the moral support or something. When he had, somewhat nervously, volunteered to find a place to get his blood drawn, Shane had literally walked out of the room.

So much for getting Shane used to the idea of taking freely given blood.

At some point, he’d work up the courage to ask Shane just what the hell that had been about.

Of course, as soon as they had made it back to L.A, Ryan realized that they had spent a night in the same hotel room and Shane hadn’t cracked a single joke about them being alone together. As if he hadn’t wanted Ryan to think about it.

To be fair, Ryan had been too shaken up from filming in a demon-infested country bar to have been in a good mood to respond to flirting, but the fact that Shane hadn’t even tried had to be a sign of something. He spent a day feeling like a complete ass, convinced that he had misinterpreted things or made Shane say something he didn’t mean just to try and save Ryan’s feelings.

Shane must have been better at reading Ryan than he would have thought, because the very next day, Shane came back to work from some mystery outing and plunked a tiny, stuffed Paddington in front of Ryan’s keyboard. “Let’s get dinner tonight.”

Ryan slowly touched the small bear’s nose with the tip of his finger, not entirely sure he wasn’t imagining things. “Sure, man. Something fast? And why Paddington?”

“Oh.” Shane shifted on his feet, reaching over his own chair to poke at his keyboard. “There’s a new fusion place on Santa Monica. Heard people talking about it.”

“That sounds like the kind of place you have to wait hours to get into,” Ryan said, raising one eyebrow. “Why do you want to deal with that when you’re only going to be able to eat a couple of mouthfuls?”

Shane’s eyes darted around, snagging on all the people that were still in the room. He hunkered down and lowered his voice. “Thought it could, uh, be my treat. If we went. Together. Just the two of us.”

*Oh, it’s a date.*

Relief and a flood of excitement made Ryan grin. He was incredibly tempted to loudly say, ‘Yes, I’ll go on a date with you’ just to see what Shane would do. But he got the feeling that ‘slow’ included keeping things private. Not that he was going to make it easy on Shane. “Only if I can bring someone.”

Shane stiffened slightly.

Ryan grinned and picked up the Paddington bear. “We’ll see if they have marmalade!”

The look on Shane’s face was priceless.

Just as they were getting ready to leave at the end of the day, the two of them exchanging nervous, but excited, glances, Jen yelled at them from across the room,”Bunch of us are going to a tiki bar! You boys should come, too. I know how much you love them.”

Ryan turned towards Shane, his mouth open to say that he already had plans, despite the fact that it was a *tiki bar*, but he paused when he saw Shane’s wry smile.
“Sure,” Shane said, effectively answering for the both of them.

“Guess I’ll drive you to the bar,” Ryan said awkwardly, trying to not let his disappointment show.

As they walked through the parking lot, Shane deliberately knocked his elbow into Ryan’s arm and leaned down to whisper, “We’ll go tomorrow, Ryan. We’ve got time.”

Ryan was a little annoyed that couldn’t stop his smile.

Three drinks in and Ryan was no longer regretting that they had gone to the bar instead of out to dinner. A lot of his closest work friends were there, crowded around a single large table and all of them well on their way to becoming completely and utterly shit faced. Ryan didn’t think he had stopped laughing since halfway through drink number two. At one point, Shane had put his arm on the back of the booth, right behind Ryan’s neck. There was no real contact between them, but Ryan was all too aware of how easy it would be for that arm to curl forward and wrap around his shoulders.

Knocking back the rest of his drink, Ryan leaned into Shane, intending to tell him that he needed the guy to move so that he could go to the bar. But his words were stuck in his throat as he registered the sensation of his arm pressed into Shane’s side. Shane wasn’t warm, but he was a solid, very real presence next to him. From so close he smelled almost sinfully good, some kind of aftershave that made Ryan want to bury his nose into the crook of Shane’s neck.

“Hey,” Shane said softly, just barely heard over the loud music and conversations in the bar. “You need out?”

That jerked Ryan out of whatever weird daze he had been in and he straightened, making pushing gestures at Shane to get him to move faster. “Yeah, move it, buster. I’m not crawling over your lap.”

For a moment, Shane arched one eyebrow, his expression openly amused. The suggestive slant to Shane’s mouth made Ryan go warm in the face, though he had every intention of blaming it on the alcohol. Instead of saying whatever embarrassing thing he obviously had in mind, Shane merely slid out of the booth to let Ryan clamber out.

Ryan swayed a little as he stood up, but not so much as to be worrisome. It’d take more than three drinks to get him plastered. “You want me to get you something?” he asked, careful not to actually look at Shane. God knew the guy probably had a very smug look on his stupid face.

“Unlike some people, I don’t drink like I’m a fish, so I’m still good.”

“Lightweight,” Ryan shot over his shoulder, quickly looking away again when he noticed Shane wink at him with absolutely no subtlety.

By the time he made it back to the table, Shane had been squished closer to the center of the round booth. Feeling like a lovesick teenager, Ryan pushed away the odd sense of jealousy that he couldn’t sit next to Shane, and took the small space next to Steven instead.

He had every intention of striking up a fun argument with Steven, but the words, “- trading four guys for Chapman was the right decision,” made Ryan look over at Shane so fast that he felt a muscle in his neck twinge. His eyes went wide when Shane continued with, “We can’t be sure that any other closer could have cinched that last win.”

Jen, who was the one that had taken Ryan’s spot, snorted and said, “Sure, but didn’t he go right back to the Yankees?”
Shane sat his beer down on the table so that he could gesture empathetically, his voice raising enough that everyone at the table could hear it. “Maybe he was used too often in the postseason, but he got his first ring with the Cubs, he should have stayed with the Cubs!”

“Is Shane talking about sports?” Steven exclaimed loudly. If Ryan had known that he was going to interrupt the conversation, Ryan would have fucking tackled the man out of the booth.

“He is,” Ryan said, exaggerating his tone of dazed confusion. “I think I’m kind of turned on.”

It was meant as a joke.

It wasn’t really a joke.

Shane froze, looking for all the world like he had been caught red handed. At Ryan’s words, though, he melted back into an unconcerned shrug. “Look, I lived in Chicago for the majority of my life. The curse has been a tried and true topic of conversation for decades, which means I need to know at least something about baseball.”

“Curse?” Maycie asked, followed closely by Zach going, “How many decades, Shane?!”

Jen rolled her eyes and answered before Shane could. “Some stupid myth about a goat being the reason the Cubs never won a World Series.”

“Until last year,” Ryan said at the same time Maycie laughed and drunkenly shouted, “A goat?!”

“That damn kozioł,” Shane muttered, either not seeing or ignoring the several confused looks. “I didn’t make it back to Chicago until 1956, but by that time the curse was already set in stone. Though I appreciate the cheek of any man that would take a goat to Wrigley Field.”

With a sigh, Maycie drained the last of her drink and said, with some relish. “Well, damn it. Born in the ‘50’s is out.”

Shane stared as everyone started laughing. “What- Oh.” He smiled and shook his head. “You guys got me. Older than ‘56.”

Jen leaned towards him, her grin wide. “1940’s. That’s gotta be your birth year.”

No one expected Shane to actually answer. It was clear to everyone involved in the bet that Shane had far too much fun being mysterious. So it was a surprise when he looked straight at Ryan and said, almost flirtatiously, “I didn’t watch any of it, but I was around for the uproar that was the Cubs and the White Sox against each other in the World Series.”

Ryan furrowed his brow, trying to cudgel his alcohol-slowed brain into working. Baseball wasn’t really a sport that he followed, but he still knew the basics. And a crosstown World Series wasn’t exactly common. “When did that happen?”

With all of the relish of a natural-born storyteller, Shane took his time taking a drink from his beer, letting the tension build amongst his tipsy coworkers that were far too interested in the outcome of a friendly bet. Then he smiled crookedly, revealing two sharp fangs on one side of his mouth. “1905 or ‘06. Can’t really remember which one.”

There was a quiet moment of shock, then Jen slapped the table. “You fucker!” she yelled, laughing. “I was so sure you weren’t that old.”

“Holy shit,” Zach said quietly. “You’re over one hundred years old.”
“Mhmm,” Shane nodded. “At least.”

Andrew, who had been quietly watching the shenanigans with a slight smile, offered, “After 1550 and before 1900, then.”

“Doesn’t really narrow it down, does it?”

Ryan had a hard time wrapping his mind around the concept that Shane was so much older than he looked. Sure, vampires were essentially immortal, since their ageing process was so slow that it was practically nonexistent, but Shane looked like he was thirty.

He hadn’t realized almost everyone had left for more drinks or to brave the bathrooms until he looked up to see that Shane was now sitting right next to him.

“So,” Shane said slowly, quirking a smile when Ryan startled. “Baseball talk really doin’ it for you?”

Ryan quickly looked around, but Andrew was the only other one still at the table and he was looking at his phone. “No, I just never thought I’d hear you willingly talk about sports,” he said, only somewhat convincingly.

Shane smirked and teased, “So you don’t want me to say things like ‘batting average’ and ‘double play’?”

“I’m not really a baseball guy. And I’m sure you’re going to turn it into something about reaching bases.”

“Or pitchers and catchers.”

Ryan broke out into high-pitched, breathless giggles that really did resemble wheezing. “For fuck’s sake-”

“Well, yes, exactly-”

“Shut up!” Ryan gasped out, taking the excuse of his uncontrollable laughter to slump into Shane. Everyone knew he couldn’t always support himself when he laughed hard enough, anyways.

Shane moved, twisting slightly, and finally that long arm was a heavy, comfortable weight across Ryan's shoulders. It made his laughing falter, but there was still a hint of humor in his voice when he said, “I'm pretty versatile. I mean. When it comes to- Uh. You know I haven't played very often, but both, um, positions were fun. Interesting. Pros and cons to both, but the appeal is there.”

The metaphor might have gotten away from him.

“If I can follow your devious, subtle hints, I think I get what you're saying,” Shane said, clearly mocking him. But he also looked rather fond, so Ryan let it pass. “Same here. If you were curious.”

Andrew groaned. “I give up, that was more information than I needed about either of you.”

They both watched as Andrew got up and walked away, taking his drink with him.

“Oh my God,” Ryan breathed, torn between the urge to drown himself in his own drink or just laugh until he died of embarrassment. “I completely forgot he was there.”

Shane took one look at Ryan's face and wordlessly pushed his beer towards him.
Ryan woke up to the uncomfortable knowledge that he wasn’t in his own bed.

He groaned and managed to drag his eyelids open, his contacts so gummy that his vision was just a blur until he rubbed at his eyes with one hand. He was sure that if he looked in a mirror, his eyes would probably be scarily red.

That’s what he got for drunkenly passing out on Shane’s couch. Or at least, he hoped it was Shane’s couch. He hadn’t gotten blackout drunk, so he was pretty sure that his jumbled memories of stumbling into Shane’s apartment to piss and then falling onto the rather inviting couch instead of calling an Uber to his own place were accurate.

Ryan levered himself into an upright position, pushing down the knit blanket that had been draped over him. His mouth tasted like the deaths of several breweries, so he wobbled onto his feet and towards the bathroom, blinking blearily the entire time. He laughed to himself when he realized that he didn’t feel like he had a hangover, which mostly just meant he was still drunk.

At least he wasn’t stumbling any more. Small mercies.

After rinsing his mouth twice with the mouthwash sitting on the side of the sink, Ryan woke up enough to realize that he hadn’t seen or heard a hint of Shane. Curious, he edged down the short hallway and peeked through the open doorway of the bedroom.

Shane was still asleep in his bed, the sheets and thin blanket flung off to the side so that Ryan had a rather good view of the length of one boxer-clad leg.

Ryan had every intention of looking away, but something stopped him. At first, it was the rare opportunity to see far more of Shane than he normally got to, even though it made him feel kind of skeevy. It wasn’t like he could see anything crotch-related, as it were, but the long, pale, thigh before him was something of a beacon.

Then Ryan took note of just how still Shane was. Once he got past the leg, Shane looked, for all intents and purposes, dead. It wasn’t particularly surprising, since vampires’ already sluggish heartbeats and breathing patterns slowed to something unnoticeable in sleep, but Ryan had never really had the chance to see Shane like this. Usually, when they had to share a hotel room, Shane woke up as soon as Ryan did.

What would it be like to wake up next to someone that was essentially a corpse? Would he ever get used to falling asleep with a cold body? Would his own body heat help Shane’s feel warmer? Would Shane feel too warm if that was the case? Did vampires prefer to feel cold?

Why was he thinking about these things when they hadn’t even been on a date yet?

Ryan wasn’t entirely sure how long he stood there, just staring. At some point, he must have zoned out, thinking about nothing in particular, because Shane tilting his head and chuckling softly actually made him jump.

Without opening his eyes, Shane said, “If you were going to kill me in my sleep, you missed your opportunity.”

Too used to Shane’s occasionally weird conversations to be confused by that, Ryan just snorted and said, “If I was going to kill you, I wouldn’t do it in your apartment. I’d do it at work and make it look
“A bizarre accident with a pencil through the heart, maybe.” Shane yawned through a laugh and stretched slowly, his long arms gently hitting the headboard above him. The stretch made his shirt ride up and Ryan finally remembered his manners and glanced away from the glimpse of skin.

Shane sat up and reached for his glasses, his hair looking like something had decided to nest in it.

“How you feeling?” he asked. “You were pretty out of it last night.”

“Not bad, actually. Though I could go for something greasy.”

“Isn’t that your default state?”

Ryan shrugged, since that wasn’t untrue.

With a quiet laugh, Shane got up, yawning again and scratching his head. He looked rumpled, sleepy, and downright soft. Ryan had the abrupt, gut-churning thought that he wouldn’t mind seeing this version of Shane every morning.

Which wasn’t a thought to have when they were supposed to be taking things slow.

Ryan went through the next hour in something of a haze, still tipsy enough that he couldn’t make himself stop thinking about how nice it was to watch Shane clatter around the small kitchen, going through the ritual of making coffee for both of them. Neither of them said anything about Ryan leaving, despite the fact that Ryan had half-expected a gentle but pointed comment about getting an Uber.

Shane wasn’t even acting like Ryan being in his apartment at eight in the morning was a new thing. It was nothing but comfortable silences and quiet, easy conversations.

Finally, when Shane said something about taking a shower, Ryan took it upon himself to be the one to mention leaving.

Shane paused, halfway between the living room and the kitchen. After a second, he said to the floor, “It’s not like you’re taking up a lot of space.”

Ryan glared at the dig at his height, but that was an instinctual reaction. Most of him was trying to interpret what the hell that meant. It hadn’t been a clear agreement that he should leave, but it hadn’t exactly been a heartfelt invitation to stay, either. Did Shane want him to go or not?

Erring on the side of caution, Ryan said, “I really need to get out of these clothes. And there’s no way you have pants that fit me.”

“I have sweatpants,” Shane muttered, before shaking his head and giving a self-mocking little smile. “No, you’re right, I’m sure you have plans.”

*Oh, he wanted me to stay.* Without thinking about what he was doing, Ryan stepped into Shane’s space. “Why can’t you just say what you mean?”

“Pretty sure I did?”

“Try the words ‘I want you to stay’, you overgrown child. You’re like four times my age, learn how to communicate.”

Shane opened his mouth, then closed it. His eyes narrowed in thought. “Math-wise, it’s a bit more
“Shane,” Ryan said, sighing. He couldn’t stop his smile when he noticed Shane’s teasing smirk, though. “You’re an ass.”

“I am,” Shane agreed. “But you’re the one in my apartment, smelling like my mouthwash. What does that say about you?”

“Hey, you want me to have morning breath or you want me to steal your mouthwash?”

Shane huffed a short laugh, leaning imperceptibly closer. Ryan’s heart thudded hard, picking up speed as his body caught up to the fact that they were standing incredibly close to each other. “I should charge you for what you took.”

“What does that come to? A whole ten cents?”

“Mhmm. I’ll send you an invoice.” Shane said it absently, tipping his head until his face was barely a couple of inches away from Ryan’s. “If your heart beats any faster, I’m going to start to worry.”

Ryan’s breath caught in his throat, but he managed to say, with fairly credible steadiness, “Seriously, having that good of hearing has to be annoying.”

“Has its uses. Always know what the neighbors are up to.” Shane’s eyes flickered once to Ryan’s lips, his faint smile growing soft, almost nervous. “Ryan…”

They were so close that Ryan could only focus on one part of Shane’s face at a time. The breathless energy that had grown between them was reaching a crescendo. Ryan was all too aware of the ridiculous fact that his hands were sweaty and his fingers were shaking slightly. Shane still smelled faintly of whatever aftershave or cologne that had smelled so good from the night before. He’d really have to ask what it was.

The pause stretched until it became awkward, both of them waiting for the other to make the first move. Eventually Ryan snorted at the absurdity, setting Shane off. They both started laughing loudly, Ryan leaning into Shane’s shoulder to support himself as they laughed until Ryan had to stop just to breathe.

“We’re bad at this,” Ryan said teasingly, grinning happily, the spate of laughing having completely broken the tension.

Grin just as wide as Ryan’s, Shane rolled his eyes, exasperated. Of course, both chose that moment to lean in, their noses bumping together. Ryan laughed again, almost cackling. “Oh for fuck’s sake, just-” He threaded his fingers into Shane’s hair, holding his head in place.

The first attempt was a mess, both of them smiling too hard to really do more than brush their mouths together. The second quickly became a real kiss, the soft pressure of lips catching and slipping together. Surprisingly, Shane was the one to make a quiet noise, a tiny sound of surprise. Ryan took that as encouragement and opened his mouth, licking once across Shane’s bottom lip. Shane parted his lips and abruptly their tongues were pushing against each other in a wet slide, a rough drag. He was so overwhelmed by the sheer feeling of finally kissing Shane that it took Ryan a moment to realize that Shane’s lips and tongue were cool to the touch, as if he had just drank a glass of cold water.

Ryan didn’t hate it.

Shane’s mouth tasted like bitter coffee and the bite of astringent mint. Under that was the faintest
taste of old pennies, a copper flavor that abruptly reminded Ryan he was kissing a vampire. Curiosity made him push up on his toes, further into Shane. He slipped the tip of his tongue across the back of Shane’s teeth, his breath catching in his nose when he felt sharp points digging into the sensitive flesh.

With a little whimper that sounded forced out of him, Shane tilted his head away. “Careful,” he murmured against Ryan’s lips, voice unsteady. “You won’t find it very sexy to have a cut tongue.”

Ryan snickered, enjoying the feeling of Shane’s mouth moving against his. It was such an intimate sensation, one only reserved for lovers. The catch and prickle of Shane’s stubble was almost too much on his skin, but he didn’t bother pulling back. “I get the feeling you’re speaking from experience.”

“You have-,” Shane kissed him once, the barest glance of soft pressure. “No idea. First couple years, I-” Another kiss, this time with a hint of moisture. “Was always biting my tongue.”

“Bet you had a lisp, too,” Ryan said, softening the teasing with a small kiss of his own.

“That I did. You try suddenly having four fangs. It ain’t easy.”

Ryan laughed, so close to Shane that he could feel his own breath washing back towards him. Feeling incredibly daring, he tugged at Shane’s shirt with his free hand, then slipped his fingers under the material, lightly skimming up Shane’s side. While Shane was distracted, twitching slightly from the no-doubt ticklish feeling at his ribs, Ryan claimed his mouth in a deep kiss that focused just as much on Shane’s teeth as his tongue.

For whatever reason, Ryan felt like he had to prove that he could be with a vampire, that Shane didn’t need to worry about him or try to hide. He was bound and determined to show that he could handle everything about Shane. Including his dick.

In the middle of attempting to trace every single point of Shane’s teeth, Ryan practically giggled at his own thought, making him lose control of his mouth. He drew his tongue back too fast, scraping one side against two fangs.

It didn’t hurt at first. Not really. The faintest taste of blood layered over the flavor of mint, no more than Ryan occasionally got if he flossed too hard. Other than the initial jerk of surprise and the mumbled ‘ow’, Ryan had every intention of continuing the kiss.

But Shane had frozen, his mouth motionless against Ryan’s.

Ryan breathed a faint laugh, whispering, “Shane, it’s fine, it-”

Hands that had been resting lightly on Ryan’s sides were abruptly wrapped around his upper arms in a hard bruising grip that nearly didn’t register because Shane was just as suddenly kissing him with a wildness and intensity that Ryan had never experienced before. It went from hot to worrisome in a matter of seconds. Ryan couldn’t even respond accordingly, afraid that if he tried, he really would cut himself on Shane’s fangs.

He tried to twist his head away, to catch his breath or just to tell Shane to slow down, but Shane made some kind of low, rumbling sound and started to kiss down Ryan’s chin and jaw. The feeling of fangs dragging thin lines of pain down his skin made Ryan go completely still.

Confusingly, he was already half hard.

“Shane,” he tried to whisper, the name getting caught in his throat.
Shane’s mouth was wet against the stretch of his neck, a continuous suction that would have felt amazing if there hadn’t been teeth pressing into his flesh and if fear hadn’t started to filter through the lust.

Ryan went to step away, but as soon as his muscles tensed, Shane literally growled, a sound that made all the little hairs on Ryan’s body stand up. The grip on his arm tightened into something painful. “Shane,” he tried again, his voice high and squeaking. “C’mon, man, I thought you wanted slow?”

The pinprick of sharp points pressing into skin.

“Shane!” Ryan yelped, getting desperate enough to push at Shane’s chest. “Stop!”

In a move so fast that Ryan didn’t really see it, Shane was several steps away from him, his eyes wide in alarm. His glasses were visibly smudged. He didn’t look like a vampire that had been about to bite Ryan. He just looked scared.

“Fuck,” Shane swore, his voice shaking. He sounded stricken. “I-”

“I know I said I was curious about biting, but maybe we should talk about it first,” Ryan said, doing his best to sound like he wasn’t a mess of fear and painful arousal. What the hell had that been about?

“I’m sorry, I- I don’t know what-”

“Dude, it’s fine,” Ryan said, taking a step towards him.

Shane damn near scrambled backwards, a sickly attempt at a smile pasted on his face. “Look at the time, you should probably head on home.”

Ryan’s heart dropped somewhere to the vicinity of his feet. “What?”

At the look on Ryan’s face, Shane’s expression softened. He tugged at his hair, grimacing. “That was- That shouldn’t have happened.”

“The kiss?” Ryan’s voice sounded thick even to his own ears.

This time Shane was the one to step forward, though he stayed far out of reach. He sounded exasperated when he said, “Ryan, no. God, no, that part was really, uh. Nice.”

“Nice.”

“Yeah,” Shane said, scowling slightly. “Nice is a fine adjective. That was a top ten kiss right there. But I shouldn’t have- I have better control than-” He let out an annoyed sigh. “Darn near two hundred years old and I still can’t get this figured out. I need some time, okay?”

No matter the emotional ramifications of whatever was going on, there was no way Ryan could have let that pass. “Two hundred?! What?!”

Shane winced. “Shit. Forget I said that.”

“You-”

Looking like he had to steel himself to do it, Shane stepped close enough to grab Ryan’s fingers in a comically light grip. “Head home, Ryan. I’ll text you.” He kissed the back of Ryan’s hand, that same gesture from months before. “I promise.”
Shane looked far more worried up close than Ryan had suspected. He looked scared. Deeply unnerved. And Ryan wasn’t sure that there was much he could do to help if Shane didn’t want to talk.

Shaken and unsure of what had happened, all Ryan was able to do was believe Shane would keep his promise.

The back of his hand tingled, a lasting impression of Shane's lips.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for such an overwhelming response! <3 Everyone!
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Heed the tags!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Shane did text Ryan.

About work. His research for his new show, questions about episodes for Unsolved that they would be traveling for, Post Mortems, and if he would end up being late on certain days.

It was only ever about work. And, okay, memes. Which occasionally threw Ryan for a loop because he had a vampire sending him memes like a millennial.

But Shane never once hinted at setting up a date in his texts, or even tried to flirt.

Ryan wanted to strangle Shane. He wasn’t entirely sure if it was possible to strangle a vampire, but he would sure give it a try. Maybe after kissing him a little first. He hadn’t yet made up his mind on that one.

Weirdly, their personal interactions while at work or traveling to a location didn’t suffer. Maybe it was because Ryan didn’t want to push Shane too hard. Or maybe it was because Shane was so carefully trying to quietly reassure Ryan that he couldn’t stay mad for long.

Shane’s texts had become bizarrely impersonal, but his actions had steadily gained a furtive kind of romance. If Ryan tried to steer their mutual ribbing and back and forths towards something a little more flirtatious, Shane would stop responding. But he always came back an hour later with some kind of small, but sincere compliment. If Ryan even hinted that he wanted to get Shane alone for ‘something fun’, Shane would stonewall his every plan, while at the same time going out of his way to do something nice for Ryan.

It was as if Shane was trying to form a romantic relationship with him without actually adding in the physical aspects. Ryan could have willingly accepted that if they had actually talked about it. They had already kissed, there was no point in pretending otherwise. So why didn’t Shane want to do at least that much again? Would it be so hard to just explain?

The way Shane was acting left Ryan confused, frustrated, and reluctantly endeared. He wasn’t an idiot, he knew it had something to do with the way Shane had reacted when he had cut his tongue on Shane’s fangs, but he also suspected that Shane was blowing the moment completely out of proportion. It wasn’t like Shane had tried to kill him or anything like that. He had stopped as soon as Ryan had told him to.

They really needed to man up and talk about it like functioning, emotionally secure adults. It was incredibly odd for Ryan to feel like the mature one, considering the other person in the equation was an old as hell vampire.

In the quiet moments at night, though, before falling into sleep, Ryan had to admit to himself that he wasn’t actually trying all that hard to confront Shane. There was a small, secret part of him that liked
this odd, slow courting- for lack of a better term- that Shane was doing. God knew that he would have vastly preferred some physical contact, hint hint, nudge nudge, but there was something disturbingly cute in watching Shane try to casually insert sincere compliments into their conversations.

Ryan was severely tempted to call Shane out on the occasionally lame phases he used, but he was enjoying it more than was probably healthy. It wasn’t every day that someone told him his editing storyboards were well thought out. Or that his eye color was ‘actually rather nice.’ Sure it was a little bit lackluster, and yeah, he had teased the shit out of Shane for it, but fuck, who didn't like hearing they had nice eyes?

And the almost-bite incident had apparently scared Shane into drinking blood more often. He hadn't said anything about it, but Ryan had noticed lately that Shane looked more like a white guy that didn't often go outside than a pallid body that had been dead for three days. On the one hand, Ryan was immensely glad that his friend- co-worker? Lover? Partner in crime?- was looking far healthier than he’d ever seen him. On the other hand, he felt guilty that Shane was likely doing it out of fear. And what if he was making himself go broke buying extra blood? It wasn't like he was asking their friends to volunteer.

Ryan knew because he was essentially stalking their friends and the poor company medic that had helped in the blood drinking video.

There was the small but slim possibility that Shane had started hitting up vampire bars and was getting blood there, but even just the idea of it made Ryan squirm in ill-directed jealousy. And something about that scenario seemed unlikely. Shane just wasn't the type to bite complete strangers.

Hopefully the idiot wasn't resorting to animal blood. It wasn't the worst strategy, but Ryan had heard rumors that vampires that relied too heavily on animal blood for too long could get a little… odd.

And Shane was odd enough as it was.

It was the Lizzie Borden house that was to blame for Ryan’s sex-obsession, though.

The house itself was quaint in the way that New England bed and breakfasts were. Everything felt old, slightly too small, and distinctly floral. It didn’t look like a place where two people were brutally murdered. Instead, it looked like the kind of place one of his college girlfriends would have drug him to because of how ‘cute’ it was.

Ryan might have been a little bitter because of how damn cold it was. It was still fall, so he had thought that he wouldn’t need to bring an actual coat. He had severely underestimated the bite the air had to it.

He wasn’t sure if Shane’s smug smirk whenever he complained about freezing was because the guy was from Illinois or because he was a vampire that didn’t feel cold.

Same damn difference.

Disappointingly, despite a couple of jump scares that Ryan had to admit were the result of his own keyed up nerves, the house was rather lackluster in terms of activity. Lizzie’s room held a heavy atmosphere that pressed down on him, but he couldn’t be sure if that was because there was something there or it was just his own mind playing tricks on him.

Both him and Shane were on the bed, idly bantering back and forth, knowing that the more jokes they got on camera, the easier it would be to edit something together. Ryan truthfully wasn’t tempted
to make an insinuation about them sharing a bed. He was too aware of the cameras and that weird
presence of the room to want to try anything.

Ryan idly picked at the label of his beer, the silence that had fallen between them stretching for a
long moment. He glanced up at Shane, about to suggest that one of them try to get sleep, when he
noticed the oddly melancholy expression on Shane’s face. He looked at what Shane was staring at,
but it was just the antique wash stand, with its large porcelain jug and towel.

“Hey man,” he said softly, already knowing this wouldn’t make it into the cut. “You okay?”

Shane blinked and turned to look at him, quirking one eyebrow in silent question.

Ryan waved a hand vaguely. “You seem a little out of it.”

He could see the way Shane started to make a joke, but then he paused, staring at Ryan with an
unreadable look in his eyes. Eventually he said, “Think I’m just nostalgic.”

It took Ryan a second, then his eyes went wide as he looked all around the room, taking it all in with
new eyes. He felt like such an idiot. While he still didn’t know exactly how old Shane was, the
Borden murders had happened in 1892. If Shane was nearly two hundred, he had definitely been
around then. That thought hadn’t even occurred to Ryan until just that moment.

Were the furnishings and decorations around them accurate? Some of it was original to the time of
the murder, supposedly. Did Shane feel like he was back in time somehow?

“Did-” For some reason his voice croaked and he had to clear his throat, excitement mixing with a
strange kind of nervousness. Sometimes he was so curious about Shane’s life that he could barely
stand it, but fuck, he really didn’t want to sound like he was only interested in Shane because he was
an ageless vampire or whatever bite junkies were into. “Did you grow up somewhere like this?”

Both of Shane’s eyebrows rose and he actually laughed. “God, no. A three story house for only one
family and a couple of servants? These guys were fucking rolling in the dough. When I was a kid,
we shared a building with two other families and considered ourselves lucky.”

“But that would have been a few decades before this, right?” Ryan asked, trying not to sound like he
was fishing for information about when Shane was born. He really was genuinely curious.

Shane shrugged, leaning farther back into the pillow behind him. “Subtle, Ryan. But yeah. A few
decades. Things didn’t change as fast back then as they do now, though. This isn’t that far off.” His
expression went distant, a faint smile on his face. “Sometimes I would make deliveries for my father
to some of the rich families. I got to see how our betters lived.”

There was silence as Ryan tried not to blurt out every single question that was crowding behind his
teeth. Shane threw him a fond, exasperated look, as if he knew exactly how hard Ryan was holding
himself back.

“I really wanted to buy one of those fancy wash basins for my mama,” Shane said, laughing softly
and gesturing at the basin in the corner. “We had a tin pan that had to be shared between us. I mean,
it got better. Once my brother married and got a new job, we were able to move into a new place.
But I never was able to afford that porcelain.” His gaze strayed to the some of the other knickknacks
and antiques around him. “A lot of this stuff, really. We did well before I died.” He paused. “Uh,
before I was turned. But never as rich as this. Never enough to have a servant or multiple sets of
clothes or actual headboards like this. We weren’t exactly living the glorious high life of manifest
destiny.”
“Apparently even the rich didn’t think to accommodate for giants, though.” Ryan thought about his words, eyeing the way Shane could barely fit on the bed even when he was sitting up, and suddenly sat up himself. “Wait, weren’t people all smaller back then? Shouldn’t you be, like, tiny?”

“Yes and no,” Shane said unhelpfully, with all of the confidence of someone that knows far too many trivia facts. “The genes for height aren’t exactly new, but it’s more of a question of diet. Genes mean nothing if you’re spending all of your childhood starving. And life before globalization wasn’t full of plenty. But uh, while we might not have been rich, my parents made sure we had enough to eat.” He gestured at his legs wryly. “Obviously.” And then, not looking at Ryan, he said, “My brother was actually a little taller than me, believe it or not.”

Ryan gently sat his bottle on the floor, all of his attention on Shane. He wanted desperately to ask more questions about Shane’s life, to hear all of the stories that the man had to know but never told. To have a window to all of that history? To learn about all the little details that history books left out? It would be fascinating. Shane had to know so many interesting things.

Not to mention that Ryan wanted to know more about Shane’s family and how he had grown up. This wasn’t the first time he had heard about a brother, but that was essentially all he knew. For one moment, he thought about pursuing that line of questioning, of getting Shane to open up about what his life had been like when he was human. But Ryan couldn’t turn off his awareness that they were here for the show, that there was a camera on them. Reluctantly, he forced his question to be something relevant. “You said you didn’t know about the Lizzie Borden thing?”

Shane seemed slightly taken aback by the question, then his eyes flickered towards the camera and he smiled a little ruefully. Abruptly Ryan wished he could take the question back. “I’m sure it was in the newspapers. But I uh,” he slanted a glance at Ryan. “Was going through some things at the time. Wasn’t really paying attention to what was going on.”

Ryan stared. Was Shane talking about- Did that mean-

Before Ryan could find a way to articulate a gentle enough question to confirm his suspicions that Shane was alluding to the time he had been turned into a vampire, Shane said, “I don’t actually remember all that much, you know? Bits and pieces. Sometimes I’ll get this really clear memory of a moment from 1866 or something and I’m blown away all over again at how much has changed. Fuckin’ sliced bread, man.”

“What?” Ryan snorted a laugh, the quiet atmosphere breaking between them.

Shane pointed at Ryan, a mock serious expression on his face. “Don’t question the marvel that is cheap, packaged, pre-sliced bread, Ryan. There’s a reason why the saying is about sliced bread and not something else.”

“Well now I know what to get you for Christmas.”

Shane chuckled and slid off the bed. “I’m brushing my teeth and going to sleep. Ol’ Lizzie can do what she wants, but I need my z’s.”

He rounded the bed and stooped down to pick up his bag from the pile that had been thrown on the floor, out of sight of the camera. It wasn’t anything more than a movement of convenience when he put his hand on Ryan’s leg, just below the knee, to steady himself as he bent over.

It was- okay, guys didn’t really do that, Ryan was perfectly aware. But there such an air of unstudied casualness to Shane that he really didn’t think Shane had meant anything by it.
But Ryan couldn’t help how his breath caught and how his heart pounded once in a great thump. He swallowed, unable to look away when Shane paused, then slowly lifted his eyes up, looking at Ryan through his lashes.

Ryan didn’t mean to make the jump to *blowjob* but Shane was literally bent over next to him while he lay in a bed. He couldn’t have stopped the mental image of Shane leaning over even farther if he had wanted to.

And goddamnit, he’d been jerking off to the idea of sex with Shane for the past month, it wasn’t exactly that big of a mental leap.

Shane had been so skittish about flirting lately that Ryan completely expected him to back away, maybe make a joke, then hightail it out of there. He was already looking forward to whatever dorky compliment Shane would come up with later to make up for it.

Maybe it was because of the conversation or, more likely, the knowledge that there was a camera on them and Ryan couldn’t do anything about it, but Shane didn’t back away or even let go of Ryan.

Slowly, taking his sweet time about it, Shane continued picking up his bag. His fingers squeezed once around Ryan’s leg, then he placed his bag across Ryan’s thighs, making a big show of deciding to rifle through it to look for his toothbrush instead of just taking the entire thing with him.

Ryan knew that for the sake of the show, and the poor editor that would have to make the first sweep through the footage, he should have said something indignant, maybe tipped Shane’s bag back onto the floor.

All he could really do was stare as Shane shifted things around, the weight moving across Ryan’s thighs in a horribly distracting way.

He opened his mouth to say something, anything, but all that happened was a dry click in his throat as he tried to swallow again.

With his face angled away from the camera, Shane did nothing to hide his smirk. It was infuriating. And far, far too sexy coming from a guy that looked like his features had been put together by someone that didn’t entirely understand human faces.

Shane didn’t do anything as obvious as lean forward to whisper into Ryan’s ear, but he did mutter, so low that the camera would only pick up faint murmuring, “The first time I blew a man was in 1880. Give or take a year or three.”

Ryan made some kind of confused noise that could only be described as ‘bwuh?’

With a small, satisfied grin, Shane said, still in that intimate, low volume, “So maybe I’m not that good at relationships. But I’ve had plenty of practice when it comes to sex.” He held up his toothbrush and dropped his bag back onto the floor, then winked, the wrinkles around that eye oddly attractive. “Just some food for thought.”

*I’m not going to get hard on camera, I’m not going to get hard on camera—*

Of course, then Shane had to ruin the moment by turning to Ryan before he left the room, making a tongue-in-cheek *blowjob* hand gesture. He then wiggled his eyebrows and nodded, as if Ryan hadn’t gotten the implication the first time.

Ryan was pretty sure he was going to die from laughing.
Two days later, Ryan yanked his headphones off his head, turned to Shane, and exclaimed, “But you have fangs?!”

There was a general stillness of movement as everyone in the area turned to stare at Ryan.

Refusing to look at Shane, Ryan ducked his head, jammed his headphones back on, and tried desperately to pretend that he hadn’t just done what he had.

A few seconds later, Ryan’s phone lit up. He was sorely tempted to not look at the text, but even sideways, he could see the name of the sender was Shane. He couldn’t say he was too busy to look at his phone when Shane was literally sitting next to him.

Reluctantly, he grabbed his phone to open the message.

It was just a string of question marks. Which was fair.

Ryan tried to think of some way that he could convey ‘blowjob’ without being obvious about it, but he kept coming up blank. He didn’t want to text anything where someone might happen to look over his shoulder and read it, he definitely didn’t want to say anything out loud, but he also wasn’t going to sit there and make significant gestures at Shane in full view of everyone on the floor.

Long fingers tapped the table next to his keyboard, a polite attempt at getting his attention. With an internal sigh, Ryan took his headphones completely off.

“So,” Shane said casually. “You want to get lunch?”

“But it’s barely eleven-”

Shane raised one eyebrow.

“Oh. Uh, yeah, sure, lunch sounds good.”

Ryan tried to ignore the eyes on him as everyone watched them walk out, but he didn’t straighten up from his hunched position until they were sitting at an outside table in a small courtyard that was still technically on BuzzFeed grounds.

Shane waited a moment, but when Ryan didn’t say anything, he sighed. It was an amused sound, at least. “Okay, Ryan. I say this with all the care in the world, but what the fuck?”

Well, he had already embarrassed himself today.

“So I was thinking about what you said when we were at the Borden house, and uh-”

Shane started laughing. Great breathy laughs that sounded almost painful. He brought his hand up to cover his mouth, his smile so big that it was crinkling his eyes to the point that they were practically closed.

“Oh my God,” Ryan breathed, trying not to laugh himself. “Shut up!”

“You-” Shane managed to get out before falling back into strangled wheezing. “You just now-” More laughter.

Ryan punched him lightly on the arm. “Shut up! It’s a legitimate worry, okay! I don’t want sharp things anywhere near my dick!”
Shane’s eyes were damn near sparkling from humor when he said, “For a species that lives off blood, it is kind of tempting. All engorged-”

“Gah! No!”

“Practically bursting at the seams-”

Ryan slapped his hand over Shane’s mouth, manfully ignoring when Shane licked his palm. “Stop! Oh my God, stop,” he yelled, smiling and laughing despite how warm his face was. He lowered his voice to complain, “I’m never going to get a boner again, you asshole.”

Shane gently grabbed Ryan’s wrist, lowering Ryan’s hand away from his mouth. “Well that sure would be a shame.” His grin looked far too unrepentant and amused.

He was gorgeous.

Ryan’s breath caught in his throat, a warm feeling making his chest feel tight.

Ah, hell.

Shane’s expression softened, though it didn’t lose that teasing edge. “Just how much have you been thinking about what I said, anyways?”

Thinking about sex was preferable to the epiphany that Ryan had just had, so he groaned theatrically and said, “All the time, dude. You’re killin’ me.”

“Somehow I think you’ll survive.”

Ryan took in the way Shane was looking at him, the pressure of their thighs against each other, and how Shane was now holding his hand instead of his wrist. Feeling like his heart was in his throat, he stretched up and went in for a kiss.

Shane turned his head away at the last second, making Ryan’s lips land on his jaw.

“What-”

“Ryan…”

“Shane,” Ryan interrupted him, voice ruthlessly even to keep himself from sounding upset. “There’s slow and then there’s standstill. We hit standstill awhile ago.”

“I don’t think that’s true-”

“A month, Shane. It’s been a month since we kissed.” Ryan was aware that they were outside, where anyone could walk by and overhear, but he was hoping Shane’s hearing would warn them before someone got too close. “I dont- We don’t have to-” Ryan made an inarticulate noise of frustration. “If you don’t want to, y’know, do anything, that’s fine, but at least let me kiss you.”

God, he sounded pathetic. Whiny and needy. But he was willing to put his heart out there if it would get Shane to just talk about it.

Shane looked away, his mouth a thin line.

“C’mon, man,” Ryan said. “I don’t care that you nearly bit me-”

Suddenly Ryan was alone on the low bench.
Every once in awhile Shane would do something like that, use vampiric tricks without warning. It always made Ryan stare. But this time he tried not to let the fact that Shane was now standing on the other side of the table distract him. “You can’t run away from me, Shane, we work at the same company. We sit next to each other.”

Shane sighed through his nose.

“I want you to bite me anyways,” Ryan admitted, the words feeling like they dragged through his throat. “I wasn’t even really trying to stop you that time, I was just surprised. If you had given me a second—”

“I don’t want to kill you.”

Ryan’s eyebrows slowly furrowed together as he frowned. That wasn’t exactly something he had been expecting. “Um. That’s always good to hear. You won’t?”

“I feel like I don’t have any control around you.”

Shane was half in the shadow of the trees in the tiny courtyard they were in, a pale, skinny, hunched figure. The abject misery on his face was painful to look at it.

Ryan narrowed his eyes. Stood up from the bench and walked over to the absolutely ridiculous vampire he was unfortunately interested in.

“I cannot believe you just said that to me,” he hissed, glaring up at Shane.

Shane grimaced.

“How dare you?!”

The grimace turned into a frown of confusion.

“You just turned us into a Lifetime movie! A really bad one with a vampire plotline!”

“What? No, I—” Shane’s eyes went wide. “Oh no. Oh no. What have I done?”

Ryan grabbed him by the arms. “Take it back, take it back!”

Shane stared unseeing above Ryan’s head. “We’re both guys. We wouldn’t even be the main plot. We’d be the side plot. You’d be the main character’s brother or gay best friend. I’d be the main vampire’s lackey.”

Thumping his head into Shane’s chest, Ryan just groaned.

“Maybe- Maybe we could make it an independent film and it could be shown at Sundance? That would be kind of neat.”

“I hate you so much right now.”

“I’ve always wanted to be in a montage,” Shane said musingly.

Ryan leaned back to glare. “I am not going to be the side character in some woman’s sad, angsty, ‘I’m in love with an immortal bloodsucker’ montage.”

Alright, time to change the subject.

“Try explaining to me again why you don’t want to, I don't know, make out or bite me or whatever.” Ryan held up his hand to add, “Without sounding like a character from a CW show.”

Shane sighed and ran his fingers through his hair, making the strands stick up. “It’s complicated.”

“And without sounding like a Facebook relationship status.”

“It- Let me talk, you.”

Ryan snickered but waved his hand.

“I wasn’t lying when I said I’ve got a lot of experience,” Shane said, his gaze fixed on the ground. “But it’s not what you’re thinking.”

“I don’t know what that means.”

Shane twisted his mouth to the side in thought. “Before ‘79, before hospitals and blood banks, there were two ways to get blood from humans. Attacking them. Or tricking it out of them.” He rubbed his hands over his arms in a useless little gesture before finally crossing them over his chest. “Obviously attacking is the easiest. But, even if that was something I had wanted to do, it attracts attention. Sure, I can take on anyone one on one, but an entire town?”

After a slight pause, Shane smiled without much humor. “Even vampires need to sleep. So it’s better to, well, seduce blood out of humans. You remember and fear the crazy man that tried to attack you. You dismiss the man that you met at a bar and left a huge hickey on your thigh. I swear that’s why there’s such a stigma around vampires and sex. It’s not because we’re actually sexy, we just all had to get really good at it in order to make humans forget that we’re stealing your blood.”

That was, truthfully, an incredibly interesting thing to think about. But it didn’t explain why Shane was acting like touching him would be the end of the world. “Okay, so all horny teenagers are vampires. But what does that have to do with why you,” he brought his hands up to do finger quotes, “‘Don’t have any control around me’.” Annoyingly, he had to actually stop himself from saying ‘end quote’.

“Ryan, sex for me for the past century has been about getting the person off as fast as possible so that they’re out of it when I feed off them” Shane said bluntly, faint color rising in his face. “It’s a fucking Pavlovian response at this point. I don’t know if I can’t not bite you.”

“If this is supposed to be some kind of warning, it really isn’t working.” The exact opposite, frankly.

Shane groaned, scrubbing his hand over his face. His voice was muffled when he said, “You’re more than just blood to me.”

Ryan opened his mouth, then kind of just… stopped. He wasn’t sure if he was supposed to be flattered, but somehow that felt like one of the most sincere compliments he had ever gotten in his life. He managed to clear his throat and said, somewhat hesitantly, “Thank you. But uh, I don’t understand the melodramatic ‘killing me’ thing?”

Looking at him from over his own fingers, Shane inhaled a long breath through his nose, then dropped his hand and said with every evidence of frustration, “Your blood tastes *really* good to me. And I don’t know why. It’s not that much different than anyone else’s. I think it’s a feelings thing, which is some kind of.” He scrunched his nose in disgust. “It’s bullshit is what it is.”
It was hard not to feel a little bit pleased at that.

Shane took one look at Ryan’s expression and rolled his eyes. He muttered something that wasn’t English, but Ryan chose to ignore it.

“Mostly all I’m hearing is that you’re being emo.”

Instead of looking affronted, Shane hooked a thumb back towards himself and exclaimed, “Vampire! It’s part of the package.”

Ryan snorted and stepped into Shane’s space, laying his hands on the man’s shoulders. “I trust you, you walking cliche.”

Shane looked down at him, his eyes trailing back and forth as he searched for something in Ryan’s expression. Finally he quirked a little smile. “You’re weirdly brave for a guy that’s scared of wind.”

Rather than respond to that dig, Ryan grinned at him. “Nah, it’s all morbid curiosity now. You’ll break yet.”

Shane shook his head, exasperated.

“So when you say getting someone off as fast as possible, just how fast is fast?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

“Yes! Yes, I would!”

Considering that only a handful of minutes ago, Shane had looked like he was about to go live alone with his angst in an abandoned castle, Ryan hadn’t expected anything to happen. So it came as a complete surprise when cold fingers slipped under his shirt and Shane leaned into him, lips brushing the top of his ear. He yelped quietly at the sudden chilly touch. “What are you-?”

“Really, Ryan? Right now? Would you sit on the bench and make me get on my knees right here, where anyone walking by could see?” Shane’s voice was low and careful, the clear amusement somehow making his words worse. Or better. “Would you get your pants down past your knees? Or would you be too impatient and barely manage to unzip?” A quiet breath that stirred his hair and sent a rush of energy down his spine. “The trick to good, slow oral when you have fangs is to use your tongue and lips more than the rest of your mouth. But fast?”

The fingers that were under Ryan’s shirt skimmed down his sides, drawing firm patterns across his stomach and dipping under the waistband of his boxers. Ryan made a noise that could generously be called a whimper. “Shane, what-”

“If you want fast, and you’re careful, I’d tip my head back, open my mouth as far as I could, and just let you fuck my throat. I don’t need to breathe, you know. And no gag reflex. Not anymore.” Fingernails scratched through the curls of hair above Ryan’s dick, his pants too tight for Shane to do much more than that from such an awkward angle. “I’d let you use my mouth however you wanted,” Shane whispered slowly. “And then-” He bent down and kissed Ryan, his tongue swiping across Ryan’s bottom lip. “And then it’s time for us to go back to our computers.”

The words made absolutely no sense until those cold fingers were completely gone from Ryan’s body. Ryan’s eyelids flew open. He hadn’t even realized he had closed them. “But- Wait, no!”

Shane grinned at him, his fangs completely on display. It shouldn’t have been a sexy image when he had literally just spoke about having his mouth on Ryan’s cock, but fuck if it wasn’t hot.
Ryan tried to chase after Shane, determined to at least return the kiss, but the damn vampire was too fast for him, already on the other side of the small courtyard and around the corner of the building by the time Ryan registered that Shane was leaving.

“You dick,” he muttered, knowing Shane would hear it. “I can’t go back in there with a hard on in these pants.”

He could hear Shane’s faint laugh in the distance.

Ryan smiled, even as he said ‘dick’ again to the empty air.

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Like the horrid cock tease that he was, Shane acted like he hadn't nearly grabbed Ryan's dick in the middle of a public courtyard. He just smiled innocently whenever Ryan tried to insinuate something.

Ryan was both looking forward to their trip to Salem and dreading it. Learning about all the ghouls and history of the area was going to be fascinating.

Staying in the same room as Shane was going to be a horrible test of his control.

Traveling to Massachusetts in the middle of winter may not have been Ryan's best decision in the world. The trip had already hit a snag and they were only one flight in.

They were stuck in O'Hare, a two hour layover that had become five due to local weather delays. Logan was cold but clear, at least, and he was glad for that. He wasn’t looking forward to trying to drive in snow.

Shane was a weird mix of excited, melancholy, and pensive. He would keep pointing out Chicago inspired tourists gifts; the kind of cheaply made, overpriced gag gifts that looked the same in each airport, the only difference being whatever name was stamped on them. But when Shane wasn’t trying to convince Ryan or one of their crew that they really needed a hat with a giant ‘C’ on it, he was staring at his phone with his brows furrowed, pacing back and forth across the tiny space they had claimed at an empty gate.

“Hey,” Ryan said quietly, just loud enough to get Shane’s attention. “Sorry the layover isn’t long enough for you to go wander around the city.”

Shane glanced up from his phone, then out the large windows that showed only tarmac and planes. “Eh, I was here for Christmas. Had dinner with the fam’.”

“Wait, you have living family?”

There was a small pause, Shane's mouth turning down at the corner, as if he hadn't realized what he had revealed. Then he shrugged. “Technically, yeah. Great-great-whatever nieces and nephews.”

Ryan’s gaze went distant as he tried to think about how weird it would be to have a family ancestor still around. “That’s like the best trump card on the playground. My uncle can beat up your uncle because he’s a vampire.”

Shane shook his head, smiling a little. “I mean, the youngest is like thirty-five, but I guess if he really wanted me to beat up the other kids, I could show up.”

“Did—” Ryan swallowed, aware that this might be a delicate question but painfully curious. “Did your family always know you were around?”
“Nah, I approached them in the 90’s. I wanted to offer them some info on their roots if they were interested,” Shane said easily, though he didn’t quite manage to look at Ryan when he said it. “I uh, had a funeral when I turned and then just watched my brother’s family grow up. Kept track of each new generation.”

“That’s a little stalker-ish.”

“Vampire.”

“That’s not an excuse to be a creep, dude.”

Shane shrugged. “It sure was before the 80’s. Back when vampires were in hiding, I didn’t think it would be a good idea to show up out of nowhere like a horror movie monster.” He threw on a bad Bela Lugosi accent and exclaimed, “I am your dead great-uncle! Blegh!”

Ryan snorted. “Now tell me you don’t drink… wine.”

“I always hated that line,” Shane said, idly pulling out his phone and refreshing the weather app. “I get that there were a lot of myths about vampires, but why wouldn’t we drink wine?” He frowned at what he saw on his screen.

Snapping his fingers, Ryan said, “Oh! I keep forgetting to bring a cross with me.”

“Doesn’t work if it’s not pure silver,” Shane muttered absently, still frowning. “And if you try to burn me with silver I’m telling HR.”

“I actually meant for the demons, but I’ll keep that in mind.”

Shane rolled his eyes and stood up, slinging his backpack over his shoulder. “I’ll be right back, I need to pick something up.”

“Oh?” Ryan asked, standing up as well. “What do you need? I’ll come with you.”

It was clear from the way that Shane hesitated that he thought about giving Ryan some kind of dismissive answer, but then he seemed to search Ryan’s face. He sighed. “There’s a storm front approaching Massachusetts. If we get snowed in at Salem, I need to be prepared.”

Ryan furrowed his eyebrows. “I doubt it’ll be that bad. What do you need, anyways?”

Shane started to walk away, muttering something under his breath. Ryan hurried to catch up with the man’s long legs. “What? Stop acting like I should already know everything, ya dickwad.”

“I’m a vampire, Ryan, what do you think I’ll need?”

Oh, right. Ryan did feel a little stupid. “But didn’t you bring blood?”

Shane shook his head, easily weaving between travelers. He said over his shoulder, “Can’t get it through security. Have to buy the overpriced airport stuff. I drank a bunch before heading to LAX, but if we get stuck in Salem for an extra day and I’m in the same room as-” He trailed off.

Since Ryan was the one who had okayed the rooms, he didn’t need Shane to finish the sentence. He followed in Shane’s wake, lost in his thoughts. Was Shane worried about his control if he got hungry and was in close quarters with Ryan? Did he really think that Ryan wouldn’t volunteer his blood if Shane needed it? Because he didn’t think he’d have to worry about Shane accidentally killing him or whatever, despite Shane’s dramatic fears.
Ryan had to admit there was something oddly cozy about the idea of being holed up in a snowed-in hotel in New England with Shane. And, weirdly, Shane snacking off Ryan’s veins fit into that picture a bit too well.

Fuck, maybe he was getting a little too into the vampire thing.

Shane led them towards a small store tucked into the corner of a concourse that looked like it served mostly local flights. There weren’t as many people in the area as compared to the rest of the airport. It was almost eerie. The store itself was typical of airport stores, though, down to the useless knick knacks, candy bars, and the bored employee who was staring dully at her phone.

Except that one entire wall was taken up by- Well, Ryan could only really call it vampire paraphernalia. Sunscreen, aloe gel, sunglasses, fake tanning lotion, pamphlets about vampire friendly bars in Chicago, and even a couple of novelty T-shirts with pithy vampire puns. And in the corner was a small glass door fridge, filled with blood bags. It was like a soda fridge, but very red.

Ryan tried not to stare as Shane reached into the fridge, grabbed two bags, then plopped them on the counter. The woman working there didn’t even blink, though she did send a glance at Ryan when he gasped quietly in surprise at the price.

“Shane- Stop, don’t-” Ryan whispered, not wanting to make a scene but also not wanting to see Shane spend that much money when he was literally filled with blood. “That’s way too fucking expensive, you don’t have to do this.”

Shane ignored him completely, handing over his card without any hesitation.

Ryan shifted uncomfortably, trying to come up with ways he could pay Shane back. He knew the price would be marked up because they were in an airport, but if that was indicative of how much blood was, no wonder Shane was half-starved all the time.

They were walking towards the exit when two people came through the door. Ryan thought nothing of it, stepping to the side so that he could move around the couple. A hand on his shoulder stopped him in his tracks.

“What-” He looked up to see that Shane was completely still, his eyes focused on the man, who was staring back with sharp focus. They were both poised, a breathless pause between the two of them. Two predators sizing each other up.

Ryan didn’t have to see fangs this time to guess that the man was a vampire.

The stranger, a dark haired man with an oddly ashy skin tone, took one gliding step to the side. Then his eyes darted towards his companion and his expression turned alarmed. “Melissa, wait-”

Melissa, a curly haired woman who looked maybe twenty, was apparently paying more attention to her phone than her friend. She bumped into Shane, glanced up at him, and said, “Oh, sorry.”

“Oh no, you’re fine,” Shane said with a kind of automatic politeness, obviously taken aback.

The woman did a double take. And then she literally squeaked. “Oh my God,” she breathed, staring wide-eyed at Shane. “You’re-”

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“Melissa, please come back here,” the man said, looking pained.

Melissa grinned, revealing four tiny fangs. They were almost cute. “You’re Shane! You’re the guy from that show!” She started flipping through apps on her phone with a harried kind of excitement.
Ryan did nothing to hide his growing smile. They weren’t recognized often, but it had happened enough times by now for him to know that she was going to ask for a picture.

The woman’s companion edged closer, looking like he wanted nothing more than to snag her arm and drag her out of there. He kept eyeing Shane like he thought Shane was about to attack. “Mel, you’re being very rude.”

“Ben! You know who this is, I made you watch those videos.”

Ben closed his eyes briefly, as if gathering mental strength. “I am so sorry for her, she’s ...She’s very young.”

Shane very slowly relaxed from his stiff posture. He offered a nod to the other man. “I understand. It’s an airport, anyways. No harm, no foul.”

“Oh! Hi, Ryan!” Melissa suddenly said, waving at Ryan. It was clear she only had eyes for Shane, though. “Can I have a picture, please? I’m such a big fan!”

They both posed with her, though Ryan was surprised to see that Shane kept his hand a respectable distance away from her shoulder. Which was odd, as Shane had never been the type to hover hand their fans. But then again, judging by the antsy way Ben was acting, maybe it was for the best.

Melissa grinned at the photo on her phone, then said, somewhat shyly, “I’m really glad there’s a vampire on YouTube. I know you old ones think I’m super new and dumb about all this, but it really means a lot to me. It’s totally rad.”

Shane looked like he had been smacked with a pole. He blinked, then shook himself, his expression falling into a real smile. “Hey, thanks for watching.”

They were finally able to walk out of the store, though not before Melissa suddenly turned and said, “But that doesn’t mean I’m not a Boogara for life!”

Ryan chortled and offered up a hand for a high five. “Take that, Madej!”

Melissa’s palm was cold against his, but nothing he wasn’t used to from Shane. Both Shane and Ben flinched at the noise and suddenly Ryan was being hustled away.

Once they were far enough away that even vampiric hearing wouldn’t be able to pick up his voice, Ryan turned to Shane and asked, “Alright, what the hell was that about?”

“That was a fan, Ryan. I know you don’t have many of them, but-”

Ryan smacked the back of his hand against Shane’s arm. “Shut up, Shane. Seriously, why did you and that guy look like you were about to throw down?”

Shane grimaced and lowered his voice, edging them towards the side, away from the main flow of travelers. “It’s- Well. Christ, this sounds so medieval, but it’s a territory thing.”

“Wait, seriously?”

“Yeah. Back when we weren’t legal, you couldn’t have many vampires in one area or it became obvious that people were being preyed on.”

Ryan made a ‘I’m listening’ noise, trying not to think about ‘being preyed on’.

“For the older vampires, it’s almost instinct to threaten any strange vampires they come across. Used
to make traveling a pain in the ass, which is why airports are neutral. “

“That girl sure didn’t seem to feel very territorial.”

Shane smiled, though it quickly turned into a frown. “She’s young. Those turned after ‘79 don’t really understand the things we used to have to go through, just to remain undiscovered. I’m worried that will get vampires like her in trouble one day. If it all goes down the shitter, she won’t know how to survive.”

“What, like you think suddenly vampires will be illegal again?”

With a raised eyebrow, Shane drawled, “History repeats itself. Let’s just say that I wouldn’t be surprised.”

Ryan, because he loved gestures as much or more than the next romantic, hooked his arm around Shane’s waist, tried not to think about the fact that he was doing it in public, and said, “If you become legally dead again, I’ll let you stay with me. It’ll be like Prohibition. I’ll start a vampire speakeasy.”

Shane snickered. “Make vampires in your bathtub?”

“Smuggle them in from Canada.”

“I’d probably give you a hangover if you tried to drink me.”

Ryan paused, then realized he still owed Shane for the past few weeks of acute sexual frustration. So he looked up and grinned. “I guess I’ll just make sure you drink me, instead.”

Shane looked gobsmacked. It was pretty great.

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Because the weather had decided to fuck with them, they did get snowed in while in Salem. Which mostly just meant that their flight had been canceled and rescheduled for the next day. If the power had gone out, Ryan might have flipped. Luckily, they were able to get their rooms for another night, so they didn’t even have to pack.

Unfortunately, that meant there was a full day of being stuck in a hotel room for the entire crew to try and get through. Normally Ryan would have welcomed the mini vacation, but there wasn’t much to do. He had already been to the best of the witchy and haunted tourist spots in Salem and he didn’t feel like trying to drive into Boston during a snowstorm. And the day before had seen more than enough playing in the snow for him.

Though managing to pelt Shane in the face with a snowball had been worth the frozen toes.

By the time dinner had passed, Ryan had managed to answer every email he had, set up preliminary storyboards for the episode, and scroll through every post on his Instagram and Twitter twice over. He would have loved to have gone to a gym to work out, but the hotel didn’t have one and he wasn’t venturing out into the cold.

Shane, on the other hand, seemed to love every moment of it. He spent most of his time just wandering around outside in the snow or sitting in a chair next to their room’s window, staring out into the swirling snowflakes.

It was a little unfair that vampires didn’t really feel the cold.
“Why do you even bother putting on gloves,” Ryan asked abruptly from where he had flung himself onto his bed, staring up at the ceiling.

“How?”

“Isn’t like you need them, right?”

“I can still get frostbite, Ryan. Negative temperatures are actually pretty dangerous to vampires. We kind of slow down until we just stop completely.”

“Like snakes?”

Shane laughed softly. “Yeah, sure, like snakes.”

Ryan turned his head to look at Shane, surprised to see that Shane was looking back at him and not out the window. There was a faint smile on the man’s face.

“Does this place remind you of anywhere? It’s got a- a rustic feel to it.”

Shane blinked slowly, then glanced at the gas fire that was burning merrily in the tiny fireplace. Ryan had loved it at first, but it was weird to have such uneven heat in the room. “Yes and no. This area does reminds me a little of turn of the century New York City.”

Ryan reached up to grab a pillow and stuff it under his head. It made it easier to keep his eyes on Shane. “Oh? You were in New York?”

“Yes. People started noticing that I wasn’t aging, so I had to go somewhere new for awhile.”

Shane’s mouth tipped into a thoughtful frown. “It used to be a lot easier to become someone else. I’m not sure what I would do if I had to change my name and hide now.”

Because Ryan didn’t want to think about that kind of thing, he asked, “What was New York like?”

“At the time? Dirty.”

“Really?”

Shane nodded, getting up to go stand in front of the fireplace. “Coal was the big thing back then. It got on everything. Sometimes I-” He laughed, more an amused breath than anything else. “I do miss it. But I know it’s all rose-colored glasses. Everything stank. Everything. Cities were becoming too big too fast all over the world. The sewer systems couldn’t keep up, let alone the rest of the infrastructures.”

“The Fire actually helped Chicago, despite how terrible it was. It gave the city a chance to rebuild, to put plans in place for the sheer number of people that lived there. Other cities just kind of muddled along.” Shane turned, then hesitantly, as if he thought Ryan wouldn’t appreciate it, sat on the edge of Ryan’s bed. The mattress dipped, making Ryan’s leg slide to rest against Shane’s hip. “I lived in a couple different tenement buildings in New York. The first one was-” He pulled a disgusted face. “A floor just for single men. Poor, unwashed, desperate for work or alcohol or both. A penny a night for the pleasure of a spot on the floor, where you’d probably be stepped on at any point.”

“God, that sounds really gross.”

“Right?” Shane shook his head, then laughed. “I actually got kicked out of that one because they thought I had consumption.” At Ryan’s confused noise, Shane waved his hand. “Uh, tuberculosis. Funny enough, it was also called the vampire disease for awhile. I was pale and didn’t eat much, so
they got rid of me just in case.”

The sound of Ryan carefully scooting back and sitting up was loud in the quiet room, but it didn’t seem to disturb Shane. Ryan deliberately left the side of his shin resting against Shane, enjoying the contact.

Shane watched Ryan move, though he looked like he wasn’t entirely in the present when he continued. “It worked out for the better, anyways. I was able to move in with a Polish family that had managed to get every member together in one place. Which was a feat for some of the immigrants coming through Ellis Island. They needed someone that could help them figure out America and I needed someplace to stay. Not that it was great, since there was six of them for one room and I had to sleep in a corner on a pallet, but it- Well. They reminded me a bit of my own family. I stayed with them for five years.” He rubbed his fingers through his hair, an unconscious, sheepish gesture. “They actually tried to get me to marry their youngest daughter.”

Ryan spluttered a surprised, amused snort of laughter. “What?”

Shane laughed as well, absently placing his hand on Ryan’s knee. “Yeah. I was a catch back then, baby.”

“Everyone wanted a Bigfoot?”

Slanting a glance at Ryan, Shane gestured vaguely at his face with his free hand. “I had all of my teeth, no real acne scars, and relatively healthy if you didn’t think I had consumption. I was a hot ticket.” His smile turned into something softer. “Though, I think they actually liked me. But I couldn’t do that to her. Even if it was tempting.”

“Ah,” Ryan said, shifting in place. Though he didn’t move his knee out from under Shane’s hand. “She was that pretty?”

“Yeah, actually, but it wasn’t that. I just wanted something normal. With normal people. And, ah, I think they had an idea of what I was, but at the same time, I didn’t want them getting caught up in the vampire thing.”

Fingers trailed up and down Ryan’s leg, a touch that was rather innocent. Almost pleasant. It was also incredibly distracting.

Shane stared at his own hand as it moved over the fabric of Ryan’s pants. “I guess I never really missed the trappings of a certain time. The people, though? I’ve always found people that were good. Worth knowing. It’s made the decades easier.” He snorted. “People have such a romantic view of the past. I don’t miss the smell of horse shit. The rat bodies rotting away in gutters. The bed pans or the water that tasted like coal or the dirt roads that turned into mud. The sounds of people dying all around me because everyone had some disease or other. Or broke a leg and couldn’t afford a doctor so they just strapped it to a board and then died of sepsis two months later. Being afraid that the next person I took blood from would have one of the few diseases I can actually catch. The smell of unwashed bodies.” His fingertips grazed the inner seam of Ryan’s pants. “You don’t know how happy I am that showers are so easy nowadays.”

Ryan’s voice sounded oddly thick. “Shane, this is fascinating. Seriously. But are you trying to seduce me by talking about horseshit and rat bodies?”

With a cute little grin, Shane raised one eyebrow. “Is it working?”

“Fuck you.”
“So yes.”

Ryan let his head drop back against the headboard and groaned. “I hate you.”

“Mhmm,” Shane hummed, leaning closer until he was nearly looming. “I’ve learned to spot when people are interested in me being a vampire. It’s occasionally handy.”

“Wait, is this like your thing? Is this your- your yawn and stretch, arm over the shoulder move? Talking about the past?”

Shane shrugged.

“Oh my God, you fucking dork.”

That got Ryan an unrepentant grin.

Ryan leaned forward, putting himself well within Shane’s space. “Shane, you have to tell me now if you’re just teasing me or if this whole-” he waved at Shane’s hand on his leg, “-thing is leading somewhere.”

The corner of Shane’s mouth tilted down, his expression turning thoughtful. “I’m not going to bite you.”

“Dude, I don’t care.”

“I guess I could be convinced to get you off, then.”

“...Yeah, just hit me with that sexy talk, that enthusiasm is what really gets me hot and bothered.”

Shane made a useless little gesture. “I still don’t trust my control around you, alright?”

“Shane, I swear to God-”

“It’s a valid concern.”

“You’re just bored, aren’t you?” Ryan asked after a moment, his eyes narrowed.

“I love snow as much as the next man, but even I can only stare at it for so long.”

“You-” Ryan interrupted himself to pull Shane into him, going straight for a long kiss that left him panting. It was really only their second kiss, but something about the quiet of the room, the casual banter, it made everything feel easier. Comfortable. Ryan kissed Shane like they had been lovers for years, as if he already knew the shape of Shane’s mouth. It was as disconcerting as it was good. It wasn’t even what he had intended when he had started the kiss.

And then the tip of one fang grazed Ryan’s lower lip and he whimpered despite himself.

“Ryan,” Shane muttered, admonishing. “I’m not biting you.”

“Doesn’t count as biting if I’m the one that cuts myself,” Ryan mumbled, getting his hands under Shane’s shirt, tugging at the fabric.

Shane got the message and pulled it over his head, though he did frown. “Seriously, I don’t trust myself around you.”

Ryan heaved a long-suffering sigh, letting his forehead thunk against Shane’s collarbone.
A thought popped into his head.

He leaned back, studying Shane. Partly because Shane was shirtless but also because he couldn’t decide if Shane would agree to his plan. “What if I had an idea?”

“That’s never a good sign.”

Ryan ignored that and asked, “Did you bring a tie?”

Shane’s brows furrowed together. “No. Why?”

“Well, it’s called a tie.”

Shane was already shaking his head. “That won’t work, though I like that your mind went instantly to bondage.”

“At least I didn’t suggest a muzzle.”

With a little flinch, Shane sighed. “Why am I not surprised you know about those?”

“Look, I’m trying to hook up with a vampire, of course I was going to look things up on the internet.”

“Anyone I know?”

Ryan groaned and slid off the bed to rummage through his bag. He held up his own tie. “Trust me, okay? I have a plan.”

He sat the tie down on the bed, but before he could explain himself, Shane picked up the tie, arched one eyebrow at Ryan, then promptly tore the fabric in two like it was tissue paper.

Considering that had been silk, Ryan was a little impressed. He stared for a moment. “You owe me a tie, now.” Then he held up one hand, as if requesting a pause. “Also, I shouldn’t be hard from that, and yet—”

Shane’s eyes dropped to Ryan’s crotch. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Ryan picked up the two pieces of fabric, a little peeved, but mostly just excited. They were still long enough that they would work. “Get naked and lie down.”

Both of Shane’s eyebrows went so far up that they looked like they were trying escape. “Wow, just jumping right in, are we?”

“Shane,” Ryan said slowly and carefully. “I’ve been jerking off so often lately that its like I’m thirteen all over again. You are a goddamn cocktease and you know it. So you’re going to get naked and then lie down on the damn bed.” He finally glanced down. “Uh. Please. If you want.”

Faint color rose in Shane’s cheeks, but he didn’t look like he was embarrassed. He cleared his throat, then announced, “Hot.” But he did stand up and start to unbutton his pants, so Ryan let him be.

While Shane was struggling with his socks, Ryan tried to calm his breathing and heartbeat. His idea was a little silly, he knew that, but he also wanted to prove to Shane that he didn’t have anything to worry about.

Also, sex. That was a big plus if his idea worked out.
Were they going too fast? Ryan bit his lower lip, abruptly unsure if he was doing the right thing. He had gotten an idea in his head and hadn’t really stopped to think about it before going for it. Shane kept saying he wanted things to be slow, and God knew he had proven his ability to stick to that, but, other than the fear about biting him, Shane had seemed alright with Ryan taking charge, so-

A pair of boxer briefs hit him in the chest, making Ryan glance up and- *Oh.*

Somehow, while Ryan had been trying not to freak out too much, Shane had taken off every stitch of clothing without him noticing.

He swallowed, for some reason unable to decide if he was allowed to stare or not. Logic dictated that it was okay, expected even, but what if-

Shane shifted on his feet, looking rather nervous for a ‘nearly two hundred years old’ vampire. “So I guess I’ll just get on the bed now.”

When Ryan nodded, a bit wide-eyed, Shane slowly stretched out on the bed Ryan had been using. The guy wasn’t exactly going out of his way to be sexy, but Ryan couldn’t help the way he licked his lips at the sight, his mouth oddly dry. Even the cheesy wink that got sent his way didn’t stop Ryan’s sheer appreciation of what he was seeing.

Fuck, Shane was- He was-

Well, he was far, far more attractive than he had any right to be.

Ryan’s fingers twitched, an urge to touch every inch of skin in front of him washing through him. And it was a lot of skin. Shane’s limbs seem to go on forever.

“Allright,” he said, straightening his spine and feeling rather proud that his voice didn’t shake. “Arms out. I’m going to put these across your wrists.” The fabric felt slick across his palm as he placed one knee on the bed and leaned over Shane. Dark brown eyes stared up at him.

“You know this isn’t going to stop-”

“Shane,” Ryan said softly, “Just listen to me, okay?”

Shane slowly closed his mouth and nodded.

Ryan gently laid one half of his tie across Shane’s closest wrist, then stretched over Shane’s body to do the same with the other wrist. “You can feel that, right? The silk?”

“Yeah.” Shane’s voice was quiet.

Holding Shane’s gaze, Ryan leaned closer, petting his fingertips down the center of the man’s chest. “No matter what I do or what you want to do, you’re not going to let either of those move. You got that?”

Shane blinked slowly. “I don’t really understand.”

“You’re going to be your own ropes,” Ryan said, flattening his hand out to skim his palm down Shane’s stomach. The hair there tickled his skin. “Those ties aren’t going to move a single inch. Right?”

Understanding dawned. Shane nodded. “Okay. I get it. They won’t move.”

“Good,” Ryan breathed, trying to force down his own giddiness. Fuck, here he was, trying to get a
naked vampire to pretend he couldn’t move his arms. What the hell had happened in his life to lead to this?

He slipped both hands up to Shane’s shoulders, then leaned down and kissed him. This time he kissed Shane the way he wanted to, with no real care or thought to fangs. He didn’t try to cut himself, but he didn’t go out of his way to avoid them, either. It was a kiss that was about exploring Shane’s mouth, about tasting every part that he could reach and feeling every slick slide of their tongues and lips. When sharp points scored thin lines across his lip, he just winced and kept going.

The shoulders under his hands tensed and Ryan drew back, nudging his knee into Shane’s side. “Nu uh,” he whispered, squeezing lightly. “Remember, you can’t move your arms.”

Shane groaned and closed his eyes, but didn’t say anything. He looked like he was struggling with himself, torn between stopping this and letting Ryan just take control.

The original plan had been to focus on biting and how neither of them had anything to fear from Shane chowin’ down on Ryan’s neck, but he couldn’t help but pause and stare. He had Shane laid out in front of him like some kind of kinky gift. How could he not take advantage of that a little?

He stood up from the awkward leaning position he had been in and let himself drag his hand up the length of Shane’s calf, digging his fingers in enough to feel the coarse texture of leg hair snagging in his nails. The skin under his hand was cool to the touch, but the room was warm enough that it felt rather pleasant. He intentionally turned his touch into something lighter and ticklish as he continued his path towards Shane’s hip, pausing to caress down the inside of his thigh.

Shane twitched and narrowed his eyes in an exasperated glare, his hips twisting slightly, either in an attempt to escape the ticklish feeling or to get Ryan’s fingers closer to something interesting. Ryan grinned, lightly skimming two fingers across the crease of Shane’s thigh and up his pelvis, but intentionally stayed away from the thick cock that was resting diagonally over the man’s stomach.

There was a not insignificant part of Ryan that was full on gibbering, wanting nothing more than to get his hands on that cock. Or his mouth. Or even fucking stare. Fucking, he’d be perfectly happy just jerking off, staring at Shane spread out like this, nothing but a couple pieces of silk and Shane’s own will keeping the man still. The fantasy of his cum striped across Shane’s hips, across his cock, was such a strong mental image that Ryan had to pause, his fingers splayed over Shane’s ribs.

But as much as he wanted to do exactly that, this wasn’t really about sex. This was about trust. The trust he had in Shane to not lose control.

Christ, even in his own head that sounded melodramatic.

“Ryan,” Shane practically whined. He had probably meant to sound less affected than he did, but there was a hint of desperation to it that was only adding to the destruction of Ryan’s crumbling resolve.

Okay. Damn it. Sex later.

Though he did drag his fingers across Shane’s chest, catching the closest nipple with one fingernail. Shane flinched and started to lift one arm, but Ryan could see him check the movement, intentionally relaxing back against the mattress. Then, instead of voicing his annoyance, he drew his lips up and hissed, rather like an indignant cat. The flash of his fangs was an image seared into Ryan’s brain.

Before Ryan could really react, Shane tossed his head back and growled quietly to himself.

Well, it was official. Ryan was ruined for humans and Shane hadn’t even bitten him. Maybe he
needed to question why that had turned him on instead of making him laugh. By all rights, he should have been mocking Shane for such a cliche vampiric reaction, but all he could really do was swallow and try not to think about how freaking tight his pants were.

Now came the weird part of the idea.

“Shane,” Ryan said softly, waiting until Shane was looking at him before he continued. “You still have that one bag of blood, right?”

There was a pause, Shane’s eyebrows doing something complicated as he went from confused to surprised to a kind of quiet excitement that Ryan could tell he was trying to hide. Finally, Shane nodded.

“May I use it?”

Shane cleared his throat, his adam’s apple jumping. “Yeah. Um. If you’re proposing what I think you’re proposing, yeah. You can use it. Just, uh, be careful when opening it. Gets everywhere if you’re not careful.”

Ryan finally convinced himself to step away from the bed. He nearly tripped over his own bag on the way towards the mini fridge next to the TV, his mind so focused on what he was doing that he wasn’t really paying attention to his surroundings. After grabbing a styrofoam cup from next to the coffee maker, he took out the remaining bag that Shane hadn’t already drank. It wasn’t shaped like the blood bags he had seen in hospitals. This one was obviously for vampires and not meant to hang from an IV stand. Slowly, almost nervously, Ryan tore open the corner, along the dotted line.

The blood was too cold to have a strong smell, but Ryan heard Shane inhale behind him, a deep breath that sounded hungry.

Now his fingers started to shake.

Biting his lip in concentration, Ryan poured half of the bag into the styrofoam cup, then put the rest back into the mini fridge, managing to prop the bag up against the side. It was a way for him to focus on something else for a moment, to calm himself.

When he turned around, he was startled to see that Shane had turned his head to watch him, his expression intense. Ryan hesitated, then stepped forward, holding the cup out in front of him like some kind of offering.

As he got closer, he could see how Shane’s arms were tensed, the muscles bunched together. But the pieces of the tie across his wrists hadn’t moved.

“Eager much?” Ryan asked, trying to instill some kind of teasing into the words. He thought he just sounded nervous.

But Shane must not have noticed, because he just opened his mouth in a shaky smile, a thin, “Rarin’ to go,” escaping him. His fangs glinted in the low light cast by the fireplace.

Ryan gently placed the cup on the table next to the bed, amused by the way Shane’s gaze followed it. Though it was flattering when that gaze snapped right back towards him as he started to unbutton his shirt.

“I’m not getting blood on my clothes,” he said, needing to say something to keep the silence from being awkward. As much as people teased him for always taking his shirt off, there was a difference between showing off his muscles and getting completely naked in front of a lover. He was both
horrified and exasperated to realize he felt shy.

Shane’s faint swear when he stepped out of his boxers helped, though.

Moving as smoothly as his jittery limbs allowed, Ryan slid onto the bed and straddled Shane’s stomach. His cock rested against Shane’s sternum, a distracting sensation that he tried to ignore.

Ryan stretched to grab the cup, then had a moment where he realized he had no idea what he was doing.

Shit, I should have just stuck to the sex.

Shane must have sensed his hesitation, because he tilted his head up, smiling crookedly at Ryan, though his arms didn’t move in the slightest. “You’re mouthwatering.”

Ryan blinked, then snorted. “Fuck off.”

The moment centered Ryan, making it easier for him to dip the fingers of his right hand into the blood. It was cold and oddly smooth. Wetter than he had expected, though it definitely didn’t feel like water.

He tried desperately not to think about whoever had donated it.

When he was sure his fingertips were liberally coated, he whispered, “Open your mouth.”

Shane followed the order so fast that it almost made Ryan laugh. Careful not to let it drip, he slid his blood-covered fingers into Shane’s mouth, over his bottom teeth and across the tip of his tongue.

Ryan had to let out a careful breath when Shane made some kind of surprised, pleased noise, as if he hadn’t thought Ryan would actually do it.

Shane’s tongue was cool compared to a human’s, but it was warmer than the cold blood, soft and wet as he started awkwardly licking at Ryan’s fingers, making hungry, urgent little noises that he probably didn’t even realize he was doing. The blunt teeth in between his fangs scraped over Ryan’s knuckles, making him shiver.

Considering that he was naked and straddling Shane’s chest, there was nothing Ryan could do to hide his reaction. Shane looked up at him, his eyes dark and half-lidded. Deliberately, he closed his lips around Ryan’s fingers and sucked, the motion forcing the side of one finger to glance against the point of a fang.

Slowly, Ryan pulled his hand back, letting his fingers trail down Shane’s chin.

Shane left his lips parted, his gaze that of a focused predator when he quietly asked, “More? Please?”

Well, who would deny such a heartfelt request?

This time Ryan dipped his finger farther into the blood, no longer caring about making a mess when one drop splattered onto Shane’s neck. There was no protest when he pushed his fingers farther into Shane’s mouth, nearly petting the arch of Shane’s tongue, fascinated by the gentle, wriggly feel.

“What does it taste like?”

Shane blinked slowly, sucking once before letting Ryan’s fingers go with a faint pop of sound. “Hard to describe.” He sounded slightly stoned. “It’s- I mean. It’s blood. But you know when you really
crave something? And you crave it for weeks and weeks and weeks? And then when you finally get it, it’s the best thing you’ve had in months? It’s like that. But every single time.”

Ryan swallowed, shifting in place. Fuck if that hadn’t been a little hot.

He wiped at the spot of blood that fallen onto Shane’s neck, surprised that it felt a little sticky. Teasingly, not really thinking about what he was doing, he pretended to bring it to his own mouth.

“Ryan, no,” Shane said with a kind of soft urgency. “You’ll make yourself sick.”

Shane’s expression didn’t match his words in slightest.

He had actually sat up slightly, his eyes bright and focused, his pupils dilated until there was almost no brown left of his irises.

It had just been a funny moment, the kind of thing Ryan would do with anyone he was dating, like pretending to steal fries off their plate or taking a sip from their drink. It had been his attempt to dial the tension down a notch, to keep himself in control, if only because they were in a hotel and something told Ryan getting blood all over the sheets was a very possible outcome.

Judging by Shane’s reaction, funny wasn’t the right word for the situation.

Ryan wasn’t interested in blood. Hell, he didn’t particularly want it on his fingers, let alone tasting it. If anything, the idea was disgusting.

But he’d always done dumb stuff for a pair of pretty of eyes.

Holding Shane’s gaze, he re-wetted one finger in the cup. Then, trying to think sexy thoughts and not about that he was doing, drew that finger across his own lips, using the blood like some kind of macabre lipstick.

Then, deliberately, he licked the blood off.

It hadn’t been very much blood, but it had been enough to leave a very distinctive taste. It took everything Ryan had not to try and spit that taste out.

Shane’s expression made it worth it.

The guy frankly looked like he was having a religious experience.

“Ryan,” Shane said. He sounded completely wrecked. There wasn’t a hint of his usual humor, no sarcasm, nor ill-placed guilt to mar the shaking, breathless quality of his voice. He tried, God, did he try, but Ryan didn’t have to have supernatural hearing to know that his next words were a token protest at best. “You shouldn’t- It’s not healthy-”

Ryan shut him up by painting one side of his neck with cold blood that made him shiver. By the time he had set the cup back on the side table, he could feel a drop starting to make its way down over his shoulder. It made him shiver again, the fire at his back a sharp contrast to the cool liquid that was sliding down his skin.

He leaned forward, awkwardly angling his neck and shoulder towards Shane’s mouth, his nose pressed right up against the man’s ear. Shane’s tongue was just barely warmer than the blood at that point, but it didn’t distract from the feeling of him alternating between licking and sucking as best as he could without moving his shoulders.
Fangs scraped once, then twice, a soft pressure than never became too much, though Ryan’s stomach tightened in a mix of dread and anticipation. Shane let out a shuddering breath against his skin, then kissed the spot and continued to suck gently.

“Shane,” Ryan whispered as quietly as he could into Shane’s ear, his already fast heartbeat speeding up into something that was probably dangerous. “When we get home, we’re going to do this again. On your bed and your sheets. And one of us is fucking the other, I don’t care who.” Shane stopped moving entirely, his tongue pressing hard again Ryan’s skin. “And after I’ve come, you’re going to bite me and I want you to make a mess of my shoulder. Bite me twice, bite me three times if you want to.”

Shane groaned, twisting under Ryan’s weight even as he rumbled, “Fuck, Ryan, you can’t say that-”

“I want to look utterly used by-”

“You have no survival instincts-”

“The time you’re done. And now I’m going to do something incredibly stupid.”

Ryan could tell that Shane was out of it, since he didn’t even try to take that bait.

Neck feeling bruised, wet, and oddly sticky, Ryan sat up and studied Shane for a long moment.

No one should ever look sexy with blood smeared across their mouth and chin, but somehow Shane made it work. Or maybe Ryan was just that deeply infatuated.

He idly tugged at his cock, enjoying the way Shane’s eyes flickered down to watch the movement. Goddamn, even just a couple passes with his hand felt good. But there was something he was far too curious about trying.

Before he could second guess himself, Ryan picked up the cup, drained the last of the contents without swallowing, then dropped the cup to the side and leaned down to kiss Shane. He let the blood trickle between his lips into Shane’s already open mouth.

The flavor, the viscosity of the blood hit Ryan then and it was all he could do not to start coughing and gagging. But Shane was doing his best to lick his way into Ryan’s mouth without bringing his fangs into the mix, damn near devouring his tongue an an attempt to get at all of the blood.

Knowing that he was about to make his life difficult for the next couple of weeks, knowing that there were easier ways to do this, Ryan pulled his head back and slipped his thumb into Shane’s mouth. The rest of his hand covered Shane’s cheek, his fingers curved next to the man’s eye. Stubble scraped and prickled against his palm.

He didn’t let himself hesitate. He didn’t let Shane try to stop him. He pushed the pad of his thumb up, up against two sharp points, until the skin broke and pain washed over him.

Ryan held his breath, his entire body tensed; fighting against the instinctual urge to jerk his hand away.

Shane was completely still, his eyes squeezed shut and his mouth hanging open.

Every muscle in his shoulders and arms was clenched.

Daring to move, Ryan twisted and awkwardly groped for Shane’s cock behind him with his free
hand. His fingers skidded through a slick pool of precome that painted the valley of Shane’s hip, then caught up against the length of Shane’s shaft.

Fuck, he’s really hard.

It was difficult to do what he wanted, Ryan’s position barely allowing him to get his fingers around the head Shane’s cock. It felt more like he was just rubbing the palm of his hand over it than anything else. It was impossible to get a proper grip, since his wrist just didn’t twist that way. But he was determined to make this work, to make sure that Shane came with Ryan’s blood in his mouth, not some stranger’s.

Shane didn’t seem to care that it wasn’t a good hold. His entire body twitched and Ryan could hear his feet sliding across the sheets, as if he was full on writhing from the waist down.

A tongue that no longer felt cold dragged over the cut on Ryan’s thumb and he yelped, surprised by the feeling and the sting. Before Shane could pull his head away, Ryan pushed his thumb farther inside Shane’s mouth, pressing down against his tongue. He did what he could to provide a grip that Shane could fuck into, cock firm and heavy in his fingers.

Shane tried to say something, a barely intelligible, garbled, “Fuck-” escaping before he began to push his hips up in aborted little thrusting motions.

Faster than Ryan could have anticipated, Shane screwed his eyes shut, his face twisting in a raw, open expression as he came with a surprised, swallowed moan. Liquid hit the inside of Ryan's wrist and his lower back, warmth sliding wetly down his skin.

Shane shuddered and relaxed bonelessly into the mattress, panting shallowly around Ryan’s thumb. Ryan had never heard him breathe so heavily before. He opened his eyes, staring at Ryan in a dazed kind of way. Idly, clearly unaware he was doing it, he went back to gently licking at Ryan’s thumb.

“Can I come in your mouth?” Ryan blurted. Even his hushed, hoarse voice was startling loud in the quiet atmosphere of the room.

A slow, lazy chuckle was his answer, Shane sucking once at Ryan’s cut, before arching his neck and letting his mouth fall open. Ryan was high enough on endorphins at that point that the pain meant nothing to him. The cloying aftertaste of blood in his mouth was easily ignored. All he could think about, all he could see, was the red of Shane’s lips, the stain on his teeth that Ryan knew was at least partly from him.

That knowledge; knowing that he had, however minutely, fed Shane, that doing so had meant so much to the vampire that it had made him come in such a short time, it left Ryan nothing more than a bundle of over exposed nerves. He felt like he was going to burst out of his skin from the sheer need that had overtaken him.

Normally he was all too aware of the inherent awkwardness of shuffling his knees up a lover’s body, but this time there was no room for self-consciousness. He straightened up, one hand braced against the wall above Shane’s head. Blood from his thumb smeared in a small arc across the wall but he couldn’t bring himself to care. Washing that off was a small price to pay.

It didn’t take long. It would have been embarrassing how little time it took for Ryan to go from simmering arousal to right on the edge, but Shane was staring up at him with dark, heavy eyes that were driving him wild.

Shane quirked one eyebrow at him; lazily smug and satisfied and -fuck, that did it.
Ryan came with a strangled groan around Shane’s name, barely managing to get his cock near Shane’s mouth in time, his eyes open wide so that he wouldn’t miss a single thing.

The image, the scene of his cock resting on Shane’s bottom lip, the head centered between bloody fangs, of Shane swallowing and then running his tongue over his teeth was something Ryan was going to take with him to his grave.

Abruptly feeling like he had been completely wrung out, Ryan collapsed to the side, half on Shane’s outstretched arm. He let his head thump back into the mattress, trying to get his breathing under control and his limbs to stop shaking.

Ow. My thumb hurts.

Did I just put half a cup of blood in my mouth?

“Ty- Jesteś-” Shane shook his head slowly, making a quiet, amused noise. After a moment, he softly asked, the words sounding slurred, “Ryan? Can I move my arms now?”

“Wha-” It took him a second, then Ryan remembered about the tie and how Shane still hadn’t moved. “Oh. Yeah.” He flailed one hand around until he could push the silk material off the wrist he could reach.

Sometimes Ryan forgot how strong Shane really was.

It had never been more intimately apparent to him than in that exact moment, when he suddenly found himself being easily arranged to Shane’s liking and then wrapped up in strong limbs. It felt like he blinked and he went from sprawled across Shane to little spoon for an octopus.

Shane made some kind of rumbling noise that was purely inhuman, then started to contentedly lick at Ryan’s neck, where he could feel blood and spit drying stickily.

And, well, cum drying on his back, right where Shane’s stomach was pressed against him.

“If we fall asleep like this, it’s going to be incredibly gross when we wake up.”

“Mhmm.”

“I really want to brush my teeth.”

“Mmm.”

“Vampires are weird.”

Shane laughed quietly. “You’re stuck with me now, though.”

“Possibly literally.”

Another soft laugh, then Shane said, somewhat dreamily, “The last time someone shared blood with me like that, it was another vampire and it was thirty years ago.” He chuckled, so close that the movement of his lips tickled the small hairs at the back of Ryan’s neck. “Only you could accidentally stumble into something vampires only do with each other.”

Ryan blinked. Decided not to question anything he had just heard until later.

But he couldn’t entirely get rid of the image of Shane’s awed expression. When he had sucked the blood off of his own finger, Shane had looked... thankful.
Maybe…

Maybe it wouldn’t hurt to look up all the information he could about becoming a vampire.

Just-

Just in case.

Chapter End Notes

Also known as the chapter where Ryan has no chill.

Thank you so, so much for all the love! I really hope this chapter lives up to what people were hoping for!
The rain fell non stop, a constant dull pattering that nearly overwhelmed the ambient sounds around him. The sounds of a large city that never truly slept.

Shane almost could have loved the rain for that alone. But as he slogged through the ankle deep mud of the back alleys, he only wished that the summer would come. Even though the heat came with its own problems.

A trip that was supposed to have been a brisk half hour walk had become a full hour, according to the last church bell he could faintly hear ringing blocks away. The mud had ‘slowed’ him down and twice he had had to divert his path. Once because some young toughs had been eyeing up a shop front and once because a coal cart had become tangled up with a rich woman’s ostentatious carriage.

Any other day, the shouts of the cart driver, the surprisingly creative obscenities being shouted by the woman, and the constant neighing of the horses trying to escape their traces would have been a fine evening’s entertainment.

Now he just wanted the day to end, for his night to be over and done with.

Hunger clawed at him, an aching emptiness that no food or alcohol could fill. The constant reminder of his missing humanity was enough to leave him on edge, the animal instincts that harried his every thought urging him towards the dark, dank depths of a cheap bar filled with easy prey.

With hard won control, Shane angled towards a brightly lit tavern that he had never been in before, the spritely tune of a fiddler drifting through the open doorway.

It was a reckless decision. He had gone out to feed, not to socialize. But the part of him that was still himself, that was still the rabble rousing Illinois boy of thirty years ago, longed to get drunk and to relax. To let go and dance a reel to the songs that had changed names and words but not melody, to meet a pretty young thing and sweep her off her feet for the night.

His ears were assaulted as soon as he set foot inside the tavern, the shouts and cries of dozens of people having a good time mingling with the screech of the fiddle that was slightly out of tune and the stomp of dancers twirling from partner to partner. More accents than he could comprehend washed over him and for one glorious moment, Shane felt human again.

Then a drunken tough bumped into him and his senses latched onto the strong heartbeat he could hear pounding away. It forcibly reminded him of why he was here.

Shane ignored the drunken slur of an apology and edged around the man, his sights set on the pale curve of a young woman’s shoulder as she giggled with her companions. Her hair was uncovered, her dress pulled so low that her bosom nearly spilled out of it. He could imagine that she smelled like some kind of cheap perfume that would make him gag, but that was preferable to the unwashed stink of the last three people he had fed off of.
It would be a welcome change to set his mouth on someone that had seen a washrag within the last month.

As he got closer and his vision could focus on her, he saw that she wasn’t conventionally pretty. Her chin was too sharp, her nose too big, and she wasn’t as young as he had thought at first glance.

She was still wondrously alive and full of the very thing his body craved.

Reminding himself to keep his lips over his teeth, he smiled at her when she looked up and mimed tipping the brim of his hat towards her.

That got him a raised eyebrow and an appraising look. The woman apparently liked what she saw well enough, as she laughed and waved him over.

Relief beat strongly through Shane, a stronger pulse than his own heartbeat. He weaved his way towards her, doing nothing to hide his eagerness. Another hour, a couple of drinks, a whispered suggestion and he would be able to quiet the endless thirst-

Shane saw the hand coming towards his shoulder but did nothing to stop it.

“Hey.” A gruff man with bristly mutton chops stepped in front of him, looking disgusted that he had to tilt his head up to meet Shane’s eyes. The man smelled strongly of horseshit and sweat, the unmistakable odor of an ostler or teamster. “Ya think ya get to talk to my woman, Legs?”

“Original,” Shane said before he could stop himself. “How long did it take you to come up with that one?”

The man glared and stabbed stained fingers into Shane’s chest. “Get outta my sight ‘fore I break your head open.”

It would have been the work of a moment to snap the man’s fingers off. A part of him wanted to. But when he looked over the man’s head to see that the woman had turned away and was laughing with her neighbor, he knew her blood wasn’t worth it. So Shane raised both of his hands and took a step back. “Just looking for a friendly drink.”

Sometimes making jokes at his own expense was the only thing keeping him sane.

“Look elsewhere, ya fuckin’ meater.”

Shane muttered a swear under his breath, a word that his mama would have slapped him for, and started to turn around.

“Yeah, run away. Dumb fuckin’ P-”

The man didn’t get to finish the sentence.

Other than a couple of people that were standing right next to him, no one was paying attention to the two of them. No one wanted to get involved in a scuffle that could get them thrown out.

And he was far more angry than he wanted to acknowledge.

Shane spun on his heel and grabbed the man by the front of his shirt, jerking him off balance. “What was that?” he hissed in the man’s face, doing nothing to hide his teeth. “What were you going to say?”

The sound of a heartbeat tripping and doubling in speed was music more sweet than anything a
fiddle could produce. He could have danced to it. Dark satisfaction oozed through Shane as the man gasped and stuttered, his face paling dramatically. “N-nothin’, I wasn’t gonna say nothin’.”

God above, it would be so easy to bury his teeth in this worthless teamster’s neck, to rip and tear and bathe in the fountain of blood, to revel in it, to-

Shane jerked away, nearly throwing the man in the process.

Instincts screamed at him to finish the man, but he fled before he could give into those urges, walking at a brisk pace that barely stayed at a human speed. He kept blindly moving until he caught up against the brick of an old building, deep in an alley.

A terrified whisper of ’vampire’ echoed in his mind.

He sank into a crouch against the wall, burying his face in his hands.

The faint smell of horse and sweat lingered on his fingers.

_Pater noster qui es in caelis-

_Jesus, please-

_Zdrowaś Mario, łaskiś pełna, Pan z Tobą-

_Lord, why, why did this-

Shane laughed into his hands, the sound deranged, echoing in the small alleyway. The jumble of thoughts and half-formed prayers in his head went quiet. There was no use in them. God had turned His back on him long ago.

The older he became, the more years that passed, the more he began to understand why his maker did not believe in any kind of higher power.

A sharp pang of hunger lanced through him, making Shane laugh helplessly again.

He had revealed his monstrous nature to a half-rats teamster and he hadn’t even gotten any blood out of it. All because of alien instincts and urges that had burrowed deep into his soul, urges that he still couldn’t control.

The knowledge that he had threatened a man weighed heavily on him. He hadn’t made a joke, he hadn’t backed away; he had _threatened_. And that wasn’t _him_. That wasn’t how he dealt with situations and never had been.

Shane tilted his head back, letting the rain drop onto his face for a few minutes.

There was nothing else to do but stand up and find some place else. Someone else. Someone already drunk. It was too late for him to find another comely young woman that wouldn’t be a chore to get alone. He needed to get back to his building before someone woke up and noticed he was still out.

Stanisława had an unfortunate tendency to stay awake until everyone was back.

And he wasn’t going to go back before he fed. Not with his _urges_ running so close to the surface.

This time he found a dimly lit bar, with no fiddler and no shouts of joy or raucous cheers. Just the steady murmur of men complaining about their lives into their tankards of cheap ale.
It was pathetically easy to find an weathered man that was more than willing to talk Shane’s ear off and accept the drinks that kept coming his way. This one was too drunk to want more than a sympathetic listener, thank the Lord.

Shane let the words wash over him, counting his pennies and listening to the man’s heart struggle under the alcohol. When he judged the time was right, he politely suggested that he would help the man to his lodgings.

It was the only stroke of luck for the night that the man had a private room in a building down the block. Better than tempting the fate of a dark alleyway. Shane pretended to stumble as they made their way into the dank room, dumping the man onto the messy pallet on the floor that practically crawled with bugs.

Any minute and-

The man passed out, sprawled awkwardly on the floor.

For one second, Shane held himself back, wishing once again that he didn’t have to do this. That he wasn’t the monster he had been made to be.

But putting it off never did him any good.

Not bothering to remove his coat or the man’s, Shane easily picked the man up into a standing position, tilted his head to the side, and bit down.

At the first swallow, the world disappeared.

It didn’t matter that the man held the sour stink of never washing, that his skin was greasy to the touch or that his beard rubbed against Shane’s jaw.

The sensations of mortal trappings paled in comparison to the rich, heavy, metallic liquid gushing into his mouth, running down his throat and filling him with stolen life.

Shane was no poet. He didn’t have Twain’s capacity for a turn of phrase, the wit of Bierce, or the sensual imagery of Wilde. And yet, every time he stole blood, every instant that it coated his tongue, he wanted desperately to set pen to paper. To try and capture the feeling of it, the satiation of need that left him weak in the knees and yearning for more.

Surely this was the ambrosia of the Greek gods.

It would have been so easy to keep drinking, to bite over and over again to keep the wounds open, until every single drop of blood was drained out of the prey in his arms. It was rightfully his, he had claimed it, he was the one that-

*The slowing heartbeat stuttered once and Shane made himself pull back and drop the man onto the pallet.*

*He closed his eyes, shuddering at the aftereffects of finally slaking the thirst that had been riding him all day. Making sure that there was no blood on his clothes, he absently wiped once at his mouth, licking the blood off his hand as he made his way out of the building and started the long, dark walk back to his tenement building.*

*Guilt roiled and clawed at him, though it did nothing to mar the animal satisfaction of his gut.*

*What he wouldn’t give to no longer feel that hunger.*
Or at least for the bedamned rain to stop.

Water dripped down the back of his neck and he hunched farther into his raggedy, oiled coat, glad all over again that the cold no longer affected him like it once did. He was miserable enough as it was.

The squelch of mud that he had to pretend hindered him more than it did, the growing dampness of his clothes, the emptiness of his pockets, and the lingering flavor of a tanked up schmuck.

None of it came together to make for a pleasant walk back to his tenement.

A cur growled at him from where it was digging through a pile of garbage. Shane growled back on instinct, then glanced around and picked up his pace, despite knowing that no one had been close enough to hear it.

God in Heaven, even after feeding it was hard to pretend.

He did feel more human, though, for whatever meaning that word held for him now.

By his judgement, it was nearly two in the morning by the time he made it back to the row of wooden tenement houses that looked like they were leaning drunkenly towards each other. His fingers reached automatically for his pocket watch, before he remembered that he had left it stashed in the toe of one of his good boots, not willing to risk something so expensive in the area he had been in.

There was relief in being back in a neighborhood he knew. A rightness to it, that told him he was back in the territory he had claimed as his own.

He ducked through the low door, going up the four flights of stairs as quietly as he could. Judging by their heartbeats, most of the people in the building were asleep. Except the Torellis, who were fucking again, and the four men who had rented the corner room on the second floor. They were quietly fighting about their plans again. Shane was sorely tempted to tell them that the Eastman Gang wasn’t going to give up this block to a handful of young hooligans from the sticks. Not when half of their brothels’ clientele came from these buildings.

And not when he knew for a fact that one of the lieutenants of the gang was just like him.

It was only something like professional courtesy that had kept Zelig from running him out of the neighborhood. Maybe he would send the man a tip about the four that were staying here. He didn’t want any trouble happening in the building and it wouldn’t hurt to have Zelig owe him.

Shane was more focused on how he would contact Zelig than his surroundings when he came to the door of the room that the majority of the Konczak family had crammed themselves into. So it was a surprise when he opened the door and saw candlelight flickering on the single table. A woman sat at one end, an embroidery hoop in her hands. A quick glance around told him that Stanisława was the only one awake, though.

He automatically reached up to politely take the hat off his head, wincing when the soaked wool started to drip onto the floor.

Stanisława laughed softly at him, waving at him to come farther inside. “Change into something dry,” she whispered, quietly enough that it didn’t disturb her family. To Shane, she might as well have shouted it.

“Yes, ma’am,” he muttered after a second, making the mental shift from English to a language that still reminded him far too much of his childhood, despite having lived with the Konczaks for nearly
five years. He ducked under the tacked up line of sheets that separated the sleeping area from the rest of the room and edged his way between the two beds and towards the corner that had become his own personal space.

Shane changed quickly, thankful to get out of the damp pants and shirts that had been clinging to him for the better part of eight hours. The pants he slipped into barely reached past his calves, but Stanisława had seen worse. At least this pair didn’t require a belt.

She constantly offered to make clothes for him, but he refused every time. She had three children and a husband to take care of, she didn’t have the time to waste on him. Though he got the feeling that she had convinced herself that Shane would make a great substitute for her absent eldest son. Anton getting married and moving to New Jersey had been a relief on the purse strings, but Shane could tell she missed him.

By the time Shane made it to the table, Stanisława had set out a cup of water and the broken-framed spectacles he only wore when he needed to read something. He wanted to tell her that he didn’t want water, that he had slaked his thirst an hour ago, but that was a fleeting urge. Maybe he was a little nutty but he wasn’t an idiot.

He did frown as he sat down and reached for the spectacles, though. Stanisława had become convinced that it would do him good to wear them more often, but they were cheap, old things that gave him a headache more often than not. “Ma’am-

“Hush, boy,” she said quietly, bustling around the small stove and pulling out a heel of bread that had been hidden in a cloth-wrapped basket. “Anton sent a letter, finally. There’s a page for you in it.”

Shane blinked in surprise but went ahead and fumbled the spectacles onto his nose. He was slower about accepting the bread. He hated trying to eat tough chewy bread in front of people. It required too much tearing and too many chances that someone would catch a glimpse of his teeth.

“You need to eat, you’re like a stick.”

As he was about to thank her, a hand on his face interrupted his words. Stanisława’s fingers were rough from a life of hard work, but gentle as she frowned at his mouth. Shane clenched his teeth together so tightly that it became painful.

Stanisława made a disappointed noise, rubbing her thumb across his chin. Shane wanted desperately to ask her what she was doing, but he didn’t dare open his mouth with her so close.

She could only stare, dumbfounded, when she spit on the corner of her apron, then used the damp cloth to rub at something on his chin and jaw. She smiled, a wry expression, then held up the apron. “You need to be more careful,” she said chidingly.

Even with better night vision than a living person, it took Shane a moment to realize that the stain on the cloth was a dull, reddish-brown.

Blood.

His eyes widened and Shane jerked back, away from Stanisława’s fingers. He brought his hand up to his mouth, covering it in a doomed attempt to hide. Fear, sorrow, and broken, bitter self-recrimination raced through him. It was galling that such a stupid mistake would see him kicked out of yet another place in this God-forsaken city.

“I- I am-” Shane tried to say from behind his hand. He took a deep shaking breath.
It was amazing that his cold, undead heart was beating harder than it had in years. He could almost convince himself he was alive in that moment.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled, lowering his hand. There was no point in pretending any more. “Just let me pack my belongings-”

Stanisława slapped him up the backside of his head. He flinched out of surprise.

“Don’t be stupid,” she angrily whispered at him. Her frown deepened. “Did you really think we didn’t know?”

Shane flushed, the sluggish feeling of blood rising to his cheeks an odd one. “Yes?”

“Just how blind do you think we are?” She asked rhetorically. Then she shook her head, exasperated. “Shane, sometimes you sleep with your mouth open.”

Oh.

He hadn’t known that.

Adrenaline coursed through him, a sudden belated reaction to the long string of memories that began to surface, of the hundreds of places he had slept in the past twenty years. Some of them had been very public.

“God and all His saints,” Shane breathed in English, since even in the midst of shock, he knew better than to take the Lord’s name in vain in front of Stanisława in a way she could understand. Judging by the way she narrowed her eyes at him, she got the gist anyways. But she didn’t hit him again, so that was a small mercy. “How long? How long have you known that I- That I’m not-?”

Suddenly, Stanisława seemed to understand just how rattled he actually was. Her expression softened and she stepped closer to him, her arms spread. “Oh, my poor boy. We don’t think any differently of you.”

It had been twenty-three years since he had seen his mother.

Fifteen since his maker had abandoned him.

Six since a woman had hugged him without looking for something carnal.

Every carefully constructed emotional wall and defense he had maintained since his death came crumbling down. He stood and hunched forward into her arms, clutching her in a hold that was no doubt too tight. She merely started to pat his head, humming soothing noises.

It probably would have looked comical to an outsider. Stanisława was not a tall woman. Shane towered over the entire family, but made her especially look like a doll. But in that moment, she was the one supporting him, the one holding him up as he fell apart.

He kept his tears silent because he refused to wake the rest of the family, but that was the only control left to him as he cried open-mouthed into her shoulder, his spectacles crammed sideway over his face. He couldn’t even bring himself to care that she could probably feel his fangs pressing into the wool of her dress.

Stanisława looked nothing like his mother. They didn’t even speak Polish the same, the two hailing from different parts of the country. Different parts of the century. Hell, he was older than her by ten years, even if he didn’t look it. But with his eyes closed, the smells of dried pork and cooked cabbage
and onions permeating the air, the feel of her scratchy wool dress against his skin, he could almost convince himself that she really was his mother.

It had been far too long since he had been touched with such innocent care.

Was he damned to an eternity of walking the Earth alone? Was this the last time he could trick himself into thinking he was loved?

Who could ever actually accept him as the walking undead creature that he had become?

With very little effort on his part, he could kill every single person in the room. In the building. He could gorge himself on their blood, revel in the precious liquid.

A slavering, hungering beast in the corner of his mind urged him to do exactly that. To take what was his.

And that was why he couldn’t allow this to ever happen again.

Stanisława let him cry himself out, a woman who had comforted four different children in her long, trouble-filled life. It was clear that, to her, he wasn’t anything more than a taller child.

When Shane finally straightened up, she reached up to cradle his face in her hands, wiping at the tears that tracked down his cheeks. “You need your sleep. It will be overcast again tomorrow, I can feel it in my joints. You’ll be able to go out earlier to help the girls.”

In retrospect, maybe it should have been obvious that they knew about him.

Shane was wearily reaching for the cup of water that had been forgotten on the table when Stanisława abruptly said, “Anna will be nineteen soon.”

“Ah. Um, I thought I would get her a couple of those ribbons-”

Stanisława cut him off. “She needs a husband.”

Shane’s eyes went wide. “Ma’am?”

Now she looked rather calculating. “Think about it. You’re a part of our family. Maybe you should make it real. And she’s a pretty girl. A good worker.”

Thank the Lord on High that Anna was asleep right now.

“Goodnight, ma’am,” Shane said, somewhat forcefully.

Stanisława snickered at him, then picked up a folded over piece of paper that had been sitting next to a stack of others on the table. She handed it to him before he could take more than a step away.

“Don’t forget to read that. Please.”

Adjusting the spectacles on his face, Shane squinted at the page to try and make the letters focus. It had been written in English, which was a rather blatant attempt to keep Stanisława from reading it. No wonder she was so curious to know what was in it. “Anton says that… it’s a good town. He’s found a big house. He wants to ask you all to move there, but…” Shane trailed off, reading ahead. He swallowed.

“Well?” Stanisława asked, leaning forward, her voice going louder than a soft murmur for the first time all night in her excitement. Everyone wanted desperately to leave New York, but traveling with so many was expensive. And Stanisława and her husband weren’t exactly young. “Why didn’t he
mention it in his letter to me?”

If Shane had needed proof that the entire family knew about him, it was right there in the letter.

In the end, it wasn’t even a decision.

He would do what was best for this family that had accepted him as one of their own.

Shane cleared his throat. “He says that there’s a group of- of vampire hunters that live in the town.”

It almost hurt to say the word out loud. “He- He wanted to leave it up to me. If I wanted to let you

know. Since I wouldn’t be able to go with you if you did move.”

The expression of hope on Stanisława’s face melted into blatant sorrow. “My poor boy... “

Gently laying the letter down on the table, Shane walked over to her and was the one to offer an arm

in comfort this time. He kissed the top of her head. “I’m a big city boy, mama. New Jersey past the
cities is nothing but woods. I’d be so bored.”

She laughed quietly, wetly, already knowing that there was no other choice. Shane would never be
selfish enough to make them stay. She whispered, “Don’t forget us when we’ve all turned to dust in
our graves.”

“I could never forget you.”

She looked up at him then, her gaze piercing. “I don’t care if you’re dead. Promise me you’ll live
your life well and to the fullest, for however long it lasts.”

“Ma’am-”

“Promise me, Shane.”

Shane stared at her for a long moment. Smiled crookedly, one sharp tooth catching his bottom lip.
“’I promise.”

Oddly, he really meant it.

And he never forgot it.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Pater noster qui es in caelis- The beginning of the Lord's Prayer in Latin. (Mass was

held in Latin at the time.)

Zdrowaś Mario, łaskiś pełna Pan z Tobą- The beginning of the Hail Mary prayer in
Polish.

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Life came at me hard and writing fell by the wayside for a bit. But! The story somehow
grew two more chapters than originally planned and I accidentally a plot.

Thank you so, so much for all of the kind comments and the kudos. I seriously
appreciate it <3

(And a big thanks to Emilia for the help with the Polish and her unwavering support. Any mistakes you see in the story are mine.)
“I like the font on that one better.”

Ryan made a face at his computer screen, trying not to do something obvious like lean into the hand that was on his shoulder. He wasn’t really sure why Shane was standing over him like that, but if they wanted to keep their relationship private at work, Shane was going to have to knock it off.

“Are you sure it’s not too bubbly?”

Shane snorted, squeezing his thumb into the meat of Ryan’s shoulder in a small circle. “Bubbly?”

“Yes, bubbly. I know this is BuzzFeed, but we don’t need to make it look like something doodled by a bored teenage girl.”

“Just going to throw half our audience under the bus like that?”

Ryan twisted his head to glare up at Shane.

Putting his hands up, Shane laughed and shrugged. “It’s all the same to me, Ry-Guy. Go with whatever you want.” He sat back down at his own chair, nonchalantly clicking on a few programs.

“Still can’t believe you became a meme,” Ryan muttered half to himself, ignoring both the nickname and how much he wished Shane’s hand was back on his shoulder. He chewed on his lip for a second before typing out that yes, he did like option three for the new merch line, then sent out the email.

“I’m the one that believes in the stuff but somehow you became ‘that demon guy’.”

“The internet is a strange and mysterious place,” Shane said absently. “You busy tonight?”

Ryan almost said no, wanting nothing more than to go over to Shane’s and watch something on Netflix while sprawled on top of the guy. Shane didn’t exactly produce a lot of heat, but he was oddly comfortable for all that he looked like he was nothing but bone.

But Ryan had a plan that needed to be worked on without Shane knowing about it. He had research he needed to do and arguments to put together. Possibly in the form of bullet points. “Sorry,” he said, sending Shane an apologetic grimace. “I’ve got stuff I need to do. Come over tomorrow?”

Shane smiled at him, the expression soft. “I’ll be there with bells on.”

After work, they didn’t stand in the parking lot to talk for an hour or look at each other longingly before going their separate ways. Even though Ryan was tempted to do exactly that. Instead, Ryan lightly punched Shane on the shoulder and walked away without a second glance.

Fuck, if Shane hadn’t become an integral part of what made Unsolved what it was, Ryan could have wished that they weren’t co hosts. The ramifications of the two of them dating hadn’t really sunk in until after Salem, but Shane had, reluctantly, pointed out that they shouldn’t announce anything to anyone until they were sure it was something permanent. No pressure or anything.

The fact that ‘permanent’ while dating a vampire meant something a little different than for most people was a topic both of them had completely avoided.
That night, Ryan downloaded three different PDF files from one of those quintessentially unwieldy government websites that never quite looked legit, and stared at the first one for a long time.

It was a surprisingly easy thing to fill out. It just needed his basic personal information and his signature acknowledging that he knew all of the inherent risks.

In the end, he only filled out the other two, much lengthier forms, then printed off all three.

Asking to be Shane’s Emergency or Primary Donor would take some arguing, he knew, but he was confident he could get Shane to see reason.

Telling Shane that was he was thinking about testing if he was compatible with the vampire virus? That would be a little trickier.

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The next Saturday, just before noon, Ryan sprung his trap.

His text to Shane asking if the guy wanted to go hiking had been answered instantly, which went more towards showing Shane’s enthusiasm than his simple response of ‘Sure.’

Ryan had known that getting out into the wilderness would be a great way to butter Shane up.

Considering that it had originally been a plan for Shane, Ryan ended up enjoying the day more than he would have thought. He had assumed that the looming spectre of a planned argument for the night would have left him unable to appreciate the day. Somehow, though, it was easy to relax. He wasn’t often able to get out into nature and just enjoy it. Locations for Unsolved didn’t count. It was hard to appreciate the beauty of his surroundings if he was sure that he was about to be murked by a ghost.

They went to a set of falls that wasn’t too far away, one of the few places Ryan had actually been to before, but didn't think Shane had. The drive there was quiet and peaceful, the two of them comfortable with nothing but soft music. Once they parked, they chose to take the faster, tourist-friendly hiking trail without much thought, since it was supposed to be a day of relaxation.

Though Ryan quietly vowed to himself that they would come back one day and do the much longer loop when he noticed Shane’s wistful look at the sign above the trailhead. Maybe one day they would go camping. It wasn’t something he had done often, but it seemed like an activity Shane would enjoy. A day in nature that was away from the crowds and city.

The falls themself were beautiful, a cascade of water that tumbled off the cliff and over moss covered rocks, falling in a spray of sparkling droplets into the pool below. It was louder than Ryan remembered, the recent rain storms of the season swelling the waterways that fed it.

After the requisite photos and selfies, Shane stared up at the falls with obvious contentment, mist settling on his eyelashes and the wisps of hair that weren’t covered by his beanie. Despite the fact that the day was overcast and Shane had slathered on a thick layer of sunscreen in the car, his nose and forehead was slowly turning a dull red. It was an eye-catching contrast to his normally pale skin. He looked awkward and vaguely sick, obviously a vampire that had spent too long in the sun, if one knew what to look for.

Ryan couldn’t help but think Shane was beautiful. He didn’t even feel embarrassed for the thought, which went a long ways towards showing just how far gone he was.

Not caring about all the tourists, the families, and other nature lovers that had come up for the weekend, Ryan stepped up next to Shane and wrapped his arm around the man’s waist. Shane
glanced at him, then smiled softly, putting his own arm over Ryan’s shoulders. “Hey, little guy. What’s up?”

Leaning into him, Ryan shook his head, unable to keep his smile to himself. “Nothing. Just—” He shrugged. There weren’t any words that he could think of to convey how he was feeling.

Judging by the fact that Shane willingly, in a public space, pulled Ryan’s hat off to more easily kiss him, he got the idea.

Just as they were starting back up the trail, it began to rain lightly. They laughed but didn’t bother to hurry. It had been a humid day, if not a particularly hot one, and the rain was something of a relief. By the time they made it back to Ryan’s car, the shirt he was wearing was soaked to his skin. Ryan solved that problem by just taking it off, to Shane’s non stop teasing and occasional appreciative glances.

Shane, of course, had been wearing layers, so his T-shirt was damp but serviceable. Which was a waste of an opportunity, in Ryan’s opinion. He would never turn down an unobstructed view of Shane’s shoulders or collarbones. It had been weirdly fascinating to learn that Shane had faint freckles across the back of his shoulders.

When they made it back to Shane’s apartment, Shane handed Ryan an old T-shirt that had been worn thin and soft from years of washing. It smelled like detergent and Shane’s deodorant. Weirdly, that prompted all kinds of warm, gooey emotions that Ryan wasn’t entirely sure he knew how to deal with.

They spent the rest of the afternoon and night there, lounging around; playing video games and ordering delivery when Ryan got hungry. There were many opportunities for Ryan to bring up the papers he had secured away in his messenger bag, but each time there was a comfortable lull in conversation, Ryan let the silence lie until some other topic of conversation came up naturally.

It had been such a pleasant day that Ryan almost wanted to leave it be. It would be so easy to turn the rest of the night into a fun hour or two of slow, unhurried sex, making the entirety of the day one of the best of his life. But there was an itch in the back of his mind, a niggling little thought that wasn’t quite worry that told him he needed to have this conversation before he self combusted.

They were curled up together on the couch, some new true crime show playing on the TV that neither of them were paying attention to. Both of them were on their phones, checking various social media sites and email. The only thing that made it a bit strange was the way Shane had taken Ryan’s left wrist and was idly mouthing at it. It was an odd little habit that Shane had started and Ryan wasn’t entirely sure the man was even aware he was doing it half the time. Not that it was always the wrist. Sometimes it was Ryan’s neck or the crook of his elbow. Whatever major artery that was easily accessible at the time.

Ryan wanted desperately to make a joke about not being a chew toy, but he had managed to keep quiet so far. Partly because it wasn’t exactly unpleasant. There was something simultaneously soothing and nerve wracking about the soft, wet suction, the scrape of fangs across thin, delicate skin. It always left Ryan a weird mix of relaxed and keyed up. And he got the feeling that if he did say something, Shane would take it as a complaint and stop doing it entirely.

It felt like such a vampiric thing, like maybe Shane having his mouth so close to a source of blood was comforting, and Ryan didn’t want him to think it was too weird to handle. So Ryan kept his mouth shut about it.

Or maybe Shane was just constantly testing himself. Which didn’t seem like a very Shane thing to
do, but Ryan couldn’t be entirely sure, either. There were quite a few times in the past month or so where Shane had zoned out, staring at Ryan without actually seeing him. Or, more accurately, staring at Ryan’s neck.

Despite words said in the heat of the moment in Salem, Shane had yet to actually bite him. And they’d had sex plenty of times since then, too. Goddamn had they had sex. As Shane had put it, they’d been banging like a screen door in a hurricane lately.

Shane hadn’t been exaggerating in the slightest when it came to his skill with his hands or mouth. Honestly, it was too good, sometimes. Shane seemed to approach each act as if it was a timed race, which was vaguely disconcerting. Ryan had asked more more than once for Shane to just slow down, since it was hot the first couple of times to come that fast, but it got frustrating after that. There was something to be said for enjoying the trip as well as the destination, as it were.

Ryan’s sense of competition had been bolstered when he learned that Shane was barely above average when it came to good old-fashioned penetrative sex. Which said a lot about the things he had and hadn’t gotten up to in his long life. Not that Ryan let himself dwell on that. He just let his ego take the win and moved on with his life.

He had been mindlessly scrolling through Twitter for a few minutes, not really seeing what was in front of him. When Shane shifted and the lips on Ryan’s wrist started to move with a little more intent, the fangs press a little harder, he could read the cues easily.

This was the last chance he had for the night. If he didn’t bring up the papers and being a donor now, he would have to wait until another day. He wasn’t going to spring it on Shane after fucking. That seemed kind of disingenuous. Gross. Grody, his southern Californian childhood provided.

Ryan snorted to himself. He hadn’t thought of that word in years.

“The spark has gone out of the relationship. You’re already laughing at my attempts to seduce you,” Shane murmured against Ryan’s wrist, pressing his smile to spit-slicked skin.

Now or never.

Feeling like his heart was about crawl out his throat, the beat going too fast for what should hopefully be just a discussion, Ryan gently tugged his arm away and twisted so that he was fully facing Shane. He tried to keep his smile from being nervous when he said, “So hey, I wanted to run an idea by you.”

Both of Shane’s eyebrows went down in a frown of confusion then right back up in a leer. “A kinky idea?”

“I guess it could be?” Ryan answered without thinking. He shook his head. “No, wait, I mean-Serious idea. Not sex related.”

“Serious, huh? Serious like politics or serious like the pyramids being built by aliens?”

It was such a well worn argument that the words came to Ryan without conscious effort. “Okay, you have to admit that it’s weird that the pyramids were built so precisely! And how did they get done so fast? It doesn’t make-”

“It’s almost as if people were able to figure out basic math.”

Ryan narrowed his eyes, then took a deep breath. “Don’t distract me.”
“You’re the one trying to defend-”

“Shane.”

Shane grinned at him.

“I would like to be your Primary Donor,” Ryan said quickly, like ripping off a band-aid. He hurriedly added, “At least your Emergency Donor. I read all the laws and the things I would need to do. There’s a place not too far from my apartment that does classes on using syringes and how to safely regulate how much blood I can lose on a regular basis. And really, that’s all I need to do, I just need the class certificate and your signature and… “ He trailed off awkwardly, suddenly aware that Shane hadn’t said anything.

Throughout the entirety of his word vomit, Shane had just stared at him. It was hard to read his expression. Ryan didn’t think he looked upset, at least.

Finally, after a too long silence, Shane sighed through his nose and sat up, closing his eyes as he rubbed at his forehead. "Ryan… “

“Shane.”

“Once something like that gets into the system, you’ll permanently, legally, and for the rest of your life, be connected to a vampire in the eyes of the government,” Shane said, staring at him with one of the most somber, serious expressions Ryan had ever seen on the man. “Are you sure you want that?”

He waved between the two of them. “This? What we’re doing now? It doesn’t have official repercussions, yet. But if you do this, you’ll be forever branded as a vampire sympathizer at the least. A species traitor at the worst. Any government official with access to your records will know. Complete strangers will assume things about you. Have you thought about that?”

Well. That hadn’t been an argument that Ryan had thought Shane would try.

Ryan leveled an unimpressed look at him. “Because I’ve never had to deal with people assuming things about me?”


“At least people asking me what vampire bar I go to will be something different from, 'I bet I can guess what ethnicity you are.'”

After a slight pause, Shane muttered, “Just be glad I’m no longer considered undead.”

“Yeah, I don’t really want to be called a necrophiliac.”

Shane let out a short, surprised laugh, even as he cringed. “Don’t remind me. There are a lot of reasons people develop a fetish for vampires and biting is only one of them.”

Ryan made a disgusted face at him. “No.”

“I’m cold, my heartbeat isn’t exactly noticeable to human senses, and I can hold my breath for so long that I might as well be dead. If you want to fuck a body, vampires are the next best thing,” Shane said with a grin that was as embarrassed as it was gleeful. The man really took far too much joy in occasionally shocking people.

Spluttering out a horrified laugh, Ryan grinned at Shane for a second. “You sound like you have
some stories.” Then he shook his head. Focus. “Shane, this isn’t a proposal or anything like that. We could break up tomorrow and I’d still want to do this. You’re my friend, I want you to be healthy. You don’t have to take this so seriously.”

Shane looked away, rubbing at the back of his head in a quick, skittish movement. “Maybe you’re not taking it seriously enough.”

Ryan gave in to his urges and threaded the fingers of one hand through Shane’s. He barely even noticed the cold. “I’m not asking you to bite me.” He paused at Shane’s disbelieving look. “Okay, I am, but that’s not what this is. I just want to know that you’re healthy. You shouldn’t have to choose between starving yourself or going bankrupt when I can stab myself with a needle once a week to supplement the government issued stuff.”

Truthfully, Ryan had expected a lot more arguing.

What he didn’t expect was for Shane to offer up a token protest and then just stare at him for a long time. A very long time. Long enough that he had to drop his eyes from Shane’s searching gaze, though he never let go of Shane’s hand.

Long, cool fingers trailed down Ryan’s jaw, then tilted his head up. “Ryan,” Shane murmured, his expression unusually open and sincere. There was aching vulnerability and hope in Shane’s voice when he said his name and Ryan felt like he would do literally anything Shane asked of him in that moment.

Shane leaned forward, his intent clear with the way his eyes had drifted down to Ryan’s lips.

A tickle in Ryan’s sinuses made him jerk away and turn his head to sneeze. When he turned back, Shane was laughing quietly into his hand.

“Sorry, I uh-”

Shane shook his head, still chuckling. “Give me a pen, Bergara. I’ll sign your stupid papers.”

Ryan stood up a little too fast in his haste to get to his bag and pull the stapled together forms and a pen out, his heart pounding hard in a burst of triumph and abrupt nerves. Shit, now I have to learn how to use a syringe.

His hands didn’t shake as he sat the forms on the coffee table in front of the couch and flipped to the last page, but he felt like they should have been.

This really wasn’t a big deal. He knew it wasn’t. Hell, there were enough people signing up as donors that there were classes for it. And he knew that quite a few donors were actually family members or friends of new vampires. Just because he was making it official that he would provide blood to Shane, it wasn’t some kind of announcement.

He still felt like this was a huge step.

Shane accepted the pen and wrote his name and the date on the Emergency Donor form easily enough. He hesitated over the next form.

Being an Emergency Donor didn’t mean much. It was the vampire equivalent of an emergency contact and meant that Ryan would be willing to show up and bare his veins to a possibly crazed vampire in case there was some kind of accident that left Shane wounded. It sounded dramatic, but the odds of something happening to a vampire that would actually require that kind of action were incredibly low. Honestly, all it did was pacify the naysayers in the government that tried to tag
vampires as inhuman monsters. A kind of safety measure that very rarely had to be used.

A Primary Donor, though, was essentially signing a part of their life away. For as long as he agreed to it, Ryan would be responsible for providing blood at least once a week. That meant vacations had to be negotiated, his diet had to change to support his system replenishing his blood, medical personnel had to be informed that he was essentially anemic, and he wouldn’t be able to donate to the Red Cross.

On the other hand, Shane wouldn’t be half-starved.

Changing his diet and being extra careful about planning his vacations seemed like a small price to pay.

“You sure about this?” Shane asked, glancing up at Ryan. “I don’t want to become a chore.”

Ryan grinned and stepped into Shane’s space, kissing his cheek. “You’re already a chore, Madej.”

Shane sighed, but smiled slightly. This time he signed his full name in great looping cursive, the letters like something from a book in a museum. Ryan was struck all over again at how old Shane really was.

He was barely able to make out the ‘Aleksander’ of the middle name, but the spelling did make him ask, “‘Shane’ isn’t really a Polish name, is it?”

“It’s not,” Shane said as he idly flipped through the papers in front of him. “It’s Irish.”

“Then why-”

Shane shrugged, his mouth tilting down in a slight grimace. “Childbirth wasn’t exactly easy when I was born. There were some complications and the closest midwife was busy with another birth when I decided to make my grand appearance. I was named after the woman who lived below us and helped my mother. Her name was Shannon.” He smirked as he continued to shuffle through the forms. “It was either that or Bogusław, after my grandfather.”

Ryan snickered. “That would have been a fun name to live with for a couple hundred years.”

“I probably would have started going by Alex. Or said ‘fuck you’ to all English-speakers and kept it. Whatever floated my boat for that decade,” Shane said, his eyes narrowing. “Ryan, what’s this?”

It took Ryan a second to see what Shane held up, since he had to turn away to sneeze again. When he turned back, the form for testing his compatibility to the vampire virus was right in front of his face. He had completely forgotten he had kept it with the donor forms. Once his eyes focused on the words, the brilliant response that popped into his head was, “Uh, it came with the other forms?”

“Ryan, this is dangerous.”

There was a literal growl under the words. While Ryan was glad that Shane was comfortable enough around him that he didn’t feel like he needed to hide, Ryan also didn’t want to deal with this specific conversation right now. “It’s just a blood test,” he tried to say dismissively, taking the paper from Shane and stuffing it back into his bag. “It’s not like-”

“Most people die from this,” Shane said, his eyes wide, the abrupt anger doing nothing to disguise the underlying fear.

“Shane,” Ryan said loudly, not quite annoyed but well on the way. “Calm the fuck down. It’s not
like that anymore and you know that. They test it on a sample of the blood, not the person.”

Shane took a deep breath and looked away, slowly stretching out the fingers he had clenched into a fist. “Forgot.”

“I got that, yeah.”

Hesitantly, not quite meeting Ryan’s eyes, Shane glanced at him. “Moving a little fast, don’t you think?”

The blush that Ryan had been trying to fight off won the battle. It bloomed hot across his face and down his chest. “I was just curious if I was compatible,” he said quietly, resisting the urge to cross his arms. This wasn’t some kind of declaration, he just wanted to know his options. That was all.

Suddenly he was wrapped up in a slightly too tight hug, his arms awkwardly trapped against Shane’s chest.

“Um.”

“Don’t.”

“Don’t what?”

Shane’s whispered words were soft. “I don’t want to see you die. You’re too important to me.”

*I’m human. I’m going to die.*

*I’m going to age.*

No, now wasn’t the time.

Ryan managed to wiggle his arms out from between the two of them and slide his hands up Shane’s back. “Are we really going to have this conversation when our first real date was two weeks ago?”

The sigh of amused breath that Shane let out tickled the hair on the back of his neck. “Just- Don’t make any rash decisions, Ryan. Please.”

“I’m not even thirty, big guy. I’m- I’m not that in love with you.” Who needed dignity, anyways?

Ryan drew in a long, slow, inhale, then quietly added, “Yet.”

It was a warning as much as it was a promise and acknowledgement.

Cold lips brushed the skin over his carotid artery in answer, sending a burst of sensation down his neck.

That too felt like a warning and a promise.

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Ryan woke up with a cold.

Which was just great.

After the past month, Ryan had grown used to waking up to the feeling of Shane’s cool hands pressed against his stomach or hip. Considering that LA could occasionally be a hot, dry nightmare, he actually appreciated it on some days.
In that instant, Shane’s fingers were unpleasantly cold, his hand leeching away heat from Ryan’s skin. Ryan sat up, groaning when his muscles protested. So apparently it was one of those colds that left him feeling sore and aching.

At least he could breathe. Sort of.

As if in answer to his thought, he sneezed. Ryan scowled, already hating that he was shivering and glad it was a Sunday. He could tell it wasn’t a bad enough bug to keep him in bed, but working would have sucked.

“Ryan?” Shane’s voice was rough from sleep. “It’s early, what.”

Ryan flinched away from the broad, chilly palm that had settled on his spine. **Good God**, that was cold. “Think I’m sick,” he said miserably. He sounded nasally and raspy and he wasn’t even coughing. **Wonderful**.

Swinging his legs off the bed, he groaned in annoyance when the movement made aching muscles protest. He went to stand up, but he was hindered by the arm that was suddenly looped around his stomach.

There was the rustling sound of Shane shifting behind him, then the man said right in his ear, “I can hear how congested your lungs are. Why didn’t you tell me you felt bad?”

“I just woke up,” Ryan grumbled. “Stop listening to my lungs, dude.”

Shane tried to gently pull him back. “If you’re sick, you need to rest.”

“I need to piss. Go back to sleep, Shane.”

Ryan could feel how reluctant Shane was to let him go, but when he looked back, Shane was merely lying against the pillow, his eyes closed over a faint frown.

Dismissing the last couple of minutes, Ryan went about his usual morning routine. The fact that he already had a morning routine while staying at Shane’s apartment was something that bolstered his spirits, if not how he felt physically.

He was sipping at a mug of coffee and idly staring into the fridge when Shane walked up behind him. Nudging a bag of blood aside, he said over his shoulder, “Are these leftovers still good or should I be worried its gained sentience and will attack me?”

“If you think you can hear food talking, that explains so much about the Hot Daga.” Then the rest of what Shane had said caught up to him and Ryan looked over to see that, sure enough, Shane was dressed like he was going out. He had even put his contacts in. “You don’t have to buy groceries for me, dude. What the hell? I’ll just eat a protein bar in my bag or something if the leftovers are bad.”

Shane hunched into his shoulders, glancing away and looking downright squirrely. “If you’re going to keep showing up here, I might as well have food that you can eat.” He reached into the cupboard for a mug, busying himself with pouring some of the blood into it.

“Oh.” Ryan smiled into his coffee, stupidly pleased by that statement. That Shane would be willing to accommodate him like that made him want to kiss the guy right then.
Of course, then he sneezed three times in quick succession.

“And I need to buy cold medicine,” Shane said wryly.

Ryan looked up in time to see Shane take a sip from the mug of blood. He always had so many conflicting responses to watching Shane casually drink blood that he had a tendency to either look away or stare too intensely. But it meant so many things to him. He was thrilled that Shane wasn’t doing a single thing to hide what it was that he was drinking, that they were both comfortable enough with it that Shane hadn’t thought twice about getting his own breakfast. It was also disgusting to watch someone drink blood like it was just particularly red orange juice.

And, though he didn’t want to admit it, the tint of red to Shane’s lips and teeth was bizarrely… arousing.

The visceral memory of blood coating his tongue was one Ryan thought of often and he still had no idea how to process it. It had been a nauseating, disgusting flavor, but the entire memory was so positive that it had skewed his reactions, he knew.

This is how serial killers get started.

Ryan drug his mind back to the present. “It's just a cold, I don't need medicine. I'll be fine tomorrow.”

Shane sat his empty mug into the sink, blatantly ignoring Ryan's words. “Text me if you think of anything. But I'm not buying you protein powder.”

“How dare you try to hinder my gains? My macros, man,” Ryan said, completely deadpan, before heading towards the bedroom. “If you wait a minute, I can go with you.”

Already at the front door, Shane yelled, “Go rest, Ryan.”

Ryan stared after him as he left, shifting awkwardly on his feet. “Okay,” he said to the empty living room. “I guess I’ll just… hang out in your apartment. Alone.”

Being randomly left alone while Shane suddenly decided to buy food was something else that Ryan could have dismissed. But when Shane returned, Ryan somehow found himself back in Shane’s bed, extra blankets piled on top of him, a sports drink in one hand, and a box of tissues sitting next to him.

It had happened so suddenly that Ryan wasn't entirely sure how Shane had accomplished all of it. It was confusing, because while he could admit to himself that he loved the guy, and that Shane was caring in his own way, Ryan could have never pictured this. Maybe he was being a dick, but a vampire taking care of him like he was a kid was mind boggling.

When Shane came into the room with a bowl of microwaved, cheap chicken soup, Ryan nearly threw it at him.

Shane took one look at his expression and smiled. “I'm making something better, but it this will work for now,” he said cheerfully, as if he wasn’t being glared at.

“You know I’m not a child,” Ryan said, accepting the bowl. He was hungry; he wasn’t going to turn down food. That didn’t stop him from complaining, though. “I do know how to take care of myself.”

“You were just going to pretend you weren’t sick. We both know that.”

“It’s a cold.”
Shane’s cheerful expression dropped for a second. “Colds can lead to something worse if left untreated.”

Ryan’s reply that he was sure would have been witty and scathing was interrupted by the need to sneeze again.

Okay, admittedly, that was getting to be annoying. And now his throat hurt. He reluctantly reached for a tissue, juggling it and the bowl of soup just to blow his nose. By the time he was situated again, Shane had left the room.

God, just what the hell was Shane’s problem? He was acting like it was some kind of plague, not a cold.

A few hours later, after Ryan had retrieved his laptop just to have something to do, Shane came in with more soup and a bottle of generic cold medicine. By this point, Ryan had to admit that he was maybe feeling a little worse than expected. But it still wasn’t anything to worry about it. He would just remember that walking around in wet clothes wasn’t the best idea in the future.

Ryan stared into the bowl that had been thrust into his hands. It was an incredibly clear broth, with a few pieces of chicken and carrots floating in it. It smelled delicious but he wasn’t used to a chicken soup that had so little in it. “Did- Did you make this?”

Shane looked away and shrugged. “Isn’t that what you're supposed to do?”

“Are you trying to Florence Nightingale me?”

“I think I would look quite fetching in the little nurse hat.”

Ryan exhaled a short, faint laugh. He cautiously tasted the soup, then said with some surprise, “Wow, this actually really good.”

“Your faith in my skills wounds me,” Shane said as he took the packaging off the cold medicine. “I only learned how to make that about ten years ago, but it’s, uh-” He paused, staring down at the bottle in his hands, before quirking a small, lopsided smile. “It’s called rosół. My mother used to make it. Or something really similar, I guess.”

The spoon halfway to his lips, Ryan cocked his head to the side, staring. “Are you telling me that you made a traditional family dish that you grew up with in the 1800’s for me? Just because I have a cold?”

Shane twisted the bottle uselessly in his hands, not meeting Ryan’s eyes when he said, “Possibly.”

Well, fuck.

Very carefully, Ryan put the spoon back in the bowl, then balanced everything on his lap. “Come here.”

Raising one eyebrow, Shane moved closer to him.

Ryan reached up with one hand and grabbed the front of Shane’s shirt, pulling him down to his level. “It’s a cold, you dramatic beanpole.” He softened the words by kissing Shane on the corner of his mouth. What happened next wasn't planned. The words came to him without a conscious decision. “I love you,” he murmured against Shane’s skin.

He was too close to be able to see Shane’s expression, but Ryan could hear a catch in his breathing.
Drawing back, he was amused to see that Shane’s cheeks were a pink so faint that it wouldn’t have been noticeable if the guy wasn’t so pale.

“Uh,” Shane said eloquently. It was great to see the normally quick man at a loss for words. He pressed a kiss to the side of Ryan’s head, then straightened up and thrust the medicine into Ryan’s hand. “I’ll be right back. Take some of that.”

Ryan did as directed, though only because he didn’t want to feel like shit when he went into work the next day. He also finished the soup because it really was delicious. By the time he was done, Shane was back with, of all things, a photo album.

Shane sat the album down on the bed, then quickly took the bowl and returned. Most people would have assumed Shane was being his normal, laidback self, but Ryan knew him well enough to notice the hunched position and the way he kept moving his hands. As if he was nervous.

Rolling onto the bed next to Ryan, Shane picked up the album and flipped through the pages until he came to one right in the middle. He handed it to Ryan and said casually, as if his voice wasn’t strained, “The one on top is my family. My mother insisted we scrape the money together so that we could stand uncomfortably in our Sunday best for a photo. Back when photography was still new and a big deal.” His fingers gently tapped the side of the page. “This was before my brother’s wedding.”

It was an old photograph, the kind that was faded and so worn that Ryan couldn’t entirely make out details. One corner was missing and it had the air of something that would fall apart if he touched it. It looked like something the belonged in a museum, then he abruptly realized that if this was taken when Shane was alive, it really did belong in a museum.

There were six figures in period clothes with fixed, dour expressions. The three men, all painfully tall, stood behind the seated women. Shane was instantly recognizable, despite the longer hair and unfortunate mustache. His hand was resting on the shoulder of the woman in front of him.

Ryan cleared his throat. He had seen the photo albums of a couple of girlfriends’ families in the past, but something about this felt more meaningful than a parent’s attempt to embarrass their kid in front of a boyfriend. “That’s a pretty spiffy suit. Who is who?”

“I’m incredibly glad men aren’t expected to dress like that nowadays,” Shane said. “That’s my mother, my father, my brother, and his wife,” he added, pointing at each person.

“Who is the woman in front of you?”

Shane sighed, his fingers twitching as if he wanted to pull the album back. “My fiance.”

Ryan froze, completely unsure how to respond to that. Finally he managed to choke out, “You were married?!”

Shaking his head, Shane snorted softly and deliberately drew his hand back. “No. She passed of a wasting disease about six months after this was taken.”

“Oh. I’m sorry.”

“Truthfully?” Shane said ruefully, clearly fake humor plastered over his shaky voice, “I can’t even remember her name. I had only known her for about a year.”

Ryan stared at Shane. He didn’t think he would ever forget the name of someone that he was supposed to marry, but then again, he hadn’t lived for nearly two centuries, either.
After a small pause, Shane laughed softly. “Don’t worry about it, little guy. The next photo is the family I lived with in New York for a few years.”

This one was in better condition, with so many people that Shane would have fallen into the background if he hadn’t been a head taller than everyone in it. Shane gently tapped the face of one of the young women. “This was Anna. She died of typhoid about a year after this was taken.”

“Uh…”

“I’ve seen far too many people I cared for die to disease.” Shane said, matter of fact about it. “I’ve watched a fiance die while coughing and two of my best friends sweated themselves to death because of severe fevers. I had to listen to a lover moaning in pain for a week straight as an infection started to rot her from the inside out.”

Ryan’s brain felt like it had short-circuited, because the only thing he could think to say was, “Dude. What the hell?”

Shane glanced at him, then broke into a surprised laugh. He waved his hand. “Sorry,” he said, still chuckling. “The look on your face was pretty fucking great, right there.”

“You can’t just spring this on me, man!”

Very deliberately, Shane sat his hand on top of Ryan’s, his long fingers curving and grasping in a firm hold. “I know I’m overreacting to this whole-” he waved his free hand in Ryan’s vague direction. “Sickness thing. But I hear the rattling in your lungs, I feel how hot your skin is, and all I can think about is how many people have died on me.”

Ryan huffed and slumped back into the pillows, though he made sure to keep a careful hold of the album. “Your dramatic emo vampire side is showing.”

“Gotta make sure you don’t forget about it.”

“How could I forget? Got any more tragic past to talk about it?” Realizing how harsh that sounded, Ryan met Shane’s gaze. “I’m willing to hear it if you want to talk.”

Shane smiled, “Oh, there’s plenty where that came from. I’m a veritable treasure trove of sad stories.” His eyes strayed towards the bottom photo and his smile softened. He said something that Ryan didn’t understand. When Ryan made a questioning noise, he nodded towards the photo. “Only three people have cared for me and didn’t care that I was a vampire. I don’t mean that they overlooked it, or that they were into it. They just accepted me as I was. You, a woman in the 70’s who was too strung out to care one way or the other, and the mother of that family.”

Stomach twisting uncomfortably at the words, Ryan smiled a bit nervously. “I have to admit I’m a little into it.”

Rolling his eyes, Shane grinned. “Oh, I’m aware of that. But it’s not the only reason you’re trying to get into my pants and I appreciate that.”

“Appreciate,” Ryan repeated mockingly.

Still smiling, Shane absently stroked the side of the bottom photo. He looked like he wasn't aware he was doing it. “I don't remember much Polish. In the last few years I've had to-” he paused, hesitant. “I've had to make a conscious effort to use it more, to try and relearn what I've forgotten.”

Ryan gently turned the hand under Shane's, clasping it back.
“But there’s one phrase that—” He paused again, uncharacteristically shy, then seemed to gather his thoughts. “I thought I had been careful, you know? I kept to myself as much as possible while sleeping in one room with six people. I rarely opened my mouth, I took jobs that ran well into the night so they wouldn’t question why I was never out in the sun, and I never, ever, fed within a thirty minute walking distance of the tenement.” He laughed; a quiet, derisive noise. “All wasted effort, since it turns out I sleep with my mouth open sometimes.

“I could have told you that.”

Shane smiled, rubbing the plastic over the photo absently. “One night I came back late. I had just fed. She was the only one awake, waiting up for me. And she came over to me, wiped dried blood off my chin, and said, ‘Musisz być bardziej ostrożny.’ ‘You need to be more careful.’ No matter how old I become, no matter how many memories slip from my grasp, I’ll never forget those words or what they mean.” He turned wondering eyes towards Ryan. “She wasn’t afraid. She didn’t see me as a monster. I think she saw me as a son.” Shane brought their joined hands up to his lips, his breath cold. “You’re not afraid of me, either.”

“I definitely don’t think of you as a son,” Ryan said, knowing he said it with too much love in his voice and not caring in the slightest.

Shane laughed softly. “And thank God for that.”

They leaned into each other, Shane’s shoulder a firm pressure against Ryan’s. The room was quiet, only the ambient noises of an apartment building disrupting the silence. It was peaceful, and with the ache in his muscles pulling at him, Ryan was tempted to fall asleep right there. But while he was extremely flattered and touched that Shane had shared something so personal with him, he felt like he needed to make a couple of things clear.

“You know I’m not going to drop dead as soon as you turn your back, right?” It was hard for Ryan to keep his voice quiet and gentle. There was a part of him that wanted to curl up around Shane and never let go. Another part of him wanted to take the man by the shoulders and shake him until he realized that Ryan didn’t have tuberculosis and wasn’t about to keel over. “I took your cold medicine, I ate your soup, I’m going to be fine. I’m thankful that you want to take care of me, but you need to remember that I am an adult.”

Shane sighed. “I know that, Ryan. I do. It’s just…” He spread his free hand out in a shrugging gesture. “Neuroses. They exist.”

Ryan slumped back into the pillows and said to the ceiling, “At least it’s pretty good soup.”

“You’re lucky,” Shane said, leaning over him and grinning mischievously. “I could have made an onion and honey syrup instead.”

“What?”

“It’s traditional! Good for what ails ya.”

Ryan started wheezing in hoarse laughter and pushed at Shane. “That is terrible, take your weird, old remedies and get out of here.”

“It tastes pretty good, actually. I could whip some up right now if you wa-”

“Out!”

Shane got off the bed, taking the photo album with him. He smiled down at Ryan. “Need I remind
you this is my bed? In my bedroom?"

Ryan sprawled his arms out, closed his eyes, and wiggled down into the mattress in an exaggerated show of getting comfortable. “Nu uh. It’s mine, now.”

Snickering softly, Shane gently grasped his shin through the blankets, squeezed once, and left the room.

He hadn’t really meant to fall asleep, but something about the pressure in his sinuses and a full stomach meant that when Ryan next opened his eyes, the room was dark from the setting sun and Shane was laying next to him with his glasses on. He had changed into sweatpants and was scrolling through something on his phone.

Something about the lighting in the room and the way the glasses perched on Shane’s nose made the entire scene look old-fashioned, despite the phone.

If he hadn’t been high on cold medicine, he probably wouldn’t have ever thought his next words, let alone said them. “So you're old and stuff, right?”

Shane raised one eyebrow, but didn’t startle or look up from his phone. He must have been able to hear that Ryan’s breathing had changed and that he was awake. “And stuff.”

“How come you don’t talk all old-timey?”

A quiet laugh curved Shane’s lips, his glasses making his eyes look bigger than normal when he glanced fondly at Ryan. “There’s gold in them thar hills?”

Ryan slung his arm over his face, letting out a muffled wheeze. “Not like a fucking grizzled old gold miner. I just mean- Like- The letters and stuff, you know? Everything was so flowery?”

“Flowery?” Shane repeated, shaking his head. “No one actually talked like that. That was just how you wrote, especially to friends and loved ones. If you weren’t poor.” He hesitated, making Ryan move his arm just enough that he could peek at Shane. The man sat his phone down on the bed and turned on his side to more fully face Ryan. “There wasn’t a lot for entertainment back then. If you were poor, you always had chores. Cleaning, mending, getting food ready for the next day. If you were rich enough to have servants that did that for you? Reading, writing, drinking, and gambling were the only real ways to pass the time. So you took the effort to make your letters perfect, even the short ones.”

“Did you ever write a fancy love letter?”

Shane grinned, wiggling his fingers as he said, “I’ve been known to put a pen to paper, jot down some prose. Titillate the young ladies.”

“And the boys?”

Ah shit, he hadn’t meant to say that out loud.

“Ryan,” Shane said before Ryan could take the words back. He sounded delighted. “Are you asking me to say sweet nothings to you? Do you want me to write you poetry? Do you want me to write about how I pine for you?”

The sudden flush burned dully through Ryan’s face and down his chest. Maybe he could convince himself it was just a fever if he tried really hard. “Shut up,” he mumbled, covering his face again.
“Some good old fashioned romancin’? Vampires were considered pretty romantic back in the day, once Stoker got published.”

“Shane,” Ryan whined, grinning despite himself.

A soft touch on his arm, fingertips gently stroking before tapping the back of his hand. Reluctantly, Ryan dropped his arm completely off his face.

Shane was smiling at him, teasing, but utterly fond. “Ryan,” he said softly, his voice taking on a lilt, something of an accent. There was a spark of humor in his eyes, but he sounded delicately sincere when he said, “You are grace and beauty given mortal form. An ephemeral joy, a divine thing, a thing- no, a spirit I desire and will always desire.”

Ryan choked on a breathless laugh, his heart pounding too hard as he said in a strangled voice, “That is the most ridiculous-”

“I covet you,” Shane said over him, his smile widening. “I adore you. I worship at the altar of you, this wild divinity that outshines even Apollo. This genius, this grace that is too good for the firmament of Earth.”

“You said grace twice.”

Shane laughed once, a puff of amused breath, then he gently set his hand on Ryan’s jaw. He paused, his expression growing achingly serious. “How about ‘I shall do one thing in this life- love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die.’”

Ryan was sick. He was covered in a thin layer of dried sweat from too many blankets, his eyes were bleary and probably bloodshot behind his smudged glasses, and his nose was sore and stuffed up, leaving him nasally.

Yet Shane was looking at him as if he was precious. As if Ryan was the single most important thing that had ever happened to him.

“That-” Ryan swallowed hard. “That was-”

“Cringe-worthy?”

Perfect.

Not that Ryan would ever admit that. He started laughing, smiling so hard his cheeks began to hurt. “Yes, you nerd.”

Shane laughed with him, the humor returning to his expression. “That last bit was actually something I stole from Thomas Hardy.”

Ryan blinked. “The guy from Mad Max?”

“No- What?” Shane snorted. “No. Thomas Hardy the 19th century novelist.”

“Never heard of him.”

Rolling onto his back, Shane let out an aggrieved sigh. “You mean I could have convinced you that was all my words?”

“Yeah, probably. Now I’m going to tell everyone that the first time you said ‘I love you’ it was while quoting some dead guy, like the huge fucking dork that you are.”
Shane waved a hand, obviously uncaring. “Eh, gotta maintain my image. No one will be surprised.”

Ryan stared at him for a long moment, then, ignoring that he was sick and probably shouldn’t be getting up in anyone’s space, he rolled into Shane and kissed his shoulder. “I love you, big guy.” God, it felt good to say. He grinned against the fabric of Shane’s shirt. “Despite the flowery words.”

Shane’s laugh had long been one of Ryan’s favorite things. It was starting to become something even more. Something treasured. To be cherished. For as long as he lived.

The area of Vulture Mine was oddly beautiful, despite the barrenness of the surroundings. Ryan couldn’t really spare the mental power to appreciate it, though.

Outdoor shots could always be tricky, especially with the ever changing light. He and TJ had made the joint decision to wait until it was fully dark to film the intro for the episode, just so they would know that their light source would be consistent. But that pushed the entire schedule back by a couple of hours.

While both Vulture Mine and the small town built next to it were remarkably cool and fascinating in the daylight, the coming sunset was filling Ryan with a weird mix of anticipation and dread. The abandoned buildings, detritus, and dry, rugged landscape around them was creepy enough in the daylight, let alone in the darkness. The knowledge of those extra two hours in the dark weighed heavily on him.

The knowledge that he had gotten his blood test results back also weighed on him. It was amazing that a short, dry phone call from a medical professional could so easily turn his life upside down.

A part of Ryan, the part that hated making huge decisions, had hoped that he would be like the majority of the population and his blood would violently reject the vampire virus. Then the decision would be out of his hands.

The joke was on him, because it turned out that he was ridiculously compatible with the virus.

As soon as he had hung up, his Uber to the airport had shown up and he had been too busy to really process the news. He wanted to tell Shane, but it was too personal of a conversation to have while surrounded by strangers and their co-workers. That meant that his brain would sometimes drift towards the possibility of- of it. Of being a vampire.

There was going to be extra editing to cut out all the times he stared off into space.

It didn’t help that Shane was being twitchier than he normally was during location shoots. Now that Ryan knew how territorial vampires could be, he understood why Shane had a tendency to stick to the crew.

There was something different about how he was acting at Vulture Mine.

At first, when they had parked and Shane had gotten his first look at the ghost town, he had been quietly delighted. He hadn’t even mocked the clear signs of tourism as loudly as Ryan had expected. There was an Old West feel to their surroundings that had put a kind of childish glee in Shane and it was one of the few times where Ryan had seen him look genuinely excited to explore a location.

The mine was another matter entirely, but Ryan didn’t think anyone would feel particularly cheerful next to it.
But as the sun set and it got darker and darker around them, Shane had started to act weird. When he wasn’t directly in front of the camera, he was either standing completely still, head cocked in a listening position, or he was so close to Ryan that they had tripped each other up a couple of times.

He was able to tamp it down fairly well during the actual filming, though. Which was good because Ryan was twitchy enough for the both of them.

At one point, while they were walking back towards the area they had set up for filming the intro, Shane stopped dead in the middle of the graveled path, staring off into the darkness. It took the rest of them a few seconds to realize that Shane wasn’t with them. TJ quietly nudged Mark to turn the camera on, just in case something good was happening, but Ryan ignored them and made his way back to Shane.

“Hey,” he said softly. He was pretty sure that the crunch of gravel would have alerted Shane to his presence, but Ryan didn’t want to startle him either way. “What’s up? Do you hear something?”

Shane tilted his head, not ignoring Ryan, but it was clear his attention was elsewhere. “Maybe. I’m not sure.”

Ryan knew that his question was only going to be mocked, but he had to ask it. “Like… a spirit?”

Slowly, with a pained expression, Shane turned to Ryan and just stared at him.

“Right. So, probably not ghosts.”

“Ryan,” Shane said solemnly, putting his hand on Ryan’s shoulder. “If I ever thought I saw or heard a ghost or a ghoul, you would be the first person I told. A therapist would be the second.”

Batting at Shane’s hand, Ryan grinned and started walking back towards the others. “You’ll be a believer, yet!”

Shane followed after him, taking one last look out into the darkness as he went.

They managed to film the rest of their planned scenes, including the creepy as hell schoolhouse and the bordello that had far too many bats, without Shane acting too weird. As they began packing up their equipment, Shane grew more and more distracted. It was utterly unlike him, since by this point he was usually more than happy to help out so that they could get out of the location faster.

Devon was going through her checklist, making sure they had grabbed everything, when she hummed a short, frustrated noise. “Hey,” she said, interrupting Ryan and TJ’s discussion about the best shots they had just gotten. “Did you guys remember the battery pack you switched out in the bordello?”

Mark grimaced, looking up from where he was standing with his camera, fast forwarding through all of the footage to double check that nothing had glitched or been accidentally deleted. “Ah, I might have left it on one of the tables.” He pressed a couple of buttons and sat the camera down on top of the rental van’s hood. “I’ll look for it.”

“You stay here and make sure we got all of the establishing shots. I’ll go get the battery pack,” TJ volunteered, which spared Ryan from having to do it. Thank God. He didn’t want to go back into the building by himself.

TJ was maybe fifteen yards away, just within the edge of the headlights of their van, when Shane jerked out of his preoccupation and yelled, “Hey, Teej, wait, let me-” He glanced at Ryan and Devon and continued with, “-Mark should go with you.”
Turning on his heel, TJ took a step backwards as he shouted, “Unlike some people, I’m not afraid of bats.”

There was a shift of gravel and TJ startled, spinning back around to shine his flashlight into the darkness. A flash of movement caught the edge of the light, too fast for anyone to see what it was. Ryan’s heart felt like it was trying to crawl up his throat. Had that been a coyote or cougar? It had looked too tall for either of those, but did Arizona have bears? Oh, God, Arizona didn’t have bears, did it?

Ryan’s thoughts were interrupted by Shane growling; a loud, animalistic sound that was more like a large dog’s growl than something that came from a human throat. His voice was almost unrecognizable when he said, “TJ, back up slowly towards us. Slowly.”

Why did Shane sound scared under the growl?

TJ took one small step backwards, then another, slowly swinging his flashlight back and forth. All the light revealed was broken, dusty rocks and buildings. “What the hell was that-”

Another blur of movement, then TJ disappeared with a choked off grunt of a shout.

Ryan blinked, frozen in shock, before Shane took off so fast that he also disappeared in a blur.

Sharing a stunned look with Mark and Devon, Ryan ran forward, turning on his flashlight with hands that shook. “Shane?! TJ?! Where-”

A snarl to his right made Ryan spin, frantically shining his light in that direction.

The beam of the flashlight flickered over three figures, two of them moving so fast that Ryan couldn’t really comprehend what he was seeing for a breathless second. The sounds of fighting, snarling, and bitten off yelps of pain were horrifying, but it was all happening too quickly for him to see what exactly was going on.

There was a sudden vicious growl, then TJ went sprawling onto the ground, a limp body that was being clung to by a- a man?

Ryan let out a faint, breathless, ‘No’, unable to believe what he was seeing.

It was a skeletal figure of a man in tattered clothes that had a grasp on TJ’s wrist. His hair and beard clearly matted and dirty, even in the light of the flashlight. He was fending off Shane with nails that were so long they looked like claws and there were sharp, jagged fangs in his mouth that gleamed dully when he hissed at Shane.

A feral vampire.

Those were myths, just anti-vampire propaganda, there was no such thing as vampires that went crazy, they didn’t-

Ryan’s panicked thoughts were interrupted by a blur of movement as Shane lunged for the other vampire’s arm and twisted, the snap of bone audible in the night air. The feral vampire let go TJ with a shriek that sounded more animal than human, scuttling backwards and making a tortured, mewling noise.

Now Shane was the one to crouch over TJ’s form, his own fangs on display as he snarled, “Mine!”

The strange vampire backed up to the edge of the light, cradling his arm to his chest. His eyes didn’t
focus as he looked from TJ to Shane to the rest of them standing in shock to the side. Ryan braced himself, abruptly sure that the vampire was going to rush the three of them, but the feral figure turned and fled instead.

The entire attack had happened in less than a minute.

Ryan started to run towards Shane as soon as he could no longer hear running footsteps, but stumbled and drew back when the movement made Shane growl and snap at him, hunching farther over TJ. Ryan brought his hands up and swallowed. His mouth felt horribly dry. “Shane, it’s me,” he whispered, his heart pounding so hard that it was making him feel lightheaded. “Let me look at TJ, I need to see that he’s alright.”

Shane tilted his head to the side, his lips slowly falling from their snarl. There was a focused, predatory set to his stance, his eyes tracking every single movement as Ryan cautiously edged forward.

He didn’t want to admit it, even in the privacy of his own mind, but Shane didn’t look human in that moment.

“I’m fine,” TJ murmured very quietly, a whisper that Ryan could barely hear. “Shane, I’m fine.”

The sound made Ryan jump, but Shane merely glanced down at TJ, then went right back to watching Ryan intently.

Ryan took a deep breath, reminded himself that he was dating the vampire that was currently crouched over his co-worker, then boldly took another step forward. When Shane did nothing, he continued walking towards the two of them, his hands out, palm up. He had a horrible, stupid idea.

Shaking so hard that he felt like he was vibrating, so scared that sweat was soaking into his shirt to the point that it was beginning to cling to him, Ryan didn’t stop until he was nearly standing on TJ’s legs.

He thrust his arm in front of Shane’s face, practically smacking the man in the mouth with his hand.

Ryan braced himself, half expecting to feel fangs tearing into the delicate skin and tendons of his wrist.

Nothing happened.

Ryan risked a quick glance down and was surprised to see that Shane had his eyes closed. It looked like he was smelling Ryan’s skin. Which was a lot better than ripping into his veins, so Ryan wasn’t going to say a single thing against it.

After a long breathless moment, Shane shook his head once. When he opened his eyes, there was a spark of recognition in them.

Holy shit, it worked.

Ryan vowed right then and there that he was never going to tell Shane he had gotten the idea of using his own blood as a distraction from a bad vampire romance movie.

“Is everyone okay?” Shane asked hoarsely, slowly reaching up to cling onto Ryan’s wrist. He stood up just as slowly, revealing long tears in his shirt, blood dripping sluggishly in a few places.

“Shit, Shane,” Ryan exclaimed, instantly forgetting any fear he might have felt towards the man.
“Are you okay?”

“I’ll be fine,” Shane answered dismissively. “Devon? Mark?”

“We’re okay,” Devon said from a few feet away, her and Mark standing nearly back to back in the headlights of the van. “TJ?”

Everyone looked down at TJ. “I think my wrist is broken,” he said conversationally. “Can I get up now, Madej? Are you done going caveman on me?”

Normally, Shane reveled in bad jokes directed at him. Maybe even another five minutes would have been enough time for him to relax, to respond to that dig in the teasing manner it was intended.

But rather than scoff or return the joke, Shane stiffened and looked away, drawing his shoulders up like he wanted to disappear. “Someone should call the police. While he- while the vampire is still injured.”

“Would there even be police out here?”

“Call someone,” Shane snapped at Devon. “Before some damn tourist gets killed.” He started to stride off towards the van, but stopped when he got a few feet away, looking into the darkness then back at the four of them. It was obvious that he wanted to storm off in anger or shame, but didn’t want to leave them alone with the feral vampire still out there.

Ryan exchanged a look with TJ, offering him a hand to help him up even as he arched an eyebrow and jerked his head towards Shane. “We barely have service out here,” TJ said, remarkably calm despite the awkward way he was holding his hand. “Throw the equipment in the back and lets get out of here. As soon as we’re closer to Phoenix, we’ll call the cops. In the morning we’ll call the managers of this place so they know to keep it closed.”

“You know we should probably let someone at BuzzFeed know-” Devon cut herself off when Ryan shook his head at her.

TJ walked up to Shane and nudged him with his shoulder. “Hey. That was a shitty joke earlier. Thanks. For saving me.”

Shane was silent for a long time. Eventually he sighed and said, “We should go. The farther away we get, the better.”

There wasn’t anything they could do except agree.

The entire drive back into Phoenix, Shane put his earphones in, closed his eyes, and didn’t reply to a single question. And he never let go of Ryan.

Ryan was left to wonder, in the silence of his mind-

*Am I willing to become that inhuman?*

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**Chapter End Notes**

So much fluff. So much.
Seriously, y'all are the best. I'm a little overwhelmed by the response! <3

(Again, thanks to Emilia for the Polish!)
People *sucked*.

Police officers that eyed Shane like he was about to go on a killing spree, despite TJ’s insistence that Shane had *saved* him.

A barrage of phone calls from the Mine managers and BuzzFeed HR, who had all delicately talked around the fact that Shane had chased off another vampire.

The grim silence and pointed glances of the medical personnel that worked on TJ’s wrist and the scrapes he had acquired.

The woman on the plane who had loudly asked the flight attendant for a different seat when Shane had sat down next to her.

Person after person, who saw Shane as nothing more than a monster. Ryan was going to have permanent marks left in his palms from the number of times he had clenched his hands into fists to keep from saying something that would just make the situation worse.

By the time they made it back to LA, Ryan could have kissed the Uber driver that hadn’t given either of them a second glance.

The last light of the setting sun stabbed into Ryan’s eyes as they got out of the car and stumbled up the steps to Shane’s apartment. He groaned and tugged his hat lower, trudging after Shane blindly. They hadn’t discussed Ryan coming over, but then again, he hadn’t really given Shane a choice. He didn’t think the man was in a good mental place for being alone.

Besides, he had left his nifty little bloodletting kit at Shane’s, since that was where it did the most good, and it was nearly time for him to give blood, anyways.

As soon as they were both inside, the door closed behind them, Ryan did what he had been longing to do all day.

He drew Shane into a hug and just let himself exist for a few moments. After a second of hesitation, Shane returned the hug, letting out a long, weary sigh that sounded bone-deep. Ryan wanted to say something to comfort Shane, but he wasn’t entirely sure what he could say. And what if Shane preferred to pretend nothing had happened? What if Ryan bringing it up would just hurt in the long run?

After some time had past in silence, the two of them just enjoying each other’s presence, Shane drew back, making a show of wrinkling his nose. “I smell like the airport. I’m going to take a shower.”

“Don’t take all the hot water.”
Shane started down the hallway, shedding clothes as he went. “I called it first, you’ll get what you get.”

Ryan made some kind of tired noise of protest, too caught up in his own head to respond in his usual way. He nudged his bags to the side so that he wouldn’t trip over them later and wandered into the kitchen.

The bloodletting kit that always made him feel like a heroin addict sat on the counter next to the kitchen knives, which was oddly appropriate. He automatically went through the motions of washing his hands thoroughly, then grabbed the kit and an empty blood bag with it’s too long tube and sat at the kitchen table.

The class he had taken had been run by a short, cheerful nurse who had been an absolute tyrant about doing everything correctly, so Ryan lined everything up with rote, memorized movements, lest he somehow incur the wrath of a man that barely came up to his chin. He methodically tied the tourniquet around his arm and rubbed the crook of his elbow with an alcohol pad. Luckily, that spot had healed over and he wouldn’t have to try and go looking for some other vein. Sometimes he tried to get blood out of his right arm, but he could only really do that if Shane helped. There was faint concern lingering in the back of his mind that all of the best spots would eventually be nothing but scar tissue, but that was a problem for the future.

It was amusing that two months ago, he had been- well, not afraid of needles, but he’d had a healthy dose of respect for them. Now, Ryan didn’t have any problems with tearing open the package the needle came in and getting everything attached.

But when he curled his hand into a fist and set the needle against his skin, he paused.

The memory of Shane crouched over TJ, his hand wrapped around Ryan’s wrist as he quietly breathed in the scent of blood running through Ryan’s veins was something that was impossible to forget.

In the midst of being the most inhuman he had ever seen the guy, Shane hadn’t attacked Ryan. He hadn’t bitten down on the source of blood that had literally been against his mouth.

That spoke to an incredible amount of control, whether Shane chose to believe that or not. Did that control come from decades of practice or because that was just how Shane was?

Would he have that same level of control if he became a vampire?

Ryan’s mind went blank for a long second.

God, he had almost forgotten that dry phone call. Carefully, keeping the needle off the surface of the table, Ryan sat everything down with a quiet click and rustle of the tube. He stared unseeing at the empty blood bag.

Could he really drink blood?

Could he bite someone?

Could he deal with the level of prejudice that he had seen Shane go through? Possibly for hundreds of years?

… Could he live for centuries, with only Shane as a constant companion?

“Ryan?”
Shane’s voice startled Ryan, but he only turned his head to watch Shane walk into the kitchen, he didn’t jump. He felt like he was too mired in his thoughts to react physically.

“You okay?” Shane looked worried, but what drew Ryan’s attention was the fact that he was only wearing sweatpants. There was still water clinging to the tips of his hair. “You-” Shane twisted his mouth in a faint frown and moved the other chair so that he could sit, angled right next to Ryan. “You don’t have to do this right now.” He was facing Ryan, but he wouldn’t meet his eyes. “I understand if you don’t want to.”

It took Ryan a second to figure out what Shane was trying to say. “Of course I don’t want to, it’s a needle,” he said, trying to ignore the way Shane’s expression fell. “But, no, that’s not- I’m not starving you, big guy-”

“I’m not going to starve-”

“-I was just thinking about…” Fuck, he couldn’t keep it to himself. “Shane, I need to tell you something.”

Shane hunched forward as if he was expecting a blow, then deliberately straightened his back and shoulders. He still refused to look directly at Ryan.

Ryan took a deep breath and opened his mouth. Nothing came out as abrupt worry surged through him. What if Shane didn’t want to be with him past a human lifespan? Hell, they hadn't even skirted the topic of marriage, but here Ryan was about to bring up the idea of forever.

It was the careful way Shane was holding himself, as if braced for bad news, that made Ryan finally say something.

“Before we left for the shoot, I got a call about the, uh, blood sample I gave to check if I was compatible with the virus, and well-” Deep breath. “It was positive.”

Shane's face was painfully blank when he said, “That means that you-” he hesitated.

“I'm compatible,” Ryan finished for him. “I can… If I wanted, I could be a vampire. I wouldn't die.”

Saying the words out loud was so surreal that Ryan felt for a second that he was in a dream.

There was a long, tense, silent moment where Shane just stared. Then his face crumpled into a twisted expression of such strong emotion that Ryan couldn’t read it. Shane closed his eyes and leaned forward, bracing his elbows on his knees so he that could rest his forehead on one hand. Every movement was slow and careful, as if he felt fragile enough to break.

Shane drew in a shaky breath, then just held it.

“Uh. Shane?”

“Christ,” Shane said faintly. “Warn a guy.”

Ryan started bouncing his leg up and down, his nerves getting the best of him. Was Shane excited? Relieved? Dreading having to let Ryan down gently? Would he even acknowledge what Ryan had just said? Shane had a tendency to shy away from emotional conversations, would he try to do that now?

Another full minute passed in silence. Ryan knew, because he watched the clock on the stove change.
Finally, Shane reached over and settled his hand on Ryan's knee, stilling the bouncing. “Ryan…”

“What?” Ryan held onto the thinnest semblance of calm with grim determination. “You gotta- You gotta say something, man.”

“I-”

The hand on Ryan’s knee flexed, drawing his attention to it. There was a fine tremble going through Shane’s fingers, despite how tense they looked.

Shane wouldn’t meet his eyes.

“This doesn’t have to mean anything,” Ryan said suddenly, his voice distant. His entire body felt distant, as if he was no longer fully present. “I just wanted to know and… Now I know.” Make a joke, make a joke, make a fucking joke- “Hey, I guess that means I’m special. Tenth percentile of the population, right?”

It wasn’t a good joke, but it was enough that Ryan felt like he could stand and- He wasn’t sure what he wanted to do, but he needed to move. So he stood up, carefully untied the tourniquet from around his arm, and started to walk away.

He would take a shower, he would not cry, he would change his clothes into something comfortable, and then he would take it from there. It was a solid plan.

Before he could take more than a single step, Shane gently grasped his arm, bringing him to a stop. Ryan closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and looked over his shoulder at Shane. The question he was about ask died in his throat when he saw the stricken look on Shane’s face. “Hey, whoa, are you- What’s wrong?”

Shane stood and picked him up without warning. Ryan yelped and scrambled to hang on to bare shoulders, his eyes wide. “What the hell-”

Other than a couple of times during sex, because how could they not take advantage of it a little, Shane had never so casually used his strength on Ryan before. The guy always seemed a little scared to do more than a normal, gentle touch. So Ryan had no idea what to do with the fact that he was currently being held up like he was a freaking child, Shane’s hands steady under his thighs. Shane’s arms weren’t even flexed under his weight.

It was a good thing that Shane’s apartment had fairly high ceilings, because Ryan felt uncomfortably like he was going to hit his head if he straightened up.

“Shane?” He tried, his voice cracking embarrassingly as he curled over Shane’s head. It wasn’t like he was afraid of heights, but it was a long way down if Shane dropped him. “Why?”

Shane craned his head back to look up at Ryan, his expression still unreadable. “I’m not human.”

Of all the things Shane could have said, that was so far out of left field that Ryan had to just stare for a second. He started to spread his hands in a ‘duh’ gesture, then quickly resettled his grip on Shane’s shoulders when the movement made him wobble. “I’m aware of that,” Ryan said a little too loudly. “That doesn’t explain why you picked me up!”

“Ryan, I-” Shane cut himself off, his mouth twisting down in a frown of frustration. “This-” He lifted Ryan a little higher in demonstration. “This isn’t normal. Humans aren’t meant to be this strong. When I first woke up after dying, I accidentally ripped a doorknob off a door. I once threw a rock out of boredom and it went through a tree. That’s not natural. It’s wrong. You can’t want that. I
don’t even understand how you can want to be around me.”

Honestly, vampiric strength was something that Ryan thought he would never have an issue with, but he also thought he understood the point that Shane was trying to make. And it was a stupid point. He wasn’t afraid of Shane, why would he be afraid of having the same strength?

“You’re an idiot.”

Shane jerked his head back, his eyebrows drawing together in a faintly affronted expression.

“I watched you break another vampire’s arm like it was a toothpick,” Ryan said. He tried to ignore how precarious he felt as he cupped Shane’s face in his hands. “I know that you’re strong as fuck. But you know what? There’s a guy that goes to my gym that I’m sure could do the exact same thing. You’re special, but you’re not that special.”

“That’s not what—”

“And if you call yourself ‘wrong’ again I’m going to be pretty upset,” Ryan said over him. “For fuck’s sake, Shane, you’re taking the emo vampire thing a little far. Next you’ll be telling me you’re a monster.”

Shane dropped him.

It wasn’t a jarring drop, it wasn’t like Shane had thrown him. There had been enough time for Ryan to get his legs under himself, but the abrupt change in position made his head spin. He blinked a few times, bracing himself with an arm against the wall. “The fuck?” The glare he got was blistering, but Ryan was starting to get a little angry himself. “Seriously, what the fuck is your problem?”

“My problem is that I’m not human,” Shane snapped, thumping his palm into the wall above Ryan’s shoulder in emphasis. When the plaster cracked and Ryan’s heartbeat tripped, he winced, but didn’t lose his glare. “No vampire is. We’re not just sunburn-prone humans with a liquid diet, we’re different. We’re unnatural.” He looked like he was struggling for words. “The curse- the virus, it’s horrible. And I never want to see you have to go through with that.”

Ryan swallowed and forced himself to say, “If you don’t want to be saddled with me for the next few hundred years, all you have to do is say so. You don’t have to come up with some bullshit to try and scare me.”

Shane faltered, his expression falling. “Wh-what? No, that—” He closed his eyes, shaking his head as he rubbed at his forehead. “Why do you always make me say these things out loud?”

“What things?”

Laughing tiredly, Shane took a step forward, crowding Ryan into the wall. “Anyone else would have taken the hint and dropped it by now.” Before Ryan could reply to that, Shane brought a hand up to Ryan’s neck, fingers curling around to slide through the short hairs at his nape. “Our instincts run close to the surface. When I’m calm, I can almost convince myself that I’m nearly as human as I was one hundred and sixty years ago. But…” His lips quirked in the semblance of a small smile, his fingertips pressing harder into Ryan’s skin. “I didn’t save TJ, Ryan.”

“Yes you—”

Shane brought his other hand up, his palm cold against Ryan’s mouth. “I know that’s what you guys have been telling everyone, and I appreciate it. But any vampire that hears the story is going to know what the truth was.” Dropping his voice, his gaze intense, Shane said with a heavy seriousness, “I
Ryan furrowed his eyebrows together, confused. “Vulture Mine?” he asked, his voice muffled by Shane’s hand.

There was a faint suggestion of a laugh that escaped Shane. “No. TJ is mine. Mark and Devon.” He drew his palm down, twisting his wrist so that his fingers trailed down Ryan’s lips. “You.”

Ryan swallowed.

Another quiet laugh. “Half of the people that work at the office, I’ve got to admit.” Shane’s eyes lazily roamed Ryan’s face, like he was just taking him in. “If the vampire from the New York offices ever had to visit, it would be tense. And why I’ll never go to New York.”

“I don’t under-”

“You’re mine,” Shane said, the fingers on Ryan’s neck pressing harder. “I know that’s wrong. I know you’re not an object. But my instincts want to put you in a room and never let you out so that no one else can touch you.”

“Shane.”

“It’s a constant struggle. People are right to see us as monsters.” When Ryan started to glare, Shane just smiled crookedly. “I love you as sanely as I can manage to love you. But what that means is that when you told me you wouldn’t die? That I could have you forever?”

A pause. They stared at each other.

Shane leaned down, until his lips brushed the top of Ryan’s ear. The cold skin of his bare stomach pressed against Ryan’s arm. “Truthfully, Ryan? I wanted to pin you to the table, rip my own wrist open, and force it into your mouth. I even thought about pinching your nose shut so that you would have to swallow my blood.” His sigh was loud from so close. “I still want to. But I wouldn’t do that to you. To anyone. I wasn’t given a choice. I’m not going to make the same mistake that my maker— that the woman who infected me made.”

He stepped back, his expression studiously blank as he finally stopped touching Ryan. “Don’t ever think that I don’t want you. But I think I love you too much to see you go through all the shit I went through.” Then he narrowed his eyes and tilted his head. “Ryan?”

Ryan cleared his throat, his stare dead ahead and unseeing as he put his hand on Shane’s shoulder. “I understand that this is a very important thing and that you’re making a very valid point.” He shifted his gaze to meet Shane’s eyes. “But I gotta be honest with you here, big guy. I’m dealing with a semi right now and I think I didn’t really internalize the last couple sentences.”

Shane stared at him for a long moment, his expression doing something complicated, then he just started laughing. “You- What?” He covered his face with one hand, reluctantly grinning. “How? Why?”

“I don’t know, man,” Ryan complained. He gestured at Shane’s chest. “You’re half naked and you keep touching me and you said something about pinning me to the table. All of my blood went south at that point. I get it, you’re worryingly possessive, but there’s not enough blood in my brain right now for me to make good decisions about that.”

“Fucking hell, Bergara,” Shane said, still laughing. “I’m trying to convey something serious, here.”
“I know, I know! But I’m only hu-” Ryan groaned. “I’m not finishing that sentence.”

Shane shook his head, then kissed him; a long, but chaste kiss, despite Ryan’s attempts to turn it into something more interesting. The anger and pain between them dissipated. Tension lingered, but it wasn’t as sharp as it had been. Ryan knew the conversation was far from over, but he got the feeling that they both needed to think on it.

After pulling back, Shane muttered, “We have time. You don’t have to make a decision now. I just got a little caught up in the excitement of the moment, I guess.”

“And you’re not just letting me down gently because you don’t want me to be a vampire?”

Cocking his head at Ryan’s tentative question, Shane said, somewhat incredulously, “The idea of you being a vampire hasn’t left my head since you shared blood with me. Thinking about you biting me has given me more awkward boners than Hedy Lamarr did in the 50s.”

Well that was good to know.

“You don’t let yourself do what you want very often, do you?”

Shane visibly twitched. His smile turned into something fake. “I’m not exactly in the habit of denying myself. You should see the camera I’ve been thinking of buying.”

Ryan frowned. “I’m not talking about buying shit and you know it.” He let his expression soften. “I mean… doing vampire shit. You try pretty hard to act human, don’t you?”

“I mean,” Shane gestured helplessly, “You make it sound like I want to go hang upside down from the rafters or sleep in a coffin. And while I’ve seen a comfortable looking coffin or two in my day, they’re not exactly my idea of prime real estate.”

“Stop being deliberately obtuse.”

Shane made an annoyed face and looked away. Finally, he sighed, his shoulders slumping. “Ryan, if I listened to my instincts all the time, I’d be just like the poor fucker at the Mine, holed up in a cave somewhere. And caves aren’t known for their wifi.”

Ryan gently knocked his knuckles against Shane’s collarbone, letting the back of his hand rest against chilled skin. “I have to think that there’s a good balance between completely denying yourself and going full-on Gollum.”

“My precious,” Shane muttered, his smile quick but real.

Shaking his head in amused fondness, Ryan brushed his fingertips up Shane’s shoulder and neck, letting the touch linger. “I’m just saying, you didn’t bite me when I shoved my wrist in your mouth, so it’s not like you don’t have control.” He paused for a second, thought ‘fuck it,’ and added, “You’re allowed to ask for things.”

Shane raised one eyebrow at him, then brought his hand up to cover Ryan’s, pressing their fingers against his own neck. “I feel like I’m being led.”

Ryan grinned and raised his other hand, pinching his thumb and finger together. “Little bit.”

“You’re lucky you’re cute,” Shane said. He heaved a dramatic sigh, and with an exasperated expression that didn’t entirely hide the way his voice shook slightly, asked, “Can I bite you?”
A wave of prickling tingles ran up Ryan’s spine, the phantom sensation of lips on his throat so strong that his entire neck felt overly sensitive. He tried not to let that show when he grinned wider and replied, “Can I fuck you?”

Shane narrowed his eyes. “Eh, I guess. That’s fair.”

“Then we have a deal.”

“Are we going to seal it with a handshake?” Shane asked, laughing.

“If that's what you're into, dude.”

Ryan was really glad they’d already had sex.

If he had had to worry about the process of sex with Shane for the first time and biting, he either would have blown as soon as he got a hand on his dick or he would have passed out before either of them got naked.

Luckily, they were already past the fun but awkward stages where everything was one giant question mark. He didn't have to worry about how he looked or where the lube was. Or where the towels were, since he got the feeling the ‘wet spot’ was a bit more intense when a vampire was involved. Most importantly, he knew he could trust Shane not to mock him for asking random logistical questions.

“I should probably fuck you first, right? What with blood pressure and things.”

Shane raised one eyebrow at him, amused, but answered readily from where he was standing naked next to the bed. “Probably. Depends on how much you expect me to take.”

“I didn't think you were just going to bite me and not drink the blood.” Ryan tilted his head and wondered, “Wouldn't that be like going to a restaurant, ordering a meal, then just smelling it?”

“Oh ho, you equating yourself to a nice dinner out? Someone's getting a little big for his britches.”

Ryan puffed up his chest and grinned proudly. The fact that he wasn’t wearing any clothes made the action even better. “This is Michelin Star level blood you’re about to partake in, here.”

Shane snorted, which was just rude. “I don’t have to take much. I could just lick the blood off until the puncture marks close up. I’ve had a lover or two who preferred that during sex.”

“Why the hell have you had lovers that you could bite like it was nothing, but with me it’s like your mouth is wired shut?” Ryan paused. “Nevermind, that’s not important right now.” He spread out a couple of towels on the bed, thinking to himself. Throwing the lube into the middle of the towels, he looked up at Shane through his lashes. “What would you usually do?”

“Make you come and then bite you hard enough that I don’t have to suck, but not on a major artery,” Shane said, flopping onto the bed. “Are we doing this or up what?”

“Oh, well, if you’re going to ask that like that-” Ryan sat on the edge of the bed, grasping Shane’s ankle. “You know what?”
“Hmm?”

Ryan absently scratched his nails up through Shane’s leg hair and said slowly, trying to feel out the idea. “I’m going to fuck you until you come. Then you’re going to bite me multiple times. All over my shoulders. Maybe my wrists.” It was amazing that his voice was so calm. He was a little proud of himself for that as he stretched his arm until he could caress the top of Shane’s thigh. “Mark me up, Shane. Let everyone know I’m yours.”

Shane’s voice was faint and his eyes wide when he visibly shuddered and said, “Well if you insist. I suppose I could accommodate that request.”

“Yeah, you’d really be doing me a favor,” Ryan replied wryly. “It’s not like you’re hard right now or anything.”

“Ignore that, it’s a thing that happens.”

Ryan laughed softly. “Your fingers or mine?”

“If we’re going to be hedonistic about it, yours.”

Reaching for the lube, Ryan laughed again. “Sure, make me do all the work.”

“What can I say? I have to twist weirdly and I’m lazy.”

“You didn’t have any problems on Saturday,” Ryan said, crawling onto the bed and kneeling in between Shane’s invitingly open legs.

Hooking his hand under his thigh, curling and pulling his long leg out to the side, Shane grinned and winked. “I had motivation. I still can’t believe you were sexting me at your parents’ house.”

“Like you’ve never done the same,” Ryan said absently, most of his attention on the sight in front of him. Sometimes he couldn’t decide if he wanted to get his mouth on Shane’s cock or his balls or go all in and open the guy up with his tongue. He smeared lube between his thumb and first two fingers, amused that the cold of the gel no longer shocked him. Point one for regular sex with a room temperature vampire.

Shane let out an huff of air that edged into laughter and drawled, “No, I can’t say I ever used a cellphone at my parent’s house.”

Ryan paused. “Right. I forget that you’re old as dicks sometimes.”

“I did write a saucy little note or t-” Shane trailed off, his breath stuttering when Ryan leaned over him and casually started mouthing at the head of his cock.

“Hmm?” Ryan hummed, not looking up as he continued to run his tongue over the tip, intentionally making the touch light and wet. He brushed his slick fingers down under Shane’s balls and over the edge of his hole, aimlessly rubbing lube around in what he knew was a maddening way.

They had done this enough times now that Ryan was starting to know just what Shane liked; slow, teasing, unhurried stretching that usually left him a desperate mess, despite how he would put on a show bitching about the time it took. Ryan pushed the tip of his finger into tight, grasping muscle, then just held it there. He grinned when Shane sighed, annoyed.

Since he couldn’t really lick or suck while grinning, Ryan straightened up, sweeping his gaze down the length of Shane’s body, just to appreciate what he was seeing all over again. Shane had his other
arm behind his head, his expression too fond for the entire situation.

Ryan was tempted to call Shane out on it, but he had to admit, if only to himself, that he liked being looked at with such obvious care.

“You actually going to do anything down there or just stare at me?”

“What, you have a hot date tonight?” Ryan bluntly trailed his eyes down as he pushed his finger farther into Shane in a smooth slide, enjoying the way Shane twitched and clenched around his finger at the sudden move.

God, Shane was always so tight. It had been something of a surprise the first time to learn that Shane wasn’t quite as hot inside as Ryan was used to, but that was always ignored in favor of just how tight he was. Ryan had idly wondered before if always being sinfully tight was a vampire thing, but he hadn’t yet gotten drunk enough to ask. It would take a fair amount of alcohol to get him to ask such a bad porn-worthy line out loud.

“A date with the back of my eyelids,” Shane said belatedly, his hand flexing under his knee. The action drew Ryan’s eye.

That really was too much leg for one man.

The memory of Shane saying something about him being a vampire floated through Ryan's mind as he crooked his finger. Half of his attention was on the way Shane’s breath caught, but the other half was thinking about vampires and arteries and biting.

Shane's thigh was right there.

It wasn’t all that hard to slide his free hand up the inside of Shane’s outflung thigh, then push a little, directing him to tilt his leg a bit higher.

“I don’t really move that way, Ry-”

Ryan bent down and bit him, harder than he normally would have, right where he was sure the artery in the thigh ran. He absently pushed his finger back and forth at the same time, an afterthought to his sudden urge to try something new.

Shane made some kind of noise, one Ryan had never heard before. Whatever it was, it was shocked, high-pitched, and ended on something that could have been a whimper if he was feeling charitable.

That hadn’t sounded like a bad noise, but just to be sure Ryan glanced upwards to meet Shane’s wide-eyed stare, the man’s mouth hanging open to reveal the tips of fangs as he panted harshly.

“That...was a good reaction?”

Shane blinked slowly at him, then collapsed back onto the pillows under his head with a dramatic, aggrieved sigh.

So it was a good noise.

“Was it the biting or-” Ryan wiggled his finger in demonstration.

Rubbing his hand over his face, Shane muttered, “Gee, I wonder if the vampire likes biting.”

Bantering had always been their thing. It was a comfortable fallback, something that both of them knew they could rely on and engage in without much effort. Once they had gotten used to each
other’s bodies— and they had made a concerted effort to do so in as short a time as possible— sex occasionally included more talking than actual conversations did. Shane was downright chatty until a certain point, after which he was reduced to heavy breathing and short, helpless groans.

Ryan had to admit that he wasn’t any better, his competitive nature leading him to always trying to one up Shane when it came to zingers and jokes. If he could make Shane laugh and orgasm so hard that he became a boneless mess, then he considered it a job well done.

He didn’t want that this time.

As much as he loved their back-and-forths and the crinkles Shane got at the corners of his eyes when he smiled, Ryan wanted this to be special. He wanted this to be something neither of them forgot.

“So hey, tell me if this becomes too much.”

“What-”

Ryan bit his thigh again, harder than before.

Shane melted. It was the only word that Ryan could think of to describe it. His body went completely limp as Ryan continued to dig teeth into his thigh.

It wasn’t like Ryan had never bitten Shane or left impressive hickies that would have lasted for days on someone that was human. But those had always been little nips and nibbles, just bringing his teeth into the equation to make things a bit more interesting. He had never bitten with the intent to cause pain or leave marks. Never thought about trying to make Shane bleed.

In short, he had never acted like a vampire.

Apparently he should have tried this weeks ago.

He moved farther up Shane’s thigh towards his hip, biting over and over again as he went. His teeth were too blunt to do more than pinch skin and muscle together, but that didn’t seem to matter. When he reached the edge of Shane’s hipbone, Shane moaned, the kind of sound Ryan usually associated with porn or really good massages.

That was hot. He tipped his head up to stare at Shane for a second, dumbfounded. Shane was chatty in the lead up, sure, but when it came to making sex noises, he was incredibly quiet. Ryan had never heard anything like that from him.

Any thought of going slow went out the window. Ryan needed to be inside Shane as soon as possible or he was going to go crazy. His cock had become a heavy weight that was impossible to ignore.

One finger became two, the lube dropped to the side without the cap, but Ryan couldn’t give less of a shit if it leaked. He was too busy sliding both fingers into Shane; his only immediate goal to stretch and loosen Shane the bare minimum needed. The sight of his fingers disappearing into Shane’s tight hole, the rim stretching around his knuckles, made him whisper a heartfelt ‘fuck’.

Rather than continue to watch something that would bring him far too close to the brink, Ryan curled over Shane and bit him again on the thigh. This time Shane clenched around his fingers, gasping and moaning something strangled that could have been Ryan’s name.

Abruptly, Shane reached down and unceremoniously tugged at Ryan’s wrist. “Fuck, Ryan- that-,” he shuddered as he pulled Ryan’s fingers out of himself, “That’s enough, that- Come on, let me- I’m
going to ride you," he said in a rush, sitting up and getting onto his knees as he fumbled for the lube. His expression was on the edge of unhinged as he pushed at Ryan’s shoulders.

Ryan sat back on his ass, awkwardly trying to situate his legs. “Are you sure? I barely had time to-” He let out a quiet, surprised gasp that barely made noise when Shane wrapped a hand around his cock, slicking it up with brisk, efficient movements. He was so hard that even just the perfunctory grasp felt far too good.

He must have missed a few steps, too distracted by the hand on his dick, because it felt like he blinked and Shane was straddling his thighs, torso a long, bent line as he angled Ryan’s cock just right. Ryan slid his hands up Shane’s legs and around to his ass, squeezing and kneading the flesh.

Shane looked gorgeous in that moment, his eyes dark and focused, his eyebrows furrowed in concentration and his bottom lip just barely caught under two fangs.

Ryan could only stare and do his best to hold still as Shane sank onto his cock. There was that moment of resistance, the moment where he always wondered if it would actually fit, if Shane was just hurting himself, if it even felt good for him-

They both let out a sigh when his cock slipped into Shane. “Fuck,” Ryan breathed. It was the only word available to him as he closed his eyes and focused on the feeling of the muscles under his fingers flexing and shifting, distracting himself from the urge to fuck up into that tight, smooth warmth.

Maybe Shane wasn’t as hot inside as a human would be, but it had been fun to learn that some parts of him were still warmer than room temperature.

When Shane was completely seated and filled, his thighs a pleasant weight, his cock resting against Ryan’s stomach, Ryan pulled him down for a messy, desperate kiss. “You’re always so fucking tight,” he whispered against Shane’s mouth, his lips catching on stubble. “You good?”

“Yeah,” Shane said, his voice strained. “Just- Keep talking.”

Ryan smiled, a quick little smirk, and decided to do him one better.

He bit Shane hard, right on the shoulder.

Shane actually yelped quietly, going tight around Ryan’s cock. “Shit, Ryan-” That apparently worked better than Ryan could have hoped, because Shane shifted onto his knees, making Ryan lean back, and started fucking himself on Ryan’s cock.

This had never been one of Ryan’s favorite positions, since it forced whoever was on top to tire out their thighs and knees in awkward, muscle straining ways. But vampires didn’t exactly have stamina issues when it came to strength. Shane had no problem with supporting his own weight and using Ryan like a personal fuck toy. Ryan had been in awe the first time Shane had done it and he still felt some of that same wonder.

He could have watched Shane like this for hours, but barely a few minutes had passed before Shane was reaching for his cock, his movements growing uncoordinated. Ryan knocked his hand away and reached for Shane’s cock himself, using his thumb to spread precome around the head.

With more force than he had ever used on a partner in his life, Ryan tangled his other hand in Shane’s hair and made him bend forward, drawing the man’s neck closer. Bringing his knees up and planting his feet on the bed for leverage, Ryan started to rock his hips upwards, doing his best to thrust in the position he was in. Before Shane could really react to that, he bit hard on the column of
Shane’s throat, digging his teeth in.

Shane moaned loudly, his throat vibrating under Ryan’s mouth, and went completely still. His cock was a warm, heavy, hard weight in Ryan’s hand. Ryan started jerking him in short, rough strokes.

‘I could have you forever.’

The words echoed in a loop in Ryan’s mind.

Exactly how possessive was Shane?

When spit started to run down his chin and Shane’s neck, Ryan pulled back just enough to whisper in Shane’s ear, his voice rough, “If I bit you hard enough to make you bleed right now, I could swallow every single drop.”

Shane shivered, making a whimpered, questioning noise.

“You’re already going to bite me. Maybe I should return the favor?” He closed his teeth gently on Shane’s earlobe, tugging lightly and stalling for time. He had an idea that felt incredibly silly, but Shane apparently liked him acting like a vampire, so-

Embarrassment made his face feel like it was burning, but he gamely deepened his voice as far as he could, doing his best to growl when he asked “How much do you want it, Shane? Do you want me to bite you? Make you bleed?”

It was an awkward, clearly human growl. It almost sounded like he was trying to gargle. If Shane had been clear headed, he would have mocked Ryan endlessly for it. But instead of laughing or leaning away just to roll his eyes at Ryan, Shane muttered something he didn't know that sounded like a swear, the word broken and wrecked.

“Well?” Ryan tried, nipping again at Shane’s ear. “Do you want it?”

They both knew Ryan wouldn’t do it. That it was far too soon for such a life-changing decision. If Ryan was going to become a vampire, it’d be after a lot of conversations with a lot of people. And it wouldn’t be in the middle of sex after an argument.

That didn’t stop Shane from reaching up to press Ryan’s head into his neck, though. “Please,” he whispered so quietly that Ryan barely heard it. “Please.”

Ryan bit him again, the same spot from before, so hard that his jaw began to ache. He twisted his hand around Shane’s cock, grinding his hips upwards at the same time in a level of coordination that he knew he wouldn’t be able to keep up for too much longer, but it didn’t matter, because it only took a few seconds for Shane to come with a strangled, helpless little moan that trembled. Ryan fought to stop his own moan at the sensation of Shane getting even tighter around him.

Wet warmth trailed down his hand, but Ryan ignored that in favor of supporting Shane when he slumped forward, his upper half going limp. Shane gave a full body twitch when Ryan kissed the bruised-looking bite mark, which was oddly cute.

Ryan held onto him for a long moment, smoothing his hand up the length of Shane’s back, pressing his fingers into the edges of sharp shoulder blades. He was a little confused when Shane started to move again after only a few seconds, but he wasn’t exactly going to complain about it.

He hadn’t meant to come just yet, vague plans of finishing when Shane bit him running through his head. The fact that Shane was slowly sliding up and down his cock, shaky and uncoordinated from
his own orgasm, meant that Ryan was already perilously close to the edge. He didn’t think he was too close, though.

But when Shane looked at him with heavy-lidded, sleepy eyes, slid his arms around Ryan’s neck in a surprisingly coy move, and murmured in a still breathless voice, “Are you going to come inside me?” Ryan was hit by a wave of such intense want that he was helpless against the primal need to fuck up into that tight hole.

He wrapped his hands around Shane’s waist and pulled down while pressing upwards, needing to be in, as far inside as possible-

Ryan came with a loud groan that he couldn’t have stopped if he had wanted to, curling forward until his head was resting against Shane’s collarbone as the pleasure rolled over him.

They leaned into each other for a long moment, trying to catch their breath. The air cooled the sweat on Ryan’s back, making him aware of just how sticky he felt.

And Shane hadn’t even bitten him yet.

The hair on the back of his neck rose, his thoughts falling away until only one was left.

He’s going to bite me. He’s going to bite me, he’s going to bite me, he’s-

Shane inhaled deeply and shuddered, his arms hanging over Ryan’s shoulders flexing as he finally leaned back slightly. He ducked his head down to meet Ryan’s eyes. “Hey.”

“Oh,” Ryan replied, his voice oddly tentative. A prickle of excitement and fear ran over his skin. His usual post-orgasm sleepiness was completely nonexistent. “You, uh, feeling a bit peckish?” His stomach tightened in anticipation as soon as he said the words.

“Parched,” Shane corrected in a slow drawl. “And look, there’s a short glass of blood right in front of me.”

Ryan glared, though he couldn’t entirely hide the reluctant, slightly giddy smile. “You just murdered that metaphor.”

“You’re not exactly a tall glass and I don’t want water right now,” Shane said with a raised eyebrow. Then he shook his head, the banter clearly being dismissed. “You sure about this?” he asked, his soft brown eyes and gentle, worried expression doing nothing to hide the way his gaze quickly darted once to the side of Ryan’s throat.

This was the last chance Ryan had to say no.

The parts of him that didn’t like pain and were all too aware of how easy it would be for him bleed out from a misjudged bite were clamoring to stop this now before it was too late.

He firmly ignored those scared thoughts.

“I’m not going to back out now,” Ryan scoffed, giving in to an urge to be silly and kissing the tip of Shane’s nose.

Shane made a face at him, briefly exasperated, but he no longer looked worried. “Just- don’t scream.”

“What? ‘Don’t scream?’ Yeah, that advice will keep me relaxed, thanks. Dick.”
Laughing at Ryan’s expression, Shane caressed the side of his face. “I really don’t want the neighbors calling the cops.” With gentle pressure, he tipped Ryan’s head to the side, stretching his neck out.

What Ryan had meant was that he was still okay with being bitten, after they cleaned up. He was still inside Shane, for fuck’s sake. But that apparently didn’t matter to Shane and he wasn’t going to stop the guy. It was Shane’s show, now.

It abruptly hit Ryan in a rush of understanding that Shane was going to bite him. It was no longer a hypothetical. It was a fact. The predator, the man he was in love with, was finally going to use lethally sharp fangs to puncture his skin and drink his blood. A vampire was going to feed off him.

Ryan’s heart was pounding so hard that he could feel each thump, like it was trying to escape from his ribs. Every inch of his shoulders and neck felt electrified and overly sensitive. He closed his eyes without meaning to, seeking some kind of calm in the darkness behind his eyelids. Cold lips brushed the crook of his neck and he jumped despite himself, grasping at Shane’s back compulsively.

“What?” Shane asked against his throat, a quiet question.

Swallowing hard enough to hurt, Ryan threaded his fingers into the hair at the back of Shane’s head, pushing him closer in an echo of earlier. “What, you need an invitation? I thought that was a myth.”

Shane snorted softly, a puff of air that trailed over Ryan’s skin, and then—

**Sharp** - **Pressure** - **Pain** - A cold wash throughout his neck, his entire shoulder -

A pop that was felt more than a heard, his skin giving way under four sharp fangs and pain as Shane ground his teeth down harder, forcing the wounds open farther. Ryan gasped and tensed, an instinctive reaction to the pain, and suddenly Shane’s hands were on the back of his shoulders, holding him in place.

Shane made some kind of noise, something soft and apologetic, before removing his teeth from the puncture marks. The relief was instant, the pain going from so intense that Ryan couldn’t breathe to a dull throb that was no worse than stubbing his toe. The swift change was heady and so sudden that Ryan would have swayed if Shane hadn’t been holding him in place.

The feeling of Shane’s tongue swiping and wriggling against his ripped skin was both soothing and aggravating, the edges of the wounds so sensitive that it was all Ryan could do not to jerk away. And yet there was comfort in it, the same way he’d soothe a papercut on his finger by putting it in his mouth.

There was a shift; a quiet, contented growl from Shane and then endorphins hit in a rush of bliss, the pleasure centers lighting up in his brain. If he hadn’t already came, he would have then. Ryan pulled Shane closer, his arms shaky as he felt the abrupt need to go limp. Shane hadn’t moved, sealing the marks with his mouth, so Ryan couldn’t tell what was saliva and what was blood, but his neck felt wet. Distractingly so.

His mind wandered, cut adrift at the flood of chemicals. He grew oddly aware of how close they were, Shane’s chest pressed into his, their skin sticking and sliding in Ryan’s sweat. Shane’s hands moved against his shoulders; tiny little motions, as if Shane couldn’t quite keep himself from clutching.
And fuck, why did Shane always smell so good?

Then Shane started to suck; light little pulses of pressure that pulled at Ryan’s skin and brought more and more blood to the surface. It was the oddest sensation. Not bad, not good, and so acute that he almost missed the way Shane audibly swallowed and seemed to try and burrow closer into his neck.

Ryan let out a noise that was just shy of a whimper and it was as if Shane came back to himself, pulling away to look at Ryan. “You okay?” he whispered, blood smeared across his lips. “I can stop now-”

There was a red stain on Shane’s chin, right under the corner of his mouth.

Tilting his head up to reach, Ryan licked at the spot, his tongue making an audible rasping noise over stubble. He didn’t really taste anything, but Shane was looking at him like he was some kind of miracle, so he smiled lazily and said, “Pretty sure I told you to bite me multiple times.”

Shane’s mouth dropped open, as if he had been stunned quiet. Then a move that was too fast for Ryan to follow, lips on the other side of his neck, teeth pressing-

More pain. But this time it seemed farther away, not at as urgent as the first bite had. In his excitement, Shane had apparently forgotten how to keep clean, because Ryan could feel a trickle of blood trailing down his shoulder. Shane growled quietly to himself, a rumble that Ryan only heard because he was so close, then sucked far harder than he had before. That did hurt, but Ryan only let out a ragged breath and forced himself to hold still. He could hear Shane swallowing and the sudden realization that Shane was feeding was sparking a weirdly intense wash of pride that fought with the floating lassitude that had begun to creep over him.

Shane licked the wound a few times, a delicate sensation after the sucking, then pulled back to check in on Ryan again. His hands were steady as he easily kept Ryan from swaying.

Before he could ask if he was okay. Ryan shakily smacked the back of his hand against Shane’s chest. “Again, big guy. I can take it.” When Shane opened his mouth, no doubt to argue, Ryan added, “I trust you.”

The words felt too small for the meaning behind them.

Something seemed to shift in Shane. He stared at Ryan for a long, tense second, his gaze searching before he surged forward to kiss Ryan hard.

Ryan barely had time to kiss him back before Shane moved. Suddenly there were fangs in his skin, right next to the first bite. Then another bite, then another. A line of puncture wounds across the top of his shoulder, slowly oozing blood. Each one was so fast that Ryan barely registered the pain. Everything was growing into a dull soreness that was distant and unreal under the endorphins that still rushed through him.

He closed his eyes; his entire world narrowed to the flares of discomfort in his body, the wet trickle of blood dripping down his chest and back, the breathless wait for more teeth each time Shane drew back. He was manhandled into a different position, but he just relaxed into it, letting himself slump wherever he was directed. A new line of small, quick bites that barely broke skin went across his other shoulder and all Ryan could do was sigh into the feeling.

At some point he ended up on his back, Shane crouched over him like some kind of animal. He had no idea how or when that had happened.

Opening his eyes, he was greeted by a sight that should have terrified him. But he only saw Shane,
leaning over him and watching him with a tender expression that didn’t match the sheer amount of blood that was smeared over his face.

Long fingers wrapped around Ryan’s wrist, bringing his arm up to a mouth that was dripping bright red blood like something from a horror movie. Shane’s eyes were unfocused, his voice more of a growl than anything else, but his words were clear when he tentatively asked, “Can I... Can I share?”

Ryan wasn’t entirely sure what he was agreeing to when he nodded, his mind fallen under a pleasant lethargy that worried him distantly. The combination of blood loss and exhaustion from the long day was making him loopy. He trusted Shane, but this was a little different from a quick bite for a meal.

When fangs pierced the skin on the underside of his forearm, Ryan had to hiss and slap his other hand against the mattress. It was harder than it should have been to not rip his arm away from Shane’s grasp.

Why had that hurt so much more than all of the bites to his shoulders?

Shane held still for a long moment before gently lowering his arm back onto the bed and leaning over him, expression weirdly intense.

Ryan opened his mouth to say- something. He wasn’t really sure what. But he was met by Shane's lips. There was a trickle, then a rush of blood. *His* blood. He swallowed without thinking, the metallic liquid so disturbingly warm that he gagged and coughed once. Shane didn’t hesitate to push his tongue into Ryan’s mouth, turning the entire affair into a deep, messy kiss that Ryan responded to in a daze.

A strong hand slipped under his neck, turning the kiss into something that would have been sweet and romantic if Ryan wasn’t still fighting back the urge to gag. Shane was being incredibly thorough in trying to get every last little bit of blood out of his mouth, which was an interesting approach to a kiss, but Ryan eventually had to turn his head to gasp for breath.

Shane’s body blanketed his, a weight that no longer felt cool to the touch, a slight warmth that was far more comfortable than it should have been considering how heavy Shane was. Ryan found himself smoothing his fingers through Shane’s hair, his body and mind too exhausted to question the urge. “Shane?”

He had to make a face after opening his mouth. It was like a film of blood covered the surface of his tongue, a flavor that wouldn’t go away no matter how many times he swallowed. Christ, he really needed to brush his teeth. Warm blood was not good.

The immediate response that Ryan got was a content little growl as Shane nuzzled into his neck. Ryan flinched, the action making all of the wounds on his neck and shoulder flare up in pain. Shane murmured something that didn’t sound like it was English, then apologetically kissed his shoulder. “Mine,” Shane said simply, nosing into Ryan’s hair.

Ryan wasn’t sure what to do with that. “Yeah, yours,” he agreed, for lack of anything else to say. After a few seconds, the drying blood covering him and the way exhaustion was tugging at his consciousness made tentatively ask, “You good?”

Shane rolled off Ryan with clear reluctance, but managed to eventually say, “Good is an understatement.” There was still a rumble under his words, but Ryan had to admit that he found it endearing.

“See? Michelin Star.” Ryan felt vaguely worried that his words were slurried, but trusted Shane to
know how much was too much. Hopefully.

Shane snorted, bringing Ryan’s arm up to his mouth to idly lick at the blood there. “Great, now you’re going to be arrogant about it.”

“You like it.”

“There was a moment there,” Shane admitted slowly, faint embarrassment in his voice, “Where I probably would have done anything you asked. ‘Like’ isn’t very accurate.”

Ryan blinked up at the ceiling, then lifted his head so that he could turn and look at Shane. The movement took more effort than it should have, but that didn’t stop him from raising one eyebrow and asking teasingly, “So I should have asked you when you were born?”

He expected Shane to roll his eyes.

Instead, Shane paused to stare at him. “1841. I died in 1870.”

Ryan’s mouth slowly dropped open. “What?! You mean I was right?!”

“No, you said 1840.”

“Fuck you, I was off by a year, that means I’m closer than anyone else.”

Shane shook his head, smiling slightly. “Trust me, I was as shocked as you. The first time your ‘research’ was actually kind of right.”

Ryan tugged his arm back just so he could push at Shane. “Dude. Dude. You’re old.”

“Been thinking of getting a walker. Maybe moving to Florida.”

“Oh my God, think of all the senior discounts.”

Shane laughed and sat up, looking down at him fondly. “I love you.”

Ryan smiled uncertainly, thrown by the randomness of the statement. “I love you, too?”

With a grin that was particularly ghoulish from all the blood, Shane got off the bed and bent down to pick Ryan up as if he didn’t weigh any more than a feather. “Come on, let’s get you some of that sweet, sweet OJ before you pass out.”

Ryan let his head rest against Shane’s shoulder, intentionally ignoring the kneejerk instinct to say that he could walk. He felt incredibly sticky and he was glad he didn’t have to move. “Would prefer a shower.” And maybe a few band-aids.

“I’m not washing your passed out body, so you’re going to deal with the blood until you’ve gotten some nutrients.”

“We just gonna get blood and jizz all over your kitchen?”

“It’s my kitchen, I can do what I want.”

Ryan made a face at that and muttered, “The Red Cross at least gives me a cookie.”

Shane smothered a laugh against his hair but didn’t dignify that with a response.
Suddenly Ryan straightened up, hitting his head against Shane’s chin, but ignoring the pain to exclaim, “Wait! I have to text Jen! I won the bet!”

Shane just sighed.

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Despite Shane’s assertion that he should call off sick to recover from the bloodloss, they both walked into work at the usual time the next morning. Ryan was moving like an old man and he had three different sports drinks in his bag, but he wasn’t going to call off work because of kinky sex. Or sex and then feeding a vampire.

He still wasn’t sure what last night could be considered.

And, while he hadn’t wanted to say anything out loud to Shane about it, he felt like Shane would need the moral support. Ryan didn’t expect any of their crew to say anything about the vampire attack on location, but gossip had a tendency to spread at the worst possible times. He knew that Shane was uncomfortable with how inhuman he had acted while fighting off the other vampire and he didn’t want Shane to have to face any well-meaning but misguided thanks alone.

Ryan felt too hot in the long sleeved, button-up shirt that he had on, but while showing off the single bite mark that peeked out above his collar was one thing, he didn’t need people knowing that he had nine of them on his shoulders and one on his arm. The jokes alone would probably drive him to commit homicide.

Still, he couldn’t help but feel an odd mix of embarrassment and the need to outright preen when he passed a few co-workers that definitely noticed the one bruise that could be seen. It was as bad as showing off hickies in high school, he knew, but Shane wasn’t the only one that felt a little possessive.

It wasn’t like people didn’t already assume Shane was biting him anyways.

“What do you think about going to West Virginia?”

Shane’s hand was a brief but noticeable comfort on the small of his back before they both sat down at their chairs. “For an episode? Or were you suddenly struck by the need to visit the Appalachian Mountains?”

“Mothman,” Ryan said simply, tapping a few keys to wake up his computer. “The only other thing I know about West Virginia is the Mountaineers.”

“Mothman?” Shane asked, hanging his headphones over his neck. “Like that movie with Richard Gere?”

“Please ignore that ever happened.”

“Somehow now all I can only see is Gere trying to give a giant moth a diamond necklace.”

Ryan looked over at him and grinned. “The moth hooker with a heart of gold?”

“Sex worker,” Shane said absently, bringing up some of the programs he would need for the day.
“What?”

Shane hummed briefly. “That’s the phrase now. Sex worker. Not hooker or prostitute.”

Ryan tilted his head. “Okay?”

“If you’re going to—” Shane looked around them and lowered his voice until Ryan had to lean closer to hear him. “If you’re thinking about becoming— Of being like me, you need to learn how to change with the times.”

“Oh, I know how to keep up with the youth, Madej.”

Shane shook his head. “No, it’s not the pop culture. Though that helps. It’s the phrases that might get you in trouble. If you look like you’re thirty but using terms that are now offensive, people will clock you being a vampire really fast.”

“You know vampires are legal, right?” Ryan asked, his eyebrows drawn together in a frown. “You don’t have to hide.”

With a little grimace, Shane sighed and leaned closer, until he was nearly whispering in Ryan’s ear. “It’s not just about hiding. It’s about being… Well. Not an asshole.” There was a pause where Shane tapped his fingers against the table in an agitated little movement, then he muttered with some significance, “I was alive during the Civil War, Ryan.”

The words didn’t make sense at first. All Ryan could think about was how was old Shane was. Then something in his head clicked and he sat back in his chair. “Oh,” he said distantly.

“Yeah. Things change. Words change. And if you don’t want to be a complete dick, you need to internalize that change.”

Ryan studied Shane for a long moment. There were a lot of things he wanted to ask, a lot of small things he had observed about Shane’s behavior but never really questioned until now. He didn’t like that they had fallen into such a heavy topic so early in the morning, but it was like prodding a sore tooth to say, “The fact that you can publically be with me probably would have confused the hell out of you fifty years ago.”

“Fifty years? No, not really. Hundred years? Maybe. Probably.” Shane smiled quickly, the expression shy. “It’s a good change. It— I—” He shook his head, laughed to himself, then put his hand on the back of Ryan’s chair so that he really could lean over and whisper, “Not that I’m suggesting anything, but the fact that we could get married is … Good. It’s really good.”

It was all Ryan could do stay still, torn between jerking away in embarrassment or kissing Shane right there. “I mean, if I’m already—” he started, but was interrupted by the way Shane had turned his head, his expression confused, as if he was listening to something. “Shane?”

Shane straightened up, his hand falling from Ryan’s chair. “Mark just said my name really loudly.”

“What? Mark?”

“Yeah.”

Ryan half-jokingly said, “I didn’t think Mark could be loud.” Something made him ask after a second, “You know why…?”

Shane frowned. “I can’t really— It’s not like I can zero in on one person. It’s more like he yelled my
name in a crowded room to get my attention.”

“Maybe he’s just talking about you,” Ryan suggested. “He’s complaining about having to film your big head.”

“No worse than having to deal with your jumpiness,” Shane returned. “I can’t hear him anymore. Maybe I’ll text him.”

It felt a little odd to leave the conversation where it had been, but Ryan also didn’t really want to discuss marriage and eternity while at work. So he left Shane to his slightly worried muttering as he texted Mark and turned back to his computer.

Over the next hour, Shane kept his headphones off and twice looked up as if someone had called his name. It was driving Ryan a little crazy, but Shane just kept shaking his head and saying that he couldn’t really hear anything.

Despite Shane’s behavior and his own soreness, Ryan managed to get most of his emails answered and even started on a basic storyboard for the Mine episode. He was falling into his work trance, his awareness narrowed down to only what was on his computer screen, when Shane nudged him to get his attention.

Ryan slipped his headphones off and glanced up with a question on his lips, but stopped when he saw a woman standing next to them, looking at the two of them with a practiced smile.

He vaguely recognized her as the woman that had asked Shane if he wanted to be on camera for the first time, though he had never gotten her name. It had never been explained why a higherup that was barely in the building had been the one to ask him, either.

“Shane, Ryan,” she said brightly, as if they were the best of friends. “If you’ve got a few minutes, I’d like to discuss a couple things with you.”

It was clear from the way she said it that they didn’t really have a choice, so they followed her to a meeting room, exchanging confused glances on the way.

When they came to the room, Ryan was surprised to see TJ, Devon, and Mark seated at a long conference table. Across from them was a woman that he was fairly certain was a new HR person. He thought maybe her name was Maggie.

“Guys?” he asked, a sense of dread making his stomach twist. He threw a quick look Shane’s way, but his face was painfully blank. “What’s going on?”

“Oh, nothing to worry about,” the exec said, her voice high-pitched and annoyingly bubbly. “Please, take a seat so we can get started.” Once they had sat down, she picked up an iPad with paused footage on it. She spun it around so that it faced them. “From what I understand, you haven’t seen this yet.”

When she tapped the play button, it took Ryan a few seconds to understand what he was watching. The blurred, distant movements darting in and out of bright light and darkness looked unreal. He thought for a moment that he was looking at some kind of bad CGI.

Then understanding hit him.

This was footage of the vampire attacking them at Vulture Mine. This was the fight between that poor fucker and Shane. If one knew what they were looking at it, it was easy to see that it was Shane crouched over the still form of TJ.
And all too easy to see Shane acting incredibly inhuman.

But all of their cameras had been off, they hadn’t been recording at the time, how-

Ryan glanced at Mark, shocked to see the man’s torn expression and how he wouldn’t meet Ryan’s eyes.

“What is this?” Ryan asked over the tinny sounds of snarling that were coming from the iPad.

“This,” the woman said with relish, “is the first good footage that has ever been captured of two vampires fighting.”

Shane didn’t flinch, but Ryan could feel how still he went.

“I’m sure it’s not the first,” Ryan said, playing dumb. He knew full well that there was very little evidence out there of just what vampires were capable of. At least, footage available to the public. But he had a sick feeling he knew what this woman was about to suggest.

At this point, he wasn’t even sure he wanted to know her name, despite the more logical side of his brain already planning on how to file a formal complaint against her.

“Oh it is,” she replied, her grin the kind of plastic expression that came from veneers and too much botox. “I’m sure you can imagine what a scoop it would be to be the first company to air something like this.”

‘Scoop.’ As if this woman give a shit about journalism.

“Why are we here?” Ryan asked, trying not to let his growing anger and disgust show. He knew better than to let his emotions get the better of him in a situation like this. “You already have the footage.”

And anything filmed with BuzzFeed property belonged to BuzzFeed. He knew the kinds of contracts they’d signed.

The HR woman he thought was Maggie spoke up. “You know how it is, California laws about privacy. We just need your signatures on a couple of pages.”

“They brought us in one by one to get us to sign.” TJ said quietly. He ignored the way the exec’s eyes narrowed and added, “None of us did. It’s Shane’s decision.”

Shane slowly turned his head to stare at their crew, his eyes wider than normal.

The woman seemed to brace herself, then turned her blinding smile on Shane. “He makes a valid point. As the hero of the hour, it is, of course, your decision. I’m sure you can understand how this would further your career.”

Ryan had to physically bite the inside of his cheek to keep from saying anything. The sad truth was that that level of publicity would make Shane well known. It would be controversial, but even bad publicity was better than none. If for some reason Shane wanted to become famous, this was one of the best ways to do it.

The fact that it would also make the rest of them famous- and could be leveraged into a fair amount of money if they played it right- was something that Ryan hoped Shane wasn’t thinking about.

Shane drew in a slow, audible breath through his nose, his fingers twitching as he ran his hand over
his face. “This could be a big break for you guys,” he said quietly, staring at the table.

“You guys.’ Not ‘us.’

“Shane,” Ryan hissed, “No, you can’t-”

“Of course you would all be compensated well.”

They all turned to stare at the woman.

She grinned. Ryan was starting to hate the expression. “Need I remind you that BuzzFeed is a team? And we don’t have room on the team for those that don’t play nice.”

Ryan’s heart felt like it fell to his shoes. Had she really just threatened to fire them?

“Why is no one else here?” Devon asked suddenly, her voice quiet but firm.

The exec startled, but recovered quickly. “There’s no need to bother everyone with such a simple-”

“No one knows that you’re doing this, do they? That’s why you’re asking us to sign something.” Devon interrupted her. She turned to Maggie. “And you’re too new to know the difference.”

Maggie blinked at her, then hesitantly said, “I- I was told to bring these contracts.”

“Maggie,” the exec snapped. She then smiled at them, as if she hadn’t just yelled at someone.

“There’s no need to worry. Once you guys sign, we’ll be able to edit something together quickly, put it up-”

Shane stood, his expression still remarkably blank. He nodded to the entire room in an oddly formal gesture. “Thank you for the opportunity, but I fear I will have to decline,” he said with stiff precision.

It was the kind of line that Ryan would have mocked for being overly dramatic if he had seen it in a movie. But he didn’t think Shane was acting.

When Shane walked out of the room, it was Mark who was the first to stand up and follow him. Ryan quickly went after them, vaguely aware of TJ and Devon doing the same. He was just barely able to hear Mark say, “-don’t know how it got turned on. I handed it to an intern to go through and-” he gestured helplessly. “I tried to warn you, but I wasn’t sure if you’d hear it.”

With a small sigh, Shane’s expression finally cracked. He ran his hand over his face wearily. “It’s not your fault, Mark.”

“No, it definitely isn’t,” TJ said sternly from behind Ryan. Soon they were small cluster around Shane, taking up most of the hallway. “This shouldn’t have even been an issue.”

“I would understand if you wanted me to put the video out there,” Shane said quietly.

Before Ryan could do it, Devon narrowed her eyes at him and said plainly, “Fuck that. I’m not agreeing to anything that turns you into the next real-life Lestat.”

Shane made a face, the joke apparently knocking him out of his self-sacrificing mood. “Yeah, I’d rather be the next Dracula, stakes and all.” Then he shook his head. “I’m sorry for all of this.”

TJ raised his splinted hand. “I’m not sorry you saved me from being someone’s dinner.”

“I didn’t save-”
“Yeah, yeah, you were just protecting what’s yours, I know.”

Shane’s eyebrows rose and he shot a quick glance at Ryan, who raised his hands in confusion. “I didn’t say anything.”

Devon edged up until she was squished in between Mark and Ryan. “You think we didn’t try to at least learn something about vampires?”

Shuffling his feet, Shane cleared his throat. “Ah, well-”

“We’re your coven or clan or whatever the term is,” TJ said with a slightly disturbing grin, clapping Shane on the shoulder. “What was it again?”

“You know damn well what it is,” Shane said, fighting off an embarrassed grin from behind the hand he had covering his mouth.

“I don’t.”

“Yeah,” TJ said, “Bergara doesn’t know, you should enlighten him.”

Shane let out a long suffering sigh, his smile turning into something soft and real. “Thanks, guys.”

They all exchanged glances, a couple of them shrugging. “We’re your friends, Shane. Just because we’re not mooning over you like Ryan is-”

“Hey-”

“-doesn’t mean we’re going to throw you under the bus for a shot at fame and glory.”

“And I’ll make sure that woman gets reported,” Devon said with grim determination. “She overstepped. That’s why it was just her and the newest HR hire. She probably figured we’d be too intimidated to say anything when she took all the credit.”

Not surprisingly, Shane was the one to awkwardly make an excuse to leave after that, too many feelings making him flee. Ryan caught up after making everyone promise to keep him in the loop if anything else happened. “Hey,” he said as he jogged up behind Shane. “You okay?”

Shane slowed his pace, dawdling before they went back out into well-traveled hallways and rooms. “Yeah. I’ve been expecting something like this for awhile now. It went better than I was afraid of.”

Ryan nudged his elbow against Shane’s arm and lowered his voice. “Seriously? Why didn’t you ever say something if you thought something like this could happen?”

“What was I supposed to say? Someone is going to try and exploit that I’m a vampire for views? Of course someone would. Even I’ve done it.”

That was fair. As they slowed even further, both of them knowing Ryan wasn’t done with talking, he held up two fingers. “Couple things. First, what was TJ talking about? Your coven?”

Shane closed his eyes for a long moment and groaned. “No, Ryan, don’t make me say it.”

“Say what?”

He groaned again. “What is a group of vampires called?”

“A pain in the ass?”
“I don’t know, is this like a murder of crows? A cave of vampires? A-” Ryan blinked. “A kiss of vampires? Wait, seriously?” He started to grin. “Oh my God. I can’t believe I had forgotten about that.”

“If you start laughing, I’m leaving you.”

Ryan had to pretend to cough a few times to unconvincingly hide his wheezing. “But we’re not vampires?” He managed to ask when he could keep a straight face.

“Look, my instincts aren’t very smart.” Shane threw a teasing grin at him. “They decided they liked you, so obviously-”

“Shut up, Shane,” Ryan said, holding back a laugh. “Second thing.” He pulled Shane to a stop, uncaring that they were now in a wide-open hallway that saw constant traffic. “I want to do it. I … I want to be with you. As a-” he had to swallow before he could continue. “A vampire.”

Shane quickly looked around them, then stepped closer to Ryan, lowering his voice. “Why? Why did you decide this now?”

Because I love you.

Because I never want to see you be alone.

Ryan smiled nervously, but his words were strong and clear when he said, “You were willing to put yourself in the center of a media circus if that was what the rest of us had wanted. I need to make sure you don’t make any other dumb decisions like that.” He grabbed Shane’s hand and lead him to a corner, where a potted plant gave them the thinnest semblance of privacy.

“I wasn’t-”

“Yes, you were,” Ryan said. “I know you, Shane. You come off as a dick, but you’re one of the biggest fucking marshmallows I know. You’re pure fluff.”

“I could literally tear your arm off.”

Facing Shane and bringing his hand up to cup the side of the man’s face, Ryan snorted at the indignant reply. “Uh huh. You’re really scary. A scary marshmallow.”

Shane leaned into his hand. “You can’t make this decision so soon. Have you talked to anyone about this? Friends? Your family?” His face fell. “Speaking of families, I know you want to have a gaggle of kids one day…”

Ryan frowned, confused. “Do you not want kids?”

“I-” Shane looked equally confused. “I… used to? But I’m dead, I-” He sighed, exasperated, and corrected himself. “I’m a vampire, I can’t-”

Idiot.

Smiling fondly, Ryan rolled his eyes. “Adoption, Shane. God knows I’m not ready now, but give it a decade and we could have a whole swarm of munchkins.” He laughed when Shane’s eyes suddenly widened, his expression like he’d just been slapped. “You forget that was an option?”

“I just never thought…”
Ryan shook his head and took a deep breath. He couldn’t believe he was about to do this, but if he was going to bring up eternity and children for fuck’s sake, he might as well go all in with the sappy shit. “I want to be with you. I love you. I-” He could feel his face burning from embarrassment, but that didn’t stop him. “Bear with me.”

“What?”

“Kocham cię,” Ryan said slowly and carefully, knowing full well he was butchering it, but it was the best he could do.

Shane tilted his head, his eyebrows drawing together. Then a grin spread across his face, showing off all four fangs. “You utter fucking cheeseball. Really? You seriously looked up ‘I love you’?”

Ryan ducked his head. “Shut up.”

Long arms settled around his back, pulling him into a loose hug. “Też cię kocham,” Shane said against his hair. “And now never say that again, your pronunciation was a travesty and an insult to the entire country of Poland. My father is literally rolling in his grave right now.”

Snickering, Ryan let his hands rest on Shane’s hips. “I had to use Google, what do you want from me?”

“It’s two words.”

“I’m American.”

“... In retrospect, you did a pretty good job. Well done. I give you permission to say it again.”

Ryan started laughing, leaning into Shane to support himself. A kiss was pressed to the top of his head and Ryan couldn’t have cared less that it was in a public hallway.

He was in love and nothing else mattered.

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Six months later, after countless conversations with friends and family, a general announcement on Instagram and Twitter that he’d be out of communication for a month, and two months taken off work, Ryan found himself in a private room in a small clinic that had been far more expensive than he had been comfortable with.

“I still can’t believe your parents paid for this.”

Ryan looked up at Shane, tracking the way the man was pacing back and forth across the room. He kind of wished he could burn off some energy by walking around, too, but he was hooked up to so many monitors and machines that he felt like he was one Austrian accent away from becoming the Terminator.

He pointedly ignored the existence of the straps that were also on the bed. With Shane there, they wouldn’t be needed.

Hopefully.
“I think they’ve convinced themselves this is like a marriage,” he said after a moment.

“Bit more permanent,” Shane muttered. He abruptly spun on his heel and walked back to Ryan, kneeling next to him. “You can still change your mind,” he said for the eleventh time since they had woken up that morning.

Ryan thumped his head back against the pillow. “Shane, if you say that again I’m going to kick you out and go find some other vampire to bite.”

Shane growled instantly, then cleared his throat sheepishly. “You, uh, don’t have to do that. Ha. Knew that’d get him.

Their doctor and a nurse walked in then, making Shane stand up and hover next to Ryan protectively.

Ryan really didn’t want to make the guard dog analogy, but it fit a little too well in the past couple of weeks.

“Ryan, Shane,” the doctor said pleasantly, her demeanor as coolly professional as it had been since they had first met her. It was clear this was just another day for her. That actually comforted Ryan a bit. “Are we ready?”

Taking a deep breath, Ryan squared his shoulders and nodded.

His heart was racing a mile a minute, his armpits and forehead were utterly soaked in sweat, and he felt like he was going to throw up, but yeah, sure, he was ready.

The nurse didn’t give him any time to stew in his nerves. The man quickly and efficiently inserted a needle into the large vein in the crook of his elbow and mercifully didn’t react when Ryan flinched at the feeling of the larger-than-usual needle.

The bright red blood that filled the attached tube and started dripping into a clear bag was oddly fascinating. Ryan had to force his eyes away and swallow a lump in his throat.

For fuck’s sake, he wasn’t going to get emotional over his own blood.

Besides, they would get to bring the bags of it home afterwards. Like some kind of freaky party gift. For some reason, Shane had been incredibly thankful about that fact. Ryan had never gotten a real explanation why, either.

Shane grabbed his hand, holding it in a tight grip that was probably more for his own comfort than Ryan’s, but Ryan appreciated it all the same.

Ryan knew that it only took about ten minutes for his blood to reach the appropriate level, but it felt much longer. He tried to crack a few jokes, but Shane was too agitated to respond and the polite interest of the doctor was a poor substitute.

It was odd to feel his body beginning to struggle.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, his thoughts growing slower as his heart started to pound harder, the doctor nodded to the nurse. The needle was quickly taken out and a bandage put over the spot, though Ryan wasn’t entirely sure why he bothered.

As soon as the nurse had stood up, the doctor said to Shane, “Whenever you’re ready.” Both her and
the nurse turned away and busied themselves with charts and monitors, giving them the semblance of privacy.

“Hey,” he said to Shane, his voice slow and lethargic. “Give me that sexy wrist.”

Shane laughed shakily, unbuttoning his shirt sleeve and rolling it up. “I knew it, you only want me for my joints.”

Ryan tried to wiggle his eyebrows, but he wasn’t sure how well it worked. They had discussed their various options when it came to this, but once Shane had learned that he could be present and give Ryan his blood in the ‘traditional way’, there hadn’t been any other choice. Ryan had teased him mercilessly for it, but had agreed easily enough.

He already knew that being able to touch Shane would be far more of a comfort than a syringe full of Shane’s blood ever would be.

Shane sat on the edge of the bed and reached for a scalpel that had been left on the side table for his use. But he hesitated, his eyes flicking from the scalpel to the back of the doctor to Ryan’s face. He raised his eyebrows in silent question.

Ryan rolled his eyes, but nodded. “Traditionalist,” he muttered.

“I’m a lover of the classics, baby,” Shane said, smiling somewhat sickly before literally ripping into his own wrist with his fangs.

It was all Ryan could do not to flinch, though Shane seemed unaffected by the no-doubt painful wound that instantly welled with blood. Shane leaned closer, though he didn’t offer his wrist. “You’re sure the blood test was positive?”

Ryan sighed. “Yes, Shane. You made me do it twice. I’ll be fine.”

“And you’re sure about this?”

The patter of Shane’s blood dripping onto the stupid patient gown Ryan was wearing was going to give him a headache. “Shane, I swear to God, give me your damn wrist.”

Shane straight up wheezed, a sharp bark of abrupt sound, then finally put his arm in front of Ryan’s mouth.

Ryan inhaled once, aware of his heartbeat pounding in his ears and the way his fingers shook. Fear started to rise in him, a sudden litany of ‘what if’s running through his head.

But all he had to do was look into warm brown eyes and his fears fell away. Wrapping his hand around Shane’s arm, he grinned and said, “Bottom’s up.”

He put his mouth on Shane’s bloody, ripped open wrist without hesitation.

It tasted disgusting.

He swallowed as much as he could anyways.

The transition from awareness to unconsciousness passed in fits and starts.

His hand grew too weak to hold onto Shane’s arm. It dropped to the bed.

Cold fingers threaded into his hair and cradled the back of his head, offering comfort.
His heart *shuddered*.

Breathing became a constant struggle.

Darkness stole over him without warning.

“Jesus,” he heard himself slur distantly. “You’re like… fuckin’... Everclear, man… “

The last thing Ryan heard as a human was Shane’s laugh.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Birthday, Cellar! Nearly two months late!

A huge, *huge* thank you to everyone for their support and patience! Seriously, it means so much.

And a special thanks to Emilia, Darian, and Cellar.

----Art!----

*Vampire Shane.*
*Just a little bite.*
*Vampire Ryan.*
*Confused vampire Ryan.*

(Thank you so much for all you do, Emilia!)

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