

Sunshine

With an inarticulate scream the young vampire staggered back inside. His flesh continued burning in several places as did his clothes. Jules sprayed him down with a fire extinguisher as he rolled around on the floor shrieking.

Across the room, Armando and Randy laughed while Misty shook her head and Danni scowled at them. "Virge," Danni called. "Get him some blood, quickly."

"Got it right here," he called, shaking his head.

"You assholes!" the badly burned vampire cried in a yell which was closer to a scream. "You knew this would happen. You freakin' set me up!"

"Can you see?" Virgil asked concernedly as he carried the blood he'd collected around close to the upset young vampire.

"No, I bloody well can't! My eyes burned too, you dirty mother fu..." Which was as far as he got before Virge grabbed his throat and poured the tumbler of blood into him. The younger vampire choked for a second but quickly drank down the entire tumbler. Virge let him go, shaking his head. He cut away the remains of the younger man's shirt, pulling several charcoal-like pieces of vampire away with it, before walking away to sit next to Danni.

"Well," Walter said quietly from the other doorway. "It seems you decided to start without me." Though his tone held no accusation, the others suddenly looked defensive. "Tell me, whose bright idea was it to begin without me?" No answers seemed to be forthcoming.

"Misty!" he suddenly snapped, "Answer my question!"

Misty's eyes got very round but she said nothing aloud. Her eyes did however turn towards Armando and Randy. Walter's gaze followed hers and the two vampires sitting on the table suddenly looked very uncomfortable.

"Did you think it was funny to send Keith outside before I was ready?" Walter asked in a dangerously quiet voice. "Were you thinking it would be an entertaining show? Answer me!" he roared.

Both vampires jerked as though slapped. Armando whispered 'no' while Randy just shook his head.

Walter glared at the two of them for a moment before walking over to Keith. The badly burned young man was already healing himself though it was going very slowly by vampire standards. Still looking angry, Walter slashed one of his wrists with a suddenly prominent fang and stuck the bleeding wrist into Keith's mouth. "Drink," he commanded and the much younger vampire did so. A long moment later Walter removed his wrist and licked the wound shut.

"Sit your ass down," Walter quietly told Virge who had stood up. Walter had never looked his way which still made some of the younger vampires wonder how he did it. Virge sat. "Not you," he said, holding his burned ward up. "Now, Keith. You're going to heal yourself. I'm going to walk you through it just like we've walked through using blood before. Understand?"

"Yessir," Keith managed to reply as he began shaking.

"Concentrate on your burns. I know they hurt a great deal. Do it anyway."

"I'm trying sir," the burned man replied, obviously in a great deal of pain.

"Now, feel your blood soaking up through the burns like water up through a sponge. As it rises through the heat, it soothes and cools you like a nice cool lotion on a hot summer's night. Feel

that coolness as it spreads all over your skin.”

“I’m trying, sir,” Keith whispered, his voice still sounding strained. “I...I think it’s working.” Indeed, the young vampire’s healing began accelerating.

“You’re doing good, kid,” Walter replied gently. Keith, who was still blind, never saw the furious gaze the older man raked across the other vampires. Each of them flinched back from his anger. “Very good, Keith,” he continued with none of his obvious anger reaching his voice. “Feel the healing spread across your skin. You’re making good progress. Now, I want you to concentrate on your eyes.”

“They’re burned,” Keith replied in a scared, scarce whisper.

“I know they are,” his mentor replied. “But we’re going to fix that as well. Given time and resources, there are very few things that a vampire cannot heal. In fact, it looks like your eyelids are nearly healed now.”

“Yessir.”

“Good. Keep them closed. Concentrate on your eyes the same as you’ve been doing with your skin. The first sensation you feel should be a little tingle.”

“Yes,” he replied after a while. “I feel it.”

“Good, keep working on it.” Behind him, Danni yawned. Walter turned to look at her and she froze.

“Are we boring you, Miss Demarko?” Walter asked quietly.

Looking worried, she replied quickly, “No sir. It’s just... it’s earlier in the day than I usually get up. I’m sorry.”

“No need to be sorry for your youth. What you need is some blood.” He pulled out a set of keys and threw them to Armando. “Mando, I’ve got a case of blood in the trunk of my car. Go get it. Now.”

“But sir, couldn’t we get Carla to...?”

“No, Armando,” Walter replied softly without looking away from Keith’s progress. “I’m not going to trouble Carla. She’s busy. I’ll give you two minutes to prepare. Then you’ll either be getting that case out of my trunk, or you’ll be leaving the metroplex. I hear there’s a lot of opportunities down in Houston at this time.”

“This is my home,” Armando whispered. “You’re my family.”

“Then get the damned case out of my car!” Walter barked, causing half the vampires to jump in their seats. More quietly, “You’ve got a minute and a half to prepare.”

Armando ran to the table with the sunscreen and quickly began slathering as much as he could on his face, neck, and arms.

“Your brother could use some help in preparing,” Walter told the others mildly. The others moved. Misty helped him with making sure the sunscreen covered his entire face. Randy slid his wraparound shades over his friend’s eyes. Virge brought him a dark, long sleeved shirt and Danni brought him a pair of leather gloves.

“Something hurts,” Keith groaned as he rubbed his eyes. Suddenly he froze. In a very quiet voice, he held out his hand and asked, “What’s this?”

“That, my boy,” Walter replied with a smile, “Is the charred remains of contact lenses. I suppose one of them told you they might help keep your eyes from burning. Not much left now. That it was bothering you is a good sign. Shows you’re making progress with your healing. There may or may not be one in your other eye.” Keith sighed in relief.

“Mando, where’s my blood?” Walter asked.

"I'm on my way to get it now, sir," he replied, walking to the outside door. He seemed to take a deep breath before opening the door and then the one just beyond it and sprinting outside. As he left, a woman walked in from the other door. She brought a fire blanket and two fire extinguishers, one of which she set on the table. Lifting an eyebrow, she gave the younger vampires a look and then turned her gaze significantly to the new items before she walked to the other door and leaned against the wall. They got the drift.

Randy grabbed the fire blanket and Jules looked to Danni. "I think this one still has some of it's charge left." Danni nodded and grabbed the new extinguisher.

Misty, who was wearing her own shades and looking out a window, said, "He's having some sort of trouble. He's smoking all over his back. Oh crap, there's flames now."

"Virgil," Walter called absently. "Call him back."

"Yessir," Virge replied, grabbing his own sunglasses as he ran to the door. The inside door was tinted glass and they could see Virge trying to stay out of the direct sunlight let in from the now open heavy, outside door. "'Mando! Walter says to come back!"

"I can't get the trunk open!" he screamed.

"Come back! Now!"

Armando began a stumbling run back towards the door. "Dammit," he's off course!" Misty told them. "Call to him Virge!"

"Follow my voice, 'Mando!" Virge yelled. "Over here! No, over here!" Virge then ran outside.

"Virge!" Danni yelled.

Virge returned a moment later half dragging, half carrying the burning Armando. Randy immediately covered the burning man with the fire blanket as Jules used the last of her extinguisher on 'Mando's face. Danni sprayed both Virge and Armando with her extinguisher as Randy opened the blanket back up.

Misty arrived with a tumbler. Randy and Virge looked at her and then grabbed up the groaning Armando and held his mouth open. She carefully poured the blood down his throat. "That's the last of the blood we have in here," Misty informed the group.

Walter walked over and took the keys out of Armando's trembling hands. "Oh, silly me. These are my truck keys." He then threw another pair of keys to Randy. "Randal. Be so good as to retrieve the case of blood from my trunk." Randy closed his eyes, though whether it was from fear, frustration, suppressed anger, or something else entirely, none of them knew. Misty and Jules helped Armando sit.

"There's a little of the sun screen left," Danni advised Randy quietly. Looking grim, he nodded and commenced to putting the little that remained on his face. Misty moved over and began helping him.

"This is going to hurt," Virge advised Armando a moment before yanking off his partially melted sunglasses. Armando yelled, sounding more like a battle cry than a scream of pain.

"You got a little cooked yourself, Virge," Walter noted. "Lot of blistering on your exposed skin. Well done." Virge nodded sharply.

"Here," Misty sighed, fitting her sunglasses on Randy's face. "You're gonna need them more than I do."

"Thanks," he replied, looking grim. "Can we take the gloves off 'Mando without hurting him?"

"Yeah," Danni replied, tugging them off. "The leather protected him. At least it helped more

than the other materials. He's still a little red even under there though."

"Good to know," he said quietly. "Jules? If you would, open the door?"

"Sure thing," she replied quietly.

Moving so fast as to appear only a blur, Randy ran outside. There were several gasps.

"What happened," Keith asked.

"Randy moved outside fast," Danni replied. "Real fast. Faster than he should be able to during the day."

"Excellent," Walter replied with a smile. "How's he doing?"

Misty answered, "He's at the car. He slowed way down when he got into the sunlight. He's got the trunk open but he's smoking badly. He's got the case and he's coming back. Crap, he's burning!"

"Over here!" Virge yelled from the open door. A moment later Randy crashed into him and the two men fell through the glass door. Separating from them, a large suitcase flew across the floor. Carla stopped the sliding case with an outstretched foot and absently threw the second extinguisher she carried to Jules, who immediately put it to good use. She, Misty, and Danni then helped the two men into chairs.

With a shaking hand, Randy pulled the sunglasses off. "Thanks Misty. They helped me see long enough to get the case."

"No problem," she whispered.

Carla grabbed his hand and thrust a cold packet of blood into it. Without hesitating, he bit into it. She then gave one to Armando and Virge.

"Oh, give one to Danni, too," Walter instructed. "She's having trouble staying awake." Danni caught the plastic packet Carla threw her even though she was looking at Walter.

"Now, what have we learned?" Walter asked the room at large. When no one immediately answered, he asked, "Keith?"

"Stay out of the damned sunlight."

"Sounds like good advice," Walter smiled. "Jules?"

"Fire extinguishers are really handy," she replied, looking uncomfortable.

"True, true. Armando?"

"To bloody well wait for you when you set up an operation," he replied with raw, raspy voice.

"And that's a very important lesson to learn," Walter told him in a serious voice. "Randal?"

"You get your family into trouble, you get them out of it," he rasped.

"Indeed," Walter nodded, sounding pleased. "I'm glad you've learned that. Very good. Danni?"

"If you have to go out into the sunlight, wear leather," she replied sullenly.

Walter smiled grimly, but rather than say anything, turned to the man sitting next to her, "Virgil?"

"If one of our family's screwing up, stop them before it gets out of the frying pan," he whispered.

"Yesss," the group's father nodded. "Nip it in the bud before it gets serious. Something you'd all do well to remember. Misty?"

"So far as families go, we're pretty dysfunctional," she replied.

"Yes," Walter agreed easily. "But we're working on that. And will continue to do so for the foreseeable future."

"Why did you trick me into going outside?" Keith demanded of the room at large, still keeping

his eyes shut. "You knew I wasn't protected but you sent me outside. Why dammit?!"

Danni spoke quietly. "You remember how we looked through this very window and saw that vampire couple step out of their car? Remember how they walked across and into Nightwings just as easy as you could please despite it being daytime?"

"Yes, I remember," the newest vampire of their group practically growled.

"Now," she continued, "Do you remember how that fellow tricked you into asking Gladys Wright out for a date? One of the older, most powerful vampires in the city?"

"Of course I do," he snarled. "I was gullible. But I don't repeat my mistakes."

"That's very true," Walter replied, with a nod to Danni as he directed his words to Keith. "However, some mistakes don't allow for second chances. Sunlight is one of them."

"And they tricked me into going outside!" the angry young vampire growled.

"Yes, they did," Walter agreed with a frown. "They tricked you into going outside before I got here. And they've now paid for that mistake."

"Wait a minute...." Keith muttered suspiciously.

"Oh, yes," Walter told the young vampire. "You were going to burn today. Sunlight's a trial we all must face. You should have faced it prepared for what lay ahead and with me present to ensure that the effects weren't quite so bad. Despite all that, you faced it and have done very well. Some vampires sunlight affects some more than others. Few of our bloodline suffer intense reactions. And now you know exactly how it affects you. And what to do afterwards."

"We should have stopped them from tricking you into going early," Virge told the still blind vampire. "I'm sorry we didn't."

"This wasn't an intense reaction?!"

"No," Walter replied seriously. "For one so young as yourself, your reaction appears to have been quite mild."

"This isn't some gag. I could have died!" Keith yelled.

"No," Randy contradicted hoarsely. "We wouldn't have let it go that far. You may be gullible, but you're still family."

"I am not part of your damned family!" he snarled.

"Oh, but you are," Walter countered. "And we're going to act more and more like a family. So far as vampire groups go, we are all relatively young. I'm only a little over one hundred and fifty myself. Randy, the next oldest, is almost fifty years younger than myself. The rest of you are quite young. And... by vampire standards... weak. That we cannot truly change. Only time can change that. Oh, we can and will train. But individually, other vampires will still consider us weak. Therefore, they must not see us as individuals but rather as one family. United. Strong."

"What kind of jacked up family sends it's members out into the sun to burn?!" demanded Keith, still obviously quite angry.

"A very tough, young family," Walter replied seriously. "We've all walked in the sunlight. Every one of us. Three of you just today. And no one in this group will ever be tricked into thinking they can go into the sun without proper preparations and I doubt any of you will try it even then until you're pushing two hundred years." Keith still looked angry but he kept quiet. "By the way," Walter asked thoughtfully. "Who were the couple you saw going into Nightwings?"

"I dunno," Danni replied. "I didn't recognize them. Randy?"

"Jeff and Veronica Daniels," he replied, opening his eyes for the first time since he'd burned. He blinked and squinted trying to see clearly.

"Really? I've heard those two have a supply of doppelganger blood," I think I'll just nip over

and have a talk with them.” Carla brought him his leather overcoat, from the pockets he pulled out a pair of sunglasses and a pair of leather gloves which he pulled on. He then pulled out a hat and placed it on his head as he held out his arm for Carla.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Misty asked, giving the door a worried look.

“Oh, certainly,” Walter replied with a sly grin. “I came to this exercise prepared.” And with that he and his companion stepped out into the late afternoon sunshine.