

Get Out Of My House

by iztopher

Mel narrowly escapes being attacked by vampires on her way home to find two more waiting for her in her apartment. She is really not in the mood.

...

Mel's heart is still hammering in her chest as she stumbles through the Thais Lamplight district and towards her apartment. She holds onto the now empty bottle of holy water in her right hand, doing the mental calculations between a few droplets and the power of a hurled glass object against the trustworthiness of her knife. She glances over her shoulder every thirty seconds and feels her organs stampede against each other on their way to lodge in her throat at every noise. At least her neighborhood is aptly named. The light is dull but consistent and warm, granting her a decent visual of the street around her.

She fumbles with her left hand to unhook her key from her belt. As she turns streets onto Remraldt's line of apartments, she's never been more grateful for her spot so close to the corner. A few nervous steps and her feet are planted firmly on her welcome mat, her hand shoving in her key and turning to hear that satisfying sound of a door unlocking -

It clicks shut instead.

Mel steps back. *Did she leave the door unlocked?* She hasn't done that since her first semester, when she was still getting used to having to lock a door in the first place. But her key would only lock the door if it was open to begin with, which means...

She sets her empty bottle gently on the ground and decides to grip her knife in its stead. She takes a deep breath and reminds herself she and Edward went *adventuring* today, and she probably just got distracted in the morning, and at worst someone that perfect balance of opportunistic and struggling, like her about a year ago, got a lucky break and raided her valuables. She'll get inside and check the rooms and she'll lock the door, properly, and she'll hopefully calm her fraying nerves enough to sleep, and then she'll pack up whatever's left in the place and leave the city tomorrow.

She steps forward again, steeling herself. When she turns the key again, it makes that clean, metallic click to welcome her inside. As she exhales, Mel rubs her thumb against the hilt of her knife, catches her fingertip against the texture of its wrappings. She can do this. She just needs to open the door and step inside.

She opens the door.

She steps inside.

She screams.

She barely registers the figures before she does it on reflex, pointing her knife firmly at the one directly in front of her but keeping her eye trained to the one hovering slightly off to the side, taller and broader by the shape of their shadow. Lunging to stab would be satisfying, a temporary balm on the tension rising across her body, but it could also be entirely unnecessary and potentially risky. A threat should be, she hopes, all she needs to get her point across. "Get. Out. Of. My. House."

She just hopes whoever it is isn't a sorcerer or a vampire or better at fighting than she is -

"Oh," says the figure in front of her, with a voice mocking and *familiar*, somehow, "but rabbit, the doorstep said we were welcome!"

Definitely a vampire, then.

"*Te'ijal?! What are you doing here? Who is-*" rerouting the clearest threat in her mind, she shoves her knife towards the direction of the other figure and wishes her vision was clear enough to insult them. "This *stranger* you let into my apartment?"

"My runaway husband, of course," *Te'ijal* says, making absolutely no attempt to soothe. Even in the darkness, Mel sees the glint of her fang in her smile. She puts down her knife on the table by the door, but only so she can struggle to light the lamp there instead. "Mel, meet-

"I do not care. I want you to tell me why you are in my apartment, why you thought it was appropriate to *break into* my apartment, and then I want you to *leave* my apartment." The low light begins to clarify the features in front of her. *Te'ijal's* husband is blonde and heavily armored and appears to be human, with skin a few shades lighter than Mel's and a scar slashed across one eye. "No offense, I'm sure you're fine, but I am having a horrible night and you two are absolutely making it worse."

"She tends to have that effect," he concedes. "Please, accept my sincerest apologies for disturbing you."

Te'ijal ignores him in favor of stepping towards Mel. "That is precisely why we are here, my little lamb. My brother has found you-"

"I am *well* aware, Te'ijal!"

"-and we have found what he wants with you."

For a brief second, Mel's blood runs cold. Then her upper body bristles, shoulders tense and square, and she pushes past Te'ijal to sit down at the kitchen table. "Okay," she says, "and you had to tell me right now?"

"*You* must leave the city tomorrow," Te'ijal says. "And we cannot travel by day. This was our only guarantee to find you in time."

"We," Mel repeats, too tired to do more with her confusion than turn it over in her mouth.

"Galahad and I." Te'ijal glides across the kitchen tiles to her husband, wrapping her arm against one of his. He doesn't seem pleased with the gesture. "He is like me. The sun would destroy us both."

Mel tries not to reflect too deeply on the dizzying array of new threats to her safety opened up by vampires who look human just yet. Instead she focuses on committing the name Galahad to memory and says, "I see. So you just had to break into my apartment."

Te'ijal opens her mouth to defend herself, but Galahad catches her and cuts her off. "She is correct, wife."

She huffs. "The mat in the entryway said *Come In*! You really ought to label things properly, my rabbit, if they are of such concern to you." With two sets of eyes now set on glaring at her, Te'ijal folds her hands neatly together and purses her lips. "It was imperative we find you tonight, and this was the only place I could guarantee you would be."

"You're aware I have a front step? Nevermind, it doesn't matter. Tell me what Gyendal wants, how I can avoid him, and then please get out."

Te'ijal sighs heavily, and speaks quickly. Her tone is relegated to dry and informative, like Mel has sapped all the fun out of it. "Due to your Darkthrop blood, he believes he can use you to use the orb, regardless of your lack of magical potential. That is why he has redoubled his efforts to capture you." She takes her pack from over her shoulder and shuffles

through it. She produces a rolled piece of paper and extends her hand to Mel. "This is a map. You must next travel to Naylith. It is in the northeast, beyond the dwavern city of Gheledon. You will find the Orb of Darkness's sister, the Orb of Light, there. It will help you against my brother."

Mel's mind races with questions - *why are you helping me if you're a vampire, why not just kill me if being a Darkthrop heir is such a risk, what the hell is Naylith*- but she can see all of them diverging into a thousand different directions she has neither the patience nor energy to explore right now. She takes the map from her and sets it on the table and settles making sure her next meeting with Te'ijal is a little more graceful than their current one is the most efficient use of her time. "And you?"

"We will be in Harburg. The library at Darkthrop Keep may yield more information about the orbs. After you visit Naylith, you should meet us there."

"Anything else?"

"Keep an eye out for sunscreen, and bring it to us should you find it."

"Sunscreen. Got it." She waves dismissively at the vampires, and then towards the door. "Oh, and Te'ijal?"

"Yes, rabbit?"

"If you ever break into my house again, I *will* stab you with whatever I have on hand."

"We'll make sure to keep that in mind," Galahad says, with a tone so genuine it catches Mel off guard. He strides towards the door, glancing back at Te'ijal. "Won't we, wife?"

"That goes for you, too, blondie."

Te'ijal *giggles* at that, and follows behind her husband, turning and flashing a smile at Mel as she stands on the threshold of the apartment. "You have bite. It will serve you well."

As soon as they're out the door, Mel rushes to lock it behind them. The sound it makes is a balm on her spirit, less scared and shaky now and instead lulled to agitated and exhausted. At least she knows she'll be able to sleep. She would hate to spend her potential last night in a bed unable to appreciate it. She's halfway to her bedroom, calculating how late she can safely sleep in without risking hiding from vampires in the woods on her

way to Naylith, when an anxious knock on the door stops her dead in her tracks.

Oh, Edward is getting an *earful*.