

Young Castlevania

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Young Castlevania

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Summary

Lisa is burned at the stake in 1464, torn from her husband and their eight year old son. A year after the tragedy, a young Trevor Belmont finds himself and a Speaker girl at the heart of an absurd Speaker tale. After all, how are a group of nine years olds supposed to defeat Dracula?

One Year Ago

Adrian listened outside his father's door. He sounded so *angry*. Madder than Adrian had ever heard him be. And what the man had said... He'd send down his armies in a year? He was making people run away? Mother wouldn't have wanted that, Adrian knew it! She'd have taken father by the ear and yelled him into undoing it! Adrian looked at his hands. His small nails. He wasn't mother. Father was so tall that he couldn't even reach the man's chest. Adrian would have to convince him to lean down, somehow. The boy winced as the door creaked open under his hands. He peered inside.

"One year!" Father's magic made his mirror swirl around. "It will take me one year to summon an army from the guts of Hell itself!" Adrian swallowed. Mother wouldn't have wanted this. She wouldn't, but she wasn't here to tell father that. He'd have to do it for her.

"Father? You..." Adrian licked his lips. "You can't!"

"What do you mean, 'I can't?'" Father's voice was low. Scary. "That woman was the only reason on earth for me to tolerate human life!" Father turned to glare at him. His long hair hung over his face but Adrian could see how red his eyes were.

"Mom wouldn't want this! She wouldn't have wanted you to hurt innocent-"

"There are no innocents!" Father's shout made Adrian's shoulders hunch. "Not anymore!" Father clenched his fists and his long nails dug deeply into his own skin. Blood ran between his fingers. "Any one of them could have stood up and said, 'No, we won't behave like animals anymore.'"

"No!" Adrian shook his head. "I... I won't let you!" Father took a ragged breath as his eyes blazed a bright red. Adrian shivered as the man slowly approached him. Be like mom, he told himself, be like mom!

"My son." The words were a deep hiss, loving yet furious. "If only even *one* of the humans had shown your courage. I love you," he whispered as he towered over the boy, "but you will not keep me from this." Father moved faster than Adrian could see and in the blink of an eye the boy's world went dark.

One Year Later

Gresit. Trevor flopped down on the nearest rock and looked down the hill at the city. Big walls, he thought to himself. The boy popped his shoes off and rubbed at his aching feet. He pulled his shoes back on when he was done and paused to check his purse before he got up. It made pitiful little clinks. Not much left. It'd probably get him some small place to sleep. Hopefully a bowl or two of food. Trevor sighed as he stood and began his careful climb down the side of the hill. His cloak caught on the brambles as he walked and the boy muttered to himself as he pulled the ragged cloth free. The stupid thing was too big - he felt like he was dragging a blanket around whenever he walked. Still, he didn't dare get rid of it. People were nicer to him because of his age, but the cloak had made for a good warm blanket when others wouldn't look past his family crest. Trevor looked down and ran a hand over the symbol. He'd be a lot better off if he just took a knife and cut the crests off. Wasn't like there was anyone left to scold him if he did.

The boy pulled his cloak tighter around his shoulders and let the thick fur droop down over the crest. Not yet, he decided. Trevor stopped when he heard snarls up ahead - he crouched down at the forest edge and looked out. Squat winged beasts ran past. One of them held something in its jaws but the group moved too fast for him to get a good look at it. Trevor gripped his whip as the beasts took to the air and flew away. A *real* Belmont wouldn't have hidden. The boy grimaced at himself and started out across the flat stretch of land. He reached down to pick up the end of his cloak and bundled the loose fabric into his arms as he walked. The ground was muddy and wet here. That made it hard to walk. More than once his shoes got caught in the thick mud and he had to wrench himself free of it.

Stupid mud. It hadn't even been that rainy! Trevor kicked at a puddle as he walked by it. The splash made him smile. That was the one good thing about rain, he figured. The boy splashed through the nearest puddles as he wound his way towards the entrance gate. Mud and water flew with each kick. He ought to stop, though. City people didn't like stuff like this. They didn't like Belmonts either. They could deal with it, Trevor decided as he neared the- Oh. He stopped and stared at the piles of wood jammed against the gate. There was no way he was getting past that. The boy sighed as he let his head flop back to look at the sky. *Figured.*

Still, the next city was a *long* ways away. There had to be some way inside. Trevor set off and avoided the puddles now as he walked. Some way. Some way. He wanted to eat! He didn't really care any more what it was, so long as it was food! His stomach growled at the thought and Trevor pressed a fist to it as he rounded the corner of the city. His dad had always told him to imagine being full. A lot easier said than done. Trevor shut his eyes and imagined all the food he'd eat if he could. Soup, bread, fish, jerky; anything his mom would've cooked- A rank smell forced his eyes open as Trevor covered his nose. There. The waste hole was still open. It was big enough that'd he'd be able to get in that way, but... The boy sighed. He really didn't want to walk all the way to the next city before he ate.

Trevor pushed the ends of his cloak up over his shoulders. He didn't want it falling to the ground here. The Belmont tiptoed over suspicious looking water and grimaced when he

reached the side of the wall. It smelled awful. He was happy that he hadn't had anything to eat now. The boy clamored up into the opening and put his feet as far apart as possible. He pulled the ends of the cloak down so he could wrap his hands in them. Trevor put his shielded hands on the slick walls as he slowly shuffled forward. Oh God, the smell. Awful. Horrible. Rotten. The food he would find had better be worth it after all this! Trevor held his breath as he carefully walked through the tunnel. Faint sunlight up ahead made him try to pick up his pace a little. Had to get out. This smelled *so bad*!

Trevor gasped for fresh air when he reached the end of it and hopped out. He let the cloak ends go and hurried down the nearest pathway. It took him to a set of stairs and the boy paused as he looked around. The city looked awful. Buildings were broken and rundown. Ceiling were caved in. Widows had been shattered. Trevor pulled his cloak tighter as he made his way down the stairs. Ragged tents stretched out before him at the bottom. The boy kept his eyes down as he walked past them. Maybe if he went closer to the church places would be better. He couldn't actually go in that place of course, never again, but if he could just hide his crest long enough to get a few scraps from people around it... Up ahead was a bridge with a couple people on it. Trevor hunched his shoulders and made sure his cloak covered his shirt as he started out across it. The people were two adults - he watched as they threw a third person down the far side. As the men walked away the boy peered over the edge. He jerked back at the sight of a pile of bodies at the bottom. Shaking his head, Trevor rubbed a hand over his eyes as he continued onward. His stomach felt uncomfortable.

Trevor pressed another fist to it as he made it over the bridge and wound his way through the twisting crumbling paths. A left turn brought him to the center of the city. Or at least, he'd guess that this was it. There were a few stands selling goods clustered along the sides of the buildings, so the boy looked at their wares as started down the right side. The first few stands he ignored. Alcohol, plates, worn goods - he didn't need any of that. Trevor stopped when he spotted meat hanging off hooks. The tall woman who stood behind the counter leaned forward to look down at him. Trevor fished his purse out and looked down at his money. He had a few coins left...

"What will one coin buy me?" The boy asked as he held one up for her to see. The woman leaned further forward and looked to his left and his right.

"You buying for your ma and pa?" she asked. Trevor shook his head.

"Just me."

"Don't think I've seen you 'round here before," the woman told him as she studied his face.

"I'm just passing through." He assured her.

"Mm." She pursed her lips. "Might want to pass through a little quicker if you know what I mean. Nightfall ain't good here."

"I didn't see any guards around," Trevor said. "Are they busy with church business?" The woman shook her head.

"We don't need them. We got a tribe of Speakers here." She reached for a slab of meat and began to cut a strip off. "Once we've done what needs to be done," her hand tightened on her knife, "the demons'll leave us alone." Huh? Trevor cocked his head as she began to cut another strip loose. "Your coin. It'll get ya two bits of dried goat." Trevor slid the coin across her table and happily accepted the goat meat.

"Thank you!" Trevor pulled at the large strip until it tore in two. He shoved the smaller portion into his mouth and chewed as best he could. Swallowing it down, he looked back up at her. "Could you point me to them?" She frowned. Trevor got out another coin and offered it up to her.

"You really want to speak to 'em?" Trevor nodded. "Well, don't make it long, all right? Like I said, you'd best be out of here before night." The woman pointed off to his left. "Take a left when you reach the end of that alley way. One right, another left, go straight and then one more right. Got that?" He nodded again. "And keep your coin, boy. Ya might need it later." Trevor waved goodbye and walked into the shadows of the alley way. Speakers were here! That was great! His family had always spoken highly of the wondering groups. Maybe the tribe here would let him travel with them to the next city? Maybe not, but it couldn't hurt to ask! He was in the middle of following all the turns the woman had told him when a person rounded the corner and nearly knocked him over.

"Hey! Oh." The long blue robes - a Speaker! The old man looked down at him with wide eyes before he reached out and took Trevor's wrist. The man pressed a finger to his lips as he hurried them both along.

"Where are you, Speaker? Come out of Satan's shadows and face the light of God!" Trevor tried to look back to see who was speaking, but the man tugged him through the empty paths until they came out the far side.

"Come, child," the Speaker quietly said.

"I'm not a-!" Whatever. Trevor decided to let him take the lead. They crossed a well trodden road and headed for a large house with a snow covered roof. Ew, looked cold. The old man knocked on the thin door and it opened to reveal a large, dark room. Candles were placed all around to provide some light, but Trevor still had to squint to see the people inside. They all wore the same blue robes as the man did. Huh, looked like the Speakers had found him instead.

"Elder?" A younger man looked down at Trevor with cautious confusion.

"Ah, yes." The old man gave an apologetic smile as he kneeled down to be at the boy's level. "I'm sorry about that, my child. The priests were not in a forgiving mood today. I did not want you to unfairly punished as well."

"I'm not a child," Trevor told him. The old man shared a look of amusement with the others.

"Oh? Then what is your name, young man?" Trevor crossed his arms and stood tall. The Speakers had always been trusted by his family. He didn't need to hide the truth here.

"I'm Trevor, Trevor Belmont!"

Tales

The Speakers shared surprised looks. The younger man stepped in front of the older man and glared at Trevor through narrowed eyes.

"You would lie to us, after the kindness our Elder showed you?"

"You don't think I'm telling the truth?" Trevor hadn't expected that. His family had always been clear - the Speakers were friends. Why weren't they believing him?

"Our tribe has heard the tales. The Belmont lands," the Speaker's voice changed from confrontational to smoother tones, almost like he was singing a bit too slow, "fallen to ruin. Its lady lost to the fangs of the night." *Mother*. "Its lord lost to the hands of the church," *father*, "and in the morning, there they found him. The heir of Belmont, gone and dead. So passed the House of Hunters. So you see," his voice returned to normal, "you cannot be a Belmont." Trevor tried to put the tale behind him. He didn't want to think about mom and dad right now, not-

fires in the night. Angry voices coming down the road. His father helping him out the window, tucking the heavy cloak tighter-

"I am!" Trevor pulled the fur of his cloak back to show his family crest. "Your stupid tales are wrong! I'm still alive!" The Speakers stared at his crest. Did they get it now?

"You..." The old man leaned forward and cautiously touched the crest. He looked up at Trevor. The boy let the cloak drop lower and then turned to show the tribe the back of his tunic. Mom and dad had always wanted it to be clear where he came from, for all the good that did. Belmont colors and the big crest. The Speakers couldn't deny that now could they. "Your clothes." The man's voice dropped in what Trevor prayed was hopeful disbelief. A thin hand closed on his shoulder and the boy let himself be turned back to the group. He tugged the cloak back over the crests. "A Belmont still lives?" The Elder whispered.

"Yeah." Trevor said. "So you can fix that end of your tale. I'm not dead."

"Elder." The younger man turned to his leader with wide eyes. "*Sypha*. We sent her alone, but the legend says-"

"I know." What were they talking about? Who was Sypha? The Elder went lower, getting down to his knees. "Please, Trevor Belmont, you must find my granddaughter!" What? "She has gone in search of a person we believe can help us."

"Where is she?"

"The catacombs under the mausoleum, west of the church." The Elder told him. Wasn't right, the boy thought to himself. The elderly weren't ever supposed to look so distressed. "Will you go to her?" The old man asked.

"Sure," Trevor replied. This was a city, how bad could their catacombs be? He'd probably been in scarier places on family outings. "I'll be back when I have her!" He assured the men. He waved at the two and then took the edge of his cloak and threw it up as he turned. The boy grinned as he stepped outside. Father had always done that move before a hunt. It was cool! Now that Trevor had finally gotten to do it, he couldn't fail the Speakers. He didn't think he had much to worry about. Find a girl in some musty old catacombs? That'd be easy! Her blue robes would stand out in the darkness - Trevor would have her back with her tribe before nightfall!

Okay, he hadn't thought about how cold it'd be. Trevor pulled his cloak higher and ran his hand through the fur top. Just like with the hunger. Pretend he was warm. He was home. The hearth fire was high. Trevor closed his eyes as he walked. He could almost imagine the heat. The weight of the cloak on his shoulders wasn't fabric. It was hands. Warm hands. Mom and dad. *No!*

Trevor opened his eyes and hurried along the overgrown path. Stupid Speakers and their stupid tales! He should've told them to stop. He didn't need to be told about the fall of his house, he'd lived through it! That decided it, the boy thought to himself. He'd find the granddaughter and get her back to the Speakers, but after he was done. Forget trying to join them for traveling. He'd gotten this far on his own. He could make it to the next city by himself.

The catacomb entrance was an old one. Overgrown with vines and roots. Why weren't the people of Gresit taking care of it any more? Trevor carefully made his way up the steps and pushed the entrance doors open. The old wood scrapped across the stone floor. Trevor peered around. The place wasn't that big. It had a few fancy coffins and statues, but- The boy paused as he eyed the statue off to his right. It was of a tall monster and demon. The two had a set of stone doors and pillars behind them, but someone had made a mistake. The first door was a full one while the other two were partial. He put a foot on the base and scrambled up the leg of the demon. Trevor pushed himself up onto the head of the monster and grinned down at the little opening he'd found. Someone had something that they wanted to hide. The tunnel down wasn't so much a path as an angled slide. The boy crawled in and let himself skid down it.

Trevor felt giddy at his slide down through the darkness. He giggled as wind brushed across his face. It came to a stop too soon for his liking as the path ended and dropped him into a wider room. The boy stumbled as he landed and put his arms out to steady himself. There were more stone arches here. Trevor kept an eyes out for blue as he walked forward. What had the Speakers said the girl's name was? Damn it, he couldn't remember! Trevor cupped his hands to his mouth.

"Speaker girl!" He called out. His voice echoed through the hall. "Speaker girl, your grandpa wants you back!" There was no reply. Instead, the room shuddered. There was a distant boom. What in the-? "Speaker girl?" What on earth was she doing? Trevor followed the distant thuds and shudders. This was supposed to have been simple. Find the girl and return her. Why did he have a feeling she was going to make his life harder instead? The closer he got to whoever was making that sound, the harder the shaking got. Trevor stumbled

into the wider room ahead and then froze and swore. The Speaker girl was here all right. And she'd found a cyclops.

Rude Boy

The tales said the entrance to the Sleeping Messiah would be well guarded, but- Sypha ducked below the cold beam of light the rock monster shot at her. She summoned fire to her hands and leapt into the air as the creature swiped at her. She angled her hands down and poured more power into the fires. The flames forced her even higher. She hadn't thought there'd be anything like this! Another near miss by the monster's thick hand made Sypha extinguish her fire so that she could drop below its outstretched arm.

"The eye!" A boy's voice made her startle. She fell to her knees instead of landing on her feet. The Speaker gritted her teeth at the pain. "Quick, destroy the eye!" Sypha formed the symbols for water as the boy darted forward and flicked a small whip at the monster. The tip glanced off the hard stone without even scratching it. The girl swirled the water she'd summoned into a ball and lobbed it up at the creature. The monster paused as the liquid splashed across its colorful eye. Sypha reached out and clenched her hand as she thought of the water turning to ice. The stone thing didn't even cry out in pain as she pierced it through its eye. It merely stood there for one long moment before falling to its knees. The boy who'd run in watched as the monster collapsed to the floor. He turned to her, his eyes bright. "You did it!"

"Of course I did," Sypha replied. She cocked her head as she considered him. "Who are you?" The boy began to wind his whip back into place before he answered.

"I'm Trevor." He pulled back the fur top of his cloak to reveal a little crest. He tapped a finger to it. "Trevor Belmont." Belmont? Impossible!

"No, you are not."

"Ugh." The boy let his head drop back so he could stare up at the distant ceiling. "Not you too. Look," he ran a hand through his messy bangs, "your Speaker tales got it wrong. I'm still alive. Now let's get you out of here." What? Sypha stepped back when he reached for her. She crossed her arms.

"I'm not leaving this place."

"Oh?" He pointed past her to the rock monster. "So you want to stay in the big dark room with the stone eyed cyclops?"

"The what?"

"The stone eyed cyclops," the boy repeated. "It's right out of the family bestiary. The *Belmont* family bestiary. That's how I knew how to kill it."

"*You* did not kill it." Sypha felt the need to point out. "*I* did."

"It would've turned you to stone before you figured out how to kill it. So it's a good thing I showed up. Now come on." He turned from her and started walking back towards the

exit hall. "I'll take you back to your tribe and then-"

"I am *not* leaving." Why couldn't he understand that? "Not until I find the Sleeping Messiah." To turn back now would make her struggle against the... cyclops... worthless. She would find the world's savior! She would! Trevor turned back to cock his head at her.

"The what who?"

"The Sleeping Messiah." Sypha told him.

"Let me guess, another Speaker tale." Sypha didn't dignify that with an answer. The boy sighed. "Fine. We go a little further. When we don't find your sleeping whatever we turn back, okay?" The Speaker didn't reply, instead starting deeper down into the dark chambers. She would find the Messiah. She would show the boy who couldn't be a Belmont the truth of Speaker tales! The girl tugged her sleeves down as the boy started after her. "No, really. Your grandad-" The tile beneath her foot cracked. Sypha had a single moment to look down at it in confusion before the splinters streaked across the floor and opened up beneath her. The girl screamed in surprise as she plummeted downward.

"Speaker!" An arm closed around her waist and she looked up as the boy fumbled with his whip. "I'll catch us!" He yelled to her as they fell through the darkness. "Just hang on!" Sypha looked back down. The floor was fast approaching. She took a breath and focused her mind and magic. As the boy got ready to use his whip she stretched out her hands and feet toward the ground. Flames shot out of her palms and soles as Sypha threw as much power as she could behind her spell. The boy flinched and hugged her even tighter as her fire slowed their descent. Control! She just had to...Had to... There! Her feet softly touched the stone floor and Sypha grinned as she brought them to a smooth landing. Trevor shoved her away from him.

"Put it out!" The boy yelled at her. His eyes were fixed on her fire. "Put it out now!" Sypha dispersed the flames with a flick of her wrist. Trevor swallowed, cautiously eyeing her as she looked around. This new place was truly large. Grand, ornate structures stretched out toward the ceiling from the end of the room. A black and gold dais caught her eye and she gasped at the coffin that was carefully positioned on it. That was it! It had to be! "Hey!" Sypha paid no attention to the boy as she raced across the red carpeted floor and up the black steps. "Stop!" He had ran after her. "It could be a trap!" The Speaker ignored his fear as she pushed at the corner of the lid. It didn't budge. She looked back at the boy.

"Help me," she ordered. He shot her a look of disbelief. "Come on! We have to open it!" Trevor tucked his whip back into place as he stepped up to her side.

"If a *Speaker* gets me killed..." He muttered under his breath. The two grunted and strained against the lid. It slowly slid open and Sypha felt her heart leap as it toppled to the floor.

"Father!" Trevor grabbed Sypha by the back of her robes and pulled her away as a boy shot out of the coffin. She watched in awe as the new boy *float*ed above it. "Father?" Golden eyes found her and Trevor. "Who're you?" he asked. "Where's my father?"

The Little Messiah

"I am Sypha," the Speaker girl enthusiastically introduced herself. Trevor crossed his arms and glared up at the little kid. He's who they'd fallen God knows how many feet down for? The kid didn't even look all that happy to see them, instead looking at them like he expected someone to be hiding in their shadows.

"Do you know my father? Where is he?" The blond boy asked.

"Who's your dad?" Trevor asked him before the Speaker girl could answer.

"Vlad Tepes," the kid replied. "Although most people know him as Dracula." Dracula. Trevor looked up at the flowing blond hair. The golden eyes. He burst out laughing. Both of the other kids frowned at him as he doubled over and clutched his stomach.

"*You?*" Trevor asked. "The son of *Dracula*? The leader of vampirekind, someone so scary that even other monsters piss themselves at the mention of him? Ha! Yeah," he wiped at his eyes. "Sure." Trevor threaded his whip back through his belt and then took the Speaker's hand. "Come on, let's get you back up to the surface."

"But I am Dracula's son!" The kid insisted. The Belmont boy leaned back to look up at him,

"You're an air magician. I don't know why someone stuck you down here in this little box-"

"My father did." The blond boy hugged himself as he averted his eyes. "I made him mad because I tried to stop him," Trevor snorted, chuckling into the back of his hand as he started tugging the Speaker girl along. That kid? Tried to stop Dracula? Clearly someone had hit him over the head too hard. Trevor paused at that. Then could they really leave him down here? The boy probably couldn't even find his way out of this giant dark place. He sighed and looked back.

"We're going back to the Speaker house, do you want to come with us?"

"Please, do." Sypha implored him. "He might not believe you, but I do. You're our Messiah!" The boy floated down to land in front of them. He cocked his head at the Speaker girl.

"Messiah? What do you mean?" Sypha reached out to take his hands in hers.

"My tribe discovered a Speaker tale that was passed down through the generations! Come!" She snagged Trevor's wrist. The boy tried to flinch back when fire burst out from the soles of her feet, but she held onto him. "We must return to the tribe!"

"Wait! Wai-!" Trevor clung to the Speaker's girl hand as she used her fire to force them all up through the air. The air magician used his magic to rise with her and left Trevor to

dangle below the two. He *fucking hated this!* Sypha and the magician reached the spot where they'd fallen through faster than he expected. Trevor shook his hand free of the Speaker girl's grasp and glowered at her as she landed.

"Come on!" The girl excitedly tugged at the new boy's arm before she turned to run back up through the hallway. The boy had the gall to look at him in lost confusion.

"Let's go," Trevor muttered. "The sooner we get this done the sooner I can leave."

Faces

Trevor watched in amusement as the Speaker tribe collectively looked from their kinswoman to the blond boy and back again. Sypha looked proud as Adrian studied the group in curiosity.

"You said you were Speakers?" the boy asked.

"We are," Sypha's grandpa replied. The magician walked forward to study their blue robes.

"Mom says that you're really good storytellers. I like your clothing!" He touched the soft fabric of the Elder's sleeve. "It looks comfortable."

"Thank you." The Elder hesitated. "You are the one they found beneath Gresit?" Adrian nodded. "I see..."

"Elder." The younger man from before laid a hand on the older man's shoulder. He looked uncertain. "Surely we cannot send these children against Dracula." No shit, Trevor thought. He was a Belmont but he was also *nine*. Old enough to fight night creatures, of course, but the leader of the night himself?

"We will discuss this later," the Elder told his tribe. "Surviving the upcoming night must take precedence." The blond kid looked confused.

"Survive the night? What're you talking about?" Just how long had the magician been underground?

"Dracula sends his armies to torment the city and its folk every night." The Elder explained. "His dark forces unleash atrocity after atrocity." The man looked troubled. "I'm not sure Gresit can withstand much more." That reminded Trevor...

"You should be worrying about yourself more than these people." The Elder raised an eyebrow at him. "A woman I talked to - she made it sound like they were going to attack you."

"*What?*" Sypha turned on him, her little blue robes swishing with the movement. "You're lying! Again!" Trevor pointed at her and stepped closer to jab his finger near her face.

"I saw her eyes! Her face!" The Belmont boy glared at the girl. "She looked just like *them*." *Angry voices on the road. Wild looks and bared teeth. Hatred shining in so many eyes.*

"We will not leave these people, my child." The Elder told him. Trevor looked at the other Speakers around him. Each one met his gaze with unwavering looks.

"They're going to kill you!"

"Some will try, certainly. I do not believe they will succeed," the old man said. He had to be shitting kidding him.

"I can protect us," Sypha spoke up. She made a small gesture with her hand and Trevor flinched at the fire that appeared in her palm. She looked up at the Elder. "If I can hold them off long enough, you can speak to them." The old man smiled at her. This was fucking crazy. Try to talk to a mob? Trevor knew that wouldn't work. If his father hadn't been able to do it then no one could! The Speakers were going to *die*.

"Magician kid."

"My name is Adrian," the blond said. Trevor waved that away.

"We need to leave. Now. It's already getting dark out there. We need to get out of the city before the people of Gresit show up with pitchforks and torches."

"No!" Sypha grabbed the magician by his wrist and tugged the boy over to her relatives. "You are our savior," she told him, "you cannot leave us!"

"I won't!" The blond boy's golden eyes narrowed in thought. "If the demons really are under my father's control, maybe I can stop them..." Trevor couldn't help himself. He laughed. It felt not really funny. Two kids and a Speaker tribe against a city and an army of demons. Trevor wasn't going to watch that slaughter. He didn't have to. Not again. The Belmont stepped back from the group and turned from them.

"Child?" Trevor ignored the Elder's questioning tone. The boy pushed the door open and stepped out into the fading light. He didn't have to stay here. He didn't. The boy checked that his whip was properly wrapped in place before he started out across the rundown road.

Pets and Missions

The council's muttering was putting his teeth on edge. Through days and nights the vampires he had called to him dared to argue with his appointed planners of their war. Dracula had heard a litany of complaints, every part of Isaac and Hector's being used against them by creatures who thought themselves better.

Too young. Too untested. Too insulting. That the war council would be led by teenagers? That they would answer to beings not even close to half their age? Worse yet, the forgemasters were human. He'd spent many hours clenching his hands so hard that blood ran between his fingers. Human. Like that made his forgemasters lesser. Like the vampires were being asked to take direction from flea bitten mongrels. His wife had been human. *Lisa* had been *human*.

The council was at it again. Pestering his chosen ones with every question and concern they could think of. Dracula took his place on his throne and let the quiet arguments wash over him. Such petty prattle while the humans who had killed his wife, his *Lisa*, still lived. Lived and breathed and went about their day in a way that *Lisa* could no longer!

"Cease!" His shout echoed through the large chamber. The vampires startled at his harsh tone, quickly falling into line as Hector looked up at him in clear relief. Isaac straightened and clasped his hands behind his back. He had been clear! The humans were to be the ones guiding the war efforts! Why, then, did his generals continue to squabble and groan about following simple orders? He- Across the hall, the entrance door creaked open. Everyone turned as a thin, pale woman strode into the room. Dracula watched as she passed his generals by and approached his throne.

"I am Carmilla," the woman introduced herself. She bowed to him, her long white hair falling past her shoulders with the movement. "I am come from far Styria to join the war council." Ah. Carmilla of Styria. He had requested her presence some time ago.

"Yet you did not arrive with the other generals." Pale blue eyes met his.

"Indeed." She straightened. "Your mighty castle can cover great distances. And," those cold eyes flickered to the other vampires, "I had assumed that my aid was not dearly needed. You have such mighty vampire generals advising you and prosecuting your war." The woman gave the slightest of smiles. "Imagine my surprise, however, to hear such heated arguing coming from them." Several bared their fangs at her. She ignored them. Bold, for a mere regional ruler.

"Then tell me, Carmilla of Styria, what insights would you offer?" he asked.

"Why was this new wife of yours never turned?" Dracula was unprepared for the heat of anger that burned in his chest at the question. Turn *Lisa*? *Turn Lisa*? His wife had made it clear that she had no interest in becoming a vampire, and he had honored her wish! "You married," Carmilla continued. "You had a child." A veil of red covered his eyes. "And yet you did not make her a vampire." Blue eyes met his again. The smallest glint of amusement

dared to flicker there. "Why was that? Were you simply keeping a human pet?" A pet? *A pet?* Lisa, a pet? The woman of Styria would dare compare his wife to a lowly animal?

"**Enough.**" Dracula hissed. He stood and turned from the vampires. His palms bled anew as he dug his nails deep. "Carmilla," he spoke her name in a low snarl. "*Attend me.*" Red clung to his vision as he walked the path back to his private room. Lisa. A pet. The heat in his chest twisted. Sharpened. He could not sit. The anger would not let him. That his wife would continue to be so disrespected after her death! Dracula was only dimly aware of the door to his room opening.

"You wished to speak to me, my-!" His room warped. Bent around him as he flashed forward to be before her. His hand found her throat and he lifted the woman up off her feet.

"Hear me, Carmilla of Styria," he hissed. He tightened his hand around her thin neck. She clawed at his wrist, kicking as best she could, but the heat in his chest let him easily ignore the little pinpricks of pain. "If you ever insult my wife's memory again, I will tear you limb from limb and force my generals to eat you." He tightened his hold. Brought her down to look her in the eye. "I will keep your heart as my own, however. I will drain it into a chalice. While my generals strip your flesh from your bones, I will drink your heart's blood. *Do you understand me?*" The woman tried to speak. "I do not give you permission to speak. Nod." Her wide eyes fixed on his red ones. She nodded. Dracula let her drop. He stepped around the woman as she coughed and gasped for breath. Took his seat as she slowly stood. "You are dismissed." The vampire did as told. Dracula closed his eyes and let his head rest against his seat. Behind him, the door opened again. He relaxed at the familiar footsteps.

"My Lord." Isaac. Dracula opened his eyes and watched as the human walked over to stand in front of him. The teen bowed. Hector's pace was slower, more hesitant. The other boy was likely worried that he was still angry.

"I have a task," the man began. "One that I can trust only you both to complete." It was almost amusing to acknowledge that. He dared not trust even a single general with what he was to command, though he was their lord and leader. He could not trust them with this. "My son." Hector's eyes widened. "I confined him to a resting place beneath the city of Gresit. The entrance is through the city catacombs. I ask that you retrieve him. Bring him home."

A mistake, to leave his son in a human city. He'd had no worries at the time, yet with the city's looming destruction... His travels had taught him that the vermin were sometimes capable of incredible feats when faced with death. If even one human stumbled upon his son's sleeping place, if he or she was desperate enough... Dracula took a breath and focused on retracting his claws. He had already given into rage once today. He did not seek to do so again so soon. Isaac would weather it unfazed, but Hector - the teen was already nervous. Had been on edge ever since being introduced to the generals. Perhaps this would permit them all a few days of peace.

"As you command, my lord." Isaac swore to him. Hector nodded.

"Then you are dismissed." Dracula watched as the two young humans left. When the door to his room shut, the vampire turned back to watch the flickering flames in his fire. Adrian. Yes. It was time that his son be returned to him.

Plan

Stupid. Stupid, stupid, *stupid*! This was so stupid! Trevor paced in front of the gross waste hole and stopped to kick at the wall. Stupid! The boy ran his hands through his hair and gipped hard at the ends. Stupid Speakers and that stupid magician boy! They needed to leave! Run away while they still could! Trevor looked up at the fading orange sky. Mom and dad had always been clear - the Speakers were friends. Friends his family could trust, people who wouldn't judge them for how they fought the dark. And here he was. The city was going to die. Before it died, however, it was going to kill the only actually good people in it. And that, he kicked again at the wall, wasn't right! Damn it! Fine, fine! He'd go back. Just a quick peek. Trevor would make them see that they had to leave!

He made his way back through the dark alleyways, careful to avoid main streets and the occasional man in church cloth. Just the sight of them made him sneer. Hypocrites. No, he had to focus. Trevor picked up the bottom of his cloak and held it close as he ran from shadow to shadow. Skirted the city square. Down another alley and then- Trevor slowed and pushed his cloak back into place. He waited a moment to catch his breath and then strode out across the worn road.

"-must leave!" A woman's voice came from within. Trevor pressed himself against the thin wall and listened at the door.

"We will not abandon you or the people of this city to the night." That was the Elder.

"Please, Speaker," another man spoke up. Another voice Trevor didn't recognize. "The bishop - he's turning the people against you! They'll be here by sundown!" Was that...? Trevor straightened and knocked on the door. The voices went quiet. The boy watched as the door slowly creaked open a bit. A flame flickered in the Speaker girl's hands. Trevor held his hands up.

"If you're going to roast me, at least season me before you eat me." Her eyes widened.

"Trevor!" She reached out to jerk him inside and the boy stumbled and caught himself. He looked up. Two people, a man and a woman, stared at him in horror. They weren't wearing Speaker blue.

"It's all right," the Elder assured the two. "Trevor is a friend." The old man cocked an infuriatingly knowing eyebrow at him. "Aren't you?" Trevor crossed his arms.

"I still think you're stupid for not leaving."

"Hey!" Trevor ignored the Speaker girl's outrage.

"You." He pointed at the new man and woman. They huddled closer together. "Why're you here?" The woman looked at the man. She straightened. Squared her shoulders.

"Our son. One of those horrid beasts scratched him. He took with fever and grew worse. The Elder," she looked at the old man, her expression going grateful, "he helped us. Broke the fever. He's alive because of them."

"The church, they just prayed over our boy," the husband spoke up. "Said we'd have to trust him to God's will. God brought the Speakers here and they healed him." Trevor didn't want to think about the thought processes the man was going through to justify that strange logic. All right. So the Speakers really weren't going to leave. That was a problem. How could he keep them safe here? There were at least two more people on their side, but that wouldn't be enough. Not nearly enough. Between the other city folk and the actual demons the tribe wouldn't last a minute.

When Dracula's forced invaded they'd probably get a respite, but then he'd have to worry about the invaders. He'd seen winged beasts as he was entering the city. Unless he could find a way to fit everyone inside the Speakers' temporary home anyone would be easy pickings for the fliers. That wouldn't work. Even if he could hide them all away what was going to stop one of the creatures from just breaking down the wall? The city hadn't exactly given the tribe the most sturdy house. It was damp; moldy. Barely holding together already. They'd need something big. Sturdy. Enclosed.

The catacombs!

Trevor sucked a breath in and thought about it. Yes, yes, that might work! He turned to look at the huddled city couple.

"Okay. I have a plan. I need you to do two things. No, three." The wife stepped forward and nodded. "Find other people you trust. People who've been helped by the Speakers before and owe them. Make them understand that either they join us or die. After that, have everyone get as much salt as you can. *Everything* you can find. Don't be nice about it, we're going to need as much as you can get. Finally," he looked from the wife to the husband, "don't tell the church. Don't tell the bishop or the priests, or anyone you think might be loyal enough to them to tell them anything. Got it? If the church finds out about this *we will all die*. After you've done all that, come back here. I'll lead you and everyone you find to the new place." The couple looked at each other. Silently communicated in that way couples only could. He'd seen his mom and dad do that so many times. The two reached some sort of unspoken agreement and then looked at him. They nodded.

Okay, Trevor thought. He couldn't save the whole city, it was just too big. Too many people. Too much space. He could try to save the tribe, though. The tribe and a small group of people. Trevor was sure he could do that. Or die trying, the boy thought. If he did... that'd be a good death, right? The last Belmont going down fighting demons to protect people? Yeah. *That'd* be a good Speaker tale.

"We're going back to where we found the boy," Trevor addressed the wider Speaker tribe as the city folk hurried out.

"I have a name," the blond spoke up. "It's Adrian!" Trevor ignored that. The magician huffed at him. The Belmont worked hard to keep himself from grinning. He felt better now. They could do this, he told himself. They *would* do it.

Salt

Sypha double checked the last of her group's preparations. Adrian had been a great help - he'd been able to rig the pails of salt just above the entrance door. Trevor had had her cool a bucket of water before stirring salt into it. When the last of her family and townsfolk slipped safely down into the hidden chambers the boy had instructed her to freeze the small entrance over with the salty water. As she did that Trevor and Adrian had spread salt across as much of the floor as possible.

"Demons hate salt," Trevor had explained to them. Sypha had rolled her eyes. She knew that - the Speakers had many tales of desperate families surviving deadly nights thanks to it. Now to be told to hide away behind the last coffin in the small room? To be surrounded by more buckets of salt water and made to wait? She was a magician! She could fight-!

"I hear them," the blond boy spoke up. Sypha couldn't see him. Trevor had made the boy hide with another bucket of salt behind one of the statues of a suit of armor.

"Good." The other boy muttered. He was trying to act brave for them but the girl could hear the slight shake in his voice. She peered out from behind the coffin. Trevor stood in the center of the small room. The boy had his whip out and unfurled. He held with his free hand the end of the ropes Adrian had tied around the high salt buckets. "I see them, now." Sypha fought down the urge to lean out further. Instead she sat back and closed her eyes. Listened to the snarls slowly growing louder and closer. "Come on, you bastards," Trevor said. "See me. See-!" Sypha peeked around the coffin and gasped as a large, dark form hurtled out from the deep shadows of the night. Trevor let go of the ropes he held.

As the creature leapt through the open door salt was dumped out from the buckets above it. Sypha winced at its scream. A winged demon entered behind the wounded one as Trevor snapped his whip out at its wounded fellow. The creature's high shriek cut off as it bulged and reddened. What was-? Sypha startled as the monster exploded in a shower of red and black. How had Trevor done that? The surviving winged demon snarled at the boy as it stepped forward- Then hissed and lurched back as the salt they'd spread across the floor burned its feet. The creature ducked Trevor's whip and then pushed off as it spread its wings.

"Adrian!" Sypha watched as the blond boy jumped out from behind the statue and heaved his salt bucket at the demon. It shrieked and clawed at its own skin as Adrian floated down to stand beside Trevor. Whatever the boy saw outside made him further pale. As Trevor lashed out with his whip to strike the flailing demon a third and a fourth stepped inside. Another winged beast and- Sypha's eyes widened. What *was* the other creature? It had bright blue eyes and fangs. As the demons' wounded fellow creature burst apart the blue toothed one hissed at the winged one.

"No!" Trevor tried to strike the smaller demon with his whip as it blew away the salt on the floor with hard wing beats. The blue toothed one stood to its full height and *caught the whip*. They all gasped. It held tightly to the whip and jerked it back. Trevor stumbled forward as he was pulled with it - the demon caught him by the throat and lifted him off the ground.

"Trevor!" Sypha swirled the salt water out of their buckets and splashed it across the two demons. The winged one screamed and fell to the floor as the blue toothed one merely snarled. It tightened its hold on Trevor, thin lips peeling back in a grin as it looked at her.

"Children," it *spoke* in a strangely echoed voice, "to think that children would offer more resistance than your so called adults." Sypha shivered. It could speak? She'd never heard of a demon being able to speak!

"Let him go!" Adrian darted forward. His small nails elongated to scratch uselessly at dark skin as the monster caught him with its free hand. The boy's breath was knocked out of him as the demon slammed him against the ground. Sypha hated the thin wheezes Adrian made at that. She stepped out from behind the coffin and reached for the puddles of salty water.

"*Stop!*" The furious shout made her freeze. The water she'd been gathering splashed back to the floor as the taller demon looked toward the door. "I speak for our master! Release them!" Sypha's eyes widened in surprise as the blue toothed demon... did as he'd been told. Trevor coughed as he gasped for air, the boy leaning down to drag Adrian away from the creatures. The blond boy managed to catch his breath as the demons turned to fully face whoever was outside. "Step aside," the voice commanded. Sypha watched as two teens walked in. One of them was tall and dark; the other smaller and pale.

"Who're you?" She demanded as Trevor helped Adrian up.

"Loyal servants of Lord Dracula," the taller teen replied. Cold brown eyes fixed on the blond boy. "Your father has ordered that we return you to him."

"Wait." The Belmont looked from the older boys to Adrian. "You weren't joking? You're really...?" He pointed at Adrian's mouth. "You don't even have fangs!" The other boy's cheeks reddened.

"Mom says it's rude to flash them at people."

"Are you-" Trevor shook his head in disbelief. "*Are you fucking kidding me!?*"

Survivors

Hector directed the surviving demons out and away as Isaac spoke to Dracula's son. It was a relief to see at least two other children alive. The dead he and Isaac had passed on the way to the catacombs... Hector shivered. Men and women torn to shreds. Children with their innards strung across poles. This wasn't what Dracula had promised him! He had called out as they walked, desperate to see someone, anyone alive. Nothing moved. No one answered. Isaac had been stoic in the face of what had clearly been an all out slaughter. It was almost as if... as if he wasn't surprised by it. Hector rubbed at his arms as he walked back towards the catacombs. It couldn't be. Dracula had *promised him*!

"No!" The upset young voice of their master's son made Hector hurry in. Isaac glared down at the boy, but Adrian glared right back at him. "I'm not leaving until we get the others out!" Others? There were more than just the two other children? Hector looked to where the Speaker child stood. She'd placed her small hands against the block of ice wedged into- Hector's eyes widened as it melted under her touch. A magician? The other boy leaned forward to call out into the exposed dark hole.

"It's Trevor!" He yelled down. "You can come out now!" Hector made to walk closer but stopped when the two children glared up at him. They turned back to help the first person out - an older man in Speaker blue. The Speaker magician girl rushed over to hug the man. More and more people exited from their hiding spot. Some were Speakers and a few were townsfolk. Hector felt his heart lift at the sight of them. *Survivors*. He smiled and looked to Isaac-

Disapproval. His fellow forgemaster looked with utter disapproval at the lives Dracula's son had saved. Why? People couldn't be controlled if they were dead! That settled it, he decided. When he and Isaac returned to the castle he would request an audience with Dracula. Humanity couldn't be taught to be better if there were no more humans! Besides, he would never support complete slaughter. If Isaac had convinced their Lord down this path then he had to try to bring the vampire back to the original plan.

"You must return with us." Isaac's voice pulled Hector from his thoughts. He looked at the other teenager. "It is the will of your father," he continued as he stared down at Dracula's son.

"I want to stay and help them!" Adrian insisted. Movement made Hector glance back at the others. The older Speaker leaned down to murmur something into the girl's ear. She nodded before hugging him as tightly as she could. When the girl reluctantly stepped back the Speaker cleared his throat.

"My tribe and I will stay to help the people here."

"But-"

"You are meant to go with them," the Speaker told the blond boy. "As are my granddaughter and Trevor. Please," he raised his voice before Dracula's son could try to

interrupt him again. "You may either stay here and save our small group, or go with your father's servants to save us *and* the world."

"No pressure." The boy named Trevor muttered. He crossed his arms when Hector looked at him and stuck his chin up at the teen. Hector considered him. How strange.

"We have only come for our master's son." Isaac spoke up.

"Please, humor an old man who's grateful to be alive." The Speaker man smiled at them. "Our prophecy was clear. They must go with you."

"*Must?*" Goosebumps broke out on Hector's arms. He'd heard Isaac use that tone before. Blood and screaming always followed it. He had to stop this.

"We could take them." Brown eyes pinned him in place. Hector swallowed and then straightened. "We will take them." He was also Dracula's forgemaster - he had an equal say in what would happen! Their Lord was grieving, not heartless. If he showed the vampire the children then maybe Hector could convince him to return to the original plan. After all, it was one thing to order the deaths of faceless, nameless masses. To look two children in the face and order their deaths? Especially after they'd traveled with Adrian? This had a better chance at succeeding than if he talked to Dracula alone. "Come," he encouraged them. The forged horses he and Isaac had made waited outside. Three in total - the third would likely be strong enough to carry all of the children. His fellow forgemaster joined him outside as the Speaker girl began to say her goodbyes to her tribe. Isaac caught him by the wrist and pulled him close.

"What are you doing?" Came the quiet, hissed question. Hector nearly wavered in the face of that carefully controlled anger. No! He had made his decision! Hector shook the other teen's hand off and headed for his horse.

"I'm following our orders. We were sent for Dracula's son and now we have him."

"The others are not more pets for you to collect! They are *human*!"

"They're *children*!" Hector shot back.

"That does not matter!" That brought him up short. He studied Isaac. The other teen's glare didn't waver. He *meant* it, Hector realized. Chilled, he leaned back from his fellow forgemaster.

"Okay, we're- Wow!" The surprised voice of Dracula's son made him look to the boy. The half vampire walked around their steed with obvious amazement.

"Great." The other boy muttered as he followed after Adrian. The Speaker girl joined them outside, trying not to draw attention to herself as she wiped at her eyes. "A demon horse. I'm going to be riding a demon horse to Dracula." Adrian giggled when the horse snuffled at his hair. The boy ducked away from it and floated up to sit on its back.

"Come on," he encouraged the others as he patted at the dark flesh and fur behind him. The Speaker girl swiftly followed him up before the other boy scrambled up the horse's flank and sat behind her. Isaac mounted his own steed as Hector got up onto his own. They set out back towards... the *city*...

"Wait!" Isaac looked back at him, annoyance crossing his fine features. "The city..." The other teen merely raised an eyebrow at him. "The people." He glanced back at the three children. While Dracula's son and the Speaker girl looked at him with confusion, the other boy's face blanched.

"Cover your eyes," Trevor told the two.

"Why?" Adrian asked.

"Just do it!" Once he'd made sure that the other children had covered his eyes, Trevor did so as well.

"We are wasting time." Isaac's voice snapped Hector's attention back to the other teen. That cold gaze was unwavering. He turned to look back at the children - they still had their eyes covered.

"I'll tell you when you can look around," he told them. He tugged on the reins of their horse as he urged it forward. Isaac turned to continue toward the city.

Horrible, Terrible

Trevor's elation at surviving the attack had disappeared as they'd passed through the city. He hadn't dared open his eyes to peek - the stench had been *horrible*. Adrian had gagged and Sypha had gone quiet and still. Only once they'd successfully passed through the city and left it behind had the young vampire broken their silence.

"Sorry," he quietly said, "but what were your names again?" Trevor cocked his head to see the boy. Oh, he was talking to the older boys. The white haired boy looked back at them as their demon horses clip clopped onward.

"I'm Hector," he re-introduced himself before gesturing ahead to his companion. "This is Isaac."

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course," Hector replied.

"Where did my father get the demons?" Adrian asked.

"And why're you working with them?" Trevor decided to ask. "I mean, I'm pretty sure you guys are human, right?" Hector nodded. "Then why're you working for *Dracula*? My dad said that he wants to kill everyone!" Hector slowed his demon horse and looked between the two of them. The older boy hesitated and then sighed.

"Humans... They're like animals." What? That got Sypha's attention and the girl sat straighter as she crossed her arms.

"No we're not!" She told him.

"You take that back! My mom's not an animal!" Adrian's sudden anger made Trevor look ahead at him. Wait, mother? But his dad was Dracula, how-?

"I didn't mean your mother," Hector quickly assured the boy. "I mean, well, other people."

"How could you think that? We're nothing like animals!" Sypha insisted.

"Not you." the older boy said. "It's-" He sighed. "It's complicated."

"It sounds stupid," Trevor told him. That got him an offended, startled look. "Some people are animals, yeah-"

"Trevor!" Sypha spun to face him.

"They killed my dad!" Trevor told her. "And some of them wanted to kill your tribe, too! *Some* people are animals, but there were other people who wanted to save the Speakers!"

"Hector, why are you trying to explain?" Isaac had turned back to face Hector. "They're going to die anyway."

"You are both horrible, terrible people! I don't want to talk to you anymore!" Sypha crossed her arms and looked away from the older boys.

"You... You never answered my question," Adrian spoke up in the abrupt silence. "Father said it would take him a year to get his army of demons. How does he have so many of them now?" Trevor carefully leaned to the side to look at the boy.

"What're you talking about?" he asked.

"Your father succeeded in his goal, just as he will now," Isaac said.

"But how? Mom-" Adrian's face scrunched up and for a moment Trevor thought the boy was about to cry. "It only happened... happened last night. He said it would take a year!" Trevor didn't understand what he was talking about. By the startled look on Hector's face, he did.

"Adrian..." The teen briefly chewed at his lip, his posture screaming uncomfortable awkwardness now. "That *was* a year ago."

"I don't get it," Trevor spoke up. "What do you mean?" The smaller boy looked increasingly upset.

"Stop lying!" he snapped at the two teens. "My mom, she- she died last night!"

"We're not lying, son of Dracula." The taller boy told him. "It has been a year since your mother was murdered." *Murdered?*

"No it hasn't, mom *taught* me how to count! I was born in 1456 and I'm eight!" He held up his hands and counted off the years for them. "It's 1464!"

"No, it's not," Trevor spoke up. "They're not lying. It's 1465."

"But... But... That can't be," Adrian said, his voice going small. "I'm eight. Mom, she... She..." Shit. The boy's voice was going wobbly.

"I think we should get some sleep," Trevor rushed his idea out. Everyone but Adrian looked at him in confusion. "It's still dark out. We didn't get any sleep. I think we should!"

"Dracula ordered that his son be returned to him." Isaac said.

"By when? If he didn't say, that's his fault. I, for one," he faked a yawn, "am tired." Sypha hesitated before faking one as well.

"Yes." The girl agreed. "I am as well. The prophecy didn't say we had to face Dracula immediately. We *should* get some sleep."

"No. We-" Trevor interrupted the older teen.

"A nap, then." God, suggesting it made him feel like a little kid. He looked between Isaac and Adrian as pointedly as he could. He was relieved to see that Hector looked troubled. "Come *on*. Just a short one."

"I agree," Hector said. Yes! "Dracula would want his son to be in good health. They should rest for a while." Isaac's face was a rigid mask of frustration. "It won't be long," the other teen assured him. Not waiting for his reply, Trevor crawled off the demon horse as Sypha slid down to join him.

Failing Nap Time

For supposedly wanting to take a nap, no one seemed really interested in the sleeping part of nap. Trevor sighed as he turned on the uncomfortable ground to look at the others.

"You know, my mom liked to say that the first part of sleeping started with closing your eyes." He demonstrated that and then opened them to look between the two others. Neither had followed his lead. "As in, eyes closed."

"My tribe tells tales before we turn in for the night," the Speaker girl said. They both looked at Adrian.

"My... My mom tells me stories too," the boy quietly said. Trevor sighed. He doubted they'd appreciate listening to the glory day tales of his ancestors. He had tons of those.

"How about..." Trevor tapped his finger against the grass as he thought. "Oh! How about that Speaker tale you were telling me about?" he asked Sypha. "No one ever actually told me what was in it. It'd be kind of nice to get a feel for how we're going to defeat Dracula, since, you know - we're *nine*. And eight," he hurriedly tacked on for the other boy.

"Defeat him?" Adrian sat up at that. The boy had to pause to brush grass from his hair and Trevor had to try really hard not to laugh at that. "What're you talking about? We're just going home to stop him."

"Uh, yeah. Stop. Defeat." Trevor shrugged. "Same thing." Adrian frowned at him.

"No, it's not."

"Yes, it is," he insisted.

"Okay!" The Speaker girl slapped her hand to the ground and the boys turned to over at her. "If you want to hear it, I'll tell you." Finally. Trevor pushed himself up to sit cross legged as Sypha got up. She brushed twigs from her long sleeves and then cleared her throat. "The prophecy says this: Youth will be our salvation," the girl began. "When a mother's death drives the father to grief, when night threatens to swallow the day, seek the city of Gresit. There is where the savior sleeps. Wake him, guide him; return him to his father's place. Love shall staunch a bleeding heart as tears shall wash away the sins of humanity." She sat back down. What? Trevor had been expecting something more like, well, pray to God and make sure you stab the bastard with the sharp bit of the stake. What was all this 'sins of humanity' and 'tears' stuff?

"Was there anything else?" he asked. "You know, like, 'when his eyes turn red make sure you duck. Stomp on his foot, stake him, then win and go- Go on with your life.'"

"Stake him? Why?" Adrian shook his head. "You can't do that, that'd kill him!"

"Um." Trevor was not prepared for the mom glare the Speaker girl immediately turned on him. "What I meant was... Stake him... Through the hands?" Sypha clapped a hand to her face.

"But that would hurt him!" The other boy was starting to look upset again.

"Okay, okay! We'll... We'll hit him over the head. Or something." Adrian thought about that for a moment before he shook his head.

"That wouldn't work. He's tall." The boy held his hand up as high as he could reach. "*Really* tall." Well, shit.

"Then we'll just have to jump really high." Trevor told him.

"Tell me, what will you do with the other generals?" All three of them startled as Isaac joined the conversation. From their left, Hector leaned against the tree beside him to watch them. Trevor had honestly forgotten that the teens were still there. "I doubt *they* will stand still to let you hit them." Sypha chewed at her lip as she thought about it.

"The prophecy didn't mention them..."

"Then we don't have to worry about them for now." Yeah, Trevor liked the idea of ignoring that problem for the time being. Isaac gave them all unimpressed looks.

"You truly are children," the teen muttered. "Dracula is working towards a future that will have only peace and love. That you would even try to stop him..." The tall young man looked annoyed.

"He locked his kid in a coffin. Alone. For a year," Trevor pointed out. "Not exactly loving if you ask me." Isaac's lips pulled back in a taunting sneer as he replied.

"As you said, you are nine. You haven't seen the true cruelty of humans. How it takes everything you hold dear and grinds it to-"

"Stop it!" Adrian covered his ears and hunched his shoulders. "Just stop it! I- I don't care about some Speaker prophecy or the generals or hurting father! I want to go home! I just... I just *wanna go home!*" In the following silence, Trevor swallowed around the lump in his throat.

"Me too," he whispered. He couldn't. Home was gone, just like mom and dad. Everyone else. He took a shuddering breath and shut his eyes. He wasn't a little kid anymore. Only little kids cried!

"Well." The white haired teen cleared his throat. "I think we're past any sleep happening. Should we continue on?"

"Yes." Isaac walked back towards his horse as Sypha helped Adrian up. The boy hugged himself and refused to look at any of them. As Trevor got up to follow after them, Sypha slowed so they could all walk together.

"I wish grandpa was here," the girl quietly said. She held Adrian's hand tightly in her own. They helped the son of Dracula back up onto the horse. Once he was secure, Sypha took a spot in front of him as Trevor sat behind. Yeah, the boy thought to himself, he kinda wished the old man had come too.

Is This True?

The moment they came within sight of the imposing castle, Adrian floated up from the freaky demon horse and shot through the air towards it. "Damn it!" Trevor pushed himself off the horse's bony back and jumped down to run after the boy. Sypha shot past him and the flames in her hands made him shudder. "Wait for me!" The smaller boy reached the tall entrance and let himself inside without so much as a glance back at them. Sypha raced in after him. What the Hell were they doing!? The prophecy had been pretty fucking clear that they had to face Dracula together. As in, all three! Trevor muttered curses under his breath as he ran as fast as he could. He managed to catch hold of the entrance door before it shut and he squeezed inside. And instantly regretted it.

Tall, fancy looking vampires all turned to look at them. Well, shit. Forget the prophecy. The monsters were going to pick their pointy teeth with his fucking bones, weren't they. Here lies Trevor Belmont, the boy thought with a shot of amused terror, died by stupidity. He reached for his whip and snapped it loose. If this really was it, he'd go down fighting. Sypha had apparently come to the same conclusion. The Speaker girl stopped halfway and looked back at him. He ran to her side, surprised every step of the way when sharp nails didn't dig into his arms with each step. Instead, the vampires just continued to... look at them. As if they hadn't even been expecting them! What the Hell was this? They really hadn't been expecting them? Even fucking *Dracula* looked surprised! And shit, the boy thought as the old man slowly stood from his seat, he really *was* tall. Trevor would probably have to stand on Sypha's shoulders if he really wanted to hit the man in the head. Tall, and thin, and okay he was kind of scary with those way too sharp teeth. Did the man just sit around and chisel them for moments like this?

"Adrian?" The vampire rasped out. The other boy had stumbled to a halt just shy of the man's throne.

"Hurry up and hit him in the head!" Trevor yelled at him. His mouth abruptly went dry as scarlet eyes briefly flickered to him.

"We... We have come to stop you, Dracula," the Speaker girl shakily declared. Amused chuckles came from all around them as the other vampires leisurely began to approach.

"Kids?" A red haired vampire laughed as he wiped at his eyes. "The humans sent fucking *kids* to fight us?" Trevor shivered at the hungry glints in their eyes. He shared a wide eyed look with Sypha and together the two shuffled closer to Adrian while trying to keep their backs pressed against one another. Dracula bent at the waist, his creepy red eyes for his son alone as he spoke.

"Is this true, my son?" Adrian took shallow, quick breaths before his hand blurred upward at the vampire's face. Trevor's mouth dropped open as the kid *snagged his father by the ear*.

At A Complete Loss

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dracula froze at the tight pinch of his son's fingers to the man's ear. The vampire stared down at his son in total shock as the boy hesitated. For a moment they stood in tense silence, and then-

"You... You have been a very *bad* boy, Ad- Vlad Tepes!" Dracula watched with wide eyes as Adrian shook his finger at him. "You're not supposed to... to *hurt* people! Or flash your fangs at them! I am *very* disappointed in you!" Dracula saw then his beloved wife's face flash over his son's. Lisa's voice mixed with his. "Now put your army away, go to your room, and think about what you've done!" A lump formed in the man's throat. His wife's face faded and Dracula found himself speechless as his son paused. "I... You..." The boy's brief passion was fading.

"You did a very good impression of your mother," Dracula whispered, his voice hoarse.

"I..." Adrian's face went tight. His son's lips quivered. "I miss her!" He took a shuddering breath as his shoulders shook. "I miss mom," Adrian wept, his face reddening as he took hard, gasping breaths. "Mom! *Mom!*" Tears streaming down his cheeks, his son reached up for him with both hands. Dracula's heart ached as he swept the boy into his arms. His son sobbed as he buried his face in the man's chest. He held his son tight as the boy continued to cry. A thin hiccup drew Dracula's gaze. The Speaker girl had covered her mouth with a hand. She watched as his son cried, a slight tremor going through her shoulders as well.

"I..." Her voice wavered. Dracula stared, taken by surprise, as tears gathered in the corners of her eyes. she hiccupped again as her shoulders gradually shook harder. "I miss my tribe. I... I... I want grandpa!" She broke down then, crying as she buried her face in her small hands. His arms full with his still sobbing son, Dracula blinked at the girl. What. *What* was- The other human child hunched his shoulders then. The vampire looked to him as the boy's lower lip stubbornly quivered. Wait. That crest he wore. A Belmont had survived? The Belmont boy squinted and looked away. As his son and the Speaker girl continued to cry, Dracula watched in utter disbelief as the boy finally broke down as well.

"Damn it! *Damn it!* Mom, dad," the Belmont boy declared, "why'd they have to die? Why!?" Dracula now had three sobbing children before him. His son. The Speaker girl. The Belmont boy. For the first time in his long, long life, the vampire found himself at a complete loss.

Chapter End Notes

Our group of nine year old children:



Poor Dracula:



Without Anger

"Get out." His generals hesitated, as did Isaac and Hector. The vampires looked to each other in veiled uncertainty.

"My Lord-" Carmilla began as she stepped forward. Red bled across Dracula's vision. His nails lengthened and he had to lighten his hold on his son so that he didn't scratch the boy. The woman fell silent as the older vampire leaned forward.

"Get," his voice was a low hiss, "*out*. Leave my home. I'll summon you back when once I've," he glanced at the still weeping three children, "dealt with this." Silent resentment and disapproval radiated from the group, but he kept his red gaze on them until the vampires bowed and left. The human teens obediently left as well. His boy shifted closer, his small hands wrapping tight around Dracula's back as the boy cried against him. Dracula's heart ached at how distraught his son was. Feeling out of practice, the vampire rubbed his son's back as he tried to sooth the boy. He couldn't help but look at the other two children. Both of them had sat down on the floor, the little Speaker having pulled her knees to her chest as the boy clutched his small whip.

Discomfort crawled up Dracula's chest as the foreign feeling of guilt pushed at him. He knew what Lisa would've done. Could almost feel her motherly glare from beyond her grave. In a rare moment of awkwardness, the vampire settled his boy against his hip and stood. The children before him cried harder at that. Lisa, what should he do? The vampire kept his movements slow as he stepped forward. The man inched his way down onto the floor. He crossed his legs to better balance Adrian. With one hand still against his son's back, Dracula slowly reached for the little girl. She watched him through tear reddened eyes as he lightly rested his hand against her head.

"I-" It had been a year since he'd had to speak to a child. Even more since he'd had to comfort one. His wife had always been better with Adrian when the boy became distraught. Dracula didn't know what to say. Dracula carefully pulled his hand back and looked to the Belmont boy. A child of his enemies. Here. Crying on his floor. The man desperately wished for his wife as he reluctantly reached for the boy. The child's hair was coarse beneath his fingers. Fear made the boy go pale and for the first time since Lisa's death, Dracula didn't feel vindictive pride at eliciting the emotion. He felt... The man took his own shuddering breath as he sat silently before the children. The man very much doubted that anything he said would improve the situation. At a loss for words, without anger to fall back on, Dracula could only hold his son close.

Toward Home

The weeping finally subsided. As the other two children leaned against each other and wiped their reddened cheeks, Dracula carefully stood. His son didn't move, instead continuing to cling to him.

"Speaker." She had to lean back to look up at him. "Where is your tribe? Your grandfather?" They couldn't be near his lands - his forces had wiped out every human life for miles around. Unless, he thought with sudden discomfort, they *had* killed her tribe.

"Gresit," she whispered, her voice still shaking. "They're," she swallowed, "they're in Gresit." *Gresit*? People there had survived his army's attack?

"I am capable of moving the castle great distances," he told her. "I'll return you to your people."

"I can't." Her lower lip quivered again. "Not until we complete our legend." Legend? He knew how seriously the Speakers took their prophesied tales. She wouldn't budge until she thought she'd succeeded.

"Then tell me what it is," he asked of her. She finished wiping at her cheeks, her trembling hands clenching into small fists.

"When a mother's death drives the father to grief, when night threatens to swallow the day, seek the city of Gresit," she continued. "There is where the savior sleeps. Wake him, guide him; return him to his father's place. Love shall staunch a bleeding heart as tears shall wash away the sins of humanity." That... He looked at each of them. At his son. That had been strangely straightforward for a Speaker legend. And the ending... They'd sent children to cry at him? With his own son among them? If not for the strain of having been with weeping children, he would have laughed at the absurdity of it. He, Vlad Tepes, moved by children's tears? His rage had not abated. He could still feel hatred burning in his heart, yet... Adrian straightened then. The boy wiped at his reddened eyes.

He'd made his son cry. He'd laid his hands on his boy. Buried him in the dark, away from their home.

Again, he felt small. It was a strange and unwelcome feeling. Something bitter tasting pushed at his heart alongside the rage. Shame. A shame that widened the more he thought; cut deeper into him than any fire of hate had before. The vampire looked away from the children. From his child.

"Then you have succeeded, girl," he finally told her. Three sets of eyes widened. His heart still screamed for blood, yet Adrian... He was not strong enough to make his son cry again. "Wait here," he said. "I shall take you to your people." The Belmont boy gave the girl a disbelieving look as Dracula turned from them. A few long strides, flashing though his great halls, led him to the device. His son buried his face in the man's shoulder as Dracula reached for it. A few moments of concentration. Sparks of light. Rumbling as stones around them

creaked. His home settled into place then. He wondered briefly if any survivors of Gresit had seen their arrival. The humans' terror had to be great. With the weight of his son in his arms, he found he couldn't revel in it. Several flashing steps took him back to the throne room. The other children jerked back at his sudden appearance.

"Come." He tried to speak softly. "We've arrived at Gresit." The two children shared a look.

"Mom and dad said he could do stuff like that, but..." The Belmont boy eyed him. "How do we know you're telling the truth?"

"Walk with me," Dracula encouraged them. "And see." He turned then. Slowly set out across the throne room. Heard the sounds of small feet following him. They walked together through the long hallways and reached the front door. His son shifted to look up at the sky as they stepped outside. Another stab of shame pierced his heart. What would Dracula have done if his servants had successfully brought Adrian home alone? Locked the boy away in his room? Avoided that heartbroken gaze as he slaughtered the rest of the humans?

He would have. Cold shame crept further along his rage. Banked the flames as he looked at his son, Lisa's dear boy, and realized the life he would have condemned his child to. Had he eventually reunited with his wife in the afterlife, she would have never forgiven him. The thought of an eternity without her chilled his rage. The boy had suffered just as much as he, had cried out for her, and Dracula-. No. *Vlad* had failed his son. Discomfort squirmed in his chest.

"He wasn't lying!" The Speaker girl cried out in surprise. She broke from them then and ran for the city gates, her talk of legend overshadowed by the infinitely more powerful need of a child to be with their own. And they, he thought in turn with mirrored surprise, had not been lying either. The city gates creaked open and figures dressed in matching blues rushed out. The Speakers were careful not to pass an older man at the front of the group.

Ah, the grandfather, Vlad realized as the girl leapt into the older Speaker's arms. The elderly human swept her up and cradled her just as the vampire did his own son. He watched, not certain of what to expect, as the Speakers slowed to a purposeful stride and continued toward him. The elderly human settled his granddaughter more firmly on his hip before he spoke.

"Greetings, Dracula, lord of vampires."

"Speaker," he returned it, "grandfather of the girl."

"Sypha," the elderly man replied. One hand stroked through the girl's hair as he continued. "We're thankful for her return."

"And I, for my son's." Adrian pressed his head to the vampire's shoulder. Vlad knew that look of exhaustion.

"Will our legend ring true?" the elderly Speaker asked. Vlad watched as his son fully relaxed against him.

"It will." He never wished to see that heartbroken expression on his son's face again. Never wished again to be the cause of it. He wasn't sure he'd survive that.

"Is that seriously it?" They all looked to the Belmont boy. "It's just... We didn't even fight him..." The elderly Speaker smiled down at the boy.

"No battle you fight will overshadow this day," the human said. "For today, you helped save humanity. Your parents," his expression softened, "would be proud of the young man they raised." The boy looked away. Sniffed.

"Sure." His voice was quiet.

"Your mother and father's duties took them far and wide," the Speaker told him. "We crossed paths with them on numerous nights. Although your library was lost to fire, the words in those books live on in us." The Belmont boy's head shot up at that.

"You mean-?"

"There is always room for one more in our travels." The older Speaker's smile widened. "We'd be honored to return their tales to you." The Belmont boy perked up as he made his way over to the Speaker tribe.

"Could we visit them? Later?" Adrian's question was small. "They're nice."

"Of course." In that moment, there was nothing Vlad wouldn't do for his son. The boy waved at the two children. The kids waved back. The elderly Speaker nodded to the vampire before the tribe started back toward the gate. Vlad's son on his hip, the man turned back toward their home. His generals would be displeased, as would Isaac and Hector. Perhaps one of the vampires would be infuriated enough to challenge him. If the time came, he'd answer any rival's challenge and put them down.

For now, though, Vlad held the other half of his heart in his arms and continued on toward home.

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