

Blood so Sweet

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Content Warning

Content warning: Blood, non-consensual feeding, violence (domestic/physical/murder), transphobia, estrangement from parents.

Blood so Sweet

I should be dead.

I try to open my eyes. I'm awake, or barely, and it's my first thought. My body knows it should have died, so why am I alive and feeling almost better than on a normal morning? I'm hungry, that is, but that's not surprising. Breakfast can fix anything, right?

It's a strange feeling because I don't feel fear. It's almost like I'm missing something.

I open my eyes, sit up, and look around. I spot him instantly. His crimson eyes settle on me, and I look at them. They remind me of something, but I can't decide what.

"How are you feeling?" he asks. His voice is deep, and it feels like a balm on my skin or a nice cup of tea during a rainy afternoon. I know this voice.

"I should have died." The words stumble from my lips, and I barely recognize my own voice. It's a bit hoarse. I'm thirsty too. "I don't..." I shake my head.

My body feels foreign. I'm in a dimly lit room. Everything is in dark shades of purple, green, and grey. It's tasteful, but I don't know where I am.

"I don't remember." I look again for the crimson eyes.

I press my hand to my chest, and something feels very wrong. Then it hits me. Cold. I'm too cold. And even with focus, I can't find my heartbeat.

He gets up from his chair and moves toward me. The only thing I can look at are his features and his eyes. Gently, he reaches for my temples and my face. All I feel is the coldness of his hand on my skin. I reach out to put my hands on his. It feels great. I close my eyes again. There is a low chuckle with a whisper. "Remember."

I remember.



He's there, sitting in the café. He's always there. Every day. Huddled in a corner, it looks like he's hiding from the last ray of light filtering through a cloud. He sits in the same spot when he comes.

I give the window a quick glance. It has been raining for the past few weeks, and I'm not even mad about it. Today is a bit different, and the sun pierces through.

In the café, people come and go, and they give him a wide berth, some more than others. No one really stops to speak to him. It happens, from time to time, and people tend to nod at him in respect.

I remember I started watching him because he reminded me of a painting in a museum. Something about the way he moves, the way he dresses, the way his hair is tied. The air seems different around him.

Safer.

I watch him too much, and I draw him often. While there is no one around, when it's quiet. It's always a quick sketch, and I'm never too happy with it because I can't capture the likeness. The angles of his face, his nose, and his thin lips.

He's always courteous. His order is always the same. He never orders anything to eat. But he drinks two large black coffees, and then he nurses an almost empty cup.

He always comes when there aren't many people around. He sits alone. He often looks outside. Sometimes he reads. For me, the fact that he simply exists in this place, in the same space as I am, is enough.

I've longed to speak with him, a real conversation, not just "what would you like today?" And yet. I never have.

"You should give him one of your sketches. They're quite good," one of my colleagues says in passing while nodding toward him and glancing at my notebook. He doesn't comment on my fixation; he has his own.

"I don't want him to get ideas."

“It’s a drawing, not a wedding ring.” He shrugs and walks away with a rag to clean tables.

He has a point.

I look around. The café is quiet, and I decide to go for it. Not a wedding ring, I remind myself. I bring him another coffee. His cup seems empty, and it gives me an excuse to approach him. I don’t want to look like a creep.

“Hi.” I put the coffee on the table.

He looks at the cup. Then his eyes settle on me. It’s rare for me to lock eyes with someone because I usually avoid eye contact with Others. For no particular reason. It might be because humans are not at the top of the food chain, it might be because I’m afraid people might wonder about me and ask questions I don’t want to answer. No one hides anymore, but some species are best avoided sometimes.

An alarm bell rings in my head.

Vampire.

Of course he is. It’s hard to go unnoticed. He couldn’t be anything else, and the deep crimson eyes are a feature of their kind.

I’m breathless as I push the sketch toward him, and he picks it up. I see the corner of his mouth lift. For a second there, his teeth catch the light. I don’t tell him that I’ve been drawing him almost every day. Deep down, I know he knows. I tell myself everyone would have done the same. He has an ethereal beauty that only his kind possesses, and it would be a crime not to draw him.

"I'm Atlas." I shuffle on my feet. That, too, he knows. Hopefully. It's not like I don't repeat it with every order.

He nods, looks at the sketch again, folds it neatly in a square, and pockets it.

He looks at me again. Then he gives me his name. "I'm Levi."



Another flash returns.

"What the fuck kind of name is Atlas?" The guy throws the money in my face, and I take a step back. Customer greetings include a simple welcome and our name. I always liked the idea, and it has never been a problem before. I love my name, the one I picked, but now I want the ground to swallow me. The girl next to him looks at me in apology. She leaves me a hefty tip, but I can see it in her eyes. It doesn't make up for his behavior. She knows. And she knows I know. She glances one last time at me and then at him again. The guy's words ring loudly in my head. I'm on the verge of crying. It's never happened before. People are usually more open-minded than this—that's why I moved here.

"I will just take five minutes," I tell my closest colleague. He nods at me. He knows how important my name is to me. I don't even remove my apron. I slide between the boxes in the stock room, and I open the back door to the alley behind the café.

I take a deep breath, and I resist the urge to scream and throw whatever I find.

“Fuck you,” I whisper to no one but myself. I wipe my tears on my sleeve, but they don’t want to stop. My body feels tight.

“Are you okay?” The voice startles me.

“Fuck.” I jump and put my hand on my chest.

Levi stands a few meters away, in his impeccable slacks and buttoned shirt. The guy is spotless. Not a hair out of place. Appearing out of nowhere.

I check my watch. He usually arrives at this time. I look up at the sky. Clouds are scattered around, but the sun is still there. I know the myths got a lot of things wrong, and vampires can be found outside at all hours. Still, it’s always surprising.

“You’re here.”

“You’re sad.”

I nod. There is no point in lying. “Is it that obvious?”

I haven’t moved, and he hasn’t either. Right now, I long for a hug. I glance again at the sky and at Levi. I barely know the guy and yet... What if? He has always been nice and courteous, but our interactions have always been short, too short for my liking. Mentions of the weather, brief conversations about art and drawings and books.

“What can I do to alleviate your pain?” The question seems genuine.

I shake my head. “Don’t worry about it.”

“Atlas. Tell me.” He takes a step toward me, but he’s still too far away.

I think it's the first time I hear my name on his lips. I look at him, and my eyes settle on his. My heart skips a beat. An entire world separates us because of who he is and who I am.

"Are we friends, Levi?"

I see the shift in his features. Hesitation.

"We can be friends." He nods at me. "I don't have many of those."

"Neither do I."

We watch each other again, and I wonder what he sees. My tear-stained face? My mismatched earrings, my too-short and dark hair.

"I see you, Atlas," he says with a smile.

I open my mouth, and it takes me a few seconds to articulate the words, "Can you hear what I think? Can vampires do that?"

He laughs. An unfiltered full-bellied laugh. I've never heard it before and I wish I could bottle it and carry it around. "No, we can't." He pauses. "It's the first time you've acknowledged out loud what I am. People tend to be afraid of vampires."

"I'm not afraid of you," I tell him in a low voice.



Another flash comes.

The shouting comes first. Always. The voice. Ringing in my head. Too loud. But today it's different. It's worse, and it took me by surprise.

It started with a pattern, and that's why we broke up a long time ago. But it didn't matter. I kept moving, and he always found me.

But that day.

The shove is intentional, hard. My first thought is that he really wants to hurt me. The second is that he wants to kill me. I remember the fury on his face, contorted into an ugly expression, one I know brings a whole lot of problems. The voice rings again as I fall down. "You belong to no one but me."

I can't open my eyes, and I can't move my body. I know I'm fading away, and after all, I don't want to feel pain anymore.

Somewhere, I hear faint footsteps.

I feel light. Lighter than usual. Hanging in between states of consciousness.



I should be dead.

I open my eyes again. Now I remember. "Levi." And it dawns on me that he found me. He came to me. He saved me.

"Thank you." I whisper the words

"Immortality is not something you should thank me for. I'm selfish after all." He reaches into his jacket pocket and takes out a piece of paper, neatly folded. He caresses it with his fingers, with reverence. It takes me a whole minute, but I realize it's the sketch I gave him months ago. I don't ask why he kept it, I don't

ask why I'm here. Still, I feel reborn, even if I'm well and truly dead.

I grab my knees and rest my head on them.

"What now?"

He cocks his head to the side. "What?"

"What's next?"

He smiles at me and gets up from the chair again. "Come." He extends his hand, and I take it. If my heart could still beat, I'm sure it would be fast.



We walk side by side, my arm looped through Levi's. He gives me a brief history of where we are. As a matter of fact, not so far from my previous home. A bit more hidden. I've spotted the trees outside. And Levi's house is a whole lot bigger.

His face is unreadable. Like when he was sitting in the café. There were times when I wished I knew what he was thinking. His voice breaks my thoughts, "Atlas, I don't do things out of the goodness of my heart. You know by now that I don't have one. I told you, I'm selfish. And I am. You are the first person in a long time." He pauses. "The first person to look at me...." He pauses again. "I told you I don't have many friends. Hence, I can't let them die." He gives me a thin smile.

"That's practical." I'm a bit disappointed. I wish I weren't *only* a friend, or *only* practical. Still, I will take it. I didn't die. That's a win.

He chuckles. "Is it so surprising?"

I shake my head and look at my feet. He reaches out for my chin and raises it slowly. "Don't avert your gaze. You never have to do that again, you hear me?"

"Yes."

There are many things I want to tell him. I don't want to thank him again, so I reach out and hug him. It feels like the *one* hug I didn't give him when we were standing in the alley. Thinking about it, I don't know how long ago it was, because my perception of time is all over the place. *Immortality will do that to you*, Levi said when I mentioned time was different now. As my chest collides with his, he hugs me back, tight, and he rests his head on mine. He's caressing my hair and murmuring words I can't hear properly, but I'm too afraid to ask him to repeat.

Time stops, and I've never felt better as long as I've been dead.



The clothes in the wardrobe are nothing I've worn before, and they are always fun to look at. Fluffy dresses covered in lace, classy shirts, and smart matching pants. Choices, I have choices.

The first time, I discard the dresses instantly; it's been a while since I've worn anything dress-shaped. Today, I choose the bluest pants I've ever seen and pair them with a white shirt. I look at myself in the mirror and hesitate before I step out of the room.

I meet Levi in the living room.

“You look dashing.”

His words ring true.

“Thank you.”

“That is too many *thank yous* for one lifetime.” He moves his hand around, frowning.

I look at his long blond hair, and I reach out for a strand.

“Can I braid it?” Many times, I’ve imagined what it would feel like to run my fingers through it.

Levi nods. “It would be my pleasure.”

He sits down in front of me.

I start humming a tune.

“You sound happy.”

“For someone so dead?”

“We are the same, you know. And I don’t feel dead. At least not dead, dead.” He pauses. “It’s been a long time since I’ve felt dead anyway.”

I start braiding. “I understand,” I tell him in a low voice.

There is a beat of silence where I revel in the feeling of his hair on my fingers.

“You never mentioned your family. Is someone looking for you? Caring about you?” he asks.

It startles me. A sore topic.

I wish I could take a deep breath to steady myself, but the whole *not having a beating heart* is not helping. “I had an ex-boyfriend. Well. That didn’t go well. You found my dead body, after all.” I move my hands to his shoulders, and he tenses under my fingers. “My family. My sister is abroad. Studying.

I used to braid *her* hair. We don't really talk, not anymore anyway. She's my opposite. My parents, well... They don't take too kindly to change, if I can call it that. And they hate my name. My new name."

"Atlas?"

"Yes."

"It's a beautiful name. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise." He looks at me with his deep crimson eyes, and I feel like I'm drowning in a pool of blood.

I love it.

I love him.



I've lost track of time when Levi appears beside me.

"You look happy. With an extra pep in your step." I close the book I'm reading and put it in front of me on the table.

He rocks back and forth on his heels. I have never seen him like this. He seems giddy. It's so cute. He's so cute.

"I have a gift," he says.

I get up from the chair. "Oh, Levi, you don't need to. You have already done enough." I don't voice it, but immortality—for starters—seems like a gift I would never be able to repay, then housing, because Levi won't hear another word of me moving out of here and doesn't want to leave me out in the world, all by myself. New gifts are not necessary.

He smiles at me. "This one is different."

“Is it food?”

He shrugs. “Come.” He reaches out to me, and I take his hand. Now I’m intrigued by what the gift could be.

We take the stairs to the cellar. I remember touring it when I first started living here, but it’s damp and not very pretty.

I’m about to ask Levi what the gift is when it dawns on me as to why we are down here.

Alan is huddled in the corner, in between wooden boxes. I never thought I would see him again. I get a flash of the last time that happened. I remember his heavy footsteps, so different from Levi’s light ones. The last time he put his hands on me. My fall. My death.

“Surprise!” Levi says, making jazz hands. “It took me a while to find him. I got some help. He almost skipped town.” Levi bends at the waist until he’s at the same height as Alan. He boops his nose and smirks at him. “He thought he could get away with murder. No, no, no.”

He keeps booping Alan’s nose, and it reminds me that vampires are predators after all.

“Don’t play with the food.”

He straightens and looks at me with a mock offended look. “I wouldn’t.” He puts a hand on his chest. “Feel free to do so if you like.” He extends his hands towards Alan, whose eyes are now taking me in. If eyes could bulge out of someone’s head and run on their own, I’m sure they would.

He opens his mouth, and nothing comes out. No sound, nothing. Seeing him there, I had the small hope that he would beg for mercy. Try to apologize.

Since I started this new life, I forgot about him. Maybe I should even thank him, because it brought me closer to Levi.

I take the few remaining steps and grab him swiftly by the throat. Such a gesture would have been impossible before. The strength I have now needs to be controlled, but all I want to do is unleash it.

“What should I do?” I ask, because that’s not a conversation I’ve had with Levi. I know what’s in the treaties. Vampires are not allowed to hurt or hunt humans, unless they are defending themselves. Biting needs to be consensual. All this is known.

I glance at Alan again. Deep down, I know what I should do. Make him suffer, that is. After all, he killed me, or at least, he tried.

“It’s up to you,” Levi says. He reaches for one strand of my hair. It’s been getting longer, and he has been doing it more and more often.

A whimper breaks my thoughts. And I glance at my hand. Still tight on Alan’s throat. Such a weak human body. I feel the blood pumping. I see it move below his skin, and I’m mesmerized.

I’m hungry.

I search for Levi’s eyes, and he smiles at me, then nods. Not that I need permission, but I’m glad to have it anyway.

I bite. Hard. Ripping skin, blood staining my shirt. All I hear is a gasp. He goes limp in my arms, and I have to hold him so I can drink properly. Even for this, he's still useless. I stop, and I look at him. The man I thought I loved, the man I thought loved me. He's a bit ashen now, with pale blue lips. It suits him. I like him better like this. Almost dead and silent.

"You decide." Levi's voice brings me back to the moment. I don't think twice. I keep drinking until it feels like I'm just emptying a juice box.

I'm thirsty for revenge after all.



The body drops to the floor with a *thump*, and I don't give it another glance.

"Does it taste good to you?" Levi asks, one brow raised.

"A bit strange."

He reaches out to me and gathers some blood left on my lips. He brings his fingers to his mouth and sucks on them. "Indeed."

He tugs on my hand, and we exit the cellar. Leaving the body behind.

He loops my hand around his waist. With my body pressed against his, I've never felt more me than here, in his arms, without a beating heart. His eyes settle on mine, and he smiles at me, his fangs on full display. He's devastating, and I don't know if I could love him more. Something passes, and I don't have to tell him. I see it in his eyes, he knows I love him. He has

known for a while, I'm sure, even before I was turned. Made of small bits of conversations, that first sketch I gave him, smiles, lingering eyes. And now this gift. Such a magnificent one. A declaration of love.

While I think about blood, I have a brief memory of taste, and I can still feel Levi's blood on my tongue. The thing that saved me. The thing that made me like him. That tied me to him. Forever.

"I barely remember the taste, but your blood is sweeter, better," I tell him as I watch him.

He nods and gives me a hint of fang. "Love tastes sweet."

I absentmindedly play with his shirt.

"Can I bite you?" I ask him.

He smiles at me. "I thought you would never ask."

I trail my hands on his collar and slightly push it down. I'm on my tiptoes, and his hand presses my back. My body is flush against his. I've never felt so confident before.

I bite, gently, as if it were a kiss. His blood fills my mouth, and it's sweeter than what I remember, sweeter than honey. It's perfect. He's perfect.

On instinct, I lick the wound, and the bleeding stops. It's so much more than just a bite, so much more than just blood. It's a bond, and it's beautiful. Ours only.

There is a stretch of silence, and I feel like I could hear our hearts beat again.

Levi's voice is a mere whisper. "I love you, Atlas."

"I love you too, Levi."

More

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