

IMMORTAL LOVE



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The rabbit's nostrils twitched, making me pull on the muscles in my thighs harder. I was upwind so he wouldn't smell me, but the slightest hint of movement would have him running at full speed. I stayed still as a shadow. His head remained in the air for a little while more. His nostrils twitched, and his ears swayed like crops in the wind, but then he returned to grazing. I took another silent step towards him. Though I was almost out of the bushes, he didn't notice me.

Then, I pounced.

The rabbit's ears caught me before his eyes did. Finally realising the danger he was in, he jumped out of my way, but it was too late. My teeth dug into his neck, filling my mouth with thick, warm blood and replenishing my strength. It had been months since my last hunt. My thirst possessed me, and when I finally removed my mouth, not a single drop of blood spilt out of the bite. With

my hunger under control, I ran home, leaving the carcass for whatever lucky animal came across.

Autumn littered the roads with leaves, making all the houses look identical, but I knew my way home. I hadn't ventured too far. The community park crawled with rabbits, looking for a place to spend the winters. Just this night, I had hunted three. Their blood would sustain me through the winter.

As I turned the last corner, I saw little Jenny outside. Her pigtails whipped through the air as she ran circles in the yard, calling out my name. She sounded worried. Her tears tore my heart from my chest, but the love in her voice made me happy. A bark escaped my throat before I could think.

"Bruno!" She yelled as her hands flung out of the fence towards me. Her voice had no anger, just relief, which made my tail wag so hard it hurt.

I had been with Jenny's family for barely a week, but both Jenny and her father, my master, had shown me incredible kindness. The mistress had yet to warm up to the idea of me but had compromised for the sake of her daughter. They tried to give me the best they could. It only made me wish they had gotten any other dog.

To a vampire like me, the expensive dog food neither tasted good nor could it replace my need for blood. Four days ago, the master had let me lick the blood off the counters and eat the marrow off discarded bones, but it was not enough. I wish I could talk so I could tell him what I really was.

"Bruno! Come here, boy!"

I leapt towards Jenny.

And then something hit me so hard it knocked the wind out of my lungs. My vision swam. Jenny's

scream was so loud it hurt my ears. I tried to get up, but my paws felt like they weren't a part of me. The air was thick with blood. My blood. And the blood of the rabbits.

I heard a gate open and footsteps coming towards me. I felt myself being lifted from the ground.

"Will Bruno be okay, daddy?" Jenny was sobbing.

Master didn't answer. I could feel his own body shaking against mine.

"Daddy needs to take Bruno to the doctor, Jenny. Why don't you go and fetch his file?"

Her little shoes slammed against the driveway as she ran into the house.

"Will he survive?"

"Unlikely. He has lost a lot of blood. Jenny..."

I let the darkness consume me.



They say in the moment of your death, your life flashes before your eyes. At least, that's what I thought was about to happen. I was somewhere in the middle of life and death. Not quite asleep but not awake either. I was aware of my pain but not privy to it. And then the memories came flooding.

Memories of the lush green meadow were so real. I could taste the dew on the grass and smell the dandelions. The sky was a pretty shade of pink, and I felt the chill in the air on my nose.

"Alexander!"

That voice... I knew that voice...

"Alexander! Where are you, little one? It is late. We must return home at once."

I shot in the direction of the voice. My legs seemed sturdier than I remembered. Marie stood under the willow tree in a flowy pink dress. Her hair hung in a low ponytail behind her back. A warm smile lit up her face when she saw me. My throat choked up. She looked so young... not a day over twelve. I had almost forgotten how beautiful she was. I reached her and put my front paws on her dress. She frowned, but her fingers lowered into my hair and scratched behind my ear. I stuck my tongue out and licked her hands. Roses and cream. I could never forget that taste. She smiled, sat down, and pulled me in her arms.

"Oh, Alexander! Why must you be so anxious all the time? I would never leave you behind."

That was a lie, but I would not let it dampen my excitement. I licked her face, and she burst into a melodic laughter. The people around us gave her

dirty looks, but I growled at them, and they returned to their business.

"Come, now. We must leave at once."

She stood up, dusted the mud off her dress, and walked away from the meadows. I followed her, paying no attention to where she was headed.

When we reached home, it was dark. Marie opened the gate to let me in. Grandma stood by the door with her hands on her hips and a pout on her face. This would not be good for us. I ran to her and put my paws on her apron, but she brushed me away like always.

"Marie! What is the meaning of arriving home at this hour?"

"I apologise, Grandmother. The sunset was quite mesmerising today. I lost track of time."

"Hmm... It seems your supper lost track of you, young lady. You may proceed to your bedchambers after you have fed the leftovers to your mutt."

With slumped shoulders, Marie went to the kitchen and collected some bones to feed me. My mouth salivated at the smell. I followed her into the yard, where she put down my dinner. I dug in. She sat down next to me and scratched my back. It felt good when she did that.

Her stomach growled, so I picked up one of the meatier pieces and put it next to her hand. She looked at me, smiled, and scratched my ear.

"I can't eat that, Alexander, but thank you for showing me kindness. You are a blessing from the heavens above."

A smile stayed on her lips, and her eyes stayed on me as I devoured my supper. Now and again, her stomach grumbled, but she said nothing. After I

was done, she led me to her bedroom. She wiped her face with a rag and fell into the bed. I took my place by the foot of the bed.

"Alexander!" She called out, and I jumped into the bed beside her. She laughed and scratched my ear as I settled on the blanket. I nuzzled her, and she laughed even more. Her laughter lingered in the air long after she fell asleep.



I woke up to the wailing of a baby. I opened my eyes and found myself enveloped in Marie's hands. A sliver of moonlight entered the room through the slit in the curtains and fell on her face. She was so much older now, so much bigger. Snug under the thick woollen blanket, she slept soundly. Her hair looked dishevelled, and her eyes

looked sunk in. New scars had appeared on her face and hands.

I slipped out from her arms and leapt off the bed. My feet hurt as I landed on the cold stone floor. Following the sound, I reached the baby in the adjacent room. He smelled so much like Marie! On seeing me, he calmed down. I shoved my snout through his crib and licked his cheek. He grabbed my fur and ran his chubby little hands all over my face.

I heard Marie's feet land on the cold stone. A few seconds later, she entered the room and picked Henry from the crib.

"Look at that, Alexander. Henry loves to play with you. I don't know what I would have done without your support." I let out a soft growl and followed her to the other room. As she nursed Henry, I slept by her feet.



I opened my eyes and found Henry's eyes on me. On seeing me awake, the young boy gave me a toothy smile and scratched the back of my neck. One of his front teeth was missing.

"Come, Alexander," he held out his other hand to reveal a cube of cheese. "If you want it, you will have to play with me. Come on, now, boy."

"Leave him alone, Henry. He is too ill to play with you."

"But Mother, he wants to play. Alexander, stand up, boy." He held the cube close to my nose and pulled away. Instinct made me get up to my feet, but the pain in my joints slowed my movements. A grunt escaped my mouth as I got to my feet.

"Henry, no. Go play outside." She snatched the cube from his hand and gave it to me. I grunted

in satisfaction. Henry ran out of the house and left Marie kneeling next to me. She scratched my head. "Oh, you poor old boy! It pains me to see life slowly drain out of you. You have helped me all my life, stuck by my side through all the hardships we have endured, and I feel so helpless as you lie here waiting for death. I wish there were something I could do to make it better."

Her tears fell on my snout. I wanted to lick her face like I used to, but my bones hurt too much to move.

"Rest, Alexander."

She took my head in her lap and ran her fingers through my hair. I let sleep take me.



A stabbing pain shot up from my neck. I tried to jump to my feet, but my body had been pinned to

the floor. I howled as loudly as I could and thrashed the air with my legs.

"Hush now, Alexander. This will all be over soon."

Even though I was scared and almost blind with age, I trusted Marie. I stopped moving. Whatever had been stabbed in my neck was pulled out. My blood gushed out of the wound. I heard a dagger slice against flesh, and warm blood - not mine - poured over my wound. It entered my body and began to burn through me. I was very aware of the pain, as I was of my surroundings.

"Is it done, then? Will he live?"

"Yes, although I would advise leaving him out every night to hunt. New vampires have difficulty controlling their thirst. Humans have some capability for thought after being converted, but a canine vampire... that's a first for me. Nobody knows how he would react."

The excruciating pain ebbed as quickly as it rose, and my vision slowly cleared up. Marie smiled at me through tear-filled eyes.

"Alexander!"

I ran to her side.

For the first time in a long time, I could stand without pain. I could move without my bones screaming for rest.

"You taught him well."

The stranger, a tall but thin man, looked at me with curious eyes. His clothes were hidden behind his cloak. I couldn't hear his heartbeat or smell him, but I believed my eyes. I had felt his hand on me a few minutes ago. I could see on his hand the blood that had burnt through me.

I jumped between the two, keeping Marie behind me.

"I must ask for your leave, fair lady. Tonight, I shan't feast on you so you can cherish my companionship gift. Pray I never cross this village, for the next time, I might not find mercy in my heart."

He disappeared without another word.

Marie wrapped her hands around me and burst into tears. I tried to calm her down by licking her face, but that only made her cry harder.

"Oh, Alexander! Thank the heavens you are still with me." She held my snout and lifted my head.

"Now I never have to worry about losing you. We will live a very long and happy life."



I blinked, and I was by her bedside. Henry held Marie's old, wrinkled hand as she breathed her last. He had grown up to be a strong man.

"Henry, take Alexander with you. Make sure you take good care of him. And at the end of your life, make sure you bring him to the other side. Remember, Henry, I trust no one as I trust you." She sighed deeply and looked at me. "I should take you to the other side, but I am a coward. I hope Henry is stronger. Take care of him as you took care of me."

At the end of his life, Henry didn't dare to end my life either. So, I outlived him... and his children.



"Are you hungry, sweet boy?" The skinny kid asked me. In his extended hand, there was half of a strip of bacon he had stolen from the meat shop down the road. The smell might have enticed me in my younger days, but vampirism had taken from me

everything I had once enjoyed. I wasn't after the meat. I was looking for company.

The boy slowly came closer, taking small, unsure steps until he reached close enough to put his hands on my head. I let him. He scratched the corner behind my ear. After thirty years of lonely life on the streets, that tiny gesture made me purr.

"You are alone, aren't you? I am alone, too. My name is Edward. And you will be Charlie from now on."



The small bell over the door chimed as Jenny pushed open the door. She jumped around the place, excited to take home her new best friend. I glanced at her from the corner of my eye but stayed lying down. I had seen it too many times

in the last three years. They would pick one of the younger puppies. Nobody wanted old dogs.

I followed her with my eyes as she walked around with her father. Something about her face made it impossible to look away. She occasionally stopped and played with a dog before moving on to the next one. Then, she came to me, knelt, and smiled.

Something snapped in place between us. I stepped closer to her and she reached out and scratched behind my ear. My tail began to wag without me realising.

"Do you like him?"

She nodded.

"Miss, we would like to take this one home. Can we get started on the paperwork?"

"Excellent choice, sir. Maxwell is very patient and well-behaved. He is a bit on the older side,

but he is wonderful with children. I am sure your family will love him."

He turned to Jenny.

"What do you think of his name? Do you like Maxwell?"

"No." She puffed.

"What should we call him then?"

"Bruno!" The excitement in her voice got my tail wagging once more. Master laughed.

"Very well! Let's take Bruno home."

Bruno... I like that name.



"Bruno! Don't leave me, please."

When I opened my eyes, I found myself surrounded by my family. Master had my head in his lap, and

Jenny had her head on my chest like she always did.

As I breathed my last breath, my eyes locked on Jenny. She was facing the other way, so I could only see the back of her head, but I could feel her pain. Her body shivered slightly as she tried to stay strong for me.

After Marie's passing, I hadn't expected to find the kind of bond we shared. In my last days, Jenny reminded me of what that felt like.

Now that I stood at death's door, my heart was filled not with fear but with love. I wish Jenny knew.