

Healing

“How’s she doing?” Walter asked quietly as he silently closed the door behind him. The bedroom he’d just entered was small and both sparsely decorated and furnished. Of its two other occupants, only one was conscious.

“I do not know if she’ll pull through or not,” his soulless companion, Carla, replied with a frustrated sigh. “There was a splinter of wood that breached her heart. It was small and the intrusion relatively shallow, but with her other injuries... I just don’t know.”

Walter stood looking down at Misty’s battered face with no expression on his own. The sheets that were pulled up to her neck hid most of her injuries. But the vampire who’d brought Misty into the world of the night had already seen them. The fire of his rage burned silently; revealed only in his eyes as he looked down at the face of a woman he thought of as a daughter.

“I would dearly love to find out who did this. And kill them. Slowly.”

“Yes,” Carla replied quietly, her calculating eyes on her lover’s face. “I can feel your anger boiling just below the surface. Be calm. Now is the time for clear thought. Later... well, the future holds many possibilities for us yet. You must be able to think clearly so that you may find the path leading to the most desirable of those possibilities.”

With a nod he turned and opened the door. Pausing in the doorway, he half turned back to Carla, “I want someone here with her at all times. Until she awakens or.... She is never to be alone.”

“I’ll see to it.”

“Thank you,” he replied, silently closing the door behind him.

“Alright,” Walter told his somber band of vampires a little while later that evening, “We’re here for two reasons. One is to discuss healing. What is happening with your sister, why, and how. After that, we’re going to spread out and find out everything we can about the night she was attacked. Where she went, what she did, who she spoke to... everything we can find.”

“How is she?” Jules asked in a near whisper.

“She was beaten unconscious,” the older vampire replied in a quiet emotionless voice that sent shivers through the gathered vampires. “No doubt her attackers thought her dead. She was thrown down from the 8th Street bridge into the woods below. Ironically, the greatest danger to her life came not from the beating but from landing in the branches of a tree. A splinter of wood pierced her heart. A tiny thing to be sure but any heart wound is just as critical to us as it is in humans. More so really.”

Keith looked like he wanted to ask a question but instead chose to look at his shoes.

“Keith, I believe you were going to ask why a heart wound is so bad for vampires,” Walter said in a warmer, more gentle voice and tone. The youngest of the assembled vampires simply nodded. “We are nosferatu. The living dead. Bodies in the world of the living. Souls trapped halfway into what comes next. We drink blood in order to live. Each night, we use up some of that blood doing everyday things. Just walking and talking uses up a tiny amount of blood. When we press ourselves to do extraordinary things, we use more blood. Everyone with me so far?”

Randy muttered, “Yeah,” while the others settled for nodding.

“So blood goes in, but unless we’re injured, no blood comes out. What happens to the blood? Is it burned up? Incinerated by our undead metabolism? No, it is not. But it is mostly drained of energy. And that draining process on the blood cells greatly reduces them in size. It removes the vast majority of the fluid from the cells, killing them. So what happens to the dried up remains of these blood cells? Anyone?”

“Well, we certainly don’t piss them out,” Virge said with a frown as he realized he really didn’t know how this fundamental aspect of being a vampire worked.

“Quite right,” Walter agreed with a nod. “As the blood cell remnants are pumped through the body, these cells bounce along through our bloodstreams... until they reach our hearts. Well, the majority do anyway. A small amount go into our hair and nails. But only a small amount. Anyway, after many long talks with DeVartis, I think I finally have a fairly complete understanding of how it all works.”

“How what all works?” Danni asked from her position lightly leaning against Virge.

“The nosferatu heart,” Walter stated with a slightly satisfied smile. “Why do the dead blood cells stop in the heart? Why doesn’t this clog up our hearts with a sludge of dead blood cells? In a word: magic. Necromancy to be exact. Our hearts are essentially necromantic batteries. You see, the dead blood cells are further compacted as they reach the heart. The compacting process generates electricity which has the same general effect in us as it does in humans... we move and think. In our case the electrical impulses originate in the heart and not the head. The now tiny remains of our spent blood cells are absorbed first into our hearts where they are transformed and passed along into the rest of our bodies to construct... or reconstruct... other tissues. Primarily neural tissues as our bodies can directly use freshly ingested blood to do the vast majority of our other healing.

“Once more, I get off track. The truly great thing is, the older our hearts get, the better they work.

“But there’s more to it,” he continued with a grim smile. “Obviously we have a lot of blood in our bodies and we drink new blood every night. Our stomachs no longer process blood, they just store it while it is absorbed into our bloodstreams. As we go about our evening’s labors, blood is ‘burned’, as I mentioned before. But it is the weakest of the blood that is used. The stronger blood remains in your bloodstream. It is your bodies’ way of being ready for hard times and quick action.”

“So,” Mando began thoughtfully, “Heart wounds are so bad because they interrupt the necromancy that gives us life?”

“Some would argue with your use of the word ‘life’ but basically you are correct. Wood is a bane to necromancy. Why? If we continue thinking of our hearts as batteries, then think of wood being the equivalent to a piece of metal. What happens when you drop a piece of metal across both terminals of a car battery? Simple: it will short out and drain the battery. Sticking wood in a our heart literally grounds out the magic that keeps us going.”

“And Misty’s heart was damaged by a piece of wood,” Danni whispered.

“Yes,” Walter replied quietly. “It was. Only a small sliver, but that may very well be all it takes to kill her. Your sister is still very young... and this is the type of wound that can kill elder vampires. Misty is strong though and we’re doing everything we can to help her.”

“And what is that?” Jules asked, wiping away a bloody tear. “What can you do to treat such an injury?”

“We began with a giving her a pint of my blood, half orally and half via IV, and making sure that the entire splinter had been removed. Carla did basic first aid for her other injuries which mainly consisted of setting multiple broken bones. Your sister was beaten very badly. I called Gladys

Wright asking her for a favor of her blood. As you well know, Gladys has very strong blood in her veins. Instead of the pint I asked for, she sent three. Despite what we have done for her in the past, we are in her debt. Gladys' blood is being fed to your sister intravenously as we speak. All we can do now is wait, the rest is up to Misty."

"So why is it that bullets to the heart will kill us just as dead as wood?" Randy asked after an uncomfortable silence had fallen over the group.

"The heart is still our necromantic battery. It's also the center of our nervous systems. No battery works well leaking fluids or shorting within itself."

"I want to go find who did this to Misty!" Mando declared fiercely, smashing a fist into the palm of his other hand.

"Soon my son, soon. We're not quite finished with our talk on healing." Mando gave a curt nod, apparently not trusting himself to speak.

"So why does concentrating allow us to speed our healing?" Walter asked.

"Oh, I know!" Jules declared brightly.

"Then tell us, please," Walter asked with a fond smile.

"Unlike the living, we can focus where our energy goes. It's the same mechanism that allows us to move faster, be stronger, or sometimes even be smarter than humans. By focusing, we give direction to where our blood energy is spent. And face it, we don't have to keep our bodies alive... just maintained and not rotting."

"Yes," Walter nodded with a little smile. "Jules is quite right. Our focus directs where the blood energy from the heart goes. The heart can quickly grow new neural tissue and that tissue can directly tap into the body's blood supply. This is what allows us to heal so quickly.

"And *that* is why I constantly harp at you about mental discipline. If you're panicking, you are wasting your heart's energy. Panic causes a loss of focus. A loss of focus results in diminished efforts. And diminished efforts can get you killed."

"Damn sure can," Randy agreed with a frown and a nod.

The oldest vampire looked over his children for a long moment. He saw no questions in their eyes that did not involve finding who'd so badly injured their sister.

"Very well," the group leader began with a frightful determination. "Go find what you can about what happened to your sister last night. Mando, you and Jules go by TXDOT. We know where she ended up. See if the traffic cameras can find us anything. Be sure and get Jules proper ID so no one will question why you're there."

"We're on it boss," Mando responded, standing up and walking away. Jules was forced to hurry to catch up with his quick stride.

"Randy, Keith, her car is still missing. Find it and learn the story of how it came to be wherever it is you find it."

"Let's go kid," Randy called to the youngest of them. "Time to go hunting."

"And Randal, I want answers not a pile of corpses. Not yet anyway."

"Answers you shall have," Randy replied with a little, formal bow before he and Keith departed.

"What of us?" Virge asked, the fingers of his right hand tightly interlaced with the fingers of Danni's left hand.

"You two are the most personable of my line. I want you to check Misty's usual haunts. Find who she talked to. Find out who saw what. Be as subtle as you wish. But have a care. Don't get in over your heads."

“We’ll be careful,” Danni promised. “And we’ll bring you back information. We’ll find who did this to our sister.”

“Then go. And good hunting.”

“Thank you sir,” Virge replied as the two of them left at a trot.

“Did you tell them about the needle mark on her neck?” Carla asked as Walter returned to the room where Misty lay unconscious.

“No.”

“Did you mention the phone call telling you where to find her?”

“No, I didn’t tell them about that either.”

“It could be useful to them,” Carla suggested.

“Perhaps, but it could also bias their investigations. Any word yet on the blood found on her shoes or under her finger nails?”

“Not yet, I’m expecting the lab results back soon. I’m also most curious to know if there are traces of any drugs in her system.”

“Alright, we’ll give the lab a little more time then.”

“What are your plans if the attack turns out to be the work of other vampires?” Carla asked.

“Most likely, I’ll disappear them,” Walter replied coldly. “I’ll not allow a precedent to be set that one can attack my family and get away scot-free.”

“That path has many hazards of its own,” she said quietly.

“Yes,” he agreed, looking down at his daughter’s battered face. “All paths have their own inherent dangers. And when we find the person or persons who did this, we will show them the hazards involved in attacking a man’s daughter.”

“Or a woman’s daughter,” Carla added, running a gentle hand over Misty’s hair.

“In attacking our daughter,” Walter acknowledged, taking the unconscious woman’s hand in his own as a single bloody tear ran down his cheek.