

Ivaldi: Book 2 Chapter 9

Blood

The building looked no more than a ruin, incapable of enclosing anything, but as we thrashed around in the underbrush we came upon a thick wooden door that looked newer than the stones it was set into. It hung on iron hinges and was closed by an iron bar with an incongruously shiny brass padlock. The lock was as big as my palm, but Peter simply ripped it away from the door, with only a grunt of effort. I wondered if all of Duvalye's kin were so strong. He shot back the bolt and yanked the door open. Beyond was a hallway with several rusty iron doors on each side; evidently this had been a prison. Striding purposefully into the gloom, Peter without hesitation chose a door and flung it open. I stumbled after and, peering over his shoulder, saw Teja.

She appeared to be lying on the stone floor, her arms and legs fettered to the wall on either side, each with two thick iron chains. Then I realized that she was stretched so tightly that she actually hung slightly suspended, spreadeagled several inches above the floor. Her head lolled back, hair pooling on the floor below. She was completely naked, and her skin had a greenish pallor. There were dried bloodstains on the floor beneath her, though I could see no wound on her body.

Peter stepped carefully over the chains and put his hand on her breast. I was already certain that she was dead, but he said: "She is alive, but unconscious. We are in time." He bent to grasp one of the chains that bound her leg, then stopped, straightened, and looked at me.

"What are you waiting for?" I asked impatiently.

"It would be better to feed her while she is still chained. She will be a danger to herself and to us until she returns to normal consciousness."

"She must be weak as a kitten! How could she be a danger? And how can she eat in that position?"

Peter shook his head. "The bare minimum of sustenance will suffice to bring her to awareness of her condition and her hunger; then she will be difficult to restrain. In her state, the hunger is... overpowering."

"I don't understand."

"Well, then, trust that I know what I am doing," Peter said impatiently. "Now, are you ready to help?"

"Of course." I began rummaging in my pack for my water bottle and the food I had brought along. Peter stared at me.

"You really don't understand, do you?" he asked.

“I told you I didn’t,” I snapped, handing him the water and a wedge of cheese. He waved them away.

“She cannot eat that. She needs your *help*.” He put a peculiar emphasis on the word.

“I said I am ready! But how?”

“Seaborn, she needs your blood.”

My eardrums pounded with shock. Suddenly, it all fell into place. All the stories half-told, all the evasions. This was the final secret that Teja had not been ready to reveal. She was a blood drinker. I had heard something about creatures like this - but now was not the time to think about it. I looked back at Peter.

“Would I die?” I kept my voice as steady as possible.

“No. She needs only enough to keep alive until we can find another... source. You will suffer no lasting harm.”

“I suppose yours won’t do,” I said, only half-hopefully.

“I am of her kind and kin. My blood would kill her...” He paused.

“Well, at least it would make her even more ill. It must be fully human blood.” He paused while I pondered the implications of that. “Will you do it?”

I nodded. “How?” was all I could say, not wanting to go further in words or imagination. Peter frowned in thought.

“From your wrist,” he said. “Since we don’t have a cup, it will have to be directly.” I stood stiff. “Your wrist,” he repeated gently, reaching out to me. I offered him my right arm. He gripped it hard at mid-forearm, drawing his knife with his other hand. I trembled as he poised it along a prominent blue vein.

“Be careful,” I said queasily. “I need both hands to play.”

Peter nodded, and I looked away as he drew the blade lightly down my wrist. It was sharp as a barber’s blade, and I felt warm moisture on my skin before the pain reached me. Peter pulled me towards Teja’s head, back in the dark corner. My blood followed, dripping along the floor. Kneeling beside her, he supported her head with one hand, while the other drew my wrist to her lips. I watched in horror and fascination.

A few drops fell into her half-open mouth. Peter loosened his grip above the wound on my arm, and the drops fell faster. Teja swallowed convulsively and her brows drew into a frown. Peter put the wound to her mouth, and I felt a powerful pressure as she clamped onto me, sucking avidly as a baby at breast. I wondered if this was how a mother might feel, watching nourishment flow from herself to her child, this strange mixture of tenderness and loathing. After a few

minutes I began to feel light-headed, and realized that I was near to fainting.

“Peter,” I croaked feebly, trying to withdraw. Teja’s head lifted, her teeth seeking a hold in my flesh. In sudden terror I wrenched my arm away, sprinkling blood over her face and the wall. Teja’s eyes came open and she snarled like a beast, convulsing in her chains. I stood panting, arms hanging stupidly at my side while my blood continued to flow. Peter leaped at me.

“Fool!” he snapped. “Bind it!” He gripped my arm tight enough to hurt, slowing the blood to a seep. He yanked a thin scarf from around his neck and used it to bandage me tightly.

“Now sit down and be quiet for a bit, while I tend to Teja.” I slumped against the wall, having barely the strength to lift my head to watch him.

One by one, he carefully pulled the eight chains out of the wall until Teja lay flat on the floor. She seemed to have fainted again, though her flesh looked a little rosier. *My blood*, I thought, *that’s my blood in her*.

We hadn’t brought any tools suitable for removing the chains, so Peter had to wind them around her arms and legs to keep them from dragging. She was a grotesque apparition, her pale, slim body burdened with these tumors of iron. Peter wrapped her in a cloak and carried her outside, and I stumbled after. He mounted his pony while I held Teja upright, then he hauled her up in front of him. The scene was eerily familiar. I mounted, and we headed for home as the first rain began to fall.