

Ivaldi: Book 2 Chapter 10

From the Lost Papers of the Six-Fingered Mage

Several days went by while Teja slept. I did not speak to Peter, though he was now up and active, seemingly fully recovered, or at least distracted, from his grief. I had many questions, so many that I did not know where to begin asking, but I was shy of asking Peter, even of talking to him. I had no idea what supplies he acquired for Teja, nor did I wish to know. Sometimes I felt his gaze on me, and I wondered: had I refused to give my blood to Teja, would I have left that tower alive? It was another question whose answer I probably did not want to know.

Peter had cleaned and bandaged my wound very neatly, and now took daily care of it. It seemed to be healing well. But it ached, and was a constant reminder of thoughts I wished to be distracted from. Of course I could not play the guitar, so I immersed myself in Duvalye's travel diaries, reading about many countries I had visited, and many I hadn't. But the answers I really sought were not there.

Finally one morning Peter came to me while I was eating breakfast and said, "Teja is awake. She would like to see you."

I got up and went to her, leaving my soma to chill on the table. She seemed very small and pale in the huge, white-sheeted bed, but her eyes were lively. She sat up, holding the blankets around her chest with one arm, and held out the other hand to me. I took it in both of mine, seating myself on the edge of the bed.

"My friend," she said simply. I didn't reply. I stared into her face, feeling a curious numbness.

"Are you, still?" she asked sadly.

"I... don't know. You called me friend, but you certainly didn't trust me much."

"Not nearly as much as you deserved. I am not sure I can make that up to you. But you must understand how difficult it was for me." I nodded.

"I have something to show you," she said. She threw back the blankets and got out of bed, striding, nude, to an elaborate secretary desk that stood against the wall. I watched her body with a detachment I would not formerly have been capable of feeling; it was a beautiful body - but not a human one.. She leaned over the desk and extracted from somewhere a brittle scroll of paper, which she brought to me.

"Handle it carefully," she said. "It is the most precious document we have."

I went to an armchair by the window, where the light was better, and unrolled it cautiously. It was written in Ivaldin, but in an old-fashioned, elaborate script whose ink was now faded to a pale rust color. What follows is transcribed from memory, and may not be entirely accurate:

A great sage has said:

“Ivaldi, City of Light, is primarily a city of men. But gods dwell there also, and demons of various kinds, including the thousand-times-damned, those who do not die and so cannot be released from the cycle of life and rebirth. They live by and delight in blood, for they seek their own deaths. Though they live hundreds of lifetimes, each spends that span searching for the one who will bring about his passing from this world. Each demon thus carries within himself the seed of his own destruction, for what creature would desire to remain thus, eternally alive and eternally sundered from the bliss of the All?”

They might tell their own story a little differently, if they told it at all. They call themselves vampires, those who must have blood to live. To others they are anonymous, disguised, concealing their true natures beneath the mask of humanity. It is said that demons are created by curses, and this might have been the origin of their species. From some obscure, possibly mythical, foreparent they received a uniquely vital blood, almost a living entity in itself, which uses the vampires to maintain and propagate itself. Since it is the blood and not the vampire which reproduces, their method of procreation is not that of normal human beings.

The cycle begins with a normal adult human being, in no way different from any other mortal until a vampire seduces him and drinks his blood. The blood-taking is part of a vampire’s pleasure, as well as his essential source of nourishment; usually he will space his “attacks” over weeks or months, taking only a little blood each time, for a mature vampire does not need much sustenance. The victim/lover could in fact survive giving blood at intervals over an indefinite period, with no adverse effects. But, as the vampire continues to feed, the link between vampire and human, whether of love, lust, or other powerful emotion, grows stronger, fed on blood. The lover belongs more and more to the vampire and his kind, and the culmination of their bond is the Exchange of blood. This may take place after days or months, the interval between the first blood-taking and the Exchange being dependent upon both vampire and human. If the human is reluctant, the vampire will not Exchange blood with him, and will cease taking blood from him entirely. In these cases, the human is

made to forget the peculiarities of his vampire lover, and suffers no lasting harm.

For the vampire, the Exchange of blood is the supreme pleasure, and some indulge in it as frequently as they dare (there are physiological limitations). Others see it as the natural fruition of a great love, and reserve it for a few occasions in their long lives.

The first step of the Exchange is the near-total draining of blood from the human. The vampire then gives him his own blood, and this powerful vampiric blood quickly takes control of the body. After several days of "illness," the lover seemingly dies. He may even be cremated by grieving relatives who do not understand what has happened. But usually the vampire protects his lover, placing the comatose but living body in a dark underground vault where he may draw strength from the earth while his body undergoes profound and fearsome changes. When he emerges, nine days later, the human has become a creature who looks like his former self, but possesses terrible powers, and even more terrible hungers. A vampire's powers are of strength, speed, and the senses, far beyond anything he enjoyed in human life. He shares the blood of the first of his kind, and its virtues have never deteriorated. Born of blood, he must live on blood, and so long as he can get it, he is immortal.

For the first few years of his life, the vampire can be likened to an infant, in that he does not have the full powers of the elders of his race, nor does he require their adult diet - that is, of human blood. Animal blood will suffice him for several years, though he needs it often. Generally the vampire who created him, and to whom he is permanently bonded, will look after him during this time, teaching him to survive as a vampire while concealing his nature from the human society in which he lives and from whom he must take his nourishment.

The vampire clan is hierarchical, with the oldest (and therefore most powerful) at the top. The blood-bond is the most important element in the vampires' social order and is a lifelong tie, breakable only by death. The young vampire owes his existence to the one who created him, his blood-master, and he can deny that no more than he can deny his body's need for blood. The blood-master has obligations to protect and guide his offspring, but the weight of such obligations is outweighed by the power and prestige which accrue to him by his creation of new vampires. However, vampiric tradition includes controls on the numbers and characters of people to be transformed into vampires, in the interests of the security of the group, and these are strongly enforced by the Elders.

A vampire reaches maturity when he first slakes his thirst for human blood. His blood-master usually guides him through the first taking, so that he does not kill the human outright. An inexperienced vampire can do this inadvertently, and some even enjoy it, but it is considered a perversion. After his first taste of human blood, the vampire is considered mature among his kind, though it will probably be many years before he Exchanges blood, entering the fully adult, blood-master phase of his existence.

The frequency and amount of feeding needed to sustain life varies among vampires, but decreases slowly over the course of their eternal lives. Starving a vampire would presumably be a very slow process, and they are very difficult to kill by any means. Wounds seem to bother them little, unless there is tremendous loss of blood, and all wounds heal very quickly. Vampires are far stronger than ordinary humans, with faster reflexes and keener senses. Most are eerily attractive, with particularly striking eyes. They have certain inherent magical powers of empathy and telepathy, and some of the older ones develop other powers in both the active and perceptive magics. These would seem to arise from the blood's enhancement of inherent ability. A Mage who became a vampire, or vice versa, would surely be awesomely powerful.

As a race, vampires are not a threat to the human species. To take blood by force is disapproved of in vampire society, and rarely done. Their human lovers are ignorant of the vampires' natures at first, but as a bond of trust develops they are told, and the blood-exchange is never done without the knowing consent of the human. But the vampires remain secretive, past experience having proved that the greater part of the human race is not prepared to tolerate their existence. Immortality is repugnant to those doomed to death, and the vampires' means of attaining it even more so. Whether this fundamental gap may ever be bridged is a question I leave to sages wiser than myself.

Appended to the above:

Dearest,

Here is the result of my studies. Brief, but there is not much more to be said which would be of value to the general public. I have omitted those personal details which we agreed should be left private, and also the data from my more specific physiological studies. The latter might be of interest to the Kelessi, but I would not recommend that you share it with them! With their bigoted attitudes, their reactions to the new

and unknown are unpredictable, but generally negative. What you do with this is up to you. It may someday prove useful, if my considered opinion matters a damn to future generations. There are only two copies. The other is in a sealed packet of papers marked to be destroyed upon my death. As executor of my estate, you will be looking after that yourself. More when we meet.

“This explains much,” I said, rerolling the scroll and handing it to Teja. “But not everything. To start with, what the hell happened to you in that dungeon? And who put you there?”

“There is much I do not know about that myself,” Teja replied. “I will tell you everything I can, and soon, but not right at the moment. I am still very... tired. Will you be patient a few days more?”

“I suppose I must.” I hesitated, then bent and kissed her forehead. “Rest, then. We’ll talk later.”