

"SHHH!"

That time it took all three of them. Dude would just not shut up.

"Is he cramming for a history final or something?" Rebecca whispered.

Libby thought this unlikely. "He's too old to be in high school. Anyway, if he was cramming for a history final he wouldn't be reading one of our textbooks."

She squinted. "What are you..."

"No, Libby's right, that's the one Mrs. Steinhope's class uses. And can we get back to the project already?" Amber tapped her pencil against the paper imperiously. But it was science class, and it was Amber, so no one expected anything else.

This lasted for another five minutes before the man shouted "Son of a ..." and looked around guiltily before the "whore" slipped out. Not only did the three girls throw any available pencils or erasers at him, he was ejected from the library.

"I just feel bad for him, you know?" Rebecca sighed as she retrieved their materials. "What if he was a coma patient or something? That was a modern history textbook, maybe he was reading up on the whole global warming thing."

"The Kyoto Pact?" Amber chirped. "I could tell him about the Kyoto pact if..."

"Of course *you* would know about all international rules and regulations having to do with global warming." Libby rolled her eyes dramatically, only to be sandwiched in a frenzy of elbows from the other two.

They packed up their things after hashing out the verbiage for their science project and giggled their way down the block and to the corner where they could stop at the old-fashioned for a well-earned shake, or go straight to Rebecca's house. Options were discussed with such animation that they didn't notice the man from the library approaching them with diffidence.

"Excuse me..."

All three girls jumped. Libby screamed, Amber adopted a position that she'd learned from watching dozens of movies and that had nothing to do with martial arts, but she'd also learned that when she stood that way people assumed she could kick their ass. Rebecca ducked behind Libby, because when Libby screamed that way it meant someone was on the verge of getting punched.

The man screamed too, jumping back with his hands up. Amber lowered her fists. "Don't *do* that!"

"I'm sorry!" he yelled back. Then paused. "And your stance is absolutely horrible. I'm sorry, I just wanted to talk to you..."

"Um," said Libby, and a world of dubious commentary in that um, as she took a step further between the other two and the stranger.

Fortunately he picked up what she expected and seemed as disgusted as they were. "Not... I didn't mean that. Not like that. That's ... no."

She lowered her fists. "Then what did you mean?"

"I meant..." and then he had to stop and think about what he meant. Or how to say it in a way that didn't sound threatening.

The three girls exchanged a funny look. Amber had her phone half out of her bag, no doubt with one of the others' phone numbers cued up and ready to call to get them the hell out of here. When they were old enough to start walking around the city on their own they set up a code system among the five of them, different movie quotes for different situations that they'd try to work into conversation somehow. Stranger Danger wasn't one that had come up. They could use the one for being invited back to someone else's place for sex purposes, or maybe the one for being threatened by a man. Libby tried to cobble something together.

"I've been... out of touch for a few years. Quite a few years," he amended, looking worried and sheepish and none of the girls could figure out why, by that second puzzled exchange. I've been trying to catch up on the current events, but there's quite a number of things that are taken for granted in the publications..."

*The publications?* Amber mouthed.

"I was wondering if you'd be able to help me."

They stared. Libby blinked. Rebecca blinked, stepping forward. "Why us?"

"Well, to be honest, the librarians at the library weren't very good," he took a step backwards as all three of them advanced to defend their favorite hangout that didn't involve food. "At least, the ones there tonight aren't."

"Duh, that's because Tuesday nights are the nights when only the interns are there. Well, Tuesday and Thursdays."

Amber elbowed Libby. "Don't say 'only' the interns. They're cool, they're just still learning. But I guess if you've got something specific you're looking for..."

"Anything from the last fifty. Hundred years or so?" Rebecca spoke up suddenly. Both girls turned to look at her; it wasn't like her to be so quiet for so long, but then again they didn't get accosted by strange men on the street that often. Physically accosted, at least. Libby

took her by the arm and put her behind them again, or tried to. "No, I think I know what he's talking about, I mean. I think I know what happened to you. You're... you know. Right?"

Silence became more and more uncomfortable. "Well the *rest* of us don't know," Libby protested, only to be met with a two-forked-finger gesture from by Rebecca's mouth. "Oh you are shitting me. Sorry." Her hand came up over her mouth. Rebecca's hand, too.

"It's true, I saw his... you know. When he screamed."

"I did not," he protested, not very well. "I am not." Even less of a convincing protest. All three of the girls stared at him, and after they had stared down Dr. Goldwater in bio class over the classification of frogs and toads they figured they could stare down anyone. Even a however old he was vampire, if Libby read Rebecca's gestures correctly. Sure, why not. They'd fought an incubus last year.

Several seconds went by. Passers-by started to stare, which Libby thought was absurd and stupid since no one had stopped to check on them or help when they were screaming. "Aren't you going to run?" the vampire asked.

"Are you going to start talking in a bad accent?" Libby asked. "I mean okay, you're a vampire, you can obviously control yourself. Or you wouldn't have been in a public library." She assumed. Even a vampire who regularly drank blood, even every night, if he was as soft-spoken and smart as this he wouldn't be going into a public library if he thought he'd go berserk and start gnawing on the patrons.

He still looked surprised, guarded. "That's awfully clear-headed thinking for one so young."

"I'm sixteen!"

"She defeated an incubus last ouch!"

That one was because Rebecca had stepped on Amber's foot.

And then Libby grabbed the vampire's arm and started to haul him along. "Okay, the first thing we can't do is we can't stand out here in the streets talking about fantasy novels."

The vampire opened his mouth to say something.

"*Talking about fantasy novels*," Libby told him in that tone of voice that sent Rebecca into fits of giggles. "And we can't stay out much longer, we were supposed to be home already but whatever, okay, we need a quiet place to sit, and we need a parent who's not going to ask questions."

"Frankie," all three of them chorused, arriving at the same conclusion by different paths. Two of them remembering how she had helped last year, known the landscape of the weird wide world they'd been flung into. One of them remembering that her family hardly blinked no

matter how weird things got. Rebecca pulled out her cell phone while Libby steered the group over to a nearby coffee shop. Amber, still torn between being drawn to the non-humans and repelled by them after what one had done to her, kept Libby between her and the vampire. Not that she felt any animosity towards vampires in general or this one in particular, but better safe than enthralled again.

"She'll be here in fifteen or less," Rebecca said as they all got a table and Amber went up to the counter with their drink orders. Including the vampire's, to their surprise. "So, what's the last thing you remember ... seeing on the History Channel before you went to sleep? Fell asleep," she corrected herself to a more normal phrase.

Libby didn't know why she was surprised at Rebecca's ability to double-talk around the magic stuff in public, but it always did surprise her. It surprised the vampire, too, though of course it did since he didn't know the girls at all. "I think they were covering... Westward expansion?" Both girls gave him a flat stare. "The railways. There was ... they were covering the automation of the railways," he amended to make it sound less like he'd fallen asleep during the event and more like he'd fallen asleep during a tv program about it.

"So you got a fair amount of sleep, you're fine." Libby punched his shoulder in a not entirely friendly way as Amber came back with the coffees. "We're starting from the end of Westward Expansion and the automation of the railroads, and I guess the test covers up to the present day?"

"Sounds good." Amber set down the coffees and made a 'bring it' gesture. "Let's go."

The vampire adopted a lecturing expression and posture, which only raised more questions that would have to be answered in private. "At the end of westward expansion, what railway companies remained in operation."

Amber rattled off several companies, to Libby's mild surprise. Rebecca was still searching Wikipedia. "My grandfather," Amber admitted. "Big history buff."

"And what were the consequence of the automation and increased efficiency of the railroads?"

That, they couldn't give clear answers on, and there was a lot of searching on phones. Rebecca summed up all the points that they could find while the vampire tried to make it seem as though his expressions were a result of the coffee and not the discussion. That took them through the next ten minutes.

"And what led to the Great Depression?" he asked, clearly dreading the answer.

"Unregulated stock market!" Libby declaimed cheerfully and proudly, having waited until he was drinking his coffee so he could choke on it. Okay, that was a bit mean. "There were no, um, the Federal Reserve didn't do anything but sit on their hands, so a lot of things crashed when they could have been avoided, like now, kind of. With interests rates and that kind of

thing. It depends on who you talk to where it started. Some people say it was because people freaked out after the stock market crash of 1929..."

"Black Tuesday," everyone chorused, and nodded as if they knew what they were talking about.

"And other people say it was because they weren't spending enough."

"Millennials aren't buying diamonds and houses and cars and nobody knows why, those stubborn millennials," Amber grumped.

"What..." The vampire lowered his voice. "What are millennials?"

And *that* explanation took them until Frankie came running into the coffee shop to pick them all up.

Libby and Rebecca squeezed into the back seat with the vampire, with Frankie sitting across their laps. They made it back to her house without being stopped by the police somehow; Libby thought Frankie's mother muttering the whole time back had something to do with it. Rebecca explained that she was a witch or a sorceress or something, which did nothing to ease the stiff and terrified look on the vampire's face.

"How long have you been out, anyway?" she asked with what probably was innocent curiosity.

But then he answered. "About a week? It took that long to travel down here from New York," and met with a chorus "Oh you sweet child" and he sank deeper down into his seat.

Frankie took over the history lessons when they got in and could stop talking in code. Her mother just shook her head and took them over to the library, aka the five floor to ceiling bookshelves that dominated their living room. They arranged themselves on couches and called their parents to bring over clothes because they'd gotten caught up in "reviewing history", which wasn't even a lie. Not that their parents would ask why they'd decided to have a spontaneous sleepover at a friend's house. Frankie was safe. She'd been one of the girls for a couple years now. As far as their parents were concerned, it was abrupt but fine and healthy to want to spend the night at a friend's, particularly when the friend's parent was there and had given the okay.

They didn't need to talk it over to decide that telling their parents about the adult male vampire was a bad idea.

"Your friend can stay in the guest room," Frankie's mother told the group. "Have you all eaten yet? Is there something you need in terms of nutrition..." As though vampires wandered into her house every day. The only person who blinked was the vampire.

"Ah. No. No, I'm all right for now. Thank you." He didn't seem to know how to ask whether or not she was offering, and she'd gone to the kitchen before he could decide whether or not to. Much to the girls' relief because there were some things they didn't want to see or hear or think about where their parents were concerned. Vampire feeding was only a couple steps below sex.

"Okay, so." Libby clapped her hands and rubbed them together gleefully. "Where do you want to start."

Rebecca was the first to pick up on where he was looking. First Libby, then Amber, then herself, and more specifically at her grandmother's necklace that she'd taken to wearing. "Oh no," she held up her hands. "No, no no no, if we start in on the last hundred years of race relations we'll be here all night. Um, the gist?"

"The SparkNotes version." "The Wiki Summary."

"What are Spark Notes?"

Libby ignored the small question and picked up the larger, running down the list as far as she could remember it. Black Lives Matter, Spike Lee, Loving v Virginia, civil rights and Martin Luther King, skimming through jazz and blues because Zillah would never forgive her if she didn't, and covering the bits and pieces she remembered of Reconstruction. Amber went through all of the Asian subgroups because, she said, they tend to get lured together. Internment camps, Bruce Lee, changing stereotypes and rude questions, the Japanese panic of the 80s, Pearl Harbor. Hers was considerably less linear and involved a lot of "oh right and then."

By the time they'd covered that it was forty five minutes later of talking at rapid speed and interrupting each other. The vampire had a couple of questions but mainly just listened, looking shocked and appalled or curious or sick to his stomach by turns. Libby hoped the shocked and appalled was for how people were treated. If he turned out to be a racist vampire he was going to get tossed out a window, even if it wasn't her house.

"And the Tuskegee experiments," Rebecca reminded her. "Don't forget about that."

"Oh christ," Libby rolled her eyes.

"Tuskegee experiments?" the vampire grimaced. "I'm not going to like this, am I."

"Well, that depends on how you feel about human experimentation and who qualifies as human..." Libby started, before getting a kick from Amber.

"Facts now, rant later."

"Okay, okay." Frankie went and pulled back down the picture book of the history of Black America, finding the pictures of the Tuskegee victims and passing them over for his perusal

and cringing. "That's not the only thing either, there was a whole big eugenics thing going on, I mean, the Nazis were bad about human experimentation in World War II, but..."

"Wait, world war *two*? There were two world wars."

All four girls exchanged a look and several words. "We didn't... we did skip right past World War II didn't we." "Except some pieces." "Wasn't that what you were reading about?" "Oh, you missed Hiroshima, even." "No, we covered that."

If it was possible for the vampire to look more pale, Libby thought he would have tried. "No, begin at the first World War."

"I can't," Libby started to snicker. "Someone else take that one, I can't."

"The internet can do it better than we can, actually." Frankie was pulling it up on her phone. "Hang on, here's the whole post about Franz Ferdinand stop humming, dammit."

Rebecca didn't look the slightest bit guilty, but she did stop.

"There's also a band called Franz Ferdinand," she explained, and then passed her phone over so the vampire could read about the beginning of the first World War.

"That one was a mess. I'm ... just, a total mess," Amber's hands waved through the air, along with Frankie's knitting needles as she passed them over. The bamboo ones, everyone noted but no one commented. "So, so many people died because every one of the commanders was stupid. Okay, not all of them, but there was a lot of stupid dying in mud and blood. They wrote songs about it! Sad songs," she hastened to add.

"And glory songs," Libby muttered.

The vampire looked horrified. The more so as he figured out how to scroll on the phone and read; his eyes bugged out of his head. "I fought in the ... in the war for Emancipation, you know," he added, looking at Libby with some rebuke, which she decided not to hit him for. "But this..."

"Well, we had a lot of new technology and new ways to kill each other," she said, and went on describing machine guns tearing bodies apart and so on until Frankie glared at her. "Anyway, it was a mess."

"And then World War Two." All the girls chorused the last three words. "World War II was a mess because one jerkass decided it was all our fault." Rebecca had feelings on the subject, and a hand around her necklace.

Libby had taken Reconstruction; they all let Rebecca take the Holocaust. She backed up some, too, and started with the Russian pogroms, which Libby thought was weird until she remembered who her family friends were and where they'd come from. They went through

the rise of National Socialism and then the invasion of Poland. Touched on the other groups that had been persecuted and murdered en masse, all with the same grim and vacant look. Everyone went quiet as they listened to her lecture for another half hour, remembering more than they thought they'd ever known about the invasion, the progression, the bombing. "And then, that was Pearl Harbor, that Amber told you about?"

The vampire's eyes were even more glassy. Libby considered how much they'd told him and wondered if they should stop soon before he fell over. "I think so."

"Well, so that was when we nuked Japan. Well, because of that."

He went to get a drink of water after they explained what nuking Japan meant. And stayed there for a good twenty minutes.

"Maybe we should have just played We Didn't Start the Fire for twenty minutes," Amber grimaced.

"Oh, shush."

When he came back they had all decided to tell him only the good things that had happened in the last century or so. "The pill! I mean, it has its side effects, but the concept that women could take birth control into their own hands? I mean do you know what that did? Just the idea that they could make their own decisions for their health." Frankie, the loudest they'd heard her in weeks, talked with her hands and her knitting until Amber got excited and talked over her.

"And it's been this uphill slog, you have first wave, and then second wave, and..."

"Science! Not culture. We can do that tomorrow." Rebecca blinked. "You're science girl, tell him about DNA or something!"

"Oh god." Libby yawned as she pulled a couch cushion over her face.

Amber did take them all through the history of DNA, microtechnology and nanites, the drug industry and health care in this country when compared to other countries. "And there's a whole lot of ethical questions going on right now..." About antibiotics and their usage, about the vaccination process and whether or not it should be rushed because the ebola epidemic, who got medical attention.

"Aaand I think that's enough for one night, ladies," Frankie's mother came in with a towel for each of them, including the vampires. "You can't cover the entire last century worth of developments in one evening. You haven't even covered the last ten years worth of astronomy developments."

Libby and Frankie both opened their mouths.

"Later."

"Please," the vampire agreed with an exhausted smile. He pulled to his feet with more grace than any of the girls did, too, limbs stiff and extremities gone to sleep from sitting. "And thank you. This has been a much... more interactive introduction to the modern world than I had expected. Thank you."

"You're welcome," they chorused in one form or another. Took turns changing into the pajamas their parents had left for them at the door and all of them brushing their teeth in a pack by the bathroom.

Frankie's mother invited the vampire to use the master bathroom to brush his teeth, given both the awkwardness of the likely shape of his teeth and the intimidation factor of four teenage girls. She also kept a weather eye out to make sure they retreated back to Frankie's room and packed themselves in appropriately, both for their safety and in the interests of a healthy start to school tomorrow and for the vampire's sake.

"You think he'll still be there in the morning?" Rebecca asked, pointing her toes at the ceiling and describing a dance in the air with her feet.

Libby watched her. "I kind of hope so. It was fun telling him all that history..."

"You only say that because you liked watching him choke," Amber accused.

"And because I was surprised how much I remember! Didn't think I'd paid that much attention."

The girls giggled. Continued to giggle as Frankie sat up with a look of wide-eyed alertness, cuing the others to eyeball the door. When the vampire knocked they sat up, and in the second or two it took her to say "Come in" Libby had sat up and was braiding Amber's hair, and Rebecca was taking a careful brush and pick to Libby's. Frankie had her knitting replaced in her lap, though no one had seen her lunge across the room for it.

"I'm sorry," he explained. "But I wanted to tell you thank you, again. This truly is the friendliest welcome I had never expected to get, and the world has changed much in the last century. I cannot overstate enough how much encouragement and assistance you have given me by sitting and talking with me, let alone inviting me into your home..."

Libby ducked her head, pulling the brush out of Rebecca's hands, and managed not to say anything about all vampires sounding like they came out of Downton Abbey. Amber sounded pained as she brushed away both his concerns and his thanks.

"Honestly," Frankie broke in. "After the last time we ran into someone... closer kin to you than to us," she decided to apply delicacy rather than name the incubus by species. "Just sitting around and talking history is kind of a welcome relief to us, too."

He nodded. Turned to go and then stopped in the doorway, with all four girls attempting to perk up and trying not to groan at how much he wanted to bubble at them, too. He was a vampire, who knew how many hundreds of years old, he should be more dignified than that.

"I apologize, again. My manners are completely lacking this first week out of my grave, so to speak, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Edward..."

There were more names, and a title, Libby thought. But she couldn't get past the first one and neither could anyone else. They stared. Amber hiccuped. Rebecca laughed first, a short sharp bark before her hands clapped over her mouth and then a string of giggles. Then Libby joined in, and before poor Edward could form the question they were collapsed on the floor giggling and reaching for their cell phones. Zee would get half a dozen texts all at once at the very least explaining to her what had just happened. Not how Frankie had taken a vampire home, not even how they'd spent their supposed down time studying history instead. Just the name Edward.

"Oh my god," Libby wheezed, letting her phone drop to her side and clutching her stomach. "Oh god."

"That's perfect." Frankie shrieked. "That's so perfect."

"Edward." Was all Amber said, before clapping both hands over her mouth, all threat completely erased by the images.

The vampire stared as though they'd all lost what was left of their minds at this time of night. Frankie's mother sighed, appearing from the hallway and taking him by the arm. "Come on, let's leave them to it," she told him. "I'll explain in the hall. Or it might be better just to show you."

"Do you sparkle?" Libby called right before the door closed and three pillows hit her face. "That poor man. That poor, poor man."

"Hashtag not sorry," Frankie giggled.