

It was dark, raining buckets, and bone chillingly cold.

Despite the paranoid part of her fearing that every step forward would just lead her back to her where she'd come from, she kept braving the storm. But she knew that she couldn't go on much longer.

As if answering her prayers for shelter, she saw lights, faintly illuminating a dark silhouette against the storm. It was definitely a bigger building than anything in her little village, which was good. She hadn't gone in a circle.

But she knew nothing about this building or its inhabitance. Hopefully, if luck was on her side, they would at least let her stay until the storm passed.

Phoebe could tell her legs were giving out on her by the time she reached the front doors. They weren't the doors she was used to seeing, no. The doors were monolithic, the curving designs of creatures and knights almost terrifying in the dark.

Summoning her courage, she took one of the grand door knockers and hit it against the door a few times. The sound was like that of thunder, and she hoped it wasn't confused as such.

She couldn't really hear anything inside, as the din of the rain was too loud, so she just waited.

And waited.

Just as she was considering leaving to try her luck elsewhere, the door partially creaked open. A face peered out that she could not see the details of as the light they held was behind the other door.

But she could see their eyes.

Red ones that seemed to have their own light, glowing against the gloom.

They pinned Phoebe down and she knew that coming here, knocking on this door was a mistake. She was going to die. She was going to die and no one would find her body. She was-

The face's owner shifted the light and the spell was broken.

It was a woman that Phoebe judged to be in her twenties, like Phoebe herself. Her features were soft and fair. She had her auburn mane tied back into a loose ponytail. Her dress was simple, but finer than anything Phoebe ever owned.

In the light, her eyes were still that startling crimson, but they were far from menacing.

"Oh dear, what are you doing out in this weather? Please come inside." She opened the door further to let Phoebe in.

Phoebe was not in any state to look a gift horse in its mouth so she shakily stepped into the mansion. The entrance hall was grand and absolutely humongous. The few lit candles struggled to illuminate the entire room, but it was more than enough to see properly.

The woman wrapped an arm around Phoebe, as if she knew how weak her legs were. "Come on, let's get you dry. Luckily, I was about to have dinner, so you'll have something warm to eat."

"Oh, really that's too much..." Phoebe softly complained as the woman led her deeper into the mansion.

"I insist. It would bother me immensely if I wasn't a proper host."

They arrived at a sizeable washroom before the woman let Phoebe go. "Feel free to use my robe for now. I'll get you some more proper clothes later. There should be plenty of towels, but if you need more, just yell."

"A-alright." Phoebe stuttered as she entered the bathroom. She almost expected the woman to follow her in but she respectfully closed the door, leaving Phoebe alone.

To be frank, Phoebe was a bit stunned at the woman's hospitality. She didn't know many nobles, but the few she interacted with would only spare a glance to sneer. The woman had to know that Phoebe was just a peasant, right? Phoebe's clothes were waterlogged but they were far from anything fine.

And there she went, looking in the gift horse's mouth. She really should not be questioning her good fortune.

She began to strip but was startled by a light knock on the door.

The woman's voice was somehow crystal clear despite the door in the way. "Ah, sorry. I just realized I have not introduced myself. I'm Selena."

Phoebe must have made a noise for her to know she had jumped. "I-I'm Phoebe Doyle. Thank you for your hospitality."

"Think nothing of it." With that, the woman, Selena, fell silent.

Phoebe managed to wrestle out of her clothes and took one of the towels to dry herself. She paused though, as the towel was far softer than a simple towel had any business being. Selena must be filthy rich.

Though, if she was, why didn't Phoebe see anyone else on their walk over? She would be bound to have servants. And if she was the master of the house, why was she the one to answer the door?

"You okay in there?" Selena's voice drifted through the door again.

"Y-yes! Yes! I'm quite fine!" Phoebe squeaked and began to actually dry off.

Once she was satisfied, she hung up the towels and got Selena's robe. Like the towels, it was impossibly soft. Even though Selena had said it was fine, it felt wrong to wear such a thing.

But what choice did she have? She could hardly go out naked.

Phoebe tied on the robe and meekly peeked out the door.

Selena was standing beside the door, eyes glued to the opposite wall and a finger to her lips. She looked to be lost in thought.

"Um-"

The speed in which Selena's head whipped around to look at her startled Phoebe. Seeing her fear, Selena awkwardly glanced away and kicked at the ground, seemingly embarrassed. "Ah. Well. I'll see you to the fireplace so you can warm up."

"A-alright."

Phoebe stepped out of the wash room and Selena briefly put a hand on her back before flinching away.

She cleared her throat and began walking a tad faster than before. Phoebe could not focus on her odd behavior, only focus on not losing her and getting lost.

They soon found themselves in a grand sitting room with a roaring fire. Already, Phoebe felt herself being drawn to the fire's warmth, the weariness in her bones dragging her down just an ever bit more.

"Please, make yourself at home. I'll come get you when dinner's ready." Selena bowed her head slightly before hastily retreating.

Phoebe hadn't done anything to offend her, did she? If she did, won't she have thrown her out?

Regardless, the plush chairs were calling and Phoebe could not resist their song. She sat down on the one closest to the fire and all the exhaustion of the day hit her. She no longer cared if she was being polite or not as her eyes drifted shut.

It was impossible to tell how long she had been asleep as it felt like only a few sparse seconds when a gentle shake roused Phoebe.

Groaning, she peered through heavy eyelids at her disturber.

Selena had straightened up as soon as Phoebe stirred. After waiting a few seconds for her to wake up a bit, Selena said. "Dinner is ready. If you please, follow me."

Phoebe nodded before stretching and releasing a big yawn that she failed to completely stifle. She looked to Selena, but still couldn't read her.

Shaking off the rest of her nap, Phoebe once again followed Selena through the winding hallways that she had no hope of memorizing.

Then, she was led into a dining room no less ornate or huge than any other room in the mansion. The table could easily seat Phoebe's entire village and maybe one of the neighboring ones.

And there was only three places set.

Wait, three?

Before Phoebe could ponder on it further, Selena pulled out a seat and gestured for her to sit with a smile she couldn't tell was faked or not.

"Thank you." Phoebe muttered as she took the seat.

"I'll start bringing everything out in a bit. Just let me check on something right quick." And with that, Selena ran off without waiting for a response.

Phoebe blinked but remembered not to test her luck. She instead turned back to the third place that had been set. Well, perhaps that was an understatement. There was no plate or silverware, just a napkin and a wine glass.

Maybe it was a mistake? Or was it some weird noble thing?

Phoebe glanced after Selena. She seemed so down to earth. It didn't seem like her to do something so-

Phoebe glanced back and nearly jumped out of her skin.

*"What are you doing here?"* The woman who seemed to have materialized out of thin air hissed. She cast an imposing shadow across the dining room table, easily taller than both Phoebe and Selena. Her strong features seemed to be carved out of a pale glacier, her short cropped blonde hair doing nothing to warm the iciness of her appearance.

Phoebe felt all heat leave her under that accusing blue gaze. Her mouth went dry as she withered between that glare.

*"I asked a question."* Then the woman was right next to her.

Phoebe instinctively scrambled away with a squeak, knocking over the chair she had been sitting on.

The glacial woman advanced like bird's shadow gliding over the grass.

For the second time today, Phoebe was certain she would die. There was no doubt that this woman could rip her limb from limb without the faintest of problems. She would die a horrible, painful-

*"Gwyneira!"*

The woman tensed and shifted her gaze passed Phoebe. Shakily, Phoebe craned her neck to follow the woman's gaze.

Selena was standing in doorway with her hands on her hips and a displeased frown on her lips. "Can you not murder our guest?"

"Guest?" Gwyneira echoed.

Selena walked over to help Phoebe up but kept her attention on Gwyneira. "She was going to die."

Gwyneira sighed. "...You could have at least told me."

Selena righted Phoebe's chair then went up to Gwyneira and caressed her cheek. "I'm sorry. Forgive me?"

Another sigh, this time more affectionate. "...You make it awfully hard to stay mad at you..."

Meanwhile, Phoebe was glancing between the two cluelessly, trying to figure out exactly what was going on. There was something there, she knew it, but she had no idea what.

"...Anyway, can you be a dear and help me bring out the food, Gwyneira? Oh, and you can just sit down, Phoebe." Phoebe silently obeyed as Selena and Gwyneira disappeared into what Phoebe assumed was the kitchen.

When the two reappeared, Phoebe had to keep her jaw from dropping. That was way too much food for only a few people. The roasted chicken alone could feed a decently sized family.

They set the food down and Gwyneira went back into the kitchen.

"Is there anything I can get you?" Selena said, picking up Phoebe's plate.

"I-I can serve myself."

"I insist. You're our guest. You shouldn't have to raise a finger."

Sensing that Selena wouldn't budge on this, Phoebe gave in. "Very well. A little bit of everything then."

Gwyneira returned with two bottles of wine, one white, the other a deep red. She took Phoebe's wine glass and poured some of the white wine into it.

She wasn't showing it, but Phoebe felt that she was still unhappy about this whole situation. Gwyneira poured some white wine for Selena before she sat down and poured herself some of the red wine.

The red wine seemed quite thick for some reason.

Selena finished serving Phoebe then began serving herself. Phoebe couldn't help but notice that Selena was giving herself quite big portions.

Selena sat down and began to eat.

Phoebe glanced at Gwyneira, who was silently nursing her wine while staring Phoebe down. Why didn't Selena get any food for Gwyneira? Did she expect her to serve herself? She didn't even have a plate to eat from.

Maybe she just wasn't hungry?

Phoebe's stomach growling brought her out of her musings. Selena giggled and Phoebe's face went beat red.

Swallowing uncomfortably, Phoebe began to eat. Though, she soon had to stop herself from tearing apart her food like a wild animal. Damn, it was good. Like the best she'd ever eaten.

Phoebe forced herself to pause. "You made this?"

Just as she realized how rude that sounded, Selena smiled. "I did. I've had a lot of practice."

Phoebe muttered a wow, before asking, "Pardon me if this is rude, but is it just you two here?"

Gwyneira frowned but Selena was more than happy to answer. "Yes, it's just us."

"I'm just surprised is all. You seem to be sorts to have servants."

Gwyneira huffed something inaudible to Phoebe and Selena elbowed her before saying, "Well, we're a bit isolated for a reason, multiple reasons to be precise, but I'm more interested in why you were out in the storm to begin with."

Phoebe visually drooped. "Well, the storm blind sighted me, I must admit. But I just had to... get away."

"Village drama?" Selena guessed.

"Close knit communities tend to brew the most toxic poisons." Gwyneira idly noted.

"Well," Phoebe looked away. "It's just that... my parents have been pushing for me to marry... and just couldn't take it anymore."

Phoebe expected to be called unreasonable, to be told that it was her duty to get married as their daughter, that what she wanted was frivolous. She didn't expect what happened next.

Selena looked to Gwyneira. "Is that like... a common thing that parents do?"

"I imagine. Though my family was probably quite different than hers." Gwyneira shook her head.

"I wouldn't know. My parents weren't exactly together." Selena's expression soured. "Though if my father ever demanded anything from me, I would rip out his tongue and make him eat it."

Phoebe flinched at both what she said and the flippant way she said it.

"Regardless, it sounds terribly unpleasant." Gwyneira added.

"Pardon my curiosity, but what about marriage is offending you so?" Selena tilted her head.

"Well, the constant nagging never helped, but like, I don't know, being tied to a man for the rest of my life, it's just..." Phoebe shivered.

Selena and Gwyneira glanced at each other.

"Would you rather be tied to a woman?" Selena asked.

Phoebe blinked, not quite understanding. "You can't marry a woman though."

"You can but the church doesn't approve of it." Gwyneira took a sip of her wine.

"Wait..." Phoebe glanced between the two. "Are you two...?"

Selena took Gwyneira's free hand in hers. "Yes, we're happily married. We have been for several years."

Gwyneira's eyes gained a dangerous edge. "I trust that is not a problem."

The gears in Phoebe's head turned for a minute before she said, "I guess that's why you don't have any servants... or live near a village."

Gwyneira's gaze softened. "Yes, we are not interested in having any lynch mobs come after us. We just want to live in peace."

"That's why you were so aggressive when you first saw me..." Phoebe muttered before speaking up. "I won't tell anyone about you. It's the least I can do after all your hospitality."

A ghost of a smile passed Gwyneira's lips.

"Aw, someone's warming up to our guest." Selena cooed, leaning over to Gwyneira. Gwyneira looked away, a blush forming on her face. Selena chuckled.

Yeah, Phoebe could definitely see it now.

Gwyneira cleared her throat. "What are you planning on doing now? I doubt you have the resources to start over somewhere else. You might have to get married just to survive."

Phoebe looked down, picking at her food. "I... really don't have a plan. I just had to go. It felt like a now or never thing."

"Well..." Gwyneira glared at Selena, who returned the hostile gaze without flinching. "Come on, it's not like we'll get nothing from it."

"Our current arrangement is fine."

"Yeah, but it could be *better*."

Gwyneira crossed her arms.

"Come on, *please*." Selena whined. "I would like to actually drink too."

Gwyneira sighed. "I guess some variety would be nice... but only if she agrees."

Phoebe was once again lost.

"Okay, promise not to freak out." Selena raised her hands as if anticipating needing to calm Phoebe down.

Phoebe glanced around. "Um... sure."

"Well, there's another reason we stay away from villages..." Selena chewed on her words a bit. "You see... we're vampires."

Phoebe's heart seized in her chest.

Nervously tapping her fingers on the table, Selena continued. "Well, I'm actually a dhampir. Mother was a human, dad was a vampire. Gwyneira is a full vampire though..." Selena stared at Phoebe, waiting.

Phoebe knew she needed to say something, anything, but when she opened her mouth, nothing came out. She was such a fool, really. All this hospitality was nothing but a ruse. She had been caught in a trap the second she walked in.

Meanwhile, Selena was looking more and more distressed.

"W-why are you telling me this?" Phoebe managed to choke out.

Selena shifted uncomfortably. Gwyneira sighed. "We are not going to hurt you. You see, I get my need for blood met by Selena. That's how we've survived so far from civilization for so long. What my wife was getting at was that we would be willing to have you live with us, provide food and shelter so you don't have to return to your parents. All we ask for in return is a bit of blood once in a while."

Phoebe's hands curled in fists. This was all too much. First, her hosts were monsters. That alone was enough to run and never look back

But could she even outrun them? Gwyneira was almost blindingly fast and she doubted Selena was much slower. Plus, she could still hear the storm ragging outside. Fleeing might as well be a death sentence.

Though, she didn't understand why they were offering her any type of deal. Surely they were strong enough to take whatever they wanted without question. They said they weren't going to hurt her, but it had to be a ruse.

It had to be.

"I don't get it." Phoebe admitted. "I just don't understand."

"There isn't much to not understand." Gwyneira stated. "It's a simple deal, really."

"I mean, why offer a deal at all? Surely you could just keep me here regardless of what I thought and use me like livestock." Phoebe couldn't help but add on.

Selena choked on her wine and Gwyneria shattered her wine glass, which was filled with what Phoebe now realized was blood, not red wine. Selena recovered and immediately began fuzzing over Gwyneria.

"I'm fine, I didn't get cut." Gwyneria turned her gaze back to Phoebe. "Do you really think so little of us that we would do such a thing?"

Phoebe flinched but found no words to defend herself. She almost felt rude, they had saved her from a freezing death in the storm.

But they were vampires.

A silence passed, which Selena broke. "...We should at least finish our meal."

Phoebe quietly started eating again, while Selena more picked at her food. Gwyneria got up, vanished into the kitchen, and returned with a towel to mop up the bloodstain on the table.

Once Phoebe was done, Selena rose from her seat. "You can stay until the storm passes, but after that, you must leave. I'll show you to your chambers."

Selena didn't meet Phoebe's gaze for the entire time she lead her through the winding halls, though Phoebe wasn't trying to catch her eye anyway. The room that was to be hers for the duration of the storm was as grand and immaculate as the rest of the house, but Phoebe hardly paid any attention to it.

Guilt was gnawing at her heart and she wasn't quite sure why. They were vampires.

They were vampires!

For crying out loud, she was just looking out for herself!

But they had shown her nothing but kindness since she's been here. Well, Gwyneira had scared her at first but that was understandable. They had to be wary of outsiders.

And Phoebe had proven that right.

...

Phoebe tucked herself into bed, hoping sleep would drive her wavering heart to peace.

How wrong she was.

Nightmares plagued her that night, reminding her what the potential consequences of her little rebellion could await her if she returned home.

Not that her home had felt like one for quite some time.

She awoke covered in sweat after a particularly harrowing nightmare. Phoebe knew then that she couldn't go home. No, she couldn't face whatever punishment her parents have lined up for her.

Which left her with only one other choice.

She sighed and ran a hand through her hair. She really fucked up, didn't she?

She could hope that an apology would be enough to mend the bridge she had burned.

The storm was still raging outside. She could hear it despite how well the walls muffled the noise.

Phoebe slid out of bed and quietly wished she had something else to change into, something less soaked in her sweat. But she should apologize first and she wasn't comfortable nosing through Selena and Gwyneira's closets.

She emerged into the hallway and realized how much of a task it would be to find either of them. She hardly knew her way around the mansion, much less where their usual haunts were.

Maybe she should try calling out for them? They were vampires, they had to have a good sense of hearing-

"Is something wrong?"

Phoebe startled, whirling around to face Selena.

Selena didn't look as bright as she did when they first met. She seemed more... withdrawn.

Phoebe swallowed. "Um, hi, how did you know...?"

Selena gestured to the door. "I heard it open."

Phoebe sighed. "Oh, of course you did."

Selena's face curled at that. Phoebe quickly started waving her arm like it could erase her last statement. "No, no! What I meant was-!" Phoebe deflated. "Ugh, this started off wrong..."

Selena's eyes soften a bit in sympathy.

"I-" Phoebe swallowed. "I wanted to apologize."

Selena's expression didn't change.

Phoebe looked away, trying to summon her courage. "Um, I was being really unfair to you and Gwyneira. You have been nothing but accommodating to me and you even offered me a place to stay when I had nowhere else to go. I'm sorry... for what it's worth."

Phoebe looked back up and flinched when she saw Gwyneira had joined them when she wasn't looking.

"Are you certain you want to apologize to a vampire?" Gwyneira's voice had a wary edge to it.

Phoebe steeled herself. "Yes. I was letting my preconceived notions blind me."

Gwyneira's expression softened and she exchanged a glance with Selena.

"...What possessed you to apologize?" Selena said quietly.

"Guilt, for the most part." Phoebe couldn't quite meet their gazes. "And... I wanted to take your deal."

The two looked at each other, exchanged in a silent conversation before Gwyneira sighed. "I suppose we can do a trial run."

And that's how Phoebe found herself on the couch sandwiched between a vampire and a dhampir. Her face was on fire as they searched for the perfect spots to bite. Selena had taken her neck, running her tongue over the sensitive skin while Gwyneira gently held her wrist, scraping her fangs over the veins.

"Will it hurt?" Phoebe asked, staring up at the ceiling to try to cope with what was happening.

"Not for long. Just relax. We'll take care of you." Selena whispered in her ear.

Phoebe whimpered and shut her eyes.

She heard a chuckle before she felt two sharp pains in her wrist and neck respectfully. She tensed then relaxed as the pain dulled and faded. Despite being slowly drained of blood, Phoebe felt comfortable and warm between the two, like being wrapped up in a big blanket.

Yeah, she made the right choice.