

Bonded
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Rook: Oct.4, 1995

"You're it."

Craig's shirt ruffled from brief contact. Turning on heel he just barely managed to see Rook's receding bulk zip around a corner with some inexpert alacrity.

"Your movements are still too stiff, Rook" Craig called after the gipsy. Quietly cursing, the young Toreador took up chase. Upon turning the same corner, however, he found precisely what he'd expected. Rook was nowhere to be seen.

"Fuck."

Stretching out his senses Craig checked for any movement along the rooftop. The night was cold, fully entrenched in the damp chill of fall. When he remembered to Craig's breath clouded in streams to his left. His silk shirt and velvet vest did little to protect him from the icy wind, but he was beyond noticing.

Nothing. The bastard either made it past the edge of the roof or he wasn't moving. Craig decided to bluff.

"I know you're still here... I can smell you. The moment you move you're mine, gipsy."

Despite his vigilance Craig was still startled by Rook's laugh as the gipsy's white torso suddenly appeared on the chimney above. Leaping over Craig's head the older vampire streaked across the rooftop, obviously making for the adjoining building.

"Not this time, yah old fart."

Craig's form blurred as he switched to high speed. His nearly seven foot frame proved deceptively lithe as he leapt and dodged the various obstacles across the flat building. His superior skill at celerity began to eat up the distance between them.

Glancing back Rook noticed his friend in high pursuit and judged that he would be caught in microseconds. He

burst in a surge of speed and soared across the chasm between buildings. A rocket at it's apex, a bird in flight, he felt the wind whip at his poet shirt as his senses reeled at the giddy free fall. Moving at a dizzying pace his leap would have been a poetic moment were it not for his lack of depth perception.

Craig winced. "That -had- to hurt".

Landing softly beside Rook's prone form Craig marvelled at how the gipsy's momentum had actually conveyed enough force to fully imbed his ankle in the roof's brick embankment.

"You okay, Rook?"

"Thha hu'."

"What?"

Rook extracted himself from the roof's tar, spitting chunks of debris. His face was a mess of cuts and bruises. His nose was flat.

"I said, that hurt. I'm going to need to feed again."

"Again? What is it with you, are you some kind of vampiric glutton? Isn't once a night enough?"

Ignoring the jibe Rook continued his vain attempts at brushing the roof's dust and tar from his clothes.

"I'm gonna change first. How about I meet you at the haven in half an hour?"

Craig rolled his eyes.

"Alright. You know she still won't be there, don't you?"

"Hey, you never know kid. I know she's not much of a party girl, but I think I've definitely made an impression on her. In any case, it never hurts to keep your options open. See you in half an hour."

With that Rook slipped behind another chimney outcrop and disappeared. Listening carefully Craig followed his movements across the rooftop. Picking up a rock Craig carefully gauged the distance and threw. Turning at high speed he was over the edge of the roof and halfway down the fire escape before he heard Rook's exclamation of pain and surprise.

"Just remember, gipsy man, -you- are now -it-!"

Craig's laughter echoed down the alley, leaving Rook rubbing his head and wearing a wry grin.

The club was hot. Gleaming sweaty bodies hopped and gyrated on the dance floor as the music pounded and throbbed. The crowd's energy was positively erotic and the scent of blood intoxicating.

Craig sat in his customary corner booth, idly letting his drink evaporate as he scanned the pulsing throng. Rook was late, as usual.

"Give him half a minute and he'll take all night" he muttered to himself. Unconsciously Craig kept his senses alert, periodically checking for any sign of her. He wasn't interested in her himself, really, but she was important to Rook and, therefore, important to him. Needless to say she was nowhere near the place. He kept checking anyway.

He froze.

Rook was threading his way through the crowd, the masses of wet blood body bags parting, waves parting before the prow of a boat. Rook wasn't alone.

The man was possibly close to thirty, hair raven black, teeth fine and white, -and- in peak physical condition. The tan of his skin led evidence to the work he did outdoors. In every way he was a perfect physical specimen.

"His name's David."

Craig suddenly became painfully aware that he'd been staring. Rook's shit eating grin only added edge to his embarrassment. He could only guess how long the bastard had been standing there while Craig's jaw had hung slack.

"He's good for whatever ails you," Rook continued. "I visit him on occasion."

David sat across from Craig, smiling shyly. Tearing himself away with obvious effort Craig looked at Rook long enough to verify his statement. His cheeks red with the flush of recent feeding, Rook's complexion was entirely clear and unblemished.

Turning back to the mortal across from him Craig could see that Rook's feeding hadn't harmed David's complexion either. Exuding a healthy glow David's skin was just beginning to sweat in the club's heat.

Rook bent low to Craig's ear.

"You can give him a try if you like. Just don't drain him... I promised I'd embrace him just as soon as I get permission."

Craig: Oct. 4. 1995

Craig was shocked by the offer. He stared incredulously at Rook's face, trying to perceive the motivations beneath. Rook, only smiled back. Craig turned to look at David's shy and complacent face. Suddenly he was embarrassed and felt inadequate, as ridiculous as that may be. He felt as though he were a virgin, suddenly expected to perform some act with a far more experienced lover - or perhaps as though he were caught indulging in some clandestine passion that had previously remained secret.

But then as he looked into David's face, it struck him that here was a mortal that knew exactly what he was and accepted it with desire and not with fear. ("Wasn't that a breach of the masquerade?" - Rook's adamant and careful instruction caused the thought to bubble through the back of Craig's mind.) The allure of taking blood from a willing partner and not a victim - and the possibility of repeating that experience in the future - became almost overpowering. And God, was he beautiful!

Suddenly, Craig's initial repulsion resurfaced:

"What! Here!" he blurted at Rook.

"No, of course not! We'll go back to your place." With trepidation Craig agreed and silently, they slipped out of the Haven.

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Craig silently closed the door to his room - he had

refused to let Rook be witness to the encounter - it would at least relieve some degree of tension. He paused facing the door momentarily - his back toward David. He could feel David's eyes on him, and again felt self-conscious. Slowly, he turned and met David's gaze. They stared at each other placidly for an indeterminable length of time - until David's mortal eyes succumbed to dryness and he blinked. That tiny movement, however small, broke the spell and Craig swept David into his embrace before David's eyes had opened. David gasped as he suddenly felt the familiar - yet somehow subtly different bite on his neck. He relaxed into Craig's arms as he slipped into the euphoria to which he had become addicted, and that he longed to feel from the other side.

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Craig stared at David's sleeping form, carefully laid on the bed. He was completely in love with this enigmatic figure that lay before him. He wondered if he would have chosen this path for himself had he been given the opportunity the way this mortal had been. He truly did not know. Craig's pragmatic self fought it's way back to the surface again - the last vestige of his former life that his newly acquired Toreador nature could not eradicate. What had he done? Some niggling suspicion told him that what he had done was a mistake, but he could not explain why. How did this new person - soon to be Vampire - fit into his relationship with Rook? Rook would have a real fledgling of his own - not some "adoptive" one. Which one would Rook love more? Would the three of them be able to form some sort of family? Did such groups even exist amongst the Kindred? Craig didn't even know. Would David and Craig become like brothers, or would they become rivals? Perhaps as a sign of his hope, Craig pricked his finger and touched the drop of blood to David's lips. Craig pushed down his doubts and fears and once more let his carefree side take over his thoughts - the side that placed his ultimate trust and faith in Rook.

Rook: Oct. 18, 1995

When Craig finally arrives at their usual meeting place Rook is already waiting. His huge, shit eating grin causes Craig's cheeks to flush with David's recently contributed blood.

"I take it from your slightly dazed expression and" Rook looks at his watch meaningfully "the lateness of your arrival that you found David to be quite to your satisfaction?"

Craig's cheeks burn to a feverish heat. The night's ice cold air strikes with contrast. Rook's laughter stings further.

"Oh, Craig my boy, how young and innocent you are. Your naivete could fill volumes."

Craig, stung yet further by Rook's remark, draws himself to his full height. "What are you up to Rook? Why did you introduce me to him?"

Rook's laughter cuts short. Regarding Craig from beneath heavy brows Rook's expression suddenly becomes very serious.

"-I-? You ask why -I-...?"

Leaping to his feet Rook begins an intricate pantomime of suffering under false accusations.

"He -asks- me. Me! His mentor and closest friend. -I- go to great lengths, expend all effort, spare no expense, to shop for and prepare a succulent meal for him... and he -asks- me! He asks me -WHY- I have done this! As if I am someone not to be trusted, someone..."

Rook turns to look directly into Craig's eyes.

"Someone... he... -suspects-!"

Pacing about the building's roof Rook speaks to an unseen audience, waving his arms wildly about.

"Is this the thanks I get? Is this the -trust- I have earned at the cost of a gourmet meal? Did I -ask- for anything in return? No. Did I -expect- anything in return? No. And yet he -asks- me, -distrusts- me!"

Craig's shoulders slump, his lips quiver in a guilty pout. He has no reply.

Rook's expression softens, gradually, until he finally relaxes into a smile. Quietly approaching the tall youth he drapes an arm across the lean Toreador's shoulders.

Absently, Craig notes that Rook has to stand on one of the roof's vents to do it.

"That's alright, Craig... it's okay. You -should- be suspicious, no matter -who- is offering you the gift. Never let your guard down, kid. Not now. There are many older vampires who'd use you and eat you alive if they could."

Craig raises his head, most of the pout already gone.

"You did right kid. Don't let my little play intimidate you. It was all for show."

Craig smiles at this, relief written in his features. Rook releases his shoulders and returns to his reclined position against the large Air Conditioning vent.

"You like him, don't you kid." It wasn't a question.

Craig's cheeks began to burn anew.

Rook tried not to let his chuckle escape.

"Tell you what, kid. I had my own plans for him... I mean, you Albertans really do have some of the best beef on the planet... but it would be unfair of me to introduce you to him and then take him away again. What if, tomorrow night, before we begin our training, I show you how to make him? You could be the one to embrace him. He could be your progeny."

Rook crosses his arms, sits back, and waits for Craig's reply.

Rook: Nov. 8, 1995

Resting carelessly on the edge Rook breathes deeply, willing his pulse to subside. "By jove, I think I've got it," he manages between two breaths.

Craig appears out of thin air, sitting beside Rook on the building's roof. "I guess we both do, then. You didn't notice me for five full minutes."

Hiding his surprised expression poorly Rook still manages to keep his cool. "I suppose so... it'd be different if I had your senses."

For a few moments the two vampires stare out at the buildings and lights. Covered in a thick layer of snow, it's noise muffled, the city's glittering landscape appears fuzzy and surreal.

As usual, Rook's restless tongue is first to break the silence. "You've got a decision to make, lad."

Still caught in the city's splendor Craig barely manages enough attention to acknowledge Rook's statement with non-committal grunt.

"What're you going to do? If you want to turn David you'd best do it soon. The coronation is in a couple of nights and by then it may be too late. We have no idea how lenient this new prince is. She may not let you have him."

Craig's expression doesn't seem to change as he continues to drink in the view. His thoughts, as always, are his own.

Rook patiently awaits his friend's answer.

Craig: Nov. 9, 1995

Craig placed all his concentration on maintaining his expression - not betraying his feelings. Slowly he stilled his mind on the vista before him and composed his thoughts. He knew his answer would have to come, but for all the preparations, the practiced responses, he found he was at a loss for words. Indeed, even at a loss for an answer. What *did* he want?

"How can I do it Rook? You know the circumstances into which I was embraced... No preparation, no choice. And then abandonment! I've barely come to grips with it myself."

It's only been a year for cris'sake! How can I become a sire? What could I possibly offer - I've still so much to learn." He became quiet and continued to stare at the streets and the lights, but they became blurred.

"I have to say no, Rook. I'm just not prepared, and I couldn't bear to find out it was a mistake." Again a period of silence. "What does that mean for him Rook? What were your intentions towards him? What will you do now? And you never did answer my question - Why, Rook? Why?" With that he turned to look Rook directly in the eyes. His inner conflict, still unresolved, began to grow to a grim determination. He would get this answer - no more of Rook's dodges and pantomimes. He would get this answer or he would resolve the matter once and for all.

Rook: Nov. 9, 1995

Focusing on Rook's face Craig became very suddenly aware of a subtle change. A dark, ponderous predatory shadow brushed passed the periphery of Craig's perception. Large and dangerous it lurked the calm fathoms of Rook's expression.

And it was gone.

Rook's face lit with disbelief.

"A mistake? A -mistake-!? How could what you -ARE- be a mistake?"

Springing to his feet Rook began another act of indignation and betrayal... and stopped. Mouth open, hand in mid gesture, he poised on the brink of display, pinned by Craig's unrelenting glare.

Letting his arm drop Rook endured a moment of embarrassing silence.

He made a few tries before finally managing to speak.

"I... can't stay for too long. It's not just because I'm Ravnos, although that is often reason enough to keep moving. Someone's waiting for me... I'm expected."

The wind howled, briefly, and crystals stung Craig's

face. Rook turned back to the city, obviously deciding on how much he should tell the young Toreador.

"I'm not as free as I'd like to be, Craig. I owe a debt... and it's the kind of debt that won't go unpaid."

When Rook turned back to face him Craig could see that Rook's hedonistic demeanor was completely dissolved. Replacing the void was an uncharacteristic look of sincere concern.

"I've grown to like you Craig... more so than I would have expected, faster than I'd have thought possible. For the first time in a long time I've found myself thinking of the well-being of another. It's... well, disorienting."

Rook approached cautiously, as if unsure of his footing on the icy roof. Hesitantly he reached out and placed a hand on Craig's shoulder.

"When I found David I felt he would be a simple, elegant little present for you. He's hearty, strong, and willing. Little did I realise how he would... affect you. You're still almost wholly human, I guess, and that detail escaped my notice. You're actually concerned for him."

Rook's hand dropped back to his side as he gazed across the cityscape.

"Then the summons came... and I knew I couldn't keep you with me. The mere realisation that I would consider bringing you shocked me. I then thought that, if I were to make David for you, you wouldn't need to be alone... and you would at least have someone to watch your back. But if -I- made David he'd be Ravnos too, and he wouldn't stick around."

Smiling, Rook looked back at Craig, his demeanor obviously restored.

"But, if -you- made him, and taught him what I taught you, he would not only stick around, he'd dog your heels forever. An excellent position from which to keep your ass covered, wouldn't you agree?"

Chuckling at the blush his last jibe brought to Craig's cheeks Rook sidled over to the Toreador's side and placed his arm about Craig's shoulders.

"So you see, m'lad, I had only the best intentions. I'm

simply trying to provide for you when I leave.”

Craig: Nov. 17, 1995

For a long moment Craig could do nothing but squeeze his eyes shut as if the action would somehow generate the power he needed to keep his emotions in check. Wave after wave of grief coursed over him - to be abandoned once was bad enough; for it to happen again would be unbearable. Rook was the only one in the world he felt close to - that he trusted. All those he knew before he was suddenly alienated from by the curse that had changed his life so long ago - had it really only been a year? And the kindred world to which he had been introduced, he discovered was cruel and heartless - governed by politics and power and prestige and no one was interested in an orphan fledgling that could provide them with none of that. With all that he felt was wrong with the mortal world, at least there love and friendship were still motivating factors. Was that what it was to become a vampire? Weren't they monsters after all? Perhaps the loss of love and friendship was the price one paid to exist in the realm of the immortal. But if that were true why did Craig still have the capacity for love and why did he so strongly feel every betrayal?

If indeed Craig had heard Rook's assurances that his intentions were for Craig's own good and that they were motivated Rook's deep feelings for him, Craig was oblivious to them. He heard only that Rook would leave and Craig would not be asked to join him. "He's right though," Craig thought to himself, "a child of my own would never abandon me."

Finally Craig pushed away his sudden, deep, resentment towards his friend and agreed to allow Rook to guide him in this last gesture of good will before Craig, again, found himself alone.

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David opened his eyes to new vision. The awe written clearly across his face reminded Craig of his own first glimpse of the world through inhuman eyes and he wondered what it must be like to experience that sight without the fear and confusion he had felt - to have embraced this world willingly and to know that these enhanced senses marked the realization of immortality. David's eyes finally fell on Craig's and the two locked in a lover's gaze. They needed no words to convey the what they now felt - they had engaged in a act more intimate than any that existed in the mortal world. For a time they shared a single life. As the blood flowed from one to another in a sacred loop, their existences merged and they had become a single entity. Even now, that the exchange had ceased and David had been fully introduced into universe he had previously only glimpsed, the blood maintained the bond. It was then that Craig realized the nature of kindred blood; the sharing of the blood, the bond that it creates - *that* is what defines kindred love. It seemed to him that it was not as versatile or as variable as human love, but then as stared into the new *life* he had brought into the world, he could not deny that it was far more powerful, even more pure.

Craig broke away from David and turned to Rook who had been watching carefully, instructing Craig at every step. Pride overflowed his expression as he beamed; he even felt he could forgive Rook for his inevitable absence in light of his latest experience. A wry smile spread across Rook's face.

"Now, kill him." Craig was suddenly confused with his mentor's poor sense of humour.

"Wha-at?" Craig shook his head as he stammered out the word, not believing Rook could be serious. Rook's smile vanished from his face and was replaced with a cold, hard, expression that Craig had never before experienced. But the malignant look in Rook's eyes - that was something Craig had glimpsed from time to time, shooting out from behind the mask.

"I said kill him. Now!"

Time slowed for Craig and he turned on David suddenly as if to carry out the action he had been commanded to do.

David, of course, had heard the command, and fear was apparent on his face - fear of Craig. Craig, shocked by his own movement and by the fear that had replaced the love that David had felt only moments ago, fought his initial impulse and forced his mind to take control of his actions. Confused by Rook's command and confused by his body's willingness to carry it out, Craig searched for the source of his reaction. His own blood held the answer and it was almost as if it spoke to him - as if his blood carried a consciousness - or perhaps more correctly sub-consciousness - of its own. Underlying the bond he shared with David, was another he shared with Rook. Now that he could sense it, it felt familiar, but now it felt much stronger as strong as the new bond with David. How it had happened, he had no idea, but now he was faced with an internal struggle between the two. Craig found it almost impossible to resist Rook, but as he analysed his own feelings, he realized that regardless of how the bond between he and Rook had grown so strong, they had never shared each other's beings as David and he had. In that realization, Craig found strength; the willpower he required.

Craig spun back on Rook, settled his stance and looked firmly into Rook's eyes.

"No."

Suddenly, Rook was gone and with despair Craig realized that there was no point in even turning around. The sounds of crushing bones and ripping flesh and David's final gasps of breath assaulted Craig's preternatural ears and he crumpled to the floor, agony flooding his mind and body. The sounds stopped and with it the pain. The fulfilling bond that he had only just found had been ripped away and now all that remained was a dull ache. Regardless of recent or impending betrayal, the only thing remaining in Craig's unnatural life was Rook and like it or not, it seemed that was the way it was to be.